



The Unwalled City

Characters: Ted, Bax, Paul, Sujata, Daisy, Xu Xi (as Xu Xi)

Synopsis:

- Scene 1: Bax and Ted are on their way to their first journalism tutorial. They chat about being a journalist and guess at what their first journalism assignment will be.
- Scene 2: In Dr Lo's office. They discuss their first assignments with him.
- Scene 3: Interview with the writer Xu Xi.

Scene 1

(SFX: Urban U campus - buzz of students going to their lectures and tutorials)

- Ted: Hi Baxi... how's it going?
- Bax: Okay Ted... how about you?
- Ted: Cool... I'm off to a tutorial with Doctor Lo
- Bax: Hey... me too.
- Ted: Cool... let's go together.
- Bax: Sure.
- Ted: (slight pause) I wonder what assignment he's going to give us.
- Bax: Dunno.
- Ted: Our first journalism assignment.
- Bax: I wonder what it'll be.
- Ted: Dunno... but it's gonna be like some kind of interview right?
- Bax: Yeah, I think so... I think he said we were going to cover some kind of story.
- Ted: Yeah... I wonder what.
- Bax: Dunno.
- Ted: Maybe well have to write a story about a murder
- Bax: Sounds dangerous.... like... (humorous) 'hello... I'm a student studying for a higher diploma in journalism... could you please tell me if you really DID murder your girlfriend ... or do you think it was someone

else?'

- Ted: Yeah, well... I dunno what he's gonna ask us to write a story about... but we'll soon find out.
- Bax: (Slight pause) hey Ted... what you gonna do once you get your higher diploma?
- Ted: Dunno-
- Bax: D'you reckon you'll become a journalist?
- Ted: Dunno... Maybe... I don't know what it's like yet. How about you?
- Bax: Depends how much money journalists get.
- Ted: Right.
- Bax: Any idea?
- Ted: Not really.
- Bax: I mean it's a tough job being a journalist and if they don't pay much....
- Ted: You reckon it's tough?
- Bax: Yeah... well you don't just sit in an office all day like most other jobs.
- Ted: Hey Bax... not everyone works in an office.
- Bax: Most people do.
- Ted: Like window cleaners?! Shop assistants?! Construction workers?!
- Bax: Yeah well... we're not gonna become any of those things.
- Ted: Who knows... Anyway... what's the big deal about working in an office?
- Bax: It's nice... you get to work and sit in your office and then go home.... but if you're a journalist... they might tell you to go do some interviews and it might be raining and stuff.
- Ted: I'd rather go out then be holed up in some office all day.
- Bax: Hey Ted... what room's the tutorial in?
- Ted: P5671.
- Bax: P?... what's the 'P' for?
- Ted: Purple.
- Bax: Purple?!
- Ted: Yeah... it means our tutorial room is in the Purple Zone.
- Bax: Where's that?
- Ted: Past the red zone.
- Bax: Weird.
- Ted: Colour coded.
- Bax: But how are you supposed to know where the purple zone is in the first place?!
- Ted: Dunno... I guess you just keep walking though the red and the green

and the blue till everything goes purple... like now... look... see... we're in the purple zone.

Bax: Weird.

Scene 2

(Dr Lo's Office)

Dr Lo: Well... good morning everyone.... as I told you in the lecture my name's Patrick Lo and I'm assigned to be your tutor. Now let's see... (Checking with his register) You' re Alysha right?

Aly: That's right Dr Lo.

Dr Lo: Please... call me Patrick. And you're...

Ted: Ted.

Dr Lo: And you must be Bax?

Bax: Yes Sir.

Dr Lo: And you're Daisy?

Daisy: Yeah.

Dr Lo: Good. Now... before we go on let me ask you a few questions. Um... tell me... in a few words... why you want to study journalism and what you think journalism is. (Pause) Um... Alysha... maybe you can go first?

Aly: Um... well... I wasn't quite sure what I was going to study.

Dr Lo: You mean you didn't apply to study journalism?

Aly: Um... that's what they offered me Sir.

Dr Lo: So you're not BURNING to become a journalist Alysha.

Aly: Um.... I'm sure I'm going to like it very much Doctor Lo.

Dr Lo: And what about my second question... what do you think journalism is?

Aly: Writing for newspapers Sir?

Dr Lo: Anything else?

Aly: No Sir.

Dr Lo: Alysha... please... don't call me Sir.

Aly: Um... sorry Sir... I mean... sorry.... just sorry.

Dr Lo: Bax? How about you?

