

“The Long Journey Home”

7:34 a.m. I stand in front of my mirror in my bedroom, dressed in my pale blue blouse and my dark tartan skirt. I slip on my navy jersey and tug at the fraying edges on the sleeves, glancing at the ticket on the calendar: “Citizenship Ceremony 09. Michael Fowler Centre. 7 pm. April 1.” Ha! Is this some kind of joke? On April Fools Day? You gotta be kidding me! The last thing I want to do is stand in an auditorium with a bunch of random white people, just give me the damn certificate already! (1) I plug in my hair straightener, attack my hair with hairspray and then put in my blonde hair extensions, brushing out the strands for maximum cover.

7:56 a.m. I pull an incense stick out of a long tube and light it expertly. As the flame goes out, I am left with a smouldering tip and a trail of smoke. I hold the stick up vertically against my forehead, close my eyes and begin chanting in my head: “I am blessed by Buddha and shall forever be loyal to my family and friends. I am forever loyal to my culture and Buddha. I pray forgiveness for the sins I have committed and ask Buddha to protect the ones I love.” I bow my head, once, twice and a final third time, then plant the stick into a pot of ash alongside burning red candles. I wonder if Buddha speaks English? (2).

Period One: English

Period Two: Correspondence Chinese Level 1

10:42 a.m. Morning tea. I rush to the tuck shop to beat the crowd to the line to buy my morning tea. “Hi there, what can I get ya today?”

“Hey can I just get one of those mince pies thanks. No wait fried rice! Wait... pie? Rice? Pie? Sorry. Umm... can I just get a pie thanks.”

Period 3: Piano

Period 4: Business Studies

1.38 p.m. The lunch bell rang about eight minutes ago. I sit in the corridor with a line of black haired girls up against the wall, all identical, all holding our rice boxes and chopsticks in hand (3).

7:42pm. “... And I am forever loyal to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth...” I stand in an auditorium with a sea of a million different cultures but all united here to get the exact same thing: to be declared New Zealand Citizens. I look around me, an Indian woman stands in front of me in her sari and her long black hair, her children and her husband at her side, all wearing their traditional Indian clothes. I look to my right and see my mother dressed in a Malaysian sari. And here I stand, in my satin cocktail dress with my crystal earrings and a sequined clutch purse (4)

8 p.m “Please rise to sing the national anthem.” I stand and open my mouth as soon as the music starts. The words just pour out naturally. I have sung this song since I was 5 years old. To the left, I hear my father singing, every word loud and proud, but none of them pronounced correctly. But who am I to criticise? I am a fifteen year old Malaysian girl with olive yellow skin and pitch black hair with blonde extensions. The blood that runs through my veins is completely Malaysian, but I can’t even pronounce one single word of the Malaysian national anthem. I wasn’t born in New Zealand, I was born in Malaysia. Shouldn’t I know the words from my own national anthem? (5)

8.20 p.m “See-zee-loo-eee Chin.” I chuckle to myself, as if I’ve never heard my name mispronounced like that before! I step up to the stage, hands slightly sweaty as I look into the sea of people to my left. I walk towards the Governor General, shake her warm, welcoming hands, and receive my certificate of citizenship. I know I should feel something, some kind of jolt, a sudden belonging to New Zealand. But I don’t I feel anything (6)

9:12 p.m. I sit in the back seat of our Toyota Previa, looking out at the streets and the cars go by. I keep wondering why I didn’t feel anything when I was up there. I am a legal citizen of New Zealand now. Citizenship means I can qualify for a future university scholarship. My parents are so happy – they’ve been waiting for this moment for as long as I can remember being in New Zealand.

9.45 p.m “...from the bottom of our hearts, welcome home,” sings Dave Dobbyn on the radio as we turn into our drive and suddenly I understand. I’ve lived in this country for nearly my entire life. I’ve grown up here: Cuba Street’s buckets and records from Slow Boat; Frank Kitts’ seagull slide, Te Papa Marae on wet days, and swimming at Days Bay; Dragon Boat races on the harbour, netball on Saturday mornings and Dim Sum Sundays; Kirk’s toy department, New Year’s Eve with family and the parade the next day in Courtney Place. I don’t need

some piece of paper with the words 'Citizen' and 'New Zealand' on it. I was a New Zealander all along, a Malaysian New Zealander. And this is my home (7).