

AUTHOR OF THE BESTSELLING *TIMOTHY AND THE PHUBBERS*

Ken Kwek



Illustrated by  
**LOLITA CHIONG**



# KELLY AND THE KRUIMPS

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Illustrated by  
Lolita Chiong



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EPIGRAM  
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[KenKwek]  
For Caryn, who grew up  
too fast. And Shan Ming.

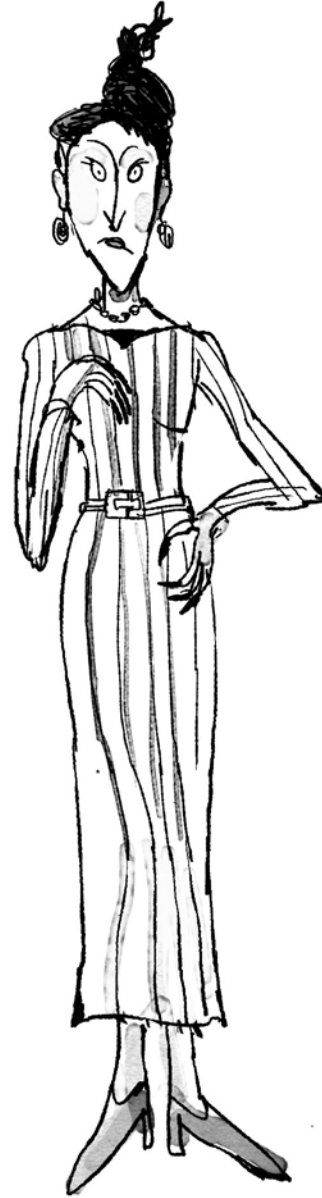
KELLY NICHOLAS



CHRISTINA  
AGUILERA



MRS  
MIGHTY MAO



MR  
MICKEY MAO



HANIS



HAI OCTANE



MILLIE



REKHA



M-POP



A-JAB



FANG BOY



BAK POW

LAP CHEONG



I  
OMG

Kelly Mao stared open-mouthed at the words “Cheryl’s Birthday”.

Unfortunately, they weren’t words printed on an invitation card. Instead, Cheryl’s Birthday was a problem in her mid-year maths exam—a ticking time bomb threatening to explode in Kelly’s brain.

Kelly’s round eyes grew rounder and her long eyelashes stood on end. Her heart pounded. *OMG*, she thought. *OMG-OMG-OMG. What is this?* She opened her mouth to suck in air. She blinked several times, chewed on her lower lip and tried to silence the panicky voice babbling in her head. *Who is the evil examiner who came up with*





*this question? There's stress and then there's insanity—and this is insanity. Is this even a REAL question? Maybe I'm dreaming. Please let me be dreaming!*

## 12. CHERYL'S BIRTHDAY

Albert and Bernard just became friends with Cheryl and they want to know when her birthday is. Cheryl gives them a list of 10 possible dates:

May 15	May 16	May 19
June 17	June 18	
July 14	July 16	
August 14	August 15	August 17

Cheryl then tells Albert and Bernard separately the month and the day of her birthday respectively.

**Albert:** I don't know when Cheryl's birthday is, but I know that Bernard doesn't know either.

**Bernard:** At first I didn't know when Cheryl's birthday is, but now I know.

**Albert:** Then I also know when Cheryl's birthday is.

When is Cheryl's birthday?

Kelly pinched herself and suppressed a yelp. She was not dreaming. She had cycled to school that morning with a knot in her tummy.

Hastily, Kelly drew a few rectangles in a row, trying to apply the bar modelling method to the problem.

*No, no, no*, she shook her head, *this is a deductive reasoning question*. She circled a few dates, then scratched them out, then circled them again. She chewed her nails and felt drops of hot sweat forming on her forehead between the curtains of her long frizzy hair. Her legs started to jiggle compulsively.

Kelly looked over her shoulder at the 29 pupils around her. From her seat in the front corner of the room, she saw her classmates hunched over, their eyes focused like lasers on their papers, their pencils working away. Nobody else seemed as lost or agitated as she was.

*Did everyone else KNOW when Cheryl's birthday was?* Kelly let her head fall onto her desk with a THUD.