Bax: Same as Alysha Sir.

Dr Lo: Patrick.

Bax: No Sir, I'm not Patrick, I'm Bax.

Dr Lo: I know... I'M Patrick... that's my name... and that's what I want you to call me. Okay?

Bax: Oh yes... sorry Sir.

Dr Lo: (Pause) Ted.

Ted: Well Patrick... I thought it would be cool to study journalism.

Dr Lo: So that is what you actually applied to study Ted?

Ted: Sure.

Dr Lo: That's good to hear. And what do you think journalism is Ted?

Ted: Well... like Alysha said I guess... writing for newspapers... but what I really wanna do is interview some celebrities... you know... like famous singers and actors... ask them about their lives, all that kind of stuff... I think that would be really cool.

Dr Lo: I see... so you want to become a member of the paparazzi Ted, is that it?

Ted: Um...do I?

Dr Lo: Chasing celebrities wherever they go... would you do that Ted?

Ted: If I had to I guess.

Dr Lo: What if that particular celebrity was having a quiet dinner in a restaurant with a friend... or going to visit a family member in hospital? Would you still follow them and try to get some kind of story?

Ted: Um... (unsure) I guess so.

Dr Lo: Don't you think that people... even celebrities are entitled to some kind of privacy Ted?

Ted: Um... I guess... but...

Dr Lo: But what Ted?

Ted: Isn't that what journalists are supposed to do?

Dr Lo: That's what SOME journalists do... if you can call them journalists... and we call that kind of journalist... the paparazzi.

Ted: Oh right.

Dr Lo: So Daisy... how about you.

Daisy: I applied to do Beauty Engineering and instead they put me in journalism.

Dr Lo: I see. Did you inform the administration?

Daisy: They said I had to stick with journalism till a place came up in Beauty Engineering.

Dr Lo: (Sighs) So no point in asking you why you want to study journalism. (Sighs) Right... well... let's see... What newspapers do you read? Alysha?

Aly: Either the China Post or the Hong Kong Daily Mail Sir.
Dr Lo: Every day?
Aly: Maybe once or twice a week Sir.
Dr Lo: Bax?
Bax: Um.... do comics count?
Dr Lo: (Pause) Ted?
Ted: Newspapers? Um... well Patrick... no, not really.
Dr Lo: Daisy?
Daisy: I don't read newspapers... I read magazines.
Dr Lo: Hmm... (Sighs) Well... as journalism students you should all start reading newspapers... every day... you don't have to buy them... most newspapers are on line so you can read them at the computer centre.
Ted: Okay Patrick... you got it.
Dr Lo: Now... let's get on to your first assignment... As you know the journalism course at UCC is task based... you work on stories that we then put onto an online newspaper called Cyber News.
Bax: On line newspaper?
Dr Lo: Yes... online news is the news of the future... Some futurologists are predicting that by the year 2020 paper newspapers will no longer exist.
Ted: Wow!
Daisy: What's a futurologist?
Dr Lo: People who make informed guesses about the future.
Daisy: How can you know what's gonna happen in the future?
Bax: You read the stars... you know... in the newspapers.
Dr Lo: Now then... your first assignment... Your first assignment is very interesting... it's about Hong Kong writers... Know any?... Ted?
Ted: Um... how do you mean Patrick... Know any?
Dr Lo: Not personally... I mean... do you know the names of any Hong Kong novelists or poets?
Ted: No.
Daisy: No idea.
Bax: Me neither.
Dr Lo: Alysha?
Aly: Um.... not really Sir.
Dr Lo: Okay... but you soon will do.
Ted: Yeah... how?
Dr Lo: I've fixed you up with an interview tomorrow at ten with the Hong Kong novelist, XuXi... she's just got a book out... it's called, 'The

Unwalled City.'

Ted: Like a... real writer?!

Dr Lo: Yes.

Ted: Wa... I've never met a real writer before.

Aly: Why is her book called The Unwalled City?'

Dr Lo: There's your first question Alysha.

Aly: Oh I see.

Dr Lo: Write it down in your notepad.

Aly: Um....

Dr Lo: You'll all need journalists notepads... you know the type you can turn the pages over from the top.

Aly: Oh yes... okay.

Dr Lo: Okay so the angle we're taking for Cyber News is that Hong Kong DOES have novelists and poets... Often people think Hong Kong is just about business and money... but your articles are going to show that Hong Kong is also about novelists and poets... okay... we want to break the stereotype of Hong Kong just being about making money.... that's the angle... you guys, as journalists... have got to project Hong Kong, to the world via Cyber News... as a literary city... okay?

