

SINGAPORE TREASURES

unusual stories, extraordinary memories, special encounters, just another unique day in Singapore

Nettings

Author: Ivan Ang

There is always a certain level of pretense in everything we do.

We wake up pretending that today would be a better day for all of us; that there's something beautiful, great or wonderful to look forward to when really, we are clueless about how things are going to unfold in the duration of the day.

I cannot quite explain why I was feeling the way I felt except that I know that there wasn't really a proper reason for doing so. I got up from my bed and made my way to the living room. I am alone in my apartment. My parents aren't home and I can't quite locate my brother. I am 23 years old this year and my brother's 19. I suppose I could text or call him but I keep getting a dead tone. My parents won't answer my calls either.

I go to college where I am working towards a BSc in Building. I couldn't quite get into the School of Architecture and I have no real interest in Real Estate so, Building seems just about the right place for me. I like where I am in college, I like the idea of how I am able to tell people about how land and space can be maximally utilized with the right approaches. I wondered if building friendships and intimacies also followed the same logic – maximum utilization.

There is no school today. I went back to my bed and laid down for a while. I took a look at my cell phone and checked if I missed any calls or text messages. I missed nothing, unfortunately. I laid on my bed for a while longer. I couldn't tell how long I laid, and I didn't want to know. I got up again, once again pretending that there will be something happening and something worth doing by my getting out of bed. I headed to the bathroom and pissed. I caught sight of the razor and was reminded of what I should have been doing. I am in competitive swimming, which means it was necessary for me to shave my legs and underarms daily. Hair of any sort has the potential to slow a swimmer down by a couple of milliseconds. And those milliseconds could determine a lifetime of fame or embarrassment. People who want to keep their hair get into those expensive pretentious looking full body Speedo suits that makes them look like cheesy aliens from the cheesier alien movies from the cheesiest era of human history. I don't need no body suits, I just needed to get hair off.

I ran my fingers over my legs. Smooth. I have done something right today. It was a pity I couldn't get to swim today. I haven't swum for the past four days in fact. I couldn't.

I went into the living room and turned the TV on. The same message was on TV, and the news presenter was repeating the same stuff she did four days ago. We are all advised to ensure that the netting of our houses were secure and make it a point to check on them every day before we go to bed. I heard the message several times, but I couldn't remember if I checked the netting. Maybe I should do so now. At least it is something important that I can do. I am following orders for once. I wish mum was here to see this. I went up to the windows of our living room and checked the green colored netting. I ran my fingers over them and there appeared to be no noticeable holes on them. Which means, they were good and I am safe. I went to the kitchen and then my room, and my parent's room and my brother's and did the same thing. No major holes whatsoever. I did notice a near empty glass of water in my brother's room. The stains on the glass tell me that he hasn't touched it for days. I chose to leave the glass alone.

I checked my cell phone again. Nothing missed. I headed back to the living room again to watch TV when the house phone rang. I jumped. I jumped like how one would jump after not jumping for a good number of years. I froze for a moment, allowing my ears to get used to the sharp sonorous ringing sound before I answered it.

"Hello?"

My voice sounded deep and hoarse. I was a little embarrassed at how I sounded and I hope whoever at the other end of the line won't freak. It was my mum. My mum was on the phone.

"It has not gone well Darrell! It has not gone well!" The unusual hysterics in her voice scared me.
"What hasn't gone well? What are you saying?"
"Felicia Darrell! She has succumbed to it! David, oh god! David's distraught!"

Felicia? Felicia was my brother's girlfriend. They met when they were in junior high. She has succumbed? Does that mean she's dead? Surely that was implied. I didn't ask. It would sound odd.

"And David?"

"David's like, he's crying and he won't stop crying! Your dad is with him trying to calm him down." I could tell she had been crying too.

"OK, what now?"

"Darrell, I need you to listen to me. Get out of there and come over to the Center now."

I shuddered a little. "No Mum, don't you think that is even more dangerous?"

"Haven't you seen the news? Wear white long sleeved clothing with jeans and a cap. There are special designated pick-up points near where you are. All you need to do is to get there! Darrell! This is important! I need you to listen to me. The Center is completely safe. You, on the other hand, are sitting at the eye of the storm."

"No Mum, it's safe in here. Really it is!"

"What's the matter with you? There? Safe? It's not safe! Why did you think we all left? Felicia thought it was safe in her home too and look what happened to her! David risked his own life when he went to get her out of her home, thinking she might stand a chance. But no! No!" My mum went into crying mode again.

"OK, OK, give me sometime OK?"

"Hurry! Oh God, please hurry!"

"I will see you Mum. I will see you."

The air of silence feels heavier after I replaced the phone receiver. I was in a daze for a while. Unsure of what exactly I said and what has gone on in the conversation I had with my mum. Mum, Dad and David are all at the Center. The Center.

I looked at the mosquito nettings that were in place. Surely there's nothing wrong with that. I went to the kitchen at stared out of the window. The sun was

blazing outside. It was a perfect weather to swim, but also a perfect weather for the *Aedes* mosquito to breed. The number of *Aedes* mosquitoes increased exponentially four days ago. People, meaning scientists and analysts could find no reason for the sudden explosion in the number of mosquitoes. They claimed that that the sudden weather change provided an optimum condition for the mosquitoes to breed and multiply. But that was the farthest they got. All they knew was that mosquitoes were everywhere and are infecting people with Dengue hemorrhagic fever. We were all advised to put mosquito nets round any openings of our houses to prevent the mosquitoes from coming in and get rid of any stagnant water source that will potentially serve as a breeding ground for the *Aedes* mosquito.

I continued staring out the kitchen window. Unsure of I what I should be doing. I felt an itch on my leg and I reached down to scratch it. Scratching only made me feel itchier. I bent down to take a look at my left leg and saw a reddish bump standing out clearly from my leg. I scratched it again, feeling a little sick. I felt a dull numbness course through my body. The same numbness I get minutes before I get ready to jump into the pool at the swimming competition.

I went into my room. Shut the door and turned down the temperature of my air-conditioner. I continued scratching till the patch threatened to bleed. I laid down on my bed and pretended once again that everything was going to be OK.

As published on www.singaporetreasures.com

