CHINGLISH



CHINGLISH



BY SUE CHEUNG

ANDERSEN PRESS

This book is a fictional account based on the life, experiences and recollections of the author. In some cases names of people, dates, sequences or the detail of events have been changed to protect the privacy of others. The author has stated to the publishers that, except in such minor respects not affecting the substantial accuracy of the work, the contents of this book are true.

First published in 2019 by
Andersen Press Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1V 2SA
www.andersenpress.co.uk

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

The right of Sue Cheung to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

Text and illustrations copyright © Sue Cheung, 2019

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available.

ISBN 978 1 78344 839 5

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

For my family,
because without them I wouldn't
have experienced life's highs and lows.
And how boring would *that* have been?!

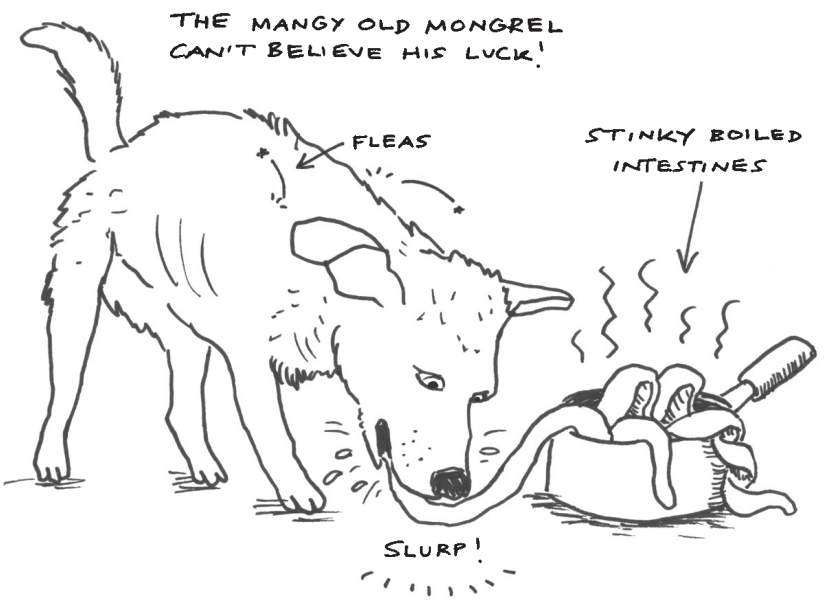


1984

Tuesday 31st July

I've just fed boiled intestines to the local stray dog, as instructed by Dad. This has been my life up till now, completely bonkers. But I'm hoping that from tomorrow everything will become normal. That's why I've started this diary. I want to celebrate my soon-to-be completely normal life. Where do I begin? Well, my name is Jo Kwan, and at the grand age of thirteen, good stuff is FINALLY about to happen!

We are moving tomorrow, it's dead exciting. Things have been crap here – *really* crap – so when I found this empty diary while packing, I realised I could use it to write down all the good stuff that's coming. So here I am!



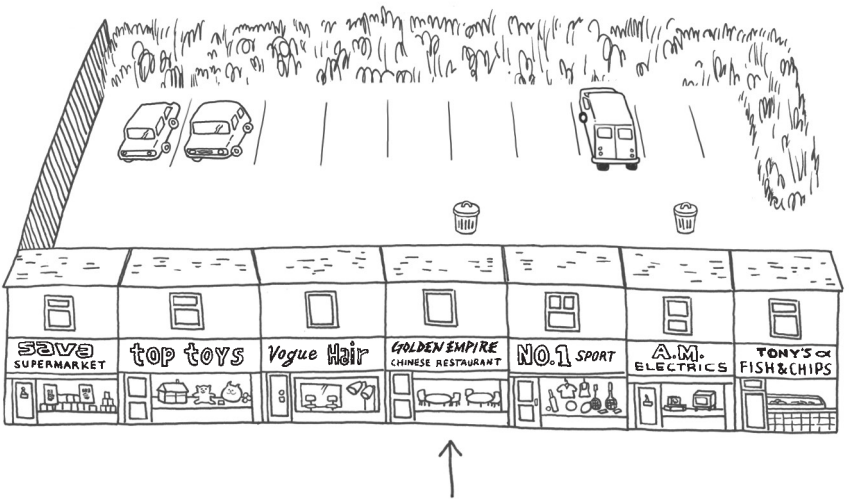
The first step to normality is to get out of this stinking butcher's shop, cos being constantly surrounded by raw offal and giblets is very unsettling.

