

# The Hallucinated Courier

Fan Xiaoqing / 范小青

One day I made a courier delivery to someone's home. The receiver was a young girl—just the type fiercely loyal about shopping online. She came out of her room, took her delivery and asked me for a pen to sign her receipt. So as to remind her, I said:

“Open up first and check the goods.”

This was on no account due to my own sense of responsibility. It's a company regulation. The company stipulates that we must first have the recipient open it up before signing for receipt. Otherwise, any later consequences will invariably befall us couriers. Since there was no wish on my part to put up with so many consequences, I was firm in having her open her parcel first before she signed. The young girl seemed a bit impatient, as if she didn't really care that much for the goods I was delivering. She hummed and hawed and said—

“*Aiyo*, let's just *not* open it. I'm busy.”

“That won't work.” I said, “It can't be

signed for if it's not been opened, unless...”

“Unless what?” She asked, hurriedly.

“Unless you make it clear in writing on the receipt.”

She asked what she should write, and I said, “You write that the receiver of this parcel does voluntarily leave the parcel unopened and uninspected, that this has no connection whatsoever with the person making the delivery, that you are responsible for all consequences, and so on... Then you sign your name.”

This got her worked up again. “*Aiyo!*” She said, once more: “What a bore! You want me to write *that much*? Oh, whatever! Whatever! I'll just open it up and have a look.”

But the parcel was wrapped up very tight, and she frowned and thought once more about humming and hawing through. Fortunately, I carry around a small knife, which cuts through the cello tape gripped around the package. This knife of mine is

used especially to deal with those people who take delivery of a package but who are afraid of any bother. Those people will take the lack of any tool to open their package as their excuse to forcibly sign the receipt, to hum and haw away and stumble through the matter. I will not permit such practices.

Of course, as you all know, not all recipients are like this girl. The habits of some people turn out to be the complete opposite. It puts you at your wit's end to see the levels they go to check the authenticity of goods you hand over. There was, for example, a woman who liked to buy clothes from the internet. Every time she got her hands on the clothes, she would inspect them over and over, looking up and down, front and back, inside and out, even poking around the seams to have a good look. I watched from the side, chuckling to myself—maybe she thought that I was the one who'd sown the item together? Although, even if she found a problem with the seams, what could she have me do about it? There was another woman, who would buy clothes with some regularity. On one occasion, she got a whiff of rubber after she'd opened her package for product inspection. She insisted that this was some fake, low-grade product, and demanded on the spot that it be sent back. She then said that wearing such clothes could give you cancer. It scared the hell out of me. Still, whether goods are real and the price is right, or whether they're just shabby fakes, neither has anything to do with me.

All she was doing was making my life difficult, and I patiently went through with her the regulation whereby, when goods are inspected, only damaged products or those not matching the agreed-upon size and colors can be returned, explaining that there was no rule stating that odd-smelling clothes could be rejected on-the-spot. Finally, after grinding away for what seemed like half a day, she began to talk sense. She accepted the possibly terrifying clothes, resolving though to make a call later to our customer-service line and demand the product be returned. I don't know what came of this afterwards, and, anyway, it doesn't concern me. Then there was this really odd recipient, who simply had to ask me for my name. I said that the company didn't stipulate that we give our names out and that I could just not tell her. However, when I saw that she persisted, I just told her, kidding myself that she might be thinking of hooking me up with a marriage partner. I wasn't expecting that the next time I went she would ask me for my name again—

“I told you last time,” I said.

“My memory's bad,” she replied, “I've forgotten.”

So I told her again.

This happened over and over, each time I visited. In the end I became quite suspicious about it all. I explained to her that a courier's name was hardly that important.

“How could it not be important?” She asked, “I even ask the names of the men

who carry up the water.” I supposed she was defending herself against any unforeseen problems, fearing that when someday something should go wrong, she could not find the wrongdoer. In actual fact she was ignorant of a rule in all delivery companies—one courier for one district. It’s all very clear, and she’d just have to state her address and the company would know who had delivered her goods. This doesn’t hold for those companies that don’t play by the rules—they won’t notify the seller unless you know the courier’s name. But in such a case, what’s the difference even if you know the name of the boss—it’s useless just the same.

