



A NOVEL

A  
Certain  
EXPOSURE

JOLENE TAN

“A masterful debut. Jolene Tan has written, in devastatingly beautiful prose, a quiet book about disquieting things. She lays bare the dark hearts of our sentimentalized HDB ‘Heartlanders’ and our vaunted government ‘scholars’ and finds: coldness, sanctimony, and corrosive attitudes the more damaging for their utter casualness. This is a passionate warning, a chronicle of tragedy foretold. How will we save our selves and our soul? Like Anthony Chen’s film *Ilo Ilo*, *A Certain Exposure* already has the feel of an essential Singapore classic.”

—**Sandi Tan, author of *The Black Isle***

“An intimately layered story about twin brothers forging different paths through the intricacies and prejudices of Singapore society, but will strike a chord wherever the struggle between personal values and social pressures is experienced.”

—**Ovidia Yu, author of *Aunty Lee’s Delights***

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places,  
and incidents either are the product of the author’s imagination  
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*For Mark and Pei Chi—the core team*

“It’s not a terrible thing—I mean, it may be terrible,  
but it’s not damaging, it’s not poisoning, to do without  
something one wants [...] what’s terrible is to  
pretend that the second-rate is first-rate.”

—Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*

“A family’s like a loaded gun:  
You point it in the wrong direction,  
Someone’s gonna get killed.”

—Belle and Sebastian, “I Could Be Dreaming”

“Old bureaucrat, my comrade,  
it is not you who are to blame.”

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Wind, Sand and Stars*

## MARCH 1998

BRIAN ORGANISED FOR the body to be flown back. His parents had been stoic enough for every other administrative task, but not for this. For a while they considered having Andrew cremated in Britain, returning, like so many dregs of tea, in a pot. But Brian could not bear the idea that he might not see Andrew again—the real Andrew, not just bits and flakes produced from his oxidation at high temperatures. So he stepped up to the job, to phone calls with Human Remains in the airline's cargo department, to have his brother's corpse sent home.

Now, in the void deck, peering uncertainly, Brian wasn't sure why it had been important. A pot of ashes might have been preferable for not pretending to any likeness. His expectation that the thing in the casket would be Andrew had ebbed away. In his mind his brother was browned, lithesome, handsome; and though there are good reasons to doubt an identical twin's assessment on those points, everyone else, too, found the head framed in the pearly padded lining remote and undersized, the skin false, almost papery. Not for the first time, "Human Remains" struck

Brian as inapt, even cruel. The human was gone.

He moved onto a chair. These were laid out in rows, bright red plastic under the white lights that hurt his eyes. He had the uneasy and unreasonable feeling that he hadn't looked for whatever vague duration might count as enough. His mother stood by the casket, her arms pressed tightly across her lower ribs, her face smudged with fatigue. His father a few seats away, looking at nothing in particular. Together they formed a loose-jointed triangle of mourners.

The sketchy theory occurred to Brian that he should move to console his parents. But the Hollywood-toned images he conjured felt hollow. An arm around a shoulder? They were not a family who touched. A sympathetic phrase? They were literal, practical people, speaking where it was useful, not given to sharing emotions. And what good could such a discussion do? Grief, guilt, anger, despair, blank exhaustion, even a kind of irritableness—as seemed so often the case, it must be impossible, Brian thought, that verbalising any of the things he felt could give comfort.

As a child, like many children, Brian had been afraid of his parents dying. This expressed itself not in subjective feelings of fear—he would not have used the word “scared”—but in a masochistic, periodically recurring obsession. Nine years old, perched on a kitchen stool, he stared at his mother as she scraped at the bottom of the rice cooker, her profile

silhouetted against the bright patches of tree showing between diagonal window grilles. You'll go, you'll go. You're here now, but you won't be. You'll go. Across the table, oblivious, Andrew hunched over a book of brain teasers. When he looked up, Brian froze, averted his eyes, began to regard his cutlery intensely and without seeing. His heart pounded. You'll go. You'll go. The large rice bowl chinked solidly on the table and his mother took her place at the corner.

“Brian, dinner.”

“Yes, Mum.”

He would close the car door behind him and become immediately certain that his father was pulling off into a collision, a delivery van perhaps, or, swerving to avoid a jaywalker, a bus. He pulsed with momentary hatred of the hypothetical pedestrian. This was more than a decade before the Nicoll Highway collapsed. His imagination did not extend to the spontaneous crumbling of tonnes of concrete.

