

Consecotaleophobia

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My feet plant against the ground as if they had been cemented in place. I look down the street, chin held high, eyes squinting. The bright lights and sounds from the street attack me, taunting me; reminding me that they are the champions, and I am the challenger. I've never been able to walk into Chinatown before, but I'm resolved to change that now.

The wind races by, carrying the scent of noodles and rice. They infiltrate my nostrils, finding a direct path to my spine, which shivers uncontrollably. I start to cower, but recover when I remember the freedom that could be.

I step forward slowly, but firmly. The wind whips up again, and I feel a million little tiny pokes at my face. I bring my hands to my face, than start to tear.

No, I can do this. There's no one here poking me. It's all in my head.

A little Chinese boy runs past me, laughing as another child chases him. It must be easy for them, to live here; to eat like normal people; to not fear the ridiculous. Lucky punks.

I approach the first store on my right. The bottles in the window are dusty, and I can see an old man at the counter in the shadows. He peers out of the window at me, but loses interest quickly.

Breathe. Just breathe.

With a deep, I march forward. Passing two more doors, my mind is focused on staying relaxed instead of the wares they might be selling. I have my destination in sight and will not be distracted again.

As I close the gap between me and the Mai Fong Chinese Restaurant, my heart pounds faster and faster. The giant red door grows larger as I approach. Its menacing size seems to warn of danger within, and even now I fear I will fall and gouge out my eye.

You've come all this way, don't give up.

This is the farthest I have ever come. On the other side of this door lies my fate. I will either man up, or pass out. I'm not sure which, but I am ready for either.

The door is heavier than it looks, which seems impossible. I pull hard, and hear bells as the door opens all the way.

"Ni Hao!" a man yells from inside, not moving his eyes from the food he cooks.

The rush of wonderful and potentially deadly food hits me in the face. I can almost taste the soy sauce on my tongue, my hands start to shake wildly. I walk through the door and it closes behind me.

The tiny sounds of wood hitting bowls fill my ears, and I close my eyes tight. I am sure people are staring at me, this silly white kid, eyes closed, body shivering.

Almost there now; almost there.

I breathe in deep, letting the smell fill my lungs. Oh how I wish I could enjoy these wonderful foods without my fears haunting me.

A young woman passes by me, giving me a little smile. Her long silky black hair is pulled back in a ponytail, and it whips back and forth as she pushes hard to open the door.

The bells ring, followed by, "Xie Xie!"

The door slams closed. I jump forward toward the counter, and that's when I see them: a plastic tub full of chopsticks.

Chopsticks! Why am I so afraid of chopsticks! I feel at any moment they will stab me, or I will fall on them, eyes first. I don't know what it is, but I am terrified.

My new years resolution was to get over my consecotaleophobia; a fear of chopsticks. I should have just resolved to lose weight, or get a better job. What was I thinking?

"Keyi bang ni ma?" the old man asks.

"E—excuse me?" I reply, voice shaking.

"Can I help you?"

My mind races, *what to order? Oh, just order something you idiot!*

"Uh, orange chicken?"

"Fried or steamed rice?" he says in a thick accent.

"Fried, please."

"Foh niety fie."

I reach into my pocket and pull out the crumpled ball of cash. My fingers are shaking so bad, I can barely pull apart the bills to hand him a five. He puts the money in the register, and doesn't even offer to give me my five cents change.

"Sit down. Fie minute." He turns around and tends the large black bowl that is steaming over the fire.

I find a secluded seat in the corner of the restaurant. Focusing all of my attention to my mantra, I try to ignore the sounds of chopsticks hitting porcelain bowls.

I can do this. I can do this. I can do this.

The minutes pass quickly, and soon there is a piping bowl of wondrous cuisine in front of me. On my tray a battle ensues between good and evil. A

white bowl of orange chicken and rice plays the part of the angel, the chopsticks the devil.

My hand shakes as I reach for the devil.

I can do this! I have nothing to fear! They are just eating utensils!

I grab the fibrous wood sticks in my hand and cringe. I remember to breathe again, and almost hyperventilate trying to catch my breath.

My back slouches a bit as I breathe in deep and exhale.

Ok, this is not so bad. I'm not dead, I'm not being attacked by these things. They aren't so bad.

A moment of revelation makes me giggle. I have been so afraid of these little things for so long, and now I wield them in my hand as a magician would his wand, or a knight his sword. *I am now the master.*

Then I rub them together.

The demon-like sounds of the wood grinding together sends a chill down my spine. I shake and cringe, dropping the chopsticks onto the tray. My heart races. I breathe faster and faster.

I can't breathe! I can't breathe! I'm dying!

I feel a crushing weight on my chest, and I grasp at my heart. I look around and notice everyone is staring at me. The challenger has been defeated, and the crowd mocks me with their eyes.

I jump up, dumping my tray on the floor. The door is even heavier than before, and it takes all of my strength to open it. The bells ring, teasing the loser as he leaves.

I run down the street as fast as I can, breathing hard the whole way. I finally find my car and fling the door open. I sit inside in a fetal position and rock back and forth. The chopsticks have won the battle—and the war. I will never touch another set as long as I live.