Truly, when the forest grows large, you get all kinds of birds. You’ve got to be careful in your dealings with each different bird—who forced you to be a courier anyway? Mistakes are frequent in making deliveries nowadays, but no matter who’s wrong or right, the bird always shits on our head. Our only choice is to act like we’re treading on thin ice so as to protect our head from the bullying birds.

But no more of birds—we should return to the person before our eyes. At length, she opened her parcel and took out the goods. I was not in the mood to care that much for what she had—even a magician’s Invisibility Box would have nothing to do with me, but she just had to take the item and dangle it in front of my face.

“Hey! You see that?”

I made a pretense of eyeing up the

goods: a pair of leggings...magenta, even. In my mind I started to hold her in very low regard: don’t think that I don’t know full well that those leggings go for nothing more pricey than a few dozen yuan online! The cheapest go for just ten! She didn’t feel any embarrassment on account of these cheap and cheerful leggings: “Okay, well, I’ve checked, so I can sign the receipt, now?” she said, her flourishing complete.

Of course you can sign. It’s not as if I’m intentionally trying to catch her out here. Everything’s fine as long as she goes by the regulations, so I politely asked her to sign her name on the receipt. I tore off the top-sheet, and I was good to go. She had already returned to her room, but as I was turning away I heard her give out a piercing scream from inside. Thinking some mistake had been made, I jerked back my head and had a look in her direction, only to see her doubled up with laughter, arching her back as she howled—

“*AI-YO-YO! AI-YO-YO!*”

Now, I had no idea what she was “*aiyo*”-ing about with such vim, but since she was not trying to make any trouble for me, I hastened my escape. Seeing me make off, she forced herself to straighten her back—

“*AI-YO!*” She blurted at me. “I’ve already bought a pair that’s exactly the same! *Ai-yo!* How could I have just totally forgotten about it? I couldn’t remember at all...”

Looking at her, it did occur to me that she bought the same pair just a few days

ago. But this had nothing to do with me, so I should still run away. Off she went again:

“I can’t be going gaga! I’m only twenty-five!”

Even so, this still had nothing to do with me, and I recommenced my escape.

At long last I was able to run off.

**T**here was some novelty value when I started out in this trade, but this feeling has now all gone with the passing of time. Everything’s in the same mould. It’s like the recipients: I’d say seventy to eighty percent of them are just like that little bitch just now. They get some cash in their hands—not a lot, mind you—and they splurge it all online on some worthless or basically useless stuff. I really cannot make sense of these women, with their itchy hands, as if no day can pass by without placing them on a computer-mouse and clicking here, clicking there, and clicking again over there. Naturally, it’s because of this daily clicking, additional clicking and further clicking that the delivery companies have sprouted like bamboo shoots after the rains, greater and greater in numbers and power. I’ve even heard that there are over a thousand delivery companies now. A colleague of mine commented:

“Over one thousand? Whose total is that? Does it cover those shady companies which can’t even be found on the records?”

This colleague has a more fertile mind than I. There are over a thousand according

to the statistics, but according to his way of thinking there’s no way of knowing just how many companies there are. No wonder the competition is so intense.

Naturally, again, amongst the countless recipients, it’s not certain that these women receive things that they bought with their own money. There are instances of other people sending things as gifts or buying the item for them: “Oh! My boyfriend!”, “Mummy and Daddy!” or my someone-else. But this is a very small percentage.

As a matter of fact, I shouldn’t moan about these women, much less look down on them, since with these girls comes the business of delivery companies and our rice bowl for the day. In actual fact, there are quite a number of decent girls amongst them. They’d be pretty excellent if their hands didn’t get so itchy. I’d be a happy man if I could find any one of them to be my wife.

