

Trial By Marriage

Samuel Butler once observed that in respect of marriages those who hesitated might sometimes be saved. But that satirist probably did not have in mind the stew I was in regarding Man-Ying. A quick fix was a necessity; hesitation courted disaster.

After returning to Singapore, I was so preoccupied with saving money for my marriage that I was oblivious of the passage of time. My sister, Pauline, gave me a jolt when she announced one day in April she would be marrying a young Indian doctor by the name of Gopal Baratham the following month. It was then that I realised the year I had planned to settle my own marriage was drawing rapidly to a close. The dark maw of matrimony yawned; but the amount I had saved remained pitifully small. The prospect of having to start married life burdened with further debt terrified me.

Weddings were supposed to be important in Chinese culture, for they signified the formation of society's basic unit -- the family. Tradition called for public announcements and face-enhancing displays, the holding of two banquets by the two families involved, the offering of cups of tea by the couple to each of their elders, and a host of other symbolic ceremonies. The latter included the presentation of a roasted suckling pig to the home of the bride three days after the wedding, to acknowledge her virginal condition at the time of marriage. That would have been a laugh in our case, as well as in most modern marriages. Everything required money; an insufficiency of it had long been an inescapable feature in my life.

I could hardly expect my family to foot the bill, since whatever savings it possessed had already been expended on purchasing the bungalow in Serangoon Gardens Estate. My father was unemployed and hence without income. The running cost of maintaining the home was being borne by my grandfather's pension and Anna's salary from the Special Branch. I knew also that Anna had sometimes borrowed money to maintain Tzi-Seng in his chemical engineering studies in London.

Even if money were available, a number of taxing problems still had to be faced. For instance, Man-Ying's immediate family was located in Hong Kong whereas mine was in Singapore. My closest relatives were evenly split between the two places. Gathering them together was out of the question.

Technical and emotional impediments also existed. Since my father's marriage to Anna under duress the previous year, I supposed Anna was now legally my step-mother. If so, I would have to offer her a cup of tea to acknowledge her as such. It was a gesture I was reluctant to make. My own mother, alive and well in another country, would be completely left out, not to mention her Filipino husband. Moreover, Man-Ying, young and untutored as she was, would probably balk at the rite of offering individual cups of tea to so many strangers she had never met before.

I decided that some nifty manipulation of the truth was necessary, to cut the Gordian knots tied by both the lack of money and family considerations.

I asked my father casually if he would object to Man-Ying and I following the Western tradition of the father of the bride issuing invitations to the wedding. Since the bride's parents were refugees from China and not particularly well-to-do -- and had no friends or relatives in Singapore -- it would make more sense to hold only a small wedding reception in Singapore for immediate family members and leave a more substantial banquet for Hong Kong, where our relatives there could also be invited.

It was not lost on my father that a more traditional Chinese wedding would require the family of the groom to bear all expenses. He was never slow on the uptake on such niceties. He duly acquiesced to the parents of the bride issuing the invitations. I thus got away with paying only for a small reception, shifting the odium of not inviting my aunts and uncles and their families in Singapore onto the shoulders of the bride's parents. I felt badly about that ploy but needs must when the devil drove. Needless to say, no banquet was

subsequently held in Hong Kong either.

Next came the question of where to set up home. Singapore was pleasant enough for me. Most of my immediate family members were there, together with a number of married aunts and plenty of cousins. I also had friends among the classmates from St. Andrew's. The place had enjoyed a partially elected government for 10 years and indications were that full internal government might arrive soon. Since I had a Singapore identity card, it seemed a far better place to work and carve out a future than in an uncertain colonial Hong Kong. The prospect of self-government there was not even a glint in anybody's eye, given the backward-looking attitudes in the Grantham administration.

Moreover, lurking in the background was the unpredictability of what might be happening in China. Reports had been circulating of a "Great Leap Forward" initiated by Chairman Mao to catch up economically with Britain in 15 years. It called for the transformation of China's agrarian society through industrialisation and collectivisation. But there were rumours of things going awry, of starvation in parts of the country. Official Chinese statements naturally disputed such reports but if they were true, floods of refugees might soon be overwhelming Hong Kong.