Bax: Yeah... um... so we interview this novelist...

Daisy: What's a novelist?

Bax: Someone who writes story books... like a novel is a story book and a novelist is someone who writes stories. Is that right Sir?

Dr Lo: Yes... but my name is Patrick not Sir... you have to be knighted by the Queen to become a Sir... and I haven't been.

Bax: Okay... um... so we ask him...

Dr Lo: Her... Xu Xi is a woman novelist.

Bax: So we ask her loads of questions and build it up into a story.

Dr Lo: A Hong Kong story.

Bax: Right.

Dr Lo: Okay... and remember, this is a group project... work together... cooperate... Xu Xi is expecting you at ten tomorrow. Here is her address. Don't be late.

Interval

Scene 3

(Xu Xi's home)

(SFX: Doorbell rings. Door opens)

XX: Hi... you must be Patrick's journalism students.
Ted: Yeah... yeah we are. I'm Ted.
XX: Hi Ted.
Aly: I'm Alysha.
Bax: I'm Bax
Daisy: And I'm Daisy.
XX: Nice to meet you all... Come on in.
Ted: Thanks.
Bax: Thank you.
Aly: Thank you.
Daisy: Thanks.
XX: Would you like something to drink?... some tea or something?
All: No thanks.
XX: You sure.
Ted: Yeah, thanks... Hey Miss Xu Xi.... thanks for letting us come round and interview you.
XX: Oh it's a pleasure... I know Patrick really well... you're lucky to have a lecturer like him.
Bax: Yeah... he's a nice guy.
Aly: But we don't know him very well... we've only just started you see... at UUC... before we were at a secondary school.
XX: It's great that you've chosen to study journalism... the world needs good journalists.
Bax: Yeah... right. Um... is it okay if we ask you some questions?
XX: Sure... that's what journalists do isn't it?
Bax: Yeah.
XX: Fire away.
Ted: Um... we've all worked out different questions so... if it's okay... we'll take turns asking you questions.
XX: Sure.
Ted: Like each of us will ask maybe two or three?
XX: No problem. So... who's going to start?
Ted: Um...
Bax: You start Ted.

Ted: Okay... so... (turning the pages of his notepad) First of all... let's see... ah yes... Which part of Hong Kong did you grow up in and tell us some stuff about it.

(All take notes as XX is speaking)

XX: Well...actually I grew up in Tsim Sha Tsui, but I have lived in lots of different parts of Hong Kong. Most of my young life, I mean from the time from I was a little kid till secondary school, about F.5, I was in Tsim Sha Tsui. And that was very interesting area, because it was back in the sixties and this was during the Vietnam War also, so there were plenty of tourists at Tsim Sha Tsui, so you always saw a lot of people, so it was very much Hong Kong but also a very international place. I really felt like I was in the middle of lots of different parts of the world.

Ted: Okay, so you lived in Tsim Sha Tsui around the sixties then, right?

XX: Yeah.

Ted: So were you born in Hong Kong?

XX: Yes, I was.

Ted: Okay.

XX: At St. Teresa's Hospital.

(Ted and XX laughing.)

Ted: Wow...you have a good memory. Okay... so how was Tsim Sha Tsui like then?

XX: Well...it was a...it was still...it was quite a busy place already then. But if you can imagine Tsim Sha Tsui without the Sheraton Hotel, without the Cultural Centre, with the old railway station and the clock tower.

Ted: Wow...(laughing) that was great.

XX: It was actually quite beautiful and we lived right facing the harbour, so we had a beautiful view of the harbour, we could see everything, there was nothing blocking our view and the tallest building in front of us at that time was the multi-storey carpark when that was built.

Ted: o...so it was basically flat land when you were there.

XX: It was quite empty. There was nothing much there.

Aly: o...Xu Xi, where did you...where in Tsim Sha Tsui did you live?

XX: I was right near the Peninsula Hotel on _____ Road.

Aly: o...I live on _____ Road too.

XX: Ah...well...there you are. It's a lovely....lovely place to live, I still like

being around there a lot.

Aly: It was very busy now.

XX: It was busy...it was busy then comparatively speaking, I mean, compare to other parts of the city, the building I lived in was _____ Mansion.

Aly: o...I live there as well.

XX: Ah...nice building, isn't it? At the time it was built, it was the tallest building in Kowloon and I remember it was in my Social Studies book.

Aly: o...yeah...okay.

