

NEVER AGAIN Book 2

*NUCLEAR
HOLOCAUST*

NEVER AGAIN

R.J. RUMMEL



Llumina Press

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To the unknown Joys and Johns
of this universe that fight and die
so that others may live in freedom

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And as always and foremost, is my wife Grace. She made this novel and series possible. Without her, I could not have written it. Another kiss, sweetheart.

To be sure, this is a book of fiction. Although some characters may in name and position bear a striking resemblance to historical figures, they are fictional. Nonetheless, I must say that whatever errors of fictional facts exist are mine, and wholly mine.

Foreword

As I pointed out in the foreword to *War and Democide, Never Again*, Book 1 in this *Never Again* series, love is one of our greatest mysteries and the greatest reward that we can receive and give others. Here I revisit the story of the love between a man and a woman, and their love for humanity, and continue my effort to uncover a subversive, insidious, and almost invisible force in human relations. This is the enemy of love and the struggle between the two pervades this book.

What is it? If you read Book 1, you will know. You can start here with your eyes open, unlike the lovers thrust by me, a merciless author, back in time again. But, this time, not alone.

R.J. Rummel
www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/

Chapter 1

New York

October 7, 1994, New Universe

Behind Lora, a sudden, blazing-white light cast everything into stark black and white, like a photographic negative. “What the . . .” Lora blurted, just before a thunderous blast pushed her into the earth. She shuddered, cringed from it. The sound hammered her for seconds, then diminished like thunder reverberating in distant mountains; it lessened further into a distant crackling, breaking, tearing, clanging. Finally it disappeared altogether, leaving a vacuum of sound, as though all noise had been sucked into the earth. All were stony silent—birds, insects, cars; no tree branch rustled, no voices called.

More seconds. She heard an approaching roar. Then, in a flurry of leaves, broken branches, shingles, and small rocks, a hot windstorm picked her up like a doll in a child’s hand and hurled her against a tree trunk. All around, a maelstrom of banging, thudding, shattering, falling things exploded in her ears. Stunned, the breath knocked out of her, Lora gasped for air, tried to focus her eyes, tried to stop the world from spinning.

A more profound stillness settled around her.

I’m dead.

No, Lora’s body screamed: that thudding was her heart; that salty iron taste her blood; that grit on her lips, that smell, was the dirt covering her face. As if proving further her survival, excruciating pain blasted her mind, and she let out an involuntary screech.

Her mind struggled against the shock and pain to gain control over her body. She had to discover what had just happened. The world steadied, her eyes focused, but nothing made any more sense than an abstract painting of complex and intertwined lines, patches of color, gray images, black holes. Then, as a strange image suddenly clicks into an obvious picture, she realized her head was upside down and, through the tangled branches of a shrub, she was watching an angry, roiling, red and black mushroom cloud climbing above Manhattan to blacken the morning sky.

Sound gave up its paralysis in an eruption of distant screams, cries, howling dogs, the metallic crunch of shattered cars, and breaking things. Almost with regret, Lora recovered full consciousness. She was sprawled upside down in a twig dogwood shrub with one leg against an oak tree, her dress suit bunched around her chest, and her shoes gone.

Asteroid, it's an asteroid. Its hit New York. It can't be anything else. After all, her mind spun out as if to defy the horror emerging in her mind and the pain and nausea of her body, Joy and John eliminated major international wars—against all odds, they succeeded. Their peace has lasted for almost a century.

My God, this can't be an attack.

Lora tried to reorient herself. *Mark and I had breakfast . . . about 9:15 we locked our apartment . . . headed for our Institute in Manhattan . . . garage being remodeled . . . car parked on Graham Street . . . walking toward the car*

MARK! Where's Mark?

She tried to right herself, and gasped from another rush of pain. Her right arm was twisted behind her. As she bent and turned to get at her arm, she screamed. Her eyes teared, and she bit her lip. It felt like somebody was cutting the muscles of her arm out with a dull, red-hot knife.

Gritting her teeth, Lora rotated her body to disentangle herself from the branches of the bush. Lying on her back, she pushed her body out of the bushes with her legs. Panting, nauseated, she sat up and stared at her right arm. It was broken near the elbow, the lower ulna and radius bones twisted backwards at a right angle. White bones streaked with blood protruded.

I can't wait for help. A catastrophe has happened. I've got to find Mark.

She jerked her eyes from street, to houses, to street, to trees. She finally located Mark leaning against a tree. *Christ, his right arm can't bend at that angle.*

"Mark. Mark! Can you hear me?"

He's moving. He's alive.

Lora gritted her teeth, gripped the broken segment of her arm, and twisted. Agony made her squeal through her teeth. She straightened her broken arm with her left hand. Dizzy, near vomiting, she held it gingerly as she struggled to her knees, then staggered to her feet. She stood swaying. Finally she checked her body for more injuries; saw scratches and punctures, but they weren't bleeding much.

“Nothing serious,” she told herself, needing to hear a voice. “Just hold the arm out from your body.” She spit blood and probed with her tongue—she’d bitten the inside of her lower lip.

She needed all her strength to lurch toward Mark. “Sweetheart,” she called, “can you move? We’ve got to get to a hospital.”

Blood dripped from a cut on his cheek. Mark grimaced and grunted as he struggled to his feet. He stood rocking back and forth like a drunken sailor. With his good left hand he felt around his ribs, and yelped. “Besides my arm,” he moaned, “I think some ribs broke.”

Letting his broken arm hang, he shuffled over to her and put out his good hand to help support her. His eyes opened wide when he saw her broken arm. “Jesus,” he exclaimed, “your arm. I’ve got to get you to a hospital.”

Lora leaned against him, happy that they both had survived whatever had happened. She rested her head on his shoulder for a moment to calm herself, then lifted it and looked around for other survivors. No one had been nearby, this late in the morning, and there had been little traffic on their narrow road.

“Our Lux looks okay,” Mark said.

The whirlwind had blown it backwards into a telephone pole, but Lora could see no serious damage. As they helped each other toward it, she realized that snow-like grit and ash was falling from the towering black and gray mushroom cloud that now loomed over them. Already it coated everything. What had been a clear, sunny day was now dim and hazy, blanketed in a gray fog. They pulled several broken branches off the car, and Mark managed to brush the debris and fallout from the windshield with his good hand.

Lora suddenly exclaimed, “My purse. What happened to my purse?”

Letting her broken arm hang around the protruding bone and trying to ignore the pain, she limped in her torn stockings toward the tree she had been thrown against, and saw her purse and shoes had been flung nearby. She quickly shoved her feet into her shoes and as she returned to the car with her purse, she heard frantic whining. She spied a small terrier, its tail between its legs and ears flat against its head, running into one object after another. Each time it fell, got up, and tried a new direction. It was bleeding from the mouth.

Lora pointed at the terrier with her good hand. “The poor thing can’t see,” she said in a voice that reflected the dog’s anguish.

The terrier heard her voice. It headed toward her, but after another crash and tumble, she pleaded, “Here. Come, boy.” The terrier stopped

about four feet away, trembling, and turned its gaze blindly in her direction. She opened the car door with her good hand, limped over to the terrier, and picked him up by the scruff. She put him on the floor of the car and commanded, “Stay.”

Lora laboriously climbed into the car, then rested her broken arm on her lap and her head on the dash. She took deep breaths to steady herself. She heard Mark cry out a couple of times and looked up with fear. He was trying to get his keys from his right pants pocket.

“I’ll help you,” Lora yelled.

Mark shook his head.

He couldn’t get the fingers of his left hand deeply enough into his right pocket. Gritting his teeth against the pain from his ribs, he bent over and with his left hand pushed up on the pocket under the keys, jiggling them upwards within reach. He raised his right leg to jam the keys against his pants, balanced himself by putting his right foot on the car, then pulled the keys out with a grunt.

Mark carefully maneuvered into the driver’s seat, but his broken ribs kept him from sitting straight. “Okay, here,” he rasped, trying to angle his body toward her so he could hand her the keys. “I can’t start the car.”

She inserted the ignition key, started the car, and turned on the windshield wipers. “Can you steer?”

“Yes. But you’ve got to change gears.”

Lora gripped the gearshift with her left hand. “I can. Just yell ‘shift,’ and I will. This is one time I’m sorry we didn’t get a car with an automatic transmission.”

Mark headed for Saint Catherine’s Hospital in Brooklyn, a few miles away. The terrier remained huddled at her feet, shaking. It moved its head, trying to look around with its sightless eyes. Blood caked around its muzzle.

How sad, Lora thought. *It doesn’t know what’s going on.* Then it struck her—*Neither do we.*

Aside from her first confused thought about an asteroid, she had not thought beyond her concern for Mark, the terrier, and her throbbing pain. Now it hit her like a punch in the face. Almost incoherently, she yelled, “My God, Mark. Jesus. It wasn’t an asteroid. It was a *nuclear bomb*. We’ve been attacked with a *nuclear bomb*.”

“Shit. Shit.” Mark almost drove into a three-car pileup in an intersection. “Jesus Christ, a nuclear bomb! Who could do this?”

Lora moaned, “Goddam, I’m too messed up to even guess who did it. It has to be the worst monster that ever lived.”

Mark scowled and his mouth compressed into a thin, tight line. She immediately regretted distracting him, and pointed to the road. As calmly as she could, she said, "First, to the hospital." She saw him try to compose himself and refocus on getting them there.

Mark threaded their car around numerous stalled vehicles, accidents, and downed trees that blocked the streets, several times detouring through gas stations, parking lots, and front yards. They made it to St. Catherine's before the flood of injured reached it, although the ambulances, police vehicles, and walking injured crammed the emergency entrance. Mark parked on the grass in a remote corner of the grounds so that vehicles converging on the hospital would not block their car.

The terrier no longer trembled, and Lora thought it best to leave him in the car. She petted and stroked him with her good hand and told him, "You be a good boy, now. We'll be back."

The hospital was on the fringe of the mushroom cloud, which was dissipating in the light wind. In its place grew an uglier cloud of solid-looking black and gray smoke from the thousands of fires ignited by the nuclear blast. As Lora limped with Mark toward the hospital, she saw virtually no fallout on the ground and parked cars. In contrast to what she knew must have occurred in Manhattan, the hospital building stood untouched. The imposing structure was a mishmash of architecture, the result of years of added extensions. The old, central three-story brownstone building remained, though, and looking toward it with her back to Manhattan, Lora thought it looked like a church in calm repose against a cloudless blue sky. The air here smelled fresh and felt crisp.

To handle the emergency load, the hospital had augmented its staff with every available doctor and nurse, but fortunately, the deluge of human misery had yet to arrive. Frightened doctors and nurses gave Mark and Lora emergency medical treatment within a half hour. Doctors set their broken arms, put them in casts, and tightly taped Mark's ribs. Because of her protruding bones, a doctor wanted to give Lora a general anesthetic before working on it, but she refused.

"Give me a local and do what you can to get me through the next couple of weeks," she told him. "I'll have surgery later, if need be."

Both required many stitches, and afterward they filled prescriptions for pain and antibacterial drugs at the hospital pharmacy.

Worried, their fear showing, all the medical personnel wanted to know what had happened. Mark and Lora could do no more than tell them that the explosion was probably a nuclear bomb, and that they soon would be overwhelmed with patients injured in every conceivable way.

An officious nurse came around with a clipboard and asked them to fill out an information sheet. She seemed oblivious to the horror around her.

“Sorry,” Mark said, “neither of us can write.” He indicated their broken arms. “What do you want to know?”

“Names?”

Lora answered, “Lora Joy Reeves and Mark John Docker.”

“Work?”

She responded, “I’m president and owner of the Joy Phim Democratic Peace Institute, and Mark is my assistant and translator. And my husband.”

The nurse continued to ask for personal, medical, and insurance information until Lora put a stop to it. “We have to leave. I’m sorry, but we’re running out of time.”

“But—”

Mark interrupted. “You have our telephone number. Give us a call if you need more information.”

The nurse nodded, clasped her clipboard to her chest, and said over her shoulder as she walked off, “Have a good day.”

Before leaving, Lora used the toilet. She emerged from the bathroom shaking and chilled with shock. She had dared peek at herself in the bathroom mirror. Proud of a beauty that in her late forties had only turned elegant, she now resembled an old woman. Her normally dark brown hair was matted and dirty, with grayish clumps and strands curling outward at odd angles. The cheek she had bitten was swollen, her lips puffy, her eyes red-rimmed and bloodshot. *A witch out of a horror movie looks good by comparison*, she thought ruefully, regarding the patches of antibacterial ointment and a large bandage that seemed to accentuate the lines in her face.

Feeling as if she was about to vomit, she stood at the entrance to the bathroom and tried to soothe her emotions. For the first time since the catastrophe, she took a real look at Mark. He appeared much worse than she did. She had always admired his good looks and strong body, and his prematurely gray hair had only added to his attractiveness. Now he couldn’t stand straight, his shoulders were rounded, and his face reflected all his suffering. Somehow he had lost a patch of hair, and one eyelid drooped in a face gray and haggard. There was a large patch bandage on his cheek. With his disheveled appearance and torn and dirty clothes, he looked like an unwashed, homeless druggie. That his one arm hung in a sling didn’t help.

Seeing her distraught look, Mark put his good arm around her shoulder in spite of his painful ribs, kissed her on the forehead, and brushed her cheeks with his lips. “We survived, precious. We’re alive. I couldn’t bear losing you. I love you.”

Lora took his hand, kissed it, and looked up into his eyes. “I love you too, honey,” she tried to purr. It sounded like a moan.

Outside the hospital, they saw ambulances and police cars backed up to the emergency entrance, and dozens of stretchers deposited on the asphalt holding bloody and mortally injured people. An occasional cry punctuated the hubbub as triage doctors and nurses scurried from one stretcher to another, dividing the injured into those beyond help, those in need of immediate treatment, and those able to wait. A large crowd of injured people stumbled or limped into the hospital, some crying, some moaning, and some appearing stoic or dazed. Some were blinded and helped along by others. Two nurses organized them all, so that the most badly injured who might survive could receive care first.

Fortunately, Mark’s foresight paid off; their Lux was not blocked. When they got in, the terrier remained where Lora had left him. He still held his tail tight against his stomach, but he sat up and looked in her direction with clouded, dead eyes. He sniffed her, then licked her hand as she tucked him in between her lap and her sling. She stroked his stomach. Her eyes grew moist. “You poor little guy. You may be permanently blinded.”

Mark drove back to their apartment, steering with his left hand while she jockeyed the gearshift. Traffic was now stop and go on a few main roads, unmoving on all the others. Mark had to take a circuitous route along back roads, and detour through parking lots and alleys.

Lora’s right arm now only ached and, freed from the pain that had dulled her mind, she gave full thought to the nuclear attack. Its full meaning hit her with the force of a violent slap in the face. *My God, our Institute must have been destroyed—all our people were killed.*

Tears flowed, and sobs wrenched her body and jarred her broken arm. Physical pain again tried to flood her mind, but could not compete with her anguish. “The bomb exploded about 9:30,” she pushed the sounds out. “Almost everyone would have been at work—all our department heads and our staff . . . dead. Janice, Bob, Shirley, Ed, Tony—Tony, whose parents are among our best friends. We’ve known him since birth! And brilliant Betty. And more. So many more . . . dead. Oh, Mark.”

The little terrier sensed her grief. In spite of his own misery, he tried to push himself up on her lap and lick her face. Lora held him to

her with her sling and cried so hard that she couldn't shift the car. Mark almost stalled when he had to slow down, and finally stopped the car. Freed from having to think of shifting, she mentally collapsed into mourning.

She pounded her fist on the dash, scaring the terrier. "So many good people, so many promising futures," she sobbed, "wiped out. So many families and loved ones devastated. And they were *our* people. Our people. All those in the middle and top positions within the Institute that we personally hired and nurtured" She shuddered, then screamed, "Killed! All of them!"

Mark's grunt of pain and his touch penetrated her misery. Lora looked up through her tears to see that he had tried to put his arm around her shoulders and pull her close, but his sling had prevented him. He turned sideways and grunted again as he put his left hand on her shoulder and squeezed it.

Her sobs soon diminished to tearful shudders. She put her good hand on top of his and whimpered, "They were our family."

Mark shook his head, and Lora saw his own tears. "We were lucky. Had we not slept late, we would have been at the Institute at 7:30, and dead now, too. Those calls we made late last night to Southeast Asia saved us, made us oversleep. I can't believe our luck."

She felt him squeeze her shoulder again, as though trying to assure himself that she was alive. She tilted her head and kissed his hand. She wept for a few more minutes, then willed her misery to silence. She mourned for her dead no less, but now there was the future to think about. One thought now filled her mind: *We have a transcendent duty, a blood obligation to all the dead, not only our own.* It focused her energy, overcame her pain and anguish and gave her purpose. She patted Mark's hand, turned her face up to his, and said, "Let's go."

He took his hand off her shoulder and grabbed the steering wheel with his good hand. "I know what we've got to do," he whispered.

"We have a duty," Lora said, her voice breaking. "To ourselves, to our dead, and to humanity. Yes!" she exclaimed, and turned to Mark. "We've almost a full tank of gas. That will give us a start toward our scientific and engineering affiliate in Santa Barbara. But first, we've got to return to our apartment."

As they approached their apartment, refugees, injured, and vehicles of all kinds filled the main roads as people tried to flee the boroughs or the fires and rubble in Manhattan. Almost no one kept to their side of the road. Debris and tree limbs cluttered the streets. Raging fires now

engulfed whole blocks. Mark again took to the narrow tertiary roads, and they were glad their apartment was on a small, seldom traveled road, reachable by back streets that few residents of Queens knew about. Even so, they had to detour through lots and, in two cases, backyards, knocking a fence down with their car. On one road no wider than a path, they teamed up with another car to push a tree limb out of the way with their bumpers.

They parked in front of their apartment, locked the car, and rushed inside. Lora put the terrier down and, while Mark got their suitcases, she jabbed the TV and radio on-buttons, looking for news about the nuclear attack. Despite being hungry for news, they had avoided turning on the car radio so they wouldn't be distracted during the difficult drive. They could not afford to damage the car—what they were sure was their only way to get to Santa Barbara, without stealing another car.

TV and radio reception was full of snow and static, and pictures and sound disappeared for minutes at a time. The news they did hear was sketchy, contradictory, and sometimes panicky. On one Gordon News channel broadcast from Philadelphia, the anchor claimed, "The attacks are acts of God for our immorality." As he started screaming, "Sinners, repent!" cameramen forcibly removed him from the news desk. A talk radio station host claimed, "It was the Russians. They attacked us. We have sent bombers over Russia to drop nuclear bombs on them in retaliation."

That's so stupid, Lora thought. We don't have any nuclear bombs anymore. We disarmed the last of them over twenty years ago.

An academic analyst on the KNS TV news channel claimed, "The United States has brought this upon ourselves, for lording it over and exploiting other countries, particularly poor countries."

Through it all, Mark and Lora wept. They tried to focus on packing their survival clothes and supplies. Suddenly Lora screamed, "Listen!" and dropped onto the arm of their easy chair.

The radio reception from Newark NYNU was clear: ". . . confirmed that a nuclear bomb destroyed Washington, D.C. at the same time the one in New York went off. The President of the United States, Vice President, Speaker of the House, and President *pro tempore* of the Senate were all killed—"

"Holy Jesus," Mark cried, gaping at the radio. He leaned on the edge of the dinner table.

Worse was to come.

“ . . . Cabinet was also devastated. Killed were the Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of Defense, the Attorney General, and the Secretary of the Interior. This leaves George Peabody, Secretary of Agriculture, who was giving a speech in Florida. He was sworn in as President in Fort Lauderdale by the Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme—” The voice broke down and in moments was replaced by someone with a deep but mournful voice.

“This has just come in . . . Central London, Berlin, Paris, and Moscow also were wiped out—”

“Oh my God!” Lora shrieked. “Our affiliated institutes in those cities must be gone—all our people. Mark, I can’t bear it.” She collapsed slowly to the floor. She was beyond sobbing, beyond physical pain. She lay trembling on the floor, her good hand covering her face, and wailed.

Mark’s face had become a sickly white. He almost fell into the easy chair next to Lora. He put his face into his left hand and bawled. They barely registered the rest of the news announcement.

“Great Britain lost not only its top leaders, but also the queen. Germany and France were also politically guillotined. The President of Russia survived only because he was visiting his mother in Kazan.”

Minutes later, Mark wiped his face with the edge of the satin tablecloth, still shuddering with suppressed sobs, and knelt down beside Lora. He stroked her shoulder and hair. When she pulled her wet hand away from her face to hold his, he told her in a quavering voice, “C’mon, precious. We’ll have to save some big tears till later. No time.”

She couldn’t get any words out, but she got herself under control and he helped her get up. She held him lightly, avoiding his ribs, and put her head on his shoulder for a moment before gently pushing away. They both went back to packing what they would take with them.

No one knew who did it. There was nothing but speculation on the radio and TV. “It’s Russia,” a high government source reportedly said.

“Crazy!” Mark swore at the radio. “It’s been a democracy for three decades. We’ve had no serious conflict with Russia.”

A radio talk show host exclaimed, “A rich and powerful secret international organization did it. They used nuclear weapons to take over the world.” Others blamed “those evil Islamic extremists,” but couldn’t agree on who would have organized and led such an attack.

Lora found her voice, although it trembled. “The problem is, without a major international war in the twentieth century, secret and security services in the democracies have atrophied . . . and political acumen about surprise attacks has dulled.” She wiped her eyes and face with a tissue and blew her nose into another.

Mark glanced at her and nodded. He piled more folders on the floor.

Once they'd accumulated all they were going to take to the car, Lora pointed to the phone and whispered, "No matter how long it takes, we must do it."

"Yes," Mark replied. "I know, but I hate it."

They began to telephone the surviving families of their department heads, secretaries, and others that they knew personally. Few calls went through, and static and fade-outs made conversation difficult. They tried to console the few they reached. They cried with them and gave them the private telephone number for their affiliate in Santa Barbara, telling them, "Call if you need any aid, or just want to talk."

Only to those who knew the secret of their institute, the husbands and wives of their department heads, did they divulge their plans. All approved. Through their tears, they offered Mark and Lora whatever help they could give.

Lora tried to call their Santa Barbara affiliate, but none of the telephone numbers worked. She tried to eletter and swore when she couldn't get a connection. Mark put his good hand on her shoulder and quietly pointed out that their ecomm hub had been in their Manhattan Institute.

Finally, they each made several laborious trips to the car to load it with what they had piled near their apartment door—food, water, first aid and other survival supplies, camping clothes, important documents and disks, laptop computers, weapons, and all their cash and jewelry.

They secured everything in the apartment for what they thought might be a long or permanent absence. Lora gave the terrier water. He had peed in a kitchen corner. "Why am I doing this?" she asked herself as she cleaned it up, but did it anyway. The terrier's tail was extended now, but still not wagging. She didn't blame him. *Mine wouldn't wag either*, she thought as she took him with her to the car.

Coughing from the smoke that now hung in the air, they drove the three blocks to where their car had been parked before the explosion and knocked on a number of doors in the neighborhood, asking if anyone had lost or knew anything about the little dog that Lora carried in one arm. Few people answered their doors. Those who did were too distressed to care, or knew nothing about the terrier. Lora gave up after an hour. There was too much at stake to delay any longer. They began what normally would have been 2,780 mile drive to Santa Barbara.



At one time, Lora had consolidated all the scientific and engineering work in their New York Institute. Increasingly, however, she found that much of the research related to their mission was done in Santa Barbara. The city had mushroomed into the scientific, technological, and computer capital of the world. She therefore set up an affiliated institute there and moved their most important scientific work into it from New York. *It's a good thing I did*, she thought. *Otherwise, we could never do what we intend to do now.*

"Let's see," Mark mused. "What routes are we going to take? We've always flown long distances."

Lora reached into the back seat with her good hand and picked up *Simpson's Road Atlas*. She took their compass out of the glove compartment. "We have all we need," Lora murmured, still subdued by horror.

Mark studied the maps, and asked Lora to help him remember the routes. "We'll catch Route 5 outside of New York to Pittsburgh, and from there Transcon Route 42 through Columbus, St. Louis, Kansas City, Denver, and Las Vegas, to a junction outside of Los Angeles. Then it's a short hop on Route 96 to Santa Barbara. Three routes in all."

So they thought. They didn't realize what a nightmare of back roads, detours, undesignated farm roads, and dangers would be involved in driving anywhere in the aftermath of this national catastrophe. More than once, that road atlas and simple compass saved them from getting completely lost.

They drove three hours on, three hours off, day and night, and made room on the back seat so that their off time could be spent sleeping. Even though they had casts on their right arms, they developed a way of shifting. They took their encased arms out of their slings before they changed places, and while driving they would bend over the edge of the steering wheel, grip the knob of the stick shift with their extended fingers, and shift only when they had to prevent stalling or to get the car moving. It was most difficult for Mark because of his broken ribs. Seeing his tight-lipped grimaces, Lora knew it was painful for him, but he insisted on doing his share of the driving.

They faced urban refugees, traffic jams, blocked roads, suspicious cops and state troopers, and overeager national guardsmen. They had brought their driver's licenses, Institute I.D.s, and federal retirement cards, all with photos, and those got them through roadblocks and state border checks.

Gasoline was scarce. Many gas stations had been vandalized and those they found selling gas were demanding as much as fifteen dollars a gallon. They learned to stop at the first functioning gas station as soon as their tank dropped down to half-full.

The first time they filled up at a combined store and gasoline station, they bought a bag of dog food and a large thermos. From then on they filled the thermos with coffee when they stopped to eat once a day, and drank coffee along the way to assure they wouldn't fall asleep while driving, especially at night.

After they ate they let the terrier out of the car and fed him. During their toilet breaks, they also let him roam around to get used to his blindness. He never explored far and responded to "Spunky," the name Lora gave him. His tail now wagged when he approached them, and he judged where he was going by sound and smell. He had shaken off his misery and proudly held his head high.

"I'm beginning to love the little guy," Lora told Mark.

On their second day on the road, they heard the incredible ultimatum over the car radio. There was no longer any question of who was responsible for the most monstrous slaughter in human history.

Chapter 2

Abul Sabah

Peking, October 8, 1994, New Universe

Abul Sabah glared at his son Turghun in sad anger. He could no longer hide his hatred.
I wish he were dead.

Turghun stood staring through the bulletproof glass, his face shining with the light of victory. Beside him, so pear shaped that not even a tailored uniform could be made to hang right, was General Mirzat Zunun, his chief of all combined military forces. By his narrowed eyes and smug expression, he appeared to be gloating already over the coming victory.

It is a wonder he does not crow like a rooster, thought Abul.

On the other side of Turghun towered long-faced and full-bearded Imam Ch'en Hsun. He was the head of China's National Governing Council—in effect, a council of Islamic Sabah clerics—and wore his emblematic toe length, all white, dragon court robe. Always inscrutable, always slippery tongued, always a holy word of Sabah on his lips. Abul did not trust him and had advised his son against appointing him to that powerful position.

Abul dropped his eyes for a moment—they felt almost too heavy to move—and gazed down with disgust verging on horror at the activity on the other side of the glass. A chill spiraled up his spine, competing with the apparent arthritis flaring up in his neck. He felt nauseous. If he vomited, he knew in what direction to spew it all.

Below was a roomful of metal desks topped with Yang computers, Lan consoles, and microphones. There were twenty desks, two for each of the major powers whose cities were to be destroyed. Twenty carefully screened technicians and scientists wearing headphones manned them. Each had a key paired up with that held by the technician at the other desk. The two keys would be inserted within four seconds of each other into key locks on the consoles of the two desks for a specific country. They would unlock the switches that set off a nuclear bomb in

one or another of its cities.

Built into the wall in front of the room was a six by twelve foot electronic world map, with China at the center. Twelve red circles marked the cities already destroyed by hidden nuclear weapons. One red, pulsing X indicated the bomb had not gone off in Tokyo. Peking had a blue square around it on the map, as though it were surrounded by protective iron walls.

Security men, with their square, narrow brimmed hats and red and blue pinstriped trousers, stood or ambled around the room along with a supervising general and his aides. Four security men hovered over the Japan desks as two technicians struggled with their unlocked toggles. They kept inserting their keys into the locks simultaneously, and pushing their toggle switches back and forth. Suddenly one of them threw up his hands exuberantly as a row of green lights appeared on his console. He yelled something and everybody stared at the wall map.

In the booth, no one moved. Abul thought he could hear his blood boiling in horror. Maybe it was someone breathing heavily.

It could not be my son. He has not taken a decent breath in years.

The X over Tokyo disappeared. A minute went by. A red circle appeared.

General Zunun turned to Turghun and smiled. His chest swelled up even more, and he stated the obvious: "The second Tokyo bomb worked."

Turghun glanced at him, then at his father Abul for the time it takes to blink, and looked back at the floor below. "Good," he said, as though commenting on the fit of his shoes.

I cannot believe Turghun would do this monstrous killing, Abul thought for the thousandth time. I'm still as sickened by it as when I first heard about his evil plans. Abul had strongly advised against the attack. He told Turghun it must not be done this way. His method—of patience and infiltration and awaiting the right political moment to strike—would work, as it had in China.

Abul rubbed an arthritic hand over his face, each finger feeling its own deep wrinkle, and checked the large black and white wall clock again—9:14 p.m.

Only fourteen minutes have passed.

Further along the observation window, General Zunun's adjutant, Colonel Chi An, sat at a gray metal desk. Different colored phones rested on the desk in front of him. The desk sat on a raised metal platform that allowed Chi An a full view of the floor below.

Abul studied him. *Tomorrow Turghun's ultimatum will be broadcast to the world in my name, despite my protests. Then the world will*

think I committed this unspeakably horrible act. Whether this ends in world victory or not, I do not care. This is not God's way; this is not the way of Sabah; this is not what I taught my son.

"Your method takes too long," Turghun had yelled at Abul, waving his hands as though tormented by flies. "We would all be dead before the final victory. This way, our victory will be fast and complete. We will control the world. Sabahism will be universal."

Abul argued, "Yes, but at what cost? One must kill to take power and consolidate it, to be sure. But not innocents. Not the masses; they could not care less who ruled. And not the wealth and history each major city contains. God wishes us to exploit what the centuries have built, not destroy it. God wants us to educate, convert to the true faith, and uplift the people in his name. You want to kill them like cockroaches, like pouring gasoline on an ant's nest and setting it ablaze."

Turghun had ignored his arguments, and made his preparations. He had the power.

Abul glanced at the two security officers in the back of the booth. Both had their eyes on him; they always did, no matter where he went. Sometimes he felt like pissing on their legs, and excusing himself as an old man.

He had threatened to go to the people. His name was still the power among the people and in the mosques. But Turghun had gradually taken away all his physical authority, all his physical power.

Oh, Abul reflected, I still can make speeches on behalf of God and the book of Sabah. But I first must ask for use of the appropriate facilities, and I have two of these security brutes always standing nearby. No security guard would let him enter a radio or television studio without express permission from his son. He couldn't even make a tape, since he had no recording device, and he didn't know how to use a computer. But he was secretly learning. Soon he would be able to get the word out by eletter or over the esystem.

All Abul's top men were long gone, either dead or transferred out of his reach. His uncle died decades ago. His son was his only living male relative. There was not one person he could trust to kill Turghun, not one person around him who would come to his defense if his son tried to kill him.

I'm now a paper caliph.

Abul dropped his throbbing head into his hands. *Is this all it means? All my successes, all my triumphs, all my planning for God, all my teaching? I converted billions to the true God; I thought my son had learned the way of Sabahism and would carry on the message of God after me.*

I cannot believe how all I have done has ended.



Uighuristan, 1914, New Universe

On November 16, 1914, soon after Uighuristan became independent of China, Abul took his first breath on the outskirts of Kashgar, in the small bedroom of a three room, mud-brick home. His mother Niyasam Sabah bore him alone. She cut his umbilical cord after he arrived. She cleaned up both of them.

His mother told him years later that she was breast-feeding him when his father Aisha returned from herding his goats and came into the bedroom. In the dim light from the small window, he glanced at the afterbirth in a pail, the bloody towels, the wet bed, and finally stared at the infant. He approached the bed and leaned over for a good look at his tiny, wrinkled face. He asked gruffly, “Is it a boy?”

“Yes,” Niyasam said proudly.

The hard lines of his father’s face crinkled into a rare smile. Aisha half bowed and clasped his hands together in momentary prayer, repeating several times, “God be praised.”

He put his rough hand on Niyasam’s head for a second, nodded, and turned to leave. As he strutted into the main room he threw over his shoulder, “You take good care of Abul. That’s what I will name him.”

Abul’s father husbanded and sold livestock, particularly sheep and goats, and Abul began to learn the trade even as a child. By the age of seven he regularly helped his father tend his livestock and sell them at the market. As was traditional in this part of the world, he also learned from his family about Mohammed and Allah—what Muslims called God—and the sacred Quran. He bowed in the direction of Mecca and said a prayer to God five times a day.

In this most conservative Islamic city, his family was one of the most fundamentalist. They attended the mosque whenever possible and on all Fridays and religious holidays, his father saved ten percent of the family income per year in the hope of taking Abul on the pilgrimage to Mecca, and he enrolled Abul in the Idgah Madrasa, an Islamic religious school at the famous twelfth century Idgah Mosque.

Now recorded in the holy book called *The Sabah* by his biographers, what happened to Abul at the age of thirteen would transform world history. He remembered that time differently, but he knew such religious myths were important to the faithful.

While on the way home with his father after herding their sheep,

Abul fell to the ground with convulsions. His lips turned blue, his forehead oozed sweat, and he foamed about the mouth. Frightened by Abul's convulsions and frightening appearance, Aisha tried to pick him up to rush him home, but his violent shaking made handling him too difficult to carry.

When Abul's convulsions stopped, he shuddered briefly. After a few minutes, he rolled over and pushed himself up to sit on a rock. His mind was still numb; he felt miserable, and he had a dull headache. It was minutes before Abul was able to focus on his father. When he did, he saw that Aisha looked worse than he felt. His father was shaking. Fear for Abul, his only son, lined his face and filled his eyes.

Abul knew nothing about epileptic fits, and such were unknown to his father and most people of Kashgar. At the time he thought it was something he ate, maybe bad lamb.

At thirteen, boyish pranks and jokes, especially on his parents, came naturally to Abul. It was also the way he relieved his fears and released tension. He was a believer in Islam, of course. Through his classes at the madrasa and his father, he was a good Muslim boy. But he was also questioning and iconoclastic, and his questions at the madrasa and his pranks had caused his father and him some grief.

So as his scared father leaned over him and while Abul's lower lip still trembled from the convulsions, Abul joked. That is, he thought he did at the time. *The Sabah* has him saying, "Father, I have had a holy visit. The angel Gabriel came to me. He told me that God wants to speak to me through him. God said that I would be his prophet. I am in Mohammed's image and must go forth and lead all people to Paradise."

Abul did not talk like that at thirteen. Years later he recalled saying something like, "Father, I saw the angel Gabriel. He said he speaks to me for God. He said God wants me as his prophet. He said I should take people to Paradise."

Abul's black hair was long and curly and framed an angelic, sweet face like a halo. He knew even at his young age that his looks put adults on their best behavior around him. Other boys teased and taunted him for it.

So, when Abul adopted what should have been a comical, saintly look and told Aisha, a simple and religious man, of his supposed revelation, his father gaped at him. He fell to his knees and bowed his forehead to the ground. He surprised Abul by saying, "You are God's prophet. God be praised. Lead us, Abul of God. I believe."

Abul thought his father was also joking, and at any moment would let out a laugh and kick him in the ass as he did his donkeys. Playing out the joke with him, Abul stood, asked him to rise, and said in a high-

pitched voice, "Take your prophet home."

Rather than laughing, Aisha stood, bowed, and said, "Everyone must hear."

His father did get the whole family together, to Abul's further surprise. Almost all came: his married sister and her husband, three cousins, his in-laws, and two uncles. All crowded into their small home and gathered before the fireplace to hear about Abul's "revelation." His father described in detail Abul's convulsions and contortions and the color of his face and lips, and explained that this was due to the stress of his communication with an otherworldly being. Then he looked at Abul reverently.

Abul knew his father had him now. This was his way of being sarcastic. He was going to teach Abul a lesson for making a joke about God and Gabriel, for blasphemy, and once he repeated his "vision," his father would hold him up as a bad example and punish him in front of everyone. Abul trembled and chewed his nails. He could not look at his father. He did not intend that things would go this far, but he felt he had to play it out. He tried to speak in a firm and knowing voice, but it sounded squeaky when he told them about Gabriel coming before him in the image of a man, and what he said to Abul.

No one laughed. His sister told him later that it was because his father brought everyone together with the admonition, "My son is divinely commissioned by God to lead us all."

But his mother was hearing this from Abul for the first time. Now she realized why his father had given him special treatment for the two days before this family meeting. Abul knew she was not dumb. She asked, "Are you sure you did not have dreams or hallucinations? It was very hot that day, and you did not eat breakfast." His sister nodded her agreement.

If his mother had just said, "You're joking," and shook her finger at him, he would have confessed his joke. But hallucinations or dreams? He was not going to admit to those. Abul replied, "It had to be a revelation." He made a boyish exaggeration. "I saw Gabriel as if he were standing here. He was so clear to me." He added what he hoped was his clincher: "But this was hard on my body. It was painful. Father saw this."

Most important, Uncle Hasan believed. Abul did not know it at the time and thought that when everyone went home, that would be the end of it. But, as an important businessman and contributor to the Idgah Mosque, Hasan told Molla Abduvahit Ahmedi about Abul's "visions." Ahmedi knew about Abul's studies at the madrasa and, Hasan told Abul later, was impressed by his seriousness and intelligence. So Ahmedi invited Abul to visit

him, and then asked him to describe his “revelation.”

Abul was scared. He could not admit to such a joke before Ahmedi. Abul was sure Ahmedi would see him as an evil blasphemer, and he would be kicked out of the madrasa and his family shunned. Stammering, hesitating, face heating up, he retold his story. He did better when Ahmedi asked him to repeat it, but Abul thought at the time, *I sound like I've been caught peeing in the fireplace.*

Abul's uncle told him afterward that Molla Ahmedi was not impressed, that Ahmedi thought Abul's “intense study of the Quran and the heat of the day caused him to hallucinate a revelation.” Abul was only relieved to hear that Ahmedi did not think him a blasphemer.

“Whew,” Abul said to himself. “I accept that.”

That interview was not the end of it, however. Unknown to Abul, his father and uncle were trying to convert everyone they knew to his “revelation.” This went slowly at first, with few converts. But this changed after Abul turned fourteen. While shopping with his mother at the Alpekin food market, the largest in Kashgar, he dropped to the rough ground in the midst of the shoppers. As his body convulsed and contorted in another epileptic fit, a crowd formed a large circle around him. His mother tried to shield his face from the sun and loosen his cotton shirt.

Many had heard about his “revelation” and it had become a local joke. No one laughed, however, when they saw his convulsions. When they ended several minutes later, he lay trembling for a few minutes, his eyes firmly closed, apparently exhausted.

Someone called out, “He has had another revelation.” Another yelled, “He has talked to God.” Abul heard and realized he was pinned down by his joke like a butterfly to a board. He just could not walk away. He would be the joke of Kashgar for the rest of his life.

