

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY SOPHIA HOTUNG



## Order *The Heist of Hooded Light* in hardback, paperback, and e-book formats:



sophiahotung.com/heist





### First edition published in Hong Kong in 2022 by K11 ARTUS Limited

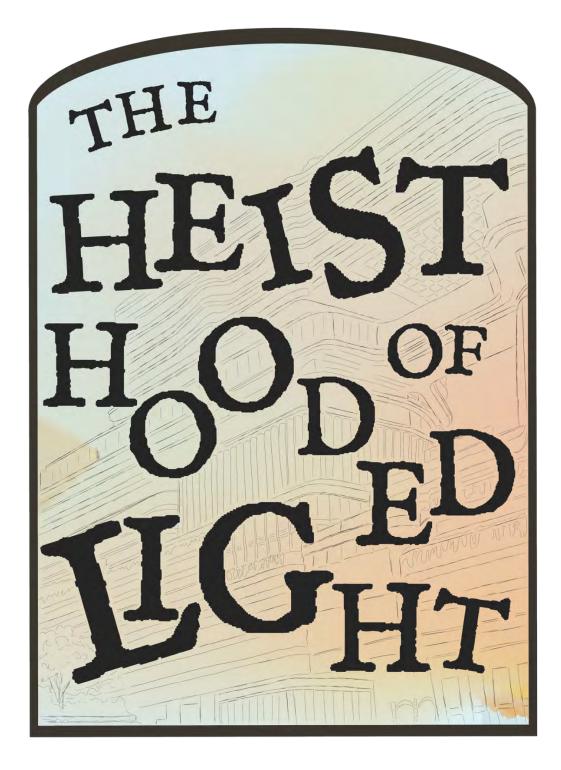
Copyright © 2022 Sophia Hotung Illustrations, text, and story by Sophia Hotung

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Book design by Sophia Hotung

This is a free version made available through K11 ARTUS. All materials are not for commercial use or distribution.

> www.artus.com.hk www.sophiahotung.com



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY SOPHIA HOTUNG



*The Heist of Hooded Light* was written during the author's stay as the Artistin-Residence at K11 ARTUS, a private residence where true luxury means having the time and space to relax and contemplate.

The Artist in Residence programme welcomes selected creatives on a cultural journey where insights are shared and inspiration is found.

Each thoughtfully curated work of art opens the door for ARTUS's residents and artisans to travel through art and discover inspiration for their own masterpieces.

*The Heist of Hooded Light* was intended to do just this for young bibliophiles.

ARTUS

# One

The Ma family checked into the squiggly building on the sea on a cold, wet day in January.

"We'll have a nice staycation for a couple of days," said Mum.

"It will be a restful break before you go back to school," said Dad.

"It will be *boring*!" moaned Marigold.

"I want to go home," groaned Marvin.

"Stop complaining," scolded Mum, and she sent them to sit to the side while they checked in.

A chipper gentleman wearing a grey waistcoat and warm smile skipped up to Mum and Dad. "Welcome, Mr and Mrs Ma!" he greeted. "My name is Quentin. We're delighted to have you at K11 ARTUS."

Dad smiled.

Mum smiled.

### Sophia Hotung

Marvin and Marigold looked at each other.

Quentin looked at the children and beamed. "We thought that you might like an art tour of your new art home. What do you think?" he asked.

Dad nodded his head vigorously.

Mum nodded her head vigorously.

Marvin and Marigold looked at each other.

"Wonderful!" Quentin exclaimed. "Right this way, we can start in the Sky Lobby. This is a piece called *...or... No.1*. It's a curious name, isn't it?"

Quentin showed Mum, Dad, Marvin, and Marigold a wibbly, wobbly, wooden sculpture. It connected into a bendy circle. It stood alone in the Sky Lobby with Victoria Harbour and Tsim Sha Tsui sprawled below. Quentin led the tour around the sculpture. It looked different from every angle.

Quentin sauntered along towards the Living Salon with the Ma family marching along behind him.

"These are a pair of famille-rose porcelain hexagonal vases from the 10<sup>th</sup> century," Quentin explained.

"Ooh!" said Dad.

#### Sophia Hotung

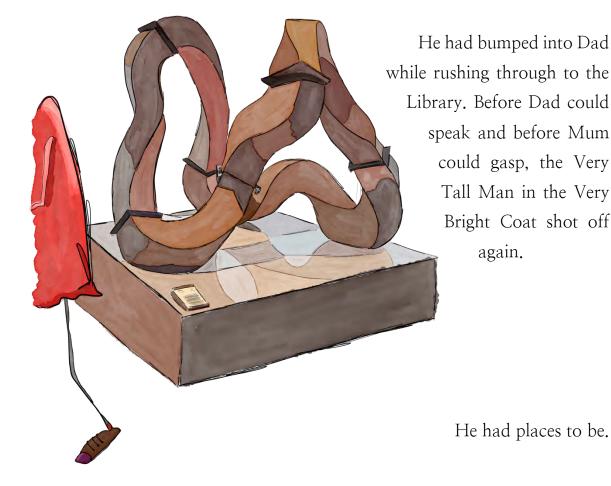
"Aah!" said Mum.

Marvin and Marigold did not say anything. They were bored, bored, bored!

They didn't care about art! It was boring, boring, bor-

"Oops! I beg your pardon," said a very tall man in a very bright coat.

The man was so tall that he hunched over his own shoulders to avoid hitting the ceiling. The coat was so bright that it stunned everybody into silence.



# Two

"Here is a fun sculpture," Quentin said. "Come see, children. This is *Relief Sculpture*. It shows rigid geometric shapes on one side and organic flowing texture on the other. Isn't it just marvellous?"



### Sophia Hotung

Marvin noticed a big stone hole behind a small white slab. "I do like the hole," he said.

"That's not part of the artwork, Marvin," Mum snapped.

"Well," said Quentin, "the great thing about art, and specifically about ARTUS, is that anything can be art. Everywhere you look, anywhere you go, inside or outside, it's art if it feels like art to you. You just need to be a real art lover."

"I like that," mused Marigold.

"I don't know about that," mused Dad.

Quentin moved along down the corridor to a tall, black, wooden sculpture. We call this *Hooded Light*," said Quentin.

"It looks like okra," said Dad.

"It looks like a cave," said Mum.

I don't like it, thought Marigold.

I don't get it, thought Marvin.

Hooded Light was like okra. It had holes all the way down its length.

It was *also* like a cave. When you looked at it from behind, a small opening curved back like the letter C.

"I will let you in on a secret," said Quentin conspiratorially. "This sculpture is *magic*."

Marigold's ears perked up.

Marvin's eyes widened.

"Magic?" they chimed. "What do you mean by magic?"

Quentin smiled and reached both hands into his pockets. He produced a skinny, wax candle from his right pocket. He produced a slick, silver lighter from his left pocket.

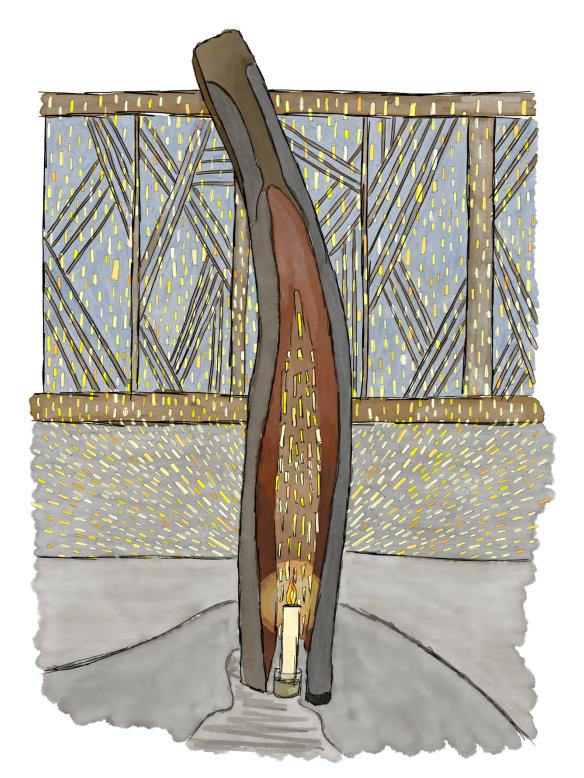
"Let me show you," he said with a wry smile.

Marvin and Marigold held their breath. Even Mum and Dad looked intrigued, and they did not believe in magic.

Quentin brandished the lighter in his right hand and lit the skinny candlewick in his left. The flame danced as Quentin placed the candle within *Hooded Light*'s cavernous hollow.

The Ma family watched in rapture as the room flooded with light. The feeble flickering flame from the candle was not bright on its own, but as it

shone through the holes in *Hooded Light*, it beamed out — brightly and boldly — across the Living Salon, drenching everybody in a golden glow.



### Sophia Hotung

"Wow-wee!" cried Marigold.

"Woah-ho-ho!" shouted Marvin.

Mum and Dad did not know what to think. They had not been expecting anything this spectacular. They thought Quentin had been teasing the children.

"I have a question!" Marigold demanded, jumping up and down on the spot with her hand in the air.

Quentin blew out the candle and the room faded back to dusky blue. He waited for Marigold's question.

"Why doesn't the wood catch fire?"

"Marigold!" Mum scolded. "Don't ask difficult questions!"

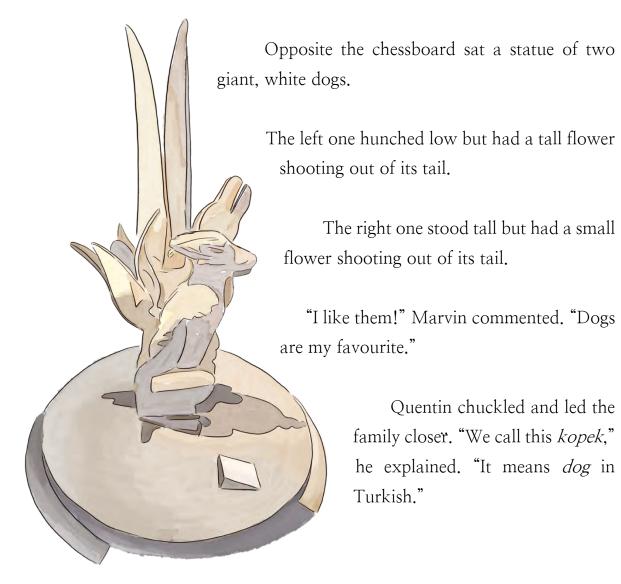
"It's not a difficult question at all," said Quentin. "It's a *great* question. Wood *should* catch fire, shouldn't it? Well, this wood has been treated in such a special way with artisanal oils and varnishes that it cannot catch fire anymore. Instead, it amplifies the light that flows into it."

Marvin and Marigold found that fascinating. *Hooded Light* truly was magic.

Maybe their staycation at ARTUS would not be so boring after all.

# Three

Quentin led the Ma family through the Library and stopped when he came to a life-sized chessboard.

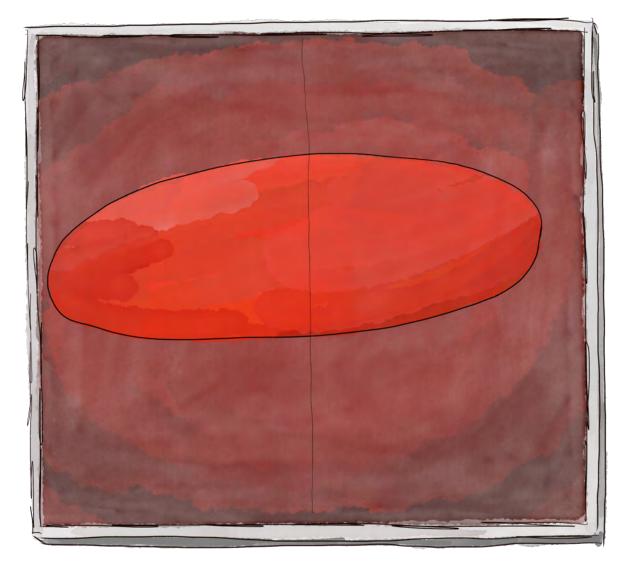


### Sophia Hotung

He turned on his heel and then pointed at the wall. There was a humungous painting: a blood orange canvas with a big red blob in the middle.

