**Sample Translation of Ting Wang, a Short Story by Acclaimed Chinese Writer SU Tong (Translated from Chinese)**

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***White Snow, Pig Heads***

Mom was shopping for a pig head, yet she couldn’t get one. She headed to the butcher's shop with hershopping basket in the early hours of the morning, but she just couldn’t get pig heads. The small pickup truck from the meatpacking plant came with eight pig heads—each giving off a haze of hot stream peculiar to freshly butchered hogs—which people saw clearly with their own eyes. Mom was the sixth person waiting in line. When the delivery man carried the pig heads two by two into the shop, she counted them carefully on her fingers. After the shop’s door opened, however, Mom was able to see only four smallish pig heads on the counter; the other four bigger ones were nowhere to be found. Both she and Granny Shaoxing, who was fifth in line, got a bit nervous. “How come they disappeared?” Granny Shaoxing asked. Mom stood on tiptoe to look down near Zhang Yunlan’s feet, but all she was able to see was Zhang Yunlan’s purple rubber boot. “Probably they’re down below there,” Mom said. “There were altogether eight of them. Where did the other four bigger ones go? Has she hidden them somewhere?” Zhang Yunlan must have overheard Mom. All of a sudden that purple rubber boot rose and kicked something to somewhere more obscure.

Mom was certain that was a big pig head.

There were no pig heads left by the time it was Granny Shaoxing’s turn. Granny Shaoxing reproached Zhang Yunlan with her kindly look, but it was futile. “They’re sold out,” said Zhang Yunlan. “Pig heads are in really short supply. Granny Shaoxing, you barely missed it. Had you been one step earlier, you’d have got one.”

Granny Shaoxing studied Zhang Yunlan’s face and saw no wiggle room in her countenance; she could see it was no use trying to smile placatingly either. Granny Shaoxing then pulled a long face and glanced behind the counter. “There’s one for me,” she said. “I saw it with my own eyes.” “You saw it? Where is it?” Zhang Yunlan’s plump body backed off one step in an aboveboard manner. Granny Shaoxing seized the opportunity to bend over the greasy counter and looked down, only to find Zhang Yunlan’s rubber boot snubbing her with a warm and purple glow. “Granny Shaoxing, isn’t your vision excellent for your age!” Zhang Yunlan suddenly gave a cackle. She raised her forearm covered with an oversleeve to wipe a cold sore at one corner of her mouth, and asked, “You can see around corners?”

Some people both inside and outside the counter joined her laughing. The ripple of mirth sounded dry and scattered—it was not so much a response to the humor as a statement of a necessary position. Embarrassed, Granny Shaoxing pointed at the corner of Zhang Yunlan’s mouth, “You’ve got a fever blister on your mouth!” Having said this somehow helped vent her spite. Granny Shaoxing stalked over to the side of Old Sun who was selling frozen meat, bought half pound, and made her way out of the butcher’s shop, muttering.

Mom was rather sulky, though. She threw the basket in her hand on top of the counter, and stood sternly in front of Zhang Yunlan. “I counted them—there’re a total of eight,” Mom said. “There’re four more. Take out the other four!”

“Four—what? Four of what do you want me to take out?” Zhang Yunlan said.

“Four pig heads! Take them out—this is absurd! I told you I saw them.”

“Pig heads, absurd, you saw them—what’s all that about? You are speaking a foreign language—I can’t understand it.”

“Take them out. If you don’t do it, I will.” Mom thought justice was on her side; seeing Zhang Yunlan waging a last-ditch fight, she got more vehement and became a bit impulsive. She pushed and nudged here and there—maybe due to the size of the crowd in the shop, or just some intentional efforts to block her way—somehow she failed to get inside the counter. She heard Zhang Yunlan’s sneer, “Who do you think you are? Getting inside here to fetch it yourself? Who’s given you permission to do so?”

Someone reached out trying to grasp Mom’s hand, “Shrug it off. Everyone knows pig heads are in short supply. Just turn a blind eye, suck it up, and wait to buy one next time. There’s no need to offend her.” Mom stood in the middle of the crowd, bald-faced. “This shop is outrageous,” she said. “Can pig heads be more precious than bird's nests? They had them hidden away. I waited in line several times and still can’t get one. They’ve taken those back to their own homes!” Zhang Yunlan responded on the other side of the counter, “Indeed, Pig heads aren’t precious. Why are you hooked on them then? Even threaten to attempt suicide if you can’t get them? You accuse us of taking them back home? Have you got any evidence?”

