

# The Shoes and the Sedan Chair

by Yilun Fan

“One, two, three, four... one, two, three, four...” Bess counted Lai Suk’s steps, observing his bare feet moving up and down on the scorching pavement at over 40 degrees. Could human skin endure such temperatures?

The sedan chair swayed along with their strides. By the count of the 1997th round, they would arrive at “Starry Silk Salon,” where she underwent monthly hair trimming. Along the way, they passed through Victoria Harbour, taking a brief rest beneath the Clock Tower. The sedan chair bearers needed to wipe their feet with a towel soaked in whale oil before proceeding. Then they traversed Kowloon Park, finally turning into the narrow alley at the entrance of St. Andrew’s Church, reaching the Mira Place.

Starry Silk Salon was on the eighth floor of the plaza. But today, she needed to visit the eleventh floor first.

Her feet were sweating. She glanced down at her shoes, a pair originating from a distant Western land. They were spoils brought back by her father from the Riverside Battle. Crafted from lizard skin, adorned with intricate patterns, the orange four-petal flower symbolized the local human tribes. It was said to represent the color of their blood.

Since arriving in Hong Kong, her mother had insisted that she must wear shoes, despite their calloused and furry feet. “Wearing shoes is what sets us apart from the barbarians,” her mother had said the first time she put shoes on her.

Yet she longed for the feeling of unbounded from her childhood, running barefoot under the starlight on her home planet. Blue fireflies brushed against her fur, clinging to her ankles and tail, cool as early spring dew.

In Hong Kong, there was no spring, only an eternal summer.

“Miss, we’ve arrived,” Lai Suk halted, turning back to her.

Sliding out of the sedan chair, she surprised the bearers by taking off her shoes and holding them in her hands.

“Let’s go to the shoe shop together.”