In his teens he sometimes approached the ultimate taboo, allowing himself to think the word *cancer*, but in a disciplined, sidelong way, never front and centre. His images of that eventuality were always rigorously vague. Once his parents took a flight without the boys, a short trip to Hong Kong, and he drove himself into an ecstasy of panic until they called from Kai Tak with a reminder not to let strangers into the flat. After that he subsided into a few days of blithe ordinariness. At one point, in a darkened cinema,

he even focused single-mindedly on the question of how to hold hands with Cheryl from Bukit Panjang Girls' School. But then he remembered, stiffening with horror at his own neglect: his parents were scheduled to be midair at that very second. They might even have sunk, glassy-eyed, half an hour earlier, beneath the foamy waters of the South China Sea.

It was entirely superstitious. Pure childishness. Not the fears, which were reasonable, and as these things go, indeed realistic: but the dutiful, limpet-like attention to these scenarios, the ritual invocations, the sense that his anticipation was a kind of magic charm. It was always the thing taken for granted that the universe snatched away, wasn't it? If he stayed on the ball, his visions were forbidden, by some hazy but compelling, almost mathematical, certainty from materialising. More pragmatically—a relative description—if he kept himself conscious of their mortality, he could never be reproached for undervaluing their presence when they did eventually go.

Brian knew, quite simply, that he *needed* his parents; he avoided thinking about whether he *liked* them. There were punishments reserved for such ingratitude.

He'd never imagined Andrew dying, of course. Andrew was a grubby, competitive presence, crowding the womb, wailing snottily from fifteen minutes prior to Brian's infancy, and then hanging about, unavoidable, for the rest of it: like a law of nature or a reflection in the mirror. When you share a

bed with your older brother, and he snores, and kicks you in the shin in the middle of the night, you shove him away and think with irritation and envy of prosaic possibilities, like one day having your own room.

Now, when it was arguably most pertinent—when Andrew had actually died—Brian was reluctant to picture his final moments. Maybe “reluctant” was the wrong word: he was simply not moved to do it. The frenetic energies invested so involuntarily and so persistently in visualising so many other fatal sequences had, here, faltered.

The foreignness of it all was against him. He could recite easily enough the bare, infamous facts of the situation, but they were strings of words, opaque to him. Pictures Andrew had shown him of Corpus Christi College in Cambridge University were dominated by smiling undergraduates. He had at most only background glimpses of the place itself: of curt, clipped circles of grass; darkened dining halls; sandy walls of stone. English air in March, winter and its end, were theories only: neither fresh cold nor dry electric heat came within his experience. He had never seen a photograph of Andrew's room—or had he? He had after all seen, well, that picture. But it revealed little of the room, if that was indeed where it had been taken, to say nothing of the window. Curtains (what patterns?) or blinds? What was the view—cobblestone street, closed square college courtyard,

temperate tree? (Themselves all further mysteries.) And what colour were the bedsheets Andrew had looped around his neck and tied to the window handle, cutting his blood flow and killing his brain—so said the doctors—just before dawn?

It was hopeless. Nothing could be made of the material. And if Andrew was so partially imagined in life, it seemed to Brian grotesque to fill in the blanks in death.

This went too for the biggest blank of all. There was no suicide note. Speculation was inevitable, and repulsive. My brother killed himself because. Because of a photograph, because of a prank, because of malice, because of his nature, because of a panic, because of a misunderstanding (on his part, on everyone else's), because of all of the above, because of none of the above. My brother killed himself because. Brian would not fill in the blank. My brother killed himself.

## JUNE 1987

OUTSIDE, THE RAIN unrolled in fat grey sheets, palpating walls and windows with a steady thrum, punctuated with intermittent deep-chested rumbles. The storm-time air was cool: the earth's usual cloak of humidity had lifted. The floor's tiles were luxuriously cold against Brian's knees and thighs and elbows and belly.

He had begun reading out of boredom. What he had really wanted to do was look for Priya. The book she had sparkled over seemed the next best thing, like he was learning something about her, a one-way conversation at least. He slid quickly in—it was ease and brilliance. When he surfaced, just before Chapter Eleven, the sturdy fall of water had given way to the filliping rat-tat of the roof run-off and to the emergent whirr of the ceiling fan. He sat up, stretched and considered.