**SSSSSSHHHHH!!!!**

shushed 30 voices. The invigilator, Mr Peh, a shrimp of a teacher with bug eyes squinting out of binocular spectacles, rose from his seat. Unsure of who exactly he was addressing, Mr Peh glowered in the general direction of Kelly's desk and pressed a crooked finger to his lips.

Kelly jerked herself back upright and mumbled an apology. She looked at Cheryl's Birthday again and read the question a third time. She tried to concentrate but the names and dates were getting jumbled in her brain as her thoughts grew confused and manic.

*Why did Bernard and Albert have to ask Cheryl when her birthday is? And why couldn't Cheryl just TELL*

**THEM** when her birthday is? What kind of weirdos are these people? What if I fail this paper? **OMG** I'll be grounded for weeks and Ma will force me to quit gym and life will be meaningless so I ~~cannot~~ ~~cannot~~ **CANNOT** fail this paper!



Three doors down, in what looked like an alternate version of Kelly's classroom, another 12-year-old with wispy lashes sat in a front corner desk with his eyes fixed on his exam paper. This child had near-identical features as Kelly, only his hair was short and straight and his face was decorated with a pair of round glasses that enlarged his eyes.

This was Kelly's twin brother, Nicholas.

And while Kelly fretted and jiggled as if a fire had been lit under her seat, Nicholas was as cool as a cucumber lying in an icebox left out in the snow.

Earlier that morning he had stood on the foot pegs of his sister's bicycle with his hands on her shoulders, enjoying the wind in his hair.

“Peddle faster, five hundred thirty, four seven seven—”

“What's the hurry?”

“Don't want to be late for the exam, four two four, three seventy-one—”

“What are you doing?”

“Revising the fifty-three times-table backwards.”

“Nick, if we weren't twins, I'd think you were from Mars. In fact, I think Martians would consider you an alien. Ouch! Did you just flick my ear?”

“Peddle faster, three eighteen...”



Nicholas was relaxed when he started the exam and he was relaxed as he solved Cheryl's Birthday\*. He was pretty sure he would ace the paper. He'd finished all the problems at lightning speed and then, after checking and re-checking his paper a dozen times, he looked up at the clock and saw he had still five minutes to spare.

Nicholas was about to go over his answers again when he felt a tingle in his bladder. He raised a hand and called out to the invigilator, whose face was hidden behind a copy of *The Straits Times*.

"Miss Thomas?"

Miss Thomas jolted with a start and a snort. "No, Mitzy! Get out of my hair, you naughty kitty!" she cried, flailing her arms above her head and tearing the newspaper to ribbons.

Nicholas' 29 classmates looked up and stared

\*Turn to Page 241 for the solution to Cheryl's Birthday.

at Miss Thomas with open mouths.

"Miss Thomas, may I go to the toilet?" asked Nicholas, coughing back a laugh.

"Yes, yes, of course, Nicholas. If you have to go, you have to go," replied Miss Thomas, clearing her throat and collecting herself. "And will you take this rag and flush it down the loo while you're at it?"

Nicholas' classmates stared resentfully at him as he collected the shredded *Straits Times* from Miss Thomas and trotted out of the room.

But Nicholas did not get to the toilet.

As he passed Kelly's classroom, he glimpsed his sister seated near the first window, staring at her desk with her fist in her mouth.

Despite the tightness in his bladder, he couldn't resist sneaking up to take a closer peek at her exam paper. Through the slats, Nicholas saw that Kelly was still struggling with Cheryl's Birthday.

“Psst! Kel! Sis! Why are you eating your hand?  
Heh heh heh...”

Kelly did not respond.

Nicholas continued to tease his sister. “What’s wrong, Kel? Is the question too hard? Are you freaking out? Oh my god, your face is all green. Look who’s the alien now? Heh heh heh...”

Again Kelly said nothing. Nicholas was about to taunt her again when Kelly started swaying in her seat.

Now Nicholas began to worry. He had learnt on NatGeo TV that when wild animals perceive danger that threatens their lives, their eyes dilate and something is triggered in their brains that prepares them for “fight or flight”. And now the look in his sister’s eyes reminded Nicholas of a gazelle surrounded by a pack of hyenas.

“Kel?” he called, a little more uncertainly.

