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**Faculty**: Design & Creative Technologies  
**School/Dept**: Art & Design  
**Programme**: AK3483 Master of Art & Design  
**Year of submission (for examination)**: 2017  
**Research Output**: Thesis  
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Student ID No  9605600
Faculty  Design & Creative Technologies
Programme  AK3483 Master of Art & Design
Research Output
- Thesis ☑
- Dissertation ☐
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Name  Don Yew Li Chooi
School/Dept  Art & Design
Date of submission for examination  7th December 2016
Points Value  120
Thesis Title
'Homebound': The illustrated graphic novel as an autobiographic voice for an immigrant Asian gay male in New Zealand

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Signatures

Student  Don Y L Chooi
Primary Supervisor  Wally Ings
Secondary Supervisor  Miriam Harris
Additional Supervisor/Mentor

Signature

Date  7th December 2016
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Date  8/11/16

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Faculty Contacts
Your primary supervisor is Welby Ings
The Associate Dean (Postgraduate) is Rosser Johnson, ext 7818
The faculty contact for doctoral candidates is Annette Tiaiti, doffice@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

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cc: Welby Ings C-41, Annette Tiaiti DA Master of Art and Design
HOMEBOUND

a personal story of family

a Graphic Novel by Don Chooi
“Home is where one starts from.”

T.S. Eliot (1888 – 1965)
I was never one to question what ‘home’ meant. I believed home to be in Malaysia, in a town called Seremban. It wasn’t until recent events that I learned to appreciate the meaning of the word.

My name is Xing Loh Yun, but I am also known as Tommy. I found my way to Auckland, New Zealand 15 years ago, seeking a fresh start and the ‘real’ me. Along the way, there were heartbreaks, confusion and sorrow, but in all honesty, I never felt more contented or assured. I fell in love with a wonderful man. Being in a relationship with Neil made it all the easier for me to consider New Zealand my home, and he and my friends, my family. I willingly let go of my past.

But the past has a way of catching up...
I really want to get settled in—especially the studio. Don't you mean setting the TV up first? It had better have... since you packed the glassware. Otherwise I'll be really, really PISSED OFF.

Hah! You're safe— for now. Let's see how the other five FareD...

Did the crystal survive? It'll get done.

*Sigh* I just want to get back to the graphic novel.

*Did the crystal survive?*

It had better have... since you packed the glassware. Otherwise I'll be really, really PISSED OFF.

Hah! You're safe— for now. Let's see how the other five Fared...
It feels good, doesn't it? Being a homeowner?

It does...

...but it's much better being a homeowner with you.

Hey! Yeah it's all going well here!

Everything's moved in — we're just unpacking...

What tonight? No — no. We haven't finished...

Babe -- the boys want to drop by with dinner and help us settle in...

You okay with this?

Whatever. Just get Thai...

Fuck, we're too tired! Argh! Okay... wait... hang on...

You'd better start unpacking the cutlery!
“Yeah -- come over around 7.00pm. We should have most of the house sorted out by then...”
MAN -- HOW THE HELL DID WE END UP WITH SO MUCH CRAP?

RELAX! THERE ARE ONLY A FEW MORE BITS. THEY CAN WAIT TILL TOMORROW.

AT LEAST WE DON'T HAVE TO COOK TONIGHT...

ONCE WE ARE DONE, WE CAN GET DAD STARTED MOVING IN.

THANKS, BABE.

CAN WE AT LEAST ENJOY A FEW WEEKS ON OUR OWN FIRST?

I WORRY ABOUT HIM. HE'S ALL BY HIMSELF DOWN IN TAUMARANUI WITH NO ONE TO CARE FOR HIM...

I KNOW, I KNOW...

... HOW ABOUT A FEW DAYS THEN? I CAN SET UP MY STUDIO IN THE MEAN TIME, AND GET BACK TO WORKING ON THE NOVEL.
Are you going to put your real name on it this time?

Hmmm... I haven't figured THAT out yet.

You were pretty freaked out about your family finding out the last time.

You practically lied to your parents about not getting the internet back home -- telling them it's evil! Just so they couldn't Google and find out about what you do!

Okay then... Don't put your name on it!

For fuck's sake...

I'm not that keen for my parents to find out that their son loves to draw big, hairy dicks all right?

