

A Catalog of Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On

Dung Kai-cheung

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In Dung Kai-cheung's collection of short stories *A Catalog of Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On*, material objects become like talismans that affect the flow of life.

These ninety-nine stories were first published in 1999, soon after Hong Kong ceased to be a British colony. Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty coincided with increased global trade and a surge in consumer culture. Thus, Dung Kai-cheung's characters wear Burberry trench coats, Gucci watches, and Air Jordans; they snap pictures with Fuji film digital cameras and watch stacks of DVDs on Panasonic portable players.

Beyond being mere possessions or purchases, the objects in the stories often have a transformational or evocative impacts. During Ka Tsai's daily commute, he becomes fascinated by a woman with a curved spine who carries an Agnès b tote bag. Pat Pat's red Converse sneakers compel her to walk backwards, into a "secret society of the spirit." And Ah Kok's love of Japanese cheesecake leads her to an unexpected feeling of "purpose"—and a potential new job.

While many of these sketches are quirky or sly in tone, there are moments of compelling intensity in the book, too. A bullied girl takes refuge at shopping malls, where she can wander alone without being tormented. Another young woman always wears a buttoned-up white blouse, until her visit to a friend's grave overwhelms her with sensual, liberating grief.

Each tale is an intriguing glimpse into bustling, millennium-era Hong Kong. With the passing of over two decades since their original publication, the stories now conjure up nostalgic memories of cargo shorts, bucket hats, raves, PalmPilots, Teletubbies, and ubiquitous Hello Kitty.

Surreal, comical, and haunting, this short story collection sees magic in everyday items.

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