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## The Hills of Don Dilli

Tan Bo Yan

When the door first flung open, I was greeted by the most welcoming sight. Glittering pearls floated through the hallways, the smell of fresh poppies filled the air, and just a mile ahead, a dazzling lit entrance could be spotted. I followed the euphonious tune and entered the room, girls and boys like me were waltzing by the step-how long has it been since I saw another human being like me? The lady that silently trailed behind me and introduced her name as 'Gre' gave me a metallic wristband, o I can't describe how beautiful it lit. A girl called Eva, a needle shorter than me came forward and did a little curtsy. By her wrist tied a string that was connected to a bobbing bubble half filled with glitter potion She asked shyly for my name and 'Pers' was all I could say, the rest was too painful. She said in a melodious voice, "All us prince, princess, and knights alike came from various kingdoms. I come from the Land of Orphz, where my people carry Orbes just like mine. Where do you come from? I wonder if it is a place I have been?" I, not surprisingly, have never heard of the existence of the Land of Orphz. Since we all came from different stops, I assume it was a faraway island. I proceeded to respond, "The Paradise of Hospy-" before I could say no more, my breathing came to a sudden halt for a second or two and I coughed non-stop. It was only after I took a sip of my magic tea brought by Gre that then I could talk. Embarrassed, I stammered, "Sorry, I get Muzellis, it's kind of common in the Paradise of Hospy, it's like a gene passed on." She gave me an assuring pat on my shoulder and laughed lightly, "No, it's alright, I get Oilges too when my potion runs out, and talking about it, that reminds me, hold on a second" The little girl turned around and in a startling loud voice she called out, "Knight Tiol, come over here, there is someone

from the same land as you." Just a few seconds later, a sturdy tan boy in steel armour dashed over, the quickest I have seen anyone, in fact, his feet were flying high." In a polite voice, he raised his brow, "Yes, Princess Eva, how could it be? My land, my people reside in an island, thousands, rather millions of ships away from here." "Well, what land did you say you were from again?" The rosy girl prompted. He puffed up his chest but quivered slightly, "The Paradise of Hospy, the one, and only Hospy." "She too is from the Paradise of Hospy." She gestured at me, and I panicked. My eyes shifted before they met Tiol's, the boy who proclaimed to come from the same place as me, I had never seen him before, what shall I ever do? An awkward silence formed, he looked at me confused, I stared back at him blankly. A moment went by and it was only broken by the chuckles of Eva, the girl who had to bring it up in the first place. "So... both of you haven't met before, maybe because you are a princess and he is a knight, two different parts of the kingdom, the Paradise of Hospy is quite big, Tiol, am I right?" "Yes, yes, the Paradise of Hospy is terribly large. Knights and Princess don't meet, they live quite far apart." A tint of remorse was seen through his gaze as he scratched his head and looked away. It was only then colour returned to my face as my lips sealed tight to prevent any more revealing of the past I inherit.

Just in time, the gong rang, the second time I heard it since I set foot in this isle. At first, I did not know what it was for until Eva led me by the arm into the dining hall. A banquet had been set, with all kinds of food one may get, from roasted pork and meat to caramelized pudding and ice cream, and of course not to forget our own brewed drinks and toffees. I sat next to Eva, and we ate and chat. Eva drank her sour Unicorn juice and I gulped down my bitter Sand Weed as fast as I could. I caught a glance of fellow Tiol surrounded by his knightly friends probably fifty needles away from me. To say the least strange of it all, a while ago I saw him laughing loudly but at present, he was looking down somberly at something shiny. I noticed this among the others too, from time to time many were looking down at the same identical thing they were clutching tightly. Yet, no one seems to mention it, no one at all, like it was

no matter, I could not bring it up to ask about it. But when I finally did try to mention it, the first time barely five words got out of my chapped lips, and the plump girl on my right swiftly cut me off. The second time, I got through a whole sentence, Eva interrupted and that was when I knew I had to stop. Their faces were scrunched up and seemed like a knife had stabbed them in the chest or chains had wrestled them by the neck, and I felt quite guilty for having brought it up, so I kept mum throughout the rest of the dining.

Thereafter, it just so happened that Gre informed me that Eva was actually my suite buddy, well I was elated, no new faces- I was quite overwhelmed by the masses at the feast table, now, the less the trouble. So I followed behind Eva as we strutted towards our room with the ebony wood ringing below our feet. The suite, well it turned out magnificent better than I had expected, a chandelier hung over the twin beds, there were two beanbags, teddy bears and little figurines that I learned from Eva were called "doll-ss", my tongue got twisted by saying it but I'm sure I could get used to it. Best of all, the walls were decorated with flowers and the ceiling that the sun was hung up on was plastered with an evening purple blue sky-no more dull gray walls for me, something I could cheer about. I changed into my silky striped nightgown and Eva did too, we looked like twins, both thin and lean, hazelnut hair, chipped lips, emerald eyes, just that I was taller than her by a bit. After I wiped my face with a towel ever so soft, I dived right into the comfy bed. For once I felt at ease, no sirens, no poking, none of that anymore. As I snuggled and turned to my left, I saw Eva crouching against the bed cushion, looking troubled at a pocket watch that was wrapped in her little hands, it shone the same light and colour as the thing many other children were holding earlier on and so it was- a pocket watch. She was smiling with watery eyes of evergreen trees, so I was puzzled and so with the urge I asked cautiously, "O, Eva, why so sad, it's just a pocket watch that the others, too have." She didn't reply at first, but mumbled, "It is my first day having it, so it is for many others, before you came I got it from the Ruler of All Things. No point hiding it, come over