Still weak, Abul got to his feet, held out his hands to the crowd, and in a quavering voice (he was really scared by this public speaking) that grew gradually firmer, he repeated parts of the sermon the Molla Aitbayev gave some Fridays, leaving out references to Mohammed. Abul recalled later that he intoned something like, “God has again talked to me through the angel Gabriel. He said, ‘God is great. You are my prophet. Lead your people to Paradise. Show them the way. Through them, lead the world to salvation.’”

Gaining inspiration, Abul pointed with a flourish to a wrinkled, bearded man in front of the crowd and said, “Gabriel stood before me like he does. Gabriel told me, ‘I speak to you for God.’”

Not bad for a fourteen-year-old, Abul thought years later.

The crowd was hushed, creating a surreal bubble of silence against the distant market hubbub.

Abruptly, the old man he had pointed to knelt and bowed; an old woman followed him, then one person after another until half the onlookers were on their knees, chanting, “Oh Prophet, lead us.”

Word spread in the market that the Prophet had come to Kashgar, and was in this very market. People rushed to see Abul Sabah, the supposed prophet, and prostrated themselves. Two men lifted him to stand on a melon table so that all could see him. As the swelling crowd gathered around, many in the front still on their knees, Abul felt a thrill of exhilaration. Carried away, he repeated over and over in one combination of words or another, “I am God’s prophet. He asked me to lead you to Paradise. My pain proves it.”

Finally his voice gave out. Beyond exhaustion, he plopped down on the table and rolled off to stand unsteadily by his bowing mother. He put his hand on her shoulder, and when she saw it was Abul’s, she got to her feet and looked at him in awe. When he croaked, “Home,” she took his hand and led him through the silent crowd.

From that day on, she gave Abul special treatment at home, including his favorite meals. His father would not let him work with him. “Prophets do not milk goats,” he told Abul while on his knees, bowing.

Abul now took it all seriously. And well he might. More and more Uighurs accepted his supposed holy leadership. He had more public fits, some now contrived, but he knew how to make them look good. He came to believe that what he had thought was a fit, and a joke—what he thought of as play-acting—was really God’s way of communicating his intent while making it easy on him. God had put the idea of a joke in his mind. Otherwise, he might have been too scared to speak, or thought he was crazy. *God does work in mysterious ways, he thought, but not so mysterious that his methods cannot be divined by his prophets.*

Abul now preached Sabahism, as his converts now called it, to large groups that gathered in one rich man’s home after another. He had been taught about Mohammed and the faith, about God’s teachings. He had read the holy Quran and interpretations of it. He had heard how the mollas interpreted God’s words. And it all came together in his head. He just knew what God wanted him to say: God wants the whole world to follow His Will—to be Muslim. If non-Muslims do not accept His Will, force is legitimate to convert those infidels to Islam. Using force to this holy end is

an obligation of all faithful Muslims. It is a holy Jihad.

Moreover, all Muslims must be united under one banner, and that is the banner of Sabahism. In unity there is God. In unity there is paradise. In disunity there is hell. In disunity there is Satan's work.

Abul encouraged what his Sabahists were calling the Sabah Hanafi School of Islam. Even though Abul disagreed with the Hanafi School, it dominated Islamic teaching in Kashgar. He was taught this in the madrasa, and naturally he hung his preaching on this hook. This was a practical consideration advised by Uncle Hasan, not a religious one. Actually, the Hanafi School tolerated different ways of interpreting the *Shari'ah*—Islamic divine law. The school taught that law was what legal and religious Muslim scholars established by agreement, and that agreement was evidence of God's will.

Abul thought this was all wrong, but he never said so outright. Instead, in boyish words, he claimed that God told him through Gabriel what this agreement should be and that those clergy who agreed with him were correct in their interpretation of the *Shari'ah*.

Abul no longer lived at home, but moved from one rich man's house to another. He had all the money he needed, through donations. He was happy. And he was happier when he discovered another benefit, when beautiful Tillakiz came into his bed for a night, unasked. From then on, he slept alone only when he wanted to.

In a population of about thirty thousand, Abul had converted about six thousand people by the age of eighteen, in spite of the best efforts of the Muslim clerics to counter his teaching. One reason for his attraction was that he gave voice to what many Uighurs believed. The need for unity among Islamic tribes and nations was intensely felt, even preached by the mollahs, although none of them claimed they were messengers of God. All of them believed unity was essential against the hated Chinese, English, and Russians, all former colonists or meddlers in the region's affairs. None of them could forget the horrendous murder of hundreds of thousands of Muslims during the Chinese annexation of their country.

Many of his rich converts financed the Sabah School in 1932, purposely built near the Idgah Mosque, and in which he would give sermons on the holy task that God had assigned him. His preaching and his school aroused the hostility of the clerics, especially that of Molla Bahtiyar Ezim, who believed Abul was a danger to the community and Islam—so much so that he decided to act against him.

In August 1933 Abul found out that in their forthcoming Friday

sermons in all Kashgar's major mosques, the mollas planned to denounce him as a fake, as a false prophet and blasphemer of Mohammed. He felt helpless. Utterly depressed. There was nothing he could do.

But, the day before these sermons were to be delivered, Ezim denounced Abul before Mamat Abliz, the Chief of Police, and demanded that Abliz arrest Abul immediately after the sermon. A fundamentalist Muslim and friend of Ezim, Abliz gave the order to Captain Abulahat Khair, and added that Abul should be shot "while trying to escape."

Khair had attended one of Abul's sermons at the home of a friend, and had seen firsthand one of his "God induced" convulsions. He'd become a secret and fervent follower of Sabah. He was an exceptionally tall and big-boned Uighur, with a barrel chest and a loud, commanding voice. Although in his mid-thirties and still young for his position, he had a charismatic presence that demanded obedience from his men. With Chief Abliz's order in hand, Khair contacted his friend and fellow convert, Major Turdi Musa, who was in command of the battalion of army troops encamped just outside of Kashgar. Together, without a word to Abul, they made their plans.

Overnight, an army company sealed off the political center of Kashgar. In the hours before dawn, Captain Khair led a police squad of selected Sabahs to the homes of Abliz and the mayor, while Major Musa took care of the seven members of the "advisory" Kashgar Islamic Council. All were summarily shot, including every member of their families. By early morning, Kashgar was declared "The Holy City of Sabah."

Throughout the morning, Sabah volunteers, troops, and police arrested all the writers, teachers, and religious figures who had been critical of the Sabah School or Abul. They were given two choices—convert to Sabah or die. Those who would not convert were tortured to reveal others who plotted against or denied the truth of Abul's prophecies. All but one of the important clerics were allowed to flee to Urumqi, the capital.

That morning, Abul was asleep in wealthy Abduhelil Gohar's house, where at his invitation Abul had been spending the week. About 8:30 a.m., there was a heavy knock on the bedroom door. Abul covered his companion for the night, and said, "Come in."

Captain Khair, Major Musa, and Gohar entered, seeming apologetic. Before saying anything, they looked at his bed, and Khair put his fingers to his mouth. Abul lifted the cover from over his companion's

head and told her that she would have to leave. Without a word and with obvious pride, she got out of the bed, threw her clothes on, and, with a nod toward Abul, walked out the open door.

Captain Khair closed the door behind her, and he and the others got on their knees and bowed to Abul. Khair intoned, "Oh Prophet Sabah, you rule Kashgar. Lead us to glory and to paradise."

Pleased but confused, Abul told them, "Stand up and tell me why you are here."

They told him.

He was thunderstruck. He was incredulous. Speechless.

They thought Abul was listening to God.

He thought, *I must be God's prophet. What else can explain that I now rule Kashgar?*

What he didn't realize at the time was that his life hung on his next words. Khair and Musa believed in Abul Sabah. They believed they had done the right thing for Sabah and Sabahism. But if he rebuked them, if he created doubt in their minds about their actions, they could have transferred this doubt to his holy authority. At the moment they were the real rulers of Kashgar, and they could still rule in the name of Sabah even though Abul had gone to Paradise, killed by a blasphemer. That might be better, since rule of Kashgar would be without his interference.

Abul was too inexperienced in power to think of this at the time. He did feel outrage at their murders. He knew many of those they'd killed. Although he thought Khair and Musa were mistaken about God's way, they were good Uighurs. But, had they asked him beforehand, he would have said, "No killing."

They had not, and the deed was done. And after all, he was now a ruler, with great power to spread Sabahism.

None of this ambivalence showed in Abul's voice when he finally put his hand on Captain Khair's shoulder and blessed him and the others: "All be praised. You have done God's work."

Major Musa let out his breath with a whoosh, and Khair's smile spread across his face his face. Gohar just looked confused. Letting his own breath out in a gust, Abul thought, *Thanks to God, I said the right words.*

Fortunately for the conspirators, few in the outside world or the democracies knew what happened in Kashgar. Any large-scale mass murder of this sort, especially of political and religious leaders, normally would have come to their attention, either through their

diplomats or foreign reporters. Uighuristan, however, was Middle Asia, deeply recessed from world attention by high mountains and deserts, and it existed on the remote and little explored peripheries of countries like China, India, Afghanistan, and Russia.

After the coup in Kashgar, Molla Ahmedi of the Idgah Mosque was the only important clergyman who remained. Captain Khair and Major Musa had given Ahmedi the choice between death and conversion, and he chose God's Way. They told him what they expected of his Friday sermon, and he gave it: "Prostrate yourselves before the true Prophet, for his name is Abul Sabah and he speaks in the name of God."

With much humility and several bows, Khair also suggested to Abul what he might do afterward. Khair and Musa had taken the lead; Abul could do no more than agree.

The sermon over, Abul strode with his Uncle Hasan through prostrating crowds of worshippers to stand on the steps of the Government Building. He was so nervous, he was afraid his baggy trousers fluttered as though in a wind.

Hasan stood behind Abul. As planned, Musa and Khair arrived to stand on each side of him. Then, before an awed crowd of thousands, Musa declared that Abul Sabah was the Holy Leader of Kashgar. Reverently, Uncle Hasan stepped around Musa and prostrated himself at Abul's feet. In a loud voice that carried to many in the crowd, he offered to take over the onerous task of political governance of the city on the Prophet's behalf.

I did not know he was going to say that. What could I do? I nodded, not trusting my voice.

And a huge cheer erupted from the crowd. Uncle Hasan stood up and, pointing to each of them in turn, appointed Major Musa as General in charge of all military forces, and Captain Khair as Chief of police and security.

Hasan turned to the crowd, opened his arms wide, and proclaimed, "This day is for the celebration of God and his Prophet Abul Sabah. Henceforth, it will be an annual holiday for prayer and thankfulness."

Abul heard that, when the expelled mollas reached Urumqi, the capital of Uighuristan, they told the powerful national Council of Clerics and President Awasy what had happened in Kashgar. Awasy then ordered police forces to arrest Abul Sabah's thousand or so followers in the city, and sent orders out to all army units to prepare to march to Kashgar to fight the blasphemers.

After his formal investiture of power, General Musa explained to Abul the military problem Awasy faced. The country's army units were

largely stationed five hundred or more miles east and southeast, along the border with China. They were far from the axis of approach to Kashgar, or that between Kashgar and Urumqi. They had never faced in their lifetime such a rebellion as what now existed.

Musa prepared for battle. Abul had no role in this planning, but he was asked to speak to God on behalf of the proposed military campaign. Thus, with what he believed was God's help, he had a fit while attending prayers at the famous Azna Mosque, with over nine hundred Muslim men present.

Coming out of his convulsions, he declared, "Gabriel again appeared before me in the shape of a man." Abul rose and, reaching his hands out to all there, he proclaimed, "Through Gabriel, God told me that every Muslim who wants to go to Paradise must fight on his behalf and unify the faith under Sabah. He told me to preach that the holy duty of all Muslims is to join in this holy war."

Volunteers flocked to join his crusade, but there was no time to train them. Most had ancient rifles, and were no more than ragtag forces around the core army battalion that had been stationed outside Kashgar. No matter how ill-trained some under his command were, General Musa insisted that they must all march to the capital and capture it before the country's army could pull its units together to attack Kashgar or protect the capital.

Three days after the celebration, General Musa moved out with a force of six thousand volunteers and military men on horses, camels, and on foot. Clothed all in white and riding on a strutting white Arabian horse, Abul was at his side. Molla Ahmedi rode behind them.

They marched along the historic road toward the Tianshan Mountains. Urumqi lay on the other side. The road skirted the lethal and desolate Taklamakan Desert, but even so, the heat prevented them from moving at all during midday. On the way they met small army units at Akesu, Baicheng, and Kuche, all carrying white flags. Abul never had to say a word. He sat proudly on his horse while General Musa dictated terms: "For God, join Sabah's army or die." They joined.

At Kurle, about twenty miles before the mountains, General Musa dispatched assassins near dawn. They sent to paradise its mayor, the head of the clergy council, and the colonel in charge of the local army forces. In the resulting chaos, the defending army units surrendered and enlarged Musa's forces by about one thousand trained men.

A few miles farther, the small town of Yanqi lay in the foothills, guarding the pass to Urumqi. When the major in charge of the army

unit stationed there saw the size of Musa's forces, he surrendered without a fight. As Musa prepared to enter the pass to Urumqi, he had nearly eight thousand men.

Then he laid a trap.

Throughout the march, General Musa had sent advance units ahead, riding Musa's fastest horses. They killed any couriers they found and cut all telegraph and phone wires to Urumqi, except for those at Yanqi. When Musa's forces reached Yanqi, he had the army telephone operator, under the threat of death to him and his whole family, telephone army headquarters in Urumqi.

The operator yelled into the phone what Musa had written on a pad before him: "Alert, alert! A courier from Kuche has just ridden in to our base to warn us. Sabah forces are on their way and now are only about one hundred miles away. They have about five thousand men."

With pistols held to their temples, local army officers were placed at all available phones to repeat the warning if military headquarters tried to verify the call.

General Musa now deployed his forces in the mountains in three places. He put those with modern rifles among the rocks that hung above a narrow ravine in the pass. At the Yanqi end of the ravine, he placed his best soldiers. Hidden above the entrance to the ravine were most of the volunteers, commanded by his best officers.

President Awasy's army had never fought a modern war and his officers had no more military experience than that gathered while fighting bandits. Moreover, since no large-scale modern war had been fought elsewhere using airplanes, they had no example to follow—they never thought to use the three vintage biplanes still at their small international airport to reconnoiter ahead of their forces.

When Awasy's army of nine thousand troops passed through the ravine in an orderly march, the ambush caught them by surprise. Rifle fire from the rocks above them decimated their ranks, and when officers ordered their soldiers to rapidly deploy forward, they ran into a solid wall of fire from Musa's soldiers, who blocked the ravine. Many of Awasy's troops turned and ran, but by that time Musa's volunteers had filled the road to their rear, and with guns, knives, sabers, and pitchforks, butchered almost all of them. No mercy was shown. By the end of the battle, all but eleven hundred prisoners were dead or wounded.

Abul was not asked and did not want this, but Musa ordered that all the officers among the prisoners be killed, and the rest be given the

choice of accepting Sabah as their prophet, or death. The remainder of the day was spent killing the wounded. When Abul found out about this, he told Musa to save those who were only wounded in the arms or legs. Musa said that his order had gone out, and it was too late to change it. He gave all the army weapons and the surviving horses and camels to the volunteers.

At daybreak the next day, Musa's army crossed the mountains and entered a defenseless capital. President Awasy welcomed Abul Sabah as the Prophet on the steps of the Presidential Palace, but at a word from Molla Ahmedi to General Musa beside him, the General had his men grab Awasy and hang him from the balcony outside the President's third floor office.

Abul, frozen in place, could only gape at the ongoing murder. He was glad his jaw did not drop, but he thought, *This is—was—the President of Uighuristan. This is an internationally recognized country. Awasy was not a democrat, God forbid, but according to our traditions, the Council of Islamic Clergy appointed him. He was himself a recognized molla. But there he is, shaking and kicking, being hanged in MY name.*

Without a word to Abul at the time, but acknowledged afterward, Musa had his men track down the clerics who had been expelled from Kashgar and execute them for blasphemy. Abul also found out that any government official, molla, or professional who informers claimed was involved in anti-Sabah activities, sermons, writing, or teaching, was also executed.

General Musa and Molla Ahmedi had plans for their first evening in power. Thousands of people, with cheer leaders scattered among them, gathered before the Presidential Palace. Some waved their fists, others waved the flag of Uighuristan, as they all chanted, "There is only one God, and Sabah is his prophet. Sabah, Sabah, Sabah."

Abul stood on the presidential balcony from which Awasy had been hung. Looking over the crowd of thousands, he waved his hand and hoped he had a look of revelation and prayer on his angelic face, rather than the disgust he felt.

At the set time, with radio and loudspeaker microphones in front of him, Abul read words written by Molla Ahmedi on a sheet pinned to a Chinese elm bench hidden by the balcony.

"Hear me, the great and holy Muslims of Uighuristan. I am your Prophet of God and I have come directly at His request to unify Islam and bring all under God. All Muslims everywhere must submit to His will and live according to the Quran, as your Prophet, with His guid-

ance, has interpreted it. Henceforth, by the will of God, Uighuristan will be a caliphate and I will be your caliph. General Musa will handle secular matters and will be my chief advisor. Molla Ahmedi will lead the Council of Clerics. There is no god but God, and I am His prophet.”

General Musa ordered all army commanders throughout Uighuristan to return their men to their camps, and join him in the capital for a military meeting. As, in twos and threes, they entered the capital, Musa greeted them, gave them the best of quarters, and fed them well. Once the fifty-seven top commanders had all arrived, Musa convened them for a staff meeting in the auditorium at military headquarters. Before they entered the auditorium, soldiers disarmed them as “a precaution against an enemy of Sabah being among them.”

Once all were seated, General Musa came in from a side door. He was followed by armed men who soon filled the aisle along both sides of the auditorium and guarded the rear exit. After all his men were in place, Musa raised his hands to quiet the buzz of alarm. The air was heavy with the smell of fear.

When he had everyone’s attention, he spoke. “My fellow commanders. You now have the great privilege of joining in God’s great struggle against blasphemy and the infidels.”

Abul was ready, as Musa had rehearsed him. He entered through a side door, stopped at the mark taped on the floor in the exact center of the stage, and, head held high, turned to face them all. He wore a white shirt hanging over white baggy pants that ended a few inches above his ankles, so the hems would not get dirty—he could not bow to God in soiled clothes. A long white cloak was draped over his shoulders. In place of a turban he wore the traditional Uighur four-cornered hat, but it was all white rather than multicolored, as was usual. Molla Ahmedi’s assistants had searched throughout the markets of Urumqi for this outfit. It became his public uniform.

After a few moments General Musa, standing at Abul’s right shoulder, announced, “All of you are Muslims. Some of you are not Uighur, but that does not matter. What is important is that each of you accepts Abul Sabah as your Prophet, and pledge your life and that of your soldiers to his mission. Each of you must come onto the stage, bow before Sabah, and pledge ‘There is one God and Sabah is His Prophet, and I pledge my life to Sabah.’”

One by one, starting with the commander in the first seat in the first row, they obeyed. Only eleven commanders refused, and they were immediately taken out and shot.

Abul had just turned twenty. He was undisputed ruler of Uighuristan.

His next step was to make an announcement to the country that Musa had prepared for him: "My fellow subjects of God. Our holy country is the home of all Muslims, regardless of whether you are Uighur, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tartar, or Han Chinese. In recognition of this, and through his angel Gabriel, God asked me to change the name of our holy country to Islamic East Turkistan. Moreover, He has commanded that all those who refuse to accept Sabah as His messenger must leave the country within one month, without exception. I, Abul Sabah, His Prophet, have spoken."

There followed a mass migration of nearly 250,000 people, mainly Han Chinese, into China. Finally, word of the events in former Uighuristan reached the outside world. An international relief effort was undertaken by the democracies for these refugees. Its operations were limited to China, since Abul would not allow relief workers to cross the border. His government was criticized by one non-Muslim country after another, and the Prime Minister of China recalled its ambassador after formally protesting Abul Sabah's expulsions as "barbaric." No other actions were taken. Within a few years a new Prime Minister was elected in China and diplomatic relations resumed.

Abul had no thought of it at the time, but China would be his next conquest.

Chapter 3

Lora

October 8, 1994, New Universe

For days she could not get beyond the thoughts that kept running like a video loop in her mind. *No one in the democracies would have guessed. No one could have imagined it. No one was prepared for it. It was the stroke of a monstrous genius.*

Now, all knew who did it and why. He told everyone still alive. It was Abul Sabah, 81-year-old Caliph of Islamic East Turkistan and still the shadow ruler behind the Muslim Council governing China. The ultimatum he'd issued to the world from Urumqi was short, without subtlety or diplomatic language. It needed none. A strong voice declared in Uighur, with an over voice translating it into English:

Leaders of the corrupt and Godless democracies. I speak on behalf of Abul Sabah, Prophet of God, Imam in Chief of Sabah, and Caliph of Islamic East Turkistan. We have shown our power with the destruction of your major cities and political capitals. We have in place more bombs that we will explode if you launch any attack on China, Islamic East Turkistan, or any other members of the Islamic Union.

We simply ask that you stand down your military forces, sign a treaty of nonaggression with the Union and China, and accept as an advisor at the highest level an appointee of China's National Council of Clerics.

If you do not accept our terms by 12:01 a.m., October 12, Greenwich Mean Time, 1994, we will destroy one of your Godless cities per day until you do. The Chinese embassy in each of your countries has been authorized to carry out the formal signing ceremony and the document now awaits your signature.

The first time they heard it, Lora was driving. She began to shake so much that she pulled off the road into a field. She could barely talk. She woke up Mark by reaching behind the front seat and poking his leg.

“Huh? What?” He rubbed his eyes with one hand, and looked up at her. Since the ultimatum was being repeated continuously on the radio, she pointed a shaking finger at it, and let him hear it without a comment from her. When he heard it all, she almost screamed, “It was Sabah. Sabah!”

For minutes Mark could only say, “Shit, shit, shit . . .” Finally he yelled, “We missed it. Nobody had a clue he’d try to take over the world like this. Jesus Christ, how could he build all those goddam nuclear weapons and place them in so many cities? And, my God—to set them off all at the same time . . .”

Lora trembled. Tears of frustration coursed down her cheeks. She tried to respond, but her throat felt as though it was in a vise. She tried to breath deeply, but could only gasp.

Finally, as Mark was about to say something, she blurted, “We knew about his coups and power plays in Asia and the Islamic world. We *have* been fighting him through our Institute.” She felt so miserable; she couldn’t stop herself from getting defensive. “We’ve fought his fanatical influence and his clergy in Indonesia and Malaysia. We’ve spent tens of millions trying to save their democratic governments.”

But guilt wrapped her mind like a wet blanket. *We didn’t do enough. We didn’t do all we could.* She argued with it out loud. “Okay, so in Paris, Hamburg, and Milan, suicide murderers killed dozens of civilians within the last week. But The Righteous Allah claimed credit. They’re a pro-Sabah terrorist organization, but *not* Sabah, as far as we knew. And we certainly couldn’t generalize from that to nuclear attacks on the world’s major cities. No one could. All the democracies were ill prepared to counter this.”

She scowled out the windshield and growled, “We should have had him assassinated.”

Mark nodded. Arms crossed, he stared down at nothing. “In hindsight, yes.”

He sat silent for several moments, his breathing fast, choppy. He uncrossed his arms and unconsciously combed his hair with his fingers. The ends of his mouth drooped in a face that suddenly seemed deeply lined and sunken. His voice came flattened by despair. “Jesus, I can’t believe it. No major international war in over a hundred years—civil war, yes, in China and Angola and a few other places, but they were no

threat to the democracies. Now this. The lack of war is what has done us in. The democracies let their security services wither to almost nothing.”

“I know,” Lora groaned. Her heart passed judgment. It was her failure.

Mine.

She tried to fight it. “I don’t know what more I could have done with our Institute. Damn it, we were already using most of our resources to combat this Sabah crap.”

She put her good hand up to her throbbing temple. “I still can’t believe we didn’t even get a whiff of this coming. Affiliates in thirty-one major countries gathering information on terrorist organizations—especially Sabah’s—and we heard nothing, not even from those we hired who were well connected with the terrorists or the underworld.”

“We even knew who was screwing whom,” Mark agreed sourly. “Well, whatever we discovered we passed on to the intelligence services of the democracies, and it didn’t do them any good, either.”

“It’s so horrible to have failed. We are . . . were . . . the world’s largest private institute. We had the huge endowment John left us for the very purpose of stopping somebody like Sabah. We failed John. We failed Joy. We failed mankind.” Lora ended in a sob. She put her head on the steering wheel and cried.

Mark got out of the back and slid into the front seat next to her. He picked up Spunky, who was trying to climb onto her lap. He let Spunky lick his face for a moment, then held him out to her. “Here, precious. He’s concerned about you.”

She waved him off, wiped her face on her damp sleeve, and sat up straight. She took several deep breaths, leaned over, and rubbed Spunky’s back with the fingers sticking out of her cast. Mark took her fingers in his good hand and caressed them with his thumb.

“We knew Sabah threatened us all,” he told her. “But no one could even come close to imagining how much he really threatened us.”

Lora thought about this for a moment. She centered on it; she tried to use it to push her emotions down. She weighed Mark’s last sentence as one would a problem in geometry. It worked. “It’s something that’s inconceivable before it happens,” she mused in a level voice, “but once it does, the chain of events, causes, and capabilities are clear. Now, after the fact, how Sabah got nuclear weapons is easy to answer. Before Sabah’s coup, China was swiftly developing nuclear energy and building large and small nuclear plants—by the time of his coup, China was getting much of its electricity from nuclear plants, far ahead of the United States.”

Mark seemed startled that she could articulate several complex sentences in a rational statement in spite of her emotional state and, she suspected, her bag lady appearance. He slid sideways on the seat to get a better look at her. He gently caressed her tear-damp lips with his fingertips.

Lora sighed. “China had known peace since the downfall of the Manchu dynasty, and it prospered. By the time of the coup, it was a rich country.” She tried the impossible. *Didn’t work. The smile won’t come.*

Mark mumbled, as though in pain, “I hate to say this, but I think that peace and our democratic culture—China’s democratic culture before the coup—defeated them, and now us.”

Lora jerked her chin up and gaped at Mark. “Defeated us? What?” she exploded. “You think the democracies have no choice but to submit to the ultimatum?”

“Yes, goddam it! Defeated us.” Mark slapped the dashboard hard, startling Spunky. His face twisted. He added, even louder, “We were damn stupid. Stupid.”

He handed Spunky to Lora again. She gathered Spunky to her with her good hand. His tail wagging vigorously, he tried to lick her nose. She continued to stare at Mark.

With some difficulty, Mark lowered his voice and explained, “The world is mainly democratic. No major power thought it had need for a large military force. No democracy thought it needed nuclear weapons any longer, and what few nuclear bombs we had were disarmed decades ago. Even when the fanatics seized control of what is now Islamic East Turkistan and created the Islamic Union and took over China, no democracy thought those crazies would build weapons of mass destruction. We—all of us—were caught in the trap of conventional thought. Shit. Democracies always tend to think the best of other coun—”

“I know, I know,” Lora interrupted. “We see nondemocracies in our own image. We see them as equally tolerant of disagreement, willing to compromise, and rejecting violence as a solution to conflict. But, sweetheart,” and Lora gripped the steering wheel tightly with her good hand and twisted her body around to look into Mark’s still angry eyes, “we *can* do something about this. And, goddam it, we will.”

Tears began coursing down her face again. “We will. We will. We can stop him. But we’ve got to survive to do it.”

Chapter 4

Abul Sabah

Peking, October 12, 1994, New Universe

Abul Sabah's mind barely worked. He kept losing his thoughts in a mental mist; he tried to hold onto each of them until they made sense. *I must be present at the conclusion of this. I must witness what my son has done, what is ultimately my responsibility.*

He lifted his heavy eyes and stared at the wall clock until he could make out the hands. It was 3:21 a.m.—three hours and forty-nine minutes until the ultimatum's deadline. Nothing seemed to have changed. Turghun and his fellow blasphemers stood on the same spots, the same adjutant manned the phones. Even the same security men stood against the wall behind him.

Abul leaned back and put his head against the headrest. He felt the air conditioning on his pate that age had rapidly turned bald. He was so tired, so wearied by it all. He felt as though his life's energy was pouring into his shoes. *No, pouring into the toilet*, he thought as his stomach cramped and the nausea that never went away surged again. *Damnably stomach flu.* He closed his eyes, tried to rest.

Turghun had been such a beautiful child, such a joyful boy. So eager to learn, so eager to foster Sabahism, so eager to command. It was China that subverted him with its unholy ways, violent traditions, and material customs, despite the Uighur teaching, despite being the son of God's Prophet. Had he not been so ambitious for God to bring China under the rule of Sabah, his son would eventually have taken power over Islamic East Turkistan and the Islamic Union, and followed God's peaceful way for achieving world power.

China! Stupid China.



Uighuristan 1933–1977, New Universe

With Abul Sabah, General Musa, and Molla Ahmedi in full control of newly named Islamic East Turkistan, Ahmedi imposed a rigid Sabahist interpretation of the *Shari'ah*. Women had to conform to strict dress codes, including wearing head coverings, veils, and shapeless, floor-length body coverings. Education was no longer allowed them and they could only be seen in public when accompanied by a male relative.

When Abul found out about these laws, he confronted Ahmedi. “This is not what I intended. It is not according to my teaching.”

Molla Ahmedi looked sadly at Abul and responded, “Oh Holy Prophet, these laws are implicit in your teaching and your revelations in *The Sabah*. They surely are what God desires. He just did not spell them out. He must not have thought it necessary for his Prophet, who divines His thinking.”

Abul was confused.

Ahmedi continued. “If your revelations are in error, it must be a small human failing. Anyway, if we now change these laws, people will question whether in fact you are the Prophet. They believe that one so close to God cannot be in error.”

Abul now realized that Ahmedi was correct, and made no more protests. Nor, he understood, could he protest to Ahmedi or General Musa the other things the government was doing in his name. What he most hated were the executions. People were executed for the most trivial behavior, such as gambling in one’s home or listening to Chinese or Western music on the radio. One woman was taken to a stadium in Turpan and, in front of thousands of cheering Muslim men, she was stoned to death for adultery. In 1938 the prisons were full of those charged with moral crimes or accused of having “blasphemed” against Sabah or Sabahism—really no more than criticism of General Musa’s or Abul’s tyrannical rule. Musa had every one of them hung from balconies, trees, and cranes.

No one asked Abul’s approval; no one consulted him. He heard about the executions from his aide, after the evil was done. That was the final bloodletting. It centered his mind more than anything done so far.

Abul excused his aide, went to his office and, alone, he let his control relax and his abhorrence over what was going on fill his mind. These mass murders were in his name, as were all the new laws. He thought execution was appropriate for blatant blasphemy, treason, rape,

and murder, and no more. And no execution should be carried out without a trial by Sabah judges, unless he, as the Prophet, ordered it.

He could no longer allow this terror. He had to take command. After all, he was Abul Sabah, the Caliph, the Prophet.

He telephoned Uncle Hasan, now the mayor of Urumqi, and asked Hasan to see him at Abul's home that evening. He could trust him.

When Uncle Hasan arrived, and Abul had put a glass of *haraq* in his hand—the only alcohol Sabahs were allowed to drink—he explained the situation. “Musa and Ahmedi are ruling in my name and doing things contrary to Sabah. They are the doings of Satan.” He detailed one law after another, and told him of the thousands of executions done without Abul's knowledge or consent. “They must be stopped. I plan to assassinate them,” Abul concluded, his voice firm.

Uncle Hasan slowly put his drink down on the floor and stared at Abul, his lips a tight line, his eyes narrowed. Abul held his breath. His heart beat rapidly. He was sweating.

If Hasan will not join me, I know not where to turn. Musa or Ahmedi had appointed all his aides, and he didn't know which commanders or security officers he could safely approach. He suspected that they also chose many, if not all of the women who provided his evening entertainment. *If Uncle Hasan now joins Musa and Ahmedi, I am dead. God empowers me to speak His word, but I am otherwise on my own.*

As though a spell had been broken, Abul's uncle threw himself on the floor, prostrated himself in front of Abul, and kissed his foot. “Glory be to God,” he said. “You are his Prophet. I will have what you wish done tonight. I humbly suggest that you appoint General Abdulrahim Hamit in Musa's place. I also suggest that you bring Chief Abulahat Khair from Kashgar, and put him in charge of national security and rooting out those whose minds have been poisoned by Musa and Ahmedi.”

Abul put his hand on his uncle's shoulder and bid him to rise. Then for an hour they discussed which untainted Sabahs could be put in critical positions. When Uncle Hasan left, Abul heaved a sigh of relief. As always, it was only one's blood relatives who could be trusted in bloody matters.

Before dawn, General Musa and Molla Ahmedi were assassinated as they slept. Their whole families down to second cousins and twenty-three of their closest aides and confidants also were killed. That had to be done, Abul believed, so there would be no aggrieved relatives or followers to seek vengeance.

Uncle Hasan and Chief Khair knew who to trust. They put together a team that began a systematic purge of those whose loyalty to Abul was questionable. Only the high officials and commanders were executed. The others were fired or transferred to nonsensitive positions or to outlying posts. Abul also replaced all his aides, including members of the Council of Clerics.

In two weeks the job was done. Abul went on national radio and gave his own speech—his first:

My holy people of Islamic East Turkistan. I am happy to report that God spoke to me through Gabriel two weeks ago and informed me that there was a conspiracy of my close advisors to subvert your Prophet's power and act contrary to His Word. I speak of General Musa and Molla Ahmedi. They have carried out mass executions against my wishes and made laws contrary to The Sabah.

They and their closest aides have been punished. In their place I will soon make new appointments, including new members of the National Council of Clerics.

I am also reviewing all laws to which I have not given agreement. You can be sure, however, that those laws forbidding jobs and education to women, those laws that make them slaves to their husbands and fathers, are contrary to God and will all be cancelled. So will vice laws forbidding dancing, music, movies, and the like.

Henceforth, all laws and any executions must have my written approval.

God be praised, for I am His Prophet.

Khair did nothing important without first consulting with Abul and getting his permission. To be sure, he placed spies among their aides. One must learn from experience.

The next year Abul took a wife, Ayner Yasin, the daughter of Aisha Yasin, one of the richest merchants in Urumqi. He thus married to his secular and religious power that of wealth, and thereby cemented his power over the country. Although as the Prophet he could fill a harem with wives, one was sufficient, and she was tolerant of his occasional evening visits from young Sabahists. She bore him four girls and one boy. Abul named him Turghun and carefully groomed him to eventually rule and promote Sabah.

To Abul, the word of God applied to all mankind. To Abul God said, “Go forth and lead *all* men to His Word and Paradise.” To Abul the iron logic followed: *God meant me to be a Prophet for all mankind.*

So, soon after he consolidated power in his country, he began to promote Sabah in neighboring Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, all republics in democratic Russia. But decolonization was proceeding rapidly, and so was the self-determination of ethnically and culturally unique regions. He was preparing for their inevitable independence.

Abul invested a considerable portion of his country’s resources in proselytizing among the dominant Muslim majorities in these countries. In every one of their major cities, he funded Sabah madrasas. They taught about Sabah’s—the Prophet’s—call for Muslim unity. And they conveyed God’s message to convert the infidel, non-Islamic world. This appealed to the average Muslim. Some of the most powerful mollas who tried to prevent the spread of Sabah met unfortunate accidents or disappeared. Abul undertook similar proselytization in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and the Muslim states of colonial India.

At the same time, he worked to subvert China. Ordinary rulers would have thought China much too huge, with relatively few Muslims for such an ambition. But Abul was God’s Prophet. He was sure God would lend a hand in spreading His Word.

There were about thirty million Muslims in democratic China, some in high places in the military, bureaucracy, and politics. A largely Islamic-oriented National Revival Party held twenty-four seats in the 472-seat legislature. And with most Chinese being Taoist or Buddhist, they tolerated different religious views. They had no built-in resistance to God’s work.

The intelligence services of China, the United States, and Great Britain knew nothing about his fostering Sabahism in Middle Asia, nor of his overall ambitions. Of course, his takeover of Uighuristan was noticed, although at the time they knew few details, especially about the mass murders conducted by Musa and Ahmedi. But news that someone so young had seized power, even in such a remote country, did become known. His spies informed Abul that democratic leaders thought him a crackpot fanatic.

Since becoming a caliph, Abul had studied these countries—their history, governments, beliefs, and so on. One must know one’s enemies. Without a war among major or middle powers for many decades, the heart of their intelligence services had atrophied like unused muscles. When Sabah took power there were only seven embassies and consulates in his country, the largest an eight-man embassy from China.

Regarding his plans for China, he was in no hurry. His allies were time, patience, and good health. He allowed the natural course of promotions to raise his secret followers to high positions in the Chinese military, police, and bureaucracy. Bribes, women, quiet threats, and lethal “accidents” worked to improve their chances at crucial junctures, but these traditional tools were seldom needed.

He also exploited China’s open borders and welcome mat for professional immigrants. With his country’s wealth, he underwrote the slow, unobtrusive migration of Sabahist Muslims from his country and the rest of Middle Asia into China. His indigenous followers found jobs for the immigrants in the important professions. Although only a few hundred a month immigrated to China, they became well placed. In forty years they amounted to over eighty thousand powerfully positioned followers. Some of them became top consultants and advisors to Chinese legislators and administration leaders, some top generals, some heads of local security forces.

In the 1950s and ’60s, a long list of states, provinces, and colonies became politically independent, including Hawaii, Alaska, and California. In Middle Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Punjabistan became independent. Because of his successful proselytization throughout this region, within a year of their independence, Islamic East Turkistan signed a mutual aid and defense pact with all these newly independent Islamic countries and set up an Islamic Union to coordinate their foreign affairs. The first Chairman of the Union was his Uncle Hasan, who had resigned as mayor of Urumqi.

Within a few years it became clear that these supposedly sovereign and independent nations were in fact under the political and religious control of Islamic East Turkistan, and thus of Abul Sabah. All their major schools had adopted the Sabahist reading of Islam and the prayers of the mollahs in all the major mosques preached devotion to Sabah, the Prophet. This was especially clear when all the armies of these countries were unified under the command of General Amat, General Khair’s Chief of Staff.

The democracies did not pay much attention to this either. Although there had been purges throughout the region, they had been done in small numbers over many years. Although the death toll from these was actually in the tens of thousands, there was not one huge massacre that would draw their attention—not that Abul wanted such mass killing. Moreover, there were no wars in the region and no rebellions.

Throughout these years, Abul realized he was free to go about God’s work in China. He waited; waited like a spider on her web, watching political events in China. In 1978 they were getting interesting.

Southern and Northern Chinese began a contentious political struggle over control of the national legislature. Since China was a democratic parliamentary system, the prime minister headed his political party and only held power if his party got a majority of legislative seats, or if he could knit together a coalition of parties willing to give him leadership. The Prime Minister Zhu Jiabao, leader of the Democratic Union, was defeated on a vote of no confidence over his plan to build a dam on the Fenhe River that would displace 230,000 Chinese. He had to call a new election and in 1979 no party got a majority in the legislature.

Over the next five years, several parties tried to establish a stable governing coalition. Two national elections were held and still no party got a majority control of the legislature. Neither north nor south could win. Prime Minister Jiabao only held power through a tenuous coalition of parties, including the National Revival Party led by secret Sabahists.

The democracies, especially the United States and Japan, with their traditional ties to the country, tried to help. They sent observers and financed extensive polling, but as long as the fight was democratic, they kept out of influencing the election.