He wanted to *know*. What would happen when they met the King? Their three-bedroom flat in this Braddell estate could not produce wonders to match these vain sorcerers and falling stars. Priya might not be there today. It would be wet. On the other hand (he stirred), the spell was already broken (he was on his feet). Something had uncoiled in his legs; his

thigh and shoulder muscles were firing urgent little twitches. The air was still enticingly fresh. He had to be moving. It was an occupational hazard of being twelve years old.

He went into his bedroom to shelve the book. Andrew was asleep, peacefully enough. There had been a lot of muttering and jerking the night before. Their cousin Mabel, whose mother was their mother's sister, sat at their desk with the inevitable Bible, a chunky volume she toted almost everywhere. Brian found it vaguely sinister, partly because it was Mabel's, and partly because it seemed, from the one time he had looked inside, deathly boring. The text was tiny and drab. Someone "begat" (what?) someone who lived for some implausible length of time and then "begat" someone else of someplace, bizarre names no one in real life would have. (The same could be said of his beloved fantasy novels, but those were not laid out, like a fossil record, with this tone of laboured verisimilitude.) On request Mabel showed him the bit about Noah and the ark, which he recalled from a picture book somewhere, but it was lifeless—no giraffes, no vigour in the waters.

It made him suspicious that the writing was not just difficult but unreachably distant, relying on retelling for charm or on translation for meaning. To hear Mabel speak, it was not a book at all, as he knew them, but a decoder-passport to shadowy authorities, to peculiar (and burdensome) commitments. Like roleplay games but in earnest, or like

school but weirder. This was, to him, wholly unlike real reading and its real pleasures—the pleasure of the enchanted castle which wanders fields—where the unusual or unknown pivots suddenly into total and private view. Brian's love of stories did not survive adolescence, but at twelve they ruled him, they had set him standards, and the Holy Bible did not make the cut.

Though they tried to be discreet, his parents, too, viewed Mabel's Christianity with reservations. Her mother, Poh Lian, had begun to attend church after marrying a fairly nominal believer. This was the immediate source of Mabel's affectation (as Brian's parents saw it), and that was innocent enough, but they had misgivings about its ultimate origins. Christianity was the ang moh religion, a supercilious British import. Lim Poh Ling and Teo Kim Seng made poor cultural purists: they spoke English at home and at work, they had bent with the winds to give their sons "high class" ang moh names, and they plied the boys with ang moh books to improve their exam results. But that was practical. This was different, this ang moh God, this Jesus Christ. (The Trinity escaped them, but they saw these two as collapsible.) It was, well, it was weird.

This was no battle of faiths. Whatever the government census claimed in its eagerness to classify, their attachment to Buddhism was so slender as to seem, if you looked from

the side, to be hardly there at all. It was the very notion of devotion, of worship, of purity, of doctrine and abstract morality, that bothered them. Particularly worrying were tales, transmitted in scandalised whispers, of converted children who refused to attend funeral ceremonies on the most abstruse grounds. Superstition, they called the traditional rites for paying respect to the dead. Devil worship. “Who is this ang moh, this Jesus Christ, so important ah, more important than her Ah Kong? Her Ah Kong leh, her Ah Kong you know!” Christianity caused weird behaviour which flew in the face of both economic gain and social ease, rather like the stories they used to hear, in lower whispers still, of people who had given away all their money, and thrown aside comfortable lives in Singapore, to serve the revolution in the motherland. Christianity and Communism were body-snatchers. And so, oddly enough, Brian’s aesthetic objections and his parents’ unimaginative ones converged.

Nevertheless, Mabel had volunteered to come each day and watch over Andrew while he sweated and moaned his way through the fever; and Brian’s parents were impressed and grateful. Mabel was not Brian’s favourite person, but if she hadn’t been there, he would probably have spent the start of the long school holidays sitting by Andrew himself, so he was grudgingly glad of her presence after all.

“I’m going out,” he said.

“Where?”

Like she needed to know. “Downstairs lorh.”

“Don’t come back late ah. And don’t mix with gangsters.”

“Yah lah.” The enduring mystery of Mabel: how could she be in Secondary Two, only fourteen, and already talk like an auntie?

His annoyance fell away quickly, at some point out the door, into his slippers, along the corridor and three flights down. (One up would get him to the lift for his block, but he hadn’t yet learned teenage laziness.) Priya wasn’t in Frankie Wong Books. He glanced into the bakery next door, scanned the corner coffee shop, and then made for the playground where they had last parted. He had been sitting cross-legged on one tyre swing, suspended from a pyramid of chains; she dismounting from another, dusting gold sand off her shorts and her calves in the slanting evening light. His heart fell: both tyres now hung undisturbed, gleaming wetly. No sign.