The second step is to be with Simon again, who was sent off with our grandparents when I was eight and he was ten. It's unnatural to be apart from your big brother for so long. I mean, Mum and Dad couldn't have split us up any further if they tried. Our house in Hull is over a *hundred miles* away from where he is in Coventry AND I still have no idea why they did it (UR). Would be cool if he moves back in with us (as long as he has stopped wiping bogies on walls).

P.S. UR = Unknown reason. Think there will be lots of these.

Wednesday 1st August

We are in the car and heading off to Coventry. It's really happening! Dad has bought a new Chinese takeaway, although that's all I know. Mum and Dad are, as usual, not exactly being informative about what our new home is like. But I think it will be just like the old days in Nottingham, with our posh restaurant and big house – no more poky old flat above the butcher's – hurray!



Coventry will be our *third* place! The first was the Golden Empire Chinese Restaurant that Mum and Dad owned on the high street in Nottingham. They worked long hours, so me and Simon were left on our own a lot.

Being unsupervised was the best thing ever. Me and Simon could do what we liked, when we liked, and we never got told off.

. . . Apart from that time we nearly burned the house down.

It got boring eating crisps for dinner, and we thought making chips from scratch would be easy. How were we to know that lard was highly flammable?

GOOD THING ABOUT PARENTS NOT BEING HOME

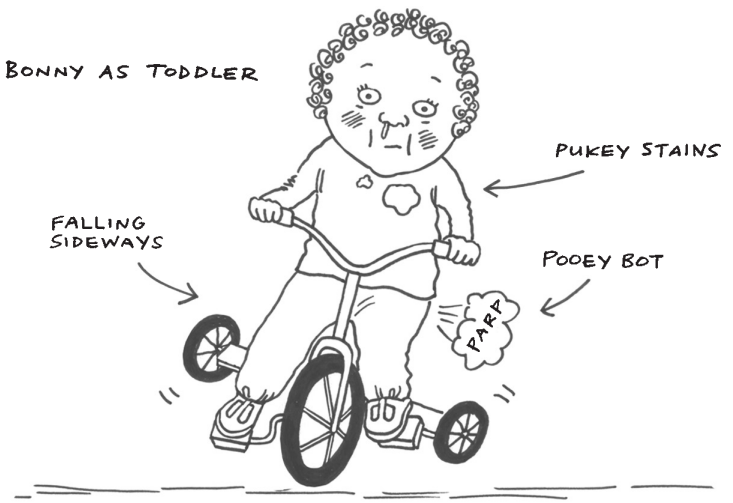


BAD THING ABOUT PARENTS NOT BEING HOME



After that, Dad drafted in Grandma and Grandad, to make sure we didn't incinerate the whole place. Nothing changed much when they moved in, except we had home-cooked meals every night and a bath on Sundays.

