

**RED WING<sup>16</sup>** When Tam Chi-wing put on the pair of Red Wing shoes, she learned what it was like to be in a world of her own.

Tam Chi-wing's earliest memory of running was that time at the mall when she was five. She had reached her hand out for a Little Twin Stars ponytail holder, but Mom said she couldn't have it, so she squeezed it into her palm, turned, and ran. Mom kept chasing her, and she ran far, far away, but the shopping center was so big, it was impossible to find the exit.

Her most spectacular marathon may have been when she was ten. At that time, Mom and Dad were on the brink of divorce and were fighting every day. Tam Chi-wing started wailing, so she got a beating. Suddenly, she threw open the front gate and ran out of the apartment, running wildly through the hallways of the housing block. She didn't stop even when she lost both her slippers, and ran and ran until she was seven blocks away at Grandma's house. It was only when she looked down at her bloody feet that she felt any pain. She hadn't expected that by her making that run, Mom and Dad wouldn't divorce. But then, they never really reconciled either, it was just always cold between them.

After that, even though Tam Chi-wing kept running, it never seemed as big a deal. Running was the only way she knew to solve a problem. If she forgot her homework, or if she was embarrassed that she couldn't answer a question in class, Tam Chi-wing would push aside her desk and dash out of the classroom. The teacher could never block her fast enough. Most of the time, Tam Chi-wing wanted to run far away from her classmates. Tam Chi-wing's eyes were narrow and pointy, so whenever she looked at anyone she looked harsh. This gradually became offensive, and she began to be hated by her classmates. In class, they loved to pull her hair or throw chalk at her, instigating the desired outcome—when they had tormented her enough, she would run off. Tam Chi-wing was constantly running here and running there, and so she never had the chance to stop and say even a few words to anyone.

Once, after gym class, some girls stole Tam Chi-wing's school uniform skirt. She asked for it once quietly, then stammered, unable to say anything more. She dashed out of the changing room, and ran into Kwong Kin-sheng in the boy's class. Kwong Kin-sheng got up and ran after her. After school the next day, some of the girls in her class ambushed her outside, tied her hands and feet with rope, took off her shoes and socks, and burned the soles of her feet with cigarettes. They cruelly jeered, "See how well you can run now," and warned her to stay away from Kwong Kin-sheng. Tam Chi-wing limped home. The next day she put on long stockings and went right back to school.

When Tam Chi-wing was not running, she would wander around in the shopping mall. There, she didn't need to run, because nobody recognized her or bothered her. Nobody even noticed her. She could stroll around, slowly, by herself, and let her gaze wander among all the dazzling things around her. Once she had saved up enough money, she would bring something home that would become a part of her. That way, she didn't need to ask Mom or anyone else. Once Tam Chi-wing's legs had healed, she went out and bought a pair of scarlet Red Wing work boots. They had white soles and square toes. As soon as she put them on, she felt that she could walk into Takuya Kimura's and Puffy's exciting but lonely world.<sup>17</sup>

When she got back to her building, Kwong Kin-sheng was sitting on the edge of the flower planters waiting for her. Once they saw each other, Tam Chi-wing turned and ran. Kwong Kin-sheng ran after her, calling out, "Don't misunderstand me, don't be scared, let's stop and talk a bit." Soon, however, Kwong Ken Sen fell behind huffing and puffing, and completely lost sight of Tam Chi-wing. As for Tam Chi-wing, wearing the pair of Red Wings, with one burst of speed she ran past the property's garden fence and up the building's pedestrian bridge. The more she ran, the faster, the higher, the farther she went, away from the bridge, and the road, and the ground, and the earth, running until she came to a land where no one could catch her.