

Success and Failure

by Curtis Chang

Margaret is sitting at cafeteria table, looking forlorn. Natalie and Jen come by with their trays.

Jen: Hey, Margaret. Can we join you for lunch?

Margaret (despondently): Sure, why not?

Jen sits down happily: Oh, good, I love this window spot. It's the only place to enjoy the sun. You know, with winter here, I always feel like I never get enough light...

Natalie, still standing, realizes something is wrong and motions to Jen to get her attention.

Natalie: We can sit somewhere else if you want to be alone...

Jen (embarrassed): Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah, we can move easily. Uh, yeah... and besides I've been getting too much sun lately anyways... skin cancer, you know?

Margaret: No, no, sit down. It is such a sunny day outside.

Natalie: Are you OK, Margaret? Is something wrong?

Margaret: No, no, nothing's wrong. I'm fine. How are you?

Jen: Pretty good. I've been so busy, you know, but I'm feeling better now that I finished all my midterms. I had to pull three all nighters but it was worth it 'cause I found out I did pretty well on my...

Margaret slumps her head down and buries her face in her hands.

Jen: ... but enough about me! (looks at Natalie confused and helpless)

Natalie: Margaret, what's wrong. Come on, you can tell us.

Margaret: Oh, I'm sorry. I don't know what's my problem. It's nothing. I don't know why I'm getting all worked up.

Jen: What happened? Did you hear some bad news?

Margaret: No, you guys are going to think I'm lame. I got back my History exam and I got a C. I don't know what's going on. I studied so hard, I went over all my notes, all the reading a hundred times. I even made all these stupid notecards (throws them away). This is the third exam I've done poorly on and I don't know what else I can do!

Natalie: Well, you tried your best. That's what counts. That's all that anyone can ask from you, right?

Margaret: It's not that easy. My parents gave up their entire savings to send me to a good school in this country. They didn't send me here just so I could get C's. Which is what's going to happen if something doesn't change. I don't know what I'm going to do.

Natalie:But, can't you just tell them that you've been trying really hard? You know, tell them about all the notecards you're making and all that?

Margaret: Yeah, maybe. It's not just them, though, it's also me. I feel like such a failure.

Jen: I know what you mean, Margaret, but you just can't let it get to you. That's what I told myself after Jeff and I broke up, "Jen, you just can't let it get to you."

Natalie:You and Jeff broke up! I can't believe you didn't tell me! When did this happen?

Margaret: Was this someone you had been going out with for a while?

Natalie:For a while? They've been going out forever, since sophomore year in high school, wasn't it? You told me once you thought the two of you were meant for each other!

Jen: Well, I was wrong. Things just didn't work out. It's been hard being at different schools, we don't see each other except on weekends and when we do, it seems like all we do is fight. So, last weekend, we finally decided to call it quits.

Margaret: What were you fighting about?

Jen: Oh, it was this and that. I guess we found out we were pretty different in some ways. Or maybe we've just changed over the years. Like, for instance, more and more he doesn't like to be with a lot of other people, but since coming to college I really like to go out. I got tired of just always spending weekends just the two of us, with him always wanting to, you know, mess around. And he got tired of of me complaining,. And I guess we both just got sick of trying to work stuff like that out all the time.

Natalie:But, aren't you sad, Jen? I mean, you guys were really serious. You don't seem that bothered.

Jen: Well, I was really depressed for a while. But like I was saying, you just can't let it get to you. So, things didn't work out with Jeff like I wanted to, what are you going to do? Besides, I was too dependent on the relationship anyways. I think I had too much riding on it, you know. I kept going up and down depending on how everything was going with Jeff. Now that I'm single, I don't have to let every little success or failure in a relationship get to me.

Natalie:But, don't you think at some point you've got to let it get to you?

Jen: What do you mean?

Natalie:Oh, I don't know. I wasn't thinking so much of you and Jeff. If it wasn't meant to be, it wasn't meant to be. It's not like you were married or something. But, well, I guess I was thinking

about my parents. They got divorced when I was in high school. There were a lot of problems in the marriage, but basically, I think they just stopped caring enough to make it succeed.

The three of them sit in silence thinking.

Curtis and Ryan enter. They are wearing caps, sweats, carrying a baseball bat and mitt, etc., and laughing and talking baseball loudly. They greet the women.

Ryan: Hey, are you guys almost done? Can we join you?

Jen: Uh, yeah, sure. We were just talking about stuff.

Ryan: Oh, don't stop on our account.

Curtis: Yeah, what were you talking about?

Margaret: No, never mind. It was kind of a deep discussion.

Curtis: What! We can be deep! Ryan and I are always having deep talks. Come on, try us. What were you talking about?

Natalie: Well, we were talking about success and failure, parents, how relationships work out... and also about marriage.

Ryan and Curtis stare at each other, and then at the women, then back at each other in silence. Curtis drums his fingers and then finally speaks up.

Curtis: Gee, you know, the sun coming through that window is really hurting my eyes. Maybe we should move to another table.

Natalie: Look, we don't have to keep talking about what we were talking about. Why don't you guys tell us what your day was like. Did you come from practice -- I didn't know the season started this early.

Ryan: It doesn't start for another three months, but Curtis here was kind enough to come out and throw me a little batting practice for me.

Curtis: A little? I don't call 50 sliders in a row "a little" batting practice.

Jen: Why did you do something like that?

Curtis: Because Ryan demanded it. Because Ryan Redwine is going to learn to drive a lefty slider if it kills him... or my arm.

Ryan: Hey, refuse to lose, baby. It's that simple.

Ryan and Curtis high five (with Curtis wincing).

Jen: Why is hitting a slider so important, Ryan?

Ryan grimaces and wrings his hands anxiously.

Ryan: Well, I suppose it goes back to last season. Division playoffs, final game. Bottom of the ninth and we're down a run. We've got the bases loaded with two outs, and I'm up. I've gone 3 for 3 that day, just been murdering the heat their pitcher's been trying to get pass me. So they bring in a relief pitcher, a skinny lefty. And on the first pitch, he throws me the nastiest slider that has me in knots. The next one is the same pitch, only I'm tied up even more. And then his third slider....

Ryan shudders and shakes his head: I still have nightmares reliving me waving right by it for strike three.

Curtis: And so for every single day since then, he's dragged me out there to throw him one slider after another. Because Ryan here is not going to let that happen to him again. Because the next pitcher that tries to slip three straight sliders past Ryan is going to get some nightmares of his own.

Ryan: Refuse to lose, baby, refuse to lose. It's that simple.

Natalie: Do you really think it's that simple?