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Instructor's Name
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Midnight Twelve O' Clock

To Morning Six O' Clock

There she was, at the stable on a rainy Sunday at the country side down to the South East part of Beijing, feeding the horses carrots after training. The northern metropolis of China, Beijing, is structured with mainly 5 rings, but 7 in total. 16,41 million sq with a population of 21,893,100 people. The locals call it 'Jing Cheng' which translates to Jing town, and say 'we Beijingers live at the foot of the imperial city' because it has been the capital since the Yuan dynasty which started in the year of 1271, the Forbidden city for instance where the emperors used to live, and also 'Zhong Nan Hai', where is the home to the first till now the 7th president of China. To get technical here, the surface area of 20 New York states equals to 1 Beijing, 155 Paris equals to 1 Beijing and 10 London equals to 1 Beijing City. Some say that couples working and living in Beijing who do not live together at the same compound is like having a long distance relationship. Some also say, "In the morning, one takes a train from France, he or she will arrive about an hour to Switzerland, and another hour or so to Italy. Around the same time span, one is at Chaoyang, one sit a hour in the car, he is still at Chaoyang, he takes for another hour, he is still at the Chaoyang District". Keep in mind, there are 16 Districts and 2 counties, nearly 300 towns and villages just in Beijing. The truth is, the serious and focused Beijing might seems to be a big, busy city, sometimes with fog coming and going to kiss and greet the people, with many roads and

highways where people honk horns at each other with or without reasons, skyscrapers filled with people who are working until midnight, and who talk about business at smoky scented whiskey bars, or exotic aromatic Chinese French fusion restaurants above 50th to 70th floors, or at the old alleyways, drinking tea and playing mahjong, everyone eventually settles down and find their own places that is called home by the end of the night. Living in a city where it is so immense and filled with different dynamic, it is important to find the bit of inner peace within everyone, whether it would be sauntering into a modern designed cafe ordering an iced americano or salted caramel latte, going to the crowded shopping mall at the CBD area or visiting the historical temples for refreshing the soul and for blessings, everyone has a place for the comfort needed for them. As for her, ever since she started living there, she did not see the magic the city distributed, but really just saw Beijing as an ancient, rigorous squared chessboard, every chess which she sees it individually as single identities doing their own businesses. But, she thought if you see them as a whole, they all work towards a common purpose, and that is to live. It is like in a crowded ocean, full of people shuttling to and fro in order to pursue their every own opportunities of life. At that time, she still had no idea what adventure would life offer her in the future.

This story takes places at a national equestrian club called “QiYu” in Beijing, but really to be looked in to, why it is written at a stable is because of what happened when “Z”, which is the girl’s name, took a trip to Xinjiang, China. Speeding forward to a few months back, where one night, after doing a full day of work at a fashion magazine publishing company called Cosmo, under their beauty column until midnight for doing a mood board about some celebrities and the theme of spring. After that, around midnight twelve o’ clock she took a navy blue colored taxi and went straight back to her little apartment up north, got into the

shower, without drying her hair, fell into sleep with her favorite grey satin bed sheets. And around the early morning, where the conscious and the unconscious mind meet, she dreamed. She was a person that believed in metaphysics, she loved to learn all about FengShui, The Book of Changes, or fortune-telling, tarot readings and even reincarnation. Funny enough, that was what actually brought her to step into the world of Buddhism. She even had kept a dream diary herself in her phone ever since the age of 15, locked in notes. This time, the mind fantasied about her being the only majestic black maned horse in a group of wild herd on the mountain valley side in autumn, sprinting together in the wilderness, and “Z” as the horse, jumped through the cliff, and took off to the sky. Feeling in such an unrestrained, untamed way of freedom and valor. When the horse was about to land back onto the grassland to meet the rest of the herd, she woke up. But then when she had awoken back into the reality, she did not know whether she was “Z” dreaming she was a horse or a horse dreaming she was ‘Z’. Plus, it was crazy in her mind to dream something like this because of what happened to her childhood. When “Z” was around 5 years old, her parents did take her to a stable once to try out horseback riding for 45 minutes on a weekend. Now looking back at it, she thought her parents were a bit superficial since they called horseback riding ‘a sports for the nobles’ and smirks in a sarcastic way whenever they bring it up during family dinners. The stable, which she forgot the name not only because she was at such a young age, but also it was because even before she fell off from that smelly white pony she remembered when she was standing in front of the pony, it kept licking her hand and neck. For the information, she was obsessively neat and clean ever since a young age, she did not like things to be messy. That was the only thing she could recall really, and ever since, she got a bit of ptsd and never went back. But because she had superstition, she kept thinking if she should try out horseback riding again in the near future.