Singapore seemed a safer selection. But it would not suit Man-Ying, for she would have neither family nor friends on hand. Her parents would no doubt prefer her in Hong Kong as well, accompanied by a new bridegroom to still any gossip which might arise of their daughter abandoning her dancing ambitions so quickly. Hence, there seemed little chance of avoiding a return to the scene of so many of my personal setbacks and failures.

Once I had worked through my restricted options, I telephoned Man-Ying long-distance at enormous expense to explain the options. She went along, having no clear preference on what she wanted. We then discussed a date for our wedding and settled on D-Day -- the 6th of June. It was agreed she

would fly to Singapore as soon as possible and I would book a hotel room for us to live in sin for a few days before the wedding. Her parents would make their own arrangements to fly in from Hong Kong.

* * *

For people heading into matrimony, absence was supposed to make the heart grow fonder. It did not work that way between Man-Ying and myself. During the year of separation, the fierce flames that had once licked our sensual desires had subsided. Both of us had hesitations and concerns over the future which neither could verbalise. So far as I was concerned, I was honour-bound to go through with the wedding, for I had fallen from grace and therefore had forfeited my right to have much say. Unless Man-Ying had expressed a change of mind, I was stuck. But I guessed she saw no other way forward either.

Naturally, we avoided all talk of love or prospects of everlasting bliss. Neither of us was really in love with the other. I suspected that, for Man-Ying, the sex we shared back in London might have been just a temporary balm to ease the hurt of her wounded pride after the annihilation of her girlish dreams.

In any case, I placed most of my cards on the table, especially about my impecunious state. She suggested we might put up for a while in her old room in her parents' home in North Point. Once she had cleared that with her parents, I accepted with alacrity.

We were both left in a sombre mood when we formalised things at a public registry. It was left to my in-laws and my family members to play out the conventional joyous scene required at our reception.

I was only glad that my grandfather was present to see his eldest grandson, at the age of 30, at last discharging his filial obligations after those of three of his younger siblings.

* * *

Living with Man-Ying's parents was more pleasant than anyone could have hoped for with in-laws. They were both considerate and non-intrusive, allowing us to get on with our lives as best we could. Mr. Fung was even-tempered and had a quiet air of dignity about him. He was, like my father and grandfather, seldom inclined to speech. His main hobby was studying racing magazines and newspapers for the forms of horses scheduled to run at the Hong Kong Jockey Club weekend races. He rarely missed a single meeting. Since he was not a club member, however, he could only gain admission to the densely crowded public stands.

Mrs. Fung was almost always neatly garbed in a Chinese *cheung-sam*, matched with embroidered slippers at home and fashionable heels outdoors. She was much more loquacious than her husband but her talking was largely directed at the solitary live-in all-purpose servant conventionally and unkindly referred to by locals as a "one-foot kick". Our own bedroom was quite small, but not extraordinarily so considering the general size of flats in Hong Kong.

I plunged immediately into the dismal necessity of finding work. My prospects shrunk by the day. I had failed in every line I had ever tried so far. Journalism was not only tainted by colonialist attitudes but also grossly underpaid; it was so organised as to prevent my being given a voice. And I could not even hold onto such employment because some unknown colonial official took a dislike to me. Nor could I make it writing fiction or polemics in London.

Pedagogy was disheartening, given the emphasis placed by both parents and students in Hong Kong on securing good marks rather than on broadening intellects and preparing for engagement with life. I had been rejected as unsuitable by the local civil service and it was fairly obvious I had

not impressed the Soviets with my potential as a spy.

The vulgar marbled portals to banks, insurance companies, trading houses, brokerage firms, property developers and other money-grubbing enterprises remained wide open and importuning. But I shunned such buccaneering callings, with their twisted half-truths and their dissembling sales pitches. Being engaged in any of them seemed tantamount to working as a pimp.

