

FELINE (R)EVOLUTION

Bridget Joy Liang

Supervisor's Name: nancy viva davis halifax

Supervisor's Signature:

Date Approved:

*N. Halifax
25 April 2017*

Advisor's Name: Eva C. Karpinski

Advisor's Signature:

Date Approved:

*Eva C. Karpinski
25 April 2017*

**A Research Paper submitted to the Graduate Program in Critical Disability Studies
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

Graduate Program in Critical Disability Studies

York University

Toronto, Ontario

M3J 1P3

(April 25, 2017)

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Abstract

Intersectionality is a core theory and practice for both activists and academics interested in social justice. From its roots articulating the unique experience that black women faced in comparison to the mono identity marginalized experiences of being black or a woman. Intersectionality has expanded to include experiences of queerness, disability, fat, class, religion, transness, and a host of other identity experiences. With so many different axis' of oppression, articulating the complexities of multiply marginalized experiences becomes difficult. In this paper, I argue in favour of using arts-based research methods, particularly storytelling as a way to convey this complexity.

Through telling stories, complex experiences of intersectional experience can be conveyed. Storytelling is an art form and a methodology that is embodied, experienced, and visceral. Storytelling can be and has historically been used argumentatively and as a form of knowledge production. To demonstrate the application of my theorizing, I have written a science-fiction story. Informed by my experiences of being multiply marginalized, I create a world where aliens with feline-like bodies crashland on Earth and are stranded here. They utilize their technology to attempt to change their bodies to pass for human with varying degrees of success. The notion of the alien interests me as someone who experiences numerous forms of marginalization. I regularly feel alienated and alien when interacting with people who do not share my experiences. Being alien I theorize, is an experience that can be read multiple ways creating space for multiply marginalized experiences to be theorized and experienced.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank first and foremost, Cath Duchastel de Montrouge and Hilda Smith for all their support in getting this done. Thank you especially for putting up with all my whining and helping to make sure I got things done. Also, the unpaid, barely acknowledged labour of being second brains for me to bounce ideas off of, looking over my work, giving me with ideas I didn't think of, doing the dishes/food when I was in crunch mode, and generally being the best queer fam/jia someone could ask for.

I'd also like to thank my supervisor, nancy viva davis halifax and my advisor, Eva Karpinski for all their support and guidance during this long and arduous process of getting this monstrosity completed.

Amy Eleanor, my fellow Rose Quartz, helped edit and poke at my story and I'm thankful for her and all the transfemmes at Wormbook Press for being brilliant, dynamic writers.

Lastly, I'd like to thank my mom and lao lao. Although they will likely never get to read this paper, I'd like to thank them for all the knowledge they passed on when I'd call them randomly with questions about a random Chinese word or about our culture.

Introduction - Stories Lost and Found

My work is intrinsically tied to my body and my lived experiences as a transfeminine mixed race disabled person. I often am overwhelmed by the pressures to identify one way or another - pulled in different directions. My life feels like I'm a ragdoll pulled in every direction by a group of children screaming, "mine!". I, the ragdoll is being tugged as each child tries to command my attention without wanting to share between them. Or instead I'm placed on a pedestal by the media or academia in order to elicit feelings of pity or smug superiority from an audience while media moguls and academics rake in money and prestige made from my likeness. I struggle as well as a budding academic within Disability Studies or within other disciplines, each identity-based category values and validates parts of me, but always seems to forget other facets. I feel neglected, splintered, never fully human.

In my Major Research Paper, I use storytelling as a method to convey the complications that often get spliced, to try to make me a whole person instead of a doll. I want control over the knowledge of my body. Many stories being written by other academics, by Hollywood, by doctors and other professionals, bodies like mine are being deployed as weapons against us.¹ Telling my stories provides the means to convey ambivalence, messiness, and a sense of control over my life.

People tell and read/hear stories for a variety of reasons. Storytelling is a part of every culture and likely predates history. For this paper, I am interested in how knowledge can be conveyed through stories and how it is made accessible to a larger audience than academia.

¹ Chris Cavanagh, a professor in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University spoke about how stories are deployed by dominant groups as weapons against marginalized groups as a way to justify their violence and to write histories justifying their violence afterwards. The video is titled, "Stories are the Most Powerful Weapons" and is part of a greater series of videos about how stories are deployed titled, "Biology of a Story". Taken from: <http://biologyofstory.com/#!/main?id=destructive-narratives&media=stories-are-the-most-powerful-weapons-chris-cava-2>

Knowledge is felt, embodied, experienced. In this story, I explore the intersections of race, gender variance, and disability through the lives of humans and cat-like aliens, the Maomi.

I use storytelling to piece together my lived, messy experiences in ways that are aligned with Crenshaw's (1980) theorizations of intersectionality. Crenshaw used the story of a crosswalk as a metaphor for the way that multiple identities can inhabit one body (particularly, marginalized identities). A person standing at the crosswalk is hit by a car, and then by another from a different direction, and again from a third direction. This metaphor/story was used to describe how it felt to face multiple forms of oppression similar to my opening metaphor of being a ragdoll pulled in disparate directions by a number of children. In this paper and story, I aim to embody intersectional theory by highlighting the experiences of marginalized people and how they find ways to survive despite the violence they face.

What's Wrong With Me?

I cannot recall anymore precisely what was happening, but I was distraught one day and feeling incredibly unvalued. I asked myself, "what's wrong with me?" but quickly corrected myself and asked, "why can't the world see value in who I am?"

I felt like an outcast, a misfit. I could not quite pinpoint which part of my identity was marked as an outcast. The cause of my oppression was nebulous because there were numerous ways I experienced violence and marginalization in my life. I thought about how ableism and transmisogyny claw away at my perceived skills and on the pervasive impacts that racism, fatphobia, and classism have on every aspect of my life. All I wanted was to live comfortably, do work that mattered to me, and have strong, supportive relationships with other people. I felt less-than-human. Maybe I was *not* even human? The fundamental ways I experience the world versus

how the world perceives me *alienates* me. The ways I understand gender and sexuality are *alien* to the norms of this society. I live and breathe *deviant* relationships and ways of being in the world.

My mother is Chinese and is understood as exotic and *alien*. I realized that the alien worked as a metaphor for many of the kinds of oppression I faced. And furthermore, this feeling of being *alien* was closely tied to the denial of humanity, of value to many other marginalized folks.

Project Structure - Behind the Scenes of Feline (R)Evolution

This project is a 15-25 page text outlining the theory of, and justification for my work. The theoretical text expands my analysis of, and demonstrates the importance of using intersectionality and story writing/art making as a research methodology.

The last 40 pages will be devoted to enacting the proposed theory through writing a fictional science-fiction story. This is a form of experimental/experiential writing that tries to enact an interdisciplinary approach to examining subjugated knowledges of disability, trans identity, queerness, and racialization. The story itself is one type of situated knowledge² of my lived experiences and the consciousness-raising through my academic background in feminist, queer, and crip theory.

The story is about aliens with cat-like features I call, “Maomi,” who crash land on Earth fleeing violence on their home world. The Maomi are taken in by Earth’s world powers and are

² As used and understood by Donna Haraway ((1988) *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, *Feminist Studies* 14, 3, 575-599). I recognize that the knowledge I am producing is not objective (whatever that means) and the limitations of this kind of knowledge. I also acknowledge that my vision has a specific way of seeing which I am explicitly making part of my process since my vision has been deemed to be a useful subject of research and now I’m using it to do my own research.

divided up between nations, given identifications, assigned genders, and promised asylum. Unfortunately, the Earth nations' honeyed words covered up their less-than altruistic objectives. Many Maomi are experimented on, socially shunned, used as cheap labour, and relegated to ghettoized zones. Their treatment parallels how immigrants and especially refugees are treated by major world powers including Canada. The premise is similar to the film, *District 9*, but I have taken this story in a very different direction.

In response to oppression and violence at the hands of the humans, the Maomi use technology called “weizhi therapy” to change their bodies so they can better blend in with human society and avoid harassment. I integrate the concept of passing into the story by exploring the process of transformation the Maomi must undertake. Since their ways of organizing bodies differ, the way their bodies are understood according to racial and gender norms varies depending on what a Maomi chooses. In addition, the process does not always work and they may still retain some feline traits. Those who are able to “pass” as human may also be discovered because their way of going about the world differs from how humans act. Many turn to extra-legal activities in order to survive, especially those who cannot pass for human or proclaim their status as Maomi. This mirrors the experiences of oppression and its impact on queers, trans folks (particularly women), people of colour, and disabled folks in poverty. Marginalized folks often need to resort to creative means of survival because the systems in place do not value them as citizens. Poverty is a uniting factor of disparate, intersecting identities. Poverty is the experience of non-citizens, the unwanted.

I utilize “ta/tade” as pronouns in this story because the Maomi do not really have a concept of gender and I wanted to use Chinese pronouns. Since I grew up speaking Mandarin Chinese, I used my knowledge of the language in the story for comedic effect. In Mandarin, “ta”

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is a pronoun applied to everyone regardless of gender. Adding the “de” makes it a possessive pronoun. In order to de-center Eurocentric and colonial gender norms, i chose to use the gender neutral pronoun (at least orally) "ta" used by Mandarin speakers and alien to all-non Mandarin speakers.

The Maomi naming process is also inherently Chinese. I am taking English names and words and transliterating them into Mandarin Chinese. I am taking English name/words and use Mandarin Chinese words that sound like the English name/words. So for example, my protagonist, Kong-balei started as Kimberly because I wanted to base ta loosely on the original Pink Power Ranger. I wanted a femme protagonist who is resilient and cares for people around ta. A few words are not transliterated and are simply Chinese words. I chose to transliterate names because my mother did it for all her non-Chinese students taking Chinese lessons from her.

The story centers around one Maomi youth who escapes from a lab with a slightly older Maomi. Their goal to be reunited with their familial units (called jia). Through the people they meet and their experiences, we see how intertwined complex intersectional lived experience is.

Each character represents a different facet of how ableism plays out and intersects with other identities. I am explicitly writing about multiply marginalized bodies and experiences because it reflects my situated knowledges. Through offering a Maomi disability narrative that is also a trans and racialized one, I aim to both challenge and humanize disabled people. I avoid disability representation as narrative prosthesis (Mitchell and Snyder 2001) through rejecting disability as a metaphor for something else, and instead present disability as literal embodiment.

Kong-balei as the narrator is the main protagonist. Ta is unaware of a lot of the social norms going around. Ta doesn't process social cues and only understands human culture after

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being told about it from tade companions. Ta also experiences sensory sensitivity. Ta is supposed to mirror autism that goes unrecognized within non-white communities where such labels are stigmatized and/or not part of the cultural vernacular (Tucker, 2015).

Bai-lengden is based off my dead name³ and has a more Maomi-like appearance and lacks opposable thumbs. Ta experiences physical disabilities but also demonstrates that ta is capable of doing work with adaptive technologies and even when disabled, has skills and abilities like any other being.

Lei-yong or Yenny is a human that acts as a foil to Kong-balei. She is an Asian (Chinese) trans woman/youth who is homeless and precariously housed engaging in survival sex work until taken in by Maomi. Her perspectives highlights differences between Maomi and humans, as well as the similarity between being autistic and alien. Although she presents an example of how Maomis are fetishized by dressing as one for her clients, she also represents the possibilities of collaboration between disparate groups.

Lai-le and the other Maomi of Masheng-duli jia are named after the cats that live/d in my household. Lai-le is named after the recently deceased Lyla, who was this old, deaf cat with no teeth and had a host of chronic health issues. In this incarnation, I took some of my laolao's life story and some of Lyla's experiences. Lai-le is a scientist who helped build the space ships that took the colony of Maomi to Earth and was part of the team that designed weizhi therapy. She (all the Maomi of Masheng-duli take on gendered, human pronouns for survival/cultural assimilation) also volunteered to be the first to try out weizhi therapy. Unfortunately, she has acquired a disability (deafness) and looks like a human/Maomi hybrid of a dark-skinned woman.

³ Dead name is slang used by trans people to refer to the name they were assigned at birth and no longer use. It is a dead name because some trans people consider

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She learns human sign language (ASL most likely) with the help of Ju-le who acts as her translator.

