

Invisible Sinner

Mai Lin shuffled up the incline of the city street, immune to the throng of people rushing past her in all directions. No one noticed her. She was just an old woman getting in the way of their important lives. Businessmen grunted their annoyance at having to manoeuvre around her, an obstacle in their busy day.

Businesswomen ignored her, bumping and pushing her in their hurry to get 'there' quickly. Mid-week shoppers, mums with prams and *respectable* elderly couples avoided her like they avoided all things different from themselves. Mai Lin continued shuffling along the footpath, seemingly oblivious to them all.

When she approached the pedestrian crossing Mai Lin became the aggressor, forcing her way through the impatient crowd until she was close to the curb. It was here her height, or lack thereof, became an advantage, allowing her to squeeze between arms and legs, briefcases and shopping bags.

Many people looked at Mai Lin angrily as she bulldozed through them, jealous of her progress and judging her worthiness to be near the front. As the lights changed they hurriedly overtook her once again, repeating the strange dance that continually revolved around Mai Lin. She did not care, she was in no hurry. Her day's work had just begun. All day, every day, Mai Lin wandered the city streets in this way, always choosing the busiest streets to roam.

At eight o'clock every weeknight Mai Lin returned to her tiny flat on the city fringe to examine her day's bounty. Once inside, with the door locked and the

blinds drawn, she emptied her large, cane-handled bag onto her coffee table. Out tumbled wallets and purses by the dozen. On a particularly good day she could pick=pocket a hundred. Usually she managed twenty-five. Tonight she had thirty-two, a little better than normal. The pay-off was the cash inside her bounty of wallets and purses.

Stripping them clean, Mai Lin placed the wallets and purses in a green garbage bag. She then put the garbage bag inside her own large, cane-handled bag, ready for disposal later in the night. She put a small amount of cash in her pocket before stashing the remainder of the money in the safe she had installed under her kitchen sink. She had nearly one hundred thousand dollars in her safe now.

As Mai Lin prepared to leave her flat and dump the garbage bag on the way to dinner, she paused by a photograph on the wall beside her front door. The picture showed Mai Lin sitting on an ornate wooden bench, with intricate carving along the arms and back. On one side of her sat a little boy, on the other a little girl. Mai Lin looked many years younger in the photograph. Soon I will see you again, she whispered to the picture, then tore her eyes from the children's faces. Mai Lin left her flat, carefully ensuring the door was tightly locked, and walked away.

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