and take a look." I climbed onto her bed, eyes fixated on that pocket watch, it was a copper watch with a cat carved on it, rather pretty, no, it was exquisite. So why are they all so sad at such a magnificent gift? Seeing my queer expression, Eva continued, "You see there are only three Roman numerals on it? It is at one now." I haven't realized that before, yes, weird indeed. "It is handmade specially for you, I see," I tried to assure her. "No." she promptly replied with no façade and the veil dropped. "We all get it, you get yours soon, same as mine, you know it too." I chocked. She smiled sweetly, " You know, we princess, prince, and knight all go to meet the Queen one day." Oh, yes, of course, that was it, to meet her majesty that was what the pocket watch was for, all the children were sober because they had to consider how to greet her majesty!

I wanted to exclaim in glee for this newly anticipated knowing, just then Eva rose up and stood on the bed. She pointed out of the glass cracked window, "You see, the hills over there, yes, those vast hills of Don Dilli, there beyond lies the castle of her highness. When the hand reaches three, it is my calling to visit the Palace. It is better than here or anywhere else, not only do unicorns live there, pegasuses, and mermaids have their holidays there too. Whereas, before that time comes, the hills will continue dancing and sing their tune for me. You will soon hear its lovely symphony..." I gazed out at the dark midnight sky, the ominous clouds could still be seen looming over those distant trees, and shimmering shooting stars were flashing by, I quietly made a wish to get my ticket to Don Dilli. Eva yawned as she rubbed her puffy eyes and I crept back into my colossal ship as the moonlight cradled me to sleep.

The next day, word of the hills of Don Dilli got around and laughter rang throughout. The news of Don Dilli had everyone elated. There was a renewed joy- at least for now, princess, knights, and princes were discussing on what to talk to the Queen about. Then, came the gong for lunch, and as I followed the other children into the hall, I started filling slightly nauseous but I shake it off, it was probably due to my Muzells. I had no appetite for that meal and was keenly wanting to get back to my fluffy cotton

cloud. Unfortunately, Gre signalled me out, coupled with a dozen other children. Eva whispered before I left that the Ruler of All Things has summoned me. So I went into the tightly enclosed room bravely and I sat there still as the chanting went on. The Ruler of All things was an old lady, expressionless and grim, probably because she has done the same rituals hundreds of times and her own pocket watch is arriving, the things she said were not particularly pleasing to hear and I could see why Eva, Toil and the other kids were so grave afterward. But that did not matter now, with the hills of Don Dilli calling for me and I could soon sing merrily. Soon after I got my own pocket watch, and Eva was wrong, not all were the same, mine was engraved with an owl on it, and even as other children of this batch had owls similar to mine, I spotted slight differences in them. Knight John had his pocket watch with an eyepatch on it just like him, Kiley Jones the Great had her owl with one blue and one green eye and as for me, my owl had a smile, probably because I was smiling all the time since I had arrived. Maybe things were not that bad after all if we could get past to see the better side of things -thanks to Don Dilli. Soon afterward, during dinner time, Eva's magical bubble popped by accident and its potion flowed out like a river, Gre and the others immediately carried her away and that was the last time I saw her, she was nonetheless smiling, the brightest I have ever seen.

The following day, before dawn broke, that was much shuffling going on, and much murmuring, the air was stiff but not depressed, it was a quiet embrace and I hug farewell to many of the new courageous associates I have befriended, including Toil, who gave me his last salute I would see-at least on this isle. "Maybe we can visit the Paradise of Hospy together one day," he commented. "No, Don Dilli is where we shall meet and we need not go back to those caves of ferocious beasts again." I corrected. He immediately understood, and with a final nod wheeled in with plenty of others into the chamber of Havens, Gre entered last and in a short fifteen minutes walked out silently. Credit must be given to Gre, she had taken care of all the children faithfully, and to do such a painful task over and over again, sure has not been easy

for her. My invitation to the palace came a day after, and as I laid on the warm sheets of wool surrounded by crimson poppy flowers, the gong rang once more. I nodded goodbye to my mates. Gre looked down and kissed me on the forehead, with all the might I had left I squeezed out my best smile, last night, the hills of Don Dilli I have come.