There was one time I made a delivery to a home. The girl opened the door and, courteously, pressed me to come inside. I knew my place, so I wouldn’t go in. Yet she became extremely enthusiastic, even moving over and pulling me inside:

“Come in! Come in! There’s no problem!” She said.

Even so I would only stand in the entrance to her home. In this way I could take a casual glance inside. Wow! She’d piled up half her room with courier deliveries, most of them unopened, bundled up dead-tight! I couldn’t tell which company had delivered

these—how could they make a delivery without having the parcels opened up first? Still, that had nothing to do with me, and I'm alright as long as I get my work done. What's the use in occupying oneself with what other delivery companies are up to? Each company has its rules and regulations...I did think, however, that it would be best not to marry this kind of woman. She was plainly making purchasing a part of her little game. How could a courier such as I have the money to play mummies and daddies with her?

Would you call this a sense of inferiority, or was it truly a sense of inferiority? Would you call this a one-sided wishful thinking, or was it truly a one-sided wishful thinking?

That is a kaleidoscopic picture of those who receive deliveries. As for the senders of these items, I don't see them, but I do know that they come in all shapes and sizes. I just can't be bothered to say more with them out of sight.

It'd be best if I take a little more concern for myself. Sometimes, arriving at a residential district, I will have the feeling that I am dreaming. Why am I dreaming? Because I am so overly familiar with these districts, and they are all so alike that although I go into different districts every day, they appear all the same and indistinguishable from each other. I not only see them in my dreams, but actually take them as a dreamland during my waking life.

In fact, you don't have to go into these districts yourself—you just close your eyes

and think about it, can it be any other way? How could those numerous newly built-up districts not come in more or less the same style? Buildings standing like matchboxes in their place, one block glued to the next, with some stuck together a bit more tightly, and some with a bit more space in between—and that is the sole difference between one district and another. The former we call a common district, and the latter we refer to as a posh district. As for the slight discrepancies in shape and colouring that exist between these buildings, this is far from being the key to the point: they are mere superficialities. We're all grown-ups, so such superficialities as these are not going to blinker us.

Then you scout out a certain building, head to a certain room, taking the elevator for the high-rises, or climbing the stairs for the lower ones. You knock on the door or ring the bell, and someone asks—

“Who is it?”

“Delivery!” You say.

Then the door opens, you take a peek inside. Never mind the similarities between one building and another; there's never much difference even in the interior decoration.

If you were to go through every single day in a space and a time much like this, perhaps you, also, would find it hard to make sense between the time when you were dreaming and the time when you were awakened from your dreams.

Alright, alright. No more of dreams. Right then I had already made my way out of the 'leggings situation' and came to another, basically similar, district, where I found a basically similar building and climbed up a basically identical staircase. Then I pressed on the doorbell. Someone inside asked—

“Who is it?”

“Delivery!” I replied. The door swung open at once, without the person behind even thinking to look out through the peep-hole before opening up. I couldn't be sure if their sense of caution was rather poor or, on the other hand, whether they were overly anxious and laid great importance on the goods I was delivering.

Sometime recently there was a story in the news about a woman who lived by herself and was killed by a courier. When the story came out, my colleagues, boss and I fell into some despondency and felt generally uneasy. We believed that our trade would soon come off the rails, or that the number of items we deliver was sure to be cut massively. The result was that they never declined, but continued to grow and grow, so that our boss became energized once more, and the online shopping at the crack of dawn on 11<sup>th</sup> November<sup>1</sup> turned out to be a fierce battle of seckilling—the stock was literally wiped out in seconds. That was really an awesome spectacle.

Sometimes I'll be feeling really bored, and then I'll fantasize about meeting some

recipient for my deliveries who's not like everybody else. But there are none. Really. None at all. This one now standing before my eyes was the same old style: opening the parcel, lowering her eyes and giving a quick scan which counted as having checked the item. She then peeped out—

“Pooh!”—and signed.

