

Ouyang Yu

THE AGENT

As soon as the need is upon me to tell a story, I feel like telling lies. Fuck. I don't know what's wrong with me. At first I wanted to say I was a solicitor or even a judge but then I decided against them. What the fuck do I want to be a solicitor for, hah? Working your ass up twenty hours a day and seven days a week trying to reduce the sentence of a criminal by sixty days or something. What's the point? You get too old too early for too much money. For me I'd be content with being a real estate agent. I'm not too smart, you know, but smart enough to catch you unawares. If you want to buy or sell a house, a unit or a flat, come to me. My name is Ritchie, Ritchie Ma. I'm with L.J. Hooker, not the hooker. You know Hooker originated with a Chinese? Well, that story later.

The other day, after I finished giving my evidence as a witness in the local magistrates court, about an auction-related matter, I came home and got a phone call from Sydney. It turned out to be a friend from China who had helped me a couple of years ago when I went back for a visit around Chinese New Year. Basically, I was a bit ashamed of telling you this but you this but you know he took me to this place where girls wearing short leather skirts with stars planted in their permed hair sandwiched you and offered you sex. I can't tell you more or else my wife, you know. Of course I haven't done anything like that! My friend said hello over the phone and I said hello back, asking how he found Sydney. Our conversation ran something like this below:

Enjoying your stay there?

Oh yeh, not too bad.

How do you mean? Didn't you do any sightseeing?

What is there to see, really? Sydney is not a very interesting place to be in, I mean. The Opera House, you know, exactly the same thing as you see in the pictures.

You haven't been to the beaches? The Australian beaches are great.

Oh yes, we went to Bondi Beach all right but there's nothing much to see. Just the waves.

But the air is good and the sky is also good, isn't it?

Well, not bad.

What about the Kingscross?

What's Kungs Crass?

Oh, the whore place. You sound close, the Cunts Crass. You don't know that?

Someone has told me and will take us there tonight.

Enjoy yourselves then and don't forget to give me a buzz when you arrive in Melbourne.

I hang up and felt offended. What did he mean there was nothing to see in Sydney? Did he imply that it was nothing compared with Beijing where he came from? He should know better than say that. Beijing was a dusty city with dusty trees and dusty faces. Even the cunts there were dusty. Okay?! I spat the words out when I related the story to my wife. She commented that he may have said it to deliberately provoke me and if he did that he obviously had succeeded. "It's jealousy," she said. "because he didn't like the idea that you seem to be doing better than him in a Western country."

I knew what she meant. I have sold a few houses to rich guys from China who pay cash as soon as they decide on a property whatever the price, say 350,000 to 800,000. No problems as long as the street numbers are right. You don't know what I mean? Well, here's a small quiz. If you ask a Chinese to choose between 44 and 88, which do you think he or she will choose and why? 44? Wrong. 88? Right. Why? 44 sounds like death death and 88 sounds like fortune fortune. Understood? Stupid Australians. I didn't say that; Mr Qu did.

Mr Qu was my client who once boasted that he could buy half of Australia if he wanted. I did not believe him although it was true that he had bought his permanent residence for about one million Australian bucks, settling his family of three in North Balwyn. I did not know much else except that he and his wife were both driving Mercedes Benz. The day they met me in my office, Mr Qu ordered, "Find me something that has the street number 18, completely modern and is around 500K, okay?", ignoring the list I was running through for him from Tudor-style townhouses to Federation houses, emphasizing that he did not want anything that had been in existence for over five years or anything that had too large a lawn to mow at the back or in the front. "I know, I know," I said. "I'm Chinese, you know. I know what Chinese people are looking for, believe me."

Did we make a deal? No, actually, because at the last minute when the house was knocked down to the bidder for 550K, the owner withdrew from the sale, claiming that it was undersold. Mr Qu was very upset and left us with that remark and something worse about the Chinese here. He said, "You just can't trust Australian-Chinese. They are so cunning! The bastard!"

Fuck him. Imagine him buying half Australia. If it was auctioned for 100 billion dollars, he would drive a hard bargain to bring it down to one billion. To reduce things to one tenth or one hundredth of their original price, this guy would do anything. It was just in his blood. Every Chinese is a potential capitalist in that sense, paying less for more, or better still, paying nothing for everything. That does not apply to me, though, for I am Australian.

I was having *xiao bai cai* (small white cabbage) and *hui guo rou* (twice-cooked pork) for dinner tonight, washed down with Carlton Cold. I wonder if they should pay me for writing this brand into my story, like they do to Fay Weldon. I heard that woman got well paid for writing a jewelry company into her latest novel. That's the way to go, I think. The whole world could be sold in an auction, like a house, if there were people richer than us from another planet. If I were prime minister of Australia, I would sell the whole country to the highest bidder. No ethics involved, really. It's all about money. Before I finished, the telephone rang. I got her to pass me the cordless phone. She grunted, made no move and kept on eating. I had to go to get it myself, once again realizing that my woman was growing more and more Australian these days, getting aggressive and less inclined to do any housework and more argumentative about rights. I'd have to think of a way to transfer the title of the property solely in my name before it was too late. You can't emulate the bloody Australian women. They are too aggressive, lazy, possessive and domineering. I didn't say that. A taxi driver said it. His name is Geoff or something. He said he'd prefer to marry an American or English woman as his first marriage with an Australian proved a disaster.