Marvin and Marigold stared at it. It was so bright that it felt like fire.

"This is called *vermilion*," Quentin said. "Do you know what 'vermillion' is?"



Mum and Dad were quiet. They did not want to look ignorant.

"Is it a *million very* bright colours?" Marvin offered.

"Marvin," Mum rebuked, "don't ask ignorant questions!"

Quentin ignored Mum. That made Marvin like Quentin.

"Close, Marvin!" Quentin said, grinning from ear to ear. "Vermillion is a colour. This very bright orange-red colour. This painting is meant to show the sun on the horizon. This painting is named after the colour."

Marigold had been staring at the piece with great interest. She had seen vermillion before. She knew that colour. But from where?

Her thoughts were interrupted when Quentin clapped his hands together.

Clap!

"Righty-oh!" Quentin said. "Let's keep going. I am going to show you my favourite room in ARTUS, but unfortunately, it's under renovation."

"What does 'under renovation' mean?" Marvin enquired.

"Don't be so nosy!" Dad hissed.

Quentin ignored Dad. That made Marvin like Quentin even more.

### Sophia Hotung

"It means that we are working on making this room even brighter and even better than it already is," Quentin explained.

Quentin guided the Ma family through wooden double doors that led to a corridor. The first door on the left towered over the twins.

K11 CRAFT & GUILD FOUNDATION, it read in big block silver letters over a plinth.

The plinth was a big marble rectangle that stood next to the door and under the sign.

A shiny doorknob protruded from its side. The doorknob read: PULL.

"Do not pull it," Mum murmured, reading her children's minds.

All that Marvin and Marigold wanted to do was pull the doorknob and peek inside the room.

Quentin looked at the door to the mysterious room, then turned back to the Ma family and beamed.

"That was the art tour," he said. "I hope you enjoyed it. I can now take you to your residence."

Marvin and Marigold's faces fell.

"We want to go inside the secret room!" Marvin complained.



"Please, Quentin!" Marigold begged.

"Maybe next time, children," Quentin said. "Maybe next time."

# Four

The twins started their first morning at ARTUS far too early and far too mischievously for any grown-up's liking.

It was six o'clock. Breakfast had not started yet in the Commune restaurant. Mum and Dad were still sleeping in the room next door. There was only one thing to do to pass the time: sneak out and explore.

Marvin and Marigold dressed and brushed their teeth. Marigold took a key card from Dad's jacket pocket. Marvin closed the door slowly behind him and his sister as they tiptoed into the corridor and into the lift.

The twins rode the lift up to the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. The morning sky was golden outside the big glass windows.

*Hooded Light* was amplifying the sun's rays all over the Living Salon, all over the Library, all over the Sky Lobby, all over ARTUS itself. The sunlight bounced off the walls, off the artworks, and off the magnifying glasses hanging over the lightbulbs.

There was a man in a bright yellow coat across from the children. He was playing with the life-size chess set. He was playing by himself.

### Sophia Hotung

As Marvin and Marigold approached, they recognised him. It was the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat who had bumped into Dad yesterday. Only now, he wore a new coat. This coat was as golden as the sun.

The children watched as the Very Bright Coat moved a black chess to the other side of the board, and piece forward. Back Tall Man in the Very piece forward, crossed moved a brown chess and forth, back and forth, he played the game alone.

could no longer contain Very Tall Man in the piped up, "hello, Who are you playing

Marvin's curiosity itself. He approached the Very Bright Coat and mister!

with?"

### Sophia Hotung

Marigold chased after her brother and stood behind him, feeling nervous and jittery. She had never seen a man so tall or a coat so bright. This coat was even brighter than yesterday's.

Marigold suddenly caught sight of *vermilion* out of the corner of her eye. Of course! She thought to herself. She recognised vermillion from the Very Tall Man's Very Bright Coat the day before.

"Good morning, children," the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat said. "Is it not obvious? I am playing against myself."

Marvin and Marigold did not know what to think of *that*. What was the fun in playing *alone*? Surely, you'd need someone to play *with*? They would have hated not having each other when it came to playing games.

This must be what it's like not to have a twin, Marvin thought.

"I've never heard of playing chess against yourself," said Marigold.

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat laughed. He had a funny way of laughing. Because he was so hunched over from being so very tall, when he laughed, his head bobbed up and down on his curved shoulders.

"Why, playing against yourself is the *best* way to play," he chuckled, "because your opponent always knows what you are thinking. That makes the game challenging. That makes the game fun." Marvin and Marigold looked at each other.

What a very odd, very tall man, they thought.

Marigold looked back at *vermilion*. The rays from *Hooded Light* made it burn brighter than ever. She then looked back at the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat and asked, "What colour is your coat, please?"

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat looked from the pawn he was manoeuvring across the board, up at Marigold, and then down at his very bright coat.

"Oh this?" he replied, "Why, this colour is called aureolin."

Aureolin, the twins thought. They had never heard a word like it before.

# Five

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat stopped his game and stood up straight. Since he was perpetually hunched over, standing up straight for him was still not that straight to Marvin and Marigold.

"How are you enjoying ARTUS?" the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat asked.

"Some of the art is nice," Marvin answered.

"Some of the art is boring," Marigold added.

"*Boring*?" the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat repeated. He did not sound angry. He sounded bemused. "What makes it boring?"

"Well," Marigold responded, "it looks... *easy*." She gestured at *vermilion*. "This is an orange-red blob on an orange-red background. *I* could paint this! And *I'm* a kid!"

Marvin gulped. When Marigold said things like this, Mum often got very angry. But Mum was not here. Mum was still curled up in bed, snoring with Dad.

#### Sophia Hotung

Would The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat get angry?

No. The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat laughed!

"I see," he guffawed. "Well, I believe that it's not about how the art is made. It's about how the art makes you feel."

Marigold felt stumped. She did not know what art made her feel. Usually, it just made her feel bored or confused.

"Art makes me feel bored and confused," she said. "I don't like it."

"I don't get it," Marvin added.

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat nodded his head slowly. He was thinking.

"I think you *do* like it," he said to Marigold, "and I think you *do* get it," he said to Marvin.

Marvin and Marigold blinked.

"When Quentin showed you *Hooded Light* yesterday, you were both enthralled," The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat reminded them.

After bumping into Dad, he must have seen Quentin shine the candlelight through the sculpture, Marvin thought. He must have seen us react.

#### Sophia Hotung

"I saw your eyes widen. I saw your eyebrows lift. I heard *you* ask a question," the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat said to Marigold. "You wanted to know why *Hooded Light* did not catch fire. The art made you feel something. The art made you feel *curious*."

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat was right, Marigold thought. She *did* feel something. She *did* feel curious.

"When you think about it," The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat continued, "*kopek* made you feel feelings too." He gestured to the two dogs with the flower tails. "You said you liked dogs after seeing these two beasts."

"I did like the statue!" Marvin chirped. "I like how the louder dog has the smaller flower, but the quieter dog has the bigger flower. It makes me feel confused... but in a happy way? You would think that it should be the other way around! A loud dog with a big flower. A quiet dog with a small one."

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat snapped his fingers, pointed at Marvin, and cried, "Exactly! You've got it! The art is making you feel — confused, happy — all sorts of things!" Marvin nodded. Marigold nodded too.

"*köpek* is telling us that things are not always as they seem. Quiet can be strong. Loud can be small. It's like chess, in fact."

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat turned his attention back to his game and placed his bony, long fingers on a brown pawn. "This pawn is going to win white the game."



### Sophia Hotung

The twins knew that pawns were the least significant players in chess. How could the brown pawn beat the black rook, the black bishop, the black knight, the black *queen*?

"Many players will not use their pawns or will underestimate their opponent's pawns, but *kopek* teaches us not to. Sometimes the smallest are the mightiest."

Marvin and Marigold liked that. They always felt very small. It was nice to feel mighty.

# Six

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat finished his game and excused himself, leaving the children to explore some more. Breakfast had not yet started in the Commune. Mum and Dad had not yet burst through the doors in search of the twins.

Marvin and Marigold wandered down the corridor behind the wooden double doors and happened upon a lift lobby. Marvin pressed the down button to return to their room. Marigold pressed the up button.

"We live downstairs, Marigold," Marvin said with a frown.

"We're exploring upstairs, Marvin," Marigold said with a smirk.

Scared to leave his sister alone and aware that he would never win an argument against her, Marvin joined Marigold in the ascending lift.

"I don't think we can even go higher," Marvin pointed out. Our key card is only for the 8<sup>th</sup> floor. Marigold frowned and beeped Dad's stolen key card against the sensor. She pressed the round button next to the silver 17. It lit up.

#### Sophia Hotung

Marvin did not know what to say. Marigold smiled smugly. They travelled up, up, up to the 17<sup>th</sup> floor.

"I wonder how high the floors go," Marigold mused as they ambled down the corridor to *another* lift lobby that invited the children to travel even higher.

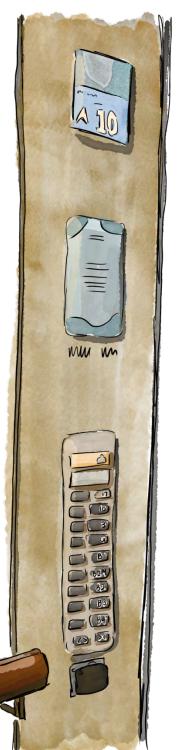
"I wonder if we are even allowed up here," Marvin whispered.

Marigold jabbed at this lift's button and pulled her brother inside with her. She pressed the highest floor -21 — and hopped nervously from one foot to the other. She was excited to see what they would find.

Another lift? A penthouse apartment? A secret society?

17.
18.
19.
20.

21.



## Sophia Hotung

The lift chimed with a delicate *ding!* and the doors slid open. Marigold stepped gingerly out into the foyer of a lift lobby. It looked like someone's home.



#### Sophia Hotung

In front of the lift doors was a small bench. To the right was a front door, cracked open ever so slightly.

Warm, aureolin light glowed from the crack. The children could smell a thick, industrial, oily smell. It smelt of construction. It smelt of medicine. It smelt and it felt like they should not be up here.

"I-I'll hold the lift," Marvin stammered as his sister ventured closer to the door.

Marigold pushed the door open further and a loud *creeeaaakkkkk* reverberated around the lift lobby, breaking the silence.

The hinges swung the door fully open, and the children saw the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat, except now he sported another curious accessory.

Balancing on the crooked bridge of his crooked nose were a pair of ginormous spectacles with thick lenses that blew up his eyes to the size of doorknobs.

The spectacles were helping him paint tiny details on an ornate porcelain vase with a very fine brush.

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat looked at Marigold through his bug-eyed goggles.

## Sophia Hotung

Marigold looked at The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat through her startled eyes.

# Seven

Into the open lift Marigold scurried.

Marvin slammed Dad's stolen key card against the sensor.

They zoomed down to the  $17^{th}$  floor.

They ran left down the corridor. They ran right.

They ran east up the corridor. They ran west.

Where were the lifts? Where were *they*?

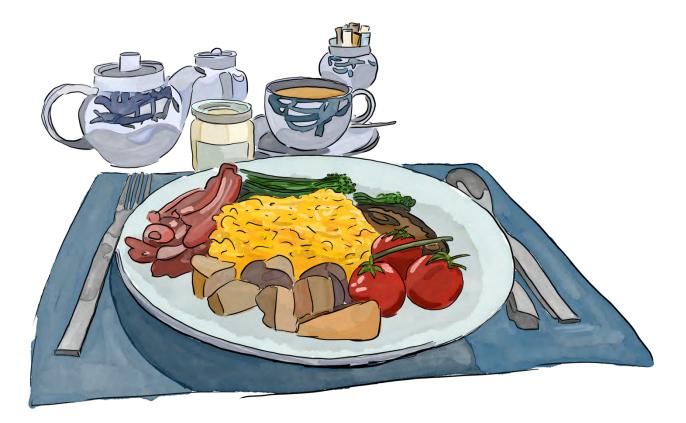
They were in trouble — the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat had seen them!