Idle time allowed me to masticate dishearteningly upon available opportunities and their advantages and drawbacks. I had to start earning money quickly. Living entirely on in-laws was embarrassing. Leslie Sung was still Editor-in-Chief of the *Standard* but there could be no going back there after I had been so summarily sacked in 1954. Some of my old *Morning Post* colleagues still had their regular *mah-jong* and poker games but it was impossible for me to participate because I had no money to lose.

One of those former colleagues told me, however, there was a vacancy for a night sub-editor at the *Morning Post*. Out of sheer desperation, I applied for and got the job. So it was back to the well-trodden but unpromising path of journalism.

The retirement of Mr. Ching saw the editorship going to one of his more drab and unimpressive expatriate subordinates. The successor displayed no indication of initiating changes in the unequal system of treatment between locals and expatriates.

The Night Editor was a cheerful and efficient middle-aged Indian called Mr. Rumjahn. My pay was set at around \$1,700 per month, with an extra month's pay as a bonus at the Lunar New Year. I had to work six nights a week from 6.00 p.m. to about 3.00 a.m., when the newspaper was usually put to bed. The pay was inadequate for maintaining an independent establishment because the rental for a modest flat would eat up at a minimum more than 60% of that income. The working hours of the job also entailed a virtual end to normal

social life. In the circumstances, it would be both impractical and imprudent to try to move out on our own.

My in-laws were very understanding and urged us to retain the arrangement in their two-bedroom flat. They must have known very well that, even if funds were not a factor, their daughter would be incapable of running an independent home. They suggested instead that Man-Ying might consider taking the opportunity for some further education.

It did not require the deductive powers of a Sherlock Holmes to realise that Man-Ying was dissatisfied with the kind of mundane and financially strapped life she had married into. Since the crushing of her dreams, she appeared to be progressively losing heart and direction. She also gave every indication she was unprepared to improve herself or to face up to the challenges of our new circumstances. Instead she turned snappy and temperamental.

I could not blame her. She was still only in her teens; and she had already missed much of the joy, wonder and effervescence of adolescence. But I did not know how to lift her from her doldrums. Nor could I hold out to her any promise of a better future further down the line. I saw none myself. I could find some solace in books but Man-Ying could only nurse her unhappiness into grievances. She appeared disinclined to interest herself in anything -- music, literature, painting, needlework, domestic science, flower arrangement or anything else.

In the circumstances, I hesitated over performing my family duty of paying courtesy visits to my elders in Hong Kong and to apologise for failing to invite them to my wedding in Singapore. It was not only my work schedule that was an obstacle; I feared the unpredictability of Man-Ying's moods if she went with me as protocol required. If she fell into a huff, it would leave a bad impression which would be hard to erase later. But in avoiding one pitfall, I created another. By refraining from visiting elders, I left the impression I had been so much more Westernised by my stay in England that I was becoming

negligent of Chinese civilities. It was Hobson's choice.

* * *

At work, I found myself transformed from poacher to gamekeeper, putting the blue pencil through any editorialising or subjective observations in the submissions coming before me. I was only too painfully aware that there was no career structure or even a system for salary increments at the *Morning Post*. It was all up to the Editor-in-Chief. It was true that in the days Mr. Ching occupied that position, he had twice doubled my pay, albeit from a very low level. I could hardly imagine his successor doing anything remotely similar.

Meanwhile, news agency reports out of China made alarming reading. A year on from launching the Great Leap Forward, famine was patently spreading. The diversion of farm labour to the production of steel in backyard furnaces was causing catastrophe. A measure of the hardships in China could be gauged from the number of food parcels being sent to the mainland by local residents. The sheer volume overwhelmed local postal services. I could not help worrying about what might be befalling Hon-Kit and Frances and to the family of my eldest aunt.