Rapid inflation and a minor recession hit China at this time. The economic philosophy of Prime Minister Jiabao was socialist. He believed in using government funds to force industrial development, particularly in heavy industry, and government power to control wages and profits. So, shipbuilding, automobiles and trucks, and heavy machinery were subsidized, particularly their exports. To do this Jiabao had to raise taxes, but when this brought in insufficient revenues, the government's National Bank of China increased its printing of new money to support government expenditures. Many Western economists said the result was predictable. So did Abul's secret Sabahists in influential positions, and that is why he commanded them to give it all their support.

As the political paralysis continued, government industrial subsidies for the largest companies began to dry up. In 1982, the China Ship Building Corporation, China's largest, filed for bankruptcy. Over 43,500 people were put out of work at its four major yards. Jiabao wanted to nationalize the corporation, but dare not put it to a legislative vote. He knew it would become a vote of no confidence, and he would lose. The bankruptcy immediately affected the economy, causing other firms to fail and deepening the recession. The National Bank printed even more money in the hope of turning it around. Hyperinflation resulted. The price of a bag of ordinary rice soared from the equivalent of \$1.23 to \$7.68 within six months.

All this questioned democracy. More and more editorials, articles, and politicians called for a strong hand to take charge, even for authoritarian rule, if that would put people back to work, stop inflation, and end political paralysis. Abul's Sabahists wrote many of these.

Abul waited patiently. Finally, when the people planned large-scale antigovernment demonstrations in Peking, when the major unions prepared a national strike at the same time, and when a vote of no confidence in Jiabao's government was scheduled, Abul sent out the order for which he had planned for so long.

On May 26, 1984, at the biannual meeting of top military commanders in Peking, General Hu Jieche, the Commander in Chief of the Western Region and a secret Sabah, shot the Chiefs of the Army and Navy, and assumed emergency command over all China's military forces. General Jieche claimed that they had attempted a coup. At the same time, the security forces were similarly taken over by Colonel Jiang Lanqing, another secret Sabahist, at a meeting called in Peking presumably to deal with upcoming antigovernment demonstrations.

Largely Muslim troops that had gradually been infiltrated into Peking surrounded the legislature, letting no one escape. Special forces with lists in hand searched through the legislature, killing all top non-Muslim political leaders. Other squads, each with their own list, hunted through the universities, newspaper offices, and ministries, shooting those who were known for their strong pro-democratic positions, or their anti-Islamic writings or speeches.

By nightfall, the coup was complete in the capital. At 7:30 p.m., General Jieche went on radio and television. He was a handsome man in his late forties, with a mixture of Caucasian Turk and Han Chinese features. Tall, with closely cut black hair, high forehead, and small eyes, he communicated a sternness appropriate to the three stars on the shoulders of his general's uniform. He sat at a marble-topped rosewood desk flanked by the Chinese flags and spoke into a collection of microphones before him. Two armed guards stood off camera, each holding a STU machine pistol across his chest. Behind the General was a vividly colored map of China. His speech was short and to the point, as Abul had advised:

My fellow Chinese. I am General Hu Jieche, commander of the Western Region. Today the Army and Navy Chiefs tried to overthrow the government. As part of their plot, they had plunged the country into chaos and created

famine in Hunan and Sheshi provinces. They also refused to allow their military forces to shore up the Yellow River banks and retaining walls that have been breached by a vast flood. Their supporters have forced people out of work and into near starvation. They have put businesses into bankruptcy. They have caused food prices to soar so that not even the middle class can afford to buy food.

Your political leaders and politicians did nothing. They were so absorbed in their petty quarrels that they ignored what was happening to you, my fellow people of China. Had my soldiers and I not stepped in to quash this plot, you would now be living under a repressive and absolutist military dictatorship only interested in power. Your welfare would be no concern to them, either.

Therefore, reluctantly, I will provide the necessary leadership to China. This is only temporary, until such time that we can hold an election of legislators and a prime minister sympathetic to your true needs. I intend no dictatorship. I am only a caretaker. I will establish a Governing Council of representatives from business, the military, and the professions to govern until such time that we can hold elections. By noon tomorrow I will announce membership in the Council. In the meantime, I ask for your patience and support as we bring economic growth, price stability, and democracy back to China.

The speech worked. It was received with much acclaim, *As one would expect of God's doing*, Abul thought when his intelligence service reported on it.

Jieche already had Sabahists in many positions of high and middle power throughout the country, and now he had them purge those thought unreliable, anti-Muslim, or anti-Sabah.

God's enemies were not long paralyzed. In the south, three military divisions rebelled against the Sabahist officers who had seized command. Anti-Sabah General Li Tu organized these divisions into an army and defeated loyal Sabahist forces outside of Anyang and then Handan.

Abul was worried. A few more such defeats, and Peking and his rule over China might be lost. War between the Islamic Union and

China would only be a matter of time, with his defeat obvious. *But God can see this no less*, he thought. *He is sure to lead my armies.*

General Li Tu consolidated his forces for three weeks before marching toward Baoding on his way to Peking. This allowed time for loyal army divisions led by the secret Sabahist General Wang Furong to organize and integrate Islamic East Turkistan troops that Abul rushed to him by road and rail. When the two armies met in the famous Battle of Wangdu, Li Tu was defeated with much bloodshed.

There also were pitched battles between security and army units in Shanghai, Wuhan, Kunming, and Taijuan. In Shanghai and Kunming, the enemy forces won and tried to fortify the cities, while calling for help from the democracies. No democracy had the forces to intervene and engage in a major war in China, however.

Once General Furong cleared the south of more dissident units, he entered Shanghai in full force with ten thousand troops, all wearing green headbands emblazoned with red crescent and star, the symbols of battle to the death for Sabah, kill or be killed. Furong easily defeated the rebellious army and security units there. Once he was firmly in control, General Jieche ordered him to make an example of the city to the rest of China while ridding it of corrupt and evil foreign influences. General Furong therefore gave his troops his famous Rule of Three—the city is yours for three days; kill all foreigners; and do not touch Muslims, mosques, or Muslim religious schools.

The next day, Abul's chief of intelligence informed him of the resulting atrocities at about the same time foreign news services were reporting the ugly details. Abul was distressed and outraged by the rape and mass murder of common people. "This is not God's way," he yelled at his chief.

In the translated foreign news, he read that soldiers raped women and girls with abandon. Mothers or fathers who objected to the daughters being raped were shot. Those gang raped were often killed afterward. The soldiers played a game they called Hop Hop: they would force a boy to rape his sister or mother, a father to rape his daughter, and pair up father and son, or mother and daughter, to perform sex acts on each other. Once tired of the play, they castrated the males, forced their genitals into the mouths of the women and girls, and then shot them all.

No male, no matter how young or old, was exempt from mistreatment, occasional rape, or death. If death came fast, they were lucky.

Some of the soldiers took particular pleasure in killing their victims an inch at a time with a cut here, another there, and within a few hours, everywhere.

The first of the three nights was chilly, Abul read with shame and horror; drunken soldiers dragged nineteen of their foreign captives to an intersection, tied their hands and feet with wire, and wrapped a long rope around them all, pressing them together until they could hardly move. The soldiers poured oil and gasoline from a nearby service station on them, then lit the mixture. They warmed themselves beside the resulting fire while making jokes about the screaming, undulating, quivering mass of bodies.

Captured Americans were tied or nailed to a tree or post and skinned alive. American and other foreign women and girls were stripped, tied or fastened spread-eagled to walls or wagons, and left for any passing soldier to take his pleasure. Abul did understand that soldiers hated Godless Americans the most, but he detested how they were treated.

After he read about the Rule of Three, Abul called General Furong directly and commanded in the name of God that he stop it. Furong issued the order and his officers tried to impose discipline on their soldiers and remove them from the city, allowing newly appointed security and police units to take over. In some cases soldiers drunk with power or heavy with loot refused to leave and had to be driven at bayonet-point to the army trucks. Some had to be shot.

There was no complete accounting of the dead. General Jieche said only that an uprising in the city had been successfully defeated with much loss of life. The Chinese Red Cross estimated that the rampaging soldiers had killed 367,000 Chinese and foreigners.

This would not happen again, by Abul's orders. What they had done to the people proved that Generals Jieche and Furong were not true Sabahists, and in time they would be removed.

Meanwhile, with the example of the Rape of Shanghai, no security police or army units in or around any other city put up resistance to government forces. There were sporadic and largely individual clashes and firefights throughout China, but General Jieche was in firm control. Within a year, the country seemed at peace and normal economic and social activity resumed. One year after the coup, General Jieche died in a helicopter crash; a month later, General Furong died, reportedly from a heart attack. A Sabah-controlled Government Council "regretfully" assumed power.

Abul continued to rule China through the Council. He made one official visit to China as a head of state, several informal visits, and numerous secret visits. As happened many times in China's history with the Mongols, Manchus, and Uighurs, the heart of China was now in the control of foreigners.

Abul was smart about his exercise of power. He made no sudden attempt to convert all of China to Islam. Nor did he make any radical change in China's laws. Gradualness was his power principle. A slightly different law here, another one there, and slow, legal, step-by-step Islamic—Sabah—law took over China. He insisted, however, that capital punishment remain limited to the usual severe crimes, adding to those excessive blasphemy of Mohammed, Sabah, and God, as interpreted by a court of Muslim clerics.

In the areas of journalism, the arts, and entertainment, the Council moved carefully also. After all, China had been a democracy and people were used to free expression. The Council therefore initiated a nation-wide debate on the role of violence and sex in television programs and the movies, and especially their impact on children. As though related, the Council also showed concern over lies and distortions of history and current events that misled or exploited people.

With Abul's hidden manipulation, a national consensus emerged, asking for action. The Council then passed several laws that set up in every city and town a "Children's Welfare Association" to which complaints about the content of newspaper articles, television programs, movies, speeches, and the like could be submitted by any citizen. The Association then had the legal right to sue in court whomever violated public or children's morals.

The Council insisted that this was not government censorship, since the membership of the Association was picked at large from local citizens and all those accused had their day in court. The effect of these new laws, as Abul planned, went beyond chilling criticism and dissent. When court cases against high profile critics of the government ended in their imprisonment, they froze it.

Within three years, the military forces of China and the Islamic Union held joint war games in Islamic East Turkistan, and Abul created a Joint Military Council to integrate their different strategies and tactics, and to work toward making their weapons compatible and interchangeable.

By 1991, he was seventy-six years old and ready to retire as anything but the final authority on the most general policy. His son

Turghun already had been involved in the day-by-day affairs of ruling East Turkistan for a decade when Abul had reached fifty-four, and in the last five years, he'd been involved in China as well. Abul had turned all but the most Sabahist-related policies over to him. Turghun was a militant Sabah, and Abul had trained and educated him for power. His holy task was to lead the rest of the world to Sabahism and Paradise, and if not achieved under him, to train his sons to this holy end. In this Abul had pressed upon him God's Way: patience, gradualness, accommodation, and alertness to the right moment to seize power.

With all his experience with power, Abul did not recognize that his son was impatient, hungry for more and more power, and eager for the final victory of Sabahism, which he would inherit or seize.

Abul remained in Urumqi as Turghun secretly ruled from Peking. With Abul's approval, he had ordered the extraction of plutonium from nuclear energy fuel rods to make nuclear bombs. Abul had thought a small number of bombs would be necessary in case the infidel democracies made war on them. The bombs were meant to be defensive weapons, a deterrent. He'd seen what happened during the secret test of the first nuclear weapon in the Taklamakan desert, and he could not conceive of using one against a city.

Such mass murder would be infinitely worse than the Rape of Shanghai, he had thought. It would be a bloody butchering of God's Way.

But without his knowledge, his son had secretly built up a much larger stockpile, and by 1994 he had the nuclear bombs hidden in major cities around the world.



Imam Ch'en Hsun
Peking, October 12, 1994

HE EXPLODED THEM IN CITIES. Abul's hand was so heavy he could hardly raise it to put his face into it. *I must now be the most hated, most despised, most loathed man in the world.*

He could barely focus. An incredible weight crushed his mind. *So a world victory, swimming in the blood of mankind, will come to Turghun. But it will not be the victory of Sabah. Not of God. Only of an evil man.*

I am ashamed I ever had a fit; I am ashamed I ever heard God's message; I am ashamed He did not pick a more worthy Prophet.

I am



Turghun coolly turned from the observation window to look at General Mirzat Zunun. "One more hour, General," he commented in an emotionless voice. He raised it to give the expected order: "If we do not hear from the democracies, Chicago is to be destroyed at precisely 7:02, our time."

General Zunun strode the few steps to his adjutant and relayed the order. The adjutant licked his lips and picked up his green phone. He glanced through the large window at the American desks on the floor below, punched a combination of buttons on his phone, and reached a specific technician at one of the two Chicago desks. The technician had already made preliminary preparations, and the adjutant watched closely as he and the technician at the other American desk inserted their keys, unlocked, and toggled all but one of the switches. They removed their keys and waited for one minute before the deadline, when they would reinsert their keys and unlock the final switch. Two security men well familiar with the procedures stood at their elbows; the supervising general hovered nearby.

Looking concerned about the lack of response to the ultimatum, Turghun glanced back at his father. He was slouched in the plush cushion of his rattan rocker, his head lolling to one side, his eyes closed.

He was too still.

Imam Ch'en Hsun stared down at the activity on the floor below, his face so placid that he seemed lost in contemplation of God. Turghun tapped him on the arm and nodded toward his father.

Ch'en looked around at Abul. Hiding a grin, he walked back to him, bent down, and looked at him carefully. He lifted Abul's wrist, seeming to seek his pulse. After a few minutes, he looked back at Turghun and shook his head. "He is dead."

Turghun stood rock still and stared at his father's body.

Ch'en took the few steps back to him and whispered, "Did you do this?"

"No," Turghun finally said. "But I am glad he is gone. He no longer spoke for God; he no longer was a true Sabah. No matter how deprived of physical power he was, he still had spiritual power, and would have been a constant danger to the new world. As his son, I'm sorry to see his death. And I will grieve when the day is done."

Ch'en bowed and said, "I am sorry about his death. My sincerest condolences. We have been honored and humbled to know the world's

greatest man, God's greatest prophet." He was afraid his eyes would give him away, and turned to look unseeingly through the window. *And by the same slow-acting thallium, you soon will join him.*

Chapter 5

Lora
1994, New Universe

“**Y**es,” Lora repeated to herself, “the lives of billions, and the freedom of billions more, depends on our survival.” It had become her mantra.

As they drove toward Santa Barbara they tried to avoid all large cities, but sometimes this had its own risks. On October 11, that most crucial day in all of world history—the ultimatum’s deadline in their time zone—her mind seemed in a state of suspended animation and her body drove by habit. At one intersection outside of Kansas City, Lora slowed to a crawl to make a sharp left turn onto a two-lane connecting route. She hardly noticed the four men and a girl standing at the intersection, watching traffic.

The girl, no more than thirteen or fourteen years old, had brown hair chopped short around her head. She wore a dirty gray t-shirt hanging loosely over a tight denim dress that barely hid her panties. She had rolled the shirtsleeves up over her bony shoulders, revealing tattoos of scaly dragons that swept down her upper arms and threw red-orange flames along her elbows.

Two of the men were dressed in tight faded denims and t-shirts. One had a skull and crossbones on his shirt and wore a black headband around dirty black hair that cascaded in rivulets down his back. Another had his shirtsleeves cut off and so many tattoos covering his arms, they looked like abstractions by Jackson Pollock. A third was bearded and wore a tank top over a bulbous stomach that drooped over his belt. The fourth man was middle-aged and neatly dressed.

As Lora slowly rounded the corner, she saw Neat Dresser nod when the girl glanced at him. Then she pointed in Lora’s direction. Two of the men immediately jumped in front of the car and forced Lora to hit her brakes to avoid hitting them.

Lora quickly locked her door, but the man with the tattoos broke the door’s window with a spiked metal bar. Leering at Lora, he reached in with stinking hands to unlock the door and pull her out. She had no

doubt what he and the others intended to do. She opened her left hand and put her right into it, cast and all, and used the power of both arms and her right shoulder to ram her left elbow into his throat, gasping from the pain as her broken arm bones ground against each other. With a strangled squeal, the punk disappeared beneath her broken window.

A second threw open the unlocked passenger door—*Stupid us*, she thought reflexively—and Spunky started barking and growling at the strange smell and noise. The man hesitated, looked at Lora with a face frozen in a mirthless grin, then leaned in and faked a thrust at Spunky with one thick hand, not knowing he was blind. At the same time, he reached out to get a grip on the dog's fur with the other, obviously intending to throw the terrier from the car.

Lora was angling her body to smack him in the face with her cast when Mark reared up from the back seat where he had been sleeping. With his pistol butt, he whacked the intruder in the nose and there was a crunch followed by a gurgling scream as the man gripped his face with both hands and fell backwards out of the car.

Hoping that Spunky would not fall out of the flapping passenger door, Lora ground the gear into first and accelerated, knocking one of the men flying with her fender and just missing the girl as Neat Dresser pulled her out of the way. Lora burned rubber spinning around the corner, threw the gear into second, third, and sped down the road.

Safe, her pinpoint focus relaxed, and her post-fight adrenaline withdrawal began. The agony in her abused broken arm overwhelmed her. She gasped, and couldn't get her fingers to work through the pain to shift into higher gear. A mile down the road, she pulled over and just let the car stall and her body slump against the steering wheel while she panted for breath.

No one had said a word; not the girl, not any of the punks. A chill went up her spine and she could feel the hair on her arms stand out. She shivered. Too close—it was too close.

Minutes went by before she could move and let Mark take her place behind the wheel. It was longer before either of them could speak. Or before Spunky stopped trembling. He didn't need sight to sense there had been great danger.

At Lawrence, the next large town, they looked for and found a Lux car dealer and asked him to replace their broken car window. Their Lux was one year old and the dealer had no replacement window. But he had the same model on the lot. So Lora showed him her universal ITU bank machine card, and Mark asked him to transfer its window to their

car. She didn't think he would have accepted the card of a New York bank. He made the transfer for an even \$3,000, finishing the job at almost 5:00, slightly over two hours before Sabah's deadline.

They decided to go on the road and then park somewhere near deadline time. At 5:50 p.m. they parked outside of Junction City. Both were so anxious, they could drive no farther. There'd been no word on the radio yet.

Hardly any cars and few pedestrians were on the streets. The parking lot of a nearby shopping center was almost empty. Most people must be waiting for the announcement.

The clock showed 5:55. Nothing.

Lora's mind, her whole body, was on minimal life support. Lora existed nowhere. Nothing existed. Only the car's digital clock and the radio. They filtered out all the chatter of experts over what to expect, and they trembled, waiting for that special announcement.

5:58

She knew she was not breathing. She saw nothing beyond the digits on the dashboard clock.

5:59

It came: "This is a Public Broadcasting Network news special from the temporary capitol of Philadelphia. President Peabody has announced that the United States has signed a Treaty of Nonaggression with the Islamic Union and China, and will accept the 'advisor' from China's College of Clerics. Senator Wells, the temporary Democratic leader of the Senate now meeting at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, has assured the country that the treaty will be put on a fast track to approval and that a quorum of Senators will be present so that it can be voted upon. President Peabody is scheduled to make a national speech from Andrews at—"

Lora took a shuddering breath and let it out as a sob. She knew what to expect. It had happened. It was real. Freedom ended; Sabah ruled.

As though from a great distance, Mark's sad voice broke into her mind. "No goddam alternative. The democracies have a few bombers, some warships, and a small army, but nothing that could cause the level of destruction in Urumqi alone that would come close to what Sabah did to just New York. The bombers couldn't even make the long one-way flight there over hostile countries. Shit!"

Mark stared at the radio and pounded the steering wheel with his good hand. "Jesus, Lora, I never dreamed in my worst nightmares that this could happen."

“I know, but it’s clear that Sabah’s threat is a realistic one. Already he’s shown he’s willing and able to destroy major capitals. But we know the hidden democratic agenda, don’t we? Government officials and the bureaucracy will use the techniques all politicians and bureaucrats learn in a democracy. They will obfuscate, delay, deny, change the subject, misunderstand, seem to agree, and fulfill partially.” Lora shook her head. “Works if your opponents are democrats. But not if they shoot you for as little as mismatched socks.”

Mark nodded. “Yeah. Well, I’m sure the democracies will set up secret labs to build nuclear weapons, and carry out covert action, especially toward assassinating Sabah and his successor son. And they’ll secretly search for the remaining nuclear bombs, if any, that Sabah claims to have hidden in major cities. Of course, the only ones he had hidden could have been those he exploded, but it’s too dangerous to try to test his claim.”

Mark calmed down sufficiently to wipe his face with the Softies she gave him and resume driving. Soon, after the news special concluded, PBN put on a panel of weapons and security experts who speculated on how Sabah had hidden the nuclear bombs he had exploded. A retired director of the American Security Group argued, “Sabah smuggled them into the cities in crates, probably routed through such innocuous countries as Indonesia and Alger—”

A retired Air Force General interrupted with, “By the 1990s we became too damn complacent and too damn open in a world where two-thirds of the countries were democracies, and we were no threat to each other. All passports had been eliminated among democracies and customs checks at the border were cursory. And trade among the democracies was almost completely free and unregulated. Some crazy could have smuggled an elephant into the country in a crate leaking its urine and feces, stinking to hell, and still managed to hide it in a major city.”

Lora leaned her head back against the headrest, closed her wet eyes, and stroked Spunky. “Now that we’ve accepted a dictator, we will soon be an occupied country with Sabah’s security forces and resident Sabah supporters rooting around for people like us, and we and our institutes were not secret or hidden.”

Mark hunched over the wheel and kept his eyes on the road. “Yeah, but the Republic of California is still too small for Sabah’s secret police to be interested in it. In time, though, the scientific and engineering center of Santa Barbara will attract their attention.”

Lora still had trouble controlling her voice and spoke much louder than she intended. “We’ve time, thank God. I’m sure California, like the United States, will be preparing for a covert war against Sabah. There’ll be secret collaboration and organization among businesses, scientific and technological centers, and universities to hide much of their scientific secrets and equipment in underground sites—perhaps abandoned gold and silver mines.”

Lora hesitated, looking mournfully out the window. “No matter. Sabah’s people will eventually uncover it all. Everything now depends on our getting to Santa Barbara and having time.”



Day after day, night after night, they drove on, keeping their doors locked and windows up, traveling on major highways between cities and back roads around them. After three days of such driving, they approached the Republic of California’s border. They passed miles of cars, motor homes, recreation vehicles, trailers, and trucks scattered in the fields, under trees, and along the side of the road. Tents had sprung up, smoke drifted from fires, and people milled about. The air smelled of too many people, too many cars and trucks.

Before they got to the border, Nevada State troopers stopped them at a roadblock. One checked their identity and let them move on to the California border only when Lora showed her California registration documents for her Institute’s Santa Barbara affiliate. She asked about all the vehicles scattered around, and the trooper waved her hand at the them, frowned, and replied, “California won’t let them in.”

When they got to the border, they also presented their documents to the well-armed border guards. The guards studied their pictures, their faces, and sullenly waved them around the roadblock. They were in California.

At Stovepipe Wells near the border, Lora called their Institute’s affiliate so they would be ready for their arrival. She explained what she wanted done. But whether the car could make it the whole way was in question. They’d been unable to find any gas being sold for the last two hundred miles, and within two days of the nuclear attack, California initiated gas rationing available only to those with California driver’s licenses. When they hit the intersection for the route to Santa Barbara, Lora called the Institute again, told them what route they were taking, and told them that if they weren’t there in two hours, to send a pickup truck after them.

The naked sun was high and a light breeze blew off the Pacific as they drove down De La Vina Street on gas fumes. Stately royal palms lined the street and mottled isolated patches of asphalt with their stingy shade. When Lora caught sight of the affiliate, she felt like cheering that they had made it and crying with sorrow that the affiliate was all that remained of Joy and John's mission.

"We're here," Lora said with a heavy sigh. "Now the real hard work begins." She picked up Spunky, who had been sleeping, his paws twitching as he dreamed. She felt the tension drain from her, leaving behind a deep weariness.

The trip had taken seven days.

The affiliate was a beautiful rose pink two-story building done in the local Spanish style. To the casual observer, it looked like the sprawling, airy home of a very rich family, rather than the location of scientific laboratories. As they pulled into the parking lot, a crowd waiting in front of the building broke and ran toward their car. Lora recognized the affiliate's staff—all had come out to greet them.

Sybil Bazyan, the Palestinian president of their affiliate, ran toward the car with her purse flapping. She reached the car door and clapped on it. The others caught up to her, shouting welcomes, and surrounded the car except for a space they left open in front. Mark stopped the car without trying to park.

Even before the car stopped, Sybil started crying. She tried to open the locked door, and waited while Lora maneuvered her body around to unlock it. Then she leaned in and hugged Lora's head, crying out, as if Lora hadn't called her on the telephone, "You and Mark are alive. God be praised, I was so worried." She kissed Lora's cheek, then backed up and ran over to the other side to hug Mark as he emerged from the car, not even caring about the cast and not knowing about his ribs. Tears flowing, she kept saying, "Thank God, thank God, you're alive."

With more restrained enthusiasm, their chief scientists welcomed them with brief hugs and left-handed handshakes; many of the assistants, technologists, and other specialists greeted them happily as well, although when they saw the couple's injuries, they did so with more consideration and concern. The mood soon turned somber as they all recognized that Lora and Mark were the only survivors of all their friends and colleagues at the Institute.

Although standing slouched with fatigue, Lora told Sybil to assemble her department heads for the immediate meeting she had asked her to arrange. As she shuffled in the front door of the Institute with

Spunky cradled in her arm, she had to pass him to Mark and vomit again, as they both had been doing frequently. “You know,” she commented to Mark, twitching her nose at the odor of the three of them, “Spunky also seems unable to hold any of his food down. I think he lost weight during our drive here. I know we did. After the horror we’ve gone through, it’s certainly understandable.”

Mark and Lora had known what to do about Sabah even before their trip began, and had the whole drive to think about it and work out the details. As soon as all department heads were at their first meeting, Lora said, “Let us join hands and bow our heads in a minute of silent remembrance of all our dead, our friends and colleagues, our fellow Americans, and our fellow human beings throughout the democracies.”

Mark and Lora removed their slings so that they could touch the hands of those on both sides of them. Afterward, she said, “We will remember them more properly later, and also try to help all their surviving loved ones as best we can. We will also hold a memorial service for them all as soon as we get settled and organized. That will be the time for tears. Now, we have a job to do.

“Most important things first. You all know about the old time machine we had kept hidden in a vault in our New York Institute until we transferred our scientific research here. We had the machine freighted here too, years ago. You’ve been all over it since then, trying to figure out how it worked. As I understand it, your problem is that we have Joy and John’s time capsule without the external electronics and laser equipment that made it operational. It’s like trying to figure out how a car works, when the motor is missing. Although we have had no immediate need to operate a time machine, given our Institute’s goals to promote democracy and prevent war and democide, I nonetheless insisted that you all work on it anyway, just in case we might need it. Now we do.”

Lora looked from one face to another. “So, what’s possible?”

Sybil answered, “We carried out several tests. We know that we can send back in time a small capsule. So far we have not been able to increase its size or successfully send a living thing back in time without it being killed.”

Looking at the bearded man on her left, Sybil asked, “Jack, tell us what we now can and cannot do.”

At that moment, Mark held up his hand, excused the interruption, and said, “I have to use my room, be back in a minute.” He rushed out.

“‘My room,’ Lora?” Sybil asked, her eyebrows arched.

Lora couldn't even grin. "He means the John. With everybody but us in the Institute, he uses his middle name. As some of you know, his father Dolphy named him in remembrance of John Banks. Anyway, we've both had diarrhea."

Then it struck her. *There is something funny about this. But I don't want to think about that now.*

Once Mark returned, Jack told them in detail about what they could now do, how far back they could go, and other limitations. "In short," he finished, "we can send back a small inanimate package no bigger than two packs of cards, and we are limited to twenty years in time travel."

Lora tried to sit up straight. Looking around the table, she said in a firm voice, "Okay, this is what we absolutely must do, within weeks. We must be able to send back in time a metal box weighing no more than two pounds and perhaps half the size of a shoebox. It must go to a precise location. Your absolute error margins are days in time, and no more than an inch in space. I will give you the four dimensional coordinates when your tests show you're ready."

During the trip, Mark and Lora had discussed how much they could reveal about the purpose of the time travel they planned. She'd explained then, "These are loyal scientists, but scientific activity on this scale can't take place without a platoon of assistants, secretaries, mechanics, and so on. There are too many possible sources of leaks, and just one could end the project and possibly everyone's lives—and the only hope of mankind. I don't doubt the local police and security officials soon will be under orders from some Sabah henchmen."

Mark had nodded. "The scientists especially won't like it, but we've no choice. We can't even connect this time travel to the attacks on the democracies—that might leak out and bring the security forces or police down on everyone. But we have to tell Sybil. If the research is to be done well, she must know."

Lora agreed.

Now, at the meeting, she tried to make sure everyone understood the importance of this project. "This is a Priority One project. You must work on this as though your life and those of your loved ones depend on it."

George, a quantum physicist said, "It would be helpful if we knew why this is so important."

Before she could answer, her head involuntarily jerked toward the floor and she spewed a grayish liquid, all that remained in her stomach. She saw flecks of blood in it.

Mark leaned over and whispered, "Are you okay, precious?"

Lora felt exhausted. She tried to put her hand on his shoulder, but her cast got in the way. Sitting up, she wiped her mouth on her sleeve, and gasped, "I think we'd better see a doctor."

Mark took over the meeting. Ignoring George's suggestion, he told them, "You all know what Lora wants." He looked from one to another. "Can it be done within a few weeks?"

Sybil answered for the scientists, "We've been working overtime to get our equipment and material ready for movement into a secret cavern in the Kilten Mine complex. We'll now do that only as time is available from work on the time machine."

One of the department heads, a thin, short, brown-skinned man with a mustache that seemed to hang from his large nose, put up his hand. Nodding at him, Sybil said, "Go ahead, Harry."

"I think we almost can to do it. The problem lies in the energy needed. We are reducing this by fiddling with the quantum foam. The worm hole across the space-time dimensions is set, however, and all we need to do is increase its size and stabilize its other end at the precise coordinates you define. This is ultimately a matter of laser power. As it is now, we can lay additional cables to tap into another electrical transformer station half a mile away, and through it tap into the California grid, but we will probably cause a citywide blackout for several hours. I'm sure the cause would be tracked down to the local transformers and the repairmen will not miss our taps. In the present national emergency, this may attract the police or even the secret security teams." He ended with his hands palm up in front of his chest.

Mark answered, "We need to do this only once. And we have to chance discovery. Forget about the fiddling. Plan on going full blast. Any more questions?"

Helen, head of the computer department, put up her hand. When Mark looked at her, she asked, "Does anybody here know how Sabah developed the bombs?"

Sybil responded, "China has been far advanced in the development of nuclear energy. They have forty-three nuclear reactors hooked into their national electrical grid. Sabah had his scientists extract plutonium from the spent fuel rods from their reactors. By our calculations, he could extract an average of one to eight kilograms of plutonium per plant per year. He only needed something like eight kilograms of plutonium for each bomb like the one that exploded in New York. Sabah has had the plutonium and time to build hundreds of such bombs. Re-

member that two years after his coup in China, there was a massive explosion in the Taklamakan desert. We think now it was the first nuclear bomb test. The nuclear bombs that Sabah exploded in New York and elsewhere were not very large, given what he could have done with all that plutonium. They were the equivalent of about fifty thousand tons of TNT.”

Lora’s heart was racing. She blurted out what she feared asking. “The New York bomb was exploded in the middle of Manhattan at a time when most people were on the street or at work.” She hesitated and took a deep, tremulous breath. “This means that the number killed must be astronomical. From what you know about the bomb and the urban populations it was exploded among, what is your best guess . . . as to . . . the human . . . toll?” The last words came out as squeal, as though Lora were trying to brake her words to a stop before the awful question was completed.

Sybil stared down at the table for a moment. Then she slid her conference chair back and stood. She slouched, her head hunched into her shoulders, the suit padding on her shoulders thrust out at the edges. She continued to stare down at the table for a long minute, brow furrowed, lips pinched. Her finger moved idly over the table’s surface. She seemed to be gathering emotional strength. A tear crept halfway down one cheek.

Lora had never seen her like this before.

The soft swishing of the air conditioning and the wheezing of one of the scientists combined into what seemed a modern musical parody of Sybil’s anguish.

Some of the scientists looked down at the table in front of them, some stared at the wall. Two of them wiped their eyes.

They all must know the estimates.

Sybil finally looked at Lora, her black eyes narrowed and wet with her misery, the skin at the corners of her mouth folded into deep creases. She forced the words out, and each one stood alone, as though a separate tombstone. “About fifty thousand dead . . . 250,000 missing in New York. In all the cities attacked . . . there may be . . . 1.75 to two billion . . . human beings killed . . . or missing.”

Sybil pulled her chair under her and plopped down with a thump. She gazed down at the teardrops splattered on the table in front of her as another tear marked a fresh path on her cheek.

Lora was stunned. The hairs on her arms and legs stood out from goose bumps as a polar breeze worked down her spine. Almost two bil-

lion human beings wiped off the face of the earth in seconds? That many? Lora's mouth hung open. Her stomach knotted as her mind warped around the indigestible numbers.

A sound pierced her whirling mind. Mark was speaking. She jerked her head to look at him, and struggled to push that impossible death toll into a corner of her mind. It would never leave her mind. She would now live with it, as though it were a metal rod that had been thrust through her brain.

Mark's face was gray. He was stammering out a conclusion to the meeting. ". . . for your help during this most terrible time." He stopped and inhaled a deep breath. He held it. And let it out in a whoosh. "Our sincerest sympathies for all the friends and colleagues each of you have lost in the despicable attacks on the democracies. Thank you all."

Lora could not speak. She put her hand on Mark's shoulder and her head on top of that and cried.

Others cried with them, and soon people got up, said a few words to each other, and left. Some came over to them, patted or stroked their backs briefly, and expressed their personal regrets and sympathy over the destruction of their New York Institute and all those inside. Sybil hung back until all the others had left. Her eyes were red and puffy.

Lora felt even sicker. She continued to lean on Mark, even after they stood up. Mark said to Sybil in a tremulous voice, "Above all, even if we sacrifice our Institute and our lives, we've got to send that box back in time."

"Amen," Sybil sighed.

Mark suddenly looked as tired as Lora felt. He leaned on the table with his good arm as he told Sybil, "Beyond our injuries, something is wrong with us. You'd better get us to a doctor."

Wasting no time, Sybil wiped the tears from her face with both hands and took Lora's good arm in hers. She walked them out of the Institute to her car. Lora remembered Spunky, and once Sybil made sure they were comfortable in her car, she retrieved him from the care of her secretary. Lora took him from Sybil and whispered, "Hi little boy," and he showed his happiness at hearing her voice by weakly barking his greeting and trying to lick her hand when she put him on her lap. He seemed unusually weary.

While Sybil drove them to a nearby hospital emergency room, Lora told her why they were sending a box back in time. Sybil's only response was, "I thought so. We'll do it, Lora. While there is a spark of life in all of us, we'll do it."

At the emergency room, Sybil got them immediate attention while she held Spunky for them. Lora tried to explain their symptoms to a doctor, but she was having trouble with the words. Sybil took over, and once she explained that they had been near the nuclear bomb explosion in New York, they became the center of attention of a squad of doctors.

None of them knew at first what to make of their tests. They conducted more, called in several specialists, and made numerous calls. The doctors finally told Lora and Mark that they should be hospitalized for observation, but the couple refused. Early that evening they left the hospital, with Spunky tucked into Lora's arm.

Sybil had rented a furnished apartment for them as soon as she knew they were coming. She drove them there, then took their car keys so someone could gas up their car and bring it by the next day. All Lora and Mark could do was say thanks and give her a kiss on the cheek and an affectionate one-armed hug.

Lora put a bath towel on the end of the bed for Spunky. She gently placed him on it, and made sure he had water nearby in case he got thirsty. Then she dropped onto a bed for the first time in weeks, put her head on Mark's chest with a sigh, and fell instantly asleep. They slept for about twelve hours.

Strange, Lora realized when she slid out of bed and staggered into the living room, *I feel no stronger after that long rest than I did before going to bed.*

There was a message waiting on their answering machine from Dr. Chang, the doctor in charge of their tests. When she returned his call, the conversation was short: "Are you at the apartment address that Miss Bazyan gave me?"

"Yes."

"May I come over now?"

"Please do."

"Will be there as soon as possible." He hung up.

When Lora returned to the bedroom she found Mark awake. She noticed the stench in the room for the first time and went to Spunky, still at the end of the bed. He lay unmoving. His eyes were closed. A yellow, mucus-like substance had drained onto the towel from his nose, and blood-flecked diarrhea stained the towel. She put her hand on him; he was hot. He opened his eyes a slit, tried to lick her hand, and gave up. She realized that he was near death.

Lora dropped to her knees at the end of the bed and cried as she gently stroked Spunky's head. Tears ran down Mark's cheeks as he

smoothed Spunky's fur. They were still there when the doctor knocked on their door.

She kissed Spunky on the head and all he could do was half-open his sightless eyes. She didn't think he could smell her anymore.

Dr. Chang had called Sybil to join him and they met at the door. They came in together when Mark answered the knock. Chang wore a somber expression and Lora knew that his news would not be good. Mark and Lora sat on the plush sofa while Sybil sat on the armrest by Lora. Chang sat on the edge of an ottoman across from them.

Mark asked, "Well?"

Chang rubbed his hand over his balding head, leaned toward them with his elbows on his knees, and clasped his hands. "I'm very sorry I have to tell you this, and you have my greatest sympathy. The tests we've done show that you both have lethal radiation poisoning. There is nothing we can do about its finality. We can, however, ease your suffering and help you avoid a painful end."

That was it. He was direct. He was honest. They had to know. They now did.

Lora had suspected as much, and had made her peace with death. All that concerned her now was the time machine. Her mind exploded with one thought: *We've got to succeed. We must.* The words almost stuck in her throat, but she had to know. "How long?"

"You two are in your forties, I know. The older you are, the faster the poisoning acts. Maybe a month. Three at most."

Mark was not surprised. He cleared his throat and asked, "Is there anything we can take to keep our minds clear until the end, no matter the deterioration of our bodies?"

"Yes. I've checked with the radiologists on this, and there is a cocktail of drugs that I can give you that will help keep your mind as clear as possible and slow the effect of the radiation. I have the drugs with me."

Mark twisted his body toward Lora so that he could hold her hand in his good one, and asked, "When we've completed what we must and we are obviously near the end, we would like to take something so that we can both go together. You understand?"

Tears had been streaming down Sybil's face. Now she let out a mournful sob and buried her head in her hands. Chang's own eyes were moist, and he just nodded. After a moment, in a controlled voice, he told them, "In a few days, I'll give you pills that will do it. It'll be just like going to sleep. You can take them together when you're ready."

He opened his medical case and handed them over a dozen bottles of pills, and a list of instructions for taking them. He took out two hypodermics and gave them several shots. Afterward, he gave them his home number and told them, "Please call me at any time for any reason." With their thanks, he let himself out.

Sobbing even more, Sybil came around the sofa, knelt down on the floor in front of them, and stretched out her arms to both. They all cried together—for humanity, for democracy, for the United States, for themselves. After a while Lora rose and went to check on Spunky. He was dead.