I didn't know what she meant by that “pooh”, but at any rate I didn't care what it was that I was delivering. The strips from the receipt to any item that we deliver, both the strip left in my hand at the end and the strip, stuck on the parcel to be left with the recipient, will have a description of the contents written on them. Still, I don't have the time or the desire to take a look at the things I'm passing on every day. I care only about the delivery, not the story behind it, certainly not the expression of the recipient when taking the goods. It has nothing to do with me whether this woman feels a sense of “pooh-pooh” regarding her parcel. She's signed, so my job is done, and I can go. At least you could say I make a fairer break for it than the case of the leggings in which that lady proved so unwilling to inspect.

I could not have imagined at this time that her pooh-pooh was to befall me three days after completing this delivery. I received a phone call from a lady. “How come her delivery hasn't arrived yet?” she asked. Such events were by no means rare—they came around frequently—and I didn't feel anxious myself. First I asked her what the situation

was. She explained that I gave her a call on the morning two days previously, saying I'd be right over, but I had not actually come around after two days of her waiting.

Here was a character! She had waited two days before giving me a call. She was by no means in a rush. I thought back to my work two days earlier—nothing had been left out...I had completed all of my responsibilities on that day. Still I didn't yet feel anxious, so asked if she was certain it was I who had called when she picked up the phone two days ago.

"Of course," She said. "I've still got your number on my phone. If not, how could I call you? Lucky I kept it, actually. Otherwise I wouldn't know who to turn to."

Actually the point she made here was wrong, or not one-hundred-percent correct. If you don't receive some delivery, the problem might not lie entirely with the courier: it is always possible that something has gone wrong at some other point along the chain. Still, I could well understand her, since these women don't know the structure of the delivery companies, nor could they see how our outfit is run. She couldn't imagine what our warehouse or our distribution centre is like. All she could see is the delivery guy, and if she wasn't to ask me, then who could she ask? At any rate, hadn't my phone number already fallen into her hands? With great patience, I verified the problem with her once more—

"You're saying that I contacted you

the day before yesterday and said that I'd be over right away with a courier delivery?"

"Yes," She said.

I was experienced in this job, so I checked up with her a second time: "Please state your address and the full name of the person taking the delivery." As she gave her reply, I rushed to grab a pen, jotted this down, and promised the speediest of responses. In such a situation, I should naturally work with the utmost speed. People like her, with what appears to be an unhurried personality, are pretty fair to deal with; the hurried ones won't even ask about the black and white, won't discuss who's wrong and who's right before they bring the complaint to your company and drag your life into a mess. Then, even if it becomes clear on some other day just whom the responsibility lies with for this mistake, you've already lost your perfect image in the eyes of your boss. You've already got a smear on you. Not really worth it, huh?

The receipts for deliveries from two days back had long been collected at the company, and, rushing against time, it was there I returned to check up on the papers. Hunting out the receipts, I went through them one by one. Absolutely nothing was left out. Every single piece of paper had been signed by someone. This proved that I myself was not in error. I made my return call to the lady, telling her that there was indeed a delivery made to her address, and that the goods had already been delivered, since the order had

been signed for. She responded with a sudden cry—

“Aha,”...Then she went on, “It’s been signed for? Impossible! There’s no one here during the day apart from me.”

“Well,” I said, “it is written in black and white, so there’s no denying the delivery.”

“So odd! Who was it? Who signed for it?” I took a look at the name, scribbled down like mad so that I had to strain my eyes to make it out. I told her so-and-so’s name. She stalled for a moment before asking just who this so-and-so was.

“The person who signed at your home,” I said. Afraid that she still couldn’t understand, I clarified the situation once more—“This is to say, I delivered the goods to your home, and it’s possible that you weren’t in, but there was someone else who signed.”