The gathering disaster in China took on for me an almost dry and surreal character. The unfortunate circumstances of the death of a single individual could be heartfelt but the human mind boggled at the notion of deaths in their millions. As I looked at Mr. Rumjahn quietly working in the middle of our horseshoe table, I felt completely useless and impotent in the face of disasters occurring virtually next door. If I could endure the prospect of being bludgeoned daily by such accounts from around the world for 10 or 15 years, I might actually get to inherit Mr. Rumjahn's position! That stark prospect brought the taste of ashes to my mouth.

The old warning delivered by Hon-Kit way back in 1948 loomed in

my memory like an apparition. I visualised myself on a ledge in the middle of another sheer cliff-face, with no way up or down. In the meantime, another revolution and yet more misfortunes had befallen my country. Unlike my two grandfathers and Hon-Kit and his wife, I had made not the slightest contribution to advancing the national cause or relieving any of its miseries. It was now too late. History had passed me by.

Another aspect of reality intruded into my introspections. Could my mother have been right in asking me to take up shorthand and typing? She had nailed me as mere office fodder, a peripheral person of no account, following a peripheral life. I was surplus to my nation's needs. I had only the choice of jumping blindly off the ledge -- either to escape or to perish!

My heart ached with misery. The lament of the celebrated Tang poet, Li Po, came unbidden into my head. "In this dream-like, floating life, how often are we happy?" The price had to be paid now for succumbing to those moments of lust in London.

Before I could resign myself to my penance, however, Man-Ying informed me she was pregnant. The news devastated me. It was not an occurrence either of us had planned or wanted. For me, it was like an additional pair of handcuffs or leg-irons being clapped on, binding both body and soul.

* * *

Given that projected increase in the size of the family, the North Point flat could no longer be adequate. Mrs. Fung and Man-Ying spearheaded a hunt for new accommodation. I went along whenever it was convenient. I noted that sometimes, when we came across a flat which both Man-Ying and I liked, Mrs. Fung would always find some small defect with it. She might point to some consideration in *fung shui* or geomancy. It surprised me for a while, because she was supposed to be a Christian and modern-minded. I myself was

agnostic on such matters. I eventually realised the so-called failings or defects she had identified boiled down to essentially the level of rent being asked.

At last a flat of under 1,100 square feet was decided upon in an apartment block called Wise Mansions in Robinson Road, a middle class area euphemistically designated as “mid-levels”, about a quarter of the way up Victoria Peak.



Battery Path with a row of sedan chairs taken in the mid 1930s. People used to be carried up by them to the Mid-Levels and beyond. The sedan chairs had all disappeared by the time I returned to Hong Kong in 1947.

Photo courtesy of Annelise Pedersen Connell and Gwulo.com

The apartment was on the 10th floor and it consisted of four bedrooms, with a tolerably-sized room at each end and two much smaller ones in-between, facing each other across a corridor. There was, in addition, a tiny cubby-hole next to the kitchen for the “one-foot kick”.

An unusual feature of the flat was that a roof garden, almost the size of the flat itself, existed outside one of the larger rooms. That was made possible because the 10th floor, and those above it, had been recessed to comply with the plot ratio restrictions on the site.

The owners of the building lived on the same floor as ourselves. They enjoyed an even bigger roof garden because they had amalgamated two flats for more space. Their section of the roof and ours were separated by a chain-linked fence.

Both sections provided an unobstructed 180-degree view of the deep-water harbour and of the distant ridge of hills in the New Territories known as the Nine Dragons. It was a view frequently reproduced in tourism promotion brochures. Naturally, it was a complete fake of reality, a clever marketing misrepresentation of Hong Kong.

Viewed from a distance, the huddles of the squatter settlements on the hillsides came over as inoffensive polychromic shades of brown. Remoteness also muted the grunts and chants of coolies on the waterfront and the cries of hawkers plying along narrow cobblestone streets. The grimness of the Central Magistracy and the Victoria Remand Prison was softened by the surrounding checkerboard of haphazard dwellings. The odours of human toil, stale food and night soil buckets could not reach the more rarefied atmosphere of the mid-levels. The crumbling tenements elbowing their way upwards, through narrow alleys and grimacing terraces, appeared merely picaresque abstractions, while the bamboo laundry poles sticking out from buildings and rooftops took on the air of festive buntings. At night, moonlit or otherwise, the neon lights and advertising signs illuminated the city like a jolly fun fair.