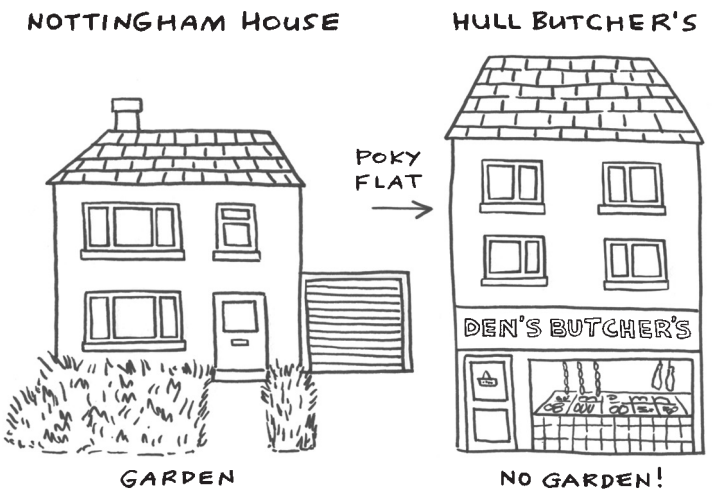
Then my little sister Bonny came along, with her puking and pooing and crying. Grandparents must have got fed up of looking after her, as well as me and Simon, cos they moved out a couple of years later . . . and that's when Simon went with them.



The rest of us moved and ended up at that bloody butcher's in Hull (UR). I've hated every second. Never made any real friends either.

Don't think any of us liked the butcher's really. So it's probably a good idea for Dad to go back to doing what he knows best, which is cooking Chinese food. Hopefully it will help him snap out of his bad moods. The less I say about those, the better.

I am strictly sticking to the good stuff in this diary.



Anyway, I don't care about all that now cos we're off somewhere better and it's going to be TOTALLY ACE!

2.30 pm: We just took the road into Coventry. Nearly there!

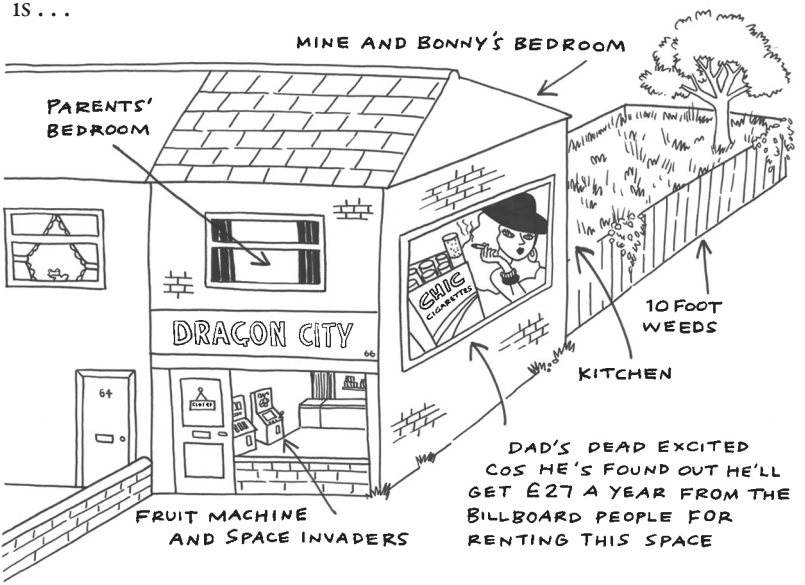
3.05 pm: Arrived at new home. Have gone upstairs to take a look. It's a ONE-storey flat above the shop (UGH NO!), with only TWO bedrooms. That means I will have to share with Bonny. This must be some kind of mistake.

3.07 pm: Hold on, just found out there is no living room either! OK, don't panic – it's probably just a temporary arrangement till we get the big house.

7 pm: Everything unpacked. Wonder how far Simon lives from here?

Thursday 2nd August

Why has Dad bought a takeaway? Why not another restaurant? (Best not to ask while he's frantically untangling utensils). Not sure if a takeaway is any better than a butcher's, but at least it's giblet-free. It only took five minutes to have a proper look around our new home, cos this is how *tiny* it is . . .



Yes, even tinier than the flat in Hull! OK, breathe. It's going to be fine . . . who needs a mansion anyway? I'm just glad we're back together again.