"*Oof!*" yelped Quentin as Marvin ran smack into his gut. Recovering from the wind knocked out of his chest, Quentin heaved and spluttered.

"*There* you two are!" he finally said. "Your parents have the whole of ARTUS looking for you!"

## Sophia Hotung

Marvin and Marigold tried to speak but did not know what to say. Quentin rolled his eyes, but he was not angry. He guided them back downstairs to the Commune where Mum and Dad were eating breakfast.



Dad had a big plate of scrambled eggs. He stuck his fork into a chunky sausage and ate it in one greedy chomp.

He slurped bacon and guzzled a jar of yoghurt. Mum had a bagel piled so high with salmon, avocadoes, and eggs that it wibbled and wobbled until she gobbled it up.

## Sophia Hotung

The children were so nervous that they could barely eat. They were in trouble with Mum. They were in trouble with Dad. And they most certainly were in trouble with the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat.

Over the sound of Dad's chomping and Mum's munching, Marvin whispered to Marigold, "The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat was painting a vase like the twin vases we saw on the art tour."





"So?" Marigold replied sulkily. She liked to be naughty but did not like to get caught. Getting caught sneaking around the upper floors had put her in a bad mood.

"Quentin told us that those vases were *twins*," said Marvin. "*Twins* means two. *We're* twins. We're *two*. If there were another one of us, we would be triplets. But we're not triplets. Like the vases, we're twins."

"Marvin," Marigold replied, "you're not making *any* sense."

"Why would the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat be painting a *third* vase in a *twin* set?" Marvin asked.

Marigold was not sure. Quentin did say that there were only two vases in the twin set.

"He feels odd to me," Marvin murmured.

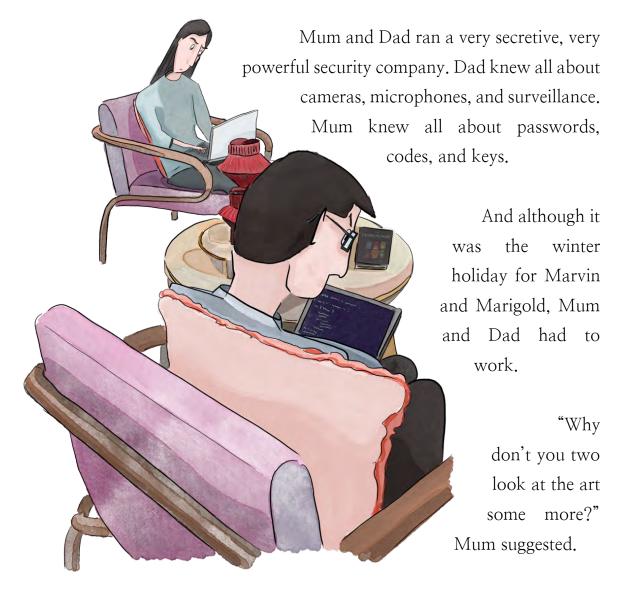
Marigold agreed. "His eyes were big and scary. You did not see his eyeballs under those glasses. They were amber. Almost *vermillion*. I jumped out of my *skin*!"

Marigold showed Marvin her forearm. It was dotted with goosepimples and tiny hairs standing on end.

"We need to be careful," Marvin said. "The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat is up to something."

# Eight

Mum and Dad wanted Marvin and Marigold to stay out of trouble while they worked in the morning.



#### Sophia Hotung

### The Heist of Hooded Light

"Quentin was telling us that there are eight artworks hidden around ARTUS," Dad said. "They are all cutout pictures that show a man and a woman hiking Mount Fuji. They are easy to spot, displayed on walls behind magnifying glasses or something. Go hunt them down and put them in order."

"That will kill some time and keep you out of trouble," Mum said, more to comfort herself than to encourage the children.

Marvin and Marigold set to work looking for the eight artworks.

"I found some!" Marvin hollered to Marigold from across the Sky Lobby.

"*Shhhhhh!*" shushed Mum from her seat in the Library.

"No yelling!" yelled Dad. "We can hear you from here!"



### Sophia Hotung

Marigold tiptoed over to her brother and, sure enough, there were four artworks magnified against the walls between the lift doors.

"This one shows the couple walking under long, spindly branches in a wood."

"This one shows the couple resting by a campfire and pointing at the view in the distance."

"This one shows village houses nestled in a glade."

"This one shows the couple holding hands as they climb steppingstones."

"So, what order do they go in?" Marigold wondered. "I don't know the way to Mount Fuji! How are we supposed to put these pictures in order when we have never even been there?"

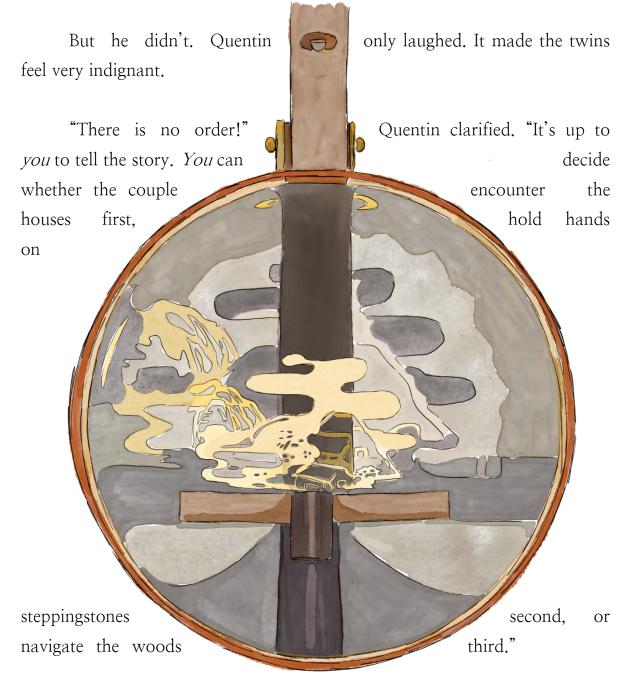
Marigold must have been yelling now, because Quentin came over to offer help.

"You're trying to order the Mount Fuji artworks?" he asked.

Marvin and Marigold nodded eagerly, hoping that Quentin would be able to give them the answers.

## Sophia Hotung

It was clear from the way that Quentin talked about the art, walked around the art, and looked at the art that he loved the art. He would surely know the correct sequence for the eight pictures.



"But what if the sequence isn't right?" Marvin asked.

#### Sophia Hotung

"Or what if we make up different sequences that we both think are right?" Marigold enquired.

"Then you have two stories. Looking at these pictures is about the feelings you get and the story you create for yourself to believe. Everyone can believe something different, and everyone can be right. What might be wrong to one person is correct to another person. It's our job to find our own understandings."

Marvin and Marigold were stumped. They knew 2 + 2 = 4. They knew ABC came before XYZ. You couldn't just make up facts!

Quentin could tell that the children were confused. He tapped his temple twice with his index finger and winked.

"You'll understand one day," he said.

Marvin and Marigold were not so sure.

## Nine

Mum and Dad were still tap-tap-typing away at their computers in the Library. Marvin and Marigold wanted to go back to the residence.

"Please may we go back to our room?" Marvin pleaded.

"We finished the Mount Fuji challenge just as you asked," Marigold said.

"Very well," Dad conceded, "but no exploring."

"We promise," promised the twins.

Marvin and Marigold started towards the double doors. They were to march straight through the doors, past the locked door to the Craft & Guild Foundation, to the lift lobby, into the lift, down to the 8<sup>th</sup> floor, along the corridor, and into their room. *No detours.* 

And they did try. They made a very good try of it... until they got to the lift lobby.

## Sophia Hotung

The doors of the middle elevator dinged, and the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat stepped out, except now his coat was no longer aureolin. It was purple-ish. It was pink-ish. It was grey-ish.



It's the colour of cough syrup, Marvin thought.

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat jumped at the sight of Marvin and Marigold. He had not expected them to be dawdling right outside the lift.

In the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat's arms was an oblong package tied up with string and wrapped in brown parcel paper.

"Oh! Hello, children," the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat stammered. "How are we this morning?"

He is acting as though he has not already seen us this morning, Marvin noticed, even though he has seen us... twice!

At least he's not angry at us, Marigold thought, or worse... disappointed in us for snooping around the upper floors.

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat did not wait for a reply. He crossed the lift lobby and skulked awkwardly with his package towards the double doors that led to the Commune.

However, he did not go through the doors. Instead, Marvin and Marigold watched, unblinking, as the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat placed his long, bony fingers on the doorknob that read: PULL.

#### Sophia Hotung

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat yanked the knob towards him. The children heard a faint click. The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat pushed the door inwards and disappeared into the Craft & Guild Foundation.

"We need to go straight to our room," Marvin reminded his sister. He could tell that she desperately wanted to follow the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat into the Craft & Guild Foundation.

"We need to come back tonight," she grinned deviously.

"There is no way," Marvin shook his head. "We are *not* coming back tonight."

Ten

Marvin and Marigold came back that night.

Marigold used both hands to pull the doorknob on the plinth outside the Craft & Guild Foundation. The twins held their breath until they heard the click of the lock.



Sophia Hotung

They were in...

The children entered a dimly lit, carpeted room. It smelt of that same medicinal varnish that had wafted out of the door on the 21<sup>st</sup> floor.

To his right, Marvin spotted a gargantuan porcelain bowl. It looked odd to him. Illustrated people decorated the insides and outsides of the bowl. They were drawn to look like they were celebrating in a Chinese courtyard, but the bowl itself looked like a European punch bowl... Chinese people did not use those... То her left, Marigold noticed a looked odd set. It tea to her. Ornate flowers and patterns decorated all the various components of the set. There were teacups with handles atop saucers. There was a milk jug. Chinese people did not use those either when it came to teatime.

"What a peculiar collection of bits and bob," Marigold whispered, turning to see what Marvin thought.

#### Sophia Hotung

But Marvin had frozen still. He stood in the archway of a second room off to the side. The dim light that illuminated the punch bowl and the tea set was coming from this second room. It was coming from a lamp, a lamp that also illuminated the hunched silhouette of the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat.

"I thought you might visit me in here," the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat said. His purple-ish, pink-ish, grey-ish coat looked yellow-ish too now in the warm lamplight.

Marvin and Marigold trembled and eyed the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat's worktop. He was tending to the same vase he had upstairs.

The *third* vase in the *twin* set.

"Well," the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat tutted, "don't just stand there. Come in. I'm curious to know what you think of the K11 Craft & Guild Foundation, or as we call it here, the KCG."

Marvin looked at Marigold. She rarely was lost for words. "W-w-we don't understand it," Marvin stuttered.

"What an odd place full of odd things!" Marigold interjected.

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat laughed again, his head bobbing up and down. He lay down the very thin brush that he had been wielding.

#### Sophia Hotung

"The KCG is a special place where we preserve the very important arts of Guangcai, of Luodian, of Baibaoqian."

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat registered the children's blank expressions. "These are all ancient Chinese art forms, but they're dying out. It is my job to make sure that they don't. I make sure the artworks are kept in good condition. I'm like their doctor."

"But th-that pot that you're working on is a third twin!" Marvin declared. "We *saw* the twin set in the Living Salon. Why would you be making replicas?"

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat laughed again and shook his head. "Oh no, this is not part of that set. That set is hexagonal — it has six sides. This one that I am working on now is rounded. Come see."

Marvin hesitated then stepped closer to the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat. He was right.

It was just different enough to be a wholly separate vase. Marvin only had not noticed the difference between the hexagonal edges and rounded shape before.