Chapter 6

Joy

Silicon Valley, 2002, Old Universe

In the midst of Joy Phim and John Bank's training by the Survivors' Benevolent Society for their travel back in time to 1906 and their mission, the FBI raided their building in Silicone Valley. Word had leaked out about the possibility of a time machine and under the excuse that there were unregistered weapons and drugs on the site, a SWAT team burst in, weapons drawn, looking for it. Only the guards in the building were armed, and they were not about to fight the FBI.

Joy's mother, Tor, rushed them to the time machine and they hurried through their final goodbyes. As Tor pushed her into the time machine capsule with John, Joy frantically brushed her hands over her mother's shoulders and cheeks. Just before the door closed on them forever, Joy screamed to her, "Good-bye, Mom, I will never forget you. I love you!"

Joy would never forget the agony on her mother's face as she yelled, "Safe journey, my dearest," and slammed the capsule door.

Tor had been her greatest love, her life, until John. Tor had adopted her when she was nothing at the age of four and had, in her love and teaching, created the woman Joy had become. More, Joy had a deep empathy for Tor's deep humanity, and her suffering under the Cambodian Khmer Rouge, who murdered her husband. For virtually Joy's whole life, Tor had been her model of love and goodness, and now she would never see her again. She would never know what happened to her mother. She would never again share her thoughts or know her feelings. And she would never be able to speak to her mother's worry about Joy and her fear of the failure of their mission. Tor had invested her life in Joy and the mission. Now, she would never know if Joy lived or died, or if the mission succeeded or failed.

So Joy broke down, devastated, in the time capsule once the door was slammed shut. In her mind and heart she saw her mother's loving face. She felt her fingers as they stroked her cheeks. She felt her arms and body as she hugged Joy to her. She heard Tor's sweet voice comforting her when she was hurt or sad.

And the sobs came from deep within Joy and rushed to the surface, emerging in a passionate howl. She sobbed out her heart.

Gripped within her grief, Joy did not even know they had traveled through time. She heard nothing, although John told her later that the capsule made a sound like a sports car starting up. Much later, when her rationality returned, she could see it now in her mind's eye, as the calendar pages flipped backwards and then whole calendars, the moon reversed its course, and the sun spun from west to east. They finally did arrive in San Francisco, precisely as their scientists had calculated: November 14, 1906, 2:51 am.

But at that moment Joy did not know it and did not care.

The capsule was cramped for both of them, but that didn't stop John. He squirmed around, knelt in front of her, hugged her, stroked her back, and just held her while she cried. Between body-shaking sobs, she managed to whimper, "I knew . . . I knew . . . I would lose her forever . . . I knew it would be like . . . death between us. I had prepared myself. But, I . . . didn't know . . . I didn't know it would . . . really feel like this."

Joy slowly cried out her grief, and when her sobs subsided into sniffing she finally sat up, still in John's arms. Her face was wet with tears and they had soaked the front of his pants. He wiped her face and eyes with the sleeve of his *uwagi*—karate shirt—and she managed to ask if they had arrived.

"Yes," he murmured, his face overflowing with compassion. He released her from his arms and as she was standing up, he looked down at the floor. His brow furrowed. He squeezed down, picked up a golden locket, and handed it to her. She guessed that Tor had thrown it into the capsule for her just before she slammed the door shut.

Joy's hands were shaking as she took it from him and held it over her heart for a precious moment. Even without opening it, she felt her mother in it. She felt her love.

She opened it and saw a picture of Tor smiling, and sending her a kiss with her hand. On the other side of the locket was a group picture of the Survivors' Benevolent Society members who had planned this mission for years, had prepared them for it, and invested all their wealth in it. Tor was in the middle of the group, and Gu, her godmother from China whose husband also had been murdered by the communists, stood next to her. At the bottom Tor had written, *Our love goes with you. Good luck.*

Joy kissed both pictures, closed the locket, kissed it, pressed it to both her cheeks, and put it around her neck. It hung over her heart.

Joy was ready to step into a the new universe they would create—live or die, succeed or fail.



Not in their wildest imaginings could they have guessed what they would find in the first few minutes in their new universe.

John carefully opened the capsule door. As planned, they were in a large, empty warehouse. A slightly sour, burnt smell, like a fire doused with water, still hung in the air, although it had been seven months since the San Francisco fire. The odor was especially unpleasant when mixed with the moldy smell and stuffiness of the warehouse. Joy sneezed several times until her nose adjusted to it. The air seemed to cling uncomfortably and coldly to her damp cheeks. *I wanna go home* was her spontaneous reaction, but she shoved the thought back into her unconscious. She didn't think it would stay there long.

They stepped out, swinging their flashlight beams through the darkness of the warehouse until they located the supply and equipment capsules that had been sent ahead of them.

Before they did anything, John thought they had better test their communication system. Doctor Laurent Nkongoli, a Rwandan member of the Society, had surgically implanted small transmitters in their necks near their throats, and a small receiver behind each one's left ear. Their bodies acted as aerials, and their communications could reach over thousands of miles. By sub-vocalizing "KK," they could toggle it on or off. But before John activated his, Joy had already noticed a beeping in hers.

"Is there something wrong with my receiver?" she asked. "I'm getting a beeping sound, even though we haven't activated it yet."

"I'm hearing that too," he replied, looking puzzled. "I don't think this was caused by our time travel, or that the receivers are defective. Maybe it's coming from somewhere in here."

John began to stride around the warehouse, leaving behind him a small cloud of dust. He soon noticed that the beeping grew stronger or weaker depending on the direction he took. By pacing back and forth and then moving in a steadily decreasing circle, he homed in on the source. Finally he stopped and pointed the flashlight down at the wooden floorboards. "It's coming from there. Get me something to pry up the floorboards."

While he stood on the spot, Joy rushed over to their supply and equipment capsules and only then noticed that there were boxes, broken chairs, empty bottles, garbage, and a spindly table by the capsules. Someone had occupied the warehouse.

But first things first.

The capsules were shaped like large residential gas tanks and made of dull gray titanium. About five feet high and seven feet long, they sat on runners attached to their bottoms. They contained everything the Society calculated they would or might need—all the clothing, supplies, equipment, weapons, and financial assets amounting to two billion 2002 dollars in gold, gems, and real and counterfeit currency.

Joy sought out the supply capsule that she knew contained an axe and crowbar and pressed down hard on the left corner of an almost invisible plate in its side. When the plate loosened, she pushed it in and sideways to reveal a keypad and punched in the code to open the capsule door. When it swung upward, she reached into a recess to one side of the open door and switched off the self-destruct mechanism, then studied the map of the capsule's contents mounted on the door. She found the tools she wanted, and took them to John.

He used the edge of the axe to create an opening for the crowbar, inserted the crowbar, and pried up one floorboard at a time. Dust kicked up in a low cloud that looked like ground fog in the flashlight beam.

"You know, dearest," Joy said, "the second thing I want, when we get a chance, is a bath."

"Oh?" John responded. "What's the first thing?"

"Something to drink. This air has made my throat dry and I don't think we've had anything to drink since well before we started your training this afternoon."

"Is that all," he replied, sounding disappointed.

Two layers of hardwood boards were crisscrossed for strength, and he had a hard time working his way through them. Breathing hard, he commented, "No wonder this warehouse survived the earthquake. Being all wood sure helped."

"I'm surprised it didn't burn down in the fire, then," Joy replied, doing a fast scan of the warehouse with her flashlight.

"Hey," John exclaimed, "keep the light on the hole." She jerked the light back.

"The warehouse is far enough south to have avoided completely the fire that burned down the downtown and commercial districts," he pointed out. "No sparks even came this way. And the ground didn't flow or settle under it during the earthquake, either."

Finally John created a large enough hole to look underneath with his flashlight. The bottom layer of boards rested on wooden beams about a foot apart, and poles driven into the earth supported these. The warehouse floor had been constructed to support heavy weight.

Beneath the beams, a bright yellow metal box about the size of a hardcover book lay on the bare clay of the ground about two feet down. John got down on his stomach, lifted out the box, and placed it on the floor next to Joy. She focused her flashlight on it. John sat up, picked up the box, and twisted it around in his hands, looking for some clue as to what it was. There was no icon nor anything printed on it, but there was a recessed keypad similar to that on a cell phone.

“Obviously, we should punch in some code, but what?” Joy said. “Let’s do something fast—that beeping in my ear has gotten irritating.”

“This keypad looks like something from our time and the electronic beeping confirms it. I bet this was sent through time for us. Maybe it’ll open with our cell phone numbers.”

John punched in her number, and when nothing happened, he tried his own. Nothing.

“Try our phone numbers,” she suggested.

John did, and nothing.

He tried their first names, their last names, and their full names. Nothing.

He was clearly frustrated. “If it weren’t for that damn beeping, we could leave this until later, when we’re settled. It would be fun trying to decode this thing when we had the time.”

“Try my mother’s name,” Joy suggested, with little hope.

Nothing.

John sat back and put the box on his lap. “Okay. Let’s relax, try to ignore the beeping, and just let our minds play with this. We’re in no hurry, right? Nothing’s at stake. We’re under no pressure, except for the beeping. And we’ve this puzzle. If this were sent to us, and it had to be, we should be able to open it. The code can’t be anything strange. It should be something that only we know.”

Joy sat back as well, and tried to relax and ignore the beeping, the unpleasant odors, and the cold chill in the air. She set the flashlight on its bottom and it lit up the ceiling beams high above them. John did the same with his and they sat quietly in the dust and dim reflected light, thinking. Still feeling emotionally drained, Joy reached over and took his hand, and they sat holding hands. The warmth and firmness of his hand in hers helped her emotionally refocus from the mother she had lost to what would now be.

She slid closer to John, put her arm through his, and rested her head on his shoulder. His closeness and vibrancy were just what she needed. She didn't doubt that only harmonically tuned lovers like them could find this situation at all romantic. What a strange and completely unanticipated way to begin their life in the new universe.

Then she had it.

She raised her head and looked at John, and he wore the same "eureka" expression that must have been on her face. John released her hand, and she picked up her flashlight and focused it again on the box. Smiling, he keyed in the code they used for their supply capsules. With an audible, metallic click, the top of the box was released and the beeping stopped.

"How can we be so dumb?" he asked, raising the top and looking for a self-destruct switch. There was none. Both of them looked inside.

Nothing was the same after they opened that box. Not their lives, not their world, not the universe. The new universe they'd just begun, that branched off from the parallel old universe from which they had traveled through time, now itself branched into another. Unknowingly, they had initiated a Third Universe.

John opened the lid of the box wide and Joy focused her flashlight inside. They could see a small electronic device that must have been the source of the beeping, the electronic locking mechanism, and two CDs and a DVD in plastic cases, carefully buttressed against shock. There was a handwritten note on the top of the CDs:

For Joy Phim and John Banks from your new universe, 1994.

Please read CD #1 as soon as you can.

All our love and very best wishes,

Lora Joy Reeves

Mark John Docker

Joy Phim Democratic Peace Institute.

Joy was more than surprised. Stunned, was more like it. This was so unexpected and the note so laden with meaning that she suddenly drew in her breath and it felt like minutes before she released it. Her hand holding the light shook. She couldn't have been more taken aback if a dead relative sat up in their coffin.

Joy's mind would not work at first. And then thoughts suddenly flooded it, as though from a burst dam. Here they'd just arrived in 1906, ready to foster democracy and intervene around the world to prevent major wars and democide. They were trying to be gods. Such grandiose ambition might easily and most likely would fail. They both knew it. There was a good chance one or both of them would be killed. They both know that too, but they hoped for at least some success beforehand.

Now, within an hour of stepping out of their time machine with a new universe of possibilities and dangers before them, they'd found a message—a message!—sent to them from the far future. Not from the universe they left, but incredibly, the very new universe they were here to create—that they will have created.

And the message implied that they survived long enough to become known. And Joy would be successful enough to have an institute named after her, although she was beginning to worry whether that meant John died or was killed well before her.

Her mind was swamped with questions, but it centered on one thing: *I've got to read these CDs immediately.*

Apparently, John thought the same thing. He slapped back the floorboards and made them secure, then rushed with the small box to their supply capsules. Joy beat him there. She found in one her laptop computer while he found his 1905 Hamilton pocket watch and her open faced purse watch styled for the same year in another.

It was 3:30 a.m.; they had some time before morning light. Joy wanted to just sit down on the floor, open the laptop, and start reading the CDs, but John insisted that they make themselves a little more comfortable. While she waited impatiently, he took out a backpack tent for two and an automatically inflatable air mattress and set them up on the floor. He got blankets to put around them and hung a bright lantern inside.

Joy was the computer expert, and put everything together in the tent so they could view the CD. They had two super long lasting batteries in the laptop, and a transformer to enable them to recharge the batteries on the variable electricity of this age. Once ready, she inserted the CD, and when it opened she saw that it contained documents compatible with the system, word processor, spreadsheet, and browser she had on the laptop. Of course. Those who made it must have known what kind of computer and operating system she had.

Joy opened the first "Read me" file.

Joy and John, this and the other CD contain the following:

CD #1

*Our letter to you
Why we are sending you all this
Institute background on Uighuristan
Sabah's seizure of Uighuristan
Sabah's takeover of China*

CD #2

The daily closing of the New York Stock Exchange, November, 1906, to October 12, 1994; commodity market, funds rate; and daily currency exchange. (This will enable you to compare and plot the new universe changes from the old universe financial statistics you have brought with you.)

The most important world events, 1906 - October, 1994, New Universe.

DVD: Scenes of nuclear destruction in New York.

"I'll be damned," John exclaimed, slapping his forehead. "This is incredible. Hours ago you were teaching me karate, and now we're not only back in time, but we have a history of what we did in this new universe on a CD."

"I don't think this is good news, dearest," she told him as she opened the CD's letter to them.

December 2, 1994

*Joy Phim Democratic Peace Institute
Santa Barbara Affiliate*

Our Dearest Joy and John:

We hope that you don't mind our being so personal. You have been part of our lives since we were born, and as close to us as our own parents. Before I continue with what has happened, I should explain about our names. You see, in honor of both of you, who meant so much to our grandfathers, our parents gave us your names. As

you now know, I am Lora Joy Reeves, and my assistant, translator, and husband is Mark John Docker (they followed your example—as Joy was John’s assistant and translator, Mark is the same to me. When we think about it, it gives us a moment of humor.)

Until now, we have tried to continue your mission. We succeeded in this only up to the last horrible months. Since then, we have spent all our available resources and time trying to get this message to you. We hope with all our hearts that once you realize what happened and have the record of relevant events, you and your successors will be able to prevent it.

Before sending you on to our “Why” document, one warning: you will have three early morning intruders in your warehouse. You will tame them and they eventually will become your greatest supporters and executives in your company, and two of them will be Mark’s and my grandfathers. You will come to love them as we did.

We so wish we could have met you both in person. In love and in remembrance of your great work, with all our hopes for your success,

*Lora Joy Reeves
President, Joy Phim
Democratic Peace Institute
Mark John Docker
Assistant, Translator, Husband*

Surprised and worried by this bad news, Joy looked over at John. He looked like someone facing a snake and unable to tell whether it was poisonous or not. She told him, “We’ve got to read what happened right away. I won’t be able to sleep, otherwise. I’m going to open the ‘Why’ document.”

“Wait,” John said. “Since we’re going to meet our future helpers, I want to be sure we see them when they come in. When I was looking around with the flashlight, I saw that the front entrance to the warehouse is barricaded and that the only entrance is the side door. Let’s turn the tent and mattress so that we can watch that entrance as we read.”

They did that, wrapped the blankets around themselves, and settled in for a long read. Joy brought up the “Why we are sending this” document on the laptop screen, and they started reading.

What no one foresaw in the old universe was the development of a radical antidemocratic Islamic fundamentalism called Sabahism . . .

It went on to explain the nature of Islam and its relationship to the growth of democracy. Then they read:

Many mullahs and imams taught this tolerance and peaceful coexistence up to the 1960s. Besides, much of this world had become democratic. The Joy Phim Institute you set up, John, and of which my grandfather Hands Reeves became first president, also saw no reason to believe otherwise.

Joy felt warm inside at reading that. “How sweet, darling. You set up an institute in my name to continue our mission.” She leaned over and kissed John on the cheek. This was the only happy moment for her since they’d arrived. They returned to reading.

What was little noted by either of you during your creation of the new universe was what went on in a remote region of the world. In Middle Asia, specifically in what was at one time or another called East Turkistan, Sinkiang, Uighuristan and, in its latest incarnation, Islamic East Turkistan. Ever since the tragic events that caused this message to you, we have asked ourselves how you two, Hands, and we could have missed what happened in what was known at the time as Uighuristan. You had no company offices in the region, and neither did we have institute offices or affiliates there. Our closest offices were in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Peking. We did have an affiliate institute in New Delhi, but this was on the other side of the Karakorem Mountains. In short, none of us had the intelligence we needed, and we were caught by surprise by what subsequently happened there, in China, and to us. We didn’t stretch our thinking enough. We never dreamed that such tragedy would be-

fall China, and have such horrible ultimate consequences for us.

So far I have given you no basis for intervention and changing the history of the new universe you are creating. Now I will. Since time presses on us, I leave the background to "The History and Geography of Uighuristan" included in this CD, and the two reports on Abul Sabah.

Sybil Bazyan, president of our Santa Barbara affiliate, will prepare a detailed chronology of events and people to put on the second CD.

Please read the two reports on Sabah, and then I will have some comments on them. In the reports you will read about what we all now agree was the most monstrously evil man to have ever existed.

John and Joy read that Abul was born in 1914, New Universe, and used his epileptic fits to create a fundamentalist Islamic sect that would eventually take over the country of Uighuristan, with himself as caliph, and that following that he gradually subverted and seized China in a coup he masterminded. It was an unbelievable story, worthy of the emperors and kings of ancient times.

The conclusion of the report was chilling:

In short, by 1994, with his hidden nuclear weapons and in control of the most populous country in the world, he was the most powerful ruler ever seen in history.

He was ready to take over the world.

When they finished reading this, Joy noticed that John's brow was deeply furrowed, his lips pulled down at both ends. She asked him, "Do you have any knowledge about those events in Uighuristan?"

He didn't raise his eyes from the screen. "No, and the report even used the word 'horrible.' I have no idea what went on."

They now turned to Lora's conclusion on the reports:

From these reports, what do I conclude about Abul Sabah that may guide your relations with him or strategy

toward him? He is ruthless. He is patient. He is brilliant. He is supremely capable. He is charismatic. He is ambitious for power. And he has inspired the dedicated loyalty of those around him.

“What time is it?” Joy asked.

John looked at his pocket watch and replied, “It’s 5:38. We’ve got time before we see our visitors. What do you think of our clever young boy, Abul Sabah?”

Joy thought for a moment before replying. “He is amazing. We’ve seen other men in the twentieth century with that kind of ability to move masses, although not by using epileptic fits and hallucinations, if that’s what they were. Hitler and Lenin had that ability and charisma, for example, as did Juan Peron of Argentina, and Mahatma Gandhi of India. You know, in our history of the old universe, I don’t remember this Sabah existing. What say you, my historian? Had you heard of him?”

Dumb question, she realized. This is not a happy moment for my historian.

“Let’s see,” John replied, thinking aloud, “I must say that, like most Western historians, I don’t know much about Middle Asia, or Sinkiang of China. With Sun Yat-sen’s revolution in 1911, Sinkiang, or what I knew as East Turkistan, did achieve autonomy, if not in practice independence, and set up their own republic in 1920. Twice the Nationalist government of China under Chiang Kai-shek tried to subdue them but failed. After the Nationalists lost the mainland to the communists under Mao Tse-tung in 1949, Mao sent a huge army into Sinkiang and reannexed the country. The communists renamed it the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.”

“Wow, I’m impressed,” Joy exclaimed with a smile.

Ignoring her, John continued. “There was nothing autonomous about it, of course. The Uighurs continued to rebel against the Chinese up to the time we left the old universe, and there were frequent massacres carried out there by the Chinese as a result.”

“So, love, I guess he must have been born and had his fits in the old universe as well, but they either amounted to nothing or he was killed under the different political and religious conditions. Yes, I guess whatever we did in this new universe made it possible for him to live, proselytize, and capture a country. We are going to have to study all this once we get settled.”

John was quick to respond with, “Well, we don’t need to study

more to know one thing: democracies cannot ever let down their guard when there are tyrants around.”

He thought for a moment. “You know, these events probably will take place after we have died of old age, or are too frail to do anything. This is now 1906; I’m twenty-six to your twenty-five. By 1960 we will be about eighty years old. We’ve got to deal with this while we are still young and healthy, and leave this message to our successors.”

Again their situation hit her. “I can’t believe that 2002, the year that we left just a few hours ago—a few *hours*, darling!—is so incredibly far in the future that we won’t even live to see that year again.”

“I haven’t absorbed it either,” John replied. “Maybe when we get out on the street and see the horses and all the buggies, and the women with long dresses and corsets, and men wearing Derby or Fedora hats, we’ll feel more like we’re here. Let’s continue reading the message.”

As we watched from afar, Joy and John, you can easily guess what we intended to do. We were by this time the largest privately funded institute in the world. We were richer than all but the top nineteen countries in the world. And through our secret conversion of the 2002 technology you left us, we were always developing new technology for the 1970s, ’80s and ’90s that would bring in new funds. Our game plan was your game plan.

We tried to use our funds at first to help those committed to returning democracy to China, but many democratic leaders had been arrested and the rest were scared and dispirited. So we tried to determine who the pivot figures were at the middle levels of the regime, particularly those in the security police and military, that we could subvert. We made several such contacts, and successfully recruited a few agents whose own contacts reached high up among the ruling echelons. But this was slow, and our major difficulty was that we had no road map of who would do what to whom, and when, as you had with your Old Universe chronology.

All this is introduction. The rest is so evil that it dwarfs any other historical evil as a massacre of thousands does a single murder.

On October 10, 1994, we decided to sleep in before heading to our Institute in downtown Manhattan. After we got up, we had made . . .

Joy and John were so utterly focused on the laptop screen, an elephant could have walked by the tent at that moment and they would not have noticed. Unconsciously, Joy leaned forward to read.

. . . . We found out later that not only were Manhattan and our Institute destroyed by a nuclear bomb, but Washington, D.C. was also obliterated. Central London, Berlin, Paris, and Moscow were similarly wiped out, along with our affiliated institutes in each city.

Joy jerked her hand to her mouth and screamed through it, “Oh my God, I don’t believe it! Nuclear bombs in so many cities? My God, it’s like our old universe. No. It’s worse. While atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during world War II, that was it. No nuclear bombs were ever exploded in or above a city again.” Her voice trailed off. “Never . . . again”

John sat staring at the screen in disbelief. He looked nauseated. He pounded his fist on his knee, his face lined with emotional pain.

Joy’s thoughts writhed with the horrible scale of this human catastrophe. She trembled all over. But like John, she couldn’t take her eyes away from the screen. Like a drug addict that must have more, ever more, no matter the physical cost and pain, she was driven to read on.

They soon got to the part where Sybil estimated that 1.75 to two billion people were killed or went missing in the nuclear attacks.

“Oh God,” Joy moaned. She finally was able to rip her eyes from the screen. She put a shaking hand on John’s shoulder and cried, “My God, John, all those poor people. I can’t believe it. That’s more killed than in all the wars, democides, and famines in the twentieth century of our old universe. In all history.”

John covered his eyes with his hand. He twisted away from the screen, dropped his hand and stared down at it as though it had turned into a rotting fish. His face looked sallow in the suffused light from the screen and lantern. His lips trembled. Joy could smell his sweat even over the stench in the warehouse. “Holy Mother of God.” His voice broke. “I can’t believe this either. All those people murdered by the decision of *one man*.”

Joy’s face contorted; her lips were barely able to twist around the words: “I don’t have words for this evil.” She tasted blood where she had bitten her inner lip.

The deadly understanding of what this all meant slowly loosened the paralysis grief held on her mind, and the words exploded out of her

mouth. “We came here to carry out our great mission to foster democracy and intervene to prevent war and democide.” Each word felt like a knife thrust into her emotions. “We failed. Utterly. We—I—created a world worse than what we left.”

Her voice rose to a wail. “I gave up my mother to come to this primitive year to . . . *fail*.”

As they sat in the dark warehouse next to their supply and equipment capsules, Joy began to shake even more. She remembered her mother’s anguished face as she pushed them into the capsule to be gone from her forever. Just a few hours ago. For nothing. And there was no way back. They were stuck here.

She couldn’t stand the sense of failure. She didn’t want this world now.

I am ashamed of what we—I—did . . . No, what I will do.

So ashamed that she began to sweat. Each beat of her heart shook her body and pounded in her ears like a drum. Her emotions beat on her thoughts and they submitted. She was a perfectly trained warrior and, when threatened by stress or danger, she could control and calm herself. But not now. Not when faced with such humiliation and disgrace.

She threw off the blanket, rolled out of the tent, and stood, shuddering and swaying, breathing heavily. Shame made her reel. Her head pounded with a tension headache and she tasted vomit. Somehow, the deep, unconscious part of her mind instructed her body what to do, and then it disengaged itself. It knew it was gone forever.

Her body straightened. It moved toward the weapons capsule and automatically keyed in the code, opened the door, thumbed off the self-destruct mechanism, and reached for her tactical knife. It felt good in her hand—just right, the perfect answer. It would end dishonor.

She couldn’t wait. She raised it to her throat to slice her carotid artery open. It was the female warrior’s way, the Heavenly Cut.

Joy was almost knocked off her feet as a rough hand grabbed her arm and another the hand holding the knife. Reflexively, she lowered her body, got her legs into the proper center of gravity, seized the arm, rotated to her left, and threw the assailant over her shoulder. He landed hard on the floor as she twisted the knife from his grip.

She straightened, ready again to do what she must.

“*JOY! No!*” John screamed at her from the floor. “No, Joy. Don’t. There’s a way out. You can beat it.”

From somewhere deeper than her trained instincts, something gained enough control of her mouth to spit back at him, “We failed. The Society failed. The Institute failed. *I failed*. I can’t stand it.”

Devastating images flooded her mind—cities wiped out by nuclear bombs; horribly mutilated bodies; the wounded and dying; the hopeless refugees. Her body allowed a single thought: *All this was our—my—creation in this new universe!*

Her mouth shrieked, “I wanna die.”

“Baby, listen,” John pleaded as she raised the knife one last time to make the cut. Then he bellowed with all the power of his lungs, “*LISTEN TO ME, GODDAM IT.*”

No one had ever yelled at her like that. Never. She hesitated with the knife near her neck. Her mind was stirring again. But it was not enough.

In a voice intermixed with love and panic, John threw words at her in a jumble. “WE change it. The future. We created Lora’s future. We didn’t know about Sabah. Now, now we do! We can save all those lives. We create a third universe. Think, Joy. *A third universe.*”

In a voice so miserable Joy didn’t recognize it as her own, her tongue countered with, “How can we fight Sabah, with all his power? Just you and me?”

“We kill him when he’s a baby or a little boy. We kill him before he has any power. Before anyone but his parents care.”

He couldn’t reach her dead mind.

She held the knife almost touching her pulsing artery. She wanted the bliss of death—the escape from shame, just a second away. There was a ritual to this, and her warrior instincts demanded that she do it just right. She properly oriented the blade for the cut.

John had to know he could never take a knife away from her. But as broken up as Joy was, he did the perfect thing. In one motion, so fast he caught her by surprise, he leaped up and slapped her face so hard he knocked her head to the side—away from the blade. She almost fell.

John was a kind and decent man, she believed in her heart. He would never strike a woman, or anyone for that matter, unless defending himself. That he would hit her, and so hard, shocked her to the core, to her innermost love for him. He shocked her mind into working again.

Joy’s body must have known she needed it, for it didn’t reflexively strike a defensive chop or kick back at him.

Joy’s cheek smarted, and her eyes teared from the slap. She stood with her hands hanging loosely, one now barely holding onto the knife. She felt as if an hour had passed, but it must have been no more than seconds. She slowly turned her head to look at John, and brought her

free hand up to touch her hot and swelling cheek.

John stared at her, his eyes pleading, tears coursing down his cheeks.

And as her mind began to work, he gently took the knife from her hand and threw it into the capsule. He put his arms around her and held her hard against his body. Slowly, as if coming out of a long sleep, she put her arms around him. They held each other tight, their heads on each other's shoulders, and John started to sob with what only could be relief.

She was still too devastated to cry. Although functioning again, her mind felt weighed down with lead. It was still overwhelmed, in the eye of an emotional storm she could not release.

She whispered huskily, "Let's simply do nothing and make a good life for ourselves. Let's get married and adopt children. We'd never have to work, with the money we have, and we could buy a nice house and travel the world and . . ." She was babbling.

John stopped sobbing, drew in several deep breaths, rubbed the tears from his face onto her shoulder, and gently pushed her away. He held her by the shoulders at an arms' distance, looking into her eyes. In a voice filled love and compassion, he said, "Sweetheart, baby, we can do it. We can prevent this. Together. It has to be you and me. I can't do it alone."

He did it! she realized suddenly. Her mind was functioning again. Her heart seemed to stop for seconds as she looked at him, staggered by the thought. She grabbed it with her mental hands and squeezed it to her. She centered on it, as though it were a lifeboat in a storm-tossed sea. "Of course, we've got the power. We don't have to fail. Yes, you're right."

Joy let out a long, tremulous breath. Her mind cleared, as a fresh breeze clears away a fog. She thrust out her chin and stood straighter. *Yes, yes, of course. My shame is now a challenge. We can do it. This is a fight worthy of a warrior and her partner. And my love has saved my life and my soul.*

She threw herself into his arms and kissed his lips, his wet eyes, his hands. Suddenly she stopped as she realized again the awful immensity of their new task. "We can do it. Yes, we can. We must. Even if it means our deaths."

She took several more deep breaths and exhaled slowly to calm herself. Now it worked. She was back in control. She took his hand in hers and kissed it again, then led him back to the laptop screen. She was emotionally and physically exhausted by all that had transpired since their training session only hours ago, a universe away, and two life-

times in the future. But still, she had to keep reading. It was impossible not to.

They cried all over again when they read about Lora and Mark's terminal radiation poisoning. And then they came to the end of Lora's message.

You now have it all. Obviously, we succeeded in getting this information to you. So, our darling Joy and John, our very best wishes and all our hopes are now with you. We know you won't fail.

We have lived a good life and have no personal regrets about our coming deaths. Like yours, our lives have been a meld of our deepest love for each other and our duty to mankind. We gain solace from the knowledge that we will die together hand in hand, and so travel as one to whatever future the universe holds for us after death. We hope that Spunky will be with us. We knew the little blind boy for such a short time.

Our deepest sympathies go out to all the millions already dead in this war, and we are profoundly sad over what may well be the end of this Institute and your legacy. We hope and pray that you can prevent this from happening in a third universe.

*With our deepest love
Lora Joy and Mark John*

February 11, 1995

Note from Sybil Bazyan:

I am adding this note to the CD just before sending this capsule to you. Had you known Lora and Mark, you would have loved them, and shared my pride in them. Although they never met you, they studied all they could about you, and heard fabulous stories about you at their grandfathers' knees. They truly loved you both.

They died in each other's arms two weeks ago, as they wanted. We know that, hand in hand, they have now gone on to whatever heaven awaits them.

They died without knowing that we had finally perfected our time machine so that we could send this capsule to you, although just before their deaths, we as-

sured them we would be able to do so.

We have been warned by our contacts that, at the orders of the local Chinese “ambassador” in Los Angeles, state police are headed for our Institute in order to take it over and prevent the destruction of any equipment or scientific documents. We have been unable to hide more than a small amount of our equipment, and nothing regarding our time machine. As soon as we send this, we will set the timer on explosives placed throughout the Institute and evacuate it before setting them off.

I join Lora and Mark in praying for your success. God be with you.

It is my lifelong regret that I never met you, but I know with all my heart that I still can say sincerely,

*With my love,
Sybil*

Joy went through the motions without thinking. She ejected the CD and carefully put it into its case, and put the case in the small capsule. She turned off the laptop computer and closed the lid. She sat there looking down at the laptop, not seeing it, overwhelmed by what she had read, still utterly exhausted by her near suicide. She could not move or cry any longer. She could not even look at John, whose heavy breathing was the only sound in the warehouse. She didn't know how long they sat there, trying to absorb and digest all they had read. Occasionally, she rubbed her cheek, still smarting from his slap. Idly, she hoped he'd left a mark.

I will bear it proudly, as a sign of his love and our new mission.

Finally John said, almost in a growl, “Now we have work to do.”

That broke her spell. “It will be light outside soon,” she responded. “I'm so drained by all that's happened that I have to sleep. But we were told we'll soon have visitors. Can you believe it, dearest? Two of them will be the grandfathers of Lora and Mark. Will you wake me up when they come? I'm exhausted.”

She didn't fall asleep right away. She heard John making a noise by the back door of the warehouse. He soon put another blanket over her and squeezed in beside her. Judging by his breathing, he actually fell asleep before she did.

Her last thought was, *When our visitors wake us up, it will be a third universe.*

Chapter 7

Joy

November 14, 1906, Third Universe

Some noise disturbed her sleep, and Joy woke with a start. She felt John close to her, as usual, since she had moved into his room at the Society's scientific headquarters. It had all been a nightmare, a god-awful nightmare stemming, she knew, from her basic fear of shame.

"Phew," Joy sighed with relief, and started to stretch.

She realized suddenly that they were in a tent, and the air stank. Joy looked around. *Damn, it wasn't a dream.*

The sound she had heard was falling bottles. John had piled them on the empty boxes he stacked against the back door, so they would be alerted when their three visitors entered.

John also had been awakened, and they both looked out of the tent. Yes, it was the visitors they'd been promised.

Three young men carrying boxes looked in bewilderment at the fallen bottles as they came in. Then they saw the tent. They stopped in surprise, and seemed even more amazed when John crawled out of the tent. While they talked excitedly among themselves, Joy climbed out of the tent and stood next to John. Her body had needed that nap; she felt better. She was still dressed in her karate practice clothes, with her hair in a pigtail and her red headband across her forehead.

After several minutes, the three guys slowly approached them, the tall man in the lead.

"What are you doing here?" he asked them. He didn't sound friendly.

John answered, "This is our warehouse. What are *you* doing here?"

"You own this?" the guy asked, still sounding a little belligerent.

"Yes," John replied in pleasant voice.

"I don't believe you," one of the men who had been hanging back challenged.

John looked at them calmly. Waving at the capsules behind him, he

said, "I bet you tried to get into our capsules. I'll tell you what. Will you believe me if I open a capsule and thus show you that they are ours?"

The third man, who had yet to speak, pointed out, "We took a sledgehammer to them and didn't make a dent. Tried everything."

Joy watched the men closely, just in case they thought of attacking. John went over to the nearest capsule and, with his back to the strangers, punched in the code, opened the door, and deactivated the self-destruct mechanism. Among other things, this capsule contained some of their money, which had been divided up among all the capsules for safety. With his back still to the men, John took out a roll of money and put it in his pocket. He turned around and looked at the surprised faces of the three men.

"Now," John said, "you are in our warehouse. Have you been living here?"

"Yes," the big man admitted. "We're sorry to trespass in your place. We've no jobs and no place to live, since the fire."

John asked for their names. They were Adolph Docker—"Folks call me Dolphy"—Sal Garcia, and the tall man was Hands (Alex) Reeves. John asked the three of them a number of questions about their backgrounds and then, after a brief description of the Tor Import and Export Company John said he was setting up in San Francisco, he surprised them by offering them jobs for a good wage: two dollars per eight-hour day, which was about thirty-eight dollars a day in year 2002 money, and higher than the average wage for the time, considering the norm was a ten-hour day. They accepted, of course.

They had yet to say something to Joy, although she kept getting glances from them. While John was talking to Sal, she caught Dolphy staring at her, open-mouthed. Finally Dolphy pointed his thumb at her and asked John, "Who's the Chink?"

Before John could say a word, Joy lost it. The accumulated stress of losing her mother, what they had gone through to get here, reading about the nuclear horror suffered by Lora and Mark and the democracies, and her near suicide made her snap. She reached Dolphy in three steps, grabbed his shirt, and threw him to the floor. As he lay there, dumbfounded, she put her foot on his chest and said sweetly, "Move, and I'll break your arm."

John was about to step over to Joy to protect her back, but she motioned for him to stop. She placed her hands on her hips, put her weight on her foot as she leaned over Dolphy, and asked even more sweetly, "What did you call me?"

"You're a Chink, ain't you?"

“Now you know, Mr. Docker, where I come from, that is a very bad word. You have insulted me. You are now working for Mr. Banks’ company, as I am, and you will apologize. You will call me Miss Phim. Let me hear it.”

John’s eyes were twinkling. The other two guys smirked.

“The hell I will,” Dolphy said, and tried to push Joy’s foot off his chest with his hand.

Joy stood back and let him get up, and offered amiably, “If I throw you three times in a row, will you apologize and call me Miss Phim? And if you throw me even once, well, you can call me what you like. Okay?”

Dolphy eyed her up and down, looking as if he’d been offered sex if he could answer whether a dog or a cat barked. His face cleared, and he shook his head. “Nah, you’re a woman. I don’t want to hurt you. It ain’t right.” He looked sad at the lost opportunity, however.

Joy took two steps over to him and pushed him hard on the shoulder. “Coward, eh? Afraid of little me?” She pushed his shoulder again. “Don’t want your friends see you lose, huh? What a coward. I bet you’re not afraid to take on little boys, howev—”

Grunting, he leaped at her, his arms reaching out to grasp her and throw her down. Joy just twisted inside his right arm, jerked his arm in his direction of motion, hooked her foot around his ankle, and friend gravity did the rest.

Dolphy rolled to a standing position more easily than she thought he could, and better than John had, for the first month of his training. Furious, he yelled, “Oh no, that doesn’t count. You tripped me.”

“Fine,” she replied.

His anger didn’t get in the way of his new caution. He assumed a wrestler’s crouch and circled her, arms bent toward her as though circling a barrel. It didn’t matter. She’d been taught how to handle this approach even before she was a teenager. She did a side snap kick with her right foot to his chest, and he flew backwards. He couldn’t roll so easily out of that one, but he still was able to do a flip jump to regain his feet.

His anger was gone. She thought at first he was grimacing. No, he was smiling.

As he adopted a hunched-over stance, almost hugging the floor with his hands out about a foot in front of his chest, she kept her eyes on his—eyes are the message board of a fighter—and used her peripheral vision.

He was waiting for Joy to attack this time.

So she stood facing him, her left leg slightly in front, looking relaxed in her unorthodox hour glass stance, her hands loosely at her side, as though waiting in line for a movie ticket. She read the confusion in his eyes and, faster than his brain could track, she faked left and right at an angle toward him and left to his side to get a wrist lock and took him down backwards.

No one made a sound as he slowly rose, holding his wrist, obviously in some pain. With surprising graciousness, he tilted his head toward her, and said. "I did some wrestling for money. You're good. Are you really a woman? I don't believe it."

Sal smiled broadly. "I want proof."

John chuckled and Dolphy and Hands reddened.

Joy was happy with the outcome. She held out her right hand to Dolphy, and at first he didn't know what to do with it. Women of this age did not shake hands.

"She wants to shake your hand," John gently pointed out.

Dolphy smiled, rubbed his hand on his trousers, and firmly shook her hand while telling her, "I'm sorry I called you . . . that, Miss Phim. I'm glad to meetcha."

"My pleasure," she said, truly pleased.