He wandered onto the damp sand and stood for a moment. The book again, after all, or the bakery perhaps, and kueh ambon? He had half-turned to go when she called his name, and he looked again at the tiled concrete tower standing in the heart of the playground. She was peeking out from the dingy cavern within, visible only dimly through a small, diamond-shaped hole. (Later, and not very much later at that, he forgot his encounters with Priya Menon almost totally, retaining only the essentials: how she made him

feel, what she came to mean. But even so, Brian felt a loss greater than simple nostalgia, as these weathered playground structures in their kingdoms of sand were replaced in almost every housing estate—grey columns, giant birds and stony dragons giving way to open metal frames and plastic squares on rubbery foam.)

He ducked in and joined her in a half-crouch. The space was ringed round with the small diamond windows. A knife-edge of light slid in above the platform, by their heads. They smiled at each other. “I’m reading that book,” he said, to be speaking of something. “It’s good.”

“It is, right? I’m so glad you like it. Have you got to the part where the wizard—oh, I’d better not spoil it for you.”

“They’re going to the King next. The castle is cool. I like the doors thing, with the colours.”

“Yes! I wish I thought of things like that. The walking and the doors and the talking fire. So many cool things together. You know, for composition, I can never think of something new, I always copy. I copied the doors, and from another series, dragons who think in rainbow patterns and you can hear them in your head.”

Her ease, her talking, these unfolding packages of thought, amazed him. He had a year’s reprieve before the mortifying, ungovernable teenage erections; but every time she said “you”, and he watched her looking closely at him, he prickled with aliveness along his haunches and in the small

of his back. He was very aware of the length and nearness of her arms, the sand giving slightly under his rubber-slipped feet, the close circling of the walls around.

He felt full of something, he wasn’t sure what. Something heavy, glimpsed between sliding panels. It was only as the afternoon drew to a close—after they’d monkeyed about on the climbing frames and the fireman’s poles; after Priya’s wonder that Brian’s brother could and did look *exactly like him* (“I really want to see you together”); after Brian’s sympathetic horror at tales of Priya’s most imperious classmates (“Mabel my cousin is just like that also”)—it was only then, as Brian was taking himself home, across the bare concrete of the void deck and up two steps at a time, that the fullness and the heaviness drained away into a kind of clarity. He was happy.

Between his own unconsciousness and Brian’s haze of elsewhere, Andrew saw little of his brother. Eight hours a night they slept side by side. But Brian bounced out of bed early each morning, and when he returned Andrew was usually asleep, exhausted from a day of sweating and headaches and pains behind his eyes.

The dengue was poorly timed. It didn’t even bring the compensation of a Medical Certificate to get him out of school. A weekend was all Andrew had of the June holidays before the fever began, and the promised month of freedom opened with

a week of fatigue, discomfort, the frustration of time burning away in enforced waste, and Mabel. (Aiyoh, Mabel.) It wasn't a combination he would have chosen for himself.

But Mabel, among these elements, surprised. Perhaps they had always been unjust to her, or perhaps something about his present neediness satisfied her desire for control. Whatever the reason, she was far more tolerable than the shared opinions of the brothers had led him to expect. She sat with her book, and waited, and asked for nothing. As his temperature approached its restless peaks she gently and efficiently applied a damp cloth. In his alert intervals they managed some commonplace exchanges about their family, and exams, and the current Li Nanxing drama serial. And she anticipated his thirst with regular hot mugs of barley, where Brian, he realised, would have had to be asked, before coming in with glasses filled at the kitchen sink.

As he himself would too, Andrew thought, were he nursing anyone: a strange idea to entertain. He propped himself against his pillow and considered Mabel's back as she sat at his desk. She was pencil thin, with a craning pony neck framed by a severe bob. He was for the first time clear-headed enough to appreciate how many hours she was spending in the sole company of a twitching, largely comatose cousin, half a stranger anyway, and to wonder why, exactly, she was there.

"Mabel, you don't find it very boring meh?"

She replied carefully, without turning round: "Find what boring?"

"Sitting here nothing to do, must be very sian, right?"

"I'm studying the Lord's word." This line was a shade more brittle in the air than in her head, where she had practised it enough times, silently, in response to more or less the same question. But she couldn't tell Andrew that, any more than she could tell him the rest, the things she barely acknowledged to herself: that there was nowhere else she had money or permission to go, which would lie beyond the Brownian motion of her mother's rattan and her rage.