Knock, knock

Are you going to hide forever? You've got to open up to them sometime...

Give me a break okay? It's not as if I had a choice.

Okay then... Don't put your name on it!

No one will buy it... because no one will know it's from me.

Can we talk about it later? Dinner's here.

I'm not that keen for my parents to find out that their son loves to draw big, hairy dicks all right?
Hey guys! Hand delivered dinner! We should be Bear Meals On Wheels!

Bonjour!

God - You'd better be starving! We bought heaps!

You know you'll have to sit on the floor.

FUCK OFF!

He's kidding. Table's all set!

Come on in!
Hey -- are you okay?

Yeah I'm okay. Just been distracted.

Looks like someone's hooking up tonight.

Hasn't Vincent already shagged half of Auckland already?

Forget it, Mase! He isn't even listening.

Hah! You'd think so!

Shit. I thought it was going so well. What happened?

It didn't work out.

Remember the guy I was seeing? Aaron?

Shit, I thought it was going so well. What happened?

I had a lot of stuff going on. Work's been shit. Maybe it wasn't the right time for me to be dating.

What's wrong with work?
The company is going through a restructure. I've been around long enough to know what that means. I'm going to get laid off.

Hey -- you can't let your depression take over.

Hey. But I hate them. I prefer wine.

Jean-Louie...

I'm just being a realist.

I'm so tired of it all. Nothing seems to work out. My job, men... it feels all too much.

Meh -- fuck them. There will be other jobs, other guys... right?

Mmm... this actually tastes quite good.

You two stop yapping and get over here! Food's dished up!

Oui. But I hate them. I prefer wine.

Oui, but I hate them. I prefer wine.

Are you still on your meds?

Oui. But I hate them. I prefer wine.

Jean-Louie...

I'm sure it won't come to that. You've put so much into your job, surely they can see your value...

You two stop yapping and get over here! Food's dished up!
So, what’s next? Gonna get a cat? Officially get married? It’s been like, 10 years?

Married? Well... we seriously hadn’t thought about it. We’re pretty happy with how things are right now.

Hmm... I better be the best man. That’s all I am saying.
Let's see how it goes. We just bought this place - and there's no rush.

Talking about parties - have you got any plans for Pride this year?

Vincent is too busy to care -- he's too wrapped up with online hook-ups.

I do have an idea, but I think it will upset some guys.

Yeah, I really don't want to have a big blow-out just so you guys can have an excuse to party.

Oh? In what way?

Well... I'm going to do drag.

Wait... DRAG?!

DRAG? As in 'Rupaul' drag? SERIOUSLY? ERRR... WAIT... DRAG?!?
It'll be great! I've been dying to do it for a long time!

I've already got my dress - all pink with polka dots.

But... but... you're a bear! You can't do drag!

What will the others think?! You'll be laughed at!

I even got my drag name sorted! It's Melinda Croissanda!

Maybe I'll throw on a feather boa... but I'll see.

And I've got a really tacky handbag and heels to go with it!

But... but... you're a bear! You can't do drag!

What will the others think?! You'll be laughed at!

Vincent...
Why should I care what others think? I am doing this for myself.

Jean-Louie can do whatever he wants. I mean, come on! It’s Pride! Everyone should be free to celebrate it however they want...

...so, good on you mate!

I’m not doing it to prove a point. But, thanks for the support.

Jean-Louie can do whatever he wants. I mean, come on! It’s Pride! Everyone should be free to celebrate it however they want...

...so, good on you MATE!

Anyway, why the fuck would you be concerned with what I do? That’s your shit argument? It’s not a ‘bear thing’? Well, why don’t you tell us what exactly that is?

You’re a man! Jeezus – being a bear is all about being butch and masculine.

Urgh! T’es un vrai gamin...

I don’t even know what that means...

Jean-Louie... are you sure this is what you want to do?

Look -- it’s taken a long time for me to be happy with who I am. I am not going to be put into a box just because it makes someone ‘comfortable’.

I just want to have some fun.
Personally, I think it’s a cool idea. You all should lighten up a little. The bears could do drag for the parade.

I think I can squeeze this puku into a sparkly unicorn outfit!

I don’t understand why you all want to dress up as women!

C’mon, Vincent...

Seriously, no one will fuck you after that.

