

Pushing Away the Plate

by Min Jin Lee

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bus stop.

It is usually bright and slightly cool in the mornings when I wait for my bus at the Seventy-second Street and Lexington Avenue bus stop. I try to get on the M101 Limited bus when I go to work. This bus going downtown makes local stops from Seventy-second to Sixtieth Street, but it makes express stops from Sixtieth Street to Fiftieth and from Fiftieth Street to Grand Central Station without halting every two blocks. Despite its Park Avenue address, my office has another entrance on Lexington Avenue between Forty-fifth Street and Forty-sixth Street so when I get on the Limited bus, I get off at Fiftieth Street and walk a few blocks toward the shiny glass building which houses my office. But on the one or two days when I miss the Limited bus, I get on the local one, and my normal ten-minute ride extends easily to twenty minutes.

Although I get a bit annoyed at myself, because I'll start my day a little late, secretly, the longer ride is small treat, because I know that I will see interesting people on my bus- old and young, rich and poor- and I shall have time to craft stories in my head about them. I'll concentrate on that rich pattern of a woman's chenille suit or gaze at the lightly textured balding spot of a man's head and imagine her or his life outside of the bus that we share. Sometimes, I get lucky and find a comfortable window seat for myself, and then I'm not annoyed at all. I daydream for a luxurious twenty minutes before reaching my destination, my shared office with its heavy, dark wooden desk piled high with documents to draft, review, and revise.

When I am seated in my window seat, I begin to think about the passengers and I discover that I forget my own size. The people around me seem to grow in their girth and breadth and my body diminished slowly. I feel tiny and girlish, rather prim but curious about my surroundings. The worn seat of the bus swallows me up and I've

become invisible. I am formless and all eyes. Around me are all these seated and standing adults who are on their way to work. Some women are breathtakingly beautiful. Their hair doesn't move as they shift the sliding weight of their printed alligator leather handbags on their narrow shoulders. The lanky, beautiful women wear expensive sunglasses and smell of musky perfume. They look as if they work in the fashion or publishing industry. Then, there are women who look fatigued; their shapes are heavy and full and they often wear clothes that look uncomfortable and tight. The tired women look like housekeepers or home-care nurses. These women carry worn plastic shopping bags emblazoned with THANK YOU FOR SHOPPING HERE on them. Mingled everywhere I notice women who wear suits. The suits are often navy or gray. Sometimes, the suits look very new on the wearer. The women who wear the suits are between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five. They carry cordovan leather briefcases with squared-off handles, which slide in and out of an envelopelike opening. The briefcases have long shoulder straps. I am amazed at the number of professional women who carry them. On the outer pockets of the briefcases, glossy fashion and life-style magazine peep out behind the unread newspapers.

As the bus advances toward my stop, I remember that I am five feet nine inches tall and weigh almost one hundred and forty pounds. My large physical frame emerges from the seat of the bus, and as I straighten the skirt of my dark suit, I remind myself that I am a corporate lawyer and not a tidy immigrant girl in a shapeless outfit. I maneuver my body toward the front of the bus and disembark.

The stroll from the bus stop to my building takes two minutes and this time is enough for me to wake up, take the tortoiseshell headband off my nearly dry hair, and straighten my posture. I am a lawyer, I am a lawyer, I am a lawyer. I recite this like a mantra for two interlocked purposes: to state affirmatively that I am a female white collar professional and to nullify the negative statement belying my mantra, that I am just a young woman who has no idea what she is doing in this shiny glass building in midtown Manhattan. I start my second diurnal chant, I belong here, I belong here, I belong here.

As I get off the elevator which opens up to the wood paneled lobby of the law firm and greet the receptionist, who sits behind an impressive oval desk made of burl wood, I feel tense knots of uncertainty with respect to my new role as an attorney. As

I walk in, other young women approach the reception desk. They are laughing and their formerly loud conversations of their subway, bridge, and tunnel rides cease, and they bend a little to sign in on the attendance sheets on a clipboard. I don't sign in because the receptionist marks a check in a box for me; lawyers do not keep track of their own presence or absence, only secretaries, paralegals, and other members of support staff do. On certain mornings, the insecurity looms over and around me and I feel like a spool bound tightly under coils of dark cotton thread. On other mornings, the uncertainty enters my head intermittently in brief spurts. On a quiet month, weeks can pass without the lingering feelings of doubt, and I wonder when I shall feel less like a guest at a bal masque.

land of lakes.

