

Singapore HeritageFest 2009
“Arte (factually) Speaking” Story-Writing Competition
Shortlisted Entry (Lower Secondary Category)



Contest ID: 110
Name: Gareth Ting Shi Xun
Gender: Male
Age: 14-year-old
NRIC: SXXXX799E
Nationality: Singaporean
School: Raffles Institution

Artefact: Kerosang Serong
Museum: Asian Civilisations Museum

Push The Button

Butterflies fluttered in her stomach as she made her way through the winding alleys and crowded marketplaces. It was the first time she was doing something so bold. This entire time, people looked upon her as the loyal, caring, and perhaps a bit naive wife who supported her husband in his career. Her gutsy act would be a small step to a more mature profile.

Her husband was older than her; she had been married off when she was still very young. As a girl, she often stayed home to do housework and things other Peranakan girls did, rather than going out. She saw little of the world beyond the confines of her home. Her husband was not bad to her- if anything, he was wonderful. Except for the fact that he was too engaged with his career- he would go to work early in the morning, come back late at night. Some nights he would sit and churn out reports at his typewriter till the next morning. He had no time to push some real buttons.

Life was boring for her as a rich tai-tai. She had money, she had servants. She had it all. But she felt something was lacking in her relationship with her husband. He did care for her; after all, he did work hard to provide for her needs. But she wanted more... attention.

A few more corners turned, and she had arrived. He had been waiting for her. She nervously looked from left to right. Because her husband was a wealthy businessman, she was quite well known in the area. She could not risk being seen with another man. She signalled for him to go in first. She only went in after fifteen minutes.

The room was dinghy and decrepit, a far cry from the comfort and luxury she was normally used to. The walls were cracked, and the sheets smelled funny and had all sorts of stains on them. She nervously fiddled with her fingers as he undressed slowly. And then, he was upon her.

He unfastened her *kerongsang* first. They were gold brooches that held her *sarong kebaya* together, somewhat like buttons on shirts. He worked his magic systematically, removing first the two smaller ones, and then the larger *kerongsang serong*. They were made of real gold, unlike some other fakes that other girls wore, which were only coated with gold. They had been a gift from her husband.

As he slowly removed her see-through top to reveal a camisole, she felt a rush. It was a strange feeling; she had never felt it before. It was indescribable, something scary and yet inviting. It was like the exotic flavours of a hard lollipop with a chocolate centre she wanted to delve in.

And then, they got down to it. "Why do you do this job?" she asked the man curiously. She did not know his name. "I have to, for the money," he replied, and there was no more conversation. She lay silently on the bed. Her escapade had left her with mixed feelings of guilt and pleasure. She waited for another few minutes, just to be safe before she started putting on her clothes again. She dug into the pile that lay on the floor beside the bed. Her *kerongsang* were gone. And all at once those mixed feelings morphed into feelings of anxiety, as she realized her act had caused her to lose not only her *kerongsang*, but also her chastity and her husband.

(585 words)