So, before she fell back to sleep again, she saw a blue butterfly rested on the balcony outside her window, and slept again ...

...As the national holiday was approaching around the end of September, where the city was slowly covered with a sheer silver wedding veil and getting ready to welcome its country's anniversary while with raindrops waving to announce the arrival of a new coming season. "Z" who was laying on her velvet ocean blue colored sofa and scrolling through social media to decide on which places she should go and visit, to leave the fast paced city and travel somewhere with a calmer environment being provided. Whether it is to the south, Hangzhou, a city next to Shanghai that was built with temples surrounding the city, having a little get-away to the bamboo wooded mountain, where the tea farmers would be busy harvesting tea leaves, then get back to the center of the city where the lake XiHu would be located, paddling on the boat, and setting out lanterns during the evening, into the night, seeing the light reflections of hundreds of lanterns in the water shimmering through. Or take a trip to the west, Dunhuang, to live in the middle of the desert, viewing the boundless stretch of the sand, with people riding camels. So she thought, she will just let fate decide. She closed her eyes and wherever the finger points to when she stop scrolling online, that would be the destination. Suddenly, Xinjiang it is! Xinjiang, where is also located in the West, that borders with countries like Russia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and India has an enchantment in its own with a sense of mysteriousness and allure. For this reason, she bought the tickets and took off next Monday to Ili. It was only on the third last day which really brought the magic to her. Her tour guide, Harik told her in the morning at the hotel that they were going on a free rein with horses.

‘Horses?’ She thought and said: “Really? I mean, are you sure it is not dangerous for a beginner like me?”

He replied: “Just trust the horses, believe me, I can see you are a born rider.”

That sunny afternoon, he took the group of 4 people into the SUV and drove up into the mountain where they later on had a picnic on the hills while waiting for the locals to bring up the horses. There were eight horses in total and she spotted the only black one, that looked quite huge comparing to the others.

Harik saw what she was looking at, came to her and said: “You spotted this one huh.”

“Yah...”

“Go for it.”

She listened to him and stepped on the left stirrup, took a leap, and sat on the horse, it was specifically at that moment, she felt the long lost security that somewhere she needed and craved in the bottom of her heart, being there when she sat on the horse, something within her just clicked, she wasn’t afraid anymore physically or mentally, she was at a state of tranquility. During the ride, going across a stream of water with a pebble stones path, that whenever the farriers meet with pebbles, it created a wave of clear sounds which woke echoes in the mountain valley, then going up to the mountain with wild purple and pink flowers waving at them. Running through the grassland... for a while, she thought she became a baby horse, being led by the herd, exploring the world around her. Beyond words, she understood why the artists had been inspired by these magnificent creatures for centuries of time through the form of literature, music, and art. She felt nothing but contentment flowing through her body, every blood cell in her veins, in her capillaries came to live, she felt her heart pumping deep and steady. This time, she was really living for herself. Ignoring

all the judgment she kept getting previously for 25 years from her parents, her boss, and the pressures from the society of the monthly bills, her at the age of 25 without a husband. At that point, she knew she had to live the life for herself, and for no one else. She didn't want to listen to anyone anymore on what things are good for her or not. By the end of the 4th hour on this ride, when the locals told the group to stop at the grassland, to take a break both for the horses and the human. "Z" suddenly thought what she dreamed few months back and told Harik and the locals about it.

One of the locals said. : "Hey, have you heard of the story called ZhuangZhou and the Butterfly?"

She replied: "I mean, I have heard about the set phrase before but I've never looked into it, why?"

"Maybe after you listen to this myth, it will explain your dream to you."