A partner with whom I often work walked into my office a few weeks ago. He asked me how I was feeling. I lied. I replied to him that I felt fine. The corporate group had been working furiously to finish many fiscal year-end transactions for one of our big clients. As a result of the large volume of transactions, non of us were sleeping very much. The associates, legal assistants, and word processors worked straight through several weekends, and all of us complained unceasingly about our jobs. I did not feel fine. The partner then smiled and said, well, then you are going to go to Minneapolis and close this deal. He proceeded to tell me the name of the transaction and then dropped a few documents on my desk, already littered with various stages of transactional documents. He said, as he walked out the door, go speak to the senior associate in charge of the deal and find out what you are supposed to do. A secretary made airline reservations for me to fly out to Minneapolis the next morning. I had never been to Minnesota before.

I was told by a senior associate that I would meet a representative of the corporate client, Jim, at the hotel. Jim's secretary and my secretary, via facsimile, arranged for us to meet at the lobby of the Minneapolis Radisson Hotel South at 7:30 the next morning. Jim was on time. He shook my hand and introduced himself. I had expected him to be older, somewhat heavier. I remembered reading in some memorandum that Jim worked in our client's Texas office, so I mentioned as we marched toward the parking lot that I had heard on the television news report that the Texas Rangers had beaten the visiting team. Jim said mildly, oh. Then I asked him if he was a baseball fan, and he said no. Then I said, oh.

Once we got into his maroon-colored rental car, he mentioned how difficult it was to travel so much. There was no time to see his wife and kids, he said. This was my second business trip, ever, but I extrapolated my experience and let on that I knew how he felt. He told me a little bit about his family and said that his daughter's swim meet went well the day before but it had been held outdoors and the temperature the day before was over 110 degrees in Plano, Texas. I told him that I had never been to Texas before. He then said in a clear and slow voice, well, don't come now, it's too hot. As he drove, we spoke about the beautiful weather we were experiencing in Minneapolis, the Land of Lakes. When we stopped at an intersection, I asked him how far we were from the closing site, and he said it would take about ten more minutes to get there. At that point, I took out the neatly written notes I had prepared that morning in my hotel room while I ate my breakfast of hot oatmeal and coffee. I started listing the business and legal issues that he should be aware of at this closing.

The reasons why I had decided to become a corporate lawyer as distinguished from a litigator are actually quite simple: one, I like to start and finish things within a reasonable amount of time, and two I don't like to fight. Closings symbolize perfectly the first reason. Nearly all issues of this Minneapolis transaction were already negotiated and all of the documents had been drafted, now, the parties to this deal would join around a table and sign the many pieces of paper framed by crisp manilla legal-sized folders and give or take certified checks denominating large sums of cash. In a boxy rented Chevrolet, Jim and I sped toward the office of the lawyer of the seller; I was the lawyer of the buyer, and Jim was, effectively the buyer; we were on our way to the closing site to meet the seller and his lawyer. There, we would end our posturing, bantering, arguing, drafting, commenting, and revising: we would bring about closure.

The sun shone brilliantly over the asphalt-covered parking lot. I thought about wearing my mirrored sunglasses but decided against it. Jim remarked on the clearness of the day. We arrived early and we stood in front of the building which looked dark and empty. On the side of the building where the entrance was located, there was a small metal plaque screwed into the wall stating the name of the seller's lawyer and on the end of his name, were the letters, J.D., signifying that he was juris doctor, a graduate of law school. The facade of his office was not very impressive. When we walked into the roomy and cluttered office, a cheery middle-aged woman

greeted us: you must be the people from New York. Jim didn't correct her by telling her that he was in fact from Texas. I extended my hand to shake hers. She looked like someone who could have been a relative of my fourth-grade schoolteacher, Mrs. Maher. Her name was Peggy and she asked us if we would like coffee. I nodded yes while I looked around the room. Jim said no. Peggy led us to the closing room.