Ju-le experiences stigmatization based on his bodily configuration. He is part of the generation of Maomi who after weizhi therapy could pass for human effortlessly. The problem is that the body that he decided on was coded as undesirable in human society as a fat, man of colour. He was a qualified administrator prior to landing on Earth, but has been shunted aside by Maomi that appeared white, male, and non-fat. He takes care of the household and uses his skills for homemaking. Regardless of how his skills are valued, he finds ways to apply his skills in meaningful ways as some disabled people do.

Bing-kesi is from the generation that can pass for human and is aware of the hierarchy of bodies. He engages in sex work/barista-ing and provides the primary income for the household. He acts as a support person for Kong-balei along with Yenny by voicing the non-verbal things that have gone over Kong-balei's head. At the end, he also represents the possibilities for defiant queerness by gaining the ability to switch between full Maomi and human forms. This defiance is likely validated and supported by Bing-kesi's privilege of having a human form that is more palatable to human norms.

The final character is named Kelixi-na. This is the only real life person I have written directly into this story. Kelixi-na is based on someone who abused me, and I felt the need to process it in this story. The role of Kelixi-na is to demonstrate violence within communities. Ta experiences the same kind of stigma that Ju-le does, but unlike Ju-le, ta preyed on the young in tade jia and was kicked out for exploiting young, naive Maomi cubs. Kelixi-na coerces Kong-balei into non-consensual sex (work) with strange, human men much the same way I had been, but it ends better than it did for me. The rest of the jia comes to Kong-balei's defense like a

community should when it comes to survivors. They do not resort to the judicial system and tried to hold Kelixi-na accountable for tade actions. They then followed up with passing on the experience to other Maomi and then discover that Yenny had also been victimized by Kelixi-na, demonstrating that violence happens to more than just an individual's.

Gender and sexuality are complicated topics in this story. They are not like gender and sexual norms on Earth and are meant to de-stablize heteronormative, cissexist understandings of gender and sexuality in my settler colonial human culture. Many thousands of years ago, Maomi had distinct genders (which are unknown). When Maomi reproduced, they did it with Maomi of the same gender for the purpose of creating more same-gendered Maomi. But when different gendered Maomi reproduced, the gender of the child would be a mix of the parental units. Over time, more genetic mixing occurred until it no longer mattered what gender a Maomi was even while some Maomi maintained purist ideals. There was also a moment a hundred years ago when the Maomi, Maozhu-xi (another name Maozidong) started a revolution that banned discrimination based on fur colour. Maomi jia have a few designated roles integral to their survival. There are the Zhangbei who are the primary decision makers. There are Jianhurens who raise and teach the cubs and often assist the Zhangbei in making decisions for the jia. There are Yijiazhizhu who do work to keep the jia going and often double as protectors to the jia. There is a Meipo whose job is to assess and guide the Maomi of the jia towards beneficial relationships. There are a number of different types of relationships with no real restriction on the number of Maomi involved in any configuration. But typically, there aren't more than 2-3 unless a jia is particularly large. Maomi acknowledge mentorship relationships, romantic relationships, rivalry relationships, and kinship relationships. Procreative relationships are slightly different in that

they always happen in groups of 3. Obviously, all of these norms do not fit into human society very well, but do exist in some, often queer, facets of human society.

Methodology - Why Storytelling?

Stories can be told through interviews, artefacts, other forms of art, as well as through fiction writing. For my project, I have chosen to tell my story through the genre of science-fiction. Science-fiction gives the space to write the fantastical and the strange. To some, the way I experience life (being trans and disabled etc.) is strange and unreal. There is an underrepresentation of trans narratives and research, particularly of those who experience additional oppressions. In telling part of my own story using science-fiction genre conventions, my goal is to remedy this gap and to demonstrate how storytelling is a crucial tool for liberation of multiply marginalized people. I aim to elicit feelings of sympathy and empathy from the readers through fictionalized stories that weave together a few of my own stories and a few ways to resist oppression. I argue that stories can convey knowledge to an audience similarly to a traditional academic essay, but the knowledge conveyed is felt more than learned. This knowledge via feeling is also an effective way of conveying complex, intersectional lived experiences which I will discuss later.

As Thomas King (2008) says in *The Art of Indigenous Knowledge - A Million Porcupines Crying in the Dark*, "The truth about stories is that's all we are." Since stories can be based on our lives or the lives of those around us, stories are connected to our experiences. Eli Clare (1999) writes, "The body as home, but only if it is understood that bodies are never singular, but rather haunted, strengthened, underscored by countless other bodies" (p. 11). Stories - that are part of our bodies and lives - are connected. Clare refers to how identity and other social

formations tie our bodies and stories together. Even if they are not precisely the same, they are joined by what they do share. These stories produce valuable knowledge when the commonalities and divergences are examined. According to former sex worker and ethnographer Katherine Frank, “[stories] help work out problems for which I am unable to find the appropriate theoretical language or framework” (Banks, 2008, p. 161). The abstractions of theory do not always sit well within the body, but through stories knowledge of the body and embodied knowledge can become more intelligible.

As I previously argued, the body is made up of stories and the collection of multiple stories of similar bodies creates situated knowledges. Storytelling is a useful form of conveying knowledges particularly those that are from a marginalized position. Bochner and Ellis (2003) write that, “to make art is to participate in an activity, to do something” (p. 507). They explain that the process of making art is informed by the artist/writer’s identity. Additionally, the identity of the viewers influences how the art is interpreted and thus artist-researchers acknowledge the subjectivity of what can be seen, touched, and heard. Thus, knowledge is produced and shared with the viewer. Instead of putting forth a logical argument attempting to convince the reader/viewer, we can ask questions about what kinds of conversations can be had, what can be possible or impossible, or what kinds of feelings can be evoked. Lockridge and Richardson (1998) were interested in exploring how a text can, “inspire something beyond itself - more research, social action, a change in the reader” (p.328).

In my search for knowledge and stories that illuminate the Chinese side of my heritage, I found a Qing dynasty author named Li Ru Zhen exhumed in a feminist anthology. He was a scholar in dialogue with other scholars discussing the role of women in Chinese society at the time. Zhen wrote about a world where women were the rulers and men were made submissive.

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His satirical story was how he conveyed his critique of foot binding, the objectification of women, and the glorification of the submissive, docile woman (Zhen, 2002). I argue that Zhen's work embodies art (story writing) as a way to convey research and arguments. He is a Chinese man in dialogue with other Chinese men about the way they as men treat women, challenging his audience with a fictional story. His fictional story flips the gender roles around, so women act towards men the way men act towards women from his perspective. Through satirizing and storytelling, Zhen has produced an argument that attempts to evoke emotions (of outrage) from his audience in a way an essay cannot.

I feel like there is a lack of voices like mine. I see fragments of trans and disabled voices in some writing, but academia (especially outside of my bubble of queer/crip/racialization/feminist network) still feels saturated with white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied male voices positing themselves as "experts" and creators of knowledge. Pathak (2010) discusses how knowledge produced through autoethnography is often discredited and illegitimized as a form of academic knowledge. Pathak discusses how historically through systems of colonization, western, white, male knowledge was understood and validated as scientific, objective, universal, and true and that knowledge had to be "neutral" and rational. Autoethnography is an accessible tool to a lot of marginalized communities who may not have access to post-secondary education (Collins & Bilge 2016). When deployed by people from marginal positions and through that position, the knowledge produced challenges the neutrality and objectivity of knowledge. (Simpson, 2014).

Driskill (2010) explains how Two-Spirit knowing sees the arts (writing, dance, theatre, visual art, film) as valid forms of theory making by saying, "the only difference between a history, a theory, a poem, an essay, is the one that we have ourselves imposed (p. 82)." Due to

neoliberal, c(r)apitalist, colonial cultural hegemony, methods and voices which differ from the dominant power are invalidated.

What I am arguing is not remarkable or original. What is interesting about my work is how I am bringing attention to the value of the story as a way to convey complicated, subjugated knowledge. My story was heavily inspired by the film, *District 9* (Blomcamp, 2009), which is about an alien colony that crash lands on Earth and is segregated, bureaucratized, and are experimented on in order for humans to be able to use their tech for military prowess. The book *Wicked* (Maguire 1996) also inspired me because it uses green skin as a metaphor for the experience of abjection and the association of the abject with queerness, gender variance, and race. *Wicked's* world explores a number of racial issues through fictional nations that parallel issues around colonialism and orientalism in particular.

Both these narratives argue and explore issues as convincingly as an essay or report. Storytelling takes data compiled from research and conveys it in another format better digested by a larger audience. In both of the examples I provided, they took arguments or ideas and turned them into a fictionalized story. Through this section, I have argued how storytelling can be used as a way to convey knowledge much the same way a traditional essay can. In the next section of this essay, I will further explore how storytelling is a useful way to enact intersectionality.

Discussion On Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw contributed the term intersectionality in her essay, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”. Intersectionality makes knowable the experience of, “those who are multiply burdened” (Crenshaw, 1989). Yet intersectionality has been taken up in

ways that deviate from Crenshaw's original objective to address the unique oppressions faced by black women. Puar (2012) argues that intersectionality has been deployed as a feminist intervention to disrupt whiteness, but not so much as a critical race intervention to disrupt masculinity. This places gender/sexual difference as a constant and race as a variant thus positioning white women at the center (p. 51-52).

I argue Qwo-Li Driskill's (2010) metaphor of doubleweaving can be applied to de-center white women's importance and the importance of any single identity discipline. Doubleweaving is a Cherokee/Native Southeastern tradition that has roots in river cane weaving. It weaves together two complete baskets together so one is woven into the other but they share a rim. It is also used as a metaphor by Cherokee people to combine disparate ideas together.

Doubleweaving is also weaving together, "a story much more complex and durable than its original and isolated splints" (2010, p. 74). Doubleweaving weaves complete stories together which is like how I weave identities together. Identities are embodied and can be conveyed together as intersecting, woven stories.

In *Feline (R)Evolution*, I weave many small moments from my life into a fictional narrative. I aim to be able to articulate the many struggles that make up my life and others who share parts of my identity and experiences. Through the weaving the numerous layers within the story, I hope to elicit a response from the readers where they can understand in their bones what it means to have multiple barriers going against you at once. I want the reader to understand the complexities of what it feels like to be, "one who is multiply burdened" as Crenshaw (1989) has said. I want to elicit feelings of sympathy and empathy from the readers and challenge their ways of thinking about oppression. I want readers to know the tensions and contradictions that I live with.

The Dangers of Normalcy

In addition to discussing intersectional theory, I think it is important to talk about systems of normalcy, the forces that are trying to maintain hierarchies where some groups are deemed, “normal” and others, “not normal”. This can manifest as discrimination, exclusion, neglect, abuse. Normalcy though is pervasive, ephemeral, and hard to pin down. For example, in my hapless search for paid employment, I often ask myself, “Am I being discriminated against? Which ways is it today? How many ways am I experiencing discrimination?” These questions are not easily answered. What I do know is that there are not many trans women in the community in paid positions of leadership, fewer still who are disabled or non-white. I feel forever unable to compete with or attain the status and privilege of white, cisgender, able bodied, thin, Christian, neurotypical, middle class, middle aged, heterosexual men. They are the ones who are deemed normal and worthy of jobs and status as a human being. They represent the mythical norm that Audre Lorde wrote about (Lorde, 1984). The mythical norm refers to this unattainable goal (of whiteness, of able bodiedness, of heteronormativity, etc.) that is held up against every person. The mythical norm is designed to be impossible for certain people (aka, marginalized people) to attain.

The more intersecting oppressions someone faces, the more mythical and unattainable normalcy is for them. Gloria Anzaldua’s concept of mestiza consciousness (Anzaldua 1987) is a concept that gives marginalized people meaning and value to their identities and takes away from the systems of normalcy. Mestiza consciousness posits that racial mixing does not dilute or spoil traits, (like whiteness) but instead it creates a rich gene pool with many possibilities (Anzaldua, 1987). It recognizes the struggle of being within the margins, between the cracks and straddling many borders. It breaks down and puts into question the duality of identity and of dynamics of

oppression because I would argue that most of us have some experience as both oppressor and oppressed and our experiences bleed into each other.