Kelly turned and stared at her brother with



googly eyes and her cheeks puffed out. She did not fight and she did not flee. Instead, her face turned from green to blue.

Then, with a sudden **RRUUURRGH** she opened her mouth and spewed half of her breakfast through the slats, all over her brother. Then she turned back to her desk and threw up the *other* half onto her exam paper.

OMG.



2

## The Maos

The Maos lived in a large three-storey house in Bukit Timah, Singapore's poshest neighbourhood. The family had moved there six years ago, so the twins could be within enrolling distance of the best and most stressful primary school in the country.

Their mother, Mighty, was the one who insisted on moving to Bukit Timah. She was a plastic surgeon and owner of Mighty Lift ("Singapore's Fourth Best Aesthetic Clinic," according to *Tatler* magazine).

Two weeks after the mid-year exams, Mrs Mighty Mao sat ramrod straight in a tall Mandarin chair, holding the twins' report cards



with her manicured fingers. Her blood-red lips curved downward on her pale, porcelain face. Her eyes smouldered like coals beneath sharply pencilled eyebrows and a black swan of a hairdo.

Nicholas had scored an average of 95 out of 100 marks for his four subjects, including 92

for maths. Kelly, by contrast, was relieved to have even passed, with a score of 65. Unfortunately, her mother considered this a total failure.

**"WHAT A DISASTER. WHAT HAPPENED, SUEY LUEI BAO??"** demanded Mrs Mao, using the Cantonese term for "disgraceful daughter". Mrs Mao was originally from Hong Kong, a city where people have interesting names

like "Purpink" and "Pebble". Her voice reflected both the cadence of a British education and the fire of her Cantonese heritage.

Kelly shrugged her shoulders helplessly.

"She puked on her paper, is what happened," said Nicholas, who was lounging in a beanbag, playing his favourite game, *Fortnite*, on an iPad. "And on me too. Luckily I had a newspaper to clean up with."

"You don't need to remind us about the puke, I've heard enough about the puke!"



“The half-digested banana was especially gross.”

“I’ll tell you what’s gross! **This!**” Mrs Mao picked up her iPhone and waved it in Kelly’s face. “Getting a call from the principal about your shameful meltdown! And then seeing her Facebook post—listen to this—‘No school can guarantee that all its students will be A-star achievers. Weaker pupils may need more tuition, especially in their PSLE year. Smiley face emoji.’”

It is now necessary to explain what the terms “PSLE” and “tuition” mean.

PSLE is the acronym for Singapore’s Primary School Leaving Examination, a test that only 12-year-old children are supposed to take but whose preparation usually involves parents, grandparents, foreign domestic workers and a variety of brain supplement manufacturers.

For Mrs Mao, having her children ace the PSLE was paramount, as it would ensure

graduation from the country’s best and most stressful primary school to the country’s best and most stressful secondary school.

As for “tuition”: In many parts of the West, “tuition” refers to classes children attend *in* school, usually from just after breakfast to just before lunch. But in Singapore and a few other places in Asia, “tuition” refers to classes children attend *outside* of school, from right after lunch to well after dark.

Tuition is a form of legal torture designed to help children do well in their school exams. In Asian countries like Singapore, China, South Korea and Japan, doing well in exams is more important than, say, being of sound mental health. When children suffer panic attacks during exams, the solution is not to provide medical attention or soothing encouragement, but to give them more tuition.



Mrs Mao tossed her phone into her \$15,000 Birkin handbag. She took a sip of tea, then looked Kelly sternly in the eye.

“You’ll do more classes at Archimedes. Five times a week instead of three. And no more gymnastics. I’m writing in to the school.”

An invisible bolt of lightning struck Kelly in the head. Silent thunder rumbled in her ears.

“Nooooooooo!” she cried. Ignoring her daughter Mrs Mao continued: “And you, Nicholas, you should get some extra classes too.”

Nicholas shot out of his beanbag like a rocket.

“What? Why me??” he protested. “I got 92 marks!”

“Which is still eight marks short of perfect!”

“Nooooooooo!” cried Nicholas.

“Nooooooooo!” cried Kelly again.