"Now it's *very* late," the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat said once Marvin seemed satisfied enough with his explanation. "You two must go back to bed before *I* get into trouble for keeping you awake until dawn."

Marigold pouted. She wanted to stay in the KCG with the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat and learn more about Guangcai, about Luodian, about Baibaoqian.

She could see a model roof that fitted together in a perfect spiralling circle of wooden slats. She could see a mysterious chest decorated with jades and gemstones. She could see a pearl-laced fan.

"I'll tell you what," the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat said. "How about we meet in the Library after breakfast? We can come back here, and I will show you around properly."

This offer excited Marvin and Marigold. They nodded and tittered with anticipation, waving goodbye to the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat as they returned to the corridor.

"I have a question," Marvin said, angling his neck around the door as it was closing. The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat looked up from his vase expectantly.

"What colour is your coat, please?" Marvin enquired.

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat smiled. His eyes softened. "This colour is called puce," he said.

Puce, thought Marvin. What an ugly word for an ugly colour.

## Sophia Hotung

"What colour will you wear tomorrow?" Marigold asked, popping her head under Marvin's from behind the door.

"I will wear my skobeloff coat tomorrow," the Very Tall Man in the Puce Coat said.

"What colour is *that*?" the children asked.

"You will have to wait and see."

## Eleven

"Mum," Marvin asked over his congee at breakfast, "what colour is skobeloff?"

Mum did not look up from her turnip cake and muttered, "Marvin, don't ask annoying questions."

Marvin and Marigold sat silently for the rest of breakfast, eager to reunite with the Very Tall Man in (what would by now be) the Skobeloff Coat.

At nine o'clock, Mum and Dad set up their laptops in a shady corner of the Library. They told the children to sit quietly in the Living Salon.

Marvin and Marigold's legs hung and swung from a bench. Where was the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat? they wondered.

At ten o'clock, Marigold saw Quentin walk past. She jumped up and ran over to him. He stopped for her and smiled. Marvin scuttled over to catch up with his sister.

"Quentin, Quentin," Marigold called. "Do you know where the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat is this morning?"

## Sophia Hotung

Quentin's brow furrowed. "Who?" he asked.

Marvin elbowed his sister. Quentin did not know that the twins knew the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat. Quentin did not know that the twins had met him while exploring forbidden floors. Quentin did not know that the twins had arranged in the dead of night to meet him for a tour of the KCG.

"Never mind, never mind," Marvin said, pulling Marigold back to the bench.

Back on the bench, Marvin whispered to Marigold, "Maybe he's eating breakfast late."



"Maybe..." Marigold pondered, but it was nearly lunchtime and the Commune was not serving a soul at this late hour.

By lunchtime, the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat still had not materialised.

The children were desperate to return to the KCG. Perhaps the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat had told them to meet *inside*.

But they could not just wander into the KCG in broad daylight.

It was off-limits. They would get caught and castigated!

"Please may we go back to our room?" Marigold asked Mum. She was hoping that they might bump into the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat by the lifts again.

"We promise that we won't go exploring," Marvin reassured Mum and Dad.

Mum and Dad were very busy on their computers. They did not even realise that it was already lunchtime and that they should stop working to eat.

"Go, go, no dilly-dallying," Dad mumbled, sliding the key card to the residence across the table and shooing the twins away.

#### Sophia Hotung

The children took their leave and scurried towards the double doors to the lift lobby.

They reluctantly walked past the PULL doorknob of the KCG, looking wistfully for a crack in the door. It was closed. It was locked. It looked dark inside.

They most certainly could not venture inside without the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat.

*Ding!* went the lift as the children arrived at the 8<sup>th</sup> floor and the doors slid open to their corridor.

Marvin and Marigold trudged towards their front door, beeped themselves in, and took their shoes off sluggishly.

"I don't understand," Marigold said indignantly. "The Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat *told* us that we were meeting in the Library after breakfast."

"Something must have come up," Marvin said. That was something Mum and Dad said when things did not go according to plan.

Marigold trudged into the bedroom that she shared with her brother and stopped in the doorway. "Marvin," she whispered urgently. "Come look!"

Marvin hurried over, stumbling over his half-removed left shoe as he went to see what had stopped Marigold in her tracks.

## Sophia Hotung

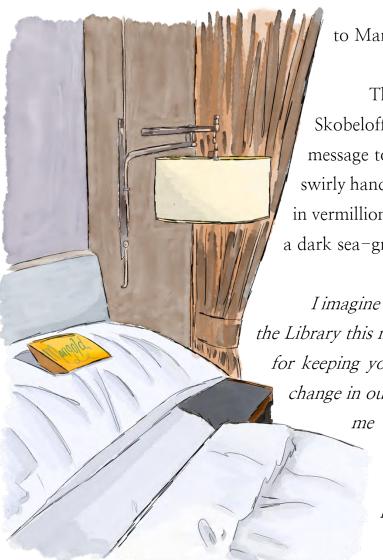
Marvin and Marigold shared a room with two single beds. He slept in the left one. She slept in the right one.

On Marvin's pillow lay an envelope. It was puce. In vermillion ink it read: MARVIN.

On Marigold's pillow lay an envelope. It was aureolin. In blue-green ink it read: MARIGOLD.

## Twelve

Dear Marvin, the letter to Marvin read.



Dear Marigold, the letter to Marigold read.

The Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat had written the same message to each of them in the same swirly handwriting, only Marvin's was in vermillion ink and Marigold's was in a dark sea-green aquamarine colour.

I imagine that you waited patiently in the Library this morning for me. I apologise for keeping you and for this impromptu change in our arrangements. Please visit

> me in my studio on the 21<sup>st</sup> floor at your earliest convenience. I trust you know the way.

Sophia Hotung

The letters were not signed.

"We have to go see the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat right this instant," Marigold insisted, stashing her letter in the large chest pocket of her dungarees so that Mum and Dad would not find it lying about the room later.

Marvin agreed. This all seemed rather mysterious and urgent.

The twins put their shoes back on and hurried back to the lifts. They rode up to the 10<sup>th</sup> floor and navigated the corridor until they found the lift to the top floors of ARTUS.

Marvin pressed the button for the 21<sup>st</sup> floor this time while Marigold held Dad's key card to the sensor. The floor lit up and the lift doors closed.

The children could hear each other's heavy breathing and heavier heartbeats as they ascended towards the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat's studio.

The door was left ajar again, but this time Marvin and Marigold were not scared to enter. They had been invited.

Stepping into the studio, they were almost knocked back by that same old chemical smell.

"Pee-yoo!" Marigold reacted instinctively. Marvin held his nose.

#### Sophia Hotung

"Marvin, Marigold," the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat said, appearing from a doorway on the right. "Come right in. Come right in right away."

He ushered them inside, closing the door behind them. The children could hear the heavy wooden door lock automatically.

How did the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat know the twins' names? They had never introduced themselves, Marvin wondered as he stood awkwardly in the stinky studio.

How did the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat know where the twins' room was? They had never shown him, Marigold wondered as she stood awkwardly in the stinky studio.

Suddenly and simultaneously, Marvin and Marigold realised that they were now locked in a strange room alone with a strange man.

Their parents had no idea where they were. This was a different sort of trouble to get into. A dangerous sort.

"Thank you for coming. I trusted that you would find your letters before day's end," the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat said, wiping his long, bony fingers on a work apron before removing it. "My apologies for the smell. It is turpentine. I use it when I work with oil paints."

The children did not say anything. They stood and surveyed the room.

#### Sophia Hotung

Every surface was covered in thick, cream, tarpaulin sheets. The sheets were stained with inks, paints, varnishes, oils, thinners, and what they now knew was turpentine. Broken vases waited to the side for repair. Parcel paper and string lay cut up and discarded on the floor.

Tools that the children recognised – brushes, pens, quills – dotted tabletops and counters. Tools that the children did not recognise – palette knives, chisels, scalpels – dotted them too. Marvin gulped. They looked sharp.

Marigold finally came to her senses and looked the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat up and down.



#### Sophia Hotung

The Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat was, as promised, dressed in green-blue skobeloff. His bug-eyed spectacles hung from his breast pocket amidst a collection of unidentified craft tools.

"Please children, sit down," the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat said, gesturing to a sofa that was uncharacteristically not covered in tarpaulin sheets, oil-stained rags, and old work aprons.

Marvin and Marigold perched on the edge of the sofa politely. Their feet hung precariously off it. This made them nervous.

They would have preferred to have their feet planted firmly on the ground, not swinging off the edge. If they needed to run, they needed to be on their feet pronto.

The Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat seated himself opposite the children on a rickety stool with one leg shorter than the rest. He wobbled as he lowered himself down.

The stool was very tall. The children would have needed a smaller stool to climb onto it. But for the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat, it was almost too short for him. His pointy knees bent upwards to the sky and his shoulders hunched even more than usual.

"I have very troubling news, children," the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat said. Marvin and Marigold did not dare even to breathe waiting for him to continue.

Sophia Hotung

"I am sure that you remember *Hooded Light*, the sculpture in the Sky Lobby," he began. "Well, it appears that light is not amplifying through it as expected."

He paused. The children could only stare dumbly at him.

Marvin finally spoke. "I don't understand. What's so bad about that?"

"*Hooded Light* is not just an artwork complicit in a little magic trick," the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat explained. "It is genuinely magical."

Marvin and Marigold's eyes grew wide, wider than when they saw *Hooded Light* amplify the candlelight and beam it across ARTUS.

*"Hooded Light* has enchanted properties that none of us truly understand. When light



#### Sophia Hotung

shines through *Hooded Light*, the holes and curves of the wood transform the light into a powerful force that radiates out the other side all over ARTUS.

"The bright magic light that shoots out the other end gets reflected off surfaces all over ARTUS. It reflects off the walls —that's why we have so much shiny marble. It swells through the glass — that's why we have so many magnifying glasses. The energy builds and builds and builds.

"The light is powerful. The light is magical. It's not the sort of light you switch on at home or the lights you see along the skyline. *Hooded Light* turns light into what is essentially *inspiration*. Inspiration is what makes ARTUS well... ARTUS.

"People come to ARTUS because there is inspiration to be felt. ARTUS makes people feel inspired. It makes people feel different. It makes people feel special. Like they can do or make or be anything. It is all because of the magic of *Hooded Light*.

"Remember when you first visited ARTUS? You were not inspired at all. In fact, you were both downright *bored*. But then you saw light shine through *Hooded Light*, and everything changed. You grew curious. You grew excited. You suddenly were intrigued. You suddenly were inspired."

Marvin and Marigold were gobsmacked. The Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat was right. They *had* gone from bored to inspired in a matter of seconds. And the turning point was when Quentin lit the candle in *Hooded Light*.

#### Sophia Hotung

"But it's not just *Hooded Light*," continued the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat. "Every masterpiece you see at ARTUS is here for a reason. They all work together to keep the inspiration alive within these walls. Take *Relief Sculpture*, for example. It has special properties too. *Relief Sculpture* acts as a blockade. It stops the inspiration from leaking out of ARTUS's windows. If *Hooded Light* brings inspiration in, *Relief Sculpture* stops it from getting out.

"But, as I've said," the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat concluded, "something was wrong this morning as the sun rose in the east and shone through *Hooded Light* into ARTUS. The light was not amplified. Inspiration did not strike."

Marvin and Marigold could not believe their ears. Every word out of the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat's mouth seemed surreal, *unreal*.

Thud, thud, thud.

There was a thundering knock at the door.

The children froze. Who could that be?

## Thirteen

He wore a grey waistcoat and carried an oblong package tied up with string and wrapped in parcel paper. His usual chipper demeanour had changed. He looked nervous. He looked concerned.

"Quentin!" Marigold called out, recognising the visitor.

Quentin looked surprised to see the Ma twins. Marvin's face reddened from being spotted. He hoped that Quentin would not tell Mum and Dad that they had not gone back to the residence like they promised they would.

"The children are guests of mine, Quentin," the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat said, accepting the package from his third guest. "You need not concern their parents with their whereabouts just yet."