In *Critical Disability Studies*, Rosemarie Garland Thomson's concept of the normate⁴ and the misfit (Thomson, 2001), enrich Audre Lorde's mythical norm. The normate refers to, "the constructed identity of those who, by the way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them. If one attempts to define the normate position by peeling away all the marked traits within the social order at this historical moment, what emerges is a very narrowly defined profile that describes only a minority of actual people" (Thomson, 1997, p. 8). The normate draws attention to the bodies that are deemed normal, valued, and privileged (and incidentally, a minority of the vast human experience) while the mythical norm posits the normate as an unattainable ideal for many people.

Thomson describes the misfit as a product of the dominant construction of space: "The built and arranged space through which we navigate our lives tends to offer fits to majority bodies and functioning and create misfits with minority forms of embodiment, such as people with disabilities" (Thomson, 2011, p. 594). The misfit looks at the systems that code bodies as outside the norm and do not fit in. "A fit occurs when a harmonious, proper interaction occurs between a particularly shaped and functioning body and an environment that sustains that body. A misfit occurs when the environment does not sustain the shape and function of the body that enters it" (Thomson, 2011, p. 594). The misfit starts with the body that is marginalized, that is forgotten, undesirable, and abject. From this position, *mestiza consciousness* can be applied. In

⁴ This concept was originally suggested by a colleague of RGT's, Sociologist, Daryl Evans at an informal talk at the 1989 Society for Disability Studies Annual Conference in Denver.

this space of margins, complexity, of mis-fitting, subjugated, isfit experiences and knowledge can produce a kind of knowledge outside of the norm, the normate.

Story Conclusions

Throughout, I have worked towards arguing the relevance of arts and especially story-based knowledge production and how intersectionality *fits* into storytelling knowledge production. We are surrounded by stories. We turn on the TV, click on You Tube/Youku, we pick up a book, comic and there is a story. The issue with the stories that we see around us is that they rarely represent bodies and experiences that mis-fit, that fail to attain the mythical norm. The reins of knowledge production are in the hands of those who are the normate and it is a struggle to get normate people to even acknowledge one facet of misfitting let alone multiple.

Feline (R)Evolution is meant to be my act of resistance. I am weaving together splinters of my misfitting identity and making something meaningful to me. I am writing a story because it lets me make knowable intersectional lived experiences. I embed shards of myself in each character and into the story as an act of defiance against the normate-dominated media. I create stories that are authentic to my experience as a marginalized person where I create meaning and value for people who are marginalized similarly to me. This project has been a messy, ambivalent, and frustrating process. But the point of double-weaving and mestiza consciousness is bring together disparate, marginalized perspectives together.

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Boom! The jarring whine of the siren and the bright, red flashing lights kicked in jolted Kong-balei out of tade sleep. Ta fell out of the nest of threadbare blankets ta made on the bed clutching tade pointed, feline ears in pain. Ta rolled under the bed curled up in a ball and not even the security of tade fluffy tail guarding tade face was enough to ward away the noise and lights. It felt like tade brain was bleeding out of tade ears. Never in endless yue that ta had been imprisoned in this forsaken place had something like this magnitude ever happened. Not even the tests the humans did on ta.

Fragments of sounds intruded in on tade mind. Yowls of pain, skittering claws on cement, the crescendo of confusion and fear, the thuds of human feet on cement, and shouting overwhelmed tade's senses. Ta keened in pain trying to melt into the cool cement wall at tade back. Was this another test that the humans were doing? What were they testing for this time? Staying put when ta could escape? Ta was pretty sure that there were maomi escaping into the halls judging by the sounds and smell... If only Kong-balei was strong enough to break the metal bars like some of the older, larger maomi had done.

A loud creak of protesting metal punctured Kong-balei's thoughts and ta howled in protest. The humans had come! They were going to hurt ta more!

"Come on tongzhi! Escape while you still can!" A hoarse voice said puncturing over the noise. Through the chaos of Kong-balei's thoughts, ta noticed that the voice felt like a Jianhuren from tade jia, Nuchua-zhuyi jia. Tade favourite Jianhuren, Jie-xika always told off the other cubs that teased Kong-balei for being awkward and introspective. Kong-balei remembered the taste of savoury yuyuan that Jie-xika made especially for ta and Jie-xika's gentle scenting and that bright moment helped Kong-balei ground taself back to reality.

Carefully, Kong-balei unfurled tasef and opened tade eyes and the silhouette of a towering figure loomed where the cell door used to be. Ta sighed in relief as tension slipped from tade shoulders to see a maomi instead of a human. Ever since coming to this laboratory, Kong-balei felt that any maomi was tongzhi regardless of what jia they came from. Ta was dragged out by the scruff of tade neck like a Jianhuren would to a small cub. *It was just a little embarrassing*, Kong-balei thought. *I am too old for this...*

Kong-balei barely had time to process who this unknown maomi was before ta was released from the maomi's jaws and slung over a large, muscled shoulder. Kong-balei tried tade best to keep tade ears flattened to block out the ringing alarm, keeping one of tade very human-looking hands fisted into the back fur of tade rescuer. Ta still felt odd about having human fingers and hands, even if opposable thumbs let ta do more than claws would. Ta had only undergone weizhi therapy a scant nian ago.

"Sorry tongzhi for picking you up without asking," rumbled the unknown maomi "You'll thank me later when we're alive and free of this place." The two moved through hallways flanked by cages full of meowing and yowling, human doctors frantically scurrying, and other escaping Maomi in a panicked search of an exit. Kong-balei, on the other hand, was glad that ta was rescued by this older, larger maomi. Ta witnessed a group of humans firing their weapons at a maomi that looked Kong-balei's age who silently fell to the floor tawny eyes vacant. That could have been ta. It felt like Kong-balei's savior had been loping through endless halls searching for a way out for a yue when Kong-balei could suddenly smell fresh air, pavement, and trees. Ta yipped and flapped excitedly pointing in the direction the tantalizing smell came from.

With a shoulder check to the door, they were free! They were free from the many, many yue that they had been captured. Earth's yellow sun blinded both of them momentarily, making

both of their eyes dilate into slits. There was a loud bang not far behind them. Kong-balei screamed and tade heart raced, nearly jumping out of the larger maomi's grip. The larger maomi didn't flinch. Ta loped away from the building. Both passed a stretch of dazzlingly green grass, and Kong-balei felt the other maomi's muscles coil tightly before jumping right over a barbed metal fence. Kong-balei's senses were awash with the scent of green, leafy trees, the sounds of birds singing, and the steady hum of life. It was intoxicating and made Kong-balei feel like ta was flying and free for the first time in tade life. As the larger maomi kept the steady rhythm of coiling and retracting muscles, the white stone building they had been trapped in became smaller and smaller, soon replaced by the brilliant emeralds of leaves and the perfume of growing vegetation. There were trees as far as Kong-balei could see. The sounds of humming, chirping, and the sighing of wind, actual wind, brushing through the trees was far preferable to what Kong-balei had left behind. Ta giggled suddenly and took deep lungfuls of earth and fresh, warm air.

It had been a very long time since ta had felt connected to the land. This land that ta had been born on was alien, but still home. The larger maomi gently lowered Kong-balei against the base of a large tree, ta promptly burying tade human toes in the cool grass purring for the first time in a nian. Kong-balei recalled the Meipo telling stories about how the planet they came from had been polluted by their ancestors, and ta felt very fortunate to grow up on a world with a beating pulse.

Kong-balei finally had a chance to get a good look at tade savior. The maomi was broad-shouldered and brawny, covered in white fur with thankfully padded paws and long tail. Tade arms, on the other hand, were long and straight like a human. Tade torso was human, but different than Kong-balei's –very muscled, though tade mammary glands were smaller and

flatter. And there was nothing visible at the meeting point between tade legs. Maomi reproductive organs were internal until needed to join with two other organs during mating. The only difference between this maomi's face and one who hadn't undergone weizhi therapy was that ta had long, curly white fur on top of tade head like a human. Kong-balei guessed that ta was from the second wave of weizhi therapy before it had been corrected to produce more consistently human appearances. Kong-balei looked mostly human, but still retained tade tail, a line of fur from tade head to tail, ears, and eyes.

Kong-balei bit back a momentary fear response from the association of whiteness and death, which hung around all white-pelted Maomi. Especially since Kong-balei was a calico, white maomi were twice as as frightening. Since the Revolution and the Exodus, pelt colour was not supposed to impact a tongzhi's treatment, but it still happened.

"For the moment, we are safe tongzhi," the White maomi said as ta sank to the soft grass, paws tucked under tade torso.

"W-what is your name, tongzhi? T-thank you for saving me! Y-y-you did not have to... You could have saved yourself," Kong-balei looked down at the ground and fidgeted with tade tail.

"Tongzhi, I am named Bai-lengden of Tong-xinglian jia. I could not just leave you in your cell when I heard your whimpering... You sounded so much like one of my jia's cubs when they were taken away by the humans to attend a place called school. We never saw them again." Bai-lengden dug tade claws into the earth and closed tade amber eyes.

Kong-balei slunk over to Bai-lengden's side and nuzzled tade flanks. "Thank you... I'm sorry that your jia's cubs are all gone. I'm grateful that you freed me... I had almost forgotten

what hope felt like. The humans hurt me so often with their experiments...” Kong-balei lapsed into silence for a moment and then said, “I want to find my jia.”

“I do not know if my jia is alive anymore. The human governing body called the UN sent them to another city. They said it was to relieve the burden of having too many maomi in the city. Still, they left me here. I have not seen them since I was young like you, back when we maomi had first crashed on this planet. Eventually I was taken by the humans and have been in their *laboratory* ever since.”

Kong-balei looked up at tade companion, completely engrossed in the story. Ta had been born on Earth, but the Jianhuren and Zhangbei told stories about the homeworld, Zhong-huaminguo, and the importance of jia.

Kong-balei remembered the ancient stories tade had heard about a black maomi named Maozhu-xi. Two hundred nian ago, maomi was organized by pelt colour. The story was told like a legend, like something from a distant past. White maomi once claimed they were better than everyone else. They fought other maomi, but all maomi disowned maomi with multicoloured pelts. Maozhu-xi wanted to put a stop to these injustices. Leaving behind tade kin, ta found and organized the outcast tabbies, calicos, the tortoiseshells. They dedicated their lives to stopping the fighting. During the peak of a battle, Maozhu-xi died saving a cache of hidden white maomi cubs that were about to be killed by another black maomi. Maozhu-xi’s sacrifice confused the black maomi. Why did one of tade own kind save the cubs of another pelt?

The puzzled black maomi told the rest of their kin after the battle of what happened, and everyone was confused too. It was said that a ginger maomi spy overheard the story of Maozhu-xi and brought the story back to tade kin. They, too, were perplexed. The story spread like wildfire to every kin group on Zhong-huaminguo.

Maozhu-xi's death ended the war. Tade selfless act changed the hearts and minds of all the maomi who heard the story. Maomi were and still are the most intelligent beings on the planet, but somehow it had never occurred to them as a species that there were other ways of co-existing with each other.

Everyone, even the white maomi, found that continuing the war was ridiculous, but they weren't sure of how to heal ingrained prejudices after nian of assault. Great talks happened, with no resolution in sight. Life still went on. There were cubs to care for and food to be gathered. Most of the younger maomi left to hunt for food and care for the cubs, leaving the older, often wiser maomi to do the thinking. After many yue, someone (it was never recorded who) realized that the way they had been living recently had worked well for all maomi. So many new bonds had been created, and this became what was known as jia. It worked and continued to work like it had for the past 100 nian. Being in a jia meant that one was connected to many others caring for and being cared by each other. And to be without a jia... was unthinkable—until the humans began to intervene. Until the experiments began to take us all.

“I know my jia is in a city nearby, I think. My home had a big, pointy tower coming from a white dome. That was where I was taken from, Kong-balei said earnestly. ”I want to find them again.”

“I think you mean Duo-lunduo. I could travel with you if you wanted. If we find your jia, they can tell me where Tong-xinglian jia was taken to,” Bai-lengden suggested.

Kong-balei's stomach rumbled. Ta placed one of tade tan coloured hands on tade belly and giggled. “I just realized for the first time in forever... I'm hungry. I'm actually hungry!”