"The Lord's word." He couldn't quite keep the laugh out of his voice.

"I know you don't believe in that."

"No, I don't." But it kept Mabel there, with damp cloth and barley. That was something. He had to respect that.

They became friends of a sort. After several days, Andrew's fever subsided. A watch was no longer strictly necessary, but Andrew was still too weak to leave the flat. Mabel continued to come by, and they sat together as they had gotten used to doing. (Brian roamed, and spent the family dinners in distraction. He remained sharp to Mabel, who noticed it for the first time, by contrast with the altered behaviour of his brother.) Andrew immersed himself in mathematical puzzles and a series of faded science books that Mabel fetched from the local library on request. He was particularly preoccupied

with one on the human body, full of pictures, the large grey coils of the intestines and the fist-like lump of the heart. Mabel kept to her Bible with the occasional foray into *The Straits Times*. Once or twice they played Uno or Monopoly, and sometimes they watched SBC 8 dramas and afternoon cartoons in companionable silence.

A few days into this routine, Mabel insisted on tuning the television in to an interview. “What is this?” Andrew asked.

“It’s one of the people they arrested. For the plot.”

He stared blankly.

“Don’t you read the news?”

“Er, no.”

“So you don’t know about the plot?”

“No?” This line of inquiry struck him as unnecessary—she’d been there with him, after all, while he was convalescent for a week.

“These Catholics were arrested, yah, and the government put them in jail. They might be there forever. They don’t get to go to court or anything. So they’re trapped lah. And this guy, Vincent Cheng, he’s one of them, they’re letting him out for this interview on TV.”

He looked at the screen. A bespectacled, soft-spoken man was being questioned by four journalists. “What were they arrested for?”

Contempt glittered in her voice. “Government says they’re dangerous.”

“What was their crime?”

“They didn’t *do* any crime.”

“So how come they were arrested?”

Mabel wouldn’t be drawn further: her attention was fixed on the screen. To be sure, Mabel moved in mysterious ways, but still the sight of someone about his age voluntarily paying heed to the news was baffling and impressive. Well, why not, Andrew thought, and settled himself down to watch. He tried to listen as unfamiliar phrases reeled past. Vincent Cheng, in the frame of the box, was asked about, and spoke of, Marxism. A classless society. An open, critical attitude. The ideals of the Church.

Andrew was as ignorant about politics as any twelve-year-old boy. But he was intelligent, and careful, and encouraged to be conscious of his intelligence, to expect high things. He understood his future achievements, unspecified but undoubted, as part of his identity. And if the historical, national and global context of the words he heard passed him by, nevertheless he recognised in them, with sympathetic kinship, a kind of ambition, a kind of identity, thwarted and sidelong.

This kinship frightened him. On the television, Vincent Cheng’s face was studiously blank, his voice dull. He didn’t strike Andrew as dangerous or criminal, but as someone hollowed out in defeat. As if his guts were being scraped out with a spoon (he saw the large grey coils), and the air was being pressed out of his lungs (he saw empty, gasping bags),

and his innards were now deposited in an ignominious public heap. The result was not an interview but fleshy puppetry, limp and grotesque.

The show ended. Mabel clicked the television off, stood by the set in silence for a moment, and then turned with an air of martyred grandeur.

“Those people who do the Lord’s work are always persecuted.”

This classically Mabellian sort of line had, in the past, been the subject of a great deal of eye-rolling between Andrew and his brother. Now he felt a kind of sick recognition at its truth. The man on the television had gambled something real and of value in himself, a small feathered thing he should have kept close. If they sensed you were keeping it from them, those who wanted it had jail and journalists and other powers; they could cut you open and scoop it out.

You had to tame it for them. You had to be on their side, the winning side. You had to keep it close.

Andrew made himself a promise. He would never do *the Lord’s work*.

Priya Menon, eleven years old, didn’t realise just yet how far she was disqualified from social notice, though others regularly did their best to educate her. It would be some time before their efforts bore real fruit, but in the meantime they were disagreeable enough. There was the day, for instance, when Michael Ong of 6A, tittering to himself, sauntered

into the prefects’ room to claim his school bag. Seeing Priya bent over homework, he came to stand by the table. “Eh, Priya, you always like joking one, right? Here, I tell you this one. What’s the difference between an Indian and a bucket of shit?”