Ted: Thank you. Can we get back to the book? What's your latest book called and what is it about?

XX: Well...it's called The Unwalled City and it's about Hong Kong. It's about Hong Kong during the handover time between 95 to 97. There are four main characters and they are going through their lives and loves here in Hong Kong, and that's basically what it is about.

Ted: So...it's from 95 to 97 and it's about the four characters' lives.

XX: And how they intersect.

Ted: Is it a love story, or is it an action...how you'd classify it?

XX: Well...it's basically a story about ordinary people's lives because there is often a lot of drama in ordinary lives, you know, little things that happen are quite dramatic, it is not just about, you know, wars and action and stuff like that. But of course the backdrop is the historical event that is coming up, which is the handover, and actually nobody really pays very much attention to it.

Bax: So...why do you call The Unwalled City?

XX: Well...I think you all have heard of the Walled City, right? Which used to be here in Hong Kong, and that's gone now. But the Unwalled City is my word. Unwalling, because when Hong Kong was handed over to China, in a way, it became a new kind of city and the idea of unwalling was to remove the barrier that had been there of colonialism. But I kept the word 'wall' in 'unwall', meaning that, in a way, though there was still a protective wall around Hong Kong out of China.

Ted: So...in unwalling, you mean the boundaries were open.

XX: In a way, yes, the boundaries were changing at least.

Ted: Well...thank you...for me, it's up to you guys, who's next?

Aly: I'll go next. Em...well...many people think that Hong Kong is about making money and not about writing story books. What do you think of this?

- XX: Well...it's true that Hong Kong is about making money. Hong Kong built itself as a city because it is a great commercial centre. However, I think that's changing now, because there was a time when Hong Kong was very poor when I was growing up here. Hong Kong was a much poorer city. Now that we have more of the middle class, we are seeing far more opportunities for young people in writing, in the arts, in all kinds of areas that as a kid I never saw.
- Aly: But many people...many young students at school right now...nowadays are still not interested in arts and how do you think one can make them motivated to study arts?
- XX: Well...a lot of it comes from believing that their city means something. I think the reason we have art and literature of any kinds is that people want to express something about where they are from, who they are and then all they think that life is about is making money and a lot of running after a career of some kind, then they won't stop to reflect. Arts is about reflection, just as writing is.
- Aly: Yeah, very true. (Slight pause) You mention for the characters in your book and what are these characters about. Are they students or businessmen?
- XX: There are four different characters. I have one woman who is, a young woman who's just come back a few years earlier from Vancouver, she is about twenty something, so a recent college graduate, and she is a music student, so she is a musician now trying to make a living and she is living with her boyfriend who is a jazz musician playing bass. And then I have an older woman who is Eurasian, also from Hong Kong, and she is a high level financial executive researcher in an investment bank. Then I have a man, an American, who is a photographer, and he's come to Hong Kong only in the last few years, actually in the last year or so, at least the year of the novel, because he can make money and he is actually running away from a divorce, and that's part of it. And the last person is an American woman who is very fluent in Chinese because she is married to a Hong Kong Chinese businessman, and that's part of the reason she wants to be in Asia and she's been in Hong Kong now for about ten years. So this is a very mixed bag of people, it's a kind of international world that I had seen and known about and that's why I was writing about.
- Aly: Well..okay. My last question is that what advice would you give to young Hong Kong writers? What do you think they should write

about?

XX: I think writers write about what they know. Now if you're a Hong Kong person, you can know quite a lot of different things depending on where you come from in Hong Kong, which school you went to, what kind of work you do and there is plenty of things to write about there. There is the environment in Hong Kong to write about, which is quite beautiful, I mean, there is a lot of very beautiful nature in Hong Kong. But there is also a very tough urban environment, there is an international trade world in Hong Kong. There are all kinds of things. That's what I would say to people who are from Hong Kong who want to write. Look at what's around you and what it is you know and feel most deeply and write about that, because that is going to be the most interesting thing.

Aly: Thank you so much and anyone else?

Bax: Okay...me!

(Slight pause)

XX: What do you want to ask?

Bax: Well...okay, Miss Xu Xi, how come you write in English, I mean, you are Hong Kong Chinese, right? So...why do you write in English, not Chinese?

XX: Well...actually my Chinese isn't that good, that's part of it. I can't write in Chinese that well. I studied English Literature. I also come from a family that is 'wa-kiu' - overseas Chinese. So both my parents, their native language was not English and not Cantonese

Bax: O...really...so....then...where were you born?

