FEAR

Lai Zhong and Ku Lee look at me in fear. I have a terrible power over them both, and they both know it.

CONSCRIPTION

Like all the others, they were conscripted to the factory from the rural provinces. Hundreds of them. A promise of a new life. Money. Opportunity.

But of course it was not.

Work in the factory is regimented and dull beyond dull. Last year we lost eight: two to escape from the compound and six to suicide. I thought it'd be more.

DUTY

As their boss, I have to make sure they are all doing what they are expected to do, without failure or complaint. Failing to keep standards means a cut in wages, or longer hours, or less food. I have to sample their work.

I look at the little clear nylon partitioned box, filled with small screws - the sort that keeps cooker knobs on. Lai Zhong filled it, so I patiently empty it and count them, slowly.

LARVA

Of course it is correct. I add a slip to the box: CHECKED BY AF36635 and return it, with a stern look on my face.

Their relief is palpable.

But I am nothing. I'm an insect too, in a machinery run by other insects. Not even that. I'm a squirming and powerless larva, beneath contempt and filled with my own importance. But like them, all I am waiting for the crush from above to send me to sweet oblivion too.