She stared into his long, beaming face, oily with the onset of adolescence. His thick hair was stiff with styling mousse. Why would anyone ask this question? Why would *he* ask it? Why would he ask *her*?

“The bucket!” He released a hiccupping laugh. She felt her mouth twist involuntarily. Michael continued, “Eh, don’t so serious lah! This one is my sister told me one, quite funny, horh?” She shrank automatically as he reached out to squeeze her upper arm with unexpected force.

Having retrieved his things, he left as suddenly as he had come. Priya willed herself to act as though he had not been there at all. She looked at the next problem sum in her workbook. Her heart was racing. She had to read the words twice before they made sense, and as she wrote in the blank space below, she could see her first equation wobbling. She stopped, looked up for a moment into the silent room, and then went on with grim doggedness. The feel of Michael’s fingers stayed with her for the rest of the day, a hot, invisible mark.

Mostly she refused to be rattled. She treated the cries of “Ah pui ah!” and “Fatty bombom!” as cosmic background radiation, and learned to drift quietly into sharp imaginings

when her classmates babbled in the impassably alien tones of Mandarin as though she was not there. She decided that the real world consisted of what her cleverness and her sunniness earned her: her parents' love, the praise of her teachers, shared laughter with the scatter of breezy, chatty, good-natured girls at school toward whom she unerringly sailed. The real world was lying across the comforting expanse of her father's stomach, on the sofa, while he hummed to himself and stroked her hair. When Michael thrust his Brylcreemed jibes in her face, or the boy who collided with her in the swimming pool shouted "Mangali cheebye!" she dismissed their abuse as the vaporous excrescences of marginal cranks, like the venomous muttering about *munjen* she heard from her uncle Sundar now and then.

The real world was made up, also, of imaginary ones: books, about tesseract, ancient artefacts, and dark shadowy powers loosed by arrogant young wizards who had then to pursue them across the sea. Priya couldn't be down about the pale life going on around her when here was such vivid proof of heart-catching beauty, of thrilling fellowships, of vital stuff. She thought everyone would strive for these things—would be pulled, as water ran downhill, toward their deep charm, once they only knew of them. She thought everyone confined to the cardboard day-to-day must feel their own ignorance like an aching hollow. Since fiction and its possibilities were there for the taking, it could only be a matter of time before they learned. Therefore the indignities

she endured were evanescent, already scheduled for doom; and so, from her child's-eye view, with all of futurity stretching before it, they were not quite real. Someday soon, her peers would see the light; if not in Primary Six, well, she gave it till Secondary Two at the latest.

When Brian Teo had bumped into her in the book-lined aisles of Frankie Wong, it had all the feeling of a door finally opening from the waiting room into this real world.

"Sorry," he said, retrieving the book he had knocked from her hands and offering it to her with a nervous, solicitous smile.

"It's okay," she said, thinking that he was very handsome. She was slightly surprised to be thinking it. It wasn't something she thought often. When her friends giggled over poster pin-ups or boys at school, she often felt unmoved, and sometimes impatient. Brian had neat features—sharp cheekbones, a clean jaw, lively eyes crinkled at the corners by a ready smile. His face already had a grown-up sort of clarity of expression, not the wet, uncertain look of children; though it would change little through his teenage years, as if it had got ahead early and then stalled.

Priya was drawn to Brian. She didn't want him to go, but she sensed that, left to his own devices, he probably would. "You like fantasy?"

"Yah," he said—not expecting conversation, but clearly not displeased.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jolene Tan studied at Cambridge University and Harvard Law School, and currently works at AWARE, Singapore's leading gender equality advocacy group. *A Certain Exposure* is her first novel.

“A masterful debut. Jolene Tan has written, in devastatingly beautiful prose, a quiet book about disquieting things. *A Certain Exposure* already has the feel of an essential Singapore classic.”

—Sandi Tan, author of *The Black Isle*

Satirical and sympathetic, political and personal, *A Certain Exposure* traces the adolescences of twin brothers Andrew and Brian, culminating in the explosive events leading to Andrew’s tragic death. A classic coming-of-age tale doubled across two vividly individual brothers, who struggle to navigate a complex tangle of relationships and coercive forces, cinematically interwoven with the yearnings and fears of an ensemble of mothers, fathers, cousins, friends and lovers both false and true. This wide-ranging debut beautifully presents the resonances and the ghosts of lost possibilities, as well as a gripping story of hope and betrayal.



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