John came over and put his hand on her shoulder. He said loud enough for all three of the guys to hear, "Miss Phim is my assistant and translator. I will attest to her womanhood." When they smirked and Joy glared at him, John reddened and blurted, "I mean to say that I have seen her in dresses. You are to treat her with the same respect you treat me. Otherwise," and he chuckled, "she'll break your arms."

The three guys smiled at this, even Dolphy, who was rubbing his aching shoulder.

Joy stepped close to John and whispered that she wanted a private word with him.

"Sit down and relax for a few minutes while we get some stuff from our capsules," he told the guys, then led Joy over to the nearest capsule and asked her, "Is this the woodshed, where I'm going to be spanked for my slip?"

She laughed. "No, dearest. What they don't find out now about us, they'll find out soon enough. Anyway, if they know we're lovers, it will save me from their advances." *And I won't have to suffer your jealousy*, she thought, then added, "Anyway, what I wanted to ask was whether you think we can trust them. I know things worked out with them in the Second Universe, since Lora and Mark were the grandchil-

dren of Dolphy and Hands. But right now they are untamed, so to speak. They have no home, no close relatives, and they've been stealing to live. We don't know if they're presently dangerous when our backs are turned. Not even I can always be prepared for a knife in the back." She smiled demurely.

"Well, what choice do we have?"

She made her suggestion to him, and he agreed, and they looked for the medical supplies in the capsule next to them. When she had everything prepared, they returned to the guys, who were watching curiously.

"Fellows," John said, "you're now working for us, and I have to protect the health of all our employees. So, my assistant will have to inoculate you for several diseases."

"Like what?" Sal asked.

Joy lied, "Diphtheria and small pox." She had no idea what one could inoculate against in 1906.

She approached them holding in one hand three swipe pads dampened with alcohol and three hypodermic needles, and in the other a syringe filled with a harmless sterile solution. She inserted a new needle into the syringe, wiped a spot sterile on Dolphy's arm, and plunged the needle into his arm. Carefully changing the needle each time, she repeated the procedure with Hands and Sal.

"Now," John said, "listen to me carefully. Miss Phim has given each of you a slow-acting poison. You'll be protected against it if we give you an antidote once a month. Each antidote will have a new infusion of poison, for which you will need another antidote the next month. This is a special poison made in China. It is unknown here, so don't bother searching for the antidote."

The guys looked sick. Hands yelled, "Why did you do this? We didn't do anything to you."

John answered, "It's simply to keep you honest while you work for us. Anytime you want to quit, or you get fired, we will give you the antidote without any new poison. You understand?"

They looked very unhappy, but nodded.

"When you've proven your loyalty, I end the poison."

John looked at his pocket watch and saw that it was mid-morning. "Okay, fellows," he said, "Now you start earning your income. We came straight here from the train station, and don't even have a place to live. How about taking us to a hotel where we can get rooms? But first," he added, "we have to get into some decent clothes. Turn around, relax, and look at the opposite wall while we change."

Joy and John retrieved from the appropriate capsule their period

clothes, and the toiletry bags that the Society had thoughtfully prepared for them. They went behind the capsule to change.

John put on all-wool, gray, pinstripe pants, black boots, and a long-sleeved, white madras shirt with separate linen collar. Shaking his head, he put the fashionable maroon bow tie around the collar. He added a blue, diagonally worsted coat, and pulled a cocky looking Fedora down over his carrot-colored hair. Unruly wisps of orange hair stuck out from beneath the hat, contrasting with its gray felt—no two colors an artist would put next to each other, except with a gun to his head.

As Joy dressed she kept chuckling at the way John looked, and had to hold back her laughter. She had to wear what was called a “lady’s” white satin waist, really a shirt, with wide collars held tight at the throat with an imitation silk bow. She tucked the shirt into a blue “short lady’s” mixed cotton and wool walking skirt with flounced bottom. It ended just above her *awful*, she thought, pointed, flat-heeled shoes. No corset. She would go naked first.

She asked John to hold the mirror from their capsule for her as she undid her pigtail and, with a dozen pins, redid her hair into a large bun on top of her head. She put on a lady’s cloth cape and finally, the *pièce de résistance*—a wide-brimmed hat with folded lace, imitation flowers, and white egret feathers sticking out at the side. What astounded her about all these clothes was that the whole outfit would have cost about \$6.00, and marked her as middle class.

Finally she dabbed some stylish light red lipstick on—for decades “decent” women had worn no makeup, but that was now changing—and heavily powdered the scar that ran from her cheek to her chin. It was still noticeable, but not as stark against her light olive skin.

John put the mirror away. He avoided looking at her. He tried to whistle some off-key tune, but his red face gave him away.

“You find something funny, John?”

She shouldn’t have asked. Like water suddenly bursting through a dam, a loud guffaw burst out of him, followed by a few cackling chuckles. She had been holding in her own laughter about the way he looked, and finally laughed with him.

When they regained their composure, Joy pointed out, “The guys will know we saw each other undressing. So your slip will be verified in their minds.”

He shrugged. “They’ll just have to envy me, that’s all.”

Before they stepped out from behind the capsule, John gave her a

final look over, idly pointed down at her stomach with bent wrist, and asked, "Where's your corset? Do you want your stomach bouncing indecently around like shaken Jell-O?"

Joy just put her hand on her hip, tilted her head, and glared askance at him. It didn't work. Her towering hat started to slide off her head and she had to put up one hand to hold it in place. It ruined the effect.

"My God," he exclaimed, "I love that . . . look."

"What look?" she asked as she punched him in the shoulder. She wagged her finger. "One more comment like that about a corset, and you'll have to cut a hole in your hat to eat."

John leaned away in mock fright and put up his hands as if to ward her off. She had to smile with him.

Joy was happy to return to their usual banter. And they'd had their first laughs since their arrival. She felt better. Much better. She was ready for . . . their third universe. *Thanks, my love*, she thought. *I owe you so much.*

Even fully dressed in his suit, John shivered in the damp San Francisco air. He pulled his Oxford gray wool topcoat out of the capsule, and asked Joy, "Aren't you cold?"

"What? In all these stupid clothes? Anyway, everybody knows men are the weaker sex."

John poked her in the stomach. "It's all due to the tons of female fat," he said.

"You have a death wish, John?" she responded, laughing, as she pulled out a beige, double-breasted box coat to hold over her arm.

For the moment, they forgot the horror they'd learned of in the message, and the possibly lethal challenge of their mission. They nodded to each other, grinning, and nonchalantly stepped from behind the capsule to rejoin the guys, who still had their backs turned. They were talking about what they were going to do with their sudden income.

"We're here," John said.

The guys stopped talking, turned around, and after a glance at John, they stared at Joy.

Finally she had to wave her hand in front of them and say, "Hello, there. Is my ankle showing?"

Three faces reddened, and Hands stuttered, "You're beautiful."

"Thanks," she responded, happy that someone liked her outfit. She was going to say, "That's nice of you," when John rudely interrupted to insist they get going.

Dolphy looked sharply at him, then asked, "Where are we going?"

John replied, “You guys are going to find us a hotel room. That’s your first job for us.”

“What kind of hotel do you want?” Hands asked.

“Middle expensive. Someplace where small businessmen stay when they come here for a short while.”

“Ah. How about the Fairfax?” Dolphy asked, looking at Hands.

Hands answered, “When I was playing minor-league baseball for the San Francisco Seals, that’s one of the hotels where I stayed. It’s okay. It’s four dollars a night. That alright?”

“Let’s go,” John replied.

“Wait a moment,” Joy said, “I think we need to take some stuff with us.”

John looked at her a moment, then his brows rose as he remembered. He went to the supply capsule, reopened it, and brought out a large briefcase; he also took out more money, she guessed. He clambered into the tent and put their laptop computer, notepaper, the two CDs, and the DVD into the briefcase, then came out and motioned to the warehouse’s side entrance. “All set.”

As Joy walked toward the door, she could not help thinking, *It’s amazing how much we filled our first morning here—sobbing hysterics, horrible discoveries, near suicide, humor and smiles, and a taste of John’s jealousy. I can’t imagine what more is to come before this day is done.*

They stepped out into the alley next to the warehouse and walked down it to 8th Street. The stench of horse manure and urine immediately struck Joy, and pesky flies were everywhere.

There was not much traffic. The street seemed to be used mainly by commercial traffic from the southern Potrero, Excelsior, and Bayview districts on their way via Hooper and 7th Streets to the downtown financial and market center of the city. Nonetheless, horses and wagons had left 8th Street rutted and potholed. A team of two horses pulling a wagon piled high with covered goods passed another one with a similar team pulling a lumber wagon in the opposite direction. A raised boardwalk ran along both sides of the street. It was in sad condition, with broken and rotted boards; here and there, pieces of the broken boards stuck up out of the earth below.

Joy was surprised. *Apparently there is no such thing as suing the city government for injury in this age. Pity. But, maybe not.*

Hands led them south to Wisconsin Street on the decrepit boardwalk, past a building partly destroyed by the great San Francisco earthquake, and over another two blocks west on 16th Street. They fi-

nally came to a concrete sidewalk and, another block over, they arrived at a three-story hotel near the intersection with Rhode Island Street. The hotel had a large marquee in front with a vertical sign reading *Fairfax Hotel*.

They entered through the hotel's two large front doors, and stepped into a spacious, traditional Victorian lobby with all its gaudy decorations, colors, artificial plants, cushiony blue velvets and Versailles chairs—even two spittoons: one by the foot railing at the registration desk, and the other underneath a potted MacArthur palm. A case of complimentary cigars rested at one end of the desk. The place smelled stuffy, heavy with dust, engrained cigar smoke, and something else Joy recognized with surprise—unwashed bodies.

Joy immediately attracted attention. Two older gentlemen sitting in the easy chairs put down their newspapers and stared at her. A fur-collared woman standing with a bearded man near the heavily carpeted stairs gave her a dirty look.

Twitching his nose, John, with Joy beside him, strolled up to the reception desk. He asked for two rooms next to each other.

Clearly from central casting, the man behind the desk could never be mistaken for anything but a hotel receptionist. He asked, "For whom are these rooms . . ." He added a belated "sir?" that made it sound like a slur.

"For my assistant and me," John responded, waving his hand in Joy's direction.

Arrogantly, the clerk pointed out, "We don't rent rooms to Orientals."

Joy was ready to walk out and find a hotel where she would be accepted, when Hands, who had remained close by, leaned over the counter, grabbed the clerk by the shirt, and hissed, "You will now. She is a friend of ours."

John gently removed Hand's hand from the clerks' shirt, and asked the thoroughly frightened man, "Is this hotel policy?"

He squeaked, "It's the rule. I only work here."

Still calm, John asked, "Where is your boss?"

"That's Mr. Foster. He owns the hotel. He's in the office," the clerk stammered, pointing to the rear.

John changed his tone. He now commanded, "Take me to him."

Enough, Joy immediately thought. She didn't want John beating up on somebody, their first day here. She put her hand on his arm and said, "This isn't necessary. We can just go to another hotel."

He didn't respond. He disappeared into the back with the clerk, who returned alone a few moments later. Joy and the guys waited.

Fifteen minutes passed.

Joy just stood where she was, although she was dying to get her ugly pointed shoes off her feet, or at least sit down. One skinny old man with a ruddy complexion and a goatee who was obviously color blind—he wore a yellow silk coat with green pants—approached her and asked, smiling, “Hello chickie, are you waiting for someone to come along?”

A dozen clever answers jumbled in Joy’s mind, but before she could unscramble them and pick the best, she realized that he was simply doing what came naturally for men of this age and place when he saw a young Asian woman standing alone in a hotel lobby.

She didn’t have to say anything. Sal rushed up with the other guys behind him. He jabbed his finger at the old man’s chest and told him, “Leave her alone. She is a decent lady.”

The man bowed to Joy and said, “I’m terribly sorry. Forgive me.” At her nod, he hastened out of the hotel.

More minutes went by and still John didn’t return. The three guys were getting restless. Joy thought she soon would have to restrain them from going into the rear to see if he needed help. Finally John emerged from the office with Foster, a middle-aged, bulbous nosed, heavysset man who was constantly moving his hands.

Foster strode up to the clerk and, waving his hand at John, told him, “Meet your new boss. He now owns the hotel. I’m your new manager.”

John stepped up to the clerk and said evenly, “I have changed hotel policy. You now accept Orientals.” Joy was sure his eyes twinkled. John stepped around the counter to rejoin Joy, and asked the clerk, “Do you have two rooms side by side for my assistant and me?”

Looking like he was about to faint, the clerk responded, “Yes sir. Do you want the six or the four dollar rooms?”

Foster waved his hands at the clerk and whispered, “He now owns the hotel, you idiot.”

Without another word, the clerk reached into the narrow mail slots behind him and pulled out the keys to two rooms and gave them to John. He shoved the register in his direction. The manager formed rapid circles and figure eights in the air with his hands and barked, “He doesn’t have to register. Don’t you get it yet? He *owns* the hotel.”

All this time, the three guys just stood by as though watching some strange African dance. Now, when John turned to them with the keys in his hand, they looked at him in amazement.

“Oh, I forgot,” John said. “You three don’t have a place to live.” He turned back to the clerk and said with a smile, “Please put my three employees up in your best rooms.”

The clerk quickly twisted around and again reached into the mailboxes. He pulled out three keys, which he handed to John. In turn, John handed them to Hands, Dolphy, and Sal, and said, "Here, the rooms are free. Please meet us in the hotel dining room for dinner at 6 p.m."

As the guys turned to go up the stairs, Hands gave John a little salute.

John and Joy also headed for the stairs. Joy hadn't said a word and didn't until they climbed the one flight of stairs and entered John's room. She turned to face him and waved her finger under his nose for emphasis as she asked, "What are you doing?" Her voice rose ten decibels on the last word.

She told him what he was doing. "That was a total waste of money for no good purpose. Prejudice like that exists everywhere in this age. Just roll with it, John. We could have found another hotel that would have accepted me."

John opened his mouth to defend himself, but she was not to be stopped. "We have more important things to do than buy hotels on a whim. Jesus, all that money so that we could have two rooms." She was running down. He just waited. "How much did you pay for this hotel?"

"Sixty-nine thousand dollars."

"What? You spent \$69,000 to get two rooms for maybe a week or so? I read that a good house only costs about \$4,500. Let me see . . ." She took out of her purse her pocket calculator shaped like a bracelet and opened a little display and numerical pad with her thumb. "Holy Christ, John, that's about 1.3 million 2002 dollars. That's stupid. You were robbed."

Joy put both hands on her hips and leaned forward to stare up at him. Not easy, since she had to tip the brim of her hat back to look up at his four additional inches. She suspected she looked comical. *No matter. This is truth to height.*

Like a truck rolling downhill without its brakes, she rattled on. "Isn't that a little bit expensive? We're going to run into this prejudice wherever we go in this age. You've got to get used to it. Think of us as being on a safari into the most primitive past."

John did not respond. She rolled to a stop. She clamped her hands down harder on her hips and almost yelled, "Well?"

John hadn't moved and just looked at her with those little tolerant dimples at the corners of his mouth. She'd warned him she was going to surgically remove them with her fingernails someday. After a few moments of silence, he said, "Yes, my beautiful Chink."

Joy's mouth dropped open in shock. She was just about to turn him

into an instant block of ice with her stare when she remembered that was what Dolphy had called her. He was playing with her. She broke up. She doubled over in laughter, her towering hat tumbling to the floor. She managed to make it to the bed and fell onto it, holding her stomach. “Bastard.” She could hardly get the word out as he fell laughing next to her.

Once he got his breath back, and with Joy now calmed down and chuckling, he pointed out, “We will need a hotel for our visitors. Remember, we will be running a new import and export company and will have many tradesmen coming here to do business with us. It will be convenient to have a hotel of our own to put them in for a couple of days. Also, it already has been useful as a temporary place for our new employees to sleep. Consider it our first company purchase.” He gave her his “ain’t I clever” smile and added, “I paid Foster with our counterfeit money, which nobody will ever be able to detect without twenty-first century equipment. And in no time, we’ll make it up with real money on the stock market.”

What, is this so I’ll absorb some of his cleverness through osmosis? Joy thought as he hugged her tight. “You stink,” she exclaimed. “Let’s take a bath. You haven’t bathed since . . . yesterday? Let’s see. We got up at 5:30, bathed, did our jog and weights, ate, I valiantly tried to teach you karate, we got the emergency warning, were shoved into the time capsule about 10:30 a.m., got here about 2:30 a.m. local time without any real difference for us in body time, and it is now about 10:00 a.m. locally. That means we’ve been up twelve or thirteen hours. And you without a bath, with all we’ve gone through in all that time. No wonder you smell.”

John looked at her, surprised. “That’s all? Twelve hours? Incredible. I get up looking forward to a day of training in February, 2002, and here I am the same day—as far as my body is concerned—in a San Francisco hotel in 1906.”

“Yes, and body-wise, you still smell.”

He lifted her arm and stuck his nose into the pit of her underarm. He pulled back, wearing a gargoyle-like face. “Smells like a football locker room a month into summer practice.”

Joy kicked him off the bed. With a laugh, he got up and looked around the room. It was large, with a little alcove containing a stone-topped side table with a drawer and a large Imperial parlor lamp on top. A dark brown armchair sat nearby. A window hung with heavy reef curtains and a roller shade overlooked the marquee. Through it, John could see San Francisco Bay in the distance.

Joy was sprawled across the room's French double bed. Above it hung a large painting of a three-masted barque on a rough sea. Next to the bed was a two-drawer side table with another Imperial lamp. The usual chest of drawers was against one wall. Above it was a painting of San Francisco Bay with the fog rolling in. The room was surprisingly similar to hotel rooms in their old universe.

"You know," he said, "maybe there is a time independent mold in which all hotel rooms are made. But two exceptions. There is that old wooden telephone box on the wall next to the door. And there is no bathroom that I can see."

He went out the door and down the hallway. He came back smiling. "At the end of the hall there is a bathroom, bathtub, and hot water. Is that a miracle, or what? Shall we?"

Joy undressed, impatient at the time and wiggling it took, and found bath towels in the closet. She was just about to head out the door when he yelled at her, "You're naked!"

"I'm glad you still notice," she said, smiling. "And how come you ain't?"

"Here, put this around you." He tossed her an extra blanket. He finished undressing, except for his shirt, which he let hang over his thighs.

They headed down the hallway and into the bathroom. It was a large room with a high ceiling and a small, claw-footed, porcelain-over-sheet-metal bathtub, hardly big enough for both of them. The hot water took a long time to arrive, accompanied by thumps and gurgles in the pipes, and it ran rust-colored in the beginning, but once it was clear John let it begin to fill the tub.

They quickly forgot about it. John obviously got aroused as she stood naked before him, waiting for the tub to fill, and that turned her on. They made love on the bath mat. No tricks, nothing extraordinary sexually, just slow, loving, and very fulfilling lovemaking. Their kisses and caresses were very special for Joy. She recognized them as their inauguration into this new world, and they helped clear away the residual horror from earlier in the morning. Somehow, somewhere in the middle of it, John remembered to turn off the water.

Their bathwater had cooled and they had to reheat it when they were finally ready for their bath. While they waited, they sat on the edge of the tub, just hugging and immersing themselves in each other's presence. Joy almost regretted washing off the residue of their lovemaking, but as they washed each other's bodies, she got aroused once more, and easily put John in the mood with her lips. Even as limber as

she was, lovemaking in the tub was a logistics challenge, and even slower and more satisfying than it had been on the rug.

Not since the first day they had made love on the gym mat during a training session, back in their old universe, had their lovemaking been so satisfying. In spite of the environment, it had the flavor of a fully romantic evening. After everything that had happened during their first morning in this universe, she felt reborn in a way, and their lovemaking reflected that.

Joy could see from John's face and his unusual gentleness that he felt this also. She knew this as a woman comes to know her man intimately, although all he could say was, "I hope all that water spilled on the floor doesn't leak downstairs."

They dried each other off and Joy undid her hair so that she could fluff it dry with a towel. When she'd finished, without thinking, she opened the door and started down the hallway to John's room. He made a grab for her, but too late—she was already out the door when a young, well-dressed couple reached the top of the stairs, led by the hotel's one bellhop, carrying their suitcase.

Joy's long hair covered part of her breasts, but she was bare everywhere else. The woman's eyes opened wide and her hand flew to her mouth, unsuccessfully stifling a gasp. Her face turned sports car red.

The man with her smiled and, tipping his hat, said, "Hello," emphasizing the last syllable, and, "Good morning," also stressing the last word. Joy was sure he would have some explaining to do to his companion for the next week.

"Good morning, sir," Joy chirped as she passed.

Behind her, a semi-naked John stumbled as he tried to get his towel around his waist. The bellhop disappeared at that point, and she didn't know whether he fell down the stairs, fainted, or had gone in search of something to drink.

When she got to John's room, she flopped onto the bed howling with laughter, while he stood by her shaking feet, looking at her as though she were a spoiled child. But soon he couldn't help laughing, and joined her on the bed. He pulled her to him and they lay there chuckling until the exhaustion they had been ignoring caught up to them, and they fell asleep in each other's arms.

Joy woke up briefly when he got up and covered her with a blanket and slid under it himself. She sighed. *What a day, and it's not even over yet. Afternoon, here we come, the force of two.*

She laughed herself back to sleep.

Chapter 8

Hu Mingsheng

Sacramento, 1995, New Universe

*S*o much for the water treatment, thought Major Hu Mingsheng as he tossed the wet towel into a nearby pail. *She wants pain, she will get pain.*

Hu bent over the middle-aged American woman whose hands, legs, and head were strapped to the steel chair, and gripped her long index fingernail with his flat-nosed pliers. He watched her face as he pulled evenly and slowly. The woman screamed so shrilly that Major Hu thanked the noise plugs in each of his ears. When the nail came completely out, leaving a bloody trail and a flap of skin, the woman started keening. Her face was as white as plaster and twisted into such anguish that it tore at her facial muscles. Blood trickled down her chin from where she had bitten through her lip.

He dropped the painted fingernail into a pail, gripped another fingernail with the pliers, and waited. Soon she stopped keening, and quaked against the straps holding her as she sobbed.

Hu pushed a little button on his right earplug to open it to middle range frequencies while still filtering the high ones. He pulled open the woman's tightly clenched eyelid with his finger so that she could see him. He raised his eyebrows questioningly.

She screamed, "I don't know. You have the wrong person. Please, no more. Please. Let me go. I'll do anything . . ." And she broke down in uncontrollable sobs, trying to get the words out: "I don't know anything about terrorism."

Well, maybe not, Hu thought, *but why was she running from the explosion at the Sabah Mosque?*

He felt his special cell phone vibrate. He'd got one designed for the deaf, since in his line of work he was often unable to hear the buzzing of a normal phone. He pulled it from a pocket of his coveralls and looked at its little message window: *Colonel Chin Baojia wants you immediately.*

He put the pliers on the black table against the wall, and stood up. He looked down at the woman with a sad expression. "I must leave you for a while. Don't get into trouble while I'm gone."

Major Hu closed the heavy metal door behind him and took the elevator from the basement's second level to the fourth floor of Sacramento Security Headquarters. It opened onto a reception area furnished with a black leather sofa, two black leather easy chairs, and photographs of the newly named Ch'en Mosque of the Three Pillars in Peking, taken from different angles. Hu nodded to the armed receptionist, who pressed a button on his desk when he recognized Hu.

After knocking on the plain oak door, Major Hu waited until the light above it turned green, and entered the office.

Colonel Chin sat at his ordinary, ship-gray metal desk in a common, middle-official, government office. Hu was always surprised to see it this way. Other than an American calendar displaying an autumn scene on the wall on one side of the desk, the light blue walls were unadorned. A metal file cabinet within reach of the desk was near the other wall. In front of the drawn, green twill window curtains, a gray metal credenza held two computer monitors, a keyboard, and a mouse; a Chinese Cheng computer was tucked underneath.

The only light in the office came from the monitors and a fluorescent lamp on the desk. There were two ordinary, stiff-backed, armless office chairs in front of the desk. And on the floor, out of the way of visitors so that they would not step on it, was an Uighur prayer rug, now the rage in Muslim China. The room was dim, dreary, and smelled musty, the victim of excessive cigarette smoke. It matched Colonel Chin, who, it was said, wouldn't care if he conducted business in a shit house. He was as informal as his office was dreary.

Colonel Chin sat behind the desk on a triple cushioned swivel chair specially built for his three-foot-two height. A step stool beside his chair enabled him to climb into it. The light from the desk lamp reflected off the papers on his desk but didn't reach his eyes, which were in deep shadow.

After waving Hu into one of the chairs, Chin took out an Enlai cigarette and lit it with a match that he then blew out and tossed onto a pile of used matches next to his granite ashtray. He leaned forward, put his elbows on the desk, and tried to push enough air through his shrunken vocal cords to be heard. When he got excited he sounded like air escaping from a balloon. In Chinese, he managed to say, "Turghun Sabah died yesterday of diphtheria. Imam Ch'en Hsun, at the direction of the Governing Council, has taken temporary power."

Major Hu's eyes widened at the news, but he quickly forced them to relax. He started to respond with the expected lamentation: "I'm very sorry—"

"As to General Mirzat Zunun, he was arrested for plotting against the Council. Under Imam Ch'en, I am sure that Sabah still rules. He is a dedicated man of the Sabah and I do not see that anything regarding our work for Sabah will change."

Hu tried again. "God be praised for—"

"That is not why I called you here. I have a job for you"

Hu leaned forward, trying to catch Chen's words as his voice seemed to fizzle out. "I'm going deaf from the screams," Hu said. "An occupational hazard. I did not hear you."

The Colonel took a deep drag on his cigarette, held it, and puffed it out in a swirl of smoke. He wheezed louder, "I said, there is something for you to do in Santa Barbara. You are one of my best interrogators and you also have a scientific background."

He stopped and raised his eyebrows. When Hu nodded to indicate that he could hear him, Chin continued. "I believe that there is scientific information of the highest importance for you to uncover. I will only sketch the details. Full details will be in a report I will give you."

"Have you heard of the Santa Barbara Scientific Institute, an affiliate to the Joy Phim Democratic Peace Institute that existed in New York—Manhattan?" He smiled knowingly with mention of New York.

Hu was happy to change the subject. "Yes. Everyone in security knows about it. Their scientists blew up the whole affiliate. They must have known about our discovery that they had blacked out Santa Barbara for over ten hours to conduct an experiment. Our people in Santa Barbara are investigating, I've heard."

Chin leaned back, sending his face deeper into shadow. He puffed on his cigarette, creating an eerie halo of smoke that slowly rose into invisibility in the darkness above. "They must have been doing very useful research, to justify destroying the whole Institute when they feared discovery. They were probably working on a new weapon. And . . ." His voice disappeared into a rasping hiss again.

Major Hu pointed to his ear and looked apologetic.

Chin crushed out his cigarette in the ashtray, climbed down from his chair, and waddled around the desk to Hu. Looking up at him, he ordered, "Pick me up and put me on the edge of the desk next to you."

Hu did so.

Chin crossed his legs and leaned on his hand until his mouth was only inches away from Hu. He said, "I want you to find out what that

Institute was working on. We are detaining three scientists from the Institute, and their wives and children. They were easy to locate—Americans keep good records for everything. Do you know how Security found them?

Hu had to smile to himself. *There is not a visit to his office in which he doesn't test me.*

He answered, "Security checked the city government records regarding the Institute's registration and job classifications and designated payments for unemployment and health insurance, with a cross-check of the names against driver's license records and city property taxes. Finally, you had people check the state income tax records here in Sacramento. If any questions remain, there is the Central Credit Bureau in Santa Barbara. I'm sure that Security has already interrogated secretaries and janitors just for verification of the identities and the importance of those three scientists. Were there only three?"

Chin leaned back for his pack of cigarettes, took a match out of his top pocket, and lit another cigarette. He took a puff and blew the smoke away from Hu's face. His breath stank of tobacco smoke when he answered, "No. All the others have disappeared and we have notified Californian and American Federal Police of their identities."

He pointed at Hu with his cigarette and ordered, "Go to Santa Barbara. Find out what you can. This has top priority and you have full power to draw on Security's resources." Waving one hand in dismissal, he ended with, "Keep me informed."

Major Hu got up and turned to leave, and heard a whistling screech. "Forget something?"

He turned and saw Colonel Chin pointing first to himself, then to the floor. Hu bowed and apologized. He reached for Chin and lifted him down.



Santa Barbara

Major Hu looked over the room he had remodeled in the last week. In its center, two stainless steel chairs were bolted to the floor. Each had built-in head, wrist, leg, and ankle clamps and straps. Tall, mobile flood lamps stood next to each chair. A metal worktable sat against a wall, with obvious torture devices arranged on its top; a stainless steel work stool was pushed halfway under it. Against another wall was a

long, narrow, steel table with clamps for head and waist; clamps for wrists and ankles swung out from the table and locked. A large, square, stainless steel laundry tub was mounted against a third wall.

The walls were padded, the floor tiled and slightly off level so fluids would run to a drain in the middle. The ceiling was soundproofed. Hooks hung from the ceiling in three places, each with a looped and knotted rope. Three more hooks protruded from the walls. The chairs, tables, and walls were painted blood red, while the floor and ceiling were black.

The heavy, prepared acidic smell of the room was almost sickening. It came from two large pails, one containing rotting pork, and the other pig's blood.

Major Hu wore black work dungarees.

Perfect, he thought. *The scientists will shit in their pants when they are brought in here, and will be disposed immediately to tell me all they know.*

He pressed the black one in a row of colored buttons on his worktable, turning on the microphones that would record all sound in the room. With one last look around, he pressed the green button and looked expectantly toward the soundproofed door.

Two guards led a heavyset man into the room. As soon as he entered he stopped dead and gaped. His nose twitched at the smell. He jerked his head around, looking at one frightening object after another. As Hu watched, he turned pale.

Hu pointed to one of the chairs, and the guards half-dragged the scientist to it and forced him to sit down. At Hu's shake of the head, they left the scientist unbound. They departed, locking the door from the outside. Hu had no fear of the scientist attacking him. Like all security officers, he was well trained in self-defense.

He pulled the stool from under the table and over the tile floor with a clatter, and sat down facing the scientist. "You are Peter Hayward?"

Hayward's eyes were wide with fright. He was trembling so much he couldn't get a word out. He jiggled his head in a nod.

"You are a quantum physicist?"

Another, less jerky, nod.

Hu picked up his clipboard and looked at the top page. "You worked in the Department of Applied Physics of the Santa Barbara affiliate of the former New York Joy Phim Democratic Peace Institute?"

"Y-yes," Hayward stammered

Hu watched the process that he'd grown so familiar with, after so many interrogations. He could see the gradual transformation on Hay-

ward's face as he gained control and steeled himself for the pain he expected. At this moment, Hu knew that Hayward was saying to himself, *I'm a dead man. But I will die with dignity and impress him with my resistance. He's not going to get any secrets from me.*

Hu asked, "Do you have any complaint about the way you've been treated?" He had ordered that the scientists and their families be kept together, fed well, and given comfortable rooms with radio, television, and whatever reading matter they requested.

Hayward shook his head. His face was now hard-set, but he couldn't control the sweat rolling down his face and the tremor in his hands. Almost with the boredom of repetition, Hu observed again all the signs he knew so well.

After waiting several minutes to allow Hayward's fear to season, Hu said, "Here is what I know about you," and he ticked off the facts accumulated from city and state archives, and the interrogation of secretaries and janitors.

Hayward's lips parted and his eyes twitched wide for a moment before he resumed his steely expression.

Hu noted it and knew that it was time to get serious. "Here are the two things I want to know. What were you working on that required so much power that Santa Barbara was blacked out? Why was the Institute destroyed?"

When Hayward answered in a shaking voice, he clearly took such care with his words that Hu knew he was telling a story he and his colleagues had concocted in case of capture and interrogation.

"We were working on molecular dynamics—really the control of molecular reactions," Hayward said. "We used a battery of lasers to control nuclear transitions. There is debate over hidden variables and how complete quantum mechanics is. So we were doing a test of the Bell inequalities—"

"Enough, my good doctor. It's all a lie. For one, your Institute was not involved in fundamental scientific research. That we know. Its purpose was practical, commercial. For another, we have two other scientists from the Institute and what they say contradicts you. And, even with the destruction of the Institute," Hu smiled as though catching a student getting a total of five for two plus two, "enough of the machinery and equipment remained that we know that is not what you were doing."

Hu let that sink in for some seconds. Then softly, almost intimately, Hu said, "Here is what I will do to extract the truth, Dr. Hayward. You

see all this equipment around here?” Hu waved at the various torture devices. “These are not for you. But more on that in a moment. Instead, I am going to use on you the number one torture method: a wet towel over your face that will prevent you from breathing until I take it away. If, after longer and longer applications of the towel, you refuse to truthfully answer my questions, nothing more will be done to *you*. All these devices here are for your twelve-year-old daughter.”

More seconds of silence, while Hayward’s steely face collapsed. Hu watched the transformation with a professional eye.

“I will bring her in here and use one device after another on her, until you tell us the truth. I will not begin with a wet cloth, for that is not crude enough. I will strip her, strap her on the table you see over there,” and Hu pointed, “and spread her legs. You see those cables near the table that are attached to that battery? I will clip the hot one with the rotary switch to her clitoris, and juice her in steps. I assure you that her screams will rise in crescendo with each step. I will add her nipple in good time.”

Hayward’s eyes were bugging out, and his face had turned gray. He was shaking, his lips trembling. He started gagging.

Gently, Hu pointed out the obvious. “You may not want to save yourself, but why subject your little daughter to such indignity and pain? Even if she survives because you decide to tell us the truth, once I start on her, she still will be dead psychologically. Is your secret worth that?”

Hayward leaned over and vomited on the floor. Hu handed him a towel he had ready, and Hayward wiped his mouth and put his head in both hands.

“Oh God!” Hayward let out heavy sigh. His voice almost a whisper, he gave up. “I’ll tell you all I know.”

Hu crossed his legs, clasped his hands around his knee, and waited.

After several silent moments, Hayward began to describe his incidental work on the Institute’s time capsule. “It was a secret project and there were many rumors as to how the Institute got a hold of it. I was not a department head and the other scientists and I were not told where the time machine came from or who developed it. We all assumed it was covert government work. This would explain our secret background check and the legally enforceable contract we had to sign about keeping everything we worked on confidential.

“With the destruction of the New York Institute and the arrival of Lora Reeves, the president and director of the Institute, work on the time machine took top priority.”

Hayward described in scientific terms what his work involved, and that, “We were successful in achieving what Lora wanted—to send a small box back in time to 1906 San Francisco.” His voice shaking, Hayward concluded, “Soon after Reeves died, we sent the box. I must assume. This caused the citywide Santa Barbara blackout.”

Hayward stopped, tears running down his brown cheeks.

Hu waited for more. There was no more.

“Time travel? You were working on time travel? I’m also a scientist, Doctor, and not as ignorant as you think. Time travel is impossible. You lie. You were working on a weapon. But let me see how good your lie is. Why, Doctor, why? You say you sent only a small box. What was in it? Whom was it sent to?”

Hayward almost screamed, “I don’t know. Nobody told us. We just assumed the Institute sent it to a time traveler in San Francisco. But who or why, I don’t know. All of us scientists were intensely curious. This time machine was the greatest invention of our lives. In history. We wanted to know what we were doing with it. But for every one of the days we worked so hard on it, there was a new rumor. The secret was kept too well.”

He paused, tried to calm himself, and continued. “We didn’t even know the space-time coordinates, but I had a friend whose wife worked on them and told me they were for San Francisco, 1906, and I’m guessing that it was being sent to a time traveler. Otherwise, it wouldn’t make sense.” Hayward sighed. He looked relieved.

“You lie. You worked in a private institute, not a military lab. Private American scientific centers do not operate that way. You know and refuse to tell me.”

Hayward screamed it this time: “Nooo! I don’t know any more.”

“Your choice.” Hu pressed the green button on the worktable, and when the two guards came in, he told them to clasp Hayward’s arms, legs, and head to the chair.

Hayward fought them to no avail. When the guards finished and left, Hu checked with his finger the band around Hayward’s forehead, to make sure that it held his head tightly against the chair back.

Hayward struggled. He kept yelling that he didn’t know any more. He gagged on the vomit he spewed into his lap and down his legs. He shook against the straps, his breath coming in gasps. “No . . . no . . .” is all he could get out, as he soiled his pants.

Hu was used to all the ugly smells a terrified human body could produce. He breathed through his mouth until his nose adjusted to

them. He waited until Hayward quieted, then half-filled a red pail at the sink and put it on the floor in Hayward's view. He stuck a towel into the water, sloshed it around, and pulled it out. Holding it over the bucket, he loosely wrung the excess water out. Holding it in front of Hayward's face, he waited.

Only Hayward's panicked gasps and whimpers could be heard.

Hu waited a full minute.

And covered Hayward's tightly closed eyes, flaring nostrils, and clenched lips with the wet towel and held it tightly against his face with an open hand.



Sacramento

Major Hu waited for the light above the door to turn green, and when it did he entered the musty office, the air even heavier with cigarette smoke this time. Colonel Chin waved him to a chair without looking up from what he was reading. A cigarette dangled from his mouth, and Chin unconsciously tilted his eyes away from the smoke.

Hu was beginning to taste the smoke on his lips. He hated the smell, but Chin would not take well to a display of his irritation. He watched the smoke tendrils as he waited, imagining turning a fan on them and happily watching the noxious fumes disappear toward the far wall.

Suddenly remembering, he moved his uncomfortable chair as close to the desk as he could by shoving both his knees sideways. He leaned over the desk on his elbows, but he didn't know what to do with his hands. After clasping them at first, he finally folded his lower arms across each other.

"Very interesting," Chin hissed out with the billowing cigarette smoke, and looked up at Hu. "You have one scientist that went insane when his daughter died under interrogation, another scientist without relatives who died keeping his secrets to himself, and another who with his wife survived interrogation. And his story is the same as that of the one who went insane. This is what you have found out." Chin let his cigarette hang from the right side of his mouth, squinting his right eye from the smoke, and ticked the findings off on his nicotine stained fingers:

"One, they were working on time travel.

“Two, the laser power they needed to send a small box back in time blacked out the city.

“Three, the scientists did not know what the box contained or why it was sent.

“And four, the box was sent to an unknown time traveler in San Francisco in 1906.”

Colonel Chin stopped and gave Major Hu a hard look. He wheezed, “Do you believe this?”

Hu had waited for this. “I did not believe it at first. But at the end I am sure the two scientists believed what they said. Either they were themselves duped, or this really happened. After I sent you the report, I did some research on the North American ecomm-net. Some physicists do believe this is possible. And there are rumors—nothing concrete—about two people sent back in time. Nobody believes that is possible. One time traveler, a small one, maybe; two is impossible, especially since two would have been sent without testing the system with one traveler beforehand. Science develops in small stages, not one big leap. There is supposed to be a document one of them wrote about his time travel experience; just in case, I talked to our archivist in Peking, and he put a team to work on it. I got a call yesterday. Nothing.”

Chin rasped, “And your speculation?”

“If the Institute’s scientists sent such a box back in time, it was sent about two months after Sabah’s Great Victory. They knew the associated electrical blackout of Santa Barbara would alert us. They destroyed the Institute so that we would not discover their time machine and duplicate it. They can have only one reason for sending this box. Sabah was born in 1914. I believe they sent a message to the possible time traveler, warning him about Sabah’s victory. What he then would do is obvious—he would kill Sabah after he is born, or kill his parents beforehand.”