XX: I was born here.

Bax: So...then where are your parents from?

XX: Indonesia.

Bax: O...Indonesia...wow...cool! Okay, then my next question will be...em...do writers earn a lot of money?

XX: No. (laughs) Well...if you are Stephen King or Amy Tan, you might. But you know, most writers don't really earn a lot of money because it's not...if you want to make a lot of money, you probably wouldn't choose to be a writer. You write for other reasons. You make a living, you can make something.

Bax: Well...so...if it isn't the money, so...what motivated you to become a

writer?

XX: When I was about ten years old or eleven years old, I woke up about four o'clock in the morning and I stood out there looking at the Hong Kong harbour, and it was just really really beautiful, and I thought I wanna write about that. So I did and then I sent this story off to the South China Morning Post, and they paid me. (laughs)

Bax: Wow...

XX: And that was a good start, wasn't it? But I'd always liked the composition in school, and I used to write stories all the time, and that's what began. And later on, I just kept doing it, because I found it was a way for me to understand the world.

Bax: Wow...then good for you. So you mean you're...are you happy being a writer right now?

XX: Well...it's what I've chosen to do. I don't think I want to do anything else.

Bax: Okay...well...thanks, over to you, Daisy.

Daisy: O...yeah...all right. What shampoo do you use and who cuts your hair?

XX: I don't really care much about shampoo, but I do care about hair cutting. You know, if you...one other thing about being a writer I find is you've got to take care of the basics. And if my hair isn't cut right, I don't like to write, I don't like to do anything. I am uncomfortable. (Laughs) So who cuts my hair is pretty important. And I've had my hair cut...now...I have travelled and lived in different parts of the world between Hong Kong and New York. So I have people who cut my hair all over the world.

Daisy: Alright...

(Laughs)

Bax: Wow...

XX: You didn't expect that, ha?

Daisy: What hairstyle do you recommend to girls who want to become writers?

XX: Well...I don't think hairstyle has very much to do with writing actually. I think you don't really worry about that part of it. You just have a haircut or hairstyle that you are comfortable with. That is you, and then you write. And then when you publish a book, then you worry about it

because somebody is going to take your photograph and put it in the newspaper. And that's when you think about what hairstyle you want.

Daisy: O...okay. What style...what style of clothes do you enjoy wearing?

XX: Comfortable and not too expensive.

Daisy: That all?

XX: Yeah.

Daisy: What cut, dress like tube top, what?

XX: Anything that fit, something that I don't feel awkward in or odd in, something that allows me to, like, move freely. I think that's pretty important.

Daisy: So...em...where do you like to shop?

XX: (Slight pause) Second-hand stores.

Daisy: Ha? (Surprised)

XX: Yes, and in the United States I often find second-hand stores because you can find very expensive clothes very cheaply.

Daisy: O...looking around your room, there seems to be so many books. Are you the writer of all of them?

XX: I wish I were, but I'm afraid I'm not. Em...one of the things I do do is to spend most of my money on books instead on clothes, that's why I go to second-hand stores.

Daisy: O...so...what made you write about Hong Kong?

XX: It's home for me, this is what I know and love the best, and that's what I want to write about. You know, it's something that I feel is very important. Hong Kong...but Hong Kong I grew up in disappeared, in a way, I mean the city I knew as a child isn't there anymore, and I wanted to record it, so that's part of it. But there's a lot more too.

Daisy: Thank you.

XX: Okay.

Scene 4

Ted: Wow...wasn't she great? What did you guys think?

Aly: O...she's wonderful.

Bax: O...yeah.

Daisy: She was boring.

Aly: I didn't believe it. She lived in the same building that I live in. Wow...

Ted: Really? I like the part where she didn't really have any generation gap with us. She was so cool and she was so really into it.

Bax: But I can't believe she'd like to be a writer, I mean, she don't earn anything. I...right now...I really regret going into journalism.

Ted: But then who cares? The point is she likes writing and so do I and writing is about using your pen instead of a sword.

Daisy: She has no taste.

Aly: What do you mean no taste, Daisy? What's your question did you ask?

Daisy: Ha! She goes to second-hand shops to buy clothes. Ah! Is she that poor?

Ted: Gosh! That was so lame. You're...you kept on going about fashion and stuff?

Aly: And her haircut, come on, Daisy.

Daisy: Yeah, her haircut, normal, straight, nothing!

Ted: Well...well...anyways...right...let's go back to the Computer Centre and start writing up the story.

Daisy: Ay! Boring.

The End