

SHORT STORY

The Perfect Student

by J.M. Wong



Untitled by Michaela Caskova (illustration)



Comments from class teacher: Sandra performs immensely well. She is well-disciplined, hard-working and a very self-motivated student. She is a humble and kind person who is always willing to help her classmates and her teachers. She has a very positive and bright attitude.



You are in the kitchen preparing breakfast and your husband is watching the news. You hear him say, ‘Isn’t this your school?’

You come out of the kitchen and see your boss’s oily and sweaty face occupying half of your 100-inch TV flat screen. Before you can figure out why he is on TV, your phone begins to buzz frantically. Multiple notifications keep popping up and they all come from the English teaching WhatsApp group:



You want to respond to the messages on WhatsApp, but your boss’s voice grabs your attention right then.

“Sandra is a perfect student who not only performed well academically but also — she was loved by her fellow teachers and peers. And St. Helena is a school that stresses greatly on students’ mental well-being and we have no records of her suffering from any mental illness. I strongly believe that her case is a case of an accident and the school will work closely with the police to get to the bottom of this in order to prove that. But of course, it is still an extremely sad and unfortunate event to have lost such an amazing student. Our school will

actively provide support to students and staff members who are affected by this incident...”

Your eyes move to Sandra Chung’s portrait displayed in the right upper corner of your TV. She has a bright smile on it. You can’t hear what your husband is saying to you while you two are stuck in traffic. His voice is muffled and his words drift away quickly once they are out of his mouth. You can’t remember whether you gave him a goodbye kiss when he dropped you off at St. Helena’s. You can’t remember how you managed to walk past the large group of press in front of the school’s gate and avoid being interviewed by them. You are not sure whether you greeted anyone along your way back to your working desk. Sandra’s face has stuck in your head for the rest of your trip back to work, and her face only evaporates from your mind when you see the dark purple binder Sandra submitted to you before her fatal fall. It lies on top of the pile of binders you intended to distribute to the English lesson today. You have a feeling that it is more than a coincidence that Sandra’s binder is on top of the pile. So, you flip open the binder and begin to go through the content within.

St. Helena’s Catholic Secondary College
Secondary 5 English Language Paper 2
Writing a Short Story

Name: **Sandra Chung**

Class: **5B (28)**

Date: **13th June 2021**

Task A: Write the exposition of your story in at least 200 words.

It appeared out of nowhere. I have no idea where it came from. I live in a high-rise building inside a concrete jungle where no grass and trees can possibly grow. A forest, a swamp or grassland is the least expected thing you can find here. It is a desert here but it’s a cultural desert, not an actual desert. There’s no way it could have survived the heavy traffic, the loud honkings of cars on the busy highways nearby, slithered through the rushed and heavy footsteps of people rushing to work and survived the stuffy and crowded MTR. There’s no way it could enter the lift safely without being crushed by the heavy metal lift doors that close as quickly as a cheetah running. There’s no way it could slither past the narrow gaps of the tiny metal gate of my apartment or climb its way up the building, through my window, with no limbs but only its body with slippery slimy scales. I live on the 23rd floor after all. But it did. It’s here now, hissing at me, haunting me. It popped out of nowhere that morning. I didn’t

know how it got there, but it started following me around and intimidating me so much that I couldn't even want to get out of my bed that morning. I could hear its hissing underneath my bed, haunting me. A huge black snake.

Feedback: As always, you have done a splendid job, Sandra! What an amazing opening for your story! Really love your choice of using the first-person perspective and I can definitely feel the intensity of having this black snake appearing in your room all of a sudden. I noticed that you want to set your story in Hong Kong. Well done for hinting about it instead of telling the readers directly that this is set in Hong Kong! You have done a great job in 'showing' instead of 'telling'!

Name: **Sandra Chung**

Class: **5B (28)**

Date: **19th June 2021**

Task B: Write the rising action of your story in at least 300 words.

No one seems to see the snake. Well, no, let me correct myself. I think my mum sees it but she just pretends not to see it. She said I was delusional when I told her about the black snake following me. It had been clinging onto my legs a lot recently. One time, it was even curling its lower body around my shoulder and wrapping its upper body around my throat, suffocating me but my mum still pretended that she didn't see it. But I know she sees it. I saw her eyes twitch, the corner of her lips dropped and her shoulders shift uncomfortably whenever the snake moved and crawled off me. I saw her brows jump a little when the snake was hissing at her the other day. She just insisted that I was too tired and my 'illusions' would go away after a good night's sleep whenever I pointed out that she could see the snake too. She just kept denying its existence like how she denies the existence of her little black dog. I saw a little black tail coming out of her sleeves the other day after she had a huge fight with dad on the phone. She quickly stuffed it back in when she saw me noticing and plastered on a fake smile, pretending that it didn't exist. I guess it's a family thing. Her parents and my grandparents might have done the same thing to her, ignoring her little black beast, pretending that it never existed, thinking that it would go away if it wasn't given much attention. It worked out for mom, didn't it? The rigid, forged smiles in family photos where my grandparents were in them. My friends can't see the snake and I don't blame them. They said I was 'too bright' to ever be haunted by these shadow beasts and they began to gossip about Ben in our class. Poor Ben was rumoured to be followed by a