Chin leaned into the fluorescent lamplight. “And the prob . . .” His voice disappeared into the smoke.

But Hu knew what he was asking. “As a scientist myself, this is all new to me. I do not know how to assess its probability.”

Chin pointed his cigarette. “Give me a number, Major.”

“About point six, to quantify the subjective.”

Chin crushed out the cigarette in his ashtray, and fiddled with his cigarette pack for a few moments while he thought. He took another one out and lit it. He watched the match flame and extinguished it just before it burned his fingers. He puffed on the cigarette and let the

smoke drift out of his mouth. Finally, he waved the cigarette, creating a spiral of smoke, and wheezed, "Even if the probability were point two, we would have to turn the world upside down . . . prevent it. I will pass this . . ."

Hu put his hands on the desk and leaned on them to get closer to Chin. He heard the rest.

"That terrorist woman you left unfinished has been waiting in her cell for you to return. Take a couple of days off. I am sure she will be happy to see you again afterward."



Imam Ch'en
Peking, 1995, New Universe

"Kill him. How many times must I say this? Kill him!"

Cao Mingsheng, Chief of Chinese Security, and Dr. Ouyang Bohao, the Minister of Science and Technology, had prostrated themselves before Imam Ch'en.

Minister Ouyang continued to whine, "We have no time machine. I have discussed it with our top physicists. They say it is all fantasy."

Ch'en picked up the report he had received from Security on what they were now calling the Santa Barbara machine and threw it at them, causing his white robe to swish over their heads. "It doesn't matter if it takes ten years or a hundred years. We can always send the time machine back to the same year to intercept this creature of Satan. If the scientists don't succeed in creating a time machine after a thousand years, then we will know it's fantasy. Not until then.

"Get off the floor, you two. I want to see your eyes."

When they were standing rigidly before him, Ch'en glared at Ouyang to make sure the minister understood how serious this was. He ordered him, "Set up a Chinese project comprising our best scientists whose specialties are most related to time travel. Make sure that the scientist in charge is a Sabah. Spare no resources."

He turned to stare at Minister Cao. He pointed his finger at him and said coldly, "These are to be top secret projects. You are to assure that."

"What are we to send back in time?" Ouyang asked.

Keeping his eyes on Cao, Ch'en responded, "Give me the capability to send someone back to 1906 to kill that infidel American time traveler."

Cao blurted, “But we don’t know his name or where he is in San Francisco, assuming he stayed there after he got the Santa Barbara message. We don’t even know if he exists.”

Ch’en’s gaze became deadlier. “You are the chief of the world’s most powerful security service. You have resources undreamed of by any previous security forces. Can’t you and your people devise some way for our time traveler to find and kill the American?”

He let that ripen. After twenty seconds, he yelled, “Out. Get to work. And I want a progress report from both of you every week. That American must be killed.”

Chapter 9

Captain Khoo Jy-ying Tianjin, 2001, New Universe

Shu Kuo lay on top of Khoo Jy-ying for a moment, panting and sweating even in the air conditioning. “Whew,” he exclaimed, and gasped, as usual, “I came inside out.”

Jy-ying could not complain. Kuo knew what he was doing and she usually had her own orgasm. But this time she was distracted. She had been preparing their confrontation for a week, and unless handled carefully, it could mean her death. This was the best time to make her demand.

She wiped him and herself, threw the tissue in the wastebasket he kept nearby, and rolled over on her side. She played with his nipple as she whispered, “I have a favor to ask.”

He was getting his breath back. He turned his face toward her, his bold masculine features lined with suspicion. “You know I can’t get you another promotion. You are already the highest ranking security officer for your age.”

“No, that’s not it. I hear from my people that you have duplicated your successful test on a prisoner.”

“That’s supposed to be top secret.”

“Not from me. I am the Chief Assistant of Security for your lab, you know. You sent him back one year and recovered him alive yesterday.”

Kuo sighed. “It’s not enough. We want to send back two men, but every time we try it with two prisoners, both die. Chief Scientist Liu Bihai doesn’t know what the problem is. The last time, he loaded the two prisoners with every kind of monitor, but they showed nothing strange. He now insists that the rumor about two being sent back in time from the United States is ridiculous. I am about ready to go with one, which is consistent with the information we got from Santa Barbara.”

Jy-ying kissed his nipple and rubbed her breasts against him. *Always ask for the impossible first*, she thought. “I want to be the one that goes when all of these experiments are done and all is ready.”

Kuo jerked away, turned on his side, and looked at her as though she had asked him to leave his wife. “No, Jy-ying. Impossible. You are a woman. You are not trained for this. Why do you ask for such a stupid thing again?”

She held her temper, but she couldn’t help the aggrieved sound of her voice. “You know that I beat Ma Dehua and Kong Qingguo in the physical competition. You know that I beat both of them at weapons. You know that I was able to take both of them down in martial arts and could have killed them if I wanted. You know,” and she could not hold the anger in anymore, “I placed first in all the intelligence, English, and history tests. But Ma was selected to go, and Kong second. I’m not even on the list of alternates.”

“I had no choice, Jy-ying. The National Governing Council would have replaced me if I selected you for this.” Now Kuo was getting irritated at her. He rubbed his hand through his full head of graying hair, and by habit pulled on his black beard. “You know that. How many times have we gone over this?”

“Then make me the alternate in place of Kong. As project director, you have the power, Kuo, and I’m sure you can make up something with the Council to justify it.”

He got up on one elbow, grabbed her crotch with his other hand, and shook it. “Woman. You are a woman. Even if I want to send you, the Council believes that God would not understand sending a woman to do a man’s work.”

Jy-ying knew he was lying. Her agents had told her otherwise. *He just loves my ass and wants to keep it here*, she thought. She couldn’t help glaring at him. “Then why did they allow me into the competition?”

“They couldn’t believe you would win. Anyway, I don’t understand why you are so insistent on going.” He sat up, looked into the middle distance, and waved one hand. His narrow eyes widened in puzzlement. “It’s a one way trip, Jy-ying. *One way*. You are well respected here; you have a good future in Security. You have my secret support. I still don’t understand. Tell me again why you want to leave all this forever.”

Calmly, Jy-ying answered, “How many times have I explained this to you? Both my parents were Sabah agents and died in his cause. I am a Sabah and will do everything in my power to spread and protect God’s way. While I have a breath in me, I cannot allow the assassination of Sabah that American time traveler may be planning. This is what you are trying to prevent, Kuo, isn’t it?”

Jy-ying sat up on the bed, turned her body, and looked at him. “You know Ma and Kong as well as I do. You know, while they believe in Sabah, their beliefs are no deeper than habit and convention. They would kill the time traveler out of loyalty, because they were ordered, and because of the excitement of it. But because their beliefs are shallow, they may be subverted. Not me. I would travel only for the reason that I want to save Sabah. I would be God’s hand.

“You know that because of my education at the California Institute of Technology, I speak better English; that because of this time spent in California, I am more familiar with the customs; that I am more skilled at weapons and the martial arts; and that I know more. I proved it in the tests.”

Kuo crossed his arms over his chest and shrugged.

Just what I expected. Now that I have that laid down, I can get serious. He is unaware that I had his shoes bugged.

“And you know, Kuo, that I have no relatives or anyone else keeping me here.” Jy-ying smiled, her voice dripping honey. “I know you are interested in another mistress, but want to keep me nearby for your occasional pleasure.”

She enjoyed watching his face. He now had both hands on his knees, gripping them. His muscles had tensed, his eyes narrowed.

“The replacement you have in mind is nurse Lee Lifhang, whom you met when you went into the hospital for your annual medical checkup. You have already taken her to bed once. She is much more amenable than I—you find me bossy, and my greater physical ability and skills and my performance on your tests threatens you. You bedded me for my looks and body. The rest gets in the way, and you regret it.”

She could see he was about to lash out at her verbally. *He wouldn’t dare try to hit me—I would break his arm.* She put up her hand. “Is my replacing Ma still out of the question?”

“No matter what you say, Jy-ying, it is out of the question.”

Jy-ying got up and stepped over to her briefcase resting on his beautiful *shingtao* marble table. Hiding her movements with her body, she took a letter from a secret compartment. She returned to Kuo, handed it to him, and sat on the edge of the low bed.

He started reading it immediately. His expression crumpled into an angry glower. His penis, which had been partly erect as he watched her nakedness, shrank into a small mound of flesh.

“You will notice,” she said nicely, “that it is addressed to Chief of Security Tao Zedong.”

She gave him time to finish reading. He did, and looked up at her with an expression that clearly threatened an accident for her in the near future.

“You no doubt can see that I report our little biweekly get-togethers, and I will include a tape of our bedtime chatter, during which you say some choice things about Imam Ch’en. Also, I am sure that they will be interested in your relationship with me, one of your security officers.”

She pointed to the letter. “That is a copy. The original is in the hands of someone I can trust, who will send it to Tao if anything—anything—happens to me, with the exception of time travel.”

His fiery eyes bored into hers. Fury contorted his face.

Jy-ying told him, “I will give you a week. What I am asking for is first slot on the time travel.”

Kuo stared at her for a moment, then spit out his answer. “I can’t, even if my life is at stake. I repeat, the Council will not allow a woman to do this. The clerics oppose it. I can’t do anything about it.”

She had expected that answer. “I will send that letter you have in your hand, unless I get a chance to go. I am sure you will spend happy days in Deyang Prison, while I will disappear into China’s vastness. I can serve God’s Prophet Sabah in other ways.”

She watched him for a moment, then said, “I will settle on first alternate. I go if Ma Dehua cannot.”

Kuo leaned back, his face softening. He idly rubbed his knee with his hand. “I still can’t justify that.” He gave it some more thought, and his face relaxed, even though, Jy-ying thought, he still looked like he was chewing on a Szechwan hot pepper.

Jy-ying took a last look around at this beautiful room. There was an Empress screen against the wall, and alongside that a carved chest of drawers, each drawer itself a montage of carvings of landscapes, sailboats, ports, old buildings, and people in ancient clothes—a vision of history and nature. There were yellow pillows, trimmed in white lace, on the floor surrounding a lacquered Kang table. A soft, braided mat covered the floor. One brown lacquered horseshoe chair sat in the corner. Wide French doors, framed by heavy, rose-colored satin curtains, opened onto a balcony overlooking downtown Tianjin. No one was in the nearby buildings at this twenty-story height, so there was no danger of anyone seeing their activities. A Majolica-style lamp in deep amber sat on a black wood and marble side table next to the bed. The walls were papered in an old Chinese landscape design complete with steep

mountain cliffs, a few tree limbs in the foreground, and dominating mist. It gave the room a gentle, outdoor feeling.

She would never see it again.

Kuo spoke firmly, interrupting her final look around. He said what she'd expected. "No, absolutely, the Council would not accept that, regardless of my arguments."

She waited, both eyebrows raised and her lips slightly parted. She saw the conclusion to this as inevitable.

He acted as though she were pulling his next words out with pliers, which in a way she was. "But I can offer you as another alternate. I can justify this on the grounds that you would never get the chance to go anyway, and that it would be a costless sop to female scientists and other professionals who have been complaining about second-class citizenship. It would also meet the criticism of Chief of Security Tao Zedong who, unlike the clergy, has put less emphasis on gender than on performance and capability. He would be pleased by your selection.

"Yes, Khoo Jy-ying. I will make you second alternate."

Yes, Director Shu Kuo, as I had planned.



When Shu Kuo called Jy-ying into his private office to tell her the news, his face was unreadable. That was the only face he had shown her since their "little discussion" three months before.

"You know about Ma's strange sickness, of course. Now, I know you won't be unhappy about the latest. Kong Qingguo has been hospitalized with heart disease." He gave her a long stare. "I am now formally informing you to prepare yourself for time travel to 1906."

Jy-ying couldn't conceal her smile.

He looked into her eyes and saw her pleasure. "You haven't left yet, and if I find out that you are responsible for the disqualification of Ma and Kong—"

She calmly interrupted. "Don't make threats you will not carry out."

She let that fill the space between them for a few seconds. Finally she said, "I have always been your best choice for this operation. Shall we get on with it, and try to make it successful?"

He nodded, and described the latest test data that had just come in. Still showing no emotion, he told her, "The last test using a prisoner concluded successfully."

Jy-ying was unclear which test, of the three they had conducted in the last week, he meant. “Is this the time capsule constructed and painted to look like an ice rock that you sent to an isolated area a few kilometers from the south pole?”

“Yes. The prisoner was warmly clothed, fed intravenously, and his physical and mental functions monitored for a week before he was killed by injection, and an air vent timed to open let the cold inside. A revolving camera placed on the top of the capsule took photographs of the stars during the polar nights. And our instruments took daily magnetic and gravitational readings. We have just finished the calculations on the data. The capsule landed within a meter of where it should have, and within three weeks of its target date in 1906.

“The other experiment had again involved sending two prisoners back, this time only for a week. No good. Both died in transit. Chief Scientist Liu is now positive that the rumors about two Americans being sent back in time is impossible—a legend.”

Kuo’s gaze seemed to assess her. “Doctor Sima says that you are in excellent shape for the time travel, and I know that you have been honing your martial arts and weapons skills, and studying the San Francisco of 1906. I think you are as ready as you can be, and we are about ready to send you.”

A smile overrode her serious expression, and Kuo studied it for a moment. “To tell you the truth, Jy-ying, I will miss you. I have missed you.” His sad grin came and went. He claimed, lamely, “You didn’t have to threaten me. You would have been my choice for this trip anyway, when Ma and Kong were unable to go.”

He made Jy-ying uncomfortable. She changed the subject. “Because of my studies and my time spent in America, I have been involved in the planning for the capsule’s landing in San Francisco, and the supplies the time traveler will need. We have agreed, subject to your approval, that we have a large time window. The message from Santa Barbara went back to 1906. We must assume it contained information on Sabah’s Great Victory and the suggestion that the recipient—and I am also sure that it is only one person—kill Sabah after he is born, or prevent his birth by killing his parents. So going back to Kashgar at a time near Sabah’s birth to protect him or his parents will not work.

“Our time traveler—now me—could only do so much to protect Sabah, even if I carried baby Sabah around in my arms, or became a servant in his house. Instead, I must catch the killer as close to his arri-

val in 1906 as possible. But when in 1906 did he arrive? There was the earthquake and fire of April that destroyed so much of San Francisco—it would not be practical for him to arrive too close to that. So, we suspect October was his best choice, and we fixed on that month in 1906 as my arrival time.”

Kuo listened carefully. “I have not been involved in all these discussions, but Liu has kept me generally informed. I agree to the date and the argument for choosing it. Have you agreed on a landing site?”

“This has been the most difficult decision,” she replied. “We have old maps of San Francisco and many photographs of the city before and immediately after its earthquake and fire. Unfortunately, the business and government center of the city suffered the most, and many records were destroyed.

“As you know, our Security Ministry has been fully involved in this. Six months ago, they sent ten agents to San Francisco to search through museums, libraries, and government documents for what might be identified as a safe landing site. We know that the person the Americans sent back had to have found a secure place to land. It would be . . . convenient if we found a different place.”

Kuo did smile at that, and Jy-ying returned it. He put his hand on her arm. She left it there.

“Well?” he asked.

“There has to be room for error. I don’t want to land in a wall or in the middle of a well traveled street.”

“Well?”

“We found a building that was once used for making wagons, carriages, carts, and the like. The owner sold it to a company that turned it into a warehouse. The plan we have shows a strong, reinforced wooden floor and a high roof. The company that bought it could not make its payments on the mortgage after the fire, and went bankrupt. The bank that held the mortgage foreclosed on it, put the warehouse up for sale, and it was sold in March 1907. It is in the Potrero District, the southern part of San Francisco, what was south of the fire, and it is my destination.”

“Good. We are preparing an equipment container to send before you go. It will have your weapons, explosives, electronics, and all else we can stuff into it, including jewels and counterfeit American hundred dollar bills. You will be a very rich woman. Oh yes—it will also contain your laptop and CDs containing the front pages of local newspapers, November 1906 to December 1915, along with as detailed a chronology of world events for those years that we could prepare.”

Jy-ying gave that some thought. "If I'm successful, I may live until . . . oh, 1960 or so. So extend the chronology to 1960. Also, I must have some way of renewing my funds, if necessary. The best legal way would be through the stock exchanges. Please also include the daily New York Stock quotes in *The Wall Street Journal*, January 1907 to 1960."

"I had not thought of that."

"It comes of having lived in American for a while," Jy-ying explained with a small grin.

Kuo squeezed Jy-ying's arm and said, "I have advised Liu that you should also carry as much as you can in your time machine, including a good supply of money, weapons for your defense, water and food, and whatever you may immediately need, just in case the equipment does not arrive as planned, or in case you land in a place other than your destination."

She nodded, and added, "Security has counterfeited for me an American birth certificate giving my birth year as 1882, which would make my age in 1906 twenty-five, my true age."

Kuo looked at Jy-ying, smiled, and said, "It could have been 1885, the way you look."

How stupid. Jy-ying could not help a little smile anyway, before continuing.

"The second identity will be as Princess Tz'u Li Poh of the Empress's side of the royal family. This high aristocratic position should get me the cooperation of any Chinese official with whom I must deal. I will also use that identity to mix with higher society in San Francisco. For all other purposes, my real name should suffice."

Shu Kuo moved his hand to Jy-ying's leg. It felt hot and she began to get a warm, fuzzy feeling. He was always able to do that to her. She had not contrived their first lovemaking; she had wanted him. The old feeling she had for him, that she'd thought gone forever, was returning. She put her hand on top of his.

He hesitated and looked at her with pleasure and anticipation. Then he said, "I know that you have been discussing with your security colleagues how to find the American time traveler. Any ideas so far?"

"It's detective work. We have come up with a number of possibilities. Can we discuss this at another time?" She was aroused and wet. She took his hand and placed it on her crotch.

He got up and made sure the door to his office was locked, and they undressed each other. They made love on his black lacquered desk. She

knew it was the last time in this world for them. She realized she would miss him. She made it last.



He came to say goodbye. Jy-ying had not seen him alone since their office passion six months prior. He stood near the door of the time machine as she fitted herself in among the weapons; a leather briefcase containing money, an American birth certificate, and college transcript; a small suitcase with a change of clothes and toiletries; and other things the scientists and Kuo thought she might need immediately. Everything was clamped in place or pushed into crevasses. She was dressed uncomfortably in a checked gingham jumper—ordinary clothing for a lower middle class woman of 1906.

The countdown had begun, and Jy-ying had thirty minutes to go. She had to shut and lock the time machine door at minus five minutes. Scientists were intent at their consoles. A crowd of assistants, associates, and administrators stood in a crowd behind them. Security allowed only a few close to the capsule, which included Shu Kuo and his aide and Chief Scientist Liu Bihai

Imam Ch'en Hsun strode into the lab and right up to the capsule. He stood for a minute looking at Jy-ying. He got down on his knees on the dirty floor, white robe and all, and prostrated himself toward her. He began his prayer with, "*La E Laaha Il Lal Laa Sabahdur Rasul Lullah*—There is no God besides Allah, and Sabah, peace be upon him, the messenger of God."

He concluded with, "O Creator of all creations, as this holy duty to protect Your Prophet Abul Sabah begins, we all beseech and implore You alone to give guidance, encouragement, strength, and determination to Khoo Jy-ying, Your servant. It is only with Your help and support that Captain Khoo Jy-ying will succeed in this holiest of holy duties. *Eyyaaka Na`Budu, Wa Eyyaaka Nasta`Een*—You alone we worship; You alone we ask for help. *Subhaana Rabbiyal A`laa*—Glory be to God, the most high."

She felt humbled as a servant of God and His Prophet Sabah. She bowed as best she could in the confines of the capsule, and returned the prayer. "*Bismil Laahir Rahmaanir Raheem*—In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful." She ended as the Imam had.

Ch'en stood, fixed her with a long look, bowed slightly, nodded, and walked to Liu's console to watch from there.

Finally, at minus six minutes, Kuo took the few steps to close the capsule door. Looking at Jy-ying proudly, he said, “May fate treat you well, Khoo Jy-ying.” He bowed deeply, as did his aide and the scientists nearby. He took hold of the capsule door, and whispered, “Have a long and successful life, Jy-ying. I will miss you.”

She bowed in return, and answered, “May your life be full of sunshine. I will miss you also.”

He shut the door on her. She turned and looked at the digital chronometer: 4:43:07 p.m., March 23, 2002. She watched it and waited for her life in a new world—or her death.



Imam Ch'en Hsun Peking

As soon as he saw the time capsule waver, gradually grow indistinct, and disappear with a loud hum, Imam Ch'en Hsun returned to Peking in his official jet, *Sabah One*. When he reached his capital office, he found a message and two documents waiting on his desk. His clergy spies had reported on their findings in San Francisco.

Three months ago, Security had heard again the rumor that one of the time travelers had written a journal or biography. Coupling this with what the two Santa Barbara scientists confessed under torture and the vague but continuing rumor that two time travelers had been sent back to 1906, Ch'en decided to investigate this himself. He sent his own spies to San Francisco to search for the rumored document, on the slight chance it might exist and be discoverable. They searched every possible repository of historical documents and papers, including all the city archives, using keywords such as “time machine,” “time travel,” and “1906.”

The message from Imam Abdul-Raouf, the Chief Advisor to the mayor of San Francisco, said they found what Ch'en was looking for in the archives of the San Francisco Fire Department. It had been evidence in the arson investigation of an apartment house partially destroyed by fire in 1938.

Ch'en made sure that each of those who handled the English document and translated it into Chinese for him swore to God on The Sabah that they would maintain strict silence, on pain of death.

He scanned the Chinese translation with increasing excitement. Many pages were scorched and charred, and an unknown number of

final pages were burned away, but nevertheless, he could not believe the information it contained. He went back through it, noting the details he needed immediately: The time travelers were the Americans John Banks and ethnic Sino-Vietnamese Joy Phim. They landed in San Francisco on November 14, 1906, and created the successful Tor Import and Export Company. Ch'en also noted the dates for their travel to Mexico, China, Japan, and Europe. The document even mentioned that John Banks had set up the Joy Phim Democratic Peace Institute, of which the Institute in Santa Barbara had been an affiliate, before its members destroyed it.

We got them. For sure, these are the time travelers that received the message.

He put through an urgent call to Shu Kuo. When Shu answered, Ch'en asked without preamble, "Can we contact Khoo Jy-ying right away?"

Shu Kuo hesitated, and finally responded. He sounded surprised that the Imam would ask this after he had seen her disappear into the past. "No. She is now in 1906."

"I want to send a message to her immediately."

"I do not understand."

"This message will contain new information that will make it easy for her to find the American time travelers and execute them before they assassinate Sabah. I want you and Chief Scientist Liu to prepare a time capsule to carry back this message to Khoo. I don't care how you do it; I don't care about the expense; you need not hurry. But I want to make sure she gets this message."

After Shu Kuo assured him they would start on the assignment immediately, he hung up.

He now had copied the essential information from what its author, Banks, called his *Remembrance*. The document was overtly revolutionary, Satanic, and anti-Sabah. It was too dangerous for anyone to read, other than a high Imam, who was armored against its lies. It exulted in a counter theology, that of infantile freedom. Ch'en knew what he had to do.

He took the original and translation home with him late that evening. He turned on the floodlight on his patio, carried the documents to his little garden off the patio, and picked up a trowel from his gardener's bench. All the snow had melted, and the first buds of spring were beginning to sprout. He dug deep and wide into the mulch he had placed around the roots of his prized, aromatic hamamelis in the au-

tumn, sniffing the exotic, spicy fragrance the activity conjured and again enjoying the beauty of its delicate, creamy-white flowers. Nearby he had also planted for contrast the red, orange, and yellow flowering varieties.

He slowly tore the pages out of both documents and then tore the pages into small pieces. He stuffed them into the hole.

Finished, he stooped over the hole, but hesitated. He'd destroyed an historic document. Perhaps the most historic—the first report of time travel to ever exist. If it were made public, it would revolutionize science.

“And these two would be heroes and martyrs to the anti-Sabahs,” he told himself firmly. “I have just saved the Sabah faith, the word of God.”

He covered the papers with soil and mulch and watered the mound.



Director Shu Kuo Tianjin

Shu Kuo watched the final preparations for sending the message to Khoo Jy-ying. They were giving the buzzer its last test. He held the message for Jy-ying that detailed where John Banks and Joy Phim were staying in San Francisco, and their major activities up to the birth of Sabah. With this information she would have no difficulty finding, ambushing, and killing them.

Liu motioned him over and said, “I want to be sure about the time frame. Security has insisted Khoo Jy-ying’s destination warehouse will be unused at least two months prior to her arrival. Because of the range of error in arrival dates for both Khoo and this box, we are planning for it to arrive two months before Khoo, which would be August. The warehouse will be unoccupied then. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“All the space time coordinates are now set, then, and have been triple checked. We have clearance to heavily draw on Tianjin’s electrical power. Anytime you are ready, we can send it off.”

Shu Kuo walked over to the little, red metal box, punched in the code—which was the same as Jy-ying’s equipment capsule, so she would know it—and inserted the plastic-sealed message. Hiding the open capsule with his body, he also put on top a personal message from him:

My Dear Jy-ying,

I know you will succeed in protecting Sabah, especially with the enclosed information. You were the best for this mission and you would have been my first choice, had the Council not stood in the way.

Now you are gone. I did not realize what you meant to me until you left. I miss you, truly miss you. I am finding it almost impossible to accept that I will never see you again, never again hold you in my arms.

I can only hope now that we will meet in Paradise.

Have a long life, Jy-ying, and I applaud with a kiss what I know will be your success. God surely will be with you.

Shu Kuo

He closed the capsule and returned to the large console to stand next to Liu. "Send it off," Shu ordered.

He watched as the red box seemed to shrivel, turned hazy, became only a dusty outline, and then disappeared.



Jy-ying

San Francisco, 1906, Old Universe

The jackhammer of sound blasted her mind. Jy-ying put her hands over her ears and moaned from the pain. She pressed her palms into her ears as hard as she could, but they had no effect. The sound beat her whole body and rattled her bones. She thought the machine must be malfunctioning and she would not survive.

It attacked her for hour-long minutes.

Then in an unbelievable instant, the sound ended. Jy-ying had a sudden falling sensation, heard a screeching sound, and was jolted to her knees.

Silence. Absolute silence, except for the beating of her heart.

She leaned against the door, feeling helpless and deaf. She couldn't think. Was she dying?

As her senses returned, she realized that she wasn't leaning, the capsule was. It was tilted toward the closed door.

She had to be sure she was okay. She felt herself all over. She looked carefully at her hands in the dim capsule light, and pulled up her

toe-length dress to look at her legs. She was not, however, going to take off the uncomfortable pointed shoes and look at her feet. She swallowed a few times, made a couple of coughs, and spoke out loud, “God be praised. Thank you. I’m in one piece and apparently healthy.”

But did she make it? She looked up at the digital reading: 3:18:02 p.m., November 13, 1906. “Success!” she exclaimed aloud. The month was off, but she didn’t think that would make any difference.

She mentally squared her shoulders. “Time to see the old world.”

She picked up her specially-made holster purse, styled to look like an ordinary 1906 woman’s handbag, and took out her Taiyang .38 caliber semi-automatic. She switched off the capsule’s inside light, and gently tried to open the door. Because of the angle of the capsule, it would only open about an inch before the floor stopped it. She pushed on it, but it would open no further. She looked through the small opening and saw light coming through a high window into what must be the warehouse. She’d apparently arrived where planned, but now she was stuck in the capsule.

How ironic, she thought, if with all their plans and preparations, she made it to 1906, to the proper destination, only to die in the capsule because she could not get the door open.

Jy-ying switched the light back on, put away her gun, and stooped down to take a look at where the door made contact with the outside floor. It was hardwood, possibly walnut, and the door was thin steel. She knew the capsule weighed as much as a small automobile, so she didn’t think she could rock it back and forth.

But why assume a negative?

Okay, she thought, I will take off my shoes after all. Good thing my feet are well callused from my sparring. She removed her shoes with a sigh, and moved and crammed equipment, bags, and containers out of the way. She carefully gauged the distance and spot to hit the capsule side at a right angle from the door—if she seriously injured her leg, she was dead—to tip the capsule over. If she succeeded, she could easily get out. She crouched as far from the spot as she could and sprang at it, hitting the metal flat and hard with one foot.

The capsule only gave a little shudder.

She fell back and suddenly realized another danger. *Oh Sabah, if it falls over on the door, I’m dead.* So much for that.

Back to the door. She had to apply enough pressure to bend its top out and its bottom in. She looked around at what she had. Just in case the range of error in space-time coordinates had materialized the cap-

sule somewhere outside the warehouse, the scientists had thoughtfully clamped in various places in the capsule a long-handled spade, an axe, a hatchet, a sledge hammer, a short-barreled shotgun, a rifle, and a few other tools.

Well, with all this, if I can't get out of here, I don't deserve to live.

First, muscles.

Jy-ying laid across the seat, braced her back against the far wall in between the clamped tools and weapons, and raised her well-muscled legs to push on the door. She pushed and grunted and pushed. The top of the door moved out maybe an inch or more while the bottom did not move at all.

She looked more carefully at the door. There was no way to un-hinge it.

Stupid, she thought. It should have explosive hinges.

There was the shotgun, but she was not going to shoot at the bottom corner of the door stuck into the wooden floor. She might well be injured by a ricocheting bullet or scattering shot from the shotgun. She could still use the shotgun, however. It gave her a brace for the shovel. She first made sure the shotgun was unloaded. Next, she held it barrel sideways across the bottom of the door, reversed the shovel so that the bottom curved down, put the tip of the shovel in the open crack between the door bottom and that of the machine, and held the bottom of the shovel against the shotgun barrel that was abutting the bottom of the door. This gave her a lever. She put her shoulder under the shovel handle and pushed up with her legs.

The screeching sound indicated some success. The door was now open about two inches, with its bottom edge bent slightly inward. She repositioned the shotgun barrel and the shovel and lifted again. She gained maybe another half an inch.

Time for some heavy action.

Jy-ying took down the sledge, but trying to get a good swing was awkward in the crowded and narrow capsule, and the position she had to take strained her side. Regardless, she began to hammer just above the point where the bottom of the door met the wooden floor outside. The angle at which she had to swing exhausted her in about ten minutes.

The door was now open about three inches.

Jy-ying sat down, panting, and looked at the door, hoping for inspiration. She could keep pounding away with the sledge, taking frequent breaks, but she would be in poor condition afterward for anything but a long rest.

She sat very still, relaxing her mind and letting it play with the problem. She imagined what the capsule and door would look like in schematic. She mentally drew into the schematic the various vector forces. That did it. The solution was simple. The door was a lever on the capsule. It stuck out, and if she used her weight to lift on the lever, she might straighten the capsule just a little, giving some clearance from the wooden floor for the now curved edge of the door. Then she could kick the door, knocking it open a little more. The more open, the more leverage, and the greater the distance she could push it open.

When her strength returned she laid the sledge hammer close to the corner of the door, turned the shovel right side up and put its point under the door as near to the edge embedded in the floor as she could, and sat the upper part of the shovel down on the hammer.

Almost there, she thought, moving to the back of the capsule where the end of the shovel handle extended.

Shoving down on the shovel handle with all her strength, she felt the capsule tip slightly, and at that moment she kicked on the door. She gained half an inch.

She did it again, gaining an inch. She kept this up, with frequent rests, until the door was open just wide enough for her to squeeze out. She put on her ugly shoes, held her holster purse in front of her and her jacket behind her, and squeezed out without tearing anything. It had taken her almost two hours.

Jy-ying looked around at the dirty and dusty warehouse, bare except for wooden columns supporting thick beams overhead. The windows were so dirty they were opaque. A dank and moldy stench mixed with an old factory smell of greasy oil seemed to paint her lips.

Her equipment capsule was close to a far wall. *Good. I have that.*

She walked around the time machine capsule, trying to see what had caused it to tilt. Looking under the back of it, she saw that it was sitting on a red metal box tipped on end, which had been squashed to half its height by the weight of the capsule.

Well, I wonder what that is. There are no other boxes on the whole warehouse floor. She shrugged and turned away. She had more pressing concerns.

Jy-ying found two entrances to the warehouse. One was through a corner office and was locked from the outside. In the middle of one warehouse wall was a shipping entrance closed by two large doors with a bar across them. Next to them was a door like that in the office, also locked from the outside.

She looked herself over as best she could. Her hair was supposed to be up in a stylish bun and she felt around it to make sure her long black hair was in place. Now that she was no longer concentrating on getting out of the capsule, she began to feel the chill and put on her wool broadcloth jacket. And then she remembered. No hat.

Striding over to her equipment capsule, she typed in her code and opened its door. Everything was there, as it should be. Her one hat, a “genteel” turban, was the only one that hadn’t generated gales of laughter when she tried on the variety of hats created for her 1906 wardrobe. She refused all the others. “Too bulky, and they take up too much room,” she had told Liu Bihai. “The turban will do until I get to a clothing store.”

After putting on her hat and pinning it, she realized that no one had thought of including a mirror. “Just as well,” she told herself, grinning.

To be sure she looked presentable anyway, she checked herself again. The bottom of her dress was wrinkled from her efforts inside the time capsule, and under the jacket she was damp from sweat. But no rips, no scratches.

I’m ready for this world.

Jy-ying unbarred the shipping doors and opened both of them out enough for her to slip between them, then closed them behind her. Looking around, she saw the shipping entrance was off a small alley that connected to De Haro Street, an area of small factories and warehouses. In the foggy distance she barely see several large buildings, their smokestacks billowing black smoke. Hazy bicycles, horses and wagons bustled around their entrances, and many more were apparently parked nearby. The air on the street smelled even worse than that in the warehouse, and she could well see why, with all the clumps of horse manure in the streets. There was no sidewalk.

All this was not completely strange. As a security officer, she had taken a tour of China, where some backward areas still remained, hardly touched by China’s economic development.

Jy-ying walked toward the street, and stopped in amazement to look at the poles that lined it. They were so laden with wires looping from pole to pole, and from the poles to the buildings scattered up and down the street, that they seemed to defy gravity by remaining unbroken, especially those leaning at precarious angles.

She had made sure she knew where the warehouse was located in San Francisco, and had memorized the streets in this area. There was the intersection with 15th Street two buildings south, and with Alameda

Street several buildings in the other direction, and she walked toward it to make sure of her orientation. At the intersection she continued on to Division Street, and from there did a one block jog over to Townsend Street. She now stood on the edge of the huge downtown, commercial, market, and residential districts destroyed by the April 18, 1906, San Francisco earthquake and fire. The fog was thicker here, and from what she could make out the area was still undergoing massive rebuilding. Two-thirds of the city had been destroyed, with 674 dead or missing, and 250,000 left homeless. She could see some indistinct mounds of rubble and a few skeletons of buildings whose owners waited for or contested their insurance settlements.

Now to find a hotel, get something to eat, and slowly settle in. No hurry. I have eight years before Sabah is born.

Chapter 10

Joy

Joy awoke in a sweat, with her heart beating rapidly. John was already awake and was looking at San Francisco's skinny telephone directory.

"I dreamed about my mom," she told him, her voice shaking. "I was with her and we were running away from a Khmer Rouge patrol when Mom fell and broke her leg. It was horrible. She told me to run and save myself and I ran and I heard the shot behind me as the patrol found her and I ran back and saw her lying in a pool of blood." Tears sprang to her eyes as she tried to recover from the nightmare.

John put his arms around her and held her tight. She felt so sad. She lamented, "I can't get out of my mind the horrible suffering people experienced in our old universe's wars and democides."

"You know," he said as he stroked her back, "finding out about Sabah and his nuclear murder of maybe two billion human beings destroyed any feeling of success that we might otherwise have had. But if you forget about him for a moment, as difficult as that is, we did succeed in stopping major wars and democide up to 1994. Except for Sabah, we did accomplish our mission."

Joy shook her head. "Isn't that like the cliché, 'The operation was a success, but the patient died'? Anyway, we can't get cocky about that or work any less cautiously or cleverly. We don't know whether we followed The Plan you and the Society worked out, or whether we succeeded as far as we did because we threw The Plan out."

John nodded. "It's as though we're starting from scratch again, except now we know about that son of a bitch, Sabah. And if we fail at everything else, we've got to kill him."

"Amen," she said. "Let's look at the chronology of this new universe that Lora sent us and at least see the consequences of what we did—not that we necessarily will be able to duplicate them."



When the time came, Joy and John met their three guys, as they were now calling them, for supper in the small hotel dining room. It was only twice the size of their room, and held seven cloth-covered post tables, all fairly close together. People were eating at four of them when they entered. The guys were already sitting at one table, and John pulled another table over so that they could eat together.

People had stopped eating to stare at John and particularly Joy as they sat down. The waiter, a surly looking fellow, ignored them for the next fifteen minutes.

Joy was irritated. John noticed, and cautioned her with his finger and a shake of his head. He finally stood, tapped on the candleholder with his knife, and waited for everyone's attention.

Smiling, John spoke loudly enough for everyone to hear. "Good afternoon. My name is John Banks. I am the new owner of this hotel, and also the owner of the Tor Import and Export Company, which I have relocated to San Francisco from New York. I would like you to meet my company's new employees," and John introduced the three guys. Then he added, "I also want you to meet my assistant and translator, Joy Phim."

He smiled broadly, and continued. "Collectively, our parents, grandparents, or near ancestors came from England, France, Germany, Mexico, Spain, Vietnam, and China. I don't see any Indians here, so all of you or your ancestors have also come from a foreign country. Now we're all Americans. And we all benefit from the diverse cultures we have brought together here. Isn't this a great country? To celebrate this, all your dinners this evening are on me."

Some of the quests clapped, and John sat down, his smile now extending from earlobe to earlobe.

Joy was proud of him, her man, and rubbed his leg with her ugly shoe to show it.

From then on, they always had the best of service from the waiter, and word rapidly got around. For several days after, when they ate in the dining room, at least one guest would come up to John, smile at Joy, thank him for bringing his business to San Francisco, and congratulate him on the speech they'd heard or heard about.



With the guys helping with directions and flagging down hacks, John and Joy began their first business in the past after breakfast the

next morning. The whole downtown area, and with it most city government buildings, had been burned down or destroyed during the April earthquake and fire. But several buildings had been repaired, and these were being used temporarily to conduct city business. Some city offices in the partially destroyed city hall were still open to the public; again with the help of the guys, they found the appropriate office for registering their company in San Francisco.

Next, John had to buy the warehouse. The Bank of California, which had survived the fire, had been appointed as trustee for the warehouse, and the court permitted them to sell the warehouse to John at a market value of \$19,233.

“Less than one third of what you paid for the hotel,” Joy whispered in John’s ear. He ignored the comment.

Until their new company developed sufficiently that they could build or take over a whole office building, they intended to renovate the inside of the warehouse into temporary offices and work and storage rooms. On the advice of the manager of the bank, John had a long discussion with Muss Builders over what he wanted and finally gave them a blank check to hire an architect and get to work. He was told that their job would have to wait a year or more—there was reconstruction going on all over San Francisco due to the fire and earthquake. After a whispered conversation with Joy that raised the eyebrows of the company owner, John tripled the estimated cost of the remodeling. Their job was given priority.

They had rented a team of two horses and a carriage, all hitched together for them at the Rent-A-Horse stalls, and had Dolphy, who had worked on a farm, drive them from city hall to banks to builders. Once they got the business details settled, John had the guys ask around for an automobile dealer. At Hughson & Merton, a new franchise for the Ford car, they found a 1905 Model C. It bore a \$800 price tag. No trade-in on carriages or wagons.