Mom was eager to get inside the counter to find the evidence. And yet suddenly she saw many hands and arms, whose were unknown, cropping up all around the shop—some were polite, holding her softly and loosely, while others were rude, gripping her arms like iron pliers, as if to prevent her from committing murders. A chaotic mixture of female and male voices rose, one surge after another—few of them were to patch up the quarrel, whereas most were to make clear their position, that is, they were siding with Zhang Yunlan. “This woman is going a bit too far. None of us got a pig head, but we bit our lips. Why is she so special and making such a big fuss?” While those people were pulling Mom with their hands, they were looking at Zhang Yunlan—their eyes were telling her, unambiguously, “Yunlan, Yunlan, we’re on your side.”

Mom lost her cool. She tried hard to break away from those annoying hands that resembled tree forks. “Hey, you people, did you lose your principles?” She said. “Does kissing up to her guarantee you a pig head every day? You will suffer from diarrhea if you eat the pig head you get by currying favor with her!” Mom’s attitude—with its all-around offense and heated rhetoric bordering on sharp and caustic—was apparently unwise. Those people left Mom one after another, rolling their eyes angrily; some leered back at her with a smirk of contempt: This woman is impossible; don’t bother arguing with the likes of her. Only Jianxi’s mom showed her true colors by staying next to Mom. She whispered something in Mom’s ear which surprisingly calmed her down. What Jianxi’s mom said was, “Don’t take this to heart. Zhang Yunlan is the type to hold grudges; she’s the last person you want to offend. I, too, have five growing children who need to eat meat. With so many mouths to feed, how can you afford to alienate her? Look, I quarrel with the neighborhood committee every day, but I’d never dare to quarrel with Zhang Yunlan.” That touched Mom on a sore spot. She stood in the shop, downhearted, thinking of the iron wok at home; that wok, having little contact with meat or fish all year round, was prone to rusting. She thought of how fast the regular condiments in our kitchen were used up, while the yellow rice wine always stayed full—why would we need the yellow rice wine if not for cooking meat or fish? Mom thought of the gluttony of her five children in gobbling down meat: Capitalizing on his being a wage earner, my eldest brother took over half a pot of pork cheeks; my second and third eldest brothers competed on the speed of chopsticks—whoever had faster chopsticks would have a more satisfied stomach; my thoughtful elder sister kept watch on the boys as a referee while taking only several slices of pig ears—however, sparing her stomach was merely saving a drop in the bucket and hardly helped; my second and third eldest brothers got along pretty well on days devoid of meat; on the rare days when we were treated with red-braised pork cheeks, however, they fought over the dinner table like a wolf against a tiger. Mom realized that the relationship between pork and her children was not a one-off, and that she couldn’t act in a fit of pique. So her tone softened when she said to Jianxi’s mom, “I wasn’t intentionally being hard on her. I had promised the kids to cook meat for them today. Now that the pig head I was supposed to get disappeared, what’s there to cook for them?” Jianxi’s mom pointed at Old Sun, “You can make do with some frozen meat.” Mom turned her head and looked blankly at the frozen meat on the counter. “That meat is no good,” she said, “expensive yet unpalatable, and with little fat.” Pork was in such short supply, and yet Mom was still picky. Jianxi’s mom didn’t know what else to say. She turned around to get back to her place in the queue, and rolled her eyes too when Mom wasn’t looking.

There were more and more people in the butcher’s shop now. Mom stood isolated in the midst of the crowd. A cabbage in her basket was bumped by someone and flopped onto the floor; she almost tripped over it. Mom bent down, padding one leg after another while yelping, “Excuse me, excuse me…my cabbage, my cabbage.” At last, Mom picked it up. The cabbage in her basket let her see a way to back out with dignity. “One won’t starve to death by skipping on pork!” She gave a final shout towards Zhang Yunlan inside the counter, and walked out of the shop with that cabbage and with her head held high.

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There’s so much unfairness of things on our street. Let’s stick to pig heads. Some people didn’t go to the butcher’s shop until the sun rose over Baoguang Pagoda at 8:00 AM; nonetheless they came out of the shop with pig heads. A case in point was our next door neighbor Xiaobing. That morning at eight o’clock, Mom saw Xiaobing heading to his home with a pig head on his shoulder. Although all pigs on earth look alike, Mom recognized at first sight that it was one of the pig heads that had disappeared in the early morning.