And in that misrepresentation, the capital drama of millions of refugees and other impoverished souls struggling to survive was being obscured. Hidden too the more grotesque afflictions of hunger and torture visited upon countless millions in the Motherland. It beggared belief that the

obsession of one senile old man could unleash so much harm.

The Chinese had always accepted the element of chance as part of the lottery of life. That was why so many became easily addicted to gambling. But foreign observers, noting what they had achieved in Hong Kong and misreading their nature, had taken such acceptance as a natural inclination of the Chinese towards capitalism. I doubted whether some of the comfortless ideas inherent in capitalism had any more appeal among my countrymen than the terse directives from a centralised Communist regime. Both systems boiled down to exploiting the weak and the squeezing the last ounce of imagined productivity out of human beings in the name of efficiency or profit or doctrine.

My in-laws assigned me and my wife the room with views which provoked in me such dismal reflections. They themselves made do with the room facing a concrete wall with windows like their own next door.

They quickly noticed that our neighbour had exploited a loophole in the Building Ordinance to construct an extension on their roof garden. Such extensions were commonplace because of the premium on space in the colony. My in-laws duly engaged builders to do likewise, to provide me with a study and card room outside my bedroom.

My mother-in-law also set about installing potted plants to beautify the roof garden. I was told that on fine evenings, after I had gone to work, my in-laws would often go through my room to sit out on the roof. Whatever thoughts occupied them as they gazed upon the many-layered and contradictory city were never conveyed to me.

With the new apartment, I insisted I should bear half the family expenses. On my salary, that did not leave much for personal indulgences. Needless to say, it also prevented me from paying down the debt I still owed to my Eighth Granduncle.

When our first son arrived, he was named Tien-Kuen. The first character in the name, meaning “sky” or “heaven”, was the generative particle laid down by the Wong family. The second part of the name, meaning “authority”, was somehow settled upon among Man-Ying, my father and myself.

The child was soon found to suffer severely from asthma. Man-Ying was much attached to him but felt helpless to assist him each time he struggled to breathe. She would grow tense and panicky at the sound of his wheezing, particularly after she had completely exhausted herself attending to him during the night before.

In this respect my father-in-law proved a monumental help. Neither of us could have done without him. He, too, cared a great deal for his grandson. So he moved out of the room he shared with his wife to the small room across the corridor from the boy's. He took over attending to him during the night.

My returning home each night in the small hours must have created additional disturbance and stress for Man-Ying. My work regime was certainly not conducive to conjugal intimacies.

Man-Ying seldom spoke to me after the arrival of our son. When she did, it would be curtly and with irritation, about mundane everyday things. Without speech, it was difficult for me to get beyond the more obvious roots of her unhappiness or to suggest ways of easing the tensions in our lives. It occurred to me that perhaps my wife, having been obsessed with ballet since childhood, could only communicate through dancing. I had danced with her at the parties organised for Eddie Gong and the experience had been enjoyable. But if she had been trying to say anything to me then, I had not been listening. Both of us now seemed truly stuck in an emotional and marital cul-de-sac.

* * *

I woke up one day at mid-morning to find Man-Ying in tears. Scattered around her were the shreds of our wedding photographs.

The sight gave me quite a turn. “What’s the matter? What’s the matter?” I asked in shock.

“Leave me alone!” she cried, bitterly. “Get away from me; just get away from me.”

I retreated in confusion. I knew not a thing about postnatal depression then or that breast-feeding was beneficial for some babies with asthma. From the destruction of our wedding photographs, it was clear that Man-Ying held me or our marriage in some way responsible for her woes. But I was only trying to give her a face-saving way out of her disappointment at Ballet Rambert. Salving my own conscience, of course, also came into it. I had noticed she had turned moodier after some publicity had appeared in the press about two Chinese girls returning to the colony to open ballet schools after studying at the Royal Ballet. They both apparently had been students of the same ballet teacher as Man-Ying. I could sympathise with her frustrated ambitions but I had not anticipated she would take it out on me. I was stumped as to what more I could do.