The seller of the business had already arrived. A portly man with lots of wrinkles under his eyes. He looked older than my father and I felt very young again. Jim and I looked like teenagers in comparison. I crossed my arms and straightened my shoulders. Feeling a little nervous, I tried to recall what Cynthia and Carol, two senior associates at the firm, had said to me before I had left New York for Minneapolis: "You have to take control of a closing, don't let anyone rush you or push you around. It's your show, take charge." The seller asked us how our flight was. We spoke for a while about the Mall of America, the largest indoor shopping center in North America, located only a few miles from the closing site. Peggy chimed in at this moment to say that Jim and I should go there after the closing. We said that we might if we had any time before our respective flights, mine to Manhattan and his to Dallas. I noticed again how excited everyone in Minneapolis got when they talked about the Mall. I had scanned a brochure about it at the hotel lobby as I was checking in, so I asked a few questions about Snoopy Park, the indoor amusement attraction. Apparently, or so it was told to me, many people from places as far away as Germany or Japan fly into Minneapolis airport just to go shopping and fly right back to Munich or Osaka after a day of retail purchases.

I walked out of the closing room leaving Jim and the seller to talk about the heat in Texas, because I had to find a phone to call my office in New York. I was asking Peggy for permission to use one of the phones when the seller's lawyer introduced himself loudly by paraphrasing his secretary: you must be the lady from New York. Yes, I am, I said.

We couldn't actually start the closing since we were waiting for the Federal Express delivery person to bring the buyer's check, which was being flown in from another state. Everyone seemed to be in good spirits, and I began to think that my first closing of a transaction would actualize the expectations that I had of becoming a corporate lawyer. Unlike a lawsuit where there is a guaranteed loser, in this kind of transaction, I ruminated, we would all walk away winners: the buyer gets the business and the seller gets his check. Interrupting my thoughts with an odd

question, the seller's lawyer asked me if I spoke other languages besides English. I replied Spanish, a menu knowledge of French and Italian, and a reasonable comprehension of Korean. Before I had a chance to ask him the same question, he exclaimed, I go to Korea all the time. Amused, I asked him why. He replied, for the shopping. At this point, my client and his client were listening to us intently. The check had not yet arrived and I was getting a little bored so I listened to him tell me about Korea.

I love Itaewon, he began his description, with his eyes weirdly sparkling. I tuned him out and tried to recall what I knew about Itaewon. It is the section of Seoul where most of the merchants sell knock-off designer handbags, fake Rolex watches, T-shirts with Chanel No. 5 printed on them, and brand-name sneakers to tourists and to American G.I's who are stationed near the demilitarized zone. I also knew that at night Itaewon transforms from the bazaar of imitation good into streets full of electric lights and neon signs advertising go-go girls and discotheques. I had been to Itaewon a few times when I was last in Korea. Clearly, it was reinforced to me by my elders that a girl does not go to Itaewon by herself. During the day, when I went to buy souvenirs, I was accompanied by my mother's best friend, and on the rare occasions that I went to Itaewon at night to go to certain approved of discotheques, I would be permitted to go only with large groups of people, many of them relatives. My uncles and aunts who lived in Korea narrated detailed and chilling stories about Korean-American girls getting kidnaped and being sold into prostitution. Over and over again, I was told that good girls do not go to Itaewon. When the seller's lawyer finished telling us what he remembered of Itaewon, I walked out of the room to check if the delivery man had arrived. From that point on, I noticed that the seller's lawyer began to touch me.

All of us waited for the check for nearly an hour. I asked the seller's lawyer to revise a set of resolutions he had drafted to include another concept. He agreed and handwrote my comment in and asked Peggy to type it up. Wordlessly, he draped his arm around my waist and said that while we waited he would give me a tour of his office and show me all the things he bought in Itaewon. He directed my body toward his office and I made sure that the office door was wide open. He pointed to a huge brass elephant that must have weighed almost two hundred pounds which seemed to guard his desk. I bought that in Itaewon, he boasted. Dismayed and slightly bewildered by his choice of decorative arts, I asked him if he was a Republican. He

said he was an Independent.

He relinquished my waist only to place his hand on my forearm to pull me toward another direction, look, I bought this clock from Korea. It was an old-fashioned schoolhouse clock with a small copper door at the base of its face and across the clock face the following word was etched into the plate glass, Federal. It seemed likely that the clock was made and purchased in Korea, but it looked so American. He then touched my back and directed me toward the closing room because Peggy told us that the check had arrived. I walked briskly away from the palm of his hand, which I felt was imprinted on the small of my back. When I saw the violet and orange striped express-mail package on Peggy's desk, I told Jim that the closing check had arrived.