**“STOP SCREAMING!”** screamed Mrs Mao.

As the twins pleaded with their mother, a man bounced in from the driveway on an electric scooter. This was their father, Mickey, whose round, tubby build caused the scooter to squeak in protest as it braked to a halt. Mr Mickey Mao had come from his office, where he worked as an insurance agent.

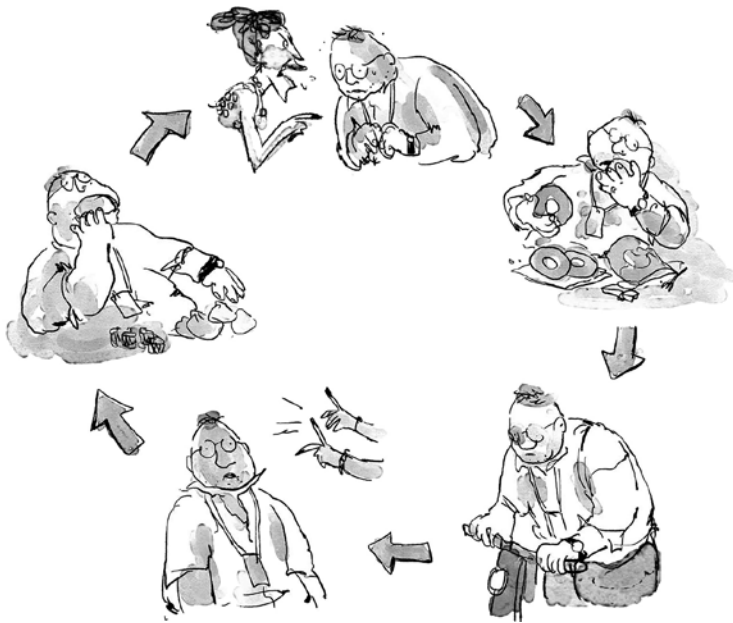
Kelly and Nicholas ran up to their father, still complaining miserably.

“What’s going on?” asked Mr Mao.

“You’d know if you had come home earlier!” snapped Mrs Mao.

“Sorry, I was held back at work,” explained Mr Mao, stumbling off his scooter. He bent over breathlessly and undid his shoelaces, his spectacles fogging up from the effort.

“Pff! ‘Held back at work’,” smirked Mrs Mao. “More likely you had trouble squeezing your fat bum out of the office chair!”



Mr Mao took a curry puff out of his satchel and jammed it into his mouth. He always felt a need to eat something when his wife criticised him—and she criticised him all the time. In the last year he had undergone two rounds of liposuction at his wife’s clinic, to no avail.

Ironically, Mr Mao was thin before he married Mrs Mao. But once they’d tied the knot, his weight

increased along with her scoldings.

After Mrs Mao laid into him for being a “slowpoke” and a “fat turtle”, Mr Mao had taken to riding an electric scooter instead of walking. The lack of exercise caused him to put on more weight, which slowed him down even further, leading in turn to more scoldings from Mrs Mao. It was a vicious cycle.

“Your daughter got a B for maths—totally unacceptable!” cried Mrs Mao, tossing Kelly’s report card at her husband.

“Hmhf?” Mr Mao dropped the report card. A few pastry crumbs fluttered out of his mouth.

“Too much gymnastics, not enough studying,” pronounced Mrs Mao.

“I got As for English and science!” Kelly pointed out tearfully.

Mrs Mao spoke over her. “If this is her performance in the first term, how is she going to

handle the PSLE? I'm sending her and Nicholas for extra maths tuition."

Mr Mao tried speaking. "Erm, more tuition? Even for Nick? But...erm...I mean their schedule is already so packed—"

"That's why she has to quit gymnastics! We have to nip-tuck the problem in the bud, Mickey!"

"Please, Pa, don't make me quit gym," said Kelly.

Mr Mao turned to his wife with open palms. "Mighty Baby, Kelly's good at gymnastics, the school team needs her. Maybe we can find a compromise?"

**"COMPROMISE? NO! NO COMPROMISE!"** howled Mrs Mao. She slammed a fist onto the table and Mr Mao's toupee fell off his head, revealing his bald pate.