“Boy,” John exclaimed, “two cylinders, ten horsepower, maximum speed thirty miles per hour. I have to buy this baby. It’s only about twenty thousand in 2002 dollars. Cheap, for all that horsepower.”

“Like we have a choice,” Joy replied. “It’s ugly, but better than a horse.” She hesitated, grinned, and whispered so that the guys couldn’t hear, “And about one sixtieth of what you paid for the hotel.”

John made a show of looking at the sky, cupped his ear, and asked Hands, who was looking the car over, “Did you hear something?”

“Huh?”

John shrugged. “Think it’s a chickeylipper”
“What’s that?”

“Oh,” John drawled, trying to look bland but betrayed by the upward twitch at the corners of his mouth, “it’s a pesky female creature that feeds off of male eagles and owls. Yes, pesky to be sure. Makes a belching sound.”

The guys looked curiously at the middle finger that Joy jabbed at John.

The dealer showed John how to use the Ford’s hand lever to control the high and low gears, how to operate the reverse and brake pedals on the floorboard, how to control the motor throttle with the foot lever, and how to set the throttle and use the lever on the steering wheel to retard the spark when starting the car.

“Have you ever cranked an automobile before?” he asked.

John looked startled.

The dealer interpreted John’s expression as a “No” and showed him how to crank the car without breaking an arm, just in case the car back-fired.

As John finished noting it all down on the car’s advertising booklet, Joy beat him to the driver’s side door and climbed up to sit behind the wheel.

John got in and told her with an undertaker’s seriousness, “Women are not allowed to drive at this time, since the automobile is considered too complex for your simple minds. Besides, it’s too difficult for a woman to crank.” He had a hard time getting her away from the crank and steering wheel for the next week—she would have cranked the car by herself, if she had to use both arms and one foot.



They’d been in San Francisco a month when Joy decided she needed a wardrobe with more variety than the one the Society had prepared for her. There were several dress shops only four blocks away along 16th Street, and walking to them would give her a better chance to look around at this old world. John was busy working with their architect on their new offices; she let him know where she was going and left the warehouse.

She got no further than the intersection of 8th and Wisconsin Streets.

“Hey you, stop!” someone yelled, and Joy turned to see two policemen walking along the street toward her. One of them was a husky

fellow, about her height, in late middle age. He had a handlebar mustache and unruly hair that curled up around his helmet. The other fellow was young and clean-shaven, and walked a step behind the older policeman.

The older man looked angry. He asked gruffly, "What are you doing here?"

"I work down the road, at the old warehouse."

"You lie. No Chinks work around here. You're not allowed around here."

"I beg your pardon," she answered levelly, "I'm an American citizen, and you have no right to stop me."

"Is that so. You're either a Chink or a Jap, and you ain't going to fool me with your forged birth certificate. There are too many of you paper sons around." He looked at his younger partner. "Call a wagon, Jim."

There was a police phone on the pole at Wisconsin and 16th Streets, and while Jim went over to call, the old one asked Joy, "How come a good-looking whore like you is working this area? You must have escaped from one of the Chink cribs. But you're too good-looking for them. I can fix you up with a good location at Turk and Steiner Streets—Madam Labrodet has opened a nice *bagnio* there, and she'll take on good-looking Chinks." He added, leering, "We'll take you there for a little payback."

Joy must have looked pretty angry, because he stepped back a couple of feet and brought his billy club up in front of him as she said loudly, clipping her words, "I am no whore. I work at the Tor Import and Export Company down the road. Do you understand that, my simple man?"

"Bullshit."

Joy briefly considered laying out both him and his partner. *Too close to the warehouse.* They might easily see her again in the future and call in reinforcements. No need for additional trouble. She'd settle this at police headquarters.

Jim returned. "Called 'em, Carl," he announced, and the pair stood off a little distance, waiting for the wagon. They stared at her and chuckled, murmuring sidelong to one another.

While they laughed over whatever little jokes they were exchanging, Joy simmered. *Let's see, which of Carl's legs should I break? Better yet, why not wrap his right arm around his leg and tuck it back into his right armpit? Nah. That's too easy on him too.*

Finally a two-cylinder Buick that looked like a motorized buggy pattered up to them, another policeman at the wheel. The police had commandeered all the automobiles after the San Francisco fire; this must have been left over from then, Joy thought. She was told to climb into the back, and Carl climbed in beside her. Jim pulled himself up in the front, next to the driver. They started off with a jolt.

Carl immediately leaned over and tried to put his hand under her dress—no easy matter, since the skirt was so long it almost covered her shoes.

She chopped down on his biceps.

He reared back, rubbed his upper arm, and tried to press the head of his billy club into her side. With a twist of her upper body, she elbowed the club away and knife-chopped down on his quadriceps, giving him a painful charley horse.

“You fucking whore,” he roared, causing his partner in the front to jerk around to see what was happening. “I’m going to enjoy personally working you over and sticking this club up your fucking twat.”

She responded as demurely as she could, looking at him from under her long eyelashes. “Try anything more—and I sincerely hope you do—and your partners in the front are going to wonder how a sweet little thing like me could take that club away and beat the shit out of you.”

He reared back against the strut holding up the car’s canopy and stared at her. *I bet no woman has ever talked to him like that*, Joy observed smugly.

“We’ll see, you fucking whore,” he spat. He kept his body turned toward her, thumping his club hard into his palm, scowling. He kept glancing back and forth between his partners in front and Joy.

After driving for about half an hour, they came to a small encampment of dirty, dusty-looking tents. The driver stopped at the entrance to the camp and looked back at Joy. “Are you a Chink or a Jap?” he asked.

“I’m American.”

“Shit you are,” Carl threw at her, his voice husky with rage.

“I think she’s a Chink,” the driver said. “Anyway, if we put her in with the Chinks, rats know their own—they’ll send her over to the Japs, if that’s where she belongs.”

The driver guided the Buick into the camp. Two policemen near the entrance stood and stepped in front of the Buick. “Where is the women’s tent?” the driver asked. “You know which one I mean.”

“Three tents down, on the left.”

The driver drove down the line of tents and stopped at the third one. Carl got out first. As Joy climbed down, he smacked her hard on the rear with his club. She stopped dead and gave him such a fierce glare, his eyes widened for a moment and he took a step away from her. As though to hide his reaction, he turned abruptly, pointed toward the tent, and beckoned Joy to follow him, all without looking at her.

The air inside the tent was hot and stunk like a spittoon—or what Joy thought it would smell like, if she were to stick her nose in one. An old Chinese woman hunched over a rickety folding table, her head wreathed in a haze of smoke. She wore a gray, shapeless robe, and clutched a long pipe with a tiny bowl in one hand.

Joy breathed through her mouth to escape the stench, and almost immediately her lips felt oily. When she unconsciously ran her tongue over them, they tasted odd, like they'd been rubbed with a rotten orange.

The old woman raised her round, shriveled face, and Carl asked her loudly, "Is this whore a Chink?"

Hardly seeming to open her eyes beyond a crack, she looked at Joy for several moments. She mumbled in Mandarin Chinese, "Who are you?"

Joy answered in Mandarin, one of the Chinese languages—mistakenly called dialects—she had studied, "I'm American. My parents were Sino-Vietnamese. My name is Joy Phim."

"What?"

The woman was partly deaf. *As well as olfactory-challenged*, Joy thought, reluctantly swallowing the taste in her mouth. She slowly and loudly repeated what she'd said.

The old woman nodded, and responded in Chinese, "Call me Mei. Am I not as enchanting as my name?" And she pulled her wrinkled mouth into a grin, exposing her yellow teeth. Then she coughed, blowing a stinking hole in the haze of smoke. She turned her head in Carl's direction—Joy couldn't tell where she looked, with those slit eyes—and nodded. In English she said, "She *Chinese*."

Carl's eyes blazed with a mixture of hate and expectation. He jabbed his finger at Joy, and opened his mouth as if about to say something. He suddenly changed his mind, clamped his lips shut, and jerked around to stalk out of the tent.

Joy took the few steps over to the table and without invitation sat down across from Mei. "Where am I?" she asked loudly in Mandarin.

Without seeming to move her lips, Mei mumbled, "You are in the Presidio, near Fort Point."

“Why are you here, Mei?”

Mei inhaled deeply from her pipe and exhaled enough smoke in her direction to obscure an ocean liner. Joy tried to hold her breath and fan it away with her hand. When she partly succeeded, she warned Mei, “Do that again, and I’ll take that pipe away from you.”

Mei ignored her threat, but answered her question. Pipe smoke puffed out of her motionless mouth as she mumbled, “All of Chinatown was burned down. We had no place to live after that, so the mayor made us all go to one camp. Then another. This is our final camp. There were about five hundred of us here, at first. Chinatown is being rebuilt. Many went back there to live in new buildings. Only about fifty of us are left here.”

“But the guards—aren’t you free to leave?”

“Yes, I think so. But, where would we go? Our homes are all gone. White men do not want us to live outside of Chinatown. The mayor is against it, and he is a little emperor.” She paused and gestured behind her. “Would you like some tea? I have a hot kettle on a little fire.”

“Yes, thank you.”

When Mei put the green tea before her, Joy sipped it as she asked Mei about her family and where she’d lived in China. Within a few minutes, though, Joy became dizzy. Mei seemed to be disappearing into a haze. *Shit. I’ve been drugged.*

She pushed herself up from the table, swayed on her feet, then crumpled to the floor. She tried to get to her knees, but her body wouldn’t work. She raised her head. Through the increasing darkness, she saw Mei’s fuzzy back as the old woman left the tent.

She felt her head bump the floor. Blackness.



Joy’s mind slowly emerged from darkness, but she still felt dazed. She had a headache. As her senses struggled toward awareness, she felt cold air blanket her body. Only cold air. She was naked. Someone had stripped her. And she could hear two men talking nearby.

She didn’t move as she tried to orient herself. She was on her side. She could feel that her hands were tied behind her. And she was shivering from the cold.

Now, she thought, I could scream, cry, beg the men to let me go, blush with embarrassment, and all those things women do in movies when threatened. That antithetical model in her mind helped her take

deep breaths, slow her breathing, relax her muscles, and center her thoughts and energy on what she had to do. She kept her eyes closed, listened, and tested the bonds around her wrists. If left alone for a few moments, she was limber enough to slip her wrists under her feet and bring her hands in front of her, where she could bite through the bonds or use her teeth to untie them.

She heard someone say, “This one is a beauty. She’s too good for the peasants. I think we can spread the word that we have the most beautiful Chink they have ever seen, available for two dollars a half-hour, ten dollars a night. Give her a nice, slant-eyed name, like ‘Lotus,’ or ‘Jade.’ I want to start working her tomorrow. Break her in by then.”

Someone with a thick accent replied, “She eat shit before she say no when I done.”

“Yes, whatever. But no bruises, no cigarette burns, no broken bones. I’m first tomorrow at 2 p.m., so I want her cunt shaved, clean, and ready. You got that? Use her other hole or her mouth if you want, but her cunt is mine.

“Before I leave I want to take a picture. When the rich pricks see it, they’ll maybe pay double, if they get an early whack at her before everybody else slimes her up. Untie her hands and sit her against the wall. Put the sheet around her, sexy-like. I don’t want anyone getting anything for free. I’ll go get the camera.”

She felt herself being rolled over onto her stomach. Her hands were untied. *Are bad guys always this stupid?* Joy wondered.

Bad Accent roughly rolled her over onto her back. He put a hand on her breast and tried to spread her legs with the other.

Planning to aim a chop at his neck, Joy opened her eyes, but they wouldn’t focus. She saw only a blurred image of a bull of a man with a large, bald, round head that seemed to merge into huge shoulders.

Focus! She imagined three hollow tiles stacked on top of each other, the ends of the bottom one supported on bricks. She prepared to break through the tiles with one mighty chop of her hand. She ignored what Bad Accent was doing, gathered her energy, and focused and focused and focused.

Yelling “Haiyeee,” Joy released her chain of power. Like a whip, it sprang up from her twisting hip and back, through her rotator cuff, into a turn of her elbow, flip of her wrist, to end in a knife chop of blazing speed and strength.

Slap. Thunk. She felt her chop dig into flesh, muscle, and cartilage where she thought Bad Accent’s neck was.

“Ummph,” he grunted, and a large club of a hand swiped at her face.

Joy ducked, rolled, and tried to stand up. The room swam before her. She swayed. *Damn drug. Okay, plan B.*

He lumbered at her with both arms held wide to bear hug her and throw her helpless to the floor. In all her years of training in judo and karate, that was one approach no one taught her. For good reason. She let him get his arms around her, but held up her right arm to keep it free. As he tightened his hug, she brought her free arm down and quickly jabbed two stiff, dagger-like fingers into his eyes.

“Yeohhh,” he cried, followed by some gibberish in a language she didn’t recognize. He released her and yanked his hands up to his eyes to rub the pain and sudden blindness away.

Joy’s vision and mind had cleared enough to do what came to her as routine. She twirled on her left leg and kicked him in the throat with her right heel, and as he bent over choking, she put both hands behind his head and jerked it down sharply onto her knee. There was a loud crackling sound, and an even louder grunt as she felt his nose break. He still wouldn’t go down.

Joy couldn’t trust going after his neck again. She simply stepped in front of him and threw a powerful front toe kick into his vulnerable throat, not caring whether she crushed his windpipe or not. He must have had concrete legs. He still didn’t go down, but bent over further, holding his throat and gasping for breath. Blood dripped from his nose. His eyes were squinted shut.

She fired a two-handed knuckle punch into his temple. Sucking air in huge, gurgling gasps, he finally lost consciousness, and toppled to the floor.

She looked around the room as she took a moment to rest. It was bare except for the bamboo mat she had been lying on, and her clothes thrown in a corner. There were no windows; light came from a single bulb hanging from the ceiling on its electrical cord. The only other thing in the room was a dirty sheet at the foot of the mat. She picked that up and was going to wrap it around her, but she remembered that the other man was coming back with a camera. She took up a position near the door and waited.

A few minutes later, a man entered carrying a large camera. She was behind the door as it opened, so the first thing he saw was Bad Accent sprawled on the floor. He jerked his head around, looking for her.

She stood as nature made her, one hand on the door, the other on her hip. “Hi Sweetie,” she said in a sexy voice, “looking for me?”

He hesitated a second, surprised, then immediately crouched; his hand flashed toward his pocket. Joy twirled, rotating her foot into his face and kicked him sprawling. She leaped on him. Unlike Bad Accent, he had a normal neck. She swiftly chopped his carotid vein switch and his head flopped as he lost consciousness.

She straddled his body and searched his clothes. She found his wallet and saw that he not only carried a badge, but that he was Assistant Police Chief Greg Glazier. She stripped him, sliding the .36 caliber Colt handgun he had in a shoulder holster toward her clothes.

She tried to do the same to Bad Accent, but he weighed about two-hundred and fifty pounds, and it was like moving a huge granite slab. Employing various laws of mechanics, she managed to strip him also. Glazier started gaining consciousness as she was doing so, so she knuckle-punched his temple and put him out again.

My locket! She realized she was not only naked, she didn't have her locket. Frantic, she rushed over to her clothes—it wasn't there. She hurried over to Bad Accent's clothes and rummaged through them. She found her locket in his pants pocket. She held it close to her heart for a moment, kissed it, and with a great sigh of relief, put it back around her neck where it belonged.

She stood contemplating Bad Accent and Glazier. She had an idea.

With great difficulty, invoking even more laws of mechanics, she dragged and rolled the naked Bad Accent up to a wall. Grunting with the effort, she leaned him against it. Then she dragged the equally naked and much lighter Glazier up to the wall, and propped him next to Bad Accent. She grabbed the sheet and wet a corner with her spittle, then wiped the blood off of Bad Accent's face. She folded the mat and placed her clothes on top so that the pile was about a foot high. This she positioned about ten feet away from the two men. Joy was pleased to see that Glazier's camera was a Kodak folding pocket bellows type, with a ten second timer. Gauging the poor lighting, Joy set the speed at its longest—one second—and balanced the camera on the folded mat.

Returning to the two men, she tilted Bad Accent down and positioned him so that his mouth was on Glazier's penis. She made sure Bad Accent's diminutive penis was visible, so there would be no mistaking his gender. She stood back and studied her handiwork, then arranged two fingers of Bad Accent's hand right around his penis. She rested Glazier's right hand on Bad Accent's head.

Again she stood back. *Better.* She grinned. *My mom would never believe this. Joy, the porno director.*

Finally, she placed Glazier's badge where she could get it in a rush. She set the timer on the camera, hid her locket down her back, rushed over to the men, and sat on the floor next to Glazier. She placed his badge over her genitals, covered her face with one hand, and with the other held his head in a loving embrace so it would be visible for the camera.

Click.

Done. Joy had to make sure. She took another photograph.

She dressed in Glazier's clothes and stuffed her hair up into his fedora to keep it from sliding down over her ears. Glazier was only an inch taller than she was, and thin, so with some adjustment of the clothes, she was satisfied she could pass for a man, if no one looked closely. She folded her clothes around her purse and placed them under her arm, lifted the camera with the same arm so she would have the other hand free to reach Glazier's gun in his coat pocket, and opened the door.

Joy had no idea where she was, but she could tell she was in a large house. A number of rooms opened off a long hallway. She could hear voices, and muffled crying came from a nearby room. Further down the hallway, there were other sounds.

Lovemaking? Wrong word—rape.

She ambled down the hallway as though she were in her own house, then passed through a dimly lit living room where a number of women sat talking and two men stood looking like they were on guard. When somebody said something to her, she lifted her hand holding the camera and waved it. She kept walking.

She walked out the front door, down several steps, and onto a street. It was night. Without stopping, she turned right and walked until the house was out of sight.

Joy walked into the middle of what a street sign told her was Castro Street and waved down what was possibly one of the first motor trucks ever made. It looked like a poorly loaded washing machine and indeed it was precariously loaded with bundled hay. When the driver leaned out and looked down at her curiously, his whole body shaking in time with the idling motor, she had to yell up at him to be heard above its popping noise. Trying to imitate a man's voice, she announced huskily, "I'm going to a costume party but I'm very late. Five dollars if you take me there."

"What's a Chink like you doing around here?"

"I'm not a Chink. This is good makeup. Fooled you."

Looking at her doubtfully, he said, "Okay. Give me the five dollars."

She pulled out Glazier's wallet, hoping he had enough money in it. She found two dollars. "Here's two. I'll give you the rest when I get to the party."

She climbed in, yelled the address at him, and with a loud backfire they started off in a plume of acrid smoke from his exhaust. She tried to raise her voice above the loud put-putting of the engines to ask, "How long will this take?"

She wasn't doing a good job of disguising her feminine voice. He looked at her suspiciously, but answered, "Maybe half hour, forty-five minutes."

Joy nodded, and thought it best to ignore him for the rest of the trip. Fortunately, the truck was so loud that she could risk finally communicating with John. Looking away from the driver, she sub-vocalized "KK" to turn on her communicator and whispered, "Dearest, are you there?"

John responded immediately. "Jesus, baby, where've you been? I was about to send the posse out after you."

"Later. I'm coming to the hotel by hay truck. Wait outside for me in a half-hour with four dollars. KK."

They arrived about an hour later. As they approached, she could see John pacing up and down the street. He took note of how she was dressed but, mindful of the driver's presence, he simply said, "Hi," and gave her the money. She turned it over to the driver and said with a smile, no longer disguising her voice, "Keep the rest."

As they walked into the hotel, John looked her over and said, "Nice clothes. They cost you much?"

Except for a look of resignation over his sense of humor, she kept silent. They got their keys from the desk clerk, who stared at her, shook his head, looked up at the ceiling, then buried his face in his newspaper as if seeking escape from a crazed world. When they reached their rooms, John followed her into her room.

As soon as the door closed behind him, she let relief flood her mind and body. It was over. The warrior could disappear until she needed her again. She wrapped John in her arms, kissed him on the lips, on the forehead, on the cheeks, and let the tears flow as she put her head on his shoulder.

All he could do was ask, "What happened? What's the matter?"

"You don't like my new clothes," she bawled, trying to imitate a little girl who had skinned her knee. He looked like she'd hit him with a rock.

Joy waited until she'd calmed down before again attempting the catharsis of humor. She finally pulled away from John, bowed, and with a sweep of her hand, announced, "Meet the newest candidate for sex slavery."

“That’s not funny,” he said sharply.

“No, really, I was. I’ll tell you about it while I get out of these stupid clothes.”

“Why? They make you look good,” John said with a twisted grin.

Joy ignored that, and was into her story by the time she had kicked the clothes into a heap on the floor and had a towel wrapped around her for warmth. By the time she got to the point in her story when she was coming out of the drug to find herself naked on the floor with two men in the room, John was fuming. When she told him that Bad Accent was going to break her in for sex slavery, he was livid. His hands balled into fists and he looked like a boiler, red hot and ready to explode. She could imagine steam pouring out of the safety valves in his ears.

But his face was transformed when she told him about flooring Bad Accent and what she had done to Glazier, and he wore a pleased grin as she explained in detail the photographs she had taken. “The photos are in that?” he asked, pointing to the Kodak.

“Yes.”

“And you covered your privates with his badge, and the badge is clear in the photo?” His grin almost split his face.

“Yes,” Joy murmured.

John now wore a delighted, smug expression, as though he had taken a photo of his worst enemy making love to a goat. He could hardly speak for chortling. “Well, well,” he managed to get out, “we’ve got ourselves a smoking gun.”

“Excuse me, dearest,” she said pleasantly, “‘we’?”

“Of course, baby. Where would you be without me to develop the photograph?”

“Of course,” she responded dryly. “I hadn’t thought of that.”

Joy gave him her version of a triumphant grin. “Anyway, I hope you don’t find it too odd if I take a bath before discussing this further.”

She wrapped a blanket around her and waited while John disrobed and covered himself with a bath towel. As they headed down the hall toward the bath, John stopped at Hands’ door and knocked.

Hands answered; Dolphy and Sal were with him. Hands looked at Joy and said simply, “We were worried about you, Miss Phim. Hope that you’re alright? We thought your boss was going to murder someone if anything happened to you,” and he looked at John and smiled knowingly.

John invited the three guys out for a meal and drinks. They agreed. Saying they would see them after their bath, John and Joy continued

toward the bathroom. Suddenly realizing what they were doing, Joy looked over her shoulder. The three guys were standing in the doorway, utterly stupefied. She gave them a nonchalant wave as John opened the bathroom door. They stepped inside.

After he closed the door, Joy said sweetly, “Do you realize those three saw us come in here? They know we’re taking a bath together.”

His mouth dropped open. He stared at her for a moment, then broke out in laughter. “Well,” he said between chuckles, “you thought they would find out about us sooner or later, even if I hadn’t made that slip yesterday. Sooner is better, but I don’t know whether I can stand the envy.”

Joy couldn’t believe it. He did have a very pleased look on his face.

When they finished their bath, always a logistic victory for two in that small tub, and were walking down the hall to her room—she now remembered to put a towel around her—Joy saw that Hands had left his door open and the other guys were still inside. She couldn’t help it. She peeked in, and said cheerily, “The bathroom is now free, if you guys want to take a bath together.”

All the way back to her room, she giggled at their shocked expressions.

When the door closed behind them, John snatched the towel off her, flicked her bottom with it, and said, “Vixen.”

Joy didn’t think he lost his pleased expression until their dinner with the guys, when she brought up the kidnapping. Hands and Dolphy were outraged. Sal sort of brushed it off. “I’m really sorry it happened to you, but it happens all the time, unless the girl has a family member or husband with her. Corrupt policemen or a gang pick her up, drug her, and make her disappear forever as a sex slave. Especially, you know, Mex and Chi—Oriental chicks, since no one in power seems to care about them.”

He looked embarrassed, and she put her hand on his arm. “Sal, thanks. I know you’re trying.”

They went out for drinks afterward, to a place Sal recommended—the new Liberty Cafe on Broadway. On the way, Joy warned John, “You had better not buy the place, if there is any trouble over me. Promise.”

“Cross my heart.”

Joy knew he had his fingers crossed as he said that. But she loved him for it.

They had no trouble. The Liberty Cafe hosted a mixed clientele, including some Indians and Mexicans, and they provided Black

entertainment. No one paid any attention to them, and they found in a corner a nicked and scratched, redwood table they could relax around.

Once they all had their steins of Anchor Steam beer, Hands told them about the sex industry in the Barbary Coast area of San Francisco and Chinatown. “Before the fire, this used to be a wide-open town, although my baseball pals told me that the crusaders and religious leaders were having some effect. There were the cribs, little rooms lined up one next to another, where young girls were forced to prostitute themselves. There were the cow-yards, which was just a collection of cribs under one roof. And there were the parlor houses for the best whores. There were hundreds of these places.”

Joy asked, “What about Chinese girls?”

Hands looked away and Dolphy found his beer stein interesting.

Finally, Sal spoke up. “I’m sorry, Miss Phim—”

“Please, I’m Joy.”

“Joy. You don’t want to know.”

Joy motioned with her hand. “Come on, Sal.”

Sal stared down at the table, his brow furrowed, his lips thinly drawn.

“Sal!”

“Okay, okay. Chin . . . Chinese girls were sold by their families in China to pimps, and then smuggled here and sold to Ch . . . Chinese cribs. My uncle used to do deliveries to some of the Chinese cow-yards. He told me that they could buy a fourteen-year-old girl for about \$1,000, and girls aged six to ten for maybe \$500. Even girls one year old were sold. Good-looking girls of twelve to fifteen might cost \$2,000.”

Still not looking at Joy, Hands added, his voice tight with disgust, “Yeah, I heard about this. The girls would be strip . . . undressed and poked before the sale. They were slaves.”

Though unfocused, Sal’s eyes blazed, as though he were staring at some despicable mental image. He didn’t seem to realize his fist was hitting the table in sync with his words. “Some Mex girls were brought in—kidnapped—and treated the same way. They and the Chinese slaves—those poor goddam girls—were diseased, ugly, and goddam useless by maybe twenty, and you know what the goddam crib owners did?”

Joy gaped at him.

Looking at no one, Sal answered, “The fucking shits took them to a goddam death house, where they had to lie on a bamboo mat in a dark

room with little to eat or drink until they died, or—” he hit the table with his fist, and again “—killed themselves.”

Sal was so enraged his face was a livid red, and both his hands were doubled into fists on the table. He was completely unaware that he had cussed horribly in front of a woman. Dolphy realized it, though, and his face flushed.

John was aghast, not at the swearing—it had lost its shock value in the old universe—but at what Sal revealed about the girls. “Jesus! I read something about the Barbary Coast being famous around the world as the American Paris—even worse than Paris—but I didn’t know the city allowed open slavery. You say it is being cleaned up now?”

“Oh,” Dolphy replied, his normal color returning, “it’s being cleaned up now, but I think some of it is still going on.”

Gruffly, John asked, “What do the slave owners charge the . . . men for these girls?”

Her face pale, her hand still on her cheek in outrage, Joy looked at him sharply. “Leave it, John.”

Sal hissed, “Twenty-five goddam cents for a Mex; for an American, one dollar.” He refused to look at Joy. “About fifty cents for Japanese or Chinese. French women can get seventy-five cents.”

There were many things Joy wanted to ask. It even crossed her mind to wonder whether the guys had used these young girls. She stomped on the thought and kicked it into her mental garbage can. Their repugnance was real. Having suffered her own experience with San Francisco sex-slavery, it all nauseated her. *But at least there is something we can do.*

“Let’s talk about the photos,” she said, and with obvious relief they all discussed what to do with them. Except for Sal. His normal light olive coloring returned, but he seemed distracted for the rest of the evening. *I would not want to be a pimp propositioning him in the next week or so,* Joy thought.

Joy and John already knew from the chronology the Society had prepared for them that in 1906, San Francisco had a corrupt administration. Just in the month of their arrival here, Mayor Schmitz, political “Boss” Abe Ruef, and Police Chief Dinan were indicted by a Grand Jury for bribery and extortion. In the following months, indictments also would be handed down for the city Attorney General and all eighteen members of the Board of Supervisors. The guys, of course, only knew about the indictments of the mayor and Boss Ruef, but they had heard rumors, as had everyone else in the city.

Now, she had found out personally that the assistant chief of police was involved in the sex trade. The historical records said nothing about indictments related to the sex slave market. Here was where the photos could be useful. But it had to be done without Joy's identity becoming known. So they talked long into the night about how to handle this.

Those young Chinese girls bought and sold into sex slavery never left Joy's mind that night, and for weeks afterward the imagined images of their awful lives blew into her mind at the oddest moments. She decided, *There are missions and then there are missions. Eradicating such slavery is a mission I could undertake with a vengeance—and in vengeance.*



They could not trust anyone to develop the photographs that she'd taken, but the Society had anticipated their need to do their own photo development and had included special chemicals in one of the supply capsules, along with 8.5 by 11 inch photo paper. All they needed was water, pans, a closed room, and a place to screw in a red bulb.

Hands bought pans, a bulb, and red paint as John requested, and watched curiously as John painted the bulb. Then he put an *Out of Order* sign on the bathroom door on their floor—his buying the hotel was proving smarter than Joy had thought—and set to work. He looked carefully at the two negatives and picked the best. Then he followed the directions that came with the development packets and photo paper, worked to counteract the photo's poor contrast and brightness caused by the poor light conditions, and finally hung it up to dry.

Three hours later, John retrieved the photo from the bathroom and examined it in the hallway, where he could see it clearly. "Yes!" he yelled, and did a little jig.

He quietly took the photograph into Joy's room, where Joy was working on her laptop, writing the letters that would accompany the photo. He leaned over her shoulder and proudly shoved one of the black and white photographs under her nose.

"Look! Worth a Pulitzer Prize."

She was amazed at how good it was, and what a pornographic tableau it appeared to be. She felt the heat in her face and realized she must be blushing.

Bad Accent actually seemed to be committing fellatio on Glazier while playing with himself. Glazier's badge showed clearly. It ade-

quately covered her genitals, and her hand hid her face. Poor Glazier. Even though he'd been unconscious, his eyes closed, in the photograph he seemed to be smirking, eyes drooping with pleasure. The only sensitive thing about the photograph were her breasts, but hell, no one would know who those belonged to. No one would even know she was Asian.

"Oops." It occurred to her: "Are you going to show this to the guys?"

John thought for a moment. "Sure; they'll envy me even more. Maybe I'll make copies for them to pin up on their walls."

"Deviate!" she yelled, and pushed him onto the bed with her foot. She jumped on him and tickled him. They both rolled around on the bed, laughing.

Once they sobered, they talked through the problem. For one thing, they had already grown to trust the guys, despite their background and the little time they'd known them. Part of the reason was what Lora had told them in her message. Another part was their intuition. The guys had already shown themselves to be good and helpful employees, even friends.

The other question was the display of Joy's body. In their twenty-first century of topless bars, R-rated movies, and Internet pornography, the display of breasts was nothing, especially for Joy, with her Asian background and the sexual training she'd received as a young girl. For the young men in this era, a revealed ankle could be erotic, and indeed, was considered risqué. Yet, if they were to use the photo to its maximum advantage, they had to distribute it, which meant that it would become an underground sensation. Then the guys might see it anyway. Besides, they were adults and surely not virgins.

"So," she finally told John, "show it to them."

"You don't think this will demean you in their eyes? I worry that they might get ideas from seeing your breasts."

"They're young men, sweetheart. They naturally get ideas, as you put it. If they haven't already, I'd think they were gay—or that there was something strange about them."

"I don't want them to cut your picture out and pin it on their wall to ogle," John protested.

"Why not? Wouldn't you?"

"Maybe I will. Okay, you win. I'll bask in their incredible envy, the unbelievable desire in their eyes, their amazing jeal—"

"Shut up, John."



John made nine copies from the negative, and the next day when they met with the guys at breakfast, he gave each of them one of the photographs.

Dolphy blushed while looking at it, and managed to say, his voice unusually high, “God—gosh, this is good.”

Sal looked at it for a few moments, and said, “You’ve got . . . nerve. I couldn’t have set this fuc—punk up any better.” He reddened, and apologized to Joy for his language.

Hands looked at the photo for a long moment, then said, “Where? I don’t see her . . . nerve.”

“There, behind the shield,” Sal said, grinning devilishly, his normal color returning.

Hands put down the photo and gave Joy a little salute with two fingers. “I think the best thing that ever happened to me was meeting you two.” Looking into Joy’s eyes, he continued. “And being hired by your boss. If I can ever help you two, and I mean beyond the job, let me know. You are my kind of people.”

“I agree,” Dolphy said, and Sal added his, “Me too.”

This affected her deeply. Moist-eyed, she reached across the table and asked that they put their hands in hers. Once they had, she placed her other hand on top of theirs and told them all, “Thanks, guys. You don’t know what that means to me.”

“To us,” John amended, and added his own hands to the stack.

That afternoon, Joy put the letters and photos in envelopes, put a two-cent stamp on each, and the guys mailed them from separate mailboxes around the city. They went to William Randolph Hearst’s *San Francisco Examiner*, San Francisco’s *Daily News* and *Chronicle*, and especially to Fremont Older, editor of the *Bulletin*, who was particularly devoted to exposing the corruption in the city. Each letter said:

Enclosed is a photograph of Assistant Chief of Police Greg Glazier of San Francisco, who is running a sex slave ring. With him is one of his female victims and the enforcer, who is seen servicing him. The enforcer’s job is to make the kidnapped girls fear him more than they are sickened by the sexual acts they must perform for ten or more men a day.

One way they procure the girls is to have them picked up by the police for some bogus reason. They are taken to

a place where they can be drugged and kidnapped into this slavery. Such a place is the third tent on the left after entering the Chinese section of the Presidio camp. An old Chinese woman named Mei is doing the drugging there. Check her tea.

*Yours Sincerely,
I.M. Justine*

Two months later, the *San Francisco Daily News* carried the following headline.

SEX RING BUSTED

Assistant Police Chief Greg Glazier, eleven policemen, four Chinese, two Japanese, and sixteen others were indicted for kidnapping, slavery, and murder. Three committed suicide within hours of the District Attorney's release of the indictments.

Toward the end of the article, was this paragraph.

Two of the indicted policemen were being treated in hospital for severe beatings they had received. One, Patrolman Carl O'Brien, had two fingers of his right hand cut off. The policemen refused to talk about the beatings and the prosecutor's office disclaims any knowledge of it. The prosecutor did say that this was assault with the intent to kill and they will pursue the perpetrators regardless of the indictments.

Neither John nor Joy ever mentioned these beatings to the guys, although she did notice the next day that Dolphy had skinned knuckles and Sal seemed unusually pleased with himself.

In the next year, all those indicted were found guilty, and Glazier was sentenced to life in prison. Of those women the ring had enslaved, twenty-three survived and five died or were murdered by the ring. The survivor's names had not been released, but through contacts John had developed in the prosecutor's office during the year, they got their names and addresses. Joy personally sent each \$5,000—about \$94,000 in year 2002 dollars—with a note:

You have my deepest sympathy for the suffering and humiliation to which you have been subjected by the Glazier sex ring. My heart goes out to you.

Not all men are like those that sexually exploited you. Most that I know are helpful, kind-hearted, and considerate. I hope that you have come to know such men also, and have found love, or will do so soon.

Perhaps this gift will make your life a little easier, although I know nothing can ever erase the memory.

*My very best wishes for your future happiness,
A friend*

Chapter 11

Jy-ying

“My name is Khoo Jy-ying, and I am here to purchase a property you are holding.”

The bank clerk was surly when he reluctantly gave her his attention. She did not understand it. She was dressed in the most fashionable and expensive clothes she could buy. She had come straight from Eglantine’s Chic Shop and even wore an awful corset that the female clerk laced up for her. She felt like she’d been strapped to a pole.

Jy-ying laid a five dollar bill on the clerk’s plain oak desk. That seemed to upset him. He looked her up and down again, then without a word he rose and went to a rear desk, where he talked briefly to an elderly man. When he returned, he pointed to the rear without looking her in the eyes and said, “Go see him.” He sat down at his desk and stared at the papers scattered across it.

She strode purposely past him and sat down uninvited in the office chair diagonally facing a lovely desk made from cross sections of red-wood burl. On it a lacquered placard read *Eugene Hoppner, Manager*.

Hoppner ignored her, apparently checking a list of numbers. She didn’t know how he could see over the gray handlebar mustache that protruded further than his nose. The bank was crowded, with two long lines of customers at the two available cashier windows. Many of the people continued to stare at her, as they had done when she walked in. The bank was uncomfortably warm and the temperature combined with her dress, petticoats, corset, and bustle were making her overheat. She could feel the sweat forming in her underarms.

Jy-ying looked back at the lines of customers. An old woman in a long yellow dress had advanced almost to the window. She thought back. *Yes. I’ve waited through five people being served at the window. Enough.*

With the flat of her hand, Jy-ying slapped the desktop.

Hoppner jumped, throwing the paper he’d been holding into the air. He jerked his head up to look wide-eyed at the invading hand, then further up to glare at her through his small wire-framed glasses, his

mustache twitching like a sweeping broom. He face reddened all the way up to the five strands of hair that he'd combed across his bald pate.

In a voice that would freeze the Nile River, she told him, "Your bank has foreclosed on a warehouse. I will buy it."

Jy-ying reached in her purse and threw down a roll of counterfeit thousand dollar bills. She laid the address of the warehouse on top. Hoppner's eyebrows reached for the sky as he leaned back, his face struggling with several emotions.

She looked at the lines of customers. No one moved; they were all watching. She waved at them and smiled, and several turned away, embarrassed.

Hoppner leaned forward and picked up the address. He twisted around and looked in the gold-colored file cabinet behind him, retrieved a file, and opened it on his desk. He compared the address to that in the file, and turned to her. "I cannot sell you that warehouse. We do not sell property to Chinks . . . Chinese outside of Chinatown."

"What? Did Chinatown not burn down in the fire?"

Hoppner didn't even try to hide his grin. "Yes, it did." His grin disappeared into his mustache, replaced by a scowl. "Because of the interference of your fuc . . . your country—that meddling Chow-Tszchi from the Chinese Legation at Washington—the mayor is allowing your people to . . . rebuild it." He said the last words as though uttering an epithet.

Jy-ying kept her temper. Too much was at stake. She gave him an apologetic look and asked, "Would the honorable sir please inform this humble Chinese woman whose policy it is that says I cannot buy this warehouse?"

He picked up a pencil and started tapping it on his desk, a question on his face about her sincerity. He leaned forward and replied, "This is not my policy; this is the owner's policy. We are both members of the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League and this is white man's land. Go back to China."

Will God be blessed? Security knew about the anti-Oriental prejudice, but they had not known it was so serious. One more question before happy time. "Who is the owner?"

"None of your business."

She swiftly leaned over the desk and grabbed a sheaf of papers. The second paper had the letterhead she was after: *National Bank of San Francisco; Paul Bales, Owner; Eugene Hoppner, Manager.*

Jy-ying stood, slowly folded the paper, and put it in her purse. She was sure she had everyone's attention. She wiggled her bustled behind as she stepped around the desk and stopped a little behind Hoppner, so that she wouldn't block the view of the customers. She leaned over him, tweaked his mustache, and gave him a smothering kiss. His struggled, but she held his lips in hers. When she finally released him, his face was the color of her outrageously unladylike bright red lipstick, which was smeared all over his lips and mustache.

She stepped back, gave him a little wave with her fingers, and called in a sexy voice, "Bye-bye, honey. See you tonight." She turned and walked out of the bank.