Simon and Grandparents came over for dinner. Simon's changed! His voice has gone all deep and he has faint stubble on his upper lip. He said, 'All right, Pongo, all right, Snotface.' He's been calling Bonny Snotface for ages but I

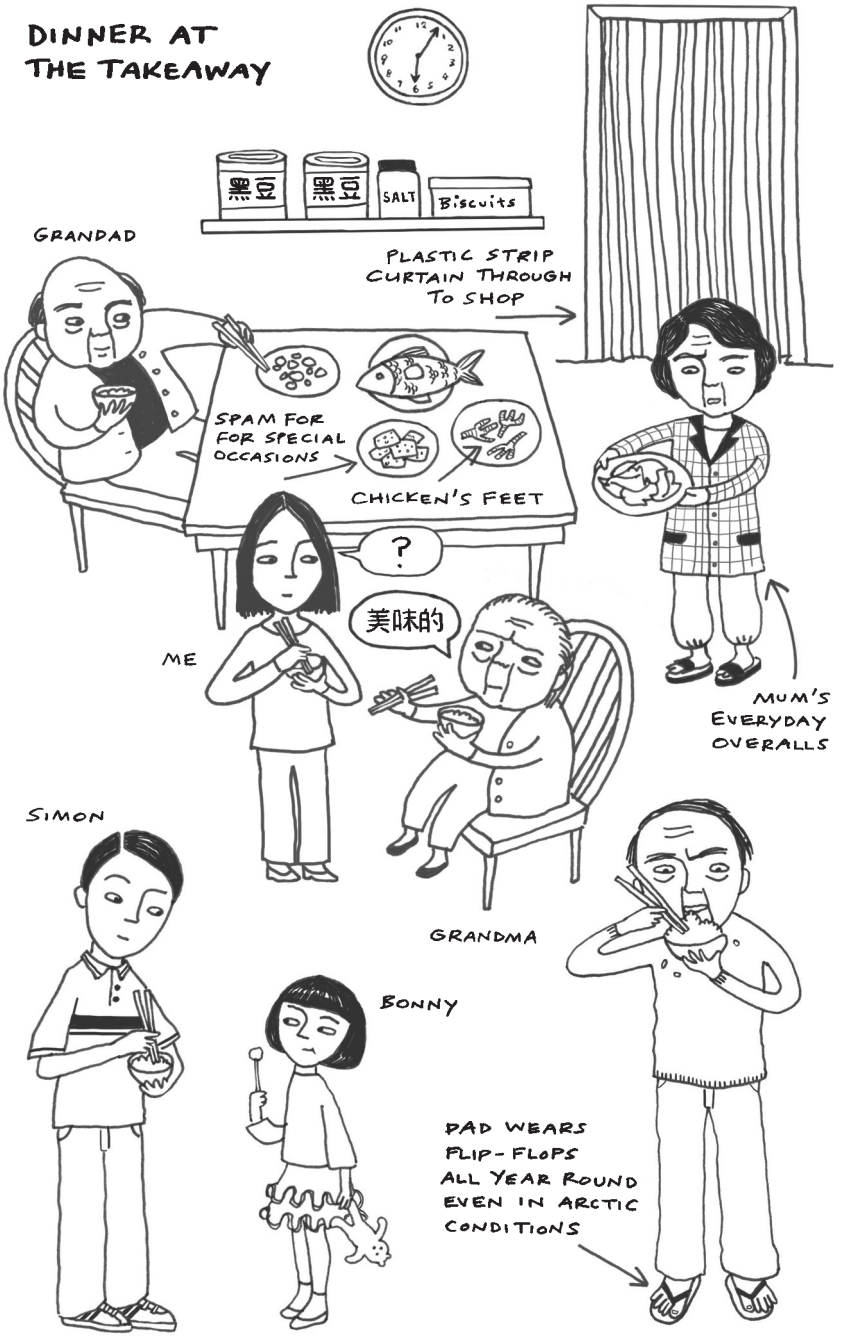
don't know why he calls me Pongo (UR). Maybe it's a term of affection?

Mum was chuffed to see Simon after so long. You could tell by the way she was putting all the best bits of food into his rice bowl. (The bits without gristle basically.) She said, 'Eat up, mao nga lao,' and Simon cringed cos that means 'no tooth man' in Chinese. She's been calling him that since he lost his two front teeth at the age of six (UR), but he has a full set of adult teeth now.