Bai-lengden was about to reply when tade feline ears picked up a loud, thwacking noise coming from the sky. Ta quickly looked around, but it was Kong-balei that spotted the small flying machine, what the humans called a “helicopter”, rising from the wretched laboratory.

Forgetting about tade hunger, Kong-balei scrambled up onto tade legs and scampered up a nearby tree.

“Hide! They’ll catch you if you don’t!” Kong-balei shouted at Bai-lengden from tade leafy hiding place. The white maomi jumped to tade paws and hid behind another tree. Kong-balei covered tade hypersensitive maomi ears quivering, hoping that the helicopter would just leave and stop being so noisy. Ta was overwhelmed by sounds a lot easier than other maomi. It was part of why ta was so easily captured by humans in a helicopter just like this.

* * *

Kong-balei was different from the other maomi cubs. Ta wasn’t sure how to interact with cubs tade age and much rather preferred spending time with the Jianhuren and Zhangbei. Ta liked listening to stories and learn about the world. Zhangbei Kai-le stressed to be careful around humans. Ta had heard stories of other maomi jia that humans abducted cubs and forced them to attend to a special “school”. The humans said that the cubs needed a proper education. One maomi cub that had managed to escape back to tade jia told them how the humans taught the cubs to hide tade maomi features, and even openly favoured those who looked most human. Everything cubs inherently followed were beaten out of them: scent, mewl, yowl, meow, or bat a paw/hand at things. Many, many died, and those who survived were *were afraid to speak of what happened*.

When Kong-balei first heard the story, tade asked Zhangbei Kai-le why the maomi didn’t return back to home to Zhonghua-minguo. Zhangbei Kai-le gravely spoke that the ship they had all arrived on was unrepairable, not without new materials, and was eventually destroyed to prevent humans from stealing their technology. It also didn’t help that and Zhonghua-minguo

was almost uninhabitable. After Maozhu-xi's revolution, the maomi population ballooned. In the two hundred nian since, the planet became overpopulated and all of their resources were gone. That's what inevitably led to the Exodus.

This answer didn't make sense to the young Kong-balei. Surely there must be more to this. Why would humans being so cruel? Ta sought out the eldest and wisest Zhangbei in Nuquan-zhuyi jia, Zhangbei Bei-la. Bei-la explained that when the maomi crash landed on Earth, a delegation of humans from the global leadership group called the *Yu-en* promised asylum on Earth. Maomi were scattered across the planet—the humans sold it as a way to equally distribute the resources of Earth. It made sense at the time, and maybe the maomi should have taken this as a clue that something was wrong.

Nuquan-zhuyi jia was placed in a country that Zhangbei Bei-le called, "Jia-nada." One would think having the word for "family" in the state's name would be auspicious, but it was not. A jia called Department of Alien Affairs came and visited Nuquan-zhuyi jia and said they were here on behalf of Jia-nada to support their interstellar brothers and sisters. They placed Nuquan-zhuyi jia in an isolated area far away from human civilization. The soil there was filled with poisons, and the air tasted of pain and suffering. The water was filled with human garbage. The humans had literally disposed of Nuquan-zhuyi jia in their landfill. Thankfully, Nuquan-zhuyi jia shortly abandoned the land they were placed on. They eventually journeyed to a city that Kong-balei knew as *Duo-lunduo*, found a place for the jia, and used their weizhi therapy to take on humanoid forms in hopes of blending better with the humans.

Despite undergoing therapy, Kong-balei failed to pass for human. Tade tail, ears, and eyes were still very maomi and further therapy was no longer an option. It was a one time deal. If ta hid all of their maomi features and wore human eye contacts, Kong-balei could pass

sometimes—but it was conditional at best. Human Jianhuren would pull their cubs closer when ta walked past and gave a withering glance at Kong-balei. Some called ta a “faggot” and push ta to the ground. Then there was the human Zhangbei who yelled to, “go back where you came from”. None of this made sense to Kong-balei. What made ta so angry with tade?

Eventually, Kong-balei met a human named Dr. Tucker who provided ta with food in exchange for Kong-balei’s stories. Something about him smelled faintly of lust, anger, and desperation, but his kindness won ta over. At least Dr. Tucker cared about helping maomi.

But this trust was short lived. During Kong-balei’s last visit with Dr. Tucker, another human stepped into the room. Immediately, tade smelled something wrong. The human said *he* was from the Department of Alien Affairs, and wanted to thank Kong-balei for confirming Nuquan-zhuyi jia was the jia that left their land graciously given to them. Without another word, the human lunged at Kong-balei, forcing tade forearms behind tade back. A cool, metal slid around tade wrists. Kong-balei was dragged out of the facility and into a helicopter on top of Dr. Tucker’s building. *Thwack. Thwack. Thwack.* The noise of that helicopter rattled inside Kong-balei mind over and over. Ta was so naive and trusting. Why didn't ta sense Tucker’s bad intentions in the first place?

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Bai-lengden shouted up the tree to where Kong-balei was cowering, “I’ll lure the human away. You can make it to the city. It is a day’s run away. Follow your nose.”

Kong-balei shook tade head. “No, you hide, I’ll run. It’s my fault that you’re here. Besides, I’m smaller, faster, and my colour blends easier in the foliage.” Ta sprang out of the tree without waiting for an answer. The helicopter followed ta, leaving Bai-lengden alone.

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Kong-balei collapsed into a bush. Ta was pretty sure that the helicopter was nearby, its roar still hovering ominously. Second ticked by into minutes; it felt like hours before the thwack thwack of the helicopter became softer. Kong-balei panted and tried to lick tade fur instinctually, but there wasn't much left since weizhi therapy. Tade heart rate slowed, and tade adrenaline levels leveled. Ta crawled out of the hiding space, picked up Bai-lengden's warm scent, and followed it to a small grove of trees where the white maomi crouched by one of the tree trunks.

"You're alright! I'm glad..." Kong-balei called out when ta caught up with Bai-lengden.

The larger, older maomi smiled softly and nodded, "Thanks to you. You were very brave to lead the helicopter away. You saved my life. I guess this means we are even..."

Kong-balei's tail swayed nervously and looked a little puffier. "I know this is unusual since we aren't part of the same jia... But could we travel... Like we are jia?"

"Of course. may I call you XiaoKong?" Bai-lengden replied respectfully.

"XiaoKong... I like that. Does that mean I can call you DaBai?"

"That is fine with me." Now that they had assured the other was safe, Bai-lengden's scent became just a little warmer and brighter, like ta was glad to have jia once again.

Ta smiled mysteriously and said, "Now that that is settled, I managed to catch a small, warm blooded creature with long ears for us to eat. I saw it while the helicopter was flying away and broke their legs. Ta are stashed in a hole in the tree and are still breathing."

Kong-balei's eyes lit up, ta smiled showing off tade tiny human teeth, and jumped up doing a backflip like an oversized cub. "Fresh prey! I haven't had fresh prey in many nian!"

"They taste a lot like tuzi from our world."

“I was born here so I wouldn’t know... Will you tell me more about Zhonghua-minguo?”

Kong-balei exclaimed, bouncing on tade heels, pawing in tade companion’s direction.

“Perhaps later. When we are well fed and away from this accursed place. I don’t think the humans will try to capture us again tonight. We can start off for the human city at first light,” Bai-lengden said.

The two maomi retired to the tree containing two prey. Kong-balei picked them up in tade hands and gently placed them on the ground. Bai-lengden watched with interest, tade tail swishing back and forth as the mammals hobbled away. That’s when Kong-balei and Bai-lengden pounced. Kong-balei tasted terror as tade mouth closed around the rabbit’s neck and, with some effort, breaking it before starting to feed. Bai-lengden straight up eviscerated tade rabbit. Kong-balei envied ta for still having sharp teeth and claws.

After a long day of their first taste of freedom, they both found a moderately soft spot in the grass and curled up separately. But before long, Kong-balei crawled tade way over to Bai-lengden’s side and curled up against the white maomi’s larger, furry flank. For the first time in many yue, Kong-balei felt safe.

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Duo-lunduo was the same as ta remembered it. It was dirty, smelled perpetually of dead fish and disdain that pervaded most of its human population. Kong-balei hoped that tade jia still lived in the old, abandoned worship building that they had found and taken over. Bai-lengden caught up to the younger, more agile Kong-balei panting.

“You must be getting old, DaBai,” Kong-balei teased.

“I’m not old, XiaoKong, you are just full of energy. You should be hunting with that kind of energy.” Bai-lengden wheezed. The admonishment wasn’t very effective.

“You’re right. It just means that I’d have better stamina during mating,” Kong-balei smiled cheekily and blushed, quickly changed the subject. “Can we try to find my jia first? I think I can find where we lived.”

Bai-lengden blushed awkwardly, but quickly composed tade expression. “Of course, XiaoKong. If you have only been gone for a few yue, they may still very well be there. When we find your jia, I would like to ask around if anyone has seen mine.”

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The old building for idol worship had been abandoned when Nuquan-zhuyi jia found it. In fact, most of the neighbourhood had been abandoned except for another jia of maomi and a few humans. It had once been a busy, prosperous neighbourhood in the early yue. Within a couple nian, most of the humans left and the area fell into disrepair. It wasn’t uncommon for a human or maomi end up dead, And the Department of Alien Affairs jia did nothing to stop this. Zhangbei Kai-le said that humans always abandoned a neighbourhood wherever maomi started living there. Ta called it “human flight”.

“It smells like no one has been here in a long time,” Bai-lengden commented as they carefully skirted the rotting body of a dead Maomi, ta face down with a hole through tade head. They climbed the short flight of crumbling steps to the building, passing below a now headless statue of a human deity.

“Hello? Anyone there? Jiexi-ka? Zhangbei Bei-la? Zhangbei Kai-le?” Kong-balei called out while pushing the dilapidated door open. The cracked tiled floors were covered in a layer of dust except for little claw prints of rodents. “No one is here... What happened here?”

Bai-lengden pushed Kong-balei behind ta and took the lead. Ta walked like a Yijiazhizhu on the hunt—graceful, lithe, and soundless, but ready to strike at a moment’s notice. Gone was Bai-lengden’s easy warm scent; It was replaced with something harder, of copper and fear.

Kong-balei took a deep breath and paused. “I smell fear. And pain. Something bad happened,” ta said while glancing around the place nervously. Memories came flooding back as ta passed a hallway of rooms. The room that stored food, was where the cubs practiced hunting rats under the guidance of a Jianhuren. The wooden booth was the remains of a nest where a newly mated triad once prepared for gestation. But if anyone was still living in the building, they had to be in the biggest room lined with the multicoloured glass windows. Without alerting Bai-lengden, Kong-balei ran up a flight of stairs, turned around a bend, and burst through its double wooden doors.

Bai-lengden caught up to the frozen Kong-balei and nuzzled at the young calico maomi’s shoulder. Kong-balei stood stricken as ta viewed the scene before ta. The windows had been smashed letting half-decomposed leaves in. The benches that the jia slept on were smashed into jagged splinters. And there was blood. Old blood. Claw marks and holes from human weapons were covered in the walls. And on the dais at the front of the room, away from most of the carnage, laid a figure curled up asleep in a pile of patchwork blankets.

The two maomi slunk towards the unknown figure. Kong-balei was confused. The figure smelled human, but looked somewhat maomi? But they were within leaping distance and the figure hadn’t sensed or heard them. Any maomi should have felt the two of them by now.

“Ertong, where are you from?” Bai-lengden said in maomi.

The figure woke suddenly screaming and scrambling back to the nearest wall.

“Don’t eat me!” the figure wailed in human.

It dawned on Kong-balei that the figure wasn't maomi. But how how did ta look like one ?

“We're not going to eat you. What are you?” Bai-lengden asked pitching tade voice lower and softer.

“A maomi! ...Actually, just a human that dresses as a maomi. Y'know. For work.” the human said.

Both maomi frowned staring at the human puzzled who looked furtively around for an escape. “What do you mean for work?” Bai-lengden asked moving closer.

Kong-balei noticed for the first time that this human was probably close to tade age... The human scrambled away again, this time behind a broken chair. Ta shared a lot of features with Kong-balei's human form. The human was a lot skinnier, had even less fur on tade body than Kong-balei, and impossibly dark eyes. Human eyes.