Quentin nodded slowly. Marvin grew nervous. Maybe Mum and Dad *should* know where they were. Quentin was as much of a stranger as the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat. Marvin did not feel very safe among strangers.

Marigold was less concerned about getting into trouble and more curious about what was under all that brown parcel paper and string.

#### Sophia Hotung

The Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff workbench and, using a palette knife sliced a slit down the paper, unmistakable form of *Hooded* 

Unwrapped, *Hooded* before Marvin, the Very Tall Man in

Quentin his trouser pocket. lighter that he had *Hooded Light* to the art tour. Quentin did not

"What are Marigold cried flicked the flame brought it the wooden

paid no Marigold the flame to artwork shot up Coat set the package on his in his breast pocket, revealing the *Light*.

> *Light* stood majestically Marigold, Quentin, and the Skobeloff Coat.

produced a lighter from It was the same silver used when first introducing Marvin and Marigold on Except this time, have a candle.

> you *doing*?!" out as Quentin on the lighter and closer and closer to sculpture.

> > Quentin heed to and touched the wood. The in a lick of fire.

#### Sophia Hotung

Orange, red, yellow, white-hot and down the wood.

Ι

Marvin's jaw dropped done?!

"Just as the Skobeloff Coat a fire destroying a of his studio. "This

It clicked for remembered on the tour. "The catch fire!" she

"Exactly, Tall Man in the "This sculpture *Light*, it feels like flammable so it is *Light.*"

"This has taken the a decoy in its licks of flame danced up

in horror. What had Quentin

thought," the Very Tall Man in said calmly, as if there was not magical sculpture in the middle is a replica, a *fake*."

> Marigold as she what Quentin had said real *Hooded Light* can't recalled.

Marigold," the Very Skobeloff Coat said. looks like *Hooded Hooded Light*, but it's decidedly *not Hooded* 

means that someone *real* sculpture and left place," Marvin figured.

1

"Who would do that?" Marigold demanded.

"Why would someone do that?" Marvin added.

"Don't you have cameras?" Marigold thought of Dad with all his surveillance work. He knew all about cameras.

"Don't you have security?" Marvin thought of Mum with all her access work. She knew all about security.

"You cannot just walk out of ARTUS with an artwork like *Hooded Light*," Marigold said.

"You cannot just walk *in* to ARTUS with a replica of *Hooded Light*," Marvin said.

"How would anyone get in?" she asked.

"How would anyone get *out*?" he asked.

It then occurred to the children that they were the only ones talking. Quentin and the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat were being very quiet.

"You should go back to your room now," the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat said abruptly. "Thank you for stopping by."

Quentin stepped to the side, clearing the twins' route to the door.

#### Sophia Hotung

Marvin and Marigold scuttled out of the studio and into the lift. Their minds were racing as they travelled back to their own quarters.

They were suspicious of what had just happened — not only of the decoy sculpture but of the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat's sudden change in tone.

He invited them to his studio, he started talking about magic, and then suddenly he asked them to leave. *What was going on?* 

What if he's the mastermind behind the stolen artwork? Marigold thought. She read many spy books. Sometimes the villains were the ones hiding in plain sight.

What if he's trying to trick us? Marvin thought. He liked superhero stories and he knew superheroes never could truly trust anybody.

Marigold reached for Marvin's hand and squeezed it in hers.

"This is not our concern, Marvin," she assured him. "We're just kids. We did nothing wrong. We should just enjoy the rest of our staycation and leave the mystery to the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat."

## Fourteen

Marvin and Marigold could not enjoy the rest of their staycation and could not leave the mystery to the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat.

They sat quietly at dinner in the Commune with Mum and Dad that night. Mum absentmindedly dragged a soggy salad leaf from one side of her plate to the other. Dad glumly rolled a prawn across his plate. Marvin morosely deconstructed a ravioli pocket. Marigold solemnly stirred her soup.

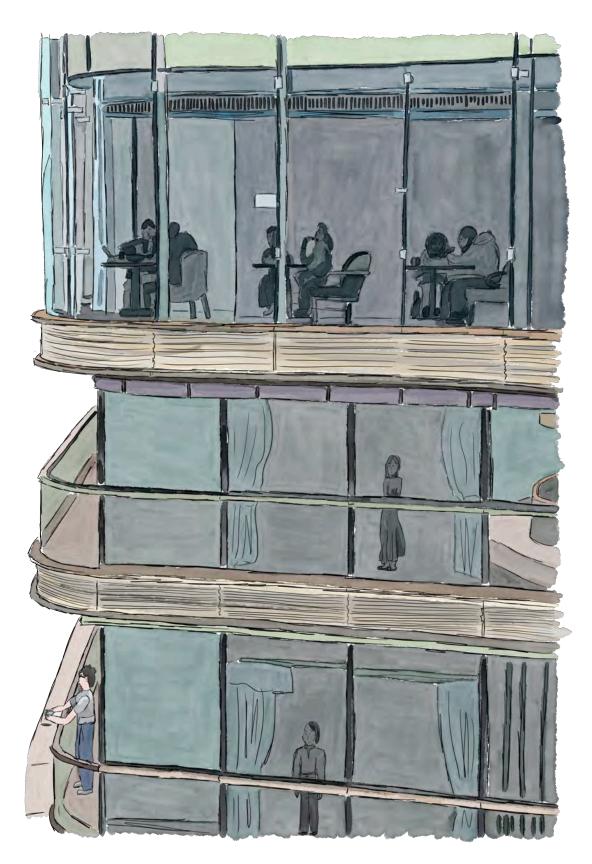
The Ma family was not the only despondent family dining in the Commune that evening. A couple across from them also looked sullen, sharing a slice of cheesecake but not enjoying it.

Marvin and Marigold looked out the window and across to the diners on the other side of the restaurant. Everyone seemed low.

"It must be the light," Marvin realised, whispering to his sister.

"The whole place has been drained of inspiration," Marigold agreed.

Dad suddenly spoke up. "We're thinking of cutting the staycation short," he told the children.



### Sophia Hotung

"We're just feeling tired and that we'd like to go home," Mum explained.

The children nodded. Their parents were probably feeling less inspired without *Hooded Light*'s magic.

The plinth where the sculpture had previously stood now displayed a small sign that read: TEMPORARILY MOVED FOR PRIVATE EXHIBITION.

Marvin and Marigold knew that was a lie, a cover-up, probably orchestrated by the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat.

"This really is none of our business, Marvin," Marigold said to her brother as they brushed their teeth after dinner.

"But it feels like it is," Marvin responded. "I feel as though the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat is hiding something. I feel as though we are the only people who know that he is up to something fishy. He has been dubious ever since we arrived at ARTUS. Quentin even seems scared of him."

67

#### Sophia Hotung

Marigold agreed. "It seems awfully convenient that *Hooded Light* went missing straight after we saw the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat playing chess near the artwork itself early in the morning when no one else was around," she noted.

Marvin agreed. "The chessboard *was* very close to *Hooded Light*. Was he hunched over because of poor back posture or was he hiding oblong artworks in his oversized coat?" he asked.

"*And* he is an expert at making replica artworks like the vase," Marigold continued. "He could have easily made the replica that Quentin set fire to!"

The twins resolved to go to Quentin for answers tomorrow. If anyone cared about the art at ARTUS, it was Quentin. He knew the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat too. He would have answers.

"Quentin!" Marvin called out from the breakfast table the following morning. "We have a question!"

Mum winced, "Stop being so noisy!"

Dad cringed, "Stop being so nosy!"

"Pipe down and eat your congee!" they both scolded.

#### Sophia Hotung

But it was too late. Marvin and Marigold were already up and out of their chairs, running through the Commune to Quentin, who was delivering two bags to another guest's residence.

"Good morning, children," Quentin greeted. He was acting as though the last time he saw them he had not set a fraudulent artwork on fire.

"Quentin, Quentin," Marigold panted, wiping congee from the corner of her mouth with the back of her wrist. "We need to ask you about the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat."

"Who?" Quentin enquired politely. The children could tell that he wanted to be on his way and was not going to answer their questions then and there.

"The Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat," Marvin urged, "although maybe today he will have a differently coloured coat."

Quentin shrugged and shook his head. "I'm sorry, children. I don't know who you mean," he said.

He nodded at them and pushed through the double doors to the residences.

Marvin and Marigold could only stand there, watching him leave. Why was *Quentin* now acting suspiciously?

# Fifteen

Mum and Dad went to the Library to organise a car to drive them home that afternoon. Marvin and Marigold were sent back to the residence to stay out of trouble.

"We need to confront the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat before we go," Marigold said as they walked through the double doors to the lifts.

Marvin agreed. He pressed the up button by the lifts and waited with his sister for a set of doors to slide open.

They found themselves on the  $17^{th}$  floor like last time. They took the hidden lift up further to the  $21^{st}$  floor.

The twins were determined to get to the bottom of this whole mystery even if they got in trouble with Mum, even if they angered Dad, even if they got no help from Quentin.

The door to the Very Tall Man in the Skobeloff Coat's studio was not cracked open this time.

#### Sophia Hotung

How can we get past a locked door? Marvin thought to himself. It's always been ajar in the past.

Marigold, however, was not wasting time on thinking. She stormed out of the lift and pressed Dad's key card to the sensor by the door handle. The door clicked open.

She stomped inside. A shocked Marvin followed her in.

The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat was sitting at his workbench tending to a porcelain turquoise plate. This morning, he was wearing a blindingly bright blue coat. He did not look surprised to see them.

"I take it that you got my letters from this morning," he said. "I am surprised you came so soon."

"We did not get letters!" Marvin declared.

"We're here on our own accord!" Marigold insisted.

"Why, how serendipitous then that I did not even need to call for you to come by," the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat said. He sounded kind and warm, although very tired. "Would you like to guess the colour of my coat today?"

"No, we would *not*," Marigold spat. "We have questions, and we demand answers!"



Marvin recoiled at Marigold's abrasive approach. It did not do well to yell at grown-ups. They would often yell back, and they could do it more loudly and more scarily than children.

However, the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat did not yell back. He only raised a single eyebrow in bemusement and nodded.

#### Sophia Hotung

"Well, you better come in and shut the door then," he said.

He rose to sit on his stool and gestured for Marvin and Marigold to return to their seats on the sofa.

As the children sat, the Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat rolled up his sleeves. "This colour is called lapis lazuli," he said.

Marvin liked it. It was his favourite colour out of all the coats so far. The colour looked bright and clear. Its name was fun to say.

"Why are you not surprised that we could get in?" Marigold asked. "Surely our key card should only work for our residence."

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat smiled. "I did wonder when you would ask me that," he said.

"I gave you an access key upon your arrival that lets you explore anywhere. I have found that nobody explores art as thoroughly as children such as yourselves, so I thought that you would appreciate the freedom to roam during your stay. It is also always helpful to me to have a second or third pair of eyes about the place."

"You didn't give us a key!" Marvin said.

"Well, I may have slipped one into your father's pocket when I bumped into him." the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat winked.

#### Sophia Hotung

He bumped into Dad on purpose! Marigold realised. This Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat gets sneakier and sneakier. Being a thief is one thing but *leaving* things in people's coats is a whole other form of treachery!

"It sounds as though you knew that there would be things to watch out for this whole time," Marigold said sceptically.

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat looked quizzically at her. Then he looked annoyed. Marvin was scared for his sister. She was always a little too impulsive, a little too cheeky.

"No time to beat around the bush, Marigold," the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat said. "What is it that you are trying to say?"

Oh dear, Marigold, oh dear, thought Marvin. He was squeezing his eyes tightly. She was going to get them into big, scary trouble with this big, scary man.

"I think that you know *exactly* what happened to *Hooded Light*," Marigold continued accusingly. "You're going to blame *us* for it going missing. Nobody listens to kids. Nobody will believe us. You planted a special key card on Dad and invited us up here so there would be security footage of us exploring restricted places. We know about CCTV footage! Our parents work in security! You tricked us by introducing *Hooded Light* to us so it would look like we had a reason to steal it. You're going to frame us and blame us, but *we're* too smart for you to get away with it!"