Xiaobing’s family had nothing to brag about. His dad worked at the fabric shop, his mom at the grocery store—merely in retail; nevertheless, they were both in the all advantageous retail sector, with one controlling cotton fabric, the other controlling white sugar—both rationed and highly sought-after goods. Mom wasn’t stupid; she got it without asking Xiaobing. But she couldn’t let it go. She followed Xiaobing and asked in a seemingly random and spontaneous fashion, “Your mom asked you to fetch the pig head, and you got it from Zhang Yunlan?” “Yes, it’s to be soused and saved for the Spring Festival,” Xiaobing replied. Mom couldn’t help stretching out one hand to rub the two large, thick pig ears; she said with a sigh, “Gosh, gosh, what a big pig head!”

Mom usually got along well with our female neighbors. She’s a dexterous tailor, good at both cutting out and sewing. Xiaobing’s mom often dropped by to ask Mom’s help with sewing projects, bringing along odds and ends her husband got her from the fabric store. Mom’s a soft touch—she granted whatever was requested, and even sewed aprons and insoles for Xiaobing’s family. Of course, Xiaobing’s mom returned the favor, mostly by giving us various ration stamps. My family didn’t have much need for white sugar. For one thing, we couldn’t afford it; besides, it didn’t help us flesh out. So the sugar stamps Xiaobing’s mom gave us were in turn given by Mom to others. Coal stamps were good, so were coarse paper stamps—those we kept for ourselves. Fabric stamps were the best—they provided Mom with a wealth of inexpensive yet high-quality khaki, denim, and printed fabrics, and did my family a big favor like helping a lame dog over a stile. At the time of the Spring Festival, each one of us in our large family would have a set of brand new clothing almost completely free. We owed this decency largely to Mom; there’s no denying that Xiaobing’s parents should also be given some credit.

That evening, Mom went to Xiaobing’s home with a fake collar, which had been made for Dad. Now that there’s a more pressing need, Mom was giving it away to Xiaobing’s mom to be worn by her husband. Dad took it with a bad grace; but he knew the fake collar was for an important mission and was able to do nothing but watch Mom wrapping it in newspaper.

The drinker’s heart was not in the cup. The night talks between Mom and the female neighbor under the lamp soon cut to the chase—pig heads and Zhang Yunlan, Zhang Yunlan and pig heads. Mom was beating around the bush somewhat, but the other party understood her intent in no time—she wanted Xiaobing’s mom to be a messenger to Zhang Yunlan and help explain that what had happened in the morning wasn’t her intentionally being difficult; it’s just that she was cornered by her voracious kids; she was sorry for the hurtthat's inflicted, but please don’t take that the wrong way and don’t hold a grudge—at this point Mom again became a bit emotional, “If I offended her, so be it; I can go without eating pork myself. But I can’t change the fact that I’ve got all these boys, each and every one of them has this insatiable appetite for meat, meat, meat—how can I afford to offend her who holds the meat cleaver?!”

Xiaobing’s mom couldn’t agree more with Mom. In her view, on our Mahogany Street Zhang Yunlan was in reality equated with pork; offending Zhang Yunlan was offending fresh pork, and offending fresh pork was offending the kids’ stomachs—it was just not worth it. Throughout their conversations Xiaobing’s mom looked at Mom with sympathy as if she were gazing at an impetuous child who caused big trouble. She’s a smart woman, and in the heat of the moment she came up with an idea for Mom to make amends for what she had done. She said, “Zhang Yunlan herself has four children. She complains all the time that the way her kids wear pants is like biting on popsicles; one bite down, a big chunk at the bottom of the pants is gone. What they wear this year will be too short next year. Why don’t you make some pairs of pants for her kids?” Mom pursed her lips subconsciously, “How can I be that easy? Now she didn’t treat me with respect, am I to offer to make pants for her family? I would become a laughing stock, wouldn’t I?” Women know women best. Xiaobing’s mom said to Mom, “For the sake of your kids’ stomachs, forget about saving face. After you get the pants in place, I will bring them to her; I guarantee that will pay off. Just think about it—the Spring Festival is just around the corner; if she and you remain in a standoff, what food can you count on providing to your kids? Let me tell you something: Zhang Yunlan’s meat cleaver has eyes—you lose out to her, and you have nowhere even to lodge a complaint against her.”

The last part of what the female neighbor said struck a chord with Mom. She replied, “You’re right—with all these kids to feed at home, I can’t even hold my head up, why should I bother saving my face? Please deliver a message to her, asking her to bring me the fabric—I will make her kids clothes from now on; no need for her to buy them anymore.”

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It’s always best to strike while the iron is hot, especially when the Spring Festival was drawing close. The next day, on her way back home Xiaobing’s mom brought a roll of navy blue fabric to Mom. She also brought a message from Zhang Yunlan, the first part of which, when summed up, sounded like a quotation from Chairman Mao, “Let bygones be bygones, cure the sickness to save the patient.” The second part of the message warmed the cockles of Mom’s heart, “She said, from now on, whatever you want to eat, there’s no need to rise early and wait in line for it; just give her a heads up the day before, and go get it from the butcher’s shop the next day after the morning market hours are over. Just go get it!”