“I mean that men pay to fuck me and pretend I'm a maomi. They call themselves Maomens. What? Never seen a sex worker before?” the human retorted, putting tade hands on tade hips.

Bai-lengden and Kong-balei gave each other a confused look, faced the human, and shook their heads.

The human rolled their eyes and fidgeted with the back of the chair. Then, they adjusted the black maomi ear attachments on top of tade head and said, “Great. Are you two some of those high class maomis like that Kai-tali. She says she represents all maomi, but she knows nothing. Fuck her.”

The two maomi looked at each other again, mirroring each other's scrunched eyebrows. Finally, Kong-balei asked, “What are you? Are sex workers human? What are sex workers?”

“Human? Not all of us. I’m friends with a few sex workers who are maomi. It sounds like neither of you know what a sex worker is so. Usually human men—although we do get some rich maomi and human women—pay gals like me to engage in human mating. We call it fucking- with them, or y’know, other things. I’m actually better at the other things.” the human rambled, tade cheeks pinked.

“That’s nothing to be ashamed of. I did not recognize that human word. We would call you a jinu. Forgive our rude introduction before, but what is your name?” Bai-lengden asked.

“My real name? Lei Yong. But my friends call me Yenny. I have other names, but they don’t matter.” Yenny said.

“Yenny... I am Bai-lengden. My tongzhi’s name is Kong-balei. Forgive our bewilderment, but we have not been in this city for many y—I mean, months. We are in search of our jia. Kong-balei’s used to stay here. Perhaps you know where they are?” Bai-lengden asked.

“A jia? Staying here? Huh... Makes sense. Well, no one’s lived here in many yue as you would say. I just decided to crash here a couple nights ago. It looks like there was a big fight here. Bet it was the goons from the DAA.”

“Please, Yenny. Do you have any idea where they could be?” Kong-balei asked, stepping forward. Tade ears folded back in submission and ta looked up at the human. “I fear for my jia’s safety.”

And for a moment, Yenny smelled like sweetness. Kong-balei had no idea what that meant. “Well... I think I might know someone,” Yenny replied. “He’s a maomi sex worker like me. And chooses to use he/him pronouns. His entire entire jia adopted human pronouns as a

survival mechanism. He knows a lot of people. It's about time that I hung out with him anyways.”

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They arrived in a neighbourhood that had more humans in it. There were some maomi walking together, mostly in clumps for safety, but still there were more humans. It didn't smell quite as strongly of death. Kong-balei sensed tremendous stress, but there was hope, exhaustion, and ta could feel the warm radiance of quanjia. The trio made their way into what Yenny described as a “Maomi Admirers Cafe” and went up a flight of stairs at the back. They knocked on a door and a ginger human answered the door. This human smelled like maomi, unlike Yenny.

“Bing-kesi isn't home,” the human said while closing the door.

Yenny stuck tade black boot in the door and retorted, “Ju-le, this isn't about work! I have two lost maomi looking for help. Could they please come in and have a meeting with Zhangbei Lai-le?”

Ju-le the human stuck tade head out of the door and scented the air. They looked over Bai-lengden and Kong-balei, then finally stepped aside. As Ju-le bowed, tade said “Welcome to Nanxing-bianyi jia. I am Ju-le. If you would follow me, I will take you to Zhangbei Lai-le.”

As the two were led into Nanxing-bianyi jia's home by Ju-le, Kong-balei felt confused. How was this human part of a jia? Ta wasn't opposed to the idea, but was Ju-le human? Or Maomi? Was Ju-le another sex worker like Yenny? Ever since weizhi therapy was perfected, it was hard to tell the difference between human and maomi. This seemed different, though. Had weizhi progressed to the point where Maomi can appear seamlessly human?

Nanxing-bianyi jia's home was filled with boxes and food supplies. Ju-le mentioned they were supplies for the cafe downstairs and to be careful not to touch them; the store owners would get angry and then kick them out.

Zhangbei Lai-le was a black tortoiseshell maomi lounging comfortably in a nest of blankets and sunlight, as if she were in the softest of materials. Ta, like most maomi, had clearly undergone weizhi therapy. Unlike most maomi, Lai-le had a full coat of fur and only a vaguely humanoid shape. The skin on tade face was a gorgeous blue-black, and ta had mostly human hands and feet.

Kong-balei and Bai-lengden paid their respects to the Zhangbei of the jia by grooming tade fur and scenting ta. Kong-balei soon realized how old Zhangbei Lai-le was, astounded by the echo of wisdom, courage, and passion that ta discerned from the Zhangbei's scent. "Zhangbei Lai-le, I'm Kong-balei of Nuquan-zhuyi jia." Kong-balei pointed at tade companion. "This is Bai-lengden of Tong-xinglian jia."

Kong-balei frowned and murred tilting tade head to the side as Ju-le made tiny motions with tade very human fingers while holding eye contact with Zhangbei Lai-le. Lai-le was watching Ju-le and returned with her slower, clumsier hand gestures.

"Ju-le, what do these hand gestures you are doing with Zhangbei Lai-le?" Bai-lengden sighed, confused and concerned. "I have never seen such a thing before."

Ju-le's hands made shapes in the air too fast for Kong-balei's brain to recognize and finally replied, "This is a human language called Sign Language. Zhangbei Lai-le lost her ability to hear. Scenting and written language wasn't enough for her to communicate, so we had to find another way. This is what I found. I would ask you two to kindly speak slowly and clearly so I can translate."

When Ju-le finished translating, Kong-balei motioned for Bai-lengden to do the talking.

“We are in search of our jia. Until yesterday, we were locked up inside a human laboratory where the humans ‘research to better human/maomi relations’,” explained Bai-lengden. “I was a part of a group that hatched a plan to escape furtively when the humans were not watching. A few of my tongzhi managed to overpower the human scientists and flipped many switches or broke screens. This opened the doors to most of the cells holding maomi, letting many escape. It was both pandemonium and freeing. I picked up Kong-balei on the way, who was unable to escape alone. Ta looked and sounded like a young cub and I could not fail another cub like the ones I took care of in my jia. Our journey back to this city, Duo-lunduo, was uneventful. We traveled to a synagogue that apparently housed Nuquan-zhuyi jia at some point. There we met the human, Yenny who told us that no one had lived here for a long time. and brought us here.”

It was silent as Ju-le translated for them. Then finally, ta said translating for Zhangbei Lai-le, “Your story is equal parts tragic and hopeful for our kind. Humans are unusually cruel to those they do not understand. Unfortunately, I haven’t heard anything about Nuquan-zhuyi jia, but I know that Tong-xinglian jia is no longer in Duo-lunduo. They left the city a nian ago. I’m sorry that I can’t help you, but I would like to offer our meager home as a place for you two to stay.”

Kong-balei smiled weakly and pawed at Bai-lengden excitedly. “Thank you very much for your kindness!” Ta blurted out. “But what can we do to help out?”

“We would appreciate if you could find work of some kind to help support Nanxing-bianyi jia during your stay. It additionally catches two laoshu with one paw and gives you a chance to meet people who may know where your jia are,” Ju-le said translating for Lai-le.

“But it was because of work that I ended up in the laboratory in the first place! I don’t want to talk to Dr. Tucker again!” Kong-balei mewed.

Ju-le’s eyes widen and tade pupils turn to slits. “...You talked with Dr. Tucker? I’m sorry about that. He’s an evil, evil man. He calls himself an expert on maomi, but his papers only say what he believes. Dr. Tucker believes we are beasts without the ability to reason properly. We lost half of our jia to his ‘experiments’. His work suggests that since we resemble the Earth animal called a ‘cat’, we can eat low-grade processed meat put into metal cans which humans call ‘food’.”

“So that’s the cans that the guards kept on banging against the bars of my cage! They kept on saying, ‘Here kitty kitty, I’ve got some meat for you!’ while leering at me.” Kong-balei exclaimed.

Bai-lengden looked at Kong-balei awkwardly and said hesitantly, “You know that the humans were trying to non-consensually engage in mating with you, right?”

Kong-balei was shocked by that revelation. Ta knew ta wasn’t aware of a lot what went on around ta, but had never thought of something like that being suggested.

“Back on topic please!” Ju-le interrupted Kong-balei’s thoughts.

But before Ju-le could continue further, another ginger human (maomi?) walked into the room. Yenny trailing behind ta.

“Yenny said that we have guests! And then I heard something about finding work? What’s going on? Are the guests going to stay with us? Are any of them any cute and looking for mating partners?” the second ginger human/maomi said loudly.

Yenny’s palm smacked into tade face and ta sighed. “Kong-balei, Bai-lengden. Meet Bing-kesi. I work with him. He’s the third and last member of this jia.”

Bing-kesi took in the two new guests carefully smiling brightly. *He* sauntered over to Kong-balei and Bai-lengden's sides, greeted them with an informal scenting, and looked both of them over lasciviously.

"How is it that you and Ju-le look like humans? I've never seen anyone pass as well as both of you do!" Kong-balei asked.

Ju-le answered that question on behalf of Lai-le. "She says that weizhi therapy has come a long way. Now anyone who undergoes it can become convincing human, though we discovered that humans react differently towards different kinds of their own bodies."

Bai-lengden, now curious, saddled beside Ju-le and asked *him* to continue. Ju-le practically preened that someone actually wanted him to actually speak more.

"Well, Zhangbei Lai-le was part of the group of Zhangbei who created weizhi therapy. In fact, she volunteered to be the first one to undergo the procedure. But there was an accident and Zhangbei Lai-le lost her hearing and teeth. Obviously, weizhi therapy has improved significantly over the nian."

Kong-balei's mind gradually tuned out Ju-le's self-righteous speech. Ta looked around and saw Zhangbei Lai-le watching Ju-le's hands raptly. Bing-kesi and Yenny retired to a corner chatting quietly and giggling over something.

"... skin colour and certain shapes are more acceptable than others..."

Ta wondered what Yenny and Bing-kesi were talking about. Kong-balei walked over to them and chirped. The two made space in the pile of blankets that they were nesting in and Kong-balei plopped down beside Yenny.



Bing-kesi looked over at Kong-balei with interest and nudged Yenny. “Ju-le likes to think he’s important. He’s not all bad though. He convinced Zhangbei Lai-le to adopt me into Nanxing-bianyi jia. He sometimes says important things, so try to listen.”

Kong-balei looked away embarrassed and wordlessly turned to face Ju-le again.

“My rounder, darker skinned body, although human, still receives harassment by humans. Bing-kesi doesn’t at all because of his light skin and thinner frame, *purposefully acts like a Maomi in public*, and refuses to find high paying jobs to support the jia.”

Bing-kesi rolled his eyes and growled, “I like my work. I like chatting with humans that know I’m maomi and might take me home with them. It makes enough for us to live off of, so why does it matter?”

Ju-le bared his teeth and looked like his hackles would have been raised if he still looked maomi. “It matters because you never know what’s going to happen. What will happen if you’re unable to work. Where will that put us? You’re our only Yijiazhizhu! You need to take this seriously!”

Ju-le then looked horrified at himself. “I’m sorry about our behaviour! A thousand apologies. It is disrespectful to you that we fought.”

Bai-lengden intentionally stepped between Ju-le and Bing-kesi, hesitantly initiating a polite grooming lick as if Ju-le was part of the same jia. “That is alright. If we are to be housing with Nanxing-bianyi jia, I like knowing how the jia lives, both good and bad. It is natural for jia to fight sometimes. I appreciate that you are comfortable enough with us to be able to fight.”

Ju-le looked pleased with himself. Bing-kesi rolled his eyes and stuck out his tongue at Ju-le. Ju-le then realized he had neglected translating for Lai-le this whole time, and the room

was silent as he conversed with the Zhangbei. Finally, he said, “Zhangbei Lai-le says that with Bai-lengden’s muscles and lack of opposable thumbs, ta could work in construction.”

Bing-kesi interrupted Ju-le and Lai-le batting the air to get everyone’s attention. , “And Kong-balei can work with me at the cafe! Ta doesn’t have to do sex work, the Maomens who come to the cafe can just look and then take me home with them.”

“Or me!” Yenny chimed in tade response, flapping tade arms. “I’d like to actually get off the streets. And I could partner up with Kong-balei. We could pretend to be sisters! Errr, what do you call offspring from the same parents?”