#### Sophia Hotung

Marvin opened his eyes a teeny-tiny peep to gauge the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat's reaction. His sister was now standing, fuming, pointing vehemently at The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat.

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat hovered patiently on his wobbly stool, waiting for her to finished.

After a deep breath, he tutted, "If this is what you believe, Marigold, then I suggest that you leave. I have no time for conspiracies. I need to find *Hooded Light* before anything else goes awry. If there is a thief at ARTUS, then it's up to me to -"

Thud, thud, thud.

There was a thundering knock at the door.

The children froze. Who could that be?

# Sixteen

"Sir!" called Quentin from outside the front door of the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat's studio. "You have to come quickly. *Relief Sculpture*! It's gone too!"

Marvin and Marigold had never seen the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat move so swiftly. He had manoeuvred the chess pieces in a deliberate and methodical manner. He had handled his porcelain vases and plates in a delicate and masterful manner. At Quentin's holler, however, he leapt from his stool and ran, all bony knees and elbows, to the door.

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat flung the door open. Quentin's gaze met the twins'. There was a momentary silence.

"Come now, come now, out you go, back downstairs," the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat urged, flapping his hands at the twins to leave.

The grown–ups rode down with the children in the lifts. They got out on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor and sent the children further down to their residence on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

Between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> floors, Marigold asked, "What's *Relief Sculpture*?"

Marvin reminded her, "It was the block in front of that marble hole. It was half boxy, half flowy. Remember?"

She remembered it well.

"So that's *two* artworks now missing?" Marigold said.

Marvin nodded solemnly.

The Ma family's residence was no calmer than the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat's studio. Mum and Dad were frenetically and frantically packing up suitcases.

"*There* you two are!" Mum shouted as soon as Marvin and Marigold stepped over the threshold. "We told you to come *straight* here!"

"W-w-we—," the children stammered. They had no idea what excuse to make for themselves.

"Enough excuses," Dad snapped. "To your room! We have a car coming to pick us up in fifteen minutes. Your suitcase has been packed already. Go get your backpacks and sit tight. Mum and I are almost finished with our own packing."

Sophia Hotung



#### Sophia Hotung

Marvin and Marigold hurried along to their room to retrieve their backpacks. On the pillows, as promised, were two new envelopes from The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat.

"I can't fit my letter in my backpack!" Marvin complained, trying to do up his zipper.

"Just put it in the suitcase then," Marigold offered, trying to squash and squish her own letter into her equally bulging backpack.

Marvin began to struggle with the big, brown, leather suitcase that he shared with Marigold. It had heavy brass buckles that were fiddly and difficult to unfasten.

"Marvin!" Mum's voice called out. "Stop messing around with the suitcase and head to the Library with your sister."

"I need to put something inside the suitcase," Marvin protested. "My backpack is filled to the brim!"

"Leave it on the bed and I will do it for you," Mum said.

She seemed very flustered. She seemed very rushed.

Had she caught wind of the missing artwork? Marvin wondered. Did she think someone would steal from *them* next?

#### Sophia Hotung

It seemed that Marigold was wondering the same thing. She asked Mum, "Are you scared that there's a thief at ARTUS?"

Mum scoffed. "What are you talking about, Marigold? Stop making up stories. Stop asking silly questions. Wait for Dad and me in the Library with your brother."

"I'm *not* making up stories!" Marigold declared. "A piece of art *was* stolen just now from ARTUS! First the long wooden sculpture disappeared, and now, *just* now in fact, a second piece has gone missing!"

"Who told you this?" Mum demanded.

She looked furious, Marvin thought. She looked the type of furious that the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat should have looked when Marigold accused him of all sorts of nefarious misdeeds.

"We overheard Quentin say it," Marigold said.

"What did I tell you about being nosy, Marigold?" Mum scolded.

"The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat said it's good to be nosy. He calls it being curious. He calls it being inspired!" Marigold insisted.

"And *what* did I say about talking to strangers?" Mum was at her wit's end. "*Don't* talk to strangers. Go and wait in the Library. You're causing too much trouble here."

# Seventeen

Mum impatiently shepherded Marvin and Marigold out of the residence and towards the front door. Then, she returned to the room she shared with Dad to finish her own packing.

"I don't want Mum to see the letters from the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat," Marvin said to Marigold. "Give me yours and wait here. I'm just going to put them in the suitcase. I'll be right back."

Marvin left his sister to put on her shoes and slinked back to their bedroom. He finally got the buckles of the suitcase undone and threw open the lid to put the letters inside.

Only, he did not get that far.

There, taking up almost all the space within the big, brown, leather suitcase were two objects he knew all too well.

"Who did Mum say packed our suitcases?" Martin asked his sister in as low a voice as possible. He was walking with her quickly towards the lifts with his backpack. He had left the suitcase where it was, buckled up shut again. "I don't remember," Marigold shrugged. "Does it matter? Is something lost?"

"Not lost. Found." Martin replied.

"Found?" Marigold repeated.

"You're not going to believe this," Marvin said. "*I* can hardly believe it. I *wouldn't* believe it if I had not seen it with my own eyes."

"But...?" Marigold pressed on. She did not like it when Marvin knew things that she did not.

"*Hooded Light* and *Relief Sculpture* are in our suitcase. Someone has stashed them there!"

Marigold felt sick to her stomach. She was *right*. The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat *had* set them up, just as she thought. If he could plant key cards in pockets and letters in rooms, he could certainly plant sculptures in suitcases too.

"We have to go back and take them out! We need to thwart his dastardly plan!" Marigold said, stopping in her tracks, ready to turn around and head back to the room.

"It's okay, it's okay," Marvin said, taking her arm and dragging her to keep walking. "I swapped them out. They were unwieldy and *very* heavy, but

#### Sophia Hotung

I removed them from the suitcase and replaced them with some of the big art books in the room. That way, whoever packed our bags with the sculptures won't suddenly feel a difference in weight."

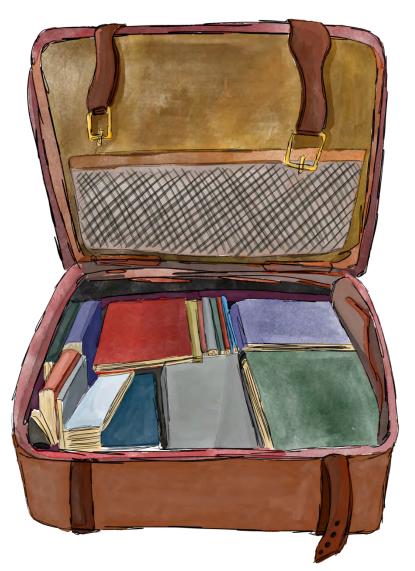
"Smart," said Marigold, genuinely impressed, "but where are the artworks now?"

"I hid them under my bed," Marvin said. "We can write to ARTUS about them once we get home.

But right now, we just don't know who to trust."

"What should we tell Mum and Dad?" Marigold asked.

"I don't know," Marvin conceded. "All I can think is that we were so worried about someone *stealing* the art that we did not ever consider someone would be *giving* the art... to us!"



# Eighteen

In the Library, Marvin and Marigold saw the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat speaking with Quentin. Beyond them stood the giant marble hole that used to frame *Relief Sculpture*. Surely enough though, *Relief Sculpture* had vanished.

"The security camera footage was totally wiped," the twins overheard Quentin say. "Someone with expert hacking skills would have had to do that."

"Can it be recovered?" the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat asked. "Is there a back-up?"

"Everything's gone," Quentin said, shaking his head. "We're dealing with a real pro, sir. We'd need an even better pro to crack this."

Marigold could not help herself. "Our Mum and Dad are pros!" she interrupted, running over to Quentin and the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat.

Marvin groaned internally. His sister was always putting her foot in it.

#### Sophia Hotung

# The Heist of Hooded Light

What if the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat was the one who planted the sculptures in their suitcase?

Why would she volunteer to help him? Or was she volunteering their parents' help to *expose* his crimes?

Marvin was not sure, but he knew that Marigold was acting on impulse. She always did. She always got them into trouble.

"Mum and Dad can certainly help," Marigold yammered. "They know all about surveillance and security. They would definitely be able to find the thief!"

"*Would* they now?" enquired the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat. He looked down his angular nose at Marigold. She looked back up at him, daring him to look away first. "Where are your parents now?" asked the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat.

Marvin swallowed. His throat felt dry. His armpits felt clammy. His legs felt trembly.

What if the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat came to their residence and found the artworks under his bed? Marvin worried.

If the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat was the person who hid the art in the suitcase, then he would be furious.

If the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat *wasn't* the person who hid the art in the suitcase, he would *still* be furious.

"They're coming down right now," Marigold replied confidently. "They're coming down this instant."

# Nineteen

As if on cue, Dad turned the corner. He looked harried and shorttempered. He did not look as though he was in the mood to fix a security problem for free.

"*There* you two are!" he said, throwing his hands in the air in exasperation. "I swear you are never where you are supposed to be. Come along. The car is waiting at the east exit."

Quentin frowned. "Mr Ma," he said, "we recommend that you use the west exit. Cars are able to park there, and we are able to assist—"

"No need, no need," Dad interjected gruffly. "The car's here now. No need for assistance. Hurry along, children. Let's go."

Marvin and Marigold looked at each other.

On the one hand, we should leave before they find the art under the bed in our room, they both thought.

On the other hand, we should stay to get to the bottom of the mystery. Dad could easily investigate the security camera footage. He was good at his job. He was a pro.

"Just one moment, Mr Ma," said the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat. "I understand that you and your wife are security specialists. This is very embarrassing, but would you be willing to spare a minute of your time and an ounce of your expertise to help us with a small problem?"

Dad scoffed. "What?! This is a posh place! You should have your own security team! Asking *guests* to do your work? What is this? If you can afford a Delta 4.9 Snapdragon security system, you can afford a team to look after it!"

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat looked at Quentin.

Quentin looked at The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat.

Marvin looked at Marigold.

Marigold looked at Marvin.

"It is impressive," the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat said, choosing his words carefully, "that you know what security system we have here at ARTUS."

# Sophia Hotung

# The Heist of Hooded Light

Dad seemed lost for words. His mouth moved. Garbled, gargled sounds came out, but he could not form a coherent word let alone a sentence.



#### Sophia Hotung

Finally, Dad spoke. "W-w-well, I noticed it. I have a keen eye. In my field, you notice these things. Like you s-s-said... I'm a security expert."

Marvin noticed that Quentin had moved to stand behind Dad, blocking him from running back the way he came.

Marigold noticed that the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat had moved to stand in front of Dad, blocking him from running forward.

What was going on?

"I see," the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat said. "Please, Mr Ma. We will take care of your ride home in return for your... keen eye."

Suddenly Dad's phone rang. He seemed grateful for the distraction. He answered it and whispered anxiously for a few seconds before hanging back up.

"That was Mum," he spluttered. "She's forgotten her um... her... her whaddayacallit... her whatchamacallit... her make-up bag."

He shook his head in annoyance and confusion. "She's had to go back upstairs. I suppose I can have a look at whatever needs seeing to."

"Excellent," said the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat. "If you'll follow me, please."

Twenty

Quentin led Dad, followed by Marvin, followed by Marigold, followed by the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat into a restricted room behind the Library desks.

The room was panelled with screens, each one showing a different angle from a different camera in a different room at ARTUS.

Marvin saw the Library. Marigold saw the Commune.

Marvin saw all the corridors that they had wandered down, thinking that no one had noticed them.

Marigold saw all the lifts that they had sneaked into, thinking that no one had noticed them.

Quentin offered Dad a seat at the control desk and stood to his right. Marigold and Marvin stood to Dad's left. Being very tall, the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat loomed behind Dad.

# Sophia Hotung

"This is the security room," Quentin explained. "We can look at footage from any security camera at ARTUS. We have cameras in all the public areas to keep our guests — and our art — safe."