“昔者莊周夢為胡蝶，栩栩然胡蝶也，自喻適志與。不知周也。俄然覺，則蘧蘧然周也。不知周之夢為胡蝶與，胡蝶之夢為周與。周與胡蝶，則必有分矣。此之謂物化”

She heard the story telling from the elder local as they finished having a break, and headed back to where the car parked in order to go back to the city as if nothing happened. But in her mind, she kept thinking. That specific night, on the king sized bed of her hotel room, from 11pm to 1am, she couldn't help to stop thinking about the story — That once, the ancient Chinese philosopher, Zhuangzi "dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly that was happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know that he was Zhuang

Zhou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn't know if he was Zhuang Zhou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhuang Zhou. The transformation of things, whether he was the butterfly or the butterfly was him.” While trying to figure out why the local said what he said to her earlier, about the story, about what she dreamed, she fell asleep. In her dream, she heard a female voice that kept telling her to wake up, but she didn't want to because there was a black maned horse sleeping right next to her. She didn't want the horse to wake up, and owing to the fact that the female voice was way too loud, the horse lifted its eyelids, then its neck, and knelt on the bed, trying to bite “Z”'s right hand. Now it was in her position who was so tired and did not want to get up and start the day, so she tried to endure the pain that was lifted from the horse's teeth until the horse started to eat her glasses right between them. She waited to see if the horse was actually going to take the risk of eating glass, and “Oh you are not gonna be that stupid are you?” she thought, then before she could blink her eyes, the horse started chewing on it. ‘Z’ got so scared that the horse might pass away, and started trying to grab the glasses away from it.

In an instant, she woke up, wide eyes open seeing her coach looking at her furiously in her dorm pointing at the clock and said :

”Do you have an idea of what time it is now, Z?” “It is twelve pm already and I cannot believe you are still in bed, not taking care of your horse Blue Morpho and getting him to the field!”

She replied, : “What? I am in the hotel of Ili? What are you saying Mrs. Meng?”

“Please, just look outside the window!”

“Oh my gosh.”

“Okay.”

“So...”

“So what happened was all just a flash back 5 years ago when I went to Xinjiang and fell in love with horseback riding...”

“What are you saying? Leave. Your. Dorm. Now!!!”

She got up, and saw the blue butterfly outside the window was gone, and went down to the stable to see Blue Morpho.

As a result, there she was, at the stable on a rainy Sunday at the country side down to the South East part of Beijing, feeding the horses carrots after her late training with Blue Morpho. As she was brushing through his hair while the horse was eating dinner. She thought back earlier on her dream, it was really herself who was reminiscing what happened five years ago. After the trip to Xinjiang, she quit her job at Cosmo, and started training professionally. Five years later, now, that she is thirty years old, she would be ready to go to the nationals in two years. However, during this year that she turned 30, she got a rider’s block and was stuck at the point to jump the 1.6m obstacle. She was so angry with herself, she felt like somehow she lost her connection with Blue Morpho that she wanted to quit. She was hearing all those voices again on her parents telling her to become a successful businesswoman, to be married and lastly, how there’s no future for her in horseback riding.

‘Yah’, to be frank, she did lack a bit of talent comparing to the other riders. But she had a heart of fierce, who never wanted to give up. Slowly, the obstacle that she was facing had became a knot in her heart that she could not untie it for about 6 months even though she was

training none stop everyday for 6 hours, she could not pass it. It went on an endless and helpless loop of blindly training. “Z” wanted to compete so bad that she forgot about what was the original intention the heart wanted when she started horseback riding. She was a woman where offices did not attract her, just sitting there and looking through the computer and typing out words by words. It was the animals, the nature that looked through her eyes and spoke to her heart. When Z first started to train, her goal was just to be happy, and become a horseback riding coach to teach the children to leave out the screens for a little while and look around to the nature. She remembered the butterfly she saw this morning and wondered if she now was the butterfly at the morning looking through Z’s dream. She remembered at the end of the butterfly story, Zhuangzi said:“ ZhuangZhou and the butterfly must be different individuals, which is called materialization. But under special conditions, Zhuangzhou could have been the butterfly, the butterfly could have been ZhuangZhou.” The transformation of things, would this dream be a metaphor in a way to symbolize the underlying fact that everything could be transformed into each other? Kongzi once said “One dreamed of birds flying across the sky, dreamed fish swimming in the lake, but one does not know whether the conversation he is having now is awake, or just dreaming?” She believed, in the nature, bird did fly across the sky, and fish did live in water, it all came naturally, there are many things that were waiting for her to explore, to experience, why should she be so stuck over something, instead of just ease in and feel the connection she had with the world, with Blue Morpho.

“Eventually it will come to me.”

One of the sublime beauties in this world is the connection human has with nature, everywhere we look, the complex magic of nature blazes before our eyes do. Whether “Z”

did pass her obstacle or not, what happens next is left for everyone's own imagination and understanding not only of this story, but also their perspectives and attitudes towards life. As for me, I thought I could write one last sentence down.

“There is a will, there is a way.”

The end?

Bibliography

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