After spending an entire day analysing our situation as objectively as I could, I concluded that our marriage had been the mother of all mistakes, a complete mismatch. I could not figure out exactly what Man-Ying wanted out of life. Whatever it was, it did not lie in the realm of the intellect or in metaphysics. The kindest thing was for us to separate.

There had been a provision in Chinese customary law since the Tang Dynasty for a “no fault” divorce, although that provision had been dropped after the establishment of the Republic. Nonetheless, there was provision in British law for a presumption of a breakdown in marriage when a couple lived apart for a prolonged period. That would allow for dissolution without acrimony or public fuss. Man-Ying would still be young enough then

to contract another marriage. I would have no objection to her keeping Tien-Kuen or to my paying maintenance.

So thinking, I approached my mother-in-law. I outlined our situation as I saw it and asked for her views.

Mrs. Fung heaved a sigh, as if she accepted the logic of my arguments but not my proposed solution. "I know it has not been easy," she said. "My daughter can be perverse at times. We have spoilt her. But you have to remember she is only just out of her teens. Marriage and a sick child coming along so soon, one after the other, are more than she can tackle at the same time. You must give her a chance to mature. There is much that she can learn from you, if you will be patient. Perhaps if you had another child who is hale and healthy, that might cheer her up and make a difference. I shall try to talk some sense into her."

My head told me her suggestion would not work. But my conscience reminded me that I owed my in-laws more than one debt. I had not only breached the trust they had placed in me as guardian of their daughter but I had also accepted the hospitality of their home since returning to Hong Kong.

"Our marriage hasn't worked so far and I doubt if it will work in the future," I ventured, hesitantly. "Our natures are too different. Material rewards, beyond a reasonable living, do not count much for me. You and Mr. Fung must realise I don't have much of a future in journalism or in anything else I have any bent for. It will be a hard slog all the way for Man-Ying. I don't think she's made for that. She's very young and ought to have no trouble finding a more suitable husband. I will nonetheless think over carefully what you have said. I will see if something can be worked out."

* * *

For days, the debate raged indecisively between my intellect and

my conscience. Not a single good solution offered itself. I felt increasingly depressed and at wits' end.

One afternoon later in the week, when I went for a haircut by the only barber in town capable of doing a decent crew cut, I bumped into a reporter surnamed Su whom I had known from my Central Magistracy days. He used to work for a Chinese newspaper and was a fair bit older than myself. We greeted each other warmly.

“I heard you're back in town, with the *Post*,” Su said.

“Yes, night sub,” I replied. “The same old rut. What about you? Still with the same rag?”

“Yeah. And still on the Central Magistracy beat, trying to make ends meet with odd jobs.”

“Life can sometimes be a real bucket of shit, can't it?” I commiserated. I felt sorry for him. It had been 12 years since we first met and, though we had not seen each other for years, he had apparently been unable to move on. Perhaps he never had anyone like Hon-Kit to warn him in good time of the hole he was getting into. Now he must be stuck.

“Chaps like me always have to trawl in the same old gutter,” Su allowed wanly, “because that's where those with power usually throw their dirty little secrets. Sometimes, even when I uncover some dirt, I don't get a chance to bring it to light. Newspapers fear being sued or getting into some other kind of trouble.”

“You don't have to tell me about *that*,” I said. “Have you heard anything of Hon-Kit?”

“Not really. Just the odd rumour now and then. He would be having it tough even in the best of times, given his temperament. With so much chaos in China now, who can tell?”

“Come on, I'll buy you a coffee and we can chat for a bit. It's good to see a familiar face. You can bring me up to date.”

Once we had comfortably settled ourselves in a quiet cafe, we talked companionably about mutual acquaintances and the gossip on the grapevine.