'You two have grown so much I hardly recognise you,' Grandma said, squinting at me and Bonny. At least, it was something like that. We vaguely understood and smiled back cos we didn't know how to answer. It's difficult trying to talk in our family cos:

1) Grandparents don't speak English at all
2) Mum hardly speaks any English
3) Me, Bonny and Simon hardly speak Chinese
4) Dad speaks Chinese and good English – but doesn't like talking

In other words, we all have to cobble together tiny bits of Chinese and English into a rubbish language I call 'Chinglish'. It's very awkward. Plus we are the only ones in our family to speak Hakka – a dialect hardly anyone uses! All our relatives speak Cantonese cos that's what most other British Chinese people speak, so I don't understand ANYTHING they say.


DINNER AT THE TAKEAWAY
SALT
Biscuits
GRANDAD
PLASTIC STRIP CURTAIN THROUGH TO SHOP
SPAM FOR FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS
CHICKEN'S FEET
?
美味的
ME
MUM'S EVERYDAY OVERALLS
SIMON
GRANDMA
BONNY
DAD WEARS FLIP-FLOPS ALL YEAR ROUND EVEN IN ARCTIC CONDITIONS

Simon and Grandparents didn't stop long after dinner. Perhaps cos they have a house of their own to go back to now – with a comfy *living room* to sit in. Not jealous or anything!

Friday 3rd August

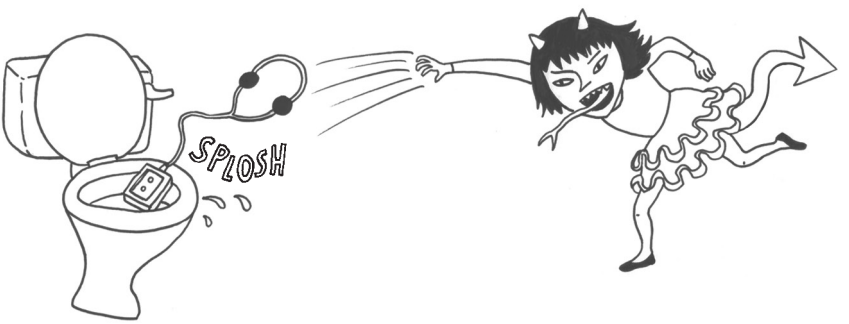
It's ace seeing Simon, but it will never be the same as before. For a start he doesn't live with us, and he's suddenly turned into this weird kind of grown-up – not how I remember him at all. I'm stuck with Bonny now. All right, she is eight, so there's less of the pooing and puking, but she is still complete DEVIL SPAWN. Last night she snapped all my pencils' tips by pressing too hard then put them back in the tin, as if still intact – *pure evil*!

Our bedroom is cramped (personal space = non-existent), and the only way into the bathroom is to go through our bedroom (UR). This is proving to be very stressful *and* there's a whole month left of summer holidays. Wonder if I will survive without strangling Bonny? At least I can look forward to being at the same school as Simon, the more agreeable sibling.

10.32 am: Bonny whinged about my Walkman taking up all of bedside cabinet. She said she had nowhere to put her signed photo of Gary Kemp (guitarist from Spandau Ballet). I told her he is the ugliest member of the band, and has worst perm known to man. We ended up drawing

a line down the middle of the cabinet with the rule that if any item goes over, the aggrieved person can hurl it across the room.

10.48 am: Bonny hurled my Walkman across the room. (Apparently it was 'half a centimetre over'.) It flew through the open bathroom door and landed down the bog and broke. I was SO ANGRY! But had to keep it down cos Dad was in one of his moods.



BONNY BEING TOTALLY AND UTTERLY EVIL!

12.03 am: Bonny fast asleep but I was still seething. I decided to chuck my cup of water over her head to teach her a lesson.

12.04 am: Bonny shrieked and sat up looking confused.

It is now 12.25 am. Can't get to sleep for laughing.