Are you listening to yourself? Bears are meant to be inclusive! Not some judgemental, shallow bitch...

Who are you calling a bitch—?

Won’t you be too embarrassed to do this?

It’s nothing to do with embarrassing myself. All this crap about ‘being a man’. Sort your own shit out. If you’re such a man, then have the balls to join me.
Thanks for getting us dinner, Jean-Louie. You didn't have to stay back and help clean up. I don't think I'm wrong.

This whole thing about drag... it's just difficult to understand.

Well... it's your choice. And I see Vincent's point of view.

Look, what he and I go through being Asian and gay... it hasn't been easy.

Tommy... trust me, I get it. But you should really see it as accepting yourself.

I had issues growing up too, and I still have issues right now -- like my depression.

But I don't have to limit my experiences. I am who I am, and I will always remain me. Fuck the rest if they can't deal with it.

The question is, are you true to yourself?

Being true to myself... That is a strange question. After all these years, I don't even know what it truly means.
I grew up amongst the paddy fields of Kedah, an emerald state north of the Malaysian peninsula. It was the hub of the paddy plantation. As far as the eye could see, sprawling hills were cut into carpets of long, green stalks. Come harvest season, the fields were abuzz with activity. Farmers toiled in the muddy waters with their scythes, scooping the paddy and beating it to separate the grain from the stalks. It was the ‘80s, and we were still reeling from the effects of the Vietnam conflict. Being so close to the borders of Thailand, the possibility of the conflict bleeding into Malaysia was quite real.

My family lived a modest and cautious life. My parents were very prudent but they made sure their children had good clothes, books and food. We were taught the principles of life – honesty, integrity and most importantly, respect for our elders. My upbringing was strict because my father believed in corporal punishment, and any misbehaviour was met with the ratan cane.

In this world, I was my father’s son. I tried hard to fit in, but something kept tugging at me. There was an inexplicable yearning within me that made me feel I was somehow different from the other children.
I remember that my father gave me a BMX bicycle for my birthday, and together with my friends, I went out cycling as soon as I got home from school.

The land was so flat that you could see curtains of rain approaching and we would race against them. I also kept pigeons – a hobby my parents abhorred and criticised because they thought that it wasted time when I could be studying and raising my academic performance.

Being in a rural ‘kampung’ fringed by deep jungle, I would sometimes go exploring. After a heavy monsoon downpour, I hunted for tadpoles that appeared in the pools of rainwater. I also ventured into the jungle in search of ‘burung merbuk’ (zebra dove) nests. I loved these birds and their melodic voices. When they were captured, the local people used them for singing competitions.

And then there were the snakes... Being in a rural world surrounded by jungles and paddy fields, serpents were in abundance – pythons, cobras and vipers. We had to be careful where we stepped. I carry the fear of them today.

Although my family raised my sister and me to be agnostic, we were made to ‘pretend’ to be Buddhists in public. This was to avoid being mistaken for communists and having the authorities bear down on us. My identification card stated that I followed the teachings of Buddha. The fear of being thrown into jail and persecuted was always there. In reflection, this may be the point when I discovered that lying could be acceptable, if used in a situation to protect oneself.

During Chinese New Year, we celebrated with firecrackers and dancing lions. The firecrackers were loud and angry, and I would run and hide. My parents would chide me for being so foolish and acting like a coward – and compared my behaviour to a girl’s. So, in addition to lying about being Buddhist, I also learnt that I had to be ‘manly’, and to mask my emotions.

I also remember looking up to the statue of Tan Quek (the Jade Emperor) and feeling intimidated but also in awe. Red-faced, bearded – to me, he personified masculinity.
When I turned six, I was sent to a Methodist preschool run by nuns. Truth be told, they scared the living daylights out of me. If I thought that my father was harsh, these nuns were worse. On the first day, they sat us all down and told us to pick out an English name. I often wondered why my parents allowed this to occur. Instead of reluctant shame, I felt pride when I raised my hand and called out my new identity. I called myself Tommy.

I remember Sister Agnes beaming down with a generous smile and nodding her head in approval. It soothed me to know that I had pleased her.

Alor Setar Methodist School was an all-boys school, and it was here that I became increasingly aware of my burgeoning sexual orientation. I would steal glances in the direction of the boys while in the changing room. Although I did not acknowledge what I was feeling as wrong, I was aware that it was dangerous to let people know how I felt. I never told anyone, not even my parents. I feared being punished. It wasn’t ‘manly’.

