

## MEANING

*Fiction by Han Li*

*Savannah, Ga., Film and television*

The girl appears from a lightly wooded area onto a rounded hill against the backdrop of the setting sun. She's a young girl, nine or ten years old. This way she can still be the embodiment of innocence, but without the trappings of ignorance or outright silliness that come with extreme youth. She can walk with a dignified air, something she couldn't do if she was any younger. So there she is, walking out of the forest with a dignified air. She has a light summer dress on, a pure sparkling white dress. No, white is innocence, and she's already innocent. That's overdone, unnecessary. Better would be bright red, deep red, the color of blood, the color of wine, and more importantly, the color of violence, the color of passion. That's a good contrast, rich with many layers of meaning and possible interpretations.

The even more important part is the girl on the hill itself (actually, the dress might turn out to be more important, it's not really up to me to decide). The thick jungle behind her is dark and foreboding. The trees are old and gnarled, distinctly evil-looking. And the setting sun (don't forget the sun is setting) throws long, thin shadows over the entire scene. Flanking the girl on both sides are two curious trees, curious because they have somehow escaped the cold prison of their peers; they stand apart, at the very top of the hill. Naturally, they're less evil-looking; in fact, they have a strange innocence that mirrors the girl's. The sun, however, is still setting, and still casts long thin shadows from the three figures standing on the hill. So now we have three figures with long thin shadows on top of a hill. The Biblical allusion is powerful and affecting.

The girl looks down from the hill and sees a field of rye before her. The golden stalks of rye are illuminated by the golden rays of the still-setting sun, thus bathing the whole scene in a warm yellow glow. Gold: the color of royalty, the color of fortune, the color of kindness.

The golden mean, the golden age, the golden ratio, the golden brew—so many meanings! This field of rye is overlooking a cliff, a precipice of great peril. The cliff is so high that below it, only clouds are visible. While this gives the setting an almost heavenly air, make no mistake, falling off the cliff would mean certain death (this is a given of the story). Furthermore, the rye grows right to the very edge of the cliff, enhancing both the beauty and the danger of the scene. Again, this makes for a great contrast and a myriad of possible meanings.

The girl looks at the golden field of the rye and smiles. It isn't a smile of politeness, not the tooth-filled smile of a little girl at a party to impress the guests and make her parents proud. It's a smile of rebellion, of freedom, a smile that's more of a smirk but without any of the negative connotations. However, it's still a smile of innocence—that's important, she's always innocent. The girl begins skipping down the hill and toward the field. No, not skipping. Skipping is something a girl does when playing hopscotch at the local park while her parents and peers are watching. Skipping is a societal creation. Instead, the girl is prancing, yes, prancing with abandon. That's a great word. It's organic and natural; prancing is what a deer does through a beautiful, unspoiled forest. The girl cannot prance for anyone but herself. So she prances into the field of rye, laughing as she does so. She prances around the entire field, in no discernable pattern, happy, euphoric even. The girl comes dangerously close to the edge of the cliff many times, but she never even slows down. It's not that she doesn't know about the cliff and the drop, or that she doesn't know about death. She is old enough not to be ignorant. She knows well enough, as well as anybody could know, but she simply doesn't care.

So now a young but not too young girl in a blood-red dress is prancing around a golden field of rye on a vast cliff but not caring. Next to the field is a rounded hill with two innocent-looking trees who have escaped their evil jungle full of evil trees, all against a still-setting sun. What a great scene, full of so much possible meaning; it burdens the reader to see deeper and further, it asks questions and hints at answers.

All the while the girl is laughing and prancing and shouting. Shouting? Why is she shouting? Shouting doesn't fit here! A shout is an expression of anguish or anger; it's just wrong! Although it is a nice contrast...

No! I don't like it, it doesn't work. She's not shouting. Not shouting! Why is she still shouting? It seems she's trying to say something. Stop it! Dialogue is not going to ruin this perfect scene. Dialogue is common and vulgar, cheap and easy, concrete and devoid of meaning. Who could she be shouting at anyway? What is she saying? She doesn't want to be prancing in this field? She's shouting angrily about how little girls don't prance around in fields of rye. She's not prancing anymore, she's walking away. Walking! Steadfast, boring, civilized, with heavy non-innocent footsteps.

She's still shouting, ranting now. What does it matter what she would like to do, or what she would normally do? Just because she hasn't read Salinger doesn't mean it's not a great scene! My readers have all read Salinger. So she keeps prancing! Keeps prancing! Why is she still walking? She thinks people don't prance. But that's all the more reason for her to prance! Now she's talking about her friends? Why? She doesn't like to be with her peers; they're constraining, shallow, judgmental. She doesn't have any friends! She's not even really a little girl, she's so much more! How can she not want to be more? Would she rather this be some silly story that doesn't even attempt to go deeper? Some plot-heavy, dialogue-filled, straightforward narrative? Who would prefer the inane to the profound? Now she's shouting about her dolls. Why would she rather play with dolls? They're so sterile and bourgeois. Not to mention there are no dolls in Salinger!

Huge trees fall on all sides of the field, closing off the girl, who is trying to walk away. There's no way out now. Instead she turns around and sees the field. The same smile that's a smirk but not a negative smirk comes across her face again. She starts prancing again. Prance! No, she's not prancing, and she never smiled. She's running. Is there anything more vulgar than running? She's running toward the cliff,

toward that deadly drop she's not even supposed to think about. The girl is shouting still, shouting and crying, about how she doesn't want to be more and how she loves dolls but thinks rye is too itchy to play in. She's bawling now, about how it doesn't make sense. Another huge tree falls in front of her, cutting her off from the cliff, but she's climbing! Climbing over the tree, she's so determined! She jumps! Jumps from the huge tree and the vast cliff and the field of rye and the rounded hill and the innocent-looking trees who escaped the evil jungle. Her little body is set against the still setting sun, the blood-red dress fluttering in the wind. And down she goes, straight down until she disappears among the heavenly clouds and to her certain death (that was a given of the story, I can't take it back now).

The scene is quiet. The sun is done setting and is now just set, darkness enveloping the field and the hill and the jungle slowly, trying desperately to salvage whatever meaning might be left. But it's not enough; a fadeout without the girl feels so empty. The girl, the girl who is probably still hurtling toward her certain death, she was different, she was perfect. But she was wrong; she shouldn't have left everything, left the perfect scene with so much meaning. Falling toward the cruel ground now, pulled along by heartless gravity, it's a stale scene every reader knows too well. What possible meaning could it have?