It was my friend on the phone.

We are now in Melbourne.

Whereabouts?

In Casino.

Spell out the name of the street or else I can't find you.

You mean you don't even know where the Casino is as an old Melbournian?

I don't gamble, you know. Otherwise, you might have to come to the mental home or a prison to visit me. Know what I mean?

It couldn't be that bad.

Did you go gambling in Sydney?

We actually came from Canberra.

Good?

Too many flies. I had to fend off them all the time by waving them away.

The Australian greeting, you know?

And nothing much to see there. Too quiet.

I wouldn't be surprised.

Are you coming to see me?

Yes, right away.

I sucked the last drop of the beer dry, put on my new leather shoes bought at Mayer, with heads that she found too big, and said to her, "I'm going to meet some friends."

"Who are they?" She asked, without interest.

"Someone from China, occupying a pretty important position," I said.

"What position?" She said.

"Was it because of that that prompted him to be so scornful of Australia? If o, why did he come here to receive the training and not the other way round?"

I ignored that apt remark and hopped into my new dark green Mazda, which, unfortunately, got a dint right there where the plate number was, obviously done in a public parking lot by someone who went too far when putting his or her car in the spot. The ever present danger of driving a brand new car is wherever you park it there is always someone who intentionally tries to touch it here and there. So, in less than six months, I have already got a few scratches here and there. Even the birds in the sky joined in the fun by shitting profusely

on you and their shit had some acid in it that ate away the paint as it did on my bum, the bum of my car.

I thought Qin would bring some gifts from China; instead, he produced a piece of paper showing the address of someone that he would like me to drive him to. The address turned out to be at a place I had never heard of, a Delahay. I took a look at my watch and it was nearly 9pm. So I said, "It's too late for Delahay. How about we just go to some places nearby for fun?"

Both Qin and his friend, a dark-complexioned man, agreed. I immediately took them to Bar 20, paid the admission fee and went in. Then I bought them one Carlton Cold each and took them to sit down near a table. The loudspeaker was broadcasting songs that were no different from the ones on Fox Radio and 101.1TTFM, the only difference being they accompanied the 95% naked women dancing under your nose. I asked if they went to table dancers in Sydney. They told me they did not but they went to see some dancing places. I asked if it was the sort of places where prostitutes came to ask them upstairs. They said yes. The dark-complexioned man commented that a dancing girl was wearing the American flag as her bra by saying, "This would be considered illegal in China." Qin agreed. I agreed but said, "It is an Australian flag, not American." The dark-complexioned man (hence referred to as the DC man for I never knew his name) said that the white women had really great bodies. Qin agreed. I agreed and said "What about the Chinese women? Do they do this?" "Oh yes," the DC man said. "Except they do it underground." "With China accepted into WTO," I said. "Table dancers would be acceptable in China, wouldn't it?" "It might take a few years, I guess," The DC said. Qin watched the show the time, his eyes focussed on a woman on a nearby table, who had shed the last strip of clothes on her and was now riding on the mouth of a man, her vagina millimeters away from his tongue. Then she moved away from him, raising her legs up, as if to walk the ceiling, her glass high heels swiftly reflecting the combination of the green red and pink lights of the showroom.

"Would you like to get a private dance?" I asked them. "You could do that right in here." I pointed to a chair near the table on which a woman was smiling towards me, invitingly. I went up to her and asked her if she could do this for my friend but DC stopped me, saying that he would like to do it rather in a quiet corner. The woman said she would have to dance a session of fifteen minutes before she could go away or else she'd have to do it right here in public.

I told DC and he said he'd rather wait.

Meanwhile, our conversation moved to the Chinese politics.

"Was it true that Chinese people were overjoyed at the news of September 11th?" I asked.

"Oh yes," DC confirmed. "There was nationwide rejoicing."

"Why?"

"It's obvious," Qin said. "It's our revenge for the two arrows."

"Two arrows? What are you talking about?" I was mystified.

"You have been in Australia for too long," Qin criticized.

"The first arrow is the American bombing of our Embassy in Belgrade," DC said.

"And the second arrow was shot when our plane was knocked down by them over Hainan Island," Qin said.

"Of course I know these," I said. "But your arrow bit got me lost."

"Hi, how are you?" The woman in red heels came over and said to me. "Sarah," She called me.

"Her name is Sarah," I said to DC and Qin. "Their way of introducing themselves is different to us in that they call you Sarah as if you were Sarah, not they." Then I said to her, "They don't speak English. They are from China."

"*Ni hao ma?*" Sarah said as she put her hands together in an Asian prayer.

