

## Beyond the Dream

By Ya-ning Ke 柯雅寧

*Everyone has a dream. The secret to make dream come true is to stay diligent.*

All the teachers tell this to students. All the schools make this as the school motto.

Diligent students will earn what they deserve and fulfill their goals. Efforts do pay off as long as you are hard-working enough.

But Thea didn't believe in this. She did not have a great dream. She was not interested in any of the subjects. She knew how to pass tests. But she had no aspiration to get higher scores. Life to her was merely a road trip. She enjoyed the views passing by. She wondered why it was so difficult for others to stop competing.

"Thea, would you stay for the night study today?" Nina, Thea's best friend at school, asked.

"Sure. Everybody stays, isn't it?" Thea knew that her parents would not be happy to see her at home especially when the exam was at the corner.

"Nice. I'd love to stay whole night at the piano room. You still want to take academic tests or wanna change to performance test like me?" Nina was fond of music. She got talents but what made her a good pianist was her countless night staying in the piano room.

“I might take the academic tests, though. Anyway, there will be something suitable for me.” Thea did not plan to do anything. She believed that everyone was doomed. She didn’t know what her talent was yet but she would know when the day came.

“Don’t you ever dream to be someone? Don’t you have any plan for the future?” Nina couldn’t understand why Thea seemed so negative toward future.

“I want ... Err...I am not sure yet.” Thea almost burst out her true will that was to lead a mediocre life. She had been haunted by her passive attitude toward learning for days. She felt kind of guilty for not being ambitious.

“Alright. You know you have plenty of choices.” It sounded like Nina had nothing to say anymore.

Thea raised a hard smile. She thought that she was not the master of her own life because everyone around was busy pursuing so-called successful dream future.

The school bell rang.

“Come on. Let’s go to grab some food.” Nina packed her bag quickly and rushed out of the classroom.

“Thanks. I don’t feel like eating anything now. Catch you later at night stay.” Thea stayed in her seat.

Night fell early before the night stay started. Thea was still thinking about the conversation with Nina. She felt irritated and decided to walk to the lake in the school.

Sitting down near the undergrowth, she enjoyed watching the water flowing. The big round moon was reflected on the lake, even in this starry night. The tranquility of the night soothed Thea's flurry mind.

A sound of the bell broke the peace. It seemed like the school bell but it came from the bottom of the lake. Thea came closer to the water, wandering where the sound was. She couldn't help but get closer and closer. She thought she saw another world at the bottom of the lake. At this moment she was still wandering, a soft wind swept Thea into the reflection of the moonlight.

The moon still shone brightly in the sky.

When Thea opened her eyes, she found herself lying on the grass near a lake.

"Hello, visitor." A voice came from the air.

"Who is speaking? Where am I?" Thea somehow felt a sense of calmness.

"I am Oliver. You are in the Dreamland now." A firm and tender voice replied.

"Why am I here? Am I in the dream?" Thea tried to figure things out.

"Thea, you will know the reason. Whether it's a dream or not, it's your choice." Olivier spoke with a joking voice. "Come with me. I will show you around."

Thea put her hands in Oliver's and got up. It was not until Thea stood up that she could clearly see Oliver. He was in a blue suit, smiling gently.

"Why do you know I am Thea?" Thea broke the awkward silence.

“I know every visitor’s name. This is my job.” Oliver kept smiling.

“What is your job exactly?”

“Haha... I guess my job right now is to answer tons of the questions you have.” Oliver was chuckling.

Thea followed Oliver’s step and crossed the undergrowth. She had so many questions but she didn’t know how to start. Everything in Dreamland looked unbelievably beautiful and placed in order. Even the lake was perfectly in a circle just like the moon hanging high in the sky.

Two high buildings were at sight. “We are now in the Meard School. On the left is the school for occupational skill training. The right one is for the academic studies.” Oliver could tell Thea’s confusion from her eyes.

“It’s the same at my school. We can choose whatever we are interested in to learn. Any particular hobby is encouraged as long as we practice hard.”

“Well.., these are two different programs. Students can only study in either one.” Oliver kept saying, “Actually, this has been decided since the moment you came to the world.”

“What do you mean by that?” This was new to Thea.

“We believe in destiny. God already arranges the road you should take when you were born. So we make a little examination to all the babies and divide them into two groups as they were born,” Oliver explained.

“On what do you base?” It was surprising to Thea while in her world no one would say things like that.

“We have high-tech examination machines to detect babies’ intelligence quality. Those whose IQ wins over 80% of others would be defined as Class I. Others would be Class II.”

“So will Class I receive better resources and education?”

“No, Dreamland is the world of fairness. There’s no better resource but suitable arrangement for individuals.” Oliver stated seriously, “ We will also choose the parents for the baby to ensure they have the proper family. People in Class I will have the occupation related to academic studies, such as the researchers, teachers and so on. People belonging to Class II learn the skills to make the world livable while Class I makes the world advanced.”

“That was really different from my world,” Thea mumbled.

“As for the nutrition they need, our research department invents pills for different purpose. For example, people in Class II need better body shape. We will ensure they receive enough nutrition for growth in their teenage years.”