“It can’t be,” She said—she didn’t know this so-and-so—“she’s not a member of our family. You delivered to the wrong place.” Her tone throughout was quite calm and polite—but what was the use of being polite? After all, no matter how polite she was, I would still have to make the delivery, but where had that parcel got to? I felt as if my head were going to explode, but I cooled myself down quickly and forced the feeling to die down. Then I gave careful thought to where the possible error might lie. Considering that the wrong person signed for it, it would be obvious to check the address first. I was experienced at this after all, and

yet, again, I checked the facts with the lady. That was it!—a single-character had been mistaken in the address—Honghu Gardens had become Hongfu Gardens. With my rich experience I knew straightaway that this is a problem with the local dialect—people confuse h’s with f’s in their pronunciation.

I was feeling far more relaxed now. Firstly, I thought, this was not my responsibility—that lay with the person who sent the parcel. The blame wouldn’t be falling on me; naturally, blame in this way couldn’t fall on the intended recipient, either. So I made haste to conciliate her:

“Alright! No need for you to panic. I know where the problem is. I made the delivery to a wrong address provided by the person who sent your parcel. This is easy to sort out. I’ll run over there and bring it back and then send it over to you.”

“How thoughtless, making a mistake when they wrote the address!” She said. Of course I knew that she was not talking about me, so I calmed myself down again and hurried over to the mistaken address.

At that moment I was still quite unhurried. It was only too common for an address to be written down wrong. Instances of wrongly spelt names also abound, and there are a great number of other errors—some you wouldn’t think of, but never any they won’t make. There was this one, for instance, when I made a call to a recipient, asking:

“Are you apartment so-and-so, Block

Y, District Z, on such-and-such a number, on such-and-such a street?”

“That’s me!” came the voice from the other end. “I’m right at home waiting for your delivery.” So I couriered along, and the person happily signed. Yet soon after, a call came demanding the very same goods. I said that it had already been delivered as requested and signed for, but the man hadn’t received anything, far less signed anything, which truly was odd. After repeated rounds of wrangling, dragging on over a great period of time, which stirred us all up to the point of not knowing what on earth to do, we finally realized that the delivery had been made to completely the wrong city! Imagine there were two cities which somehow had districts with the same name, and not only that, within those districts were identical street names and numberings on the doors. You’d think there’s no way such a thing could happen, but it really does.

More often it’s a case of a phone number of the intended recipient being written down incorrectly. When you call that wrong-number, amicable folk will tell you that you have dialed the wrong number, but dislikeable folk will tell you to “go fuck yourself.” Can you return the compliment and tell them to go fuck themselves too? Of course not.

Whatever, the general situation is like this: it doesn’t matter if the sender and recipient are those actually intended or written down wrongly, they are, each and

every one, your God—it’s just that these visible Gods are of a different kind from the true, invisible One. Once I had a problem with my phone. It just wouldn’t work. I knew the situation was urgent, so I rushed off to get it repaired. However, in the short space of time in between, in just one hour, a client had already made a complaint to the company—my phone was off, the client said, and how could a courier have his phone off? This was “robber’s logic”. Could it not happen that we couriers might get involved in some unexpected situations—what if I fell victim to a car accident en route and passed out? Damn it! It’d probably be better not to get involved in car accidents. Anyway, regardless of any misfortunes you encounter, they are God, and you are God’s servant.

**N**ow I was at that block in Hongfu Gardens. I ascended to the floor, knocked on the door of the room, and it opened to reveal an unfamiliar woman, looking at me somewhat confusedly. Even if I was supposed to have seen her but two days ago, I still felt like she was a stranger now. I couldn’t recall the face of everybody I made a delivery to, so this was very normal. And, anyway, if I had such an exceptional memory I probably wouldn’t have to weather all this wind and rain doing such a job; I’d recommend myself as a spy to the intelligence services.

But it didn’t matter whether or not this woman was a stranger to me, and I wouldn’t

come to ask for her in particular. I was here to ask her to return a parcel that had been delivered in error, and I made a clean breast of it with her. As I spoke, she shook her head. Having shaken her head right through to the end of my speech, she said:

“You’ve got it wrong. I didn’t receive any parcels delivered by you.”