“Cubs,” Bai-lengden replied. “We do not have a word for what you describe in our language,”

Ju-le sighed, giving Lai-le a forlorn look. “Zhangbei Lai-le agrees with Bing-kesi. He has been appointed as Kong-balei’s guide for working at the cafe.”

“I’ll be fine on my own. I’ve done construction work before,” Bai-lengden said. “If Ju-le would direct me towards a place of work, I’d appreciate it.”

Ju-le looked around the room for any more responses..

“It has been decided then. You know what to do.” Lai-le made a garbled meowing, catching Ju-le’s attention. Then he signed out a message, which he promptly translated, trying to disguise what was clearly his request with a haunty scowl “Zhangbei Lai-le says that Lei Yong will be staying with us as well.” Be grateful. Zhangbei Lai-le has a soft spot for taking in homeless cubs.”

Yenny looked surprised and ran to Zhangbei Lai-le’s side. Ta wrapped her arms around the Maomi, then to Ju-le much to everyone’s surprise. Kong-balei found the human custom strange, but said nothing.

“Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!” Kong-balei replied. “I will be forever grateful to you for taking me in. I haven’t had a safe place to sleep in a long time. I am in your debt.”

Zhangbei Lai-le surprisingly returned the gesture and responded with another meow. One paw signed something at Ju-le, who translated. “You’re welcome human cub. Do your best. That is all that we ask of you.”

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Kong-balei and Bai-lengden settled into Nanxing-bianyi jia. Kong-balei started washing dishes in the back of the cafe, but some human customers expressed interest in ta. One human said that he liked that Kong-balei was small and exotic, had maomi ears and a tail, but otherwise looked human. Apparently, ta looked like what he called a, “futa catgirl”. After that comment, Kong-balei left the kitchen and started waiting on tables too.

Life was going well for the first time since Kong-balei was abducted from Dr. Tucker’s office. Ta got to really know and trust Bai-lengden, Yenny, and Nanxing-bianyi jia. Yenny really helped Kong-balei understand many things about humans that ta had never understood, like how human genders worked. Yenny was a trans girl, which meant that *she* was the female gender despite humans assigning her a male gender. Many humans didn’t accept this though, which lead to violence against her. Kong-balei appeared to be trans girl to humans according to Yenny. *Strange*, Kong-balei would think. *Humans really were strange for how they treated their fellow humans differently according to appearance. It explained why humans looked at ta oddly.*

From Zhangbei Lai-le’s stories, maomi once organized society according to genitalia thousands of nian ago. Zhonghua-minguo’s most famous romantic love story between three ginger maomi, Jun-Ling, Mizi-xia, and Tao-zi. Against tradition and culture, they secretly got together without the Meipo’s recommendation. It was taboo for maomi with different genitalia to

romance and procreate with each other. But when they were found out, their love was so simple and pure that the Meipo could find no reason to keep them apart. And by the times their cubs finished gestating, the stigma of procreating with maomi with other genital configurations diminished and there was another set of cubs gestating. It mattered less that the cubs genitals and features were a combination of the sire's. And within a hundred nian of Jun-Ling, Mizi-xia, and Tao-zi's relationship revelation, maomi's genitals were too diverse to categorize. Multicoloured maomi came into existence around this time which began the divisions by pelt colour.

For humans, apparently could only procreate with humans with genitalia from the other side of their imposed biological binary. How very strange.

Kong-balei learned more about bodies and what they meant to humans. Ta had a similar body to Yenny. They both had very similar dark almond eyes and sandy skin. Yenny said that ta looked Asian like she was. They both had longer hair on top of their heads, although Kong-balei's hair was calico and Yenny's was black. Kong-balei just liked the look of almond shaped eyes and the medium skin tone when ta selected a human form before undergoing weizhi therapy.

Yenny wrote stories which she called fan fiction that she published on a curious shared digital network with the billions of humans on Earth called the Internet. She seemed really interested in pairing people up and writing romantic mating stories for whatever media she watched with Kong-balei and Bing-kesi. Sometimes Zhangbei Lai-le would silently pad into the room with the *computer* and curl up in the nest with the rest of them. Yenny also had a knack for defusing conflicts and pointing Kong-balei in the right direction for who to talk to when ta had questions Yenny couldn't answer.

Bai-lengden spent many hours outside of the jia working to build apartment complexes for rich humans. Ta spent most of tade work time carrying heavy objects too heavy for humans to carry. It was hard, brutal work, but ta didn't complain. But when ta was at *home*, ta spent time with the jia. Kong-balei enjoyed hearing what ta saw while carrying heavy beams of steel while giving the white maomi a proper grooming. The two maomi grew closer and Kong-balei wondered why ta felt warm when watching the white maomi help Ju-le wash dishes. As it was, Bai-lengden felt like a mentor to Kong-balei, but also a partner to Ju-le in taking care of the jia, and a mentee to Zhangbei Lai-le. Ta didn't really like talking about tade past, but was always willing to spend time explaining the most innocuous of human behaviours to Kong-balei.

Bing-kesi was a delight to spend time with during work. He talked extensively about Earth *cats* and naked humans (and maomi) engaging in *sex* on the Internet. Speaking of which, Bing-kesi mentioned that he had a tagline for the sex work side of his job. "A cat is fine too!" Apparently, it was a form of humour. Watching humans interact with Bing-kesi, Kong-balei noticed how humans smiled at and said nice things more to Bing-kesi than both Kong-balei and Yenny. Bing-kesi said that he chose this form so he could do what he wanted to; and he just liked the attention. He never pressured Kong-balei into the sex work side of the cafe, but there were times when ta wondered what it would be like to engage with humans sexually. So ta tried it out with Bing-kesi there to help and it was okay. Sex with humans reminded ta of dead Earth bugs mashing their bodies together.

Ju-le took a while to warm up to, but Kong-balei realized while watching Ju-le cleaning, picking up after Bing-kesi and Yenny, going over the budget, shopping, cooking, meeting with Zhangbei Lai-le, meeting with other jia, and a host of other tasks... Ju-le was truly talented and why did ta take on so many different roles in the jia?

When asked why, Ju-le told Kong-balei a series of stories between chores (that ta was roped into of course). Back on Zhonghua-minguo, a young, bright Ju-le worked in the inter-jia alliance going around to the various jia collecting stories. Ta had been praised and referred to as a maomi with so much potential. Then came the Exodus and the crash landing on Earth and the creation weizhi therapy to survive the hostile human-made climate. The maomi quickly adapted to the human systems as weizhi therapy progressed in success. Ju-le took on human culture including genders, learned the human language all on his own, but when he tried to find work in the newly created maomi services, he was told that he needed to look more respectable. And this kept on happening. Yet maomi with pale “white” human skin and a low percentage of adipose tissue were given work that he knew never had done any organizing in their lives. He tried to get work passing as a human only to be denied all but the most basic work and even then, his wages were often stolen by human (and maomi) managers. And this is why he ran the home. That and Lai-le was his Zhangbei and he was the only one skilled enough to learn two languages quickly. Bing-kesi didn’t have the patience to learn ASL much to Ju-le’s chagrin.

Zhangbei Lai-le astounded Kong-balei. They usually communicated through Ju-le, but when they were alone (or with Bai-lengden or Yenny), Lai-le wrote on a small chalk board. Lai-le was over one hundred nian old. She was born on a farming unit as the youngest cub in a large jia. Her jia had too many cubs to feed and she was a black tortoiseshell so she was cast out. And then the Revolution happened and Maozhu-xi’s sacrifice allowed her to join a new jia. Lai-le eventually became a well-known scientist. In fact, she helped design the ship, the Koumagao-tamalu that took a colony of maomi to a new planet to escape the overpopulation and earthquakes. When the Koumagao-tamalu crash landed on Earth, the humans had banned them from leaving the ship. Many maomi died on the ship before they had been allowed off the ship.

Lai-le was part of the group that made first contact with the humans and gage if humans could help repair their ship or let them stay. Lai-le, Ju-le, and the rest of Nanxing-bianyi jia were forcefully placed in a guarded camp with all the other maomi before being given identifications (including human names and genders)... The Zhangbei of every jia came together and pooled their knowledge on how to deal with the humans. And it was decided that finding a way to blend in with the humans was the best course of action. The combined knowledge of the maomi scientists resulted in weizhi therapy. Lai-le described the experience of undergoing the weizhi therapy prototype as like having your skin peeled off and your bones broken and moved into place. Her ears were bleeding and she clenched her teeth so hard that they broke. But she kept on working on how to improve weizhi therapy after her failure. And just before the colony of maomi were split to the many corners of the Earth, Lai-le chanced upon a tiny cub who had lost tade entire jia. They adopted the cub and that cub grew up to become Bing-kesi.

Lai-le was old and couldn't do as much as she used to, but she still wanted to make home a safe place for those who she could reach. And that really touched Kong-balei.

Life was good. Life was comfortable. It was as if Kong-balei had a new jia. Ta still missed tade jia, but this was nice.

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One day, Bai-lengden burst into the house shouting, "I found a lead! I found a lead for where Tong-xinglian could be! I met an Zhangbei whose jia had been held in the detention centre my jia was! Ta said that Tong-xinglian jia was taken to a city called Mengtelier to be resettled there. Ta said that Mengtelier is a six xiaoshi trip away by ca."

"Car! Those human vehicles are called cars!" Bing-kesi piped in from tade nesting room.

Bai-lengden's face pinked up and ta looked down even though someone wasn't there to poke fun of tade embarrassment.

Zhangbei Lai-le came in with Ju-le trailing behind her. She bared her gums in her equivalent of a human smile and signed her response to Ju-le. "She is asking if you'd like help. Zhangbei Lai-le has contacts that have access to a car and knows some of the jia in Mengtelier. The two of us could take you there."

Foot stomping could be heard from the upper floor and Kong-balei practically flew down the stairs barrelling straight into Bai-lengden's arms. Ta was purring happily and rubbing tade scent all over the white maomi in greeting. "You're home!"

Bai-lengden smiled fondly and scritchd Kong-balei affectionately behind the ears and returned the scenting. "I found a lead to where my jia is XiaoKong. They might be in a city called Mengtelier and Zhangbei Lai-le and Ju-le said they'd come with me to help find them."

Kong-balei pouted and stopped purring. "I'm going to miss all of you! You've become like jia... But I understand. When will you leave?"

Zhangbei Lai-le and Ju-le conversed and Ju-le said, "We have nothing scheduled anytime soon. I just need to make the calls and we could be ready tomorrow if you wanted to?"

"Yes... That works. Will XiaoKong and XiaoBing be okay on their own?" Bai-lengden asked the others.

Bing-kesi popped out of nowhere as he seemed to always do and chimed in with, "I'm coming with you! Adventure! I wanna go! Besides. You need someone who knows how to use human tech especially cell phones. Yenny can keep Kong-balei company. She can stay here while I go with you. You know I'm riiiiight!"

Kong-balei jumped straight up yowling in surprise and Bing-kesi to giggle.



“Fine. You can come, but Kong-balei, you call us every day so we can make sure that you are okay.” Bai-lengden said seriously.

“Alright... But be quick. I don’t like all the quiet. The house is so much more alive when you’re all here,” Kong-balei said quietly.

“Zhangbei Lai-le said that we will try our best. And that if you see anyone who needs help, you’re welcome to let them stay here. Our doors are always welcome to those who need it...” Ju-le translated. Then said for himself, “I trust you. If anything goes wrong, don’t hesitate to call us and we’ll come back. You’re the baober of the jia and we all care for you.”

“And tell Ronald Pump when he comes to his usual lunch session tomorrow that I’m away and that I’ll hit him extra hard next week.” Bing-kesi interjected. There were things to plan for the trip so Nanxing-bianyi jia were busy for the rest of the day.

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The next day, Zhangbei Lai-le, Ju-le, Bing-kesi, and Bai-lengden left in the car that Ju-le procured with farewell headbutts and scent markings from Kong-balei and hugs and kisses from Yenny.

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A few days later while Kong-balei was doing a grocery run, ta met a maomi that knew Bing-kesi and Yenny. Ta was a grey spotted tabby, older than Ju-le and Bai-lengden but younger than Lai-le. Tade name was Kelixi-na.

Ta looked like an older human with grey hair but also had receding black spots blended into it. Tade skin was lighter brown than Lai-le’s but darker than Ju-le’s and definitely darker than Kong-balei’s.