Signing the legal papers and handing the seller the certified bank check took less than twenty minutes. I gathered all the folders and called New York to report to the partner and the senior associate that the deal had closed. The partner told me that I should get on an earlier flight and head back to the office to pick up some more documents and then fly out to Los Angeles that night from New York to close another deal. The senior associate asked me how it went, and with my client standing next to me, I spoke into the receiver to say that the closing proceeded smoothly. I picked up my closing briefcase, which felt much lighter since I was leaving the seller and his lawyer two copies of everything I had brought with me, and told Jim that I would not be able to go with him to the Mall of America due to the change in my plans. Jim kindly drove me to the airport.

pushing away the plate.

As a young girl growing up in New York City, I dreamed of becoming many things. Between the ages of eight and twenty, I wanted to be: a cabinetmaker, an architect, a teacher, a judge, a dancer, a carpenter, a television writer, a stained-glass maker, an industrialist, a chef, and an actor. Yet in my varied and exhaustive catalogue of careers, I never wanted to be a wife or a mother. In my adolescence, donning puffy white dresses with lace veils or nursing doll babies never held much interest for me. To my surprise, however, and sometimes, dismay, I have done things I had not expected, and lately, I hesitate to rely on the conviction I felt when I was eight or twenty.

As my mother had often said, girls who never anticipated marriage always got married before the other who had longed to wed. As the middle girl of three daughters I fulfilled my mother's sage observation. In the words of my Korean kin, I was the first on to leave my father's house to go to my husband's house. Christopher and I were married in the fall of last year and as quickly as our wedding ceremony passed in mere hours, our one-year wedding anniversary is fast approaching.

In thinking back to my week-long wedding festivities, the most unsettling recollection I have from all of the events is the closing remark of my father-in-law's toast offered at the rehearsal dinner.

My father-in-law, an elegant man who had been a member of the Foreign Service, raised his glass of white wine to toast the engaged couple. Especially for the rehearsal dinner, I had my hair styled in a chignon and had my makeup applied professionally that afternoon at the coiffure at Bergdorf Goodman's, and as I sat in my seat in the bird and flower print wallpapered room at the Sky Club, which is perched on top of the former Pan Am building, I felt certain that all the guests' eyes were focused on my expensively decorated head. Nervously, I tucked a wisp of stray hair back into place and waited for my father-in-law to finish. Displaying the grace of a man who has spoken publicly many times, he thanked everyone for coming and stated how joyful he was about the upcoming wedding. He ended his toast by wishing Christopher and me many years of happiness and finally, many, many grandchildren. The guests cheered at this point and suddenly, I felt all pairs of the families' eyes directing their gaze from my head to my stomach. I smiled uncomfortably.

As a New York business lawyer, I have come to know many professional women who work in my field. Despite our common career and business interests, when I talk to these women, I have noticed that we rarely speak about structuring private placement offerings, the varying tranche interest rates created from manipulating asset pools, or the financing of off-shore deals. With the exception of griping about certain projects, annoying colleagues, or the hours that we labor, the rising star of all conversation topics is motherhood. A week does not pass where some female lawyer I know either from work, graduate school, or professional association mentions the motherhood question and its actual or perceived effects on her career and marriage.

In my single, brief year as a professional in New York City, I have learned the following from the female attorneys I have encountered: most women attorneys want children and the same women believe that having children will harm, delay, halt, obliterate, or overshadow their legal career. This dialectic of maternal desire and anticipated professional destruction invades the conversations I have with my friends, colleagues, and acquaintances who are female lawyers, and I find that the tension between such a powerful longing and an all-too-possible obstruction is transforming my budding thought about motherhood.

This is the drill: when you go to one of the top-ten law schools and you are the top third of such a law school, it is understood in the profession that certain courses are charted for you. In the fall of your second year in law school, you interview at a law firm for a summer associate position in a place like New York City for the summer months following your second year. If the firm likes you, the partners ask you to return when you graduate after completing your third and final year; this is called “the offer.” If you accept the offer, you take the bar examination after you graduate and start your career at the law firm in which you were a summer associate, but now you are deemed an associate. After eight or nine years or so of being an associate at the firm, you may be considered for partnership, and if all works out well, you become a junior partner. Keep in mind that there are many variations to this outline, but this is the stuff you are weaned on in law school if you are interested in the private sector- the goal, you are informed, is partnership. At the very minimum, however, to make partner, you must be on the track for partnership.