In my teenage years, I became aware that being ‘different’ was condemned – the effeminate, the outcasts, and the underprivileged were ridiculed. The terms ‘Ah Qua’ and ‘pondan’ (effeminate to the point of acting like a girl) were used in a derogatory way and applied to anyone who didn’t behave accordingly. Slowly, I began practicing lying – I had to – in order to escape scrutiny. In time, I became fluent in the craft of deception.

In order to remain the ‘good’ child, and mindful to not bring shame to my family, I built a fictional world in which I performed the duties and manners of a compliant and obedient son, brother and grandson. I became a perfect fiction of myself.
Hello--?

Oh, hey sis.

Brrriiing...
28

Hello--?

Oh, hey sis.
Hi, I'd like to book for the next flight out to Kuala Lumpur... Direct flight please... yes, return tickets.

Hey babe - sorry but I got a family emergency. I have to go home right away. My Dad's in hospital and getting ready for immediate surgery... it's cancer... could you take me to the airport?
Yeah... I'm sure.
You know I won't be able to explain why you're there...
... your dad's going to be all right. Call me if you need anything, okay?
Hey...

Are you sure you don't want me to come with you?

Yeah... I'm sure.
You know I won't be able to explain why you're there...

Your dad's going to be all right. Call me if you need anything, okay?
It was at these times my father imparted his sage advice. My dining experiences were full of lectures. My father was an attentive parent, and he often reminded me, “It is important to look ahead and plan accordingly, but you will never get anywhere if you ignore your past.”

My father also said, “Do your homework. If there is an ‘A’, you must achieve it. There is no reason why you cannot achieve it. If you do not, it only means that you’re not working hard enough.”

“Children are to be seen, not heard.”

And the harsher, “Do not mistake me for a friend. I am your father, not someone you think you can be on friendly terms with. You will do as you are told.”

So at each meal, along with the food, I absorbed my father’s values. I became a ‘good’ and socially well-behaved person. I do not fault my father for the upbringing I had. I lived by his wisdom. I believe I grew up to be a ‘good’ person... but, while I performed my duties as the obliging and diligent son, I lived a life in fear of revealing my true self.

There was this one time that I was late for dinner. I had been out with my friends flying pigeons and I lost track of time. When I came home, my family was already seated at the dining table. But no one was eating. My father had my mother and sister wait until I showed up. I was thirty minutes late and the food had grown cold. My heart dropped when my father launched into a tirade, saying that it was my sole fault that dinner was ruined. Afterwards, we ate in silence and I couldn’t lift my head to look at my family. I was eleven years old.

I shudder at the memories of my father sitting me down for lectures that went on for hours. He mostly talked about life lessons such as behavior and what are deemed good manners and attitudes. My sister was exempt from such lectures. She remained the apple of my father’s eye. Despite all this, my performance at school was never stellar...
I don't believe I was ever an intellectual.
When I turned thirteen, we moved further south to a town called Seremban, in the State of Negri Sembilan. I was transferred into St. Paul’s Institution for my secondary schooling. I struggled with my studies. Although I tried my best in examinations, I could recall nothing. I tried cheating and attempted to convince my classmate to provide me with answers. And every time, I would get caught. It was obvious I wasn’t even smart enough to cheat.

I remember sitting in a Chemistry exam and Mrs. Zakariah was one of the attending teachers. She was one of the most feared teachers at the school and her disciplinary punishments were infamous. Being in her class was torturous. During the examination, I blanked out and panicked. I signalled to my classmate sitting next to me and discreetly pleaded for him to share his answers. Out of nowhere, Mrs Zakariah appeared. She momentarily suspended the exams and berated me in front of my classmates. I was subsequently dragged off by the ear to the principal’s office. My parents were called in and were made aware of the situation.