“I came over here two days ago and handed you a delivery,” I said, “and you signed it yourself.” Although I suspected she was a stranger, I still had to get the upper hand over her at first; there was no alternative. Things had to go this way.

“You made a delivery here, and I received it?” she asked, doubtfully. “Did you see me? How it comes I didn’t see you?”

It wouldn’t be wise to say that I had seen her, but I dare not deny either. I switched into a different way of questioning: “Well then,” I asked, “do you do a lot of internet and TV shopping?”

“Yes,” she said, “I receive courier deliveries often, but not from you.”

Things were okay as long as she admitted that she had received the parcel, and so, at this point, I took out my receipt and handed it to her: “Take a look,” I said, “isn’t this your address?” She took a look, and said, in a slightly surprised tone, “Ai... it truly is my address. But it wasn’t me who received the delivery.” Without waiting for me to bring up more questions, she then took a step forward in pointing out the true crux of the problem. “Not just that I am not the

one who received the delivery,” she said, “I didn’t sign for it either. Neither the name, nor the writing, is mine.”

I was totally confident that this little mistake would be solved by rushing back to the mistaken address and putting things straight—how could I have known that the situation would grow so complicated? My head began to explode once again. Fortunately she was quite understanding.

“Yes.” She said, “Nowadays it’s not easy being a courier. It’s very easy to make mistakes, and we’ve all become so careless.” It appeared that she was keenly aware of the fix I was in, thus coming up with an idea, “If you don’t believe me, you take out some paper and I’ll sign the name for you to compare, so you can see whether or not the writing’s mine.”

Having no other means of my own, I can only go along with this, though I knew it would make me come off as a deeply suspicious and mean person. But you wouldn’t know: when you do this line of work, you have no choice but to be this way. Otherwise you’ll pay for a split-second of carelessness with your own bankruptcy. Even for a cash-on-delivery order, you may not lose money if it goes wrong, but it will invariably cost you something—time, efforts or your good name. At the end of the day, you have to pay in something.

She wrote her name down on the paper, and I was certain, after a quick glance, that the courier’s receipt in my hand was never



courier. And so this guy signed. Although the name he gave was not that of the actual recipient, they still lived under the same roof, so there couldn't be any mistakes here. This was Step Three, and I was still blameless.

If I had made no mistakes, then there would be no error in delivery. So where could the mop actually have got to?

Again I tried to stir up some previous experience or training, and I had another hard think. Perhaps I had gone to the wrong floor? Maybe I had meant to go to the fifth, but with an unconscious slipping into laziness, had left out a floor and ended up on the fourth? Otherwise, I could have gone into the wrong building, taken block-number-three for block-number-two—that was possible, as well. Or perhaps I had not actually come to the right district, but some other one?

As you, after all, are well aware by now—everything is very similar from district-to-district, from block-to-block and from floor-to-floor.

Now, when this thought came to me, all of a sudden I was scared out of my wits. It was just like what I had been seeing in my dreams, one district after another, all the same. But I followed the instructions to the letter, so could it really happen that I had taken one address and wandered over to another one? And if I had never been to that district, how could it be that I had this memory of it? Could it be that I'd gone there in my dream?

Could it be that those events in my

dream are truer than what have gone on in reality?

I wouldn't dare to say that it was impossible.

Anything is possible.

It was just that, as things stood now, there was not a single piece of evidence to prove which mistake I had made...

I thought back to the scene, two days back, when I made the delivery, and it occurred to me in a flash. I had an encounter with a familiar face in that district, and we had a conversation on the road...

All I've got to do is to find that person and the pieces will fall into place.

Though, in reality, we're a long way from any of the pieces slotting in.

I've always been a patient person, so it's rare for me to make mistakes. But anybody who makes mistakes rarely will act more impatiently than one frequently in error when he does make a mess of things. And I am of this type.