The following week was perhaps the busiest time in Mom’s life. Other housewives were also busy, but they’re busy with housework and Spring Festival shopping, whereas Mom was busy for Zhang Yunlan. The request from Zhang Yunlan was to make five pairs of pants—all guys’ pants, in various sizes—out of the roll of fabric she provided. The sizes were written on a piece of greasy paper, which Mom stuck onto the wall above the sewing machine. Looking at that piece of paper reminded us of the legs of four boys and one man in Zhang Yunlan’s family—those ten legs were all longer than ours; they must have had lots of bone broth! Mom, however, heaved a deep sigh when she looked at it. She complained that there wasn’t enough fabric from Zhang Yunlan, and cutting out five pairs of pants would be as hard as scaling the blue sky.

Sometimes Mom exaggerated the difficulty of cutting out only to prove how good she was with her craft. Afterward she stayed up all night, leaving cut-out pieces for the five pairs of pants stacked on the sewing machine like soft cyan rice terraces. Thereafter the annoying clump of the sewing machine droned on. Every day after returning home from work Mom sat in front of the sewing machine, saddling my poor sister with all the other chores. My sister protested with a sulky pout, “Why sewing so many pairs of pants, and all for others? Where’s my pair? Where’re my brothers’?” Mom replied, “What’s the hurry on our own pants? Still a couple days left until the Spring Festival. Anyway, I won’t let you ring in the New Year in old clothes.” My sister didn’t take the hint, and she kept babbling away, “Even if you serve the people, you can't just serve anyone indiscriminately. Zhang Yunlan is such a snob, such a nuisance; how can you make pants for her?” Mom lost her temper, “Shut up, will you? You’re a big girl, and yet you just don’t get it! Who am I keeping busy for? Am I keeping busy for Zhang Yunlan? I am keeping busy for your stomachs!”

Time was running short. Mom had to burn the midnight oil. In our dreams we heard the sewing machine singing along with the north wind outside the window—sometimes free flowing, sometimes hesitant, sometimes overflowing with enthusiasm, sometimes aggrieved and plaintive. I faintly heard Mom and Dad’s conversations in the dead of night. Mom said in front of the sewing machine, “My eyeballs are about to pop out.” “I wish they would,” Dad responded from the bed. “It’s so freaking cold,” Mom said, “my fingers are freezing.” “I wish they would,” said Dad. “Kissing up to the likes of her—you asked for it!”

Regardless of the complaints, Mom finished the pants for Zhang Yunlan, quality and quantity assured. She gave all five pairs to Xiaobing’s mom, who suggested thoughtfully, “You should go and hand them to her yourself—once you break the ice, the grip will be untangled.” Mom replied with a waveof her hand, “I had a row with her at the butcher’s shop only a few days ago. Playing nice now after being nasty then is not my thing. Be our intermediary throughout, will you?” Mom insisted on leaving the five pairs of pants behind at Xiaobing’s home, and rushed back home like a fugitive on the run.

Once again, a mountain of fabric pieces was piled up on the sewing machine at our home—these were for us. Before heading out to work, Mom added some rapeseed oil to her loyal sewing machine. I saw her squatting in front of it, glancing from time to time at the blue and grey khaki and red and white checked fabric, and then uttering a short but accurate sigh of self-pity, “Aren't I destined to a life of toil!”

Xiaobing’s mom later on must have regretted very much serving as the intermediary between Mom and Zhang Yunlan. How things turned out was totally not what she had expected. As for Mom, she didn't know whether to laugh or cry. You would never have guessed—Zhang Yunlan was transferred from the butcher’s shop to Dongfeng Deli for braised food! Her transfer couldn’t have come at a worse time, after Mom just made five pairs of pants for her family!

I recall Xiaobing’s mom looked very upset when she came to our home to break the news. “I am much to lame—too meddlesome!” Our female neighbor almost cried, “You were already so busy. I had you make five pairs of pants nonstop! I just can’t fathom why the heck Zhang Yunlan is being transferred at this juncture; she has been working on Mahogany Street for years! It really makes me mad!” Mom was hopping mad too; her face turned white. But if she were to say any harsh words, wouldn’t it make Xiaobing’s mom feel even more embarrassed? Besides, she had meant well. Under the circumstances, all Mom was able to do was to comfort the female neighbor. “No worries, that’s all right,” she said. “It took nothing more than several sleepless nights and some threads. She’s being transferred, so be it. Just take it as if I were learning from Lei Feng and doing a good deed.”