I could sense my father’s disappointment in me. He wanted a son who could become an engineer, a nanotechnologist or a medical doctor. In his eyes, I was a failure. I had no back-up skills – I couldn’t handle a musical instrument – my father truly believed I would be left without a prosperous future. It was only through some considerable effort that I managed to persuade my parents that I was capable at art. My father believed that art was a lowly career and he didn’t want to see me end up as a street artist, painting portraits of passers-by. However, he eventually relented and allowed me to pursue a career in design. I put my heart and soul into my studies. I needed to show my father that I wasn’t a failure. Knowing that he worked three jobs to put me through my education made me even more determined. I felt obliged and bound by duty to not only make it through to graduation, but to excel and strive to achieve that elusive 100% grade.

I had to be - and do my best.
PINTU KELUAR
EXIT THROUGH HERE
Hey sis! It's been a long time!

Hi 'Ko! You look good! Ma will be so thrilled to have you back.

Where is she?

She's with Pa at the hospital. We're going to head straight there.

I hope you're staying for a while.

Where is that parking ticket...?

Not so good. They had to rush him into surgery right away.

How is he doing?

I hope you're staying for a while.

*Ko is a Cantonese term of endearment for "older brother".*
So, tell me... what's been happening with you lately?

we haven't heard from you THESE PAST FEW MONTHS – is everything okay?

everything is fine. There isn't much to tell, really.

Oh, come on... surely there must be something going on with your life.

What about your job?

WE HAVEN'T HEARD FROM YOU THESE PAST FEW MONTHS -- IS EVERYTHING OKAY?

EVERYTHING IS FINE. THERE ISN'T MUCH TO TELL, REALLY.

OH, COME ON... SURELY THERE MUST BE SOMETHING GOING ON WITH YOUR LIFE.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR JOB?
Have you been seeing someone special?

Really? You’re 36 years old... you can’t hold off much longer to start your family.

I mean, I’m already married and have a five year old son.

Good for you.

No...

No one worth mentioning...

Really? You’re 36 years old... you can’t hold off much longer to start your family.

I mean, I’m already married and have a five year old son.
What's that supposed to mean?

Just because you're living all the way over in New Zealand, earning the big money, doesn't mean you get to act all high-and-mighty. You don't get to judge me. I'm happy and I'm content. That's more than anyone could ask for.

And you? I don't see you contributing any money back to the family. How long have you been gone? 15 years!

I had other things that needed attention...

It didn't mean anything.

I just said...

I heard what you said. Why do you have to make it sound like my being married is a bad thing?
"Other things"?!? What other things? Are you that busy that you neglect your own family?

Are you into alcohol? Drugs? Is that why you don't have enough to send home?

That's right! I had to be the one who looks after our parents! Pa's retired, and I'm only a housewife. Do you know how expensive that can get?

You're here looking after them... I thought...

That's crap. It would have been nice if you sent some money or came back every once in a while...

I have my own life too, you know!? So tell me - aren't we important enough?! We're your family!

Look... it's not that simple...

You know what you are? You're a selfish prick!!!

Stop it! You don't understand!

You don't help out! What are you doing that you can't even call home enough times?

I'm sorry! But I couldn't...!

What is wrong with you?!

Look! I'm gay!

Of course not!

It hasn't been easy living in New Zealand. It's an expensive place...

Look... it's not that simple...

You know what you are? You're a selfish prick!!!

Stop it! You don't understand!

You don't help out! What are you doing that you can't even call home enough times?

I'm sorry! But I couldn't...!

What is wrong with you?!

Look! I'm gay!
Are you just saying that?

Is this the reason you moved away?

It's the truth...

I'm... sorry... I didn't mean for it to come out like that...

Are you just saying that?

Is this the reason you moved away?
Yeah... I guess so...
Over the next hour, I blurted it all out to my sister. I told her about Neil, the house we recently bought together, my friends and about what I do as a job. She was surprisingly calm, while I was near-manic.

Well...

... it's your life.
Just so you know - I do understand why you had to stay away. But I wish you could have told me earlier...

You shouldn't use that as an excuse for not being there for your family. We need you now.

And... don't say anything about this to Mum or Dad. It will break their hearts. Not to mention the shame you'll put on the family name.

How could I? It's too embarrassing...

Over the next hour, I blurted it all out to my sister. I told her about Neil, the house we recently bought together, my friends and about what I do as a job. She was surprisingly calm, while I was near-manic.
Hullo everyone! Guess who’s here?

Xing Loh!

GAU-FU!*

Oh look at you! You’re so thin - are you not eating well?

Pa is still in surgery, but you make sure you go eat something first, okay?