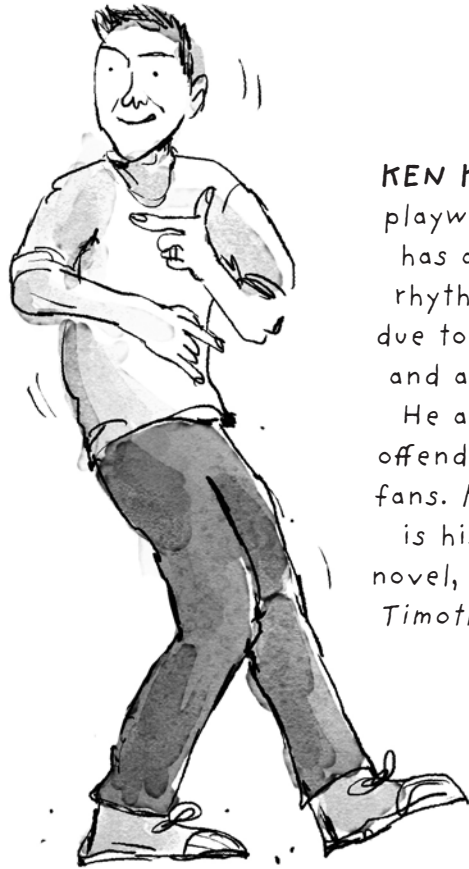
As Mr Mao fumbled with his hairpiece, Mrs Mao rose to her feet. She swept past her husband

and continued her tirade as she clomped up the stairs in her Jimmy Choo high heels.

"Will gymnastics secure her future, or will good grades? Will gymnastics help her get a job, or will good grades? Will gymnastics allow her to buy a Birkin bag, or **GOOD GRADES?** That's the problem with you, Mickey, always **COMPROMISING** and getting your priorities wrong! For goodness' sake, grow a backbone and help your children for a change! And lose some weight!"

Kelly was mortified, not only for herself but for her father. She watched as Mr Mao stuffed another curry puff into his mouth and slunk up the stairs, mumbling apologies to his wife.

Nicholas slumped back into his beanbag and shut his eyes. Arguments between their parents always ended like this: Ma getting her way, and Pa getting destroyed.



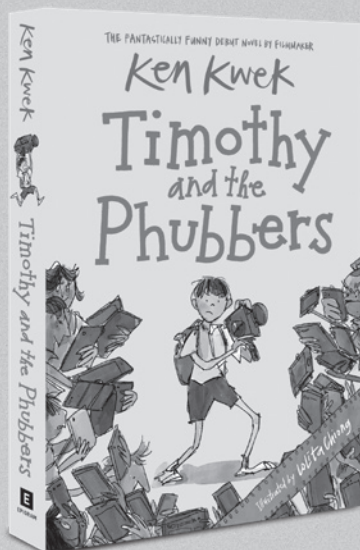
**KEN KWEK** is a filmmaker, playwright and author. He has a passable sense of rhythm but cannot dance due to torn knee ligaments and a fear of freestylin'. He also doesn't want to offend the eyes of hip-hop fans. *Kelly and the Krumps* is his second children's novel, after the bestselling *Timothy and the Phubbers*.

**LOLITA CHIONG** is the illustrator of *Timothy and the Phubbers*. She graduated from Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and loves drawing and animating cartoons. In her spare time, Lolita goes to the bird park to draw the birds. She also loves eating super-duper spicy mala hotpot with her hot boyfriend.



“Silly, irreverent...and utterly relatable.  
A fun and exciting read!”  
Monica Lim, co-author of the  
bestselling *Secrets of Singapore* series

“Full of loopy surprises.”  
Christina Newhard, publisher of *Sari-Sari Storybooks*



Timothy Pong is sick of the older kids bullying him. Even worse, he can't tell his parents as he doesn't have a phone to communicate to them via the family WhatsApp group. Luckily Timothy has a few ideas—and a rather unusual weapon—up his sleeve...

**“Energetic, thrilling...  
generously sprinkled with humour.”**

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Kelly Mao has got quite the headache: her tiger mum is threatening to ground her, her tuition schedule gives her no time to eat and she suspects her twin brother is up to no good. On top of everything, her finals are looming! When the pressure gets too intense, she turns to a madcap dance crew for friendship and freestylin'. But the choreo gets tricky when Kelly becomes entangled in her brother's troubles with a secret online gaming centre...

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