Fortunately or unfortunately, not everyone makes partner. In fact, fewer and fewer people are asked to be partner each year, and as I continue working, I notice everywhere fewer and fewer women are in fact partners, and since more and more female associates get off the partnership track, the future seems assured that there will always be fewer women partners. Whether it is a true theory or not, it is commonly believed that women associates leave the track to have children, either to stay home with them until the children are five or so, or to get jobs which are physically less demanding. So as a first-year associate, I look around me and I look above me and I notice we have come a long way but we have a long way to go.

I hear male associates whisper that women are in some ways lucky, since they don't have to stay on the track, especially the married ones, and to my shock, I can't say

that I always disagree with them. In material terms, as a married woman with a husband who can support me, I would have shelter, food and comforts even if I quit my job today. Nevertheless, I have always been hungry for more than my material needs.

Lately, I have been contemplating the sheer irony of my foresisters demanding the right to get on the track and then for me to realize how brutal it is to stay on it when you want other things, too, like, children, for one. And I hear my girlfriends asking themselves as I ask myself, why stick it out? Why should I have to bill so many hours, why should I give up relationships, why should I always be politically neutral, why should I wear these incredibly boring clothes, why should I give up having children or perhaps, worse, watch another woman raise them? Are my female colleagues and I the intended heirs of the legacies of Susan B. Anthony, Emma Goldman, Angela Davis, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Harriet Tubman, and Betty Friedan? Have we eaten our fill of our portion of equal opportunities and are we pushing away our plates?

Somewhere down deep, deep beneath the fear of failure and the pain of humiliation, I ask myself seriously if I still believe that I can do anything. I heard a clear voice cheering me on to keep at my goals as it pushed me forward when I was in elementary school, junior high school, and high school. I heard such a voice get dimmer, fuzzier when I got to college and law school. Lately, I hear a voice that doesn't sound familiar to me in my head – no, it says, no, girl, you can't do it all, no one can do it all. So, Harriet, Susan, Charlotte, Angela, Betty, and Emma, did you hear such a nasty voice? Would you have even attempted to bill 2,500 hours a year, stay married, and raise children? Ladies, did I miss you point?

I never thought I wanted to be a wife. It just wasn't on my list of things to do. And now that I am a wife, I feel privileged to feel such a profound level of intimacy and friendship. Because I was wrong about the institution of marriage, now I think, although I never thought I wanted to be a mother, my adolescent certainty against such a prospect has flagged. I'm not so sure anymore. Yet the downside of choosing motherhood has been spelled out to me. My female colleagues, alumnae, and girlfriends seem convinced and are warning me that, if I want children, I have to make a choice, I must give up my space on the track to drive a station wagon in suburbia.

It is spring in Central Park and I am staring at the marvelously painted horses of the merry-go-round, and as I wait in line to take my turn, I watch the brass ring revolve around the striped axis. I think to myself, I don't know if I want to be a partner and I don't know if I want to be a mother and I don't know if I can be both at the same time, but I know that right now I feel cornered. I sway in time to the tinny music and I wait patiently for my ride to start.

pain au chocolat.

I was late for church this morning. I had forgotten that the morning service was moved up to 10:30, so I walked in half an hour late. When I walked out of the service at noon, I felt disoriented, as I usually do when I'm not on schedule. Unlike the mildewy weather of yesterday afternoon, today was breezy and light. So instead of taking a taxi directly to work like I had done yesterday, I decided to walk down Fifth Avenue and pick up a few tubes of my favorite lipstick at Henri Bendel before heading to the office.

Whenever I enter this New York departments store, I feel like I've stepped into a beautiful gift box. The floor-to-ceiling Lalique windows gleam behind the gilded cherubim standing on glass and pewter shelves holding four-ply amber-colored cashmere sweaters. Neat rows of obscure French perfumes with exotic names suggestive of vegetation indigenous to Morocco and Tunisia frame the curving staircase.

Day after day of reading black and white corporate documents, it is refreshing to see colors and textures and smell floral and citrus scents from sensually shaped crystal flacons. I am out of my office and it feels good to be giddy and not so serious about the world of business transactions. At this moment, I am concerned solely with the shade of my lipstick.