I was slightly impatient now, not because of some lost mop, but rather on account of my sense of responsibility for the job, and my memory. Between the two, the latter is more important—if I cannot remember some event of two or three days back, how can I help but my whole body breaks out in a cold sweat?

I was impatient! Once I got impatient, the name behind that familiar face I encountered got forgotten. I made a great effort to recall the name, striving to fish out

the concrete identity of this man from my jumbled brains.

Who the hell was he?

A family member? A classmate? A friend? A colleague? A relative? A neighbour?

I suppose it's alright, since a loser like me won't have too many people that he's close to. First of all, I searched through the directory on my phone, matching their names with the appearance of that person in my memory, hoping that this would enlighten me. At first every name that passed my eyes seemed to resemble that person, but, looking again, I thought that none of them really fitted at all.

With no fear for the trouble it would bring, I then asked around—inquiring of everyone, one after another, who might turn out to be that person. Some just couldn't understand and ignored me, and some who seemed to understand thought it was all quite odd:

“What district? Never heard of it.”

“What would I be doing going there? Do you think I'm somebody's bit on the side?”

“What are you driving at?” some others would ask, “It's not April Fool's. And even if it were, couldn't you make the joke a little funnier?”

One went even further, “Are you stalking me? Who put you up to this? I know who has made you do this even if you don't tell me. It must so-and-so.” Hearing this, I was afraid that these efforts might end up

with someone getting killed—best put a stop to it!

As things developed in this vein, I became even more impatient. Any further, and it would go pretty pear-shaped. By now I had even forgotten the appearance of the person who had talked to me in the district. And I was even more at a loose-end as to what we had actually talked about. I was burning with impatience—I was afraid that this person, undoubtedly not a ghost, would disappear into thin air, as if he had never existed.

Seeing that I was clutching at straws, a colleague gave a timely reminder: “Go and have a look at the district's security video. As long as you were standing in the right place, they might have recorded you and that person.” This advice made me happier than any I could have hoped for, and I scampered off to the district. But the management said the security video recording was not just for anyone to watch. You had to have the police come, or at the very least you had to have some documentation provided by the police.

But setbacks would not get the better of me at this stage. May as well go and find someone to help! I contacted the police, who asked me what business I did that I had to look at the recording.

“Well,” I said, “I'm a courier and I lost my mop.”

The police thought I was joking with them, and I got a real scolding. I was not afraid of getting an earful, not even a few

swings. So I pled with them once more, and explained what had happened in precise detail. Losing a mop might be a small matter, but losing your rice bowl, that was a big problem. And finally, I won the expected sympathy.

“You couriers haven’t got it easy by any means,” said one of the police-officers who seemed to particularly understand me. “Nowadays there really are too many deliveries made. My wife’s become addicted to it. She buys things every day. Sometimes she won’t even open the parcel, or she’ll open one and then throw it away and go and buy it again. It kills me!”

Boosted by this piece of sympathy from the police, I could now, finally, take a look at the district’s recording. Management, too, had become awfully friendly, helping me fast-forward here, rewind there, tracking down the moment of my arrival as I dictated it to them, then looking through once more, slowly...my God! There I was! So I really did come to this district. I was alarmed by myself, noticing the great number of parcels strapped around my electric moped. If it were not me, but someone else, in that video—I would be sure to feel worried for him. How could such a feather-light vehicle carry so much cargo?

But that’s exactly what I have been doing, only that I cannot see what is piled up right there behind me when I’m cycling along on my electric moped.

I kept watching. Onwards I followed

my movements...Lord Almighty! I was actually looking at the person I met here...

And it was my grandfather.

You are not supposed to be afraid. My grandfather’s been dead for three years—I bumped into my grandfather who departed from this world all that time ago. But if I am not afraid, there’s even less reason for you to be.

Everyone says that anything can happen in today’s world, so what’s there to say that there won’t be instances of resurrection?

My grandfather was wearing his green postman’s uniform, pushing along his bicycle, on top of which were strapped paper-parcels, big and small. However, there’s nothing strange about all this—my grandfather was a postman in his younger days. In fact, when I’d started off as a courier, my mother cursed me:

“A dragon’s child is a dragon, a phoenix’s child is a phoenix, and the sons of mice nibble holes in walls.”

I decided to hit a cruel nail on the head and so I returned the abuse with a wry joke: “So I am grandpa’s boy then?” This made my mother chuckle despite her anger.

Now, although my grandfather’s appearance at this point hadn’t struck me as odd, there were still a few questions that I couldn’t answer. Under the security camera, I spoke to my grandfather:

“You’re so old. Why haven’t you retired?” I asked.

“I had retired,” he said, “But then they

said that there weren't enough hands on deck, so those of us who'd since been allowed to take a break all came out to lend a hand."

I thought about this, and it seemed perfectly reasonable. So you really shouldn't think that those couriers you are able to see bustling around the streets and byways, laden with parcels for delivery, are the whole story—there's a portion that you yourself have not seen. This was what I was thinking, when my grandfather started to speak to me again:

"Life in these modern days is really convenient. Even if you buy something from America, you'll receive it within a few days. It's nothing like the past, when you had to wait over ten days, perhaps even half a month, just for an ordinary surface mail!"

"That's right," I said, "even the word 'speed' nowadays doesn't do it justice."

"It's called 'shuttling through time'," said grandfather.

I was just thinking that I should congratulate him on this fashionable expression, when he started talking again, "It's almost the lunar New Year. I want to buy a present and have it delivered to your grandmother."

This really stunned me: "My grandmother?" I asked, "But hasn't she been gone for over twenty years? Could she receive your gift?"

"My grandson, nowadays all of us are leading a good life! Tell me, in these days, is there anything that we can't do?"

Having uttered these few words, grandfather started to push along his bike and make his deliveries. I could see why he did this—being advanced in years, he could not ride his bike when it was stacked with so many goods. He could only push it along as he went.

I went home and told my mother, saying how I saw grandfather three days ago in so-and-so district. She threw a "Bah!" in my direction before deriding me: "What the hell are you dreaming about?"

It was this "Bah!" that threw me into a state of confusion...or perhaps should I say that it brought me, with a start, back to consciousness? Perhaps everything that happened in that district was a dream of my creation?

I am not sure whether I am awake until my phone starts to ring. Yet, I still remain somewhat doubtful about it—people can make and receive phone calls in their dreams, and I happen to have frequent dreams in which I'm calling someone. These are as vivid as anything in real life—pressing buttons on the keypad, picking up and listening to the other end and your own speaking—all indistinguishable from what you would do in your conscious state.

This call is from the lady who should have received her mop. She has received it, she says, but still wishes to thank me. I am astonished. It taxes the brain to think that she has already taken delivery of it when I

haven't even gone looking for the mop, and what mop of all mops is this mop anyway? Was it that some good-hearted soul sensed the mess I was in and so offered a new one, or was it that some other careless sender who had written his address down wrong, an error which happened to bring it to the lady's address, with the result that someone else's mop had been sent to her home, or was it that my grandfather who, hating to see all this trouble I'd been going through, had concealed himself somewhere and played a magician's trick?

Who knows what it was about? At the end of the day, the mop has arrived, and it's nothing to do with me anymore. Quickly, I push the mop to the back of my mind. As long as there is no more chasing me down as if it is my responsibility, then everything is okay.

I return to the company, and take on another pile of consignments. Lowering my head to take a look at the strips of paper, I see one address for delivery written on the first receipt: Dream Gardens.

So I set out. Off towards Dream Gardens.

Translated by Edward Allen

### Notes:

1. Translator's note: In recent years, the 11<sup>th</sup> of November (11/11), China's "single's shopping day," has seen huge discounts on online shopping websites, resulting in billions of dollars worth of purchases.