

Wong Ching Yu Cheryl

Protector

Having siblings to go to the same school is a blessing. My brothers and I went to the same primary school, and because of the smaller age gap, my younger brother and I used to go home together everyday after school.

Every day when the school bell rang, I would hurry to the school hall, standing on my tiptoes, trying to spot my little brother among the noisy crowd of parents and circles of students. I especially cherish the moment when our eyes met, and his face would instantly light up with joy and relief. I love being the *protector* of my little helpless brother with his heavy dull backpack slung over his tiny shoulders, even when I am only two years older.

At the end of the academic year, my primary school would always hold an auction in each class, auctioning tiny goods like fancy erasers, the iconic matchstick blue ball pen, or mini keychains. The currency is the stamps one gets when they submitted homework on time or behaved well. I never got a chance to bid for the popular items as I could never compete with those prefects, or sport teams athletes, so I had always been more like an audience than a bidder. It is not that I am not interested in the goods, I mean, who wouldn't like a tiny box full of mini erasers in the shape of different cakes? I was simply fully aware of the fact that I could never compete with other students. They are like financial giants, holding so many stamps that they could easily manipulate the entire auction. Therefore, I had always been pessimistic about the exciting annual auction, though I preferred to call myself realistic. No matter how

cute the erasers were, they could not compel me to step forwards and become a clown, a clown who gradually stopped raising her hand to bid.

One year, I saw this pen with a particularly huge football miniature on the top of it. I was never a fan of football, and I knew nothing about it. But the moment the teacher took it out of the black mysterious bag of treasure, a surge of passion welled up inside me – a firm determination unlike anything I had ever felt for these auctions. I knew I had to get it no matter what, simply because my little brother loves playing football.

Fortunately, most of the financial giants were girls, and they showed zero interest in this weird football pen. I completely understand, as the football decoration on the top of the pen even had a pair of fists, I could not name anything more random than a football with fists, that punch air when you press the button. Yet, I had never craved anything as much as I wanted the fist-football pen. This left me in a showdown with a few boys. Whenever they raised their hands to bid, I responded with the fastest speed and the most determined gaze, raising the price even higher. When they upped their bids by five stamps, I countered with ten. What an exhilarating psychological battle it was among a couple of children. As I succeeded in making the boys believe that my confidence came from the uncountable stamps in my hands, I knew I had already won – I won the bizarre-looking fist-football pen.

Once the bell rang, I rushed to the hall to find my little brother. This time, I had a new reason to rush to the hall than usual. Once I spotted those tiny shoulders of him, I came up to him pretending to ask about the auction mindlessly,

“So... did you get anything?”

He replied, “I was not interested, I don’t have enough stamps anyway.”

Seeing my brother’s complete indifference to the annual auction filled me with secret joy. He surely had no idea he would be getting something from it. I could already imagine how phenomenal his reaction would be when he found out!

Once we arrived at the minibus stop, I could no longer pretend that I did not just participate in an intense bidding war with a few classmates, just for him. I felt like my excitement was bursting out of my body. I turned my school bag around, revealed to my brother the hideous fist-football pen with the proudest smile on my face.

He showed the perfect reaction – a look of surprise, with his eyes sparkling with joy – just as I expected!

But what I did not expect is him also turning his dull school bag around, revealing to me the cutest pen with an unnecessarily huge bunny on the top of it, with an even brighter smile than mine.

At the age of 10 and 8, we both secretly sacrificed our sacred stamps for each other, just to see the face of sparkly eyes on each other’s faces.

Maybe, I did not rush to the hall everyday after school because I wanted to be his *protector*, I probably just missed my little brother too much. And maybe, his eyes did not light up when he saw me in the hall because he felt safe around me, he probably just missed his big sister a little bit too much.