Topic: A Reunion

Pictures given: a feast, a woman scolding a boy as a girl cries, three people taking a "we-fie"

"John! We're going to the hawker centre for dinner as Uncle Mark is back from America," Mother chirped.

I gave a noncommittal grunt. My eyes were fixed on the monster I was fighting on my phone. It was the last level! If I did not manage to clear it by the end of the day, my game would restart and I would have to start from level one again. To my dismay, the words "You lose!" flashed across the screen minutes later, mocking my futile attempts to defeat the monster.

"Urghh!" I screamed. I pressed the screen of my phone to try again. It was the twenty-fourth time I was attempting this final level. Passing it seemed impossible! Having to go for dinner meant less time to achieve my goal. Perhaps I should test my luck…

"Mother! I'm not going to dinner later!" I yelled, hoping she would agree, but Lady Luck was not on my side that day. The next thing I knew, Mother stormed up the stairs and burst into my room.

"What do you mean? You're addicted to that silly game!" she hollered, her voice cracking on the last word as she prised the phone out of my fingers. Alas, the monster was not the only one triumphing over me that day. I knew my phone would be locked away in Mother's drawer, and I would only get it back that night.

After regaining my composure, I retorted, "I hate you! I hate Uncle Mark! He's so troublesome!" I flung myself onto my bed, refusing to acknowledge Mother as she marched out of the room with my prized possession. Without my phone, I felt like I had lost a limb.

I sulked until it was time for dinner. Mother practically dragged me out of the house. I sighed in resignation. This family reunion is such a waste of time, I thought, but I will be on my best behaviour. I need to get my phone back! I could already picture

it: plastic stools that stuck to the back of my legs, ceiling fans pushing hot air around, and two hours of adult conversation.

Once Mother and I reached our destination, we found our relatives. They were seated around a large round table laden with local delights, everything from Char Kway Teow to Hokkien Mee. I scanned the table and my eyes landed on a jovial, carefree man who was joking with one of my aunts.

“Hello, Aunty Jenny. Hello, Uncle Mark,” I greeted politely. I sat beside him awkwardly, wondering what the right thing to say was. Sadly, there are no children in my extended family since Mother was the only one who got married. Thus, I had no one my age to play with or talk to.

“Hey, John. I still remember you from when I was working in Singapore. You were just five back then. Look how much you’ve grown!” Uncle Mark laughed and ruffled my hair affectionately. He whipped out his phone and opened his photo gallery. To my surprise, he went to his album of “Favourites”.

Inside, there were pictures and videos of me. He clicked on a video which showed us playing joyfully together when I was in kindergarten. That day, he had to pull out all the stops because I had been throwing a tantrum. A smile crept up my lips. As he recounted more of our shared experiences, I thought of how ungrateful I had been earlier. To think I treasured my game account more than spending quality time with a family member who cared for me so dearly. Perhaps Mother was right — I was indeed addicted!

The dinner we shared, although simple, brought back a lot of wonderful memories. Uncle Mark would spend hours teaching me simple things like how to pronounce difficult words and how to catch spiders. It made me feel even more guilty for prioritising gaming over family. Time with Uncle Mark could not be taken for granted now that he was working overseas and would have to fly back soon. Who knew when he would be able to return to Singapore again?

All good things must come to an end. Just before we scattered, Uncle Mark pulled out his phone and exclaimed, “Everyone, pose for the picture!” For once, I did not hang back. I squeezed in beside him, Mother’s arm around my shoulder and Aunty

Jenny laughing somewhere behind us. “Three, two, one!” The shutter clicked, freezing all of us mid-laugh.

That night, Mother was pleased with my behaviour at the family gathering and handed me back my phone. I looked at the time and saw that it was nine at night. Although there was still time to defeat the monster and emerge victorious, I realised that the game had no meaning in it. Not only was it time-consuming, but it had almost cost me precious family time. I decided to delete it. In its place on my home screen, I set the photo Uncle Mark had taken. Then I opened up my WhatsApp and texted Uncle Mark, asking for the details of this return flight.

What a meaningful family reunion! I will look forward to any of Uncle Mark’s visits from now on and for many years to come!

Kaylee, P6