When she reached her room in the All Nations Hotel, she cranked her telephone and asked the operator to connect her with the National Bank of San Francisco. When a clerk answered, she disguised her voice. "Hello, I am a postal clerk and I'm trying to get the home address of a certain Paul Bales. I have tracked him to your bank. The home address on this letter to him is illegible."

Jy-ying heard, "Just a moment, please." And in less than a minute, "The address is 1081 Judah Street."

One more question. "For our records, does he have an office somewhere?"

"Yes, his office is Room 233 in the new Watson Building on Merchant."

Jy-ying hung up. She had to have that warehouse. She could quietly have her capsules moved somewhere in Chinatown, but the warehouse was perfect for constructing a gym for her practice. *Hmmm. How to do this? First I must find out who heads this Exclusion League.*

Olaf Tveitmoe, she soon discovered, was the man. Jy-ying called his secretary and set up an appointment to discuss a \$10,000 project. He was accommodating, and made the appointment for that morning.

When she entered the office, Tveitmoe's secretary looked at her with raised eyebrows. Jy-ying didn't think he had ever before seen a Chinese in the reception room. At least, not one the way she looked. She wore a cheap blouse and skirt without a corset, and she was chewing gum. She had applied almost luminescent red lipstick, and heavily rouged her cheeks in the manner popular among prostitutes.

He asked coldly, "Can I help you?"

"Oh yes," Jy-ying said. "My name is Blossom and Olaf wanted me to come to see him."

While the secretary hurriedly looked in his appointment book, she started to ramble. "I don't know why he wanted me to come in the morning. It is so hard getting out of bed. You know, I have this late cafe act and—"

The secretary looked up. "You have no appointment at this time. There must be some mistake. I have an appointment here for Mrs. Marble."

"Mrs. Marble? Oh yes, that's me." Jy-ying giggled and faked a guilty smile. "He told me he wanted to see me."

His lips puckered as though he'd tasted sour milk, the secretary knocked on Tveitmoe's door and stuck his head in. She could hear him snap, "Your nine o'clock appointment is here."

Jy-ying sashayed in, leaving the door open a crack behind her. She placed her purse just where she wanted it on Tveitmoe's solid oak desk. She removed her hat, and as she took the pins out of her hair, she whispered throatily, "I am a gift from Paul Bales."

She took off her cheap wool cape and threw it on the floor. He sat gaping at her as she unlaced her taffeta silk shirt. She wore nothing underneath. She exposed one breast, stepped around the desk, and rubbed it against his face. He licked his lips and his eyes widened. Face flushed, he started to caress her breast. She took his hand off her breast, raised her skirt, and put his hand underneath. She wore nothing there, either.

She pulled him to his feet. She could see he had a full erection. She leaned over, letting her breast hang, and unbuttoned his woolen pants. With some gentle maneuvering, she pulled his erection through the slot in his long underwear.

Jy-ying was ready.

She ripped her shirt further apart, shook her hair over her head, and screamed, "What are you doing? Let me go! No, stop. Please!"

As his secretary rushed in, she yelled even louder, "Help me! Rape—he's trying to rape me!"

Jy-ying snatched her cape off the floor, scooped her purse off his desk, and ran past the secretary, who stood by the door with his hand to his mouth, his eyes like saucers.

There was a public washroom two offices down the hall. She ran past two people in the hallway and into the women's room. In five minutes she had herself repaired, and quickly left the building. Another ten minutes and she was driving her new Rolls Royce Silver Ghost to her room at the All Nations Hotel.

In her room, she had everything ready that she'd brought from the equipment capsule. She took the Wang digital movie camera out of her purse, in which she'd cut a view hole in the bottom corner. She had set the camera to automatically take pictures once she switched it on with her remote. She removed the memory card from the camera and inserted it in the card reader she had plugged into her laptop. She opened her Taicang photo manipulation program and went to work.

Three hours later, Jy-ying printed out her three favorite photos and studied them with a little embarrassment. She didn't have to wonder what Imam Ch'en Hsun would think of her work on behalf of Sabah. After her noon Contact Prayers, she wrote a letter to Tveitmoe.

Dear Sir:

You are a devil, sir, trying to rape me in your office. I am sure that your secretary will try to deny that anything happened. But for my protection, I took the enclosed photographs of your mad passion and your attempt to take advantage of me.

I do not know what to do now, sir. My lawyer advised me to sue you for attempted rape. These pictures and what your secretary will have to swear to under oath should establish the truth. However, I am only a humble Chinese girl and cannot be sure that I will get justice in your white man's courts.

My honorable father is angry, and has told me to send the photographs to the newspapers. But I fear they would embarrass him.

My husband is so angry over what you have done to me that he has bought a gun and threatens to shoot you. I have begged him not to.

As for me, I have told them all I would be satisfied, if only Paul Bales would sell me the warehouse I asked for on De Haro Street. A simple transaction at market price. My lawyer, father, and husband most reluctantly will accept this if it makes me happy.

My lawyer, I am ashamed to admit, is a suspicious person. I had to turn over to him copies of these pictures, just in case something should happen to me.

I will telephone Mr. Bales tomorrow afternoon to close this deal.

*Your humble Chinese,
Khoo Jy-ying*

Jy-ying hired a courier to deliver the letter into Tveitmoe's hands only.



Jy-ying paid \$21,000 in counterfeit bills for the warehouse.

Once she killed the time traveler, she would be living in San Francisco as a base until Abul Sabah was born. Afterward she planned to travel to Uighuristan and be a servant to his family until Abul's first contact with the Agent Gabriel. She would be Abul's first convert. It was her dream. But she had a job to do and a life to live until then.

She contacted an architect, took him to the warehouse, and told him what she wanted: a complete gym for indoor jogging (he thought she was crazy), a practice room for marital arts, a weights room, a sound-proofed gun room, and a corner office with an outside door. He took rapid notes, asked a few questions, and finally asked, "What is this all for?"

"I will be training a team of athletes to participate in the 1908 Olympics."

That seemed to satisfy him. He pointed to the time machine and supply capsule and asked, "What are those containers for?"

"I shipped some special equipment from China in them. They have to be especially strong to make the voyage with the heavy equipment inside."

With the use of a primitive wagon jack and a sledgehammer, she had managed to get the door closed enough on the time machine so that the interior was hidden. She also had put a chain around the capsule to keep the curious out.

The architect drew up plans, she approved them, and he recommended The Pacific Construction Company for the remodeling. She telephoned them to send a representative to the warehouse.

He came, saw that she was Chinese, and said he could do no work for her. He was friendly enough, but could do nothing about his company's policies. He explained, "My company has to belong to the Building Trades Council. It's headed by Patrick McCarthy, and he is a leading member of the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League."

On an off chance, she asked, "Does Tveitmoe have any relationship to the Building Trades Council?"

"Yes, he is the general secretary of the Council."

“Thank you,” she replied. “I think you should make preliminary plans for the remodeling of my warehouse. I’m sure that when I explain my needs to Mr. Tveitmoe, he will allow an exception in my case.”

When Jy-ying returned to her hotel, she completed her Noon Prayers, ate her cold rice, dried tuna, vegetables, and drank the hot jasmine tea she heated up on her small electrical hot plate. Then she wrote the letter that had preoccupied her mind during lunch.

Dear Mr. Tveitmoe:

I am so sorry to disturb you again over my humble problems, but it seems that The Pacific Construction Co. cannot do the remodeling of my warehouse because of a misunderstanding over my being Chinese. As General Secretary of the Building Trades Council, I’m sure that you can resolve this question in my favor.

*Your humble American,
Khoo Jy-ying*

As with the previous letter, she sent it via courier.

Chapter 12

Joy

With a promised bonus as an incentive, the builders started remodeling John and Joy's warehouse into temporary offices almost immediately. John and Joy were surprised, then, when they arrived late one morning and found the warehouse empty. None of the workers who had been doing the remodeling were around. John telephoned their builders, who informed them that Patrick McCarthy, head of the Building Trades Council, had ordered a boycott of their remodeling. As to why, John could get no explanation. He was told to call Olaf Tveitmoe, general secretary of the Council.

John tried several times to reach this fellow, but he was either busy or out. So John drove to the Council building. Refusing to take the secretary's "no" for an answer, he stalked into Tveitmoe's office.

Tveitmoe was angry; when John confronted him, he dropped all pretense and told him the score. "The Council is going to drive you out of business, Banks, because you have violated an unwritten principle of labor in San Francisco. White men in business do not hire Orientals. You are stupid enough to do so, and you must suffer as a result. And don't think you can go to the politicians on this. They're on our side. Read this." He flipped a carbon copy of a letter across the desk.

John picked it up and read:

*Mr. A.E. Yoell
Secretary, Japanese and Korean Exclusion League,
San Francisco, California*

Dear Sir:

As it is now nearly one year since the organization of the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League, I venture to write and congratulate the League through you upon the progress made toward the ultimate exclusion of Japanese and all Mongolians from our shores.

If the agitation is kept up, and we continue to bring to the public's attention the Japanese competition and the dire evil influence upon our civilization of their residence among us, we are bound to succeed.

I shall be glad at all times to cooperate. I remain,

Sincerely Yours,

E.A. Hayes,

Congressman of the Fifth District,

House of Representatives, Washington

May 1, 1906

John made no effort to hide his disgust as he looked up.

His expression seemed to excite Tveitmoe, who gloated, "We are all members of the Exclusion League here."

John had heard enough. He wordlessly tore up the letter, spit on it, and tossed the wet pieces on Tveitmoe's desk. He rose to his full height and strode to the door, where he paused and turned to glare at Tveitmoe. He said in a clear, firm voice that he hoped carried into the outer office, "You're crud, Tveitmoe. The lowest of the low. A snake would tower over you."



"No swear words?" Joy asked, raising one eyebrow, when he told her later.

John answered, "None that I'll tell you. To complete the story, I left Tveitmoe's door open when I left his office, tipped my hat to his secretary, who was gaping at me, and walked out of the building."

Joy looked at his cool expression, and the words just rushed out of her by themselves. "I'm hurting our mission. First the Chink bit and sexual slavery, and now this. You don't seem a tiny bit concerned about it. Don't you care?"

John immediately changed his tone, which showed he had learned by now to read her looks—well, some of them—and understood her "subtle nuances." He responded, "Oh, I'm damn-well concerned. More than concerned. Didn't I show that when I left Tveitmoe's office? I'm fighting mad, and I'm not going to bow to those bastards. We could run away to another city, such as what that bastard called 'Chink ass-kissing Seattle' and leave others to suffer this discrimination. But I want to fight them."

Joy put her hand on his arm. "I'm sorry, dearest. I shouldn't have said what I did. I know you care. Of course."

John nodded at her apology, and continued. "Whatever we do, baby, we can't go off half cocked. We can't screw up our mission, or forget about Sabah. That understood, let's see what we can do about the Exclusion League and the Buildings Council."

"We aren't completely blind," Joy countered. "While you were gone, I called the secretary to the vice president of Muss Builders, and talked to her woman to woman. I told her I was your secretary, and I was going to be out of work because of your lust for some Chink, and I wondered if they had a job for me. I told her my name was Shirley Carpenter. She was friendly, and suggested I see their personnel man who does the hiring. All this was groundwork. Then I probed and probed—you know how women can do this, with little questions that build an edifice of information."

Joy grinned as John impatiently motioned with his hand, urging her to continue. "Okay. I found out that the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League you mentioned is in fact headed by Tveitmoe, and its membership includes the general president of the Buildings Trade Council, the vice president the secretary I spoke to works for, and the waterfront labor boss. And, as you know from the research the Society passed on to us, the labor movement in San Francisco has at this time the most powerful stranglehold on labor of any city in the country."

"Yes, I know," John replied.

She had to add, "Although apparently focused on Japanese and Koreans, the secretary told me that the Exclusion League is really trying to exclude all Orientals from San Francisco."

"Yes," John replied. "That was clear from Representative Hayes' letter I read."

Her final bit of information: "The local labor leaders have been strong backers of the Chinese Exclusion Bill now before Congress. This effort extends to all of California, the idea being to make it 'white man's country.'" Just saying this upset her even more.

"Because of my race, I think the Society made a mistake in picking San Francisco for our base. Perhaps New York or Seattle would have been much better. I don't know how they made this error."

"Well, they had what I thought was full information on San Francisco during these years," John replied. "But they missed the depth of feeling against Orientals, and don't even mention it in their chronology. Nor do they mention the strong anti-Oriental bias of the labor move-

ment here. I think the problem was that Society members were too familiar with the cosmopolitan, wide-open, anything goes, San Francisco of the twentieth century, and that misled them as to 1906. Also, the problems we—”

“Me, my love. I’m the Oriental here.”

“—ran into may be a matter of bad luck. If you’d gone shopping a few hours later or earlier, you probably would have missed the policemen who picked you up. Moreover, another hotel might not have any restrictions on renting rooms to Orientals.”

With more heat than she intended, Joy disagreed. “Not bad luck. Very good luck. We busted up a sex slave ring, and doubtlessly saved the lives of many women. The first lives we saved. Do you understand what that means to me? We saved the lives of many women and ended for others miserable slavery. This is not ending war. This is not stopping the mass murder by tyrants. This is not our mission. But doesn’t it weigh in the balance?”

His eyes softened, and he looked at her with pride. He put his arm around her and pressed her head to his shoulder. “And more good luck. Now we can bust up this Exclusion League. That is, if you’re interested.”

She kissed him. “You got it, dearest.”

She shook her head and looked away from John for a moment, reflecting on what they were doing. *Amazing. We certainly have egos. A less charitable interpretation would be delusions of grandeur. Here we are, new to this age, no power base, and we intend to put out of existence a very influential Exclusion League supported by powerful politicians, businessmen, and union leaders. To think of doing this should have been our ha-ha moment. But we are absolutely serious.*

“Now,” John said, “let’s think about this. We have a pretty good chronology of the immediate future for the Old Universe from the Society, we have the tremendous wealth they sent us, and we have the best of twenty-first century technology. If we can’t put something together to deal with this little problem, we’re pretty dim bulbs.”

“Yes, we’ll be the idiots some villages must be missing.” After a moment, Joy mused, “The people who control the League and the Builders Council are pretty important. We have to go high up to finesse them. What are our levers of power here?”

John replied, “So far as I know—and no matter how we hate it—these people are acting within democratically determined law. In this era, they are free to discriminate in this fashion. Whatever we do, we

have to do legally, too. No frame-ups, no Chinese mistresses coming out of the woodwork, no bribes. And this is a widely felt movement among whites; if we remove those at the top, someone will take their place. We've got to persuade those running the movement to end the discrimination themselves."

"Keep in mind that they are trying to destroy our business simply because you hired me," she pointed out. "If this is not illegal, it is against the spirit of the laws, and what our country stands for. But I agree. At first, let's try this the legal way."

She got out her laptop and opened the chronology of the Old Universe the Society had prepared. She also opened alongside it Lora's chronology of the new universe they had created. They went over them event by event.

"Aha," John exclaimed after two hours. "That's it. There's our solution."

Joy had to agree, and they started planning for it immediately.



As they left their room for dinner that evening, John thought it would be nice to ask Hands and the others to join them. He was just about to knock on Hands' door when a pretty young woman wrapped in a towel, her long brown hair unpinned and hanging over it, came out of the bathroom at the end of the hall. Hands was right behind her, also covered by a towel.

The young woman gave Joy a sisterly smile and sauntered into Hands' room. Hands turned to them in his doorway and noted, with a huge grin, "The bath is free, if you two want to use it now." He winked at John.

As they went down the stairs, Joy couldn't help thinking, *What is it with men, to make a clubby, in-group, kind of thing about sex? We don't. Hands' honey just smiled at me and went into Hands' room. No wink. No, "Ha, ha, look at what I did." No making a little joke out of it.*

John must have thought he read her look. He tried to point out, "Well, sweetheart, we did set an example."

She had to chuckle at his misinterpretation.

As they'd planned, the next day she phoned the secretary of the Chinese Consulate and made an appointment two weeks hence with Chung Pao Hsi, China's Consul-General in San Francisco. The secretary was at first reluctant to set up an appointment, but Joy described

their company and the tens of millions of dollars they would be spending, and how generous they could be. She got the appointment.



All five of them trooped into the rebuilt Chinese legation at Laguna and Geary Streets. The Chinese secretary let the Consul-General know that Miss Joy Phim had arrived, and looked surprised when Chung Pao Hsi came out to greet them. In Chinese, Joy introduced John as the head of the Tor Import and Export Company and her boss, and just waved her hand at the guys, saying simply, "Our guards." Chung seemed surprised.

He led Joy and John into his office, and asked them to sit down on a green fabric coach, while he sat on a hickory office chair across from them. When they were seated, Joy asked him if they could talk in English so her boss could participate, and he agreed.

She nodded. Looking at John, she explained, "My boss is very rich and in November transferred his company from New York to San Francisco. Part of its business will involve imports to and exports from China."

She turned back to Chung and leaned forward. "He will also hire as employees a good number of Chinese. His attempt to build his offices, however, has been boycotted by the Builders Council and the Chinese Exclusion people are clearly involved. He wants to fight them and end the discrimination against Chinese."

Chung's eyes narrowed. "We know what is going on here. It was only with some difficulty that our first Secretary in Washington and I were able to persuade local officials to allow Chinatown to be rebuilt, after it was completely destroyed in the fire. Even then, we had to talk to Governor Pardee in Oakland and pass on the Empress-Dowager's displeasure.

John spoke up. "We realize what you did, and that is why we are here. Before I make any suggestions, I would like to give you this little gift." He handed him a beautifully engraved Chinese envelope that Joy had bought from one of their future import competitors in San Francisco. Inside the envelope was \$10,000.

Next, John opened a heavy box he had carried into the office, and pulled out with two hands a smaller box with gold gilt wrapping. On top was an envelope on which was engraved in gold and classical Chinese calligraphy the name of the Empress-Dowager of China. John

carefully handed it to Chung, bowed, and solemnly said, “This is an indication of my esteem for the Empress-Dowager and for our future relations. It is a 99.98 percent pure gold bar worth \$101,023. The bar is engraved with her name, Tzu-Hsi.”

It had taken Joy and the guys a week to get everything together, and find the Chinese who had the materials and could do the fancy Chinese engraving necessary. The gold bar was part of the resources that the Society had sent them.

Chung put his envelope and the heavy box with the gold bar on his solid rosewood desk with a thump. He was obviously impressed when he turned back to them, and looked expectantly at John.

John reiterated what Joy had said about trying to end the discrimination against Chinese in San Francisco, and to improve trade with China. Leaning forward as Joy had, he went into his pitch. “I think the best way of doing this is through the American Secretary of State and the President. Although I think that President Roosevelt is opposed to discriminating against Chinese, he has so much to do that his attention needs to be focused on San Francisco by some big event or very important dignitary. Can you please ask your Empress-Dowager to do this? I know that she has a personal interest in San Francisco, since she gave about 100,000 taels, or about \$75,000, as a personal contribution to the fire relief effort after the earthquake; and an additional 40,000 taels to the relief of the Chinese here. Also, she allowed you to use her name to have Chinatown rebuilt.”

Joy knew that what the Empress-Dowager contributed to relief was big money. She tried to estimate it—overall, two million dollars in year 2002 dollars. The gold bar they’d just handed to Chung was worth nearly that. In effect, they were repaying her for her aid to San Francisco.

John asked, “Through her Foreign Minister, can the Empress-Dowager issue a formal protest to the United States over treatment of Chinese in San Francisco? A diplomatic hint would be helpful—that if the discrimination continues, China will boycott American imports from California. I’m sure your Foreign Minister can properly word such a communication. Perhaps she would also want to express how insulting this discrimination is to the great nation of China, and that the Chinese people are humiliated by it.”

Chung was silent for a moment as he probed John’s eyes. He asked, “Why are you doing this?”

John also took a moment before responding. He held Chung’s eyes with his, and said in a firm voice, “First, I love this woman sitting be-

side me. Her working for me is a formal technicality. She is in effect co-owner and manager of the business. We would marry, but have not because of the long-run interests and nature of our business. What the League and others who agree with it are doing to her is not only an insult to this woman, but to me.

“Second, I need to hire many other Chinese for my business.

“Third but not least, Chinese are an intelligent and creative people, and the United States will benefit immeasurably from their immigration and contributions.”

Joy was flabbergasted. She had no idea John would divulge their relationship. She didn't know whether to kiss him or kick him.

Chung sat back thoughtfully, and looked at Joy as though he were her father and they had asked him permission to marry. He asked her in Chinese, “Do you have a love arrangement with this man?”

“Yes. He lives in my heart.”

“Is he really so . . . accepting of Chinese?”

“Yes, he sees all people as equal, as human beings.”

“That's extraordinary. Is this not because he loves you? Doesn't he see all Chinese as being in your image?”

“No. It is his character and the way he views the world. He treats Koreans, Japanese, Russians, Arabs, Africans, and all other races and national groups the same. He does not have a prejudiced cell in his body.”

Chung's eyebrows rose. “Where, may I ask, did you find this exceptional man?”

“He was once a professor of history and I took a class from him.”

“So he is a very knowledgeable and distinguished American.”

“Yes.”

“My minister will ask me this question and I want to be clear in my answer. Is it that you are Chinese that he will not marry you?”

“No. It was a joint decision not to marry. Such a decision would have to be made by any woman in my position, given the kind of business we do.”

Chung studied her. “You two are involved in something secret, beyond this business. Yes?”

It was Joy's turn to lock eyes with him and judge his sincerity. He was in his forties, about the right age for this honored position. Clearly, he was a rising star in the Chinese Foreign Ministry. He had those soft features and the lean, small-boned body of the southern Chinese, which probably meant that he was outside the inner, influential circle around

the Manchu Imperial dynasty. That the Chinese ministry had given him this legation position was even more impressive. He spoke excellent American English; he must have had a superior education, probably some of it in an American university. People like him could be very helpful to their mission.

And his eyes never wavered from Joy's.

Okay, she thought. John trusted him about our relationship. I'm ready to go further.

Speaking in English, eyes still fixed on his, Joy asked him, "What do you think of a free, independent, and democratic China?"

John and Chung were both startled by the question. John turned and stared at her, clearly looking for a hint as to what was going on.

Chung sat back, raised his hands, brought his fingertips together, and said, "What a surprising and interesting question. And by democracy, you mean?"

She answered, "There are many types, including those where there is also a king or queen. The idea is that people freely, privately, and regularly vote for their government executive and members of a legislature, which has the power to make laws. The United States and Great Britain are examples, but not the only ones."

Chung rose suddenly and went to the door of his office. He opened it and looked around. Through it, Joy could see Hands, Sal, and Dolphy paging through Chinese travel guides and pamphlets. Chung shut the door and pulled his chair closer. He sat down.

Softly, he said, "Everything we now say in this room is private. If anything of what I say is divulged, I may not live long, but you will die before me."

They nodded.

"Now, we each have secrets," he said. "You first."

Continuing in English, Joy said in a low voice, "When the time is ripe, we will try to bring about democracy in China."

"Who are you, to do this?"

"We have resources you would not believe that make it possible for us to attempt this."

"You are secret agents for the United States?"

"No."

"But you are secret agents, yes?"

"In a way, yes. Your turn."

"I am allied with Sun Yat-sen."

Joy mulled that over. Sun Yat-sen was a revolutionary trying to overthrow the dynasty and create a democracy on his terms. In reality it would be a top down, authoritative government with a mixture of democratic elements. *Close enough.*

Joy nodded. "Thank you. You need say no more."

Chung's eyes never left Joy's during this exchange. He sat unmoving in his chair. When John saw that Joy was finished and Chung had no more to say to her, he turned to Chung and said, "Well, that concludes our appointment. I hope that you can influence your government to help us and the Chinese in San Francisco with this problem of discrimination."

Chung got up, and they stood as well. He shook John's hand vigorously, saying, "I will do what I can. You have a . . . friend here." He gave Joy a little bow, and said in Chinese, "May the sun always shine on you and your man."

"And on you and your country," Joy replied, bowing deeply in return. "Zai Chien—Goodbye."



That evening, they relaxed with the guys at the Liberty Café, singing along with everyone in the café as a small band played "In My Merry Oldsmobile," "Meet Me In St. Louis, Louis," and beer songs like "Under the Anheuser Bush" and many of the risqué lyrics popular with the men. Joy danced with John and each of the guys several times and in fact they all did get a little under the Anheuser Bush. Joy's life had been so serious for so long, she couldn't remember when she'd last had so much fun and been so relaxed. The fun continued when Joy and John returned to his hotel room.

At their breakfast together the next morning, Sal, who had a room next to John's, asked with a grin if he slept well.

John replied, "Well, something came up so I couldn't sleep for awhile."

Joy kicked him hard under the table, Dolphy choked on his donut, Hands spewed his coffee when it went down the wrong hole, and Sal smirked.

Joy glared at John, who wore the innocent look of a choirboy.

Chapter 13

Joy

In the following weeks, John rented temporary offices and storage space so they could continue to build up their business while they dealt with the Exclusion League. He also hired away from a Los Angeles import and export firm its manager, at twice his salary. He began to pull their business together, hired additional people, and initiated the difficult job of setting up company offices in other countries.

Always the teacher, John spent three hours a day home schooling the three guys about business and other things they had to learn. Hands had an education up to the ninth grade, and the other two up to the sixth. So there was much home schooling, and he told Joy that he enjoyed it. He informed the guys that this was part of their job, sort of apprenticeship training, and they accepted it. He was especially happy to discover the three were very intelligent; it was a misfortune of the age that those like them had so little education.

Somehow, the Oriental Exclusion people found out that Joy was still involved in John's business, and decided that tough action was necessary. John received a letter without a return address, left in his letterbox at their hotel, which read simply, *Fire the Chink, or regret it.*

That was all Joy needed. *Enough nice girl*, she told herself.

They had not armed themselves so far, since they perceived no danger in San Francisco. This had been a lucky decision, for if she had been armed when she was drugged by the sex slave ring, the kidnappers might have gotten scared over her knives and gun and murdered her while she was drugged.

John was against arming until they did their first intervention in Mexico, but there was too much at stake not to be prepared for hostile action. She knew how to get to him. Even though she had given him some training in weapons before they had to flee the Old Universe, she told him, "It's just as well. You'd likely shoot yourself in the foot. No, I take that back. By the time you drew your gun, I'd have knocked out our attackers and would be going through their wallets."

He agreed to arm, and they decided to visit the weapons capsule at the warehouse at noon, when they were least likely to be attacked. Still, John had a sour look as they entered the warehouse.

During her many years of weapons training, Joy had concentrated on defense with the knife. She armed herself with a five-inch tactical knife in a sheath on her hip and a six-inch throwing knife in a lower leg sheath. Both had thin, flat grips. When armed, she would choose clothes that allowed her to reach either knife in no more than two seconds. She also would carry a holster purse with her Ruger SP101 .357 magnum loaded with five 125-grain hollow points, and a box of reloads. Even a shot in the shoulder would flatten most attackers, and one of those bullets would even crumple a charging football lineman.

No knife for John, she decided as she helped him select his weapons. *Even somebody behind him is in danger when he tries to throw one*. But despite what she said when she was goading him, he was now beyond the “which end do I point?” stage with a gun. He would carry two. One, an H&K USP .45 caliber semiautomatic in a shoulder holster, loaded with ten rounds of 235-grain hollow points in the magazine and one round in the chamber. The other, a small .40 caliber S&W double-action that he could carry in his coat pocket holster.

They also donned light armored vests that had been custom-fitted to each of them, with cardiac trauma protection. They weighed a little less than four pounds. Joy’s was molded over her breasts and gave them a flatter look—she would be right in style for the flapper 1920s, when they came.

“Good fit, my boy . . . Oops, my girl,” John said, purposely showing those dimples at the corners of his mouth that irritated Joy so much.

That warranted an especially loud raspberry.

John’s armored vest covered his genitals and made his trousers puff out. “The girls are going to twitter around you,” Joy couldn’t help saying.

Deliberately puffing out his trousers even more, he responded, “That will make the discomfort worth it.”

Joy giggled, then pointed out, “Wearing these vests must now be as permanent as wearing our skin. We never know where a shot will come from, or when. These will stop bullets from a .44 caliber magnum, a 9 mm submachine gun, a modern high-powered rifle, and a 12-gauge rifle. They are little protection against armor-piercing rifles, but the dangerous ones won’t be produced until the late twentieth century.”

“What about a sharp tongue?”

“Get used to it, dearest.”



Joy wanted to buy land to build a weapons practice site outside of San Francisco, but the boycott against them and the threatening letter had prompted her to postpone this. However, they had trained in a variety of attack and defense scenarios, especially those that would protect their heads, for which they had no armor. No hurry, Joy felt. They had only been in 1906 for a couple of months and were hardly rusty yet.

One thing was certain, although neither of them would say so. They would discuss the risks of their mission in this new universe in the most serious tones: “Our mission,” they would say to each other, “our mission, now including Sabah, is uppermost. Billions of lives depend on us. Our mission cannot fail, if humanly possible.”

“Yes, that is so true,” they would agree. And they would say to each other even more seriously, “If I go down, you must escape in any way possible. I’ll hold the attackers off, if I’m able.” And they’d nod to each other.

But when laying in bed at night with the light out and her mind idle, thoughts percolated up from her heart and soul, and told her the truth: *Yes, billions of lives depend on at least one of us surviving. But I would die inside if, while escaping, I left him behind and still alive. I would be so heartbroken and ashamed of what I did that I couldn’t live with myself afterward. I’d be worthless for our mission. It’s as clear and simple as one and one equals two—if attacked, we would survive or die together.*

She knew John felt the same way.

So they armed themselves to try to make sure they *both* survived whatever kind of attack they faced.

Three days later, John received a second message: *Last chance. Fire the Chink whore, or else.*

John had wanted to keep the guys out of this, but now Joy persuaded him that they might be attacked, as well. To any casual observer, the guys probably seemed unusually close to both of them—more than simple employees.

That afternoon, they met with the guys in John’s room and he showed them the two threatening letters and explained the situation.

Dolphy said, “We’ll take care of it.”

“No,” John said. “I want them to make the first move. That will tell us what kind of action to take in return. I don’t want to do anything illegal unless it’s forced upon us. Behave. Okay? Now, do you have weapons?”

Sal took out a knife that he had sheathed in his sock and showed it to John. Joy grabbed it out of his hand and hefted it. It was a seven-inch hunting knife with a bulky handle and poor balance. Joy figured it was only good for carving wood.

“How does this thing stay in your sock without falling out?” she asked Sal. She balanced it on one finger, determined where to put her thumb and forefinger, and threw it the fifteen feet to the door frame. It stuck there, quivering. “Not a good knife, Sal,” she said. “It’s too head heavy and the grip and blade are too thick. I’ll get you a better knife.”

The three guys looked at Joy as though she had turned into a witch and had just floated up on her broom. Sal got up to pull the knife out of the door frame. On the way back he said, “*Jesús Cristo*, John, where did you find her?”

They didn’t know it was the other way around—Joy had found John.

John laughed and asked, “Do you all know how to use guns?”

Hands and Dolphy responded at the same time, “Of course.”

“Good. Now, today I want the three of you to buy guns that you are comfortable with and holsters to hide them under your clothes. Then always keep them with you for protection. The cost is on me.”

Dolphy asked, “What about you two?”

Joy pulled her gun from her holster purse, and lifted the bottom of her dress to show them the knife in its sheath on her lower leg. “That’s my throwing knife. I have a tactical knife on my hip.” She decided against showing them the one on her hip. John would have a cardiac seizure.

Sal looked appreciatively at her leg sheath and knife, while Dolphy blushed at seeing her lower leg.

John opened his coat so that they could see his .45 and its holster, and showed them his pocket S&W.

“My God,” Hands exclaimed. “I won’t mess with you two.”

John smiled. Looking from one to another of the guys, he said, “I want to be very clear on this. I will not support you if you use your weapons aggressively. We trust you all, and I don’t want to insult your loyalty and honesty, but I want to say this for the record. If your weapons are used for any criminal purpose, if you assault anyone with your weapons, I will fire you immediately.”

They agreed. John put out his hand to shake each of theirs. Then they did something unexpected—they held out their hands to shake Joy’s. She was moved by this. Putting their hands together between hers, she said, “For our boss and the company—cheers!”

“Cheers!” they echoed.

Joy visited their weapons capsule the next day and picked out a seven-inch combat knife with a double-edged, bead-blasted blade, stainless steel guard, and a linen micarta grip. She also picked out a waist sheath and a leg sheath. When she gave these to Sal in his room, he hefted the knife, threw it at his door frame, and said, “I love it. Now you haven’t got a chance. Wanna fight?”

“How dare you suggest such a thing, you brute! I’m only a poor woman,” she quipped.

Sal laughed too. “You could have fooled me. Thanks, Joy.”

After breakfast a few days later, Joy and John headed down the alley next to their hotel, on the way to their Ford. John was going to take Joy to their temporary offices, then return for the guys’ home schooling. She had yet to buy her own car, but kept saying she would do so soon.

They had almost reached the Ford when two men emerged from a doorway further down the alley. Joy automatically checked behind, and saw two other men approaching. They all carried bats, and swung them back and forth with one hand as they approached. All were burly, heavysset, and dressed in rough work clothes. They were obviously enforcement punks.

“Well, dearest,” Joy said, “fun time.”



Jy-ying

Remodeling at her warehouse was now underway. Jy-ying had been there most of the previous day, watching the builders piling construction material and getting organized. They’d brought in a Mack truck that belched oily smoke like a locomotive. It had a crane welded to the truck bed. The workers fixed chains to Jy-ying’s time machine and supply capsule, lifted each, and moved them out of the way of their first remodeling phase. When the time machine was hoisted and moved, a worker picked up the red box that had been crushed underneath it, carried it over to a dumpster, and threw it in. Jy-ying just watched. She had no interest in the warehouse’s old debris.

After her Dawn Prayer and breakfast of rice with hot tea poured over it and pickles—thank God for Lee’s Oriental Food store in Chinatown—she took a Hansom cab to her appointment with her architect, to

look at his wall and floor samples. His office was on 17th Street, across from Franklin Square.

As her cab passed by an alley on 16th Street next to the Fairfax Hotel, she glanced down the alley, and her security training instantly alerted her. She turned and yelled at the driver sitting on his high seat behind her, "Stop!" When he complied, she threw a dollar to him, jumped out of the cab, and dashed back to the alley, where she'd glimpsed four men with clubs, about to carry out a mugging, beating, or rape.

It was none of her business. But four tough-looking muggers with bats against an unarmed man and a woman—a Chinese woman, she'd seen—was unfair.

She entered the alley, prepared to intervene before the muggers could swing their clumsy clubs. Without thought she stopped and kicked off her shoes and dropped her skirt and petticoat. This was not her fashion day. She wore no corset or bustle.



Joy

Joy and John moved close to the wall next to them to protect their one side, and turned at a right angle to each other, with about five feet between them. No sense in having one of them duck a blow, only to have it strike the other's back.

As she studied the thugs approaching her, Joy suddenly noticed a Chinese woman poised just behind them. It was obvious that the strange woman was prepared to intervene. She was barefoot and had stripped down to her silk panties so she wouldn't be hampered by her clothes.

Panties? Women wear such panties in this age?

The woman still had on a shirt with frilly sleeves, and her hair was pinned up. Her shoes, skirt, and hat rested on the ground nearby. By training, Joy noticed and assimilated all this in a split second. "Woman behind the men on my side. May get involved," she tersely alerted John.

Then she warned herself, *The men are too close. No more distractions.* But with half her mind, Joy monitored John's behavior, like a music teacher at her student's first recital. This was his first battle.

John said to the two men approaching him, "Good morning. Nice day, isn't it?" His voice didn't waver. He stood rock solid, in a perfect

ready position. *The one I taught him*, Joy realized, pleasantly surprised by her student's aptitude.

"Fuck you," one of the thugs grunted to John.

Joy and John let the men get within range, and waited until the first swing of their bats. Then each suddenly ducked inside their man's swing, grabbed the men's shirts, kicked inside their knees to knock them off balance, and directing knife-chopping blows to the their necks. Both thugs sprawled unconscious, their bats now in Joy and John's hands.

In the midst of this, Joy noted peripherally that the strange woman lunged forward, as if about to jump in. When Joy glimpsed her next, she had backed up and stood watching.

The remaining two thugs came at them with bats swinging wildly, but Joy had some training in Shaolin staff techniques and had passed on the elementary moves to John during their training. It was a simple matter to block the punks' swings with their own bats. As the attackers tried to bring their bats back for another swing, Joy and John straight-armed their bats deep into the knot of nerves in each punk's solar plexus. Both doubled over and collapsed, unconscious.

Joy glimpsed the woman putting on her skirt. *Must have decided we could handle this*, she thought, and then her attention was pulled back to one of the first punks they'd knocked out. He was scrambling away from them on his knees. John overtook him and picked him up in a full nelson, his fingers locked behind the man's head to prevent the usual defense against such a move. He thrust his knee into the man's back.

Joy undid the man's belt and cut his pants down with her knife. When she did the same to his shorts, the stench of his body almost overcame her. He must never have bathed or used what passed for toilet paper in this era.

Stinky tried to move away from her, but John held him tightly. "This woman was once violently raped," he told him. "Hates men. Cuts off their balls whenever she can. I usually can't stop her, so hurry and tell me who ordered you to attack us, before you become a eunuch."

Stinky struggled without saying a thing, so Joy pricked his penis with her knife.

He screamed, and threw a name out. "Olaf."

"Tveitmoe?"

"Yeah."

"Was Patrick McCarthy involved?"

"He'll kill me."

As John repeated his question, Joy took Stinky's testicles in hand and positioned her knife as though she were going to cut them off

"Okay, yeah!" Stinky cried, trying to struggle free of John's ham-merlock on his neck. "My God, he told us you'd be easy."

John threw him forward onto the ground. He landed next to the other three.

"Pull your pants up and play unconscious like your buddies," John told him, "and no one will ever know you talked."



Jy-ying

Good for them, Jy-ying thought as she put her skirt back on, I couldn't have done better. Strange, that in this age they would be trained like that. And that Chinese woman. She is stranger still. Something familiar about her, very familiar. I must have known somebody who looked and moved like her in the . . . future? Old world? I don't know what to call it. Jy-ying shrugged. Her handsome partner can certainly protect himself, as well.

Now I know that I won't be alone in hating Tveitmoe. And he has gone too far, having a man and Chinese woman attacked like this. Time to take care of him, once and for all.

But right now she was late for her appointment, and she'd have to walk the rest of the way. No time to congratulate the strange couple.

She hurried off.



Joy

When Joy and John returned to the hotel, Joy went straight to the sink and washed her hands, smelled them, then washed them again. When she was satisfied, they puzzled over the strange woman.

"I wonder what she was doing there," Joy mused. "She could be trained in martial arts, to free her legs that way. Nobody can fight well in the clothes this era's fashion dictates. And her stance seemed ready for offense or defense. I would have at least liked to talk to her. But poof, and she's gone."

John scratched his head. "She stood just on the other side of the thugs, as though she was going to intervene. But on whose side? Was

she in fact their leader—had she organized the attack? Or was she going to come to our aid? Nice legs,” he added.

“John!” She glared at him for a moment. “She was going to help us, I’m pretty sure. I don’t know why she disappeared again, after we were done.”

John wondered, “Is she American, or newly from China?”

“From China, I bet. She had that look about her. There was something else about her . . . something I can’t put my finger on. But