Few people had such a bitter pill to swallow as Mom did. This made a fool of not only Mom’s hardworking hands but also our sewing machine, which squeaked and whistled for several days on end for a snobbish woman, but in vain. It also duped the stomachs of me and my four siblings. We had counted on feasting on the freshest meat, the fattest chicken, and the tenderest duck that Zhang Yunlan would provide us. Not only that, our baskets, crocks, and jugs were fooled as well—they were ready to be put to good use for preserving cured and soused foods after being left unused for so long; all of a sudden, someone announced, “All opportunities are lost. You poor things, just stay empty there.”

All our fanciful imagination about the Spring Festival dishes burst like a soap bubble. Apparently disillusioned, and with some qualms, Mom said to us, “There’s nothing but cabbage and radish to eat for the Spring Festival. If any of you wants better food, get up at 4:00 AM and go line up with the basket yourself!”

We couldn’t fathom why Mom, having made that many pairs of pants for Zhang Yunlan, asked us to have a revolution-style plain and bare Spring Festival!

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Heavy snow fell the night before New Year’s Eve. I remember being pulled out of bed by my third eldest brother. It was very early in the morning. My parents and others weren’t up yet. We were both so eager to go out and play we even didn’t bother to put on our socks. We jammed our toes into our cotton-padded shoes, not even waiting to wiggle the shoes over our heels—one carrying a bricklayer's cleaver, the other clutching a coal shovel—and planning to build in front of our home the largest snowman on Mahogany Street. As we pulled the latch we felt something outside was bumping softly against it. The door opened, and we were almost taken aback by a woman standing in front of our doorway. She wore a red scarf and a men’s cotton-padded worker’s coat, holding two pig heads, one in each hand. We’d never seen pig heads that big. What impressed us even more was that her scarf and coat were covered in a layer of white snow, and the ears and foreheads of the two big pig heads were also covered with white snow—they looked somewhat travel-worn and weary.

Back then my third eldest brother and I were still pretty young. We didn’t shop or socialize, so we had never met Zhang Yunlan. “Are the pig heads for us?” my third eldest brother asked. When the woman standing outside saw my brother trying to go in and call for Mom, she grabbed hold of him. “Don’t wake up your mom,” she said. “Let her sleep. She’s been toiling away.” Then we saw her squeeze through the door with a draftof coldair, and put the two pig heads on the floor. “When your mom get up, tell her Zhang Yunlan dropped by,” said she. “Don’t worry if you can’t remember my name. When she sees the pig heads, she will know it’s me.”

We didn’t know Zhang Yunlan. We expected her to leave soon after dropping off the pig heads, so we’re able to start on building our snowman. But that woman was a bit weird. Somehow she noticed our feet, and said a little frantically, “You can’t go barefoot on a snowy day. You will catch cold.” We wouldn't have minded her being merely nosy; but suddenly her eyes snapped, and she took a pair of socks out of her coat pocket as if she were performing a conjuring trick. It was a brand new pair of nylon socks, with the logo sticker still glued onto them. “You must be Little Fifth,” she signaled me to raise my feet. I knew nylon was good stuff, so I raised my feet cooperatively; and then I saw that woman squat down and put my first pair of nylon socks on for me. As you were told earlier, my third eldest brother wasn’t one that’s willing to get the short end of the stick. While he was watching he had already raised one foot and stretched it out in front of that woman. I remember Zhang Yunlan hesitated for a moment, and then took the second pair of nylon socks out of her pocket. Thus, my third eldest brother and I each received a pair of warm and trendy nylon socks on that snowy morning—an unexpected present, all things considered.

I still remember the words Zhang Yunlan uttered while putting the socks on for us, “However deft your mom is, she can’t knit you nylon socks.” We were still young then, and didn’t understand what she meant by that. Zhang Yunlan also said something else that sounds a bit over the top now, “You kids’ feet—they are a real nuisance! These nylon socks can handle you; they’re made of nylon, and won’t wear out!”

According to Mom, later Zhang Yunlan and her family moved out of Mahogany Street. After she stopped working at the butcher’s shop, naturally she faded gradually from everyone’s memories. Mom didn’t become friends with Zhang Yunlan. But she ran into Zhang Yunlan once at a jumble shop on Red Star Street, when they both reached out for a reed catkins broom—their hands almost collided, then both quickly relinquished the grip on it. Mom said they were very courteous to each other during that encounter at the jumble shop; they focused on exchanging pleasantries and simply forgot about the broom, and in the end that fine reed catkins broom was snatched away by someone else.

THE END