After I purchased two tubes of my favorite lipstick, Auburn by MAC, I ascended the stairs clutching my miniature brown and white striped shopping bag and my brown briefcase. Treat of all treats, I decided to have a cup of coffee at the cafeX located on the second floor of the store. I was going to savor being a lady of leisure for at least thirty more minutes this Sunday afternoon before I trudged toward my office to finish drafting more documents for the four acquisition deals I had to close before the end of the month.

The host seated me near the frosted glass windows. From my table I had a view of a full street block of the Fifth Avenue Book Fair which was being held outside. Decadently, I ordered a coffee and a pain au chocolat.

Ever since I left college, I get a little sad when I see stores or vendors which sell books. I stared out of the window and saw all these people milling about the stalls covered with cheerful canopies that were filled with stacks and stacks of fresh new books. I felt a tinge of envy of all those people on the street below who had the luxury of spending the day at the book fair. Stealing these thirty minutes or so to eat my brunch at this posh cafeX filled me with guilt since I had so many items to cross off my list of to-do's back at the office.

Sitting a table covered with demask linen and sipping a cup of bitter hot coffee cut by the sweetness of a flaky croissant, I contemplated my guilt mingled with envy. My envy is easy to explain. When I was in college, I wanted to be a fiction writer more than anything else. I took writing courses, wrote essays, and published my stories in little campus magazines. When I announced my decision to write, my parents made it very clear that they would not support such an unsound and baseless decision either economically or emotionally.

My father had said to me: "You're too young, you haven't lived your life yet. What could you possibly have to say? No one would care to read your books. All you've ever done was go to school, you can always write when you get older. You should go to law school. Learn a trade." And I believed him.

Frankly, I was envious not only of the people outside my window who had the leisure to peruse the tables laden with books, but also of the authors of such books. When I was twenty years old, becoming twenty-five seemed very far away, and by then, I had imagined that I would have written at least two acclaimed novels with moving plots and serious characters. I had not yet done so, and in lieu of such a grandiose feat, I had learned a specialized trade so that I would no longer eat my father's bread. I had learned to put bread on my own table, bread which happened to be at the moment a layer of chocolate enrobed in layers of buttery pastry. As I poured more hot coffee from the well-polished pewter pot into my porcelain cup resting on its gold-rimmed saucer, I shifted my gaze from the view from the window to the restaurant menu.

I had guessed that the waiter was a native French speaker from his accent when he had stopped to take my order. Hence, when he had asked me what I would like, I tried to pronounce “pain au chocolat” as artfully as possible, recollecting the acerbic comments made by a college friend who was French whenever he heard people attempting to pronounce such common menu terms. *Pain*, how could a word meaning sustenance to one man, mean hurt to another man. I wondered.

My mingled guilt is not so easy to explain. On average, as a junior associate, I work almost six days a week and each day I am at my office well over twelve hours. Surprisingly, at the end of each day, I cannot finish everything which needs to get done. My peers have the same curse it seems, so like them, I return, begrudgingly, to work on the weekends and attempt to catch up. Since I have started my job as a young lawyer, I rarely stop working and I never stop thinking about my work. No matter how hard I try. I can't finish it all.

When I was growing up in Korea, I heard the story of *Kongji and Potji* which is about the virtuous girl, Kongji, whose father remarries a horrible woman who has an evil daughter Potji, who abuses this girl and through certain miracles, Kongji ends up marrying a nobleman who rescues her from such hardship. Kongji is the good and beautiful heroine and each time her stepmother hands her one onerous task after another, a team of toads or a bevy of birds descends upon her home and aids her in completing the nearly impossible tasks.

There are moments when I feel like Kongji. Certain senior associates and partners begin to resemble Kongji's stepmother, and drafting half a dozen documents or plowing through boxes of due diligence review in one night begin to parallel having to fill large clay vessels with hidden cracks with water or hulling a hundred bags of rice by hand. At my office, there are no fairy toads to sit in the bottom of the vessels to prevent the seepage so I can fill the jars with water, and there are no friendly birds to hull the mountains of rice with their tiny beaks. The evenings advance quickly, and I am alone drafting my agreements and reviewing the piles of documents. When my eyes give, I finish what I can and head home.

New York City is magical at the very early hours of the morning. The damp, tar-paved streets glisten with the reflections of the lighted storefronts. In the quiet taxi ride returning home, I remind myself gently that I am historically privileged to have this job. After all, I tell myself, my forbears could not have imagined that their girl-

child descendant would be an attorney. At the same time, I try not to hear the calm voice of my father, who expected such an outcome.

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