I laughed because it was so funny but they two did not laugh, possibly too tense to notice that.

"I'm good and yourself?" I said.

"Are you from local?" Sarah said.

"Oh no, I am not," I said. "I come from China, too, but I speak English."

"Would you like-," Sarah made a gesture indicating sex dance and we all shook our heads, watching her go away.

Our conversation then moved on to safety issues. DC revealed that they both had come to Australia by an Arabic Airline.

"Why's that?" I was mystified.

"It's safer," Qin said. "If you fly American, ten to one you'd be shot down or blown into pieces. Understand?"

When Sarah came here for a third time, DC could no longer resist the temptation and had to allow his instincts into full bloom by following the red high-heels to a discreet corner. From where I was sitting, I could barely make out the outlines of a white mass of moving flesh. Meanwhile, Qin made a quick decision by paying a girl and gazing into her wide-open vagina.

Afterwards when we came out of the joint, I took them to the Top of the Town, a brothel right under the bridge near the old Casino.

The receptionist quickly ran through the services and I interpreted for my friends: \$135.00 for half an hour. Full service including body massage, oral and penetration. "Until you come," I added, winking at them. They were standing there, wooden, looking around at the girls, several of them Asian, and I actually liked one or two of their faces, heavily made up, pretty and fuckable. A big woman came and said to us, "There are complimentary drinks at the counter. Help yourself." When I told them that in Chinese, they shook their heads and said in unison, "Let's go."

Outside, where there was no one, they told me the reason for their rejection. The money was not bad. In China you would need about 800 yuan or so to spend the hour with a chick, equivalent to 135 bucks. "But the girls are just so old," Qin commented. "Not good-looking at all!" "I agree," DC said. "You could easily get better looking ones in China for less."

Back in Qin's room in the hotel minus DC who disappeared without a trace, not even saying goodbye, I and Qin made arrangements for tomorrow, when he cut me short, saying with his finger pointed to the television screen, "What is this?"

I saw "coming up" shown on the screen at the end of an episode of something.

"You mean 'coming up'?" I said.

"Yeh," Qin said. "What does it mean?"

"It means exactly what it says, coming up," I said. "But it doesn't make sense in Chinese. It means that the program will come back in a few minutes after the television commercials. See?"

"I see," Qin had started digging into his nostril and was now vigorously digging at things buried there in an attempt to clean himself up.

"Disgusting!" My wife said when I described the scene to her as she was cracking the melon seeds.

"Was it good?" I said.

"What, you mean the melon seeds?"

"Yes," I said, my eyes focussed on the TV screen where a Vietnamese film *Three Seasons* was showing.

"You can't even crack them open yourself," she said.

"You women are so good at doing these," I said.

"Yah, my Mom is very good and my niece is also good at it. Mom told me that over Chinese New Year she sat there cracking them and in the twinkling of an eye she had a big heap of empty husks before her. That's how good she was!"

"And what did you arrange with him to do the next day?" my wife said.

"I already told you. He wanted me to take him to this woman in Delahay and I said to him over the phone, 'I can't be bothered going there but I would like to take you out to a dinner if that's what you prefer.' I mean these mainlanders when they come to Australia they expect you to do everything for them from showing them around in brothels to taking them from place to place as if you were a taxi-driver for hire for free! I am not having that shit."

"But you could have simply said to him that you did not have time," she mildly reminded him.

"After these many years in Australia, I don't know how to pretend, you know what I mean? It's a small matter. I just don't want to do that for him and I told him directly, the same way I would do to a client. No bullshit!"

"Don't be rude, okay?" she said. "You see?" The movie had now moved to the scene where the man was paying 50 dollars for the prostitute to sleep with him but let her sleep in the bed without even touching her.

"Well," I said. "That did not seem to me to be true. Still, I want to invite him to a dinner before he left for China, you know what I mean?"

"How are you going to do that then, calling him directly and apologizing for what you said to him yesterday?"

"No, I don't think so. What do you think? Would you like to help me by calling him and saying to him that I would like to invite him to dinner?"

"This is none of my business," She stopped cracking the melon seeds and, spitting out the last husk, she said, "You have shat on someone and now you want me to wipe it clean for you. No way!"

"Now, don't be rude yourself, okay?"

"I tell you what," she whispered something into my ears and I nodded my head.

The next day I rang up 12455 to get a number for the hotel as I had lost the piece of paper bearing the number and after I got the number I rang up.

"Could I leave a message for Qin, please, for him to come to dinner tomorrow evening?" I said.

"Qin is in his room. Can I transfer you?" The man said.

"No, please just leave a message to that effect," I said.

"You mean you don't want me to transfer you to him while he's in but—"

"I want you to just leave a message for him, understand? What's your name?"

"All right then," the man said, giving up on his inquisitiveness. "if you please, sir."

When I hang up, I signed and suddenly I remembered the lit-up sign of Colonial Hotel right ahead of us when we came out of the joint and thought to myself: Now it's up to him whether he wanted to return my call or not.