

I could see the man
was very unhappy



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

I could see that the man was very unhappy. As I watched him sitting by himself at the bus stop, a big brown paper parcel beside him, I felt my curiosity perk and was also strangely troubled. I sensed that the old man felt confused and needed someone to talk to. Yet I held back. The party was in half an hour. So I could not make the time for him. Besides, who was I introduced into another person's privacy? These were my thoughts as I boarded the bus. As the bus drew away from the stop, I looked back at the lone figure on the bridge.

A few minutes later, I was back at the same place. He was still there, still alone. I sat down beside him. Other people were ignoring us. I started a conversation with him. At first, he was startled and was silent. As time passed by and he could see that I was sincere, he began to talk. His name was Arthur Tan. Barely, fifteen years ago, he had been a happily married man with two lovely children performing well at school. It seemed that nothing could upset his beautiful life. Then, on one cruise, his family decided to go along with him for a family vacation.

It was a hectic time for him, but he thoroughly enjoyed their company. Everything went well until one night, when taking over the wheel, he fell asleep. His ship collided with an oil tanker and both sank. He was the sole survivor of this tragedy. Since that fateful day, Arthur had lived miserable life. With his family gone, his life seemed to lose all meaning. He spent his days in despondency and guilt. His friends shunned him; hardly anyone spoke a kind word to him, he rarely even saw a friendly human face.

He showed me the brown parcel. He had collected all the mementos of his happier life before the tragedy - his uniforms, certificates and his family

photographs. He had wrapped all these precious things and tied them up in the big brown paper parcel. As I looked at his collection of memories, I understood his sadness. The people in the photographs were laughing and smiling happily. The Arthur Tan in the photographs was so different from the man I could see now in front of me.

He started to reminisce, and I let him. I did not care that I was already late for the party. This was more important. He talked for two hours, telling me about his family and the happy times he had with them. Finally, he looked at me with tears in his eyes and said " Thank you". Then he got up and left. I found myself sitting alone, hardly noticing the trickle of tears on my cheeks, watching him walk away. I was glad I had been there for him as all he wanted was a person to talk to.