### Sophia Hotung

"Can we see our room?" Marvin enquired nervously.

What if there was footage of the artworks being stashed under the bed? he worried.

"Well, no, not your room since the residences are not public areas," Quentin said, "but we can certainly see the corridor outside of your front door."

Quentin used the mouse next to Dad. On the big central monitor, camera footage of the 8<sup>th</sup> floor crackled to life.

"Look!" Marigold shouted, pointing at the screen. The lift doors had opened and who else but Mum had stepped out. She made her way down the corridor to their residence.



"There's Mum!" Marvin said, craning his neck to get a better view.

"We can even zoom in," said Quentin, holding down some keys on the keyboard and enlarging Mum on the screen. "You can get quite a good image, even close up."

Dad shifted in his seat uncomfortably.

"She looks stressed," Marigold observed.

"Of course she's stressed," Dad retorted. "She nearly left all her expensive make-up in the bathroom. Anyone would be stressed. I don't think we should be spying on Mum."

They could not spy for long. Mum disappeared into the residence and the corridor was once again empty.

"Mr Ma is right," the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat said. "We are interested in the activities in the Sky Lobby, not on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor."

Quentin loaded up footage from a Sky Lobby camera to the central monitor. Dad settled into his chair a little more.

Quentin rewound back in time until the footage showed a day when *Hooded Light* was still in position.

Down the corridor, you could see into the Library. In fact, you could see people in the Library. You could see Mum and Dad working in the Library. Quentin zoomed in.

"Mr Ma," Quentin said, "you seem to be looking directly into the camera lens."

Marigold squinted to see if Quentin was right.

Marvin squinted to see if Quentin was right.

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat squinted to see if Quentin was right.

Dad shook his head, squeezing his eyes tightly.

"Dad, what are you doing looking at the camera?" Marvin asked.

"I'm... I'm not. I mean... I wasn't. You can hardly see a thing, the video is so grainy," Dad protested.

"It looks as though you are, Mr Ma," Quentin said.

Dad shook his head, almost violently now, and tried to stand up from the chair. The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat, however, was still standing behind him and blocked him from pushing the chair out from under the desk.

"I didn't even know there was a camera there!" Dad insisted.

# Sophia Hotung

"You said you had a keen eye," Quentin pointed out. "You said that you noticed the cameras. You even knew the security system's name. You *must* have noticed this."



# Twenty-One

"Mr Ma," the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat said, placing both hands on Dad's shoulders, almost pressing him down into the seat. "If you don't mind, we will have to ask you to wait here while we call the General Manager. We believe that you know something about the two artworks that disappeared during your stay with us."

Dad's mouth fell open. Marvin and Marigold were agog too.

Had Dad really been the thief the whole time? Was Mum involved too?

"This is preposterous!" Dad bellowed. "You cannot keep me here! On what grounds? What *legitimate* grounds? Because I glanced at something? You have no proof!"

"Mr Ma," the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat said, "we would just like to ask you a few questions."

"We find your sudden departure to be a little suspicious too," Quentin added.

#### Sophia Hotung

Dad crossed his arms defensively. "My family came here for a change of scenery. We had heard about how nice ARTUS was and could not wait to visit. However, it must have been all smoke and mirrors because something has felt *off*! And now you're telling me that there have been *thieves* running about the place? I have *children*! We don't feel safe!"

Quentin left to get the General Manager.

Marvin nudged Marigold surreptitiously. The security footage of the 8<sup>th</sup> floor had been relegated to a smaller screen at their eye level. They could watch for Mum.

"Do you think Dad had something to do with the stolen artworks?" Marvin whispered.

"He's behaving awfully suspiciously, but I can't understand why he would steal the art," Marigold replied.

"They seemed very eager to leave ARTUS," Marvin pointed out.

"And they only felt that way *after* the artworks had been stolen," Marigold agreed. "Like they needed to run before they got caught."

Dad jerked his head to look at them and demanded, "What are you two whispering about?"

Marvin and Marigold pursed their lips.

"We don't understand!" Marvin said. "Why would you steal the art, Dad?"

"I did *not* steal the art!" shouted Dad.

"Is it because the art made us ask too many questions? Is it because it made us too curious? Too naughty? Too nosy?" Marigold asked.

"No, no, no!" Dad said. He opened out his arms and enveloped Marigold and Marvin in a big hug. "I love that you ask questions. I love that you are curious. I love that you love to explore and learn new things."

"You do?" the twins asked incredulously. It sure never felt that way.

"I'm sorry that Mum and I have been so stressed. I know that I have been short with you," Dad continued. "But you are right. You *should* be curious; you *should* ask questions — just don't get into trouble!"

Marigold and Marvin were now even more confused than before.

Dad seemed genuinely sorry that he had been so strict throughout the staycation. But was he just faking it, pretending to be nonplussed by all their naughty antics to distract from the missing artworks?

Marvin wriggled free of the hug and looked back at the screen. He saw Quentin pop up on the monitor that Mum had just appeared on. "There's Quentin!" he said, pointing at the screen.

Marigold, Dad, and the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat turned their attention to the screen as well.

Quentin used his own master key card to enter the room.

"He's probably going to detain Mum," Marvin figured.

"Did Mum help you steal the art, Dad?" Marigold asked.

Dad sighed. He was growing increasingly frustrated. "I did *not* steal anything!"

"What about our suitcase?" Marigold pressed on. "Who packed our suitcase?"

"Your suitcase?" asked the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat.

"Yes, our suitcase," Marigold continued. "We thought perhaps housekeeping or somebody at ARTUS had packed it for us, but actually it could have been you or Mum too."

"What? Why is this important?" Dad asked, trying not to get annoyed that Marigold was asking irritating questions. After all, he had just told the twins that it was good to ask questions.

# Sophia Hotung

"You packed our bags so that you could hide the art in *our* suitcase!" Marigold exclaimed. "You knew that nobody would check *kids* 'bags!"

"I what?!" cried out Dad. The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat tightened his grip on Dad. He had never looked so menacing as he did now, towering over the Ma twins and their father.



"You know where the artworks are?!" the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat boomed. The children had never heard him raise his voice so loudly.

"Don't worry," Marvin chimed in. "I hid the artworks very safely. We were not going to leave with them. Promise!"

#### Sophia Hotung

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat winced at the idea of the children handling the priceless sculptures. "Where are they?" he demanded.

"Don't worry. I was very careful. I hid them under my bed then replaced the space in the suitcase with books so that nobody would notice the suitcase was lighter. We were going to give the books back, I promise. We were going to write you a letter telling you where we hid the art as soon as we had a chance to. And we did not take them to begin with. We didn't even know our parents had stolen them. Check the cameras!"

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat held up his hand and Marvin stopped his nervous rambling. The room fell eerily quiet. The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat sunk his long, bony fingers deeper into Dad's shoulders and spoke.

"This is not looking good for you, Mr Ma."

# Twenty-Two

"I had no idea about any of this," Dad asserted. "I didn't even pack your suitcase. There must be footage on these cameras showing that I'm plain innocent. We're *all* innocent!"

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat was not convinced. Neither were Marvin and Marigold.

"But, Dad," Marigold asked, "how did the art get in our suitcase if you or Mum did not put it there?"

"Who packed our suitcase?" Marvin added.

Dad grabbed the mouse that Quentin had used earlier and began clicking around. It was clear that he was a security pro. He understood the software. It was clear that he had used Delta 4.9 Snapdragon before.

Dad brought the security footage of the  $8^{th}$  floor back to the central monitor and rewound the tape.

#### Sophia Hotung

Marvin, Marigold, Dad, and the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat watched as people flitted on and off the screen, up and down the corridor, in and out of the doors.

"There must be video footage of the thief bringing the artworks into our residence," Dad murmured, staring intently at the footage.

The foursome watched as the housekeeping team entered, then exited. The screen went grainy, snowy, fuzzy for a minute, then Dad appeared leaving through the front door.

"Pause," the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat commanded. Dad complied. "Mr Ma, we saw you exit, but the screen went fuzzy during the time you could have entered."

Dad frowned.

Marvin could feel his heart pounding out of his chest.

Marigold could feel sweat trickling down her forehead.

Dad fast-forwarded back to the real-time footage from the camera just in time to see Quentin leaving their residence. He was talking on his mobile phone. Mum was nowhere to be found.

"Where's Mum?" asked Marvin.

"Did Quentin leave her in the residence?" asked Marigold.

"He should be getting the General Manager!" said Marvin.

"He needs to find Mum first to detain her!" said Marigold.

"*Detain* her?" Dad boomed incredulously. He had let her first use of the word slide, but now he was incensed. "Marigold! That is your mother you're talking about. You cannot seriously believe that your parents had anything to do with an art heist!"

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat moved to stand in between the furious Mr Ma and the petrified twins. They had never heard their Dad shout so heatedly at them before, and he shouted at them *a lot*.

"Come now, everybody," the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat said, gesturing towards the door. "Let's go meet Quentin. We're not being productive here sitting in the dark and bandying around accusations."

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat walked in step with Dad as the children scurried along next to him. They stalked through the Library, past the Commune, and through the double doors to the residences.

Up ahead in the corridor, Marvin and Marigold could make out the waistcoated silhouette of Quentin. He was still on the phone. He must have come from the 8<sup>th</sup> floor. He was now jogging towards the lifts that led down to the east exit.

#### Sophia Hotung

"Yes, the children's suitcase," Marvin and Marigold heard him say into the phone. "Just undo the buckles then. No, not *books*. I said *artworks*. It's the sculptures. Take the sculptures. No, there should not be books. Why would there be books? Are you sure you took the right suitcase?"



#### CHAPTER

# Twenty-Three

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat looked at the twins.

The twins looked at Dad.

Dad looked at the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat.

They had all heard Quentin's hushed conversation.

"Oh no!" Marigold hissed, "Quentin's the thief!"

"And he was in the residence with Mum!" Marvin realised.

Dad lunged for the lift button and began jabbing it with his index finger urgently, desperate to find Mum.

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat abandoned the Ma family and launched himself into a gangly sprint down the corridor towards Quentin.

Dad dove into the open lift.

#### Sophia Hotung

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat dove onto the stunned Quentin.

Marvin and Marigold did not know what to do.

"Ah!" yelped Mum, who had smacked right into Dad. He had jumped into the lift that was delivering her from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> floor.

"Ah!" yelped Quentin, who had smacked right into the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat. Quentin's phone soared out of his hand and bounced off \_\_\_\_\_\_ the rug a few feet from where he had fallen.

> "What are you doing?" Mum cried out, clutching her make-up

> > bag.

"What are you doing?" Quentin cried out, grappling for his phone.

"Mum!" Marigold threw her arms around her mother. "We were so worried!" "We didn't know what to think!" Marvin joined in on the hug. "Everything happened so quickly."



"We thought the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat stole the art," Marigold explained.

"But then we thought you and Dad stole the art," Marvin added.

"But now we think Quentin stole the art!" the twins both said.

Everyone looked over to see Quentin squirming under the long, bony limbs of the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat.

They were entwined in an aggressive, gnarled skirmish.

#### CHAPTER

## Twenty-Four

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat held Quentin by the arm and heaved him back to the gobsmacked Ma family.

"It's too late," Quentin wheezed, "We've taken it all. The sculptures are gone. There is nothing you sorry lot can do."

"They're not gone! They're not!" Marigold countered. "We found the sculptures in our suitcase. We have them."

"You have them?" Quentin did not believe her. "How could *you* possibly have them? You're just little children. Pawns! This is an art heist that has been in the planning for months!"

"Why, Quentin?" the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat asked. He seemed personally hurt by Quentin's betrayal. "You love the art here. Why would you try to steal it?"

Quentin rolled his eyes and scowled. "All these years of giving art tours to people who hate art, who don't understand it, who don't appreciate it. Then -bang! - I do a little candle magic trick and suddenly you're all fans, you're all critics, you're all collectors.