I am, MA. There’s no need. Just seeing you here is enough for me.

I will. How about you? Are you hungry? I can get you something.

There’s no need. Just seeing you here is enough for me.
Hey little nephew. You've certainly grown up...

My mother wanted to know everything about me. It had been a few years since I saw her last, but she looked so much older... and tired. My nephew seemed to be taking most of her attention. I couldn't help but compare myself to him. My nephew was talkative. I was taught to be quiet. He was bubbly and exuberant. Growing up, I was aware I was different and it made me sullen and cautious. How different my own childhood had been from his.
When I was nine, I went over to my neighbour's house. In a rural village, there wasn't any real need for locked doors. Everyone knew each other, so it wasn't so wrong to be found wandering into each other's homes. The doorways were separated only by muslin cloth to encourage air circulation in a tropical climate.

I wanted to find my friend, to go cycling and hunt for tadpoles. I casually walked into his house, and was just about to call his name – when I heard something. It came from his bedroom. I crept up, and peeked through the sheer drape, and found him masturbating. And I just stood there watching him, quietly hidden. I was mesmerised.

Over time, my sexual awareness grew and I actively sought out male-to-male encounters – I knew I had to be discreet. My desire was insatiable because, as I knew, I was acting on something forbidden. Was there confusion to my state of being then? I couldn't really say. The funny thing was, there was a certainty – a clarity of sorts. This was who I was, and what I was doing defined me.
In many ways, New Zealand was very different to Malaysia. It gave me the confidence I lacked and I became comfortable with my individuality. Here, there were people fighting for me to have a voice, and for my rights as a person. I made friends who hailed from all over the globe, and shared my passions and ideas. I wasn’t stigmatised for being different, rather, I was celebrated. I felt like I finally belonged.

I visited bars and clubs – it was a rite of passage of sorts. I wanted to experience the world I had only admired from afar. I discarded my old self and explored leather and BDSM for a time. It opened my eyes to another part of the diverse gay community. I was made aware of the many roles that it offered. The dance of subtle nuances and overt sexuality proved intoxicating. But one thing remained constant – the expectation of masculinity.

However, alongside these opportunities, I also experienced a few darker truths. As a man of Asian-Chinese heritage, I had to deal with racism. There were challenges within the gay community itself. I wasn’t seen as ‘manly’ still – my masculinity didn’t count because it didn’t translate culturally. The gay scene, as euro-centric as it was, saw my cultural being as meek, submissive and asexual.

It was during this time that I came across the bears. Here was a bunch of guys who were comfortable in themselves and how they appeared. Their confidence and exuberance for the ordinary (and astonishingly middle-class) made me feel at ease. Acceptance wasn’t tied to income or a fashionable brand or a streamlined body. They felt like regular guys.
As I began to identify with these men, I started drawing them – mostly in erotic poses. This gave me a platform to explore both aesthetics and my sexual identity. My reputation grew and subsequently I was offered a publishing contract. I produced my first graphic novel based on gay bear culture and it sold with some commercial success. I was so proud of myself; I was recognised. But as my reputation became internationalised, a sense of dread dawned. What if my parents found out? It would destroy me, not to mention them. Belatedly, I cursed myself for using my actual name on the novel. I considered a ‘nom de plume’, but deep down I felt like a traitor to the honesty of the men around me... and to myself.

I felt free.

I made my own family in New Zealand. I met Jean-Lucie shortly after he moved from Paris. We shared a common story as immigrants and as artists. He became my confidant and best friend.

Falling in love with Neil was easy. He has such a lovable personality and warmth. He is my rock and I know I can always rely on him.
It felt like I had finally come home.
Mrs. Yun... we removed the tumour but there were a few complications. We will need to keep him here for a few more days to monitor him - just to avoid further problems.

Is he going to be okay, doctor?

It's too soon after the surgery to really tell. We'll know more when he wakes up and rests awhile.
SON... Yes, Pa?

I'm thirsty...

Here, let me put your bed up.

The doctor says you're healing well. It shouldn't be too long before we get you home.

I feel just fine!

I should be home now...

I'm thirsty...
So... how is work?

It's... good. It's a hard job and the hours are long... but I manage.

You're still young and it's a steady job. You shouldn't complain.

Found a wife yet?