After a while, Su said: “You’ve a better chance of getting out of this racket than most. Why are you still hanging around? You’ve got the right qualifications and you speak the foreigners’ lingo better than they.”

“You make it all sound so easy. I’m married now; got a kid. Bound hand and foot. Can’t afford to take chances.”

“Having responsibilities is all the more reason you should go for a steadier career, like government service. That’s a real iron rice bowl. Once you’re in, all you have to do is to wait for seniority to fill dead men’s shoes. They never bounce anybody unless he has done something really horrendous. I wished I knew enough English to get in.”

“You make it sound like a piece of cake.”

“Sure, for someone like you. They’re advertising vacancies for Administrative Officers right now. That’s the best ticket in town. People in that grade are supposed to be policy makers, capable of becoming future governors of this place.”

I gave a hollow laugh. “Yeah, I suppose every uninitiated Blue Lantern joining a triad dreams of becoming the Dragon Head one day. But he’s more likely to die in turf wars as a Red Pole long before that. I tried the Administrative Service back in 1953. They rejected me.”

“So what? No harm trying again. I know plenty of people who never got a government job on the first go.”

“Thanks for the advice. I’ll think about it.”

With that we said our goodbyes and undertook to meet for coffee again.

Reflecting on the conversation with Su afterwards, I knew he was -- like Hon-Kit -- sincerely trying to warn me of the dangers ahead, of the very dangers that had trapped him. I therefore decided to check up more fully on the Administrative Service.

The service was structured with five levels. A new entrant, usually a fresh graduate, would be placed on a 12-point annual incremental scale, starting on a salary of \$1,600 per month. Promotion would turn him into a Senior Administrative Officer with a four-point annual incremental scale. Further promotion would make him a Staff Grade Officer, divided into successive categories of C, B or A, equating respectively with an Assistant Director, Deputy Director or Director of a major government department. All Staff Grade Officers would be on fixed salaries. The general expectation was that most officers would end their careers at the C or B level, with only the most talented proceeding to the A level and beyond, to become a Colonial Secretary, a Financial Secretary or a Secretary for Chinese Affairs. In the history of the service, only three officers had ever reached gubernatorial status in Hong Kong.

The system was highly discriminatory, in favour of expatriates. Such officers would begin two increments higher on the scale than local officers, just for being expatriates. The most important advantage, however, was that expatriate officers were entitled to quarters, for which they paid only a fixed 12.5% of their salary. It was a tremendous perk, given the high rents prevailing in the colony. A local officer would not be entitled to quarters till he reached the Senior Administrative Officer level, which meant he could not live decently unless he had help from his family. If he were married, that would be even more difficult.

I did a rough calculation of the pros and cons. If I entered government service, I would immediately suffer a cut in salary and lose an extra

month's pay as yearly bonus. It would mean more austerity and three years to climb back to my present income level.

On the other hand, government service would provide relief from my son's mounting medical costs, as there would be free medical facilities for civil servants and their families. Just as importantly, I could look forward to a steady rise in income and a clearly established career stream. I would also be spared from working unsociable hours. I figured that since even Lenin had to take a step backwards in order to move two steps forward, it might be worth trying my luck again.

I approached my mother-in-law and explained what I had in mind. I said I still believed separation to be the best outcome for both her daughter and myself. But if I were successful in securing a government appointment, I would be prepared to give her proposition for maintaining the marriage a try -- provided Man-Ying was willing to accept with good cheer a life of austerity for a good number of years.

Mrs. Fung said she would discuss matters with her husband and her daughter and give me an answer. It was a sorry commentary on the state of my marriage that I had to use a go-between to discuss such basic family issues with my wife.

When my mother-in-law finally indicated that Man-Ying was prepared to give our marriage another try, I applied to join the Administrative Service.

In due course, I was appointed an Administrative Officer and began work in February of 1961 at a salary of \$1,700 per month, which was \$100 less than my pay at the *Morning Post*.

Man-Ying and I thereupon made some half-hearted plans for producing some dubious cement in the form of another child.