"You aren't real art lovers. You should not need gimmicks and tricks to truly appreciate art. You should not need a magic light amplifier and a glorified energy blocker. That's cheating! Real art lovers don't need all the bells and whistles."

> "But, Quentin," Marvin protested, "that's bonkers!"

> > "That's bananas!" Marigold agreed.

"Sure, we did not feel inspired until we saw Light Hooded send shining inspiration through ARTUS, but even when the light stopped being amplified, even inspiration when disappeared, we still explored, we still asked questions, we still were inspired solve to а mystery! How do you explain that?" Marvin asked.

#### Sophia Hotung

"So what if it takes people a little longer to fall in love with art, or to understand art, or to appreciate art? Isn't it better to have more people who love art eventually, rather than have a few people who love it immediately?"

"You're just kids!" Quentin spat. "What do you know? What makes you think you're right?"

Marvin remembered the eight artworks about the couple's trip to Mount Fuji.

Marigold remembered what Quentin had told them about ordering the pieces into a story.

"It's like the couple that travelled to Mount Fuji, Quentin," Marvin said.

"Everyone can believe something different, and everyone can be right," Marigold said. "You said that yourself. 'What might be wrong to one person is correct to another person. It's our job to find our own understandings.'"

Mum and Dad were bewildered. They had no context for any of the shenanigans that Marvin and Marigold had been getting themselves into during the staycation.

"What *are* you talking about?" they asked.

"Quentin is trying to tell us that there is only one right way to experience art," Marigold explained.

#### Sophia Hotung

"But he said himself that there *isn't* one right way. He said so when he taught us about the Mount Fuji pictures," Marvin said. "As long as the art makes you feel things, you're experiencing art correctly."

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat tightened his grip on Quentin's arm and turned to Mum and Dad.

"Mr and Mrs Ma," he said. "I am egregiously sorry to have dragged you and your very bright children into this mess. I need to ensure that Quentin and any accomplices of his are dealt with accordingly. But I sincerely hope that you will consider staying a little longer so that, together, we can put *Hooded Light* and *Relief Sculpture* back where they belong."

Marvin and Marigold looked up at Mum and Dad, willing them to say yes. They did not want to leave ARTUS like this.

They wanted to see the light flood in through *Hooded Light* one last time, to see the rays ricochet off the marble walls, to see the beams build behind the magnifying glasses, to feel *Relief Sculpture* lock the inspiration inside.

"Well," said Mum and Dad to the Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat, "Marvin and Marigold are always asking questions, maybe it's time they answered one."

The Very Tall Man in the Lapis Lazuli Coat smiled and turned to the Ma twins. "Well," he asked, "what do you say?"

#### CHAPTER

# Twenty-Five

You would not have noticed if you had been snoozing and snoring in bed the following morning, but two children, two grown-ups, and one very tall man in one very bright coat gathered at dawn in the Sky Lobby.

As the sun rose in the east and shone through the windows into ARTUS, *Hooded Light* began to vibrate with light on one side and inspiration on another.

The lightbulbs burned vermillion.

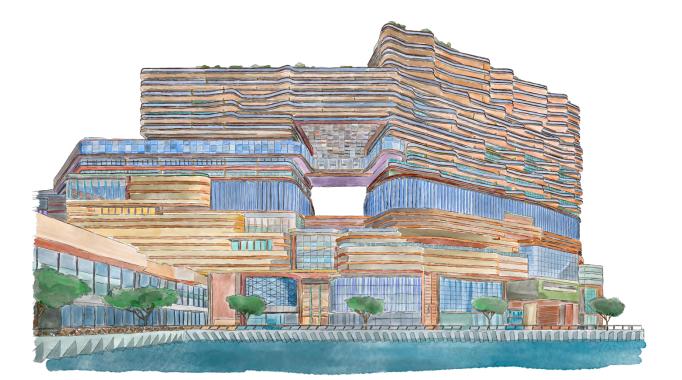
The magnifying glasses reflected aureolin.

The shadows glowed puce.

The ocean outside the windows glistened skobeloff.

The sky gleamed lapis lazuli.

And the residents of the squiggly building on the sea stirred with inspiration.



THE END

### Book Club Talking Points

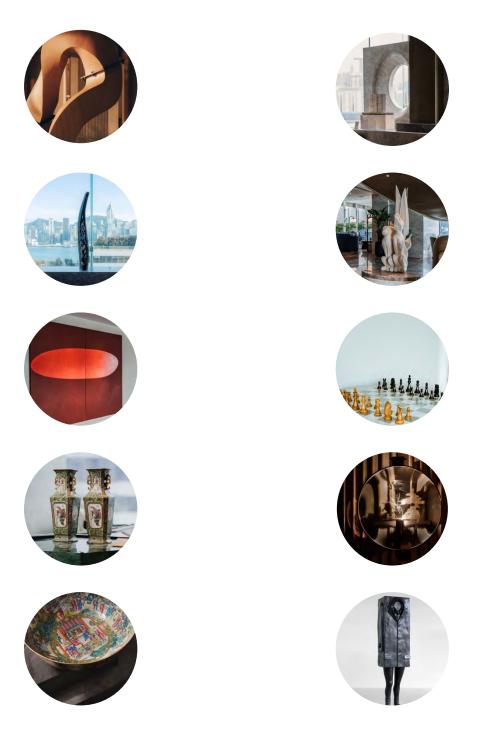
Whether you're reading *The Heist of Hooded Light* by yourself or in a book club, here are some prompts to get you thinking about the book.

Careful! This page contains spoilers and should only be read after you've finished reading. You've been warned...

- 1. How many art pieces do you remember from the book? If you had to make one of them magical like *Hooded Light* or *Relief Sculpture*, which one would you choose and what would be its powers?
- 2. The eight Mount Fuji landscapes teach the children that there are multiple way to think about art and life. Do you believe that two interpretations can be true at once? Why or why not?
- 3. What clues can you find about the villain's identity in the earlier chapters of the book? Do you think that the villain was hiding in plain sight all along?
- 4. The Very Tall Man in the Very Bright Coat wears five different colours during the Ma family's stay at K11 ARTUS. How does each colour relate to the plot and the unveiling of the mystery?
- 5. The children learn to value curiosity after their stay at K11 ARTUS. Why is it important to be curious?

### Meet the Art

Get to know the pieces at K11 ARTUS featured in The Heist of Hooded Light



Photos courtesy of K11 ARTUS





....*or...No.1 by* Wang Jianwei 2016 • Wood, metal, sprayed-on varnish • 14.5 × 160 × 138 cm

The angles and curved shapes are designed to expose the artist's working method and process, seemingly "still in the process of making" – provoking ideas and questions

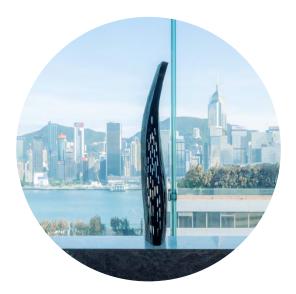


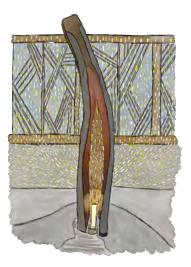


*Relief Sculpture* by Kim Lim 1995 • Portland Stone • 38 x 47.3 x 9.8 cm

*Relief Sculpture* explores the tensions between contrasting notions by making use of rough and smooth textures

#### Sophia Hotung





*Hooded Light* by David Nash 2015 • Hokkaido Birch, charred • 111 × 15 × 28 cm

David Nash works primarily with wood that has fallen naturally as a means to explore the reincarnation of life into new structures





*köpek (two) by* Melike Kara 2017 • Lime wash on wood • 180 × 62 × 81 cm

*köpek* addresses questions of social belonging and the differences between public and private self-expression and behaviours



*vermilion* by Suzan Frecon 2017 • Oil on linen • 213.7 x 132.1 x 3.8 cm

The artwork encourages viewers to appreciate the simplicity of life by projecting a "less is more" aesthetic





*Chessboard* 2019 • Wooden pieces on marble platform

A life-sized wooden chess set that incorporates players into the art itself as a form of participatory installation art



Pair of Famille-Rose Porcelain Hexagonal Vases from Mason's 19th century • Hand-painted white porcelain • Height 54cm, Width 22cm, Length 22cm

These vases were created in the Qing Dynasty by European artists attempting to imitate Chinese art and even calligraphy





8/8 Landscape by Ho Kwun Ting, Kensou 2018-2019 • Die cut stainless steel

One of eight stainless steel scenes made with using Chinese paper cutting techniques. There is no definite sequence for the eight landscapes that depict a couple's journey up Mount Fuji



Guangcai Porcelain Punch Bowl with Painting of Courtyard Party Qing Dynasty Jiaqing Period (1796-1820) • Hand-painted white porcelain Diameter 54cm Height 22cm

Commissioned by Europeans for serving drinks at parties, the scene on this punch bowl depicts a famous army general's birthday and symbolises prosperity and longevity



*Kastenmann Black* by Erwin Wurm 2017 • Bronze, paint • 200 × 60 × 55 cm • Edition 1 of 6 + 2 AP

Erwin Wurm's works alter, re-envision, and anthropomorphise everyday objects to challenge our psychological perceptions of them in reality

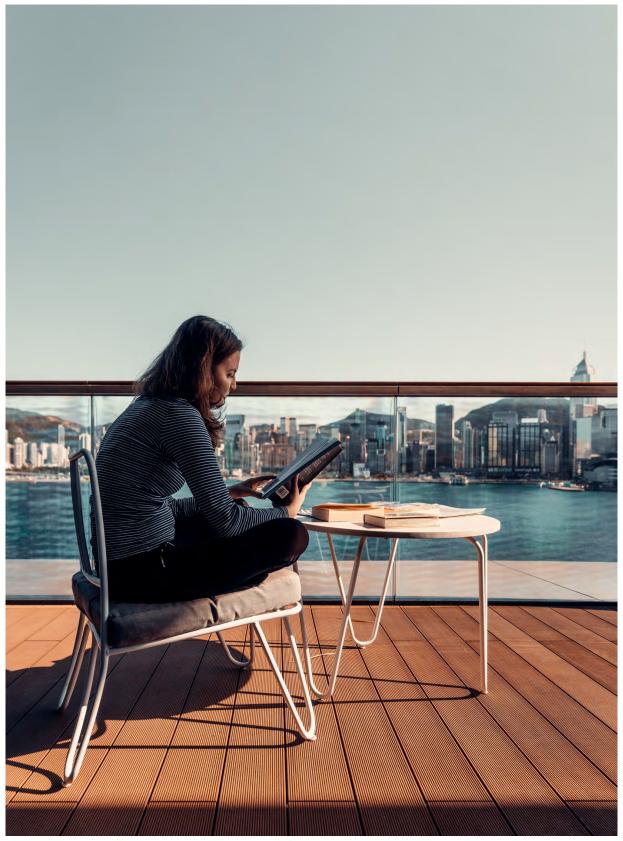


Photo courtesy of K11 ARTUS

### About the Author

Sophia Hotung is a Eurasian writer and illustrator from Hong Kong best known for creating *The Hong Konger* art collection and *The Hong Konger Anthology* book.

As one of K11 ARTUS's inaugural artists-in-residence, Hotung wrote *The Heist of Hooded Light* while staying at ARTUS in January 2022. Inspired by the artwork around the residence and the K11 Craft & Guild Foundation, Hotung wrote and illustrated the novel in twelve days.

A native Hong Konger, Hotung grew up hankering for more English language children's fiction that represented the Hong Kong experience. Now, Hotung works to represent mixed raced, Hong Kong, and disabled experiences in her writing and illustrations.

Hotung is also a disability advocate with autoimmune and chronic illnesses, including autoimmune hepatitis, autoimmune cholangitis, celiac disease, ocular myasthenia gravis, and myalgic encephalomyelitis. She only became a writer and illustrator when her disabilities made it impossible for her to continue her corporate career. She now speaks and writes regularly on the intersection of disability and work.

You can learn more about her and her work here at sophiahotung.com