Errr... no. Not yet. Girls these days are very difficult to hold onto.

I've tried dating a few but no one seemed to work out.

Although... I'm currently seeing somebody, but it's too early to tell...

You shouldn't be so picky. You're not a young bachelor anymore.
Your cousin, Lee Tsing — remember him?

He married this lovely Chinese lady — they already have two kids.

He is such a successful businessman...

You should be more like him.

I don't think what you're doing is right for you. Maybe you need to change jobs.

He drives a flashy Mercedes.

He's just bought this big condo in Kuala Lumpur, complete with air conditioning in every room.

I'll try, Pa.
It's good to have all the family here. Maybe when Xing Loh moves back, then we can have a reason to celebrate.

You're feeding me too much! I'm getting fat just by being here.

Nonsense - you need all the energy to get better.

Dad slowly recovered over the next few days. It could have been the morphine that was administered but he wasn't his usual cranky self. As my mother fussed over him, my sister continued giving me the 'look' - but I ignored her.

It's good to have all the family here. Maybe when Xing Loh moves back, then we can have a reason to celebrate.
Hey babe. Sorry I missed your call before. It looks like a few more days before Dad gets out.

I can’t wait till I come home...

... hey... are you crying?

What’s happened?

What??

Oh... no...
Babe... I am so sorry...

Are you okay?

Oh my god... that's awful!

Babe -- you couldn't have known he would have a stroke!

How did he die?

No, I don't know for how much longer.

You know I care! But I just can't leave...

Wait -- What? No! I can't come home right now! You know that!

No, I don't know for how much longer.

You know I care! But I just can't leave...

That isn't fair, Neil.

I have my responsibilities here too...

Neil -- Don't go. Please don't hang up...
Oh thank fuck you picked up! I just had the worst argument with Neil...

You heard about his Dad?
Yeah... I know. It’s just awful... and I feel so bad for not being there for him.

No I can’t just jump on a plane right now... my dad is still in hospital! Anyway, I just wanted to call and talk a bit. Everything is so f*cked up...

Huh? Not a good time?
Since when?
I don’t believe you! Have you got someone there with you?

You are sounding weird... what’s wrong?

Talk to me. Please.

Jean-Louie, what’s going on?
I am so sorry to hear that...

I can't believe they'd lay you off! You're their most valued...

What?

No! Don't even think like that!

Stop it! It's just a stupid job! You're going to find another -- better -- one!

Jean-Louie...

Just hang in there. I'll get home and we can talk it over.

Don't do anything stupid. Promise me.

Okay. Bye.

Shit.
As you are aware, we had some complications with your father’s operation. There’s a chance that he may require further surgery, but only when he gets his strength back.

We’re happy to release him home, but he will need to be cared for until that time.

Our son will look after him, won’t you, Xing Loh?

That shouldn’t be any problem, Doctor... I feel better already.
You can move back here. I can clean up your room.

That will be best – having you stay in the house with your parents.

I feel fine! I don’t need anyone to look after me.

You probably don’t have enough clothes... your sister can take you shopping tomorrow.

It will be so good to have you home, son.

Ma...

I’ll show you what you will need to do for your father once he is settled back. Some dressing techniques and the types of medication he’ll need to have.
This will be so good! Your aunties and uncles will be so thrilled to see you again.

I said I feel just fine!

Maybe you can stay for good. You can call the hospital anytime if you run into any problems.

There's no need! My son is very capable of doing things.

You'll need to check his blood pressure...

Nonsense! I don't know why you'd want to go back to New Zealand. There's nothing for you there!

Make sure he eats...

I don't need a caretaker! I'll eat what I want...

I... I... don't think...

I... I... don't think...

So, when can I go home, doctor? Can it be today?

I'll cook your favourite dishes! You need to get something in you and put on some weight.

He doesn't need to put on any weight! Look at him - he probably just needs to exercise more.

Wait...
I'm feeling just fine! Why won't you just let me get out of bed and I can show how well I am?

I CAN'T COME HOME...

COME SON. FETCH MY SLIPPERS. WE CAN GO...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

PLEASE...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

WAIT...

I'M GONNA CALL YOUR AUNTIE TENG. SHE CAN COOK SOME HERBAL...

HERE ARE THE REMAINING -- JUST KEEP THEM...

