

Anastasia Baklushina

*Writing based on the Katherine Boo  
“Behind the Beautiful Forevers” book  
and an interview in Flushing, Queens*

## **Book “Sea of Hopes, Fulfilled and Crushed”**

### **Chapter 1. A Wave of Hope**

It was a typical workweek afternoon, smoothly fading into the chilly April evening in Flushing “Chinatown”, in the Queens borough of New York. Behind the written in Chinese characters “Closed” signs on the windows of the small grocery and souvenir shops, their owners painstakingly checked in to count the day’s receipts. The streets were getting filled with the flows of people, mostly Chinese and to a lesser extent Korean immigrants, rushing back home from their jobs. Settled in one of the most diversified neighborhoods in the whole city, where Hispanic, Irish, African-American, Russian, Indian, Greek, South Asian, Jewish and Middle-Eastern communities coexist among each other, Chinatown in Downtown part of Flushing proudly bears the status of being among the largest and fast-developing Chinatowns in the world. “Chinatown Manhattan,” as the locals sometimes call it, may compete with its world-famous namesake for the prestigious role of the trade, business, capital and transportation epicenter. However, behind this success, as it always happens, stands the day-to-day routine work of the usual habitants, which life threads brought them to Downtown Flushing, marking with uniqueness each of their life stories.

Bo Xiao, whose name, for her privacy concerns, I had to invent (“Bo,” in Chinese means “wave-like” – what I thought describes her delicate features best), also didn’t expect any more clients for that day in a bed linen shop on one of the central streets of Flushing Downtown. It was one of those cosy interior design places where you can find moderate quality goods for the moderate prices and Bo had already dedicated five of her nearly thirty - five years of life working there. She tied her black, as coal, in the way hair into the thick tail and with her long thin pale, as porcelain, arms started to fold sheets on one of the exhibition beds. At first, she was doing that droningly and you could guess from her empty almond-shaped green eyes that her mind was

somewhere else. But as soon as Kiko, her ten years younger niece approached her to help, a gentle smile spread on her face. Although she generally belonged to the introvert type of people, she hated being alone, so the prospects of continuing the job in the Kiko's company charged her energy. One could say right away that women had a close bond between each other and both didn't even sometimes need a lot of words to enjoy the time together.

However, that afternoon Bo couldn't cope and overshadow some of her thoughts that got into her head. So, it was already seventeen years since she had moved to New York City. Back then in South China, as she had been leaving home, Bo had been just a recently graduated from high school young girl, who had known for sure one thing deeply in her soul: she had wanted to live a different life and it couldn't have been in China. Why had she moved to New York? Even seventeen years later Bo couldn't think of an exact answer but, perhaps, she had been enchanted by that image of the one city as the magical land of a better life for immigrants. And although she still didn't consider herself as a real New Yorker, she didn't regret her decision after all. Bo got used to her life in the City and for that she was thanking Flushing, which had been giving her a possibility to feel like home and to had been accepted by her neighbors. She had been twenty five, when she got married to Chang – a tall lean and good looking man, he had met Bo in a post office and, like they write it novels, had fallen in love with her at a first sight. Bo had always been proud of her husband - then a novice worker and now a middle manager in a real estate firm, he was her rock in a mad cycle of everyday tasks and life in a megapolis. It was also not that easy at the same time to take care of their two children, young girls Lin and Mei but Bo had never felt that her children became a burden for her. She was a loving, tender mother but also could be strict and intransigent when it was needed. With every next thought, Bo came closer to a decision that, perhaps, it was a time to finally visit her homeland in China – she didn't miss it or anyhow desired to return, she just wanted to show kids China, meet her relatives and travel a bit. She didn't give a place for hope in China. However, Bo did find a place for hope in New York, which had welcomed her and given her a wave of that hope for a life she had always dreamt about.