“So that children here can grow up the way you expected?” Thea asked.

“No. It’s what God has already chosen for everyone. God is the dominance of the dream. ”

While they were talking, Thea was led to the Class I area. She saw every student stayed in their seats and seemed pretty concentrated in the classroom. "Is this their night stay at school?" Thea couldn't help but ask.

"No. It's their school time. The class starts from 8 in the morning till 9p.m," Oliver replied.

"That's a long school day." Thea couldn't hide her surprise in her voice.

"Everyone has his duty. As for students, all they need to do is to study." Oliver said, "The whole society would be well-functioned if everyone can played his roles well."

Thea looked at the students in the classroom. She wandered if they enjoyed learning or if they even knew what the definition of dream was. But actually she wasn't so sure if it mattered to them. She wasn't so sure if this world was what she expected since she was the one who didn't believe in dreams.

"In Dreamland, all the citizens would be assigned with a house after they marry. Elders will be cared in the nursing home. Parents do not need to quit the job after they have the baby because the school looks after babies from 1 month old to 20 years old."

Oliver spoke with a sense of pride, "What's the best is that everybody doesn't need to worry about the unnecessary things but their responsibility."

"Yeah. That sounds nice." Thea couldn't focus on what Oliver said as she saw a girl sitting in front of the piano, looking frustrated.

“Leanne, have you done the practice yet?” Oliver led Thea to the piano room and asked the girl.

“No, sir.” The girl responded with a small voice.

“Keep practicing and you will improve.” Oliver patted on the girl’s back. When Oliver was about to walk out the room, Leanne stopped him. “Sir, what if I am not talented in piano?”

“It’s impossible, kid. You were born to be the pianist. Your parents are all excellent musician. You have been fed with enough nutrition to improve your hearing and the sensitivity of fingers. You should believe that sharing your piano talents with the rest of the world is your mission.” Oliver contradicted with a comforting but undeniable tone.

“But I’d rather be a cook in the future. I am more interested in cooking than music.”

“It’s not the matter of interest. What you are interested in and what you are capable of are completely different. Cherish the gift that God gave you.” Oliver held Leanne’s hands and put them on the keys, “Keep practicing. You still have three hours to go.”

As they walked 10 meters away from the room, Thea couldn’t help asking.

“Don’t they have the choice if they have different interest?”

Oliver laughed. “Why do they need to? Everything has been arranged. All they can do is to follow God’s will and then they will lead a happy life.”

“Perhaps diligence can make a difference.” It was surprising to Thea that she would ever say so.

“So how about you? What’s your interest? What do you want to do?” These tough questions came from Oliver.

“Well..I don’t know yet.” Thea felt a sense of helplessness when thinking about these questions.

“Most people do not know their potential. In Dreamland, we help them figure it out and develop it.” Oliver claimed again, “What we do here is the implementation of God’s will.”

Her mind was in chaos with so many new concepts and she wanted to change the topic.

“What is that building for?” In the far front stood a tall building. It rose high and erect to the sky.

“That’s DD, our Dream Dorm.” Oliver explained, “Allow me to take you to see the best design.”

They crossed almost half the school to Dream Dorm. On the way the moon was up and high. It looked exactly the same sky as in Thea’s world. Except that there was no star.

“Good night, sir.” A technical voice spoke when Olive and Thea walked into the building.



Oliver said, "This is the access to the visitor floor, please." They walked into the elevator. The elevator ascended so smoothly that Thea wasn't even aware she was at a different floor.

Oliver opened the first room at sight, "The bed is like a capsule. So even in the dream, people can absorb the knowledge they require. Amazing, isn't it?"

"It's really new to me. But why can't people just get a good rest at night?" Thea raised up her doubt.

"Sure they can. In the capsule, people sleep under the electric waves that can release their pressure. At the same time, people with different occupation will have different kinds of dreams. High-technology leads to numerous fabulous inventions."

Though Thea had plenty of doubts, she didn't know what to say. She had already been bombarded with too much information. She once thought that this was the world she expected, an arranged and destined world.

"Do you want to take a try?" Oliver kindly offered.

"Me? In the capsule?" Thea asked with a rising tone.

"Yes. It would be fascinating." Oliver led Thea to the bed, "Just lie down and try not to think of anything. Good-night."

Oliver gently pushed Thea to the bed of capsule. His sly smile was all Thea could remember before she fell into unconsciousness.

When she opened her eyes again, she saw two crystal big bubbles. Inside the bubbles were piano rooms. Both rooms sat a girl in front of the piano. Nina's face shone when playing the piano. Thea wanted to call her. Then she found out on the other side, it was Leanne. Thea could feel the reluctance of Leanne from the music she played.

At that moment, Thea realized that an arranged world wasn't her ideal. She stepped toward Nina without hesitation.

It was the first time that Thea felt so lucky to see the starry night.

"Hey, where've you been?" Nina was playing and looked surprised to see Thea coming into the piano room.

"I guess I found the dream." Thea replied.

"So what do you want to do in the future?"

"I am not sure yet. But I'll figure it out anyway." Thea was so relieved that her mind was in clearness.

The moon hang up high. And every star still twinkled brightly in the night.