Kelixi-na said her jia grew hostile and toxic and kicked her out of the jia. Ta had survived for nian doing sex work. The way ta spoke was mesmerizing and tade words opened Kong-balei's mind. Ta spoke about tade theories on maomi oppression and the complexities inherent in being a sex working maomi than a maomi like Kai-tali who appeared on TV as a newscaster. And so Kong-balei spent time with Kelixi-na whenever they both had free time. Kelixi-na said that ta wanted to become an older *sibling* to Kong-balei or perhaps a Zhangbei. Ta described being sibling as something akin to being a shifu.

Kelixi-na invited Kong-balei over to tade place to visit. Ta lived with a human male in an actual house with actual bedrooms. Kong-balei greeted the human who Kelixi-na introduced as John.

“You know, you'd make a good sex worker. You have the kind of body that the Maomen really like. You look exactly like this human fantasy called the neko girl. This girl was created in the country, Japan and has some cat-like features that are shared with us maomi. Let me show you.” Kelixi-na said and brought out a laptop.

Together, they perused a sex website and Kelixi-na was right. Kong-balei looked exactly like the neko girls on the website. Some even had the organ between the legs that ta had. The experience doing sex work with Bing-kesi went okay and Kong-balei could really help the jia out more if ta also engaged in sex work. Especially since it sounded like ta would be popular.

“You know, you'd look even better if you could make your breasts bigger. I know a human that could enlarge them with just a little slip of silicone inserted in them,” Kelixi-na suggested.

Kong-balei looked at at Kelixi-na's chest and then at tade own. Ta really didn't have much adipose tissue in the chest area, ta thought that it would be unwieldy. And then looked over

at Kelixina's which were much bigger. "Zhangbei Kelixi-na, what about you? Did you get it done?" ta asked.

"No child. This is what I wanted, but I knew I wanted a big breasts. And you know you'd sound sweeter if you could speak just a little softer. Try to sound more like this. Oh I'm so excited for you! You'll be so hot that all the Maomen will come to you!" Kelixi-na gushed.

"Like this?" Kong-balei said trying to imitate Kelixi-na.

"Yes! Like that child. Let me put makeup on you. You'll look so good!" Kelixi-na purred.

"Alright..." Kong-balei said hesitantly. Ta really didn't see the point in putting coloured minerals on tade face, but allowed tade new tongzhi to draw on tade face. Ta looked in the mirror once it was finished and resisted the urge to wipe it off. It felt uncomfortable and smelled strange.

"You're the prettiest little neko girl. You'll get so many Maomen looking to spend money on you! I'm jealous that I don't have your body." Kelixi-na hugged Kong-balei like Yenny would... Kong-balei wondered why Kelixi-na only used human mannerisms.

"Well, I should go home. Thank you for doing my makeup, Zhangbei." Kong-balei said slowly.

"Dearest child. I'll see you soon alright?"

Kong-balei agreed readily and left. Ta said goodbye to Kelixi-na and John and finally had a chance to go home. It was strange to go home to an empty home, it didn't feel right. Ta could hear the humans and maomi in the cafe laughing and talking. Ta twitched when the cellphone ta was given vibrated. Ta saw a text from Yenny that said she was busy doing a weekend sex work thing. When Kong-balei tried to washed off the makeup, it smeared more than came off. Ta

wished Yenny was around to show ta how to clean the makeup off properly. Ta checked in with the jia over text and sent a reply to Yenny before heading to tade nest.

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The next day in the early evening, Kelixi-na dropped by Nanxing-bianyi jia. Luckily for Kelixi-na, Nanxing-bianyi jia was close to tade house. Kong-balei greeted the grey tabby maomi and invited ta in. Kelixi-na meandered all over the meager upper level apartment/storage unit poking around bags of coffee beans and sugar.

“So you made quite the impression on my roommate John. He said you were very pretty and would love to have sex with you.”

Kong-balei frowned and was speechless for a moment. “Um... Why? Really?”

“Yes! He thinks you’re gorgeous,” came Kelixi-na’s reply.

“Alright... I should go do my daily check in with my jia,” Kong-balei made to go into another room, but Kelixi-na grabbed tade arm.

“He’s really into you! I think you’d have a really good time with him.” Kelixi-na implored.

“Seriously? But he’s really old... And a human. I don’t know...”

“Yes seriously! He’s really into you! It would mean a lot to him if you would say yes to sex with him.”

Kong-balei felt a knot growing in tade stomach. It felt like something at the edge of tade consciousness was bubbling and ta felt just slightly sick.

“Let’s just get it over with,” ta said.

Kelixi-na smiled brightly and excitedly babbled on about how good it’d be and how sexy Kong-balei was as ta guided the young maomi to tade home. Kong-balei didn’t get to call tade jia

and talk about Kelixi-na's request. Once there, Kelixi-na pampered Kong-balei with makeup tittering on about taking Kong-balei out shopping for new, sexy clothes. Once done, ta pushed Kong-balei in the direction of John's room.

Kong-balei woodenly walked into the human's room. They chatted for a few minutes as Kong-balei tried to keep on talking asking him questions about the most frivolous things before John opened the front of his pants. "I've got some fresh milk for you kitty," he said and guided Kong-balei's head down.

It could have been worse. John didn't taste bad. At least he had showered. He wasn't too big and didn't make Kong-balei gag. This was just an experience. Yeah. Just an experience. Kong-balei could be more like Bing-kesi and help make money doing this. It was over pretty quickly. Kong-balei said goodbye and went straight to the bathroom. Ta spat and rinsed tade mouth out and washed tade hands and arms thoroughly. Kong-balei didn't really think about it but part of ta felt dirty. Like ta was covered in grime. Ta said goodbye to Kelixi-na and went home again.

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Kong-balei hung out with Kelixi-na the next day. When Kelixi-na asked how sex with John went. Kong-balei said that ta did not really enjoy it and didn't want to do it again. Suddenly Kelixi-na began yelling about how ungrateful Kong-balei was and how ta owed Kelixi-na money for teaching ta. Kong-balei shrunk under barrage of noise covering tade ears and quickly changed the subject.

From there, everything went back to being okay. They chatted about sex work and maomi oppression and joked about awful human habits like asking about the weather. The next morning,

Kong-balei's cell phone started ringing... Way too early for the young maomi to be awake. Ta picked it up and answered it. "Hello?" ta answered groggily.

"My roommate is dead! John is dead! Can I come over? I'm so distraught!" Kelixi-na babbled over the phone.

"S-sure. I just need to get dressed," Kong-balei said waking up a bit more.

Kelixi-na arrived a half hour later and ta brought a heavy-looking bag along. "I'm sorry for intruding on you like this, but I feel so upset! I woke up this morning and went to have a chat with John and he wasn't moving. I went into the room and touched his foot and it was cold! Kong-balei! Don't you see? He's dead! I feel so traumatized, I don't think I can go back there. As your Zhangbei, can I please stay with you?"

Kong-balei was still sleepy and confused about all the words. So many words. But what Kelixi-na made sense. And Kelixi-na definitely needed help. It felt wrong to not help ta especially when they were friends and it's not as if Zhangbei Lai-le hadn't encouraged ta to help people who needed it... So ta agreed to let Kelixi-na stay.

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Things started to change around the apartment. Kong-balei's daily calls to Bing-kesi became clipped and unsubstantial because Kelixi-na felt triggered by them knowing anything more than that there was someone living in the apartment. Yenny was mysteriously silent and not answering her phone. Kelixi-na spent time at Nanxing-bianyi jia and out somewhere that Kong-balei didn't care to find out about. Kong-balei didn't feel like curling up in a ball on the salvaged couch or in Zhangbei Lai-le's nest enjoying the soft fuzziness. Ta instead spent more time out hoping to bump into Yenny. Ta called Bing-kesi while outside one day and voiced how ta was feeling. Everything that ta did not say in the house.

“That is not okay. You don’t get someone to have sex with someone else unless they want to and it sounds like you didn’t want to... We’re worried about you and we’ll be coming home soon,” Bing-kesi said over the phone.

Kelixi-na suggested that they both start having sex with humans regularly. Because it was fun and it’d make a lot of money. Kong-balei wasn’t totally on board, but went along with it anyways. Ta liked the idea of making people feel good and it was good practice. So they took turns bringing humans over for sex. Whoever wasn’t busy stayed in another room and kept quiet. The humans were nervous enough coming over for sex. It was as if there was something forbidden about sex with maomi. One day, Kelixi-na was with a human and ta came out of the bedroom looking debauched earlier than expected.

“Kong-balei. Would you be a dear and finish him off for me? My belly is feeling rumblingly and I don’t think I can take it without having an accident.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea...” Kong-balei stated remembering what Bing-kesi had said about sex.

“Oh come on. This guy’s hot right? He has a nice dick. You’d really like this one.”

“I just...” Something inside Kong-balei just broke. Why was ta fighting against this again? “Fine.”

Just like the time before, Kong-balei was guided to a bedroom to find a guy there. Taking action, Kong-balei initiated sexual contact. The human smelled sour and was acting strangely. His speech was slow and slurred and the way he moved was like his speech, slow and messy. But then there was pain. Blinding pain. That wasn’t slow or messy. He just wouldn’t stop and Kong-balei gritted tade teeth. *Just survive it. It’ll be over soon. Just hang in there.*

Once it was over, he tried to fuck a second time without a condom in place. Fortunately, Kong-balei told him no and forced him to get dressed and leave. Ta felt like ta was burning from the inside out and checked taself in the bathroom. There was blood.

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“I told you not to call up your jia! It triggers me. I don’t want anyone to know where I am!” Kelixi-na said when ta saw Kong-balei about to do tade daily call to Bing-kesi. Kong-balei knew that they’d be back any day now. Ta would just need to hang in there... “And when are you going to get those incisors filed down. Kong-balei! They are unsightly and you don’t look enough like a human! How will you be a proper human in this world if you don’t get those incisors filed down!”

“Kong-balei doesn’t need to file down tade incisors. They’re fine just the way they are,” came a voice out of nowhere. Bing-kesi appeared as if out of thin air as he was wont to do. “Kelixi-na I take it?”

Kelixi-na turned on Kong-balei and yelled, “You *told* him about me? You’re a liar and a *venomous snake* lurking in the grass!”

“I think the only liar around here is you,” came another voice. Out stepped Bai-lengden bulging arms crossed.

“Kong-balei told us everything... And you are not welcome in our home.” Ju-le said. Zhangbei Lai-le meowed and hissed her hackles raised as she signed furiously at Ju-le. “She said that you have taken advantage of our hospitality. You have hurt our baober. We understand that you as maomi have been hurt. You have been damaged. But that does not mean that you can take advantage of our baober. We heard that you said you were an Zhangbei? Shame on you. Leave. NOW.”



Kelixi-na looked from Bai-lengden who scowled and even though was marginally larger than Kong-balei, looked intimidating. Zhangbei Lai-le with surprising strength was holding Bing-kesi back. He had murder in his young, amber eyes. Ju-le had opened the door and for once, his green eyes were like jade flames. Then there was Kong-balei staring down at the ground.

“You are in cahoots with the humans. All of you! I will never forget this. I will bring my jia to wipe you out!” Kelixi-na threatened as ta was forced out of their lives.

The moment the door was closed and locked, everyone was surrounding Kong-balei nudging, licking, and rubbing against ta re-establishing their connections with each other and covering ta with the scent of jia.

Kong-balei sobbed once into Zhangbei Lao-le’s shoulder and was enveloped in the wiry black tortoiseshell maomi’s limbs. She crooned in her creaky, hoarse voice and purred to relax Kong-balei as a Jianhuren would do in order to get a cub to go to sleep.

“You are safe now. We are back. Sorry it took so long... I am sorry that happened to you, but you did the right thing calling Bing-kesi. That must have been so risky with how that poor-excuse-for-a-maomi was trying to isolate you. Ta is no Zhangbei and never was. Zhangbei Lai-le knows all the jia in the area. We found out ta was from LaBeizha jia. Ta will not get away with hurting you” Bai-lengden said from flush against Kong-balei’s back.

“There’s something wrong with me. I could have said no, but I didn’t. I just... I just did as ta asked.” Kong-balei croaked and sniffled loudly.