black bear because Ms Fong had called for him through the announcement microphone during one recess and everyone at school that day knew he had to go to her office for special pills to deal with the black bear following him. That's why I couldn't step into Ms Fong's office even though I remember her mentioning that she had experience in dealing with shadow beasts. I don't think it's a good idea for me to tell people about the snake now because last night, Uncle Lo was talking about not hiring someone because the person was rumoured to have been haunted by a shadow beast before. 'It might come back and haunt him again and we don't want that to affect his performance. There are just too many uncontrollable factors,' he said. While he was saying that, I saw my mum casting a worried glance at me... I know, I know, Mum. I won't tell anyone about the black snake following me. She has always wanted me to become a doctor. I can't ruin this dream of hers.

Feedback: A Wonderful job, Sandra! But I am a bit confused here. What are the 'shadow beasts'? You didn't mention this term in your exposition so I am curious about it. Does it mean there are other people who are being followed by these black beasts? Is it some kind of a phenomenon to have animals haunting someone in this world you are building? I would recommend Philip Pullman's 'The Dark Materials' for you to refer to if this is where you are going and I would suggest you rewrite your exposition again so you can introduce the 'shadow beasts' concept at the very beginning to avoid confusion for readers.

Name: **Sandra Chung**

Class: **5B (28)**

Date: **28th June 2021**

Task C: Write the climax of your story in at least 400 words.

I want you to see it! You would have seen it if you just looked down! You always ask me how I was doing in the corridor, after class, during recess and after school at the school gates but before I could tell you about the snake, you rushed off to mark our assignments or sign forms or attend a staff meeting. I know you are busy but can't you just spare five minutes for me? Okay, I understand. You are just too busy. But please just look at me! The snake is right there! I just want you to acknowledge that! It's not just suffocating me now! It's biting me, poisoning me with its venom! Can't you see how serious this is? Look at the bite marks on my wrists! Look at the venom running down my cheeks! Do you know what my drama teacher said to me the other day? 'You

are shining!’ she said, but she didn’t take the time to look at the snake that was biting me on my neck. How come no one has noticed it? It’s so obvious! Just stop assuming I am bright or I am shining. Look at the present version of me!

Feedback: Thank you for trying your best, Sandra! But you wrote only around 200 words so it’s definitely less than the required word limit. I am also confused by the shift to the second-person narrative. I want to know why you have decided to make this change. And I am quite unclear about what the climax is for your story. Is it your plan to set the physical attack from the snake as the climax of the story (because I noticed the snake was just following the narrator and not attacking in the first two parts of the story)?

Name: **Sandra Chung**

Class: **5B (28)**

Date: **5th July 2021**

Task D: Write the falling action of your story in at least 400 words.



Feedback: Sandra, I am guessing you are finding this assignment a little bit more challenging than your previous tasks? You definitely didn’t reach the word limit and I am not quite fond of how you are trying to increase your word length by repeating the phrase “Help me”. Also, I did mention in class that it is best to avoid abbreviations and there are quite a lot of misspellings here. This doesn’t seem like you. Are you feeling alright? It also doesn’t feel like a falling action of the story for me. A falling action should be about finding a solution for your crisis, slowly easing from the climax. It feels like you are still at the climax of the story. If you need help with your story, come and find me during office hours and we can figure out how to improve your piece. I definitely see a lot of potential in your story based on your opening and I don’t want you to waste it.

Name: **Sandra Chung**

Class: **5B (28)**

Date: **5th July 2021**

Task E: Write the resolution of your story in at least 400 words.

It's okay that none of you can see the snake around me. Dont worry. I have finally found someone who can see the snake. He has a shadow beast like mine, a wolf that likes to go under a sheep's skin. He has thought me a way to stop being haunted by the snake. I was sceptical at first but he is right, to make it stop hurting me, I must learn to accept my fate and let it devour me entirely. It will be peaceful and it will be finally over. No more bites. No more venom. No more hissing. No more pain. Just peace and forever happiness.

Feedback: Not enough words. I do not think this ending works. Sandra, I think you can do better than this. I have never seen you perform like this before. Are you alright? Please come and find me after class so we can talk this out.

You close the binder and look out of the window, staring straight at the rooftop hidden in the shadows of taller, darker buildings, where the sun never reaches, where her cry for help was never heeded.

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