DON'T WORRY, SON. WE'LL TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING...

I SHOW YOU WHAT YOU NEED TO...

IT WILL BE GOOD TO HAVE YOU HOME...

WHAT IS IT?

TELL US...

TELL US...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I... HAVE SOMETHING...

I... HAVE SOMETHING...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T...

MR. YUN -- WE STILL NEED TO RUN A FEW MORE TESTS BEFORE WE CAN LET YOU GO.

OK WOULD YOU PREFER NASI LEMAK OR I COULD BE IT TOO SIP...

I'M FEELING JUST FINE! WHY WON'T YOU JUST LET ME GET OUT OF BED, AND I CAN SHOW HOW WELL I AM?

I CAN'T COME HOME...

I CAN'T WAIT...

I CAN'T...

I CAN'T....
STOP IT.
ALL OF YOU.
I THINK YOU'RE RUSHING INTO THINGS.
LISTEN... MA... PA...

WHILE IT’S LOVELY TO THINK XING LOH CAN JUST PACK UP EVERYTHING HE HAS IN NEW ZEALAND AND MOVE BACK HERE, HE CAN’T JUST DO IT OVERNIGHT.

BEFORE, HE’S GOT A REALLY IMPORTANT JOB HE’S DOING RIGHT NOW. HE CAN’T LEAVE THAT. ISN’T THAT RIGHT, KO?

... YES...

HE’S ABLE TO EARN SOME REALLY GOOD MONEY, AND HE CAN’T GIVE UP THAT OPPORTUNITY.

AND YOU CANNOT EXPECT HIM TO JUST ABANDON HIS JOB, RIGHT?

HE NEEDS TO GET BACK TO HIS JOB.

BEFORE, HIS COMPANY HAS BEEN REALLY CONSIDERATE TO GIVE HIM ENOUGH LEAVE TO COME BACK. AND HE OWS THEM FOR THIS GENEROUS GESTURE.

PA IS FEELING BETTER -- AND ALL HE NEEDS TO DO IS TO GET HIS STRENGTH BACK AND SEE WHAT THE DOCTOR THINKS. WE CAN LOOK AFTER HIM OURSELVES FOR NOW.

I AM SURE WHEN WE REALLY NEED KO, HE’LL BE HERE.
What did you just do?

I'm saving you.

Besides, you'll do more damage if you told them the real reason you can't come back.

My husband and I can handle things for now.

But... I'm their eldest son...

Yes you are. But you've got your own problems to deal with. Am I right?

I caught your conversation earlier. It sounds like they need you back there.

They are... my family...

Well at least now I know you're not all alone there.

I don't know what to do...

I know you will do the right thing.

You are. But you've got your own problems to deal with. Am I right?
Mummy!
All good?

Yeah, I'm all checked in.

Are you sure you will be all right?

We'll be fine. I'll give you a call if we need something.

Besides, it's not that great of a distance between us. Just a plane ride really.
I'd like to meet Neil sometime. From what you told me, he sounds like a lovely guy.

I... should have told you earlier... about...

What's done is in the past.

Do what you need to do. Just keep in touch more frequently. We worry about you.

I know you have your own life now--but don't forget your family here. We love you.

You don't need to shut us out.

Thank you.

I'd like to meet Neil sometime. From what you told me, he sounds like a lovely guy.
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Tommy is a gay man hiding from his family in Malaysia his sexuality and to the life he has made with his partner in Auckland, New Zealand. He is confronted with his lies when his father falls ill, and bound by an unshakeable sense of duty, he returns home. The journey tests relationships with his family, as he feels trapped to conform to the construct of a ‘good son’, and his need to be true to himself. His sense of belonging is challenged, and he subsequently questions his responsibilities and obligations as a man, son and life partner.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Homebound is Don Choo’s first graphic novel and is based on his life experience as an immigrant Asian gay man. He is an illustrator, a graphic designer and an aspiring academic. He has been contributing art to the bear community since 2005. Don’s art features subjects that celebrate not only the appeal of the masculine, but also cultural diversity within the gay mainstream. His major influences include Gengoroh Tagame, Jiraiya, Christophe Jannin and Bill Ward, among many others. While he uses digital means to complete his pieces, he favours traditional media – using ink on paper – as it allows him to ‘feel closer’ to the illustration.