“We love you and care about you. We’ll get through this. You are jia... And I really care for you,” Bing-kesi said shyly. Kong-balei looked at him and laughed for the first time in weeks. They smiled shyly at one another and it was as if the pall of miasma around the house had lifted.

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Once Kong-balei had settled down enough to function, Nanxing-bianyi jia became a flurry of action. Bing-kesi contacted a bunch of sex workers and warned them about Kelixi-na and spoke about this thing called sexual abuse that had occurred to Kong-balei. And then Kong-balei received a text message from Yenny saying that she was at this house and needed to be picked up and wasn't feeling well. Kong-balei and Bing-kesi promptly left to what Kong-balei recognized as Kelixi-na's address. The duo burst into the house to find Kelixi-na standing there with Yenny pressed up against tade side.

Bing-kesi's appearance suddenly shifted. He shifted back to maomi! Bing-kesi was covered in a dark ginger coat of fur and it was obvious why humans were so fascinated with the maomi form. His normally lanky form was bigger and more lithe musculature. He still stood on two hind paws standing a full two mi in height. Tade front paws were tipped with long, pointed claws which were currently extended. Tade face was sharper, more triangular tipped by two pointed ears on top of tade head. Tade muzzle was drawn in a snarl revealing a mouthful of sharp teeth and tade facial tentacles were all poised as if to attack. And most intimidating of all were Bing-kesi's eyes. Large, amber orbs that saw all, judged all. Growling at Kelixi-na, his deep voice reverberated deep in everyone's bones.

"Give Yenny back to us. She's part of our jia." Bing-kesi said between too many long fangs.

Kelixi-na trembled and tossed the listless human at them. Kong-balei caught Yenny holding the human in tade arms. Bing-kesi snarled at Kelixi-na once more and backed out of the house when he was sure that Kong-balei and Yenny were out. He quickly reverted back to his human form and held the now shaking and flailing Yenny close.

They sat down on the steps of a Maomi Community Center as Kong-balei and Yenny clung to each other sobbing.

“I’m sorry I abandoned you! I’ve known Kelixi-na for a while now and she sometimes helps me get clients for a cut of the pay. I came back from the weekend and dropped by her place. She asked me to stay here with her because John had just died and she got upset whenever I tried to leave and check up on you. And then she wanted to help me with my writing so it might be good enough to send to a publisher and I was thinking of quitting sex work and she kept on insisting that I continue working and I don’t know what happened! She yelled a lot and wouldn’t let me leave or stop seeing clients! I’m so sorry! I’m a bad friend!” Yenny sobbed.

“I’m just glad that you’re alright... That we’re together again. You are jia too just as much as we are. You are valuable just as you are... You are human, but you fit into the role of the Meipo perfectly.” Kong-balei said soothing the human gliding a hand in circles along Yenny’s back.

Yenny laughed between her tears. “So being a professional shipper actually comes in handy.”

“Yep! Totally! You should be allowed to quit sex work whenever you want. I love doing it, but you gotta do what you gotta do!” Bing-kesi added.

“Yeah. Okay... I really love you both,” Yenny said and she found herself squished between the two Maomi who scented her enthusiastically.

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The experience tied the youngest members of Nanxing-bianyi jia closer. The three of them were cuddling in a pile of limbs and blankets on the new couch the jia was gifted by LaBeizha jia. Lai-le and Ju-le had contacted them to discuss how one of their own had hurt two

of their baober. LaBeizha jia apologized profusely and explained that they had kicked Kelixi-na out after doing something very similarly to a few of their cubs. Since ta was their responsibility, they made dues where they could. Kelixi-na wouldn't change tade ways and they were never going to report ta to the human police, but they could make sure that more maomi and humans knew not to trust Kelixi-na.

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It took a few yue to recover and come to terms what happened, but gradually Kong-balei healed. It was just a lot harder because Kelixi-na had been maomi. Ta had been a friend and the things ta said made sense... It was made all the harder that Kelixi-na had hurt Kong-balei and Yenny so badly and could not see what ta had done.

Bing-kesi became an Internet sensation rivalling Kai-tali with his ability to turn into a maomi. He made videos of himself just hanging out in public as a maomi or as a human openly behaving like a Maomi. Yenny quit sex work and was working hard on her writing when she wasn't learning from Ju-le on how to run a jia and how to read if a maomi (or another human for that matter) would make a good fit for their jia. Bai-lengden managed to fix up an old house that had been abandoned and they moved there. A home of their own. Kong-balei took to reading about the human discipline of sociology. And Lai-le built a network of humans and maomi open to working together to survive better.

Bai-lengden's search for tade jia was a failure. Tong-xinglian jia had been massacred by human scientists experimenting on all of them. Nothing came up about Nuchuan-zhuyi jia existing. But they had made a new jia together. They were a bunch of misfits that circumstance had brought together. They brought a human into the jia and maybe more down the line. Life

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was not perfect. Humans were still awful to them if they found out that they were maomi. But they had each other and that is what mattered.

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Appendix A: Glossary

This is a glossary of words used by the maomi collected and translated by the esteemed Dr. K. Tucker. He has taken painstaking care in making sure the translated are authentic and unbiased. You can see his other publications at <https://uoft.academia.edu/KarlTucker>

Common Terms

Maomi – A race of cat-like, bipedal beings from a distant planet. In the past few years of their co-habitation on Earth, they have taken on forms that look more human with varying degrees of effectiveness with their ingenious technology they call, “weizhi therapy” (see: the term below).

Ta – The pronoun that all maomi use to refer to themselves, equivalent of he/she.

Tade – The possessive form of “ta” (his/hers).

Tongzhi – A term of respect applied to friendly maomi. It roughly translates to, “comrade”, and is a means to display a level of familiarity and solidarity with another maomi. Used between younger maomi perceived by humans to be the same gender as a term of affection and humour.

jia – The maomi formation of the familial unit. Not necessarily related by blood, but composed of numerous different kinds of relationships. They engage in incestuous, polygamous, and homosexual relationships between other members of the jia.

weizhi therapy – A procedure closely guarded by the maomi that allows them to restructure their bodies to permanently appear more human in appearance. It has gone a few stages of development before it achieved passable results. The first stage produced mostly low functioning hybrids and crippled failures who probably didn’t survive long. The second stage produced more high functioning hybrids and some who could usually pass for human. The third stage perfected the process, but the human bodies they chose were often strange and unsightly by human norms. The fourth stage produced the largest number of perfected specimens some of whom have gone on to become upstanding citizens of Earth.

Jianhuren - One of the major roles in maomi culture. The job of the Jianhuren is to take care of the jia’s cubs, teach them, and protect them from any dangers that arise. The equivalent of a housewife and just as useful.

Zhangbei - The elder members of maomi culture are the decision makers. With all their wisdom and experience and their lower vitality, elder maomi generally end up becoming Zhangbei. The only exception is if a maomi has demonstrated that they are unfit to make decisions which requires a consensus decision from all the present Zhangbei.

Shifu - A teacher or mentor. This is a title given to formal mentorship relationships. May be sexual or romantic on top of being a mentorship relationship. A more porous and temporary relationship.

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Yizhizhu - The breadwinners of maomi society. Traditionally, Yizhizhu would go out and hunt for prey and bring them back to the jia. But in human society, Yizhizhu go out and get jobs. Few stick to the old ways of hunting. In most human countries, hunting is illegal.

Meipo - This role is the most confusing and least like human society. The Meipo is an organizer of sorts. They spend their time getting to know all the maomi in the jia and other jia. Their job is to build connections and suggest relationships. Be they romantic, sexual, hostile rivalry, or for mentoring, the Meipo makes recommendations. There are rarely more than one or two in a jia.

Measurements

Mi - A measurement of distance that's the equivalent to a meter.

Xiaoshi - A measurement of time that's the equivalent to an hour.

Yue - A measurement of time that's the equivalent of a month.

Nian - A measurement of time that's the equivalent of a year.

Locations/Lineages

Nanxing-bianyi jia - An ancient jia that apparently stretches back to the time of Maozhu-xi. Unfortunately, they were mostly wiped out early on in the maomi history on Earth. To date, there are only two original members. They have filled the ranks of the jia with young maomi and apparently, humans too since then.

Labei-zha jia - A jia located out of Olympia, Washington. They are well-known for their quaint performances that have inspired many professional singers and dancers. They are a highly moral jia and practice shunning of undesirables. They are also hostile to researchers.

Nuquan-zhuyi jia - A jia located in North of Toronto on the site where the Chippewas of Rama First Nation used to be. The Province of Ontario had brokered a generous treaty with them with them for the sole purpose of supporting our extraterrestrial brothers and sisters, and yet this jia spurned our nation's special care! Ontario paid good taxpayer money to quickly move the Chippewas of Rama out of their homes only for these *ungrateful aliens* to reject the land we gave them! They ended up in Toronto where I met one of their "cubs". With this cub's information, I was able to alert the Department of Alien Affairs to send them back to the land they were assigned. Unfortunately, very few made it to their destination alive. The rest regrettably died within months of arriving home.

Tong-xinglian jia - This jia had the highest population of low functioning maomi and of homosexual maomi. I am presently working on a study examining this curious correlation where I theorize functionality level with degree of homosexuality. Of course, the lowest functionality have the highest degree of homosexuality and the highest functionality are the most heterosexual. Anyways, this jia had been originally assigned to a low populated area of Scarborough but was later relocated to Montreal for overpopulation reasons thanks to *certain jia moving to Toronto*

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without consent of the Department of Alien Affairs. The jia currently is working alongside scientists to help better understand maomi biology and abilities in a Montreal facility.

Zhong-huaminguo - The home planet of the maomi. It has been estimated that Zhong-huaminguo is located near Alpha Centauri. The maomi aren't very forthcoming about their history beyond that there were overpopulation and environmental issues that they were escaping.

Duo-lunduo - The maomi name for Toronto.

Jia-nada - The maomi name for Canada.

Mengte-lier - The maomi name for Montreal.

Misc.

Yuwan - A ball-shaped pastry made from aquatic wildlife that resemble fish on Earth.

Tuzi - A presumably mammalian species native to Zhong-huaminguo. Resembles rabbits on Earth.

Laoshu - A presumably mammalian species native to Zhong-huaminguo. Resembles mice on Earth.

Ertong - A pet name given to “cubs” or younger maomi.

Jinu - The maomi word for sex worker.

Quanjia - A complicated concept that vaguely translates familial/community harmony.

Baober - Literally means beloved.

Koumagao-tamalu - The spaceship that the maomi traveled to Earth in. Not much of the ship was salvageable for study after the maomi left it.

Important Names

Kong-balei – A young, calico maomi on the search for tade jia, Nuchuan-zhuyi. Classified as a high functioning hybrid by academics of maomi relations. Has a unique mind.

Bai-lengden – An adult white maomi who joins Kong-balei in trying to tade own jia, Tong-xinglian. Classified as a low functioning hybrid by academics of maomi relations. Very handy despite lacking opposable thumbs.

Lei Yong “Yenny” – A human trans girl who dons fake cat ears and tail to cater to the desires of human Johns. Bubbly and is a font of random information.

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Bing-kesi – A young, ginger maomi from Nanxing-bianyi jia. Passes effortlessly for a human male and engages in barista work and sex work on the side. Flirty but loyal.

Ju-le – An adult ginger maomi from Nanxing-bianyi jia. Passes effortlessly for a human male, but is considered unattractive by human standards. A perfectionist, but secretly very caring.

Lai-le – A tortoiseshell maomi and the Zhangbei of Nanxing-bianyi jia. Classified as an extremely low functioning hybrid and deaf from an unfortunate accident. Knows human ASL and is rarely seen without Ju-le around to translate for her. Highly accomplished and wise.

Kelixa-na – A middle aged grey spotted tabby maomi from Labei-zha jia. Classified as a high functioning maomi. A colleague of Bing-kesi and Yenny as sex workers. Sharp and charismatic.

Maozhu-xi - A revered leader/martyr that started the jia system on the maomi homeworld.

Kai-tali - The first maomi celebrity to enter human society. She is a high functioning maomi who runs a talk show called, “*I am Kai-tali*”. Highly popular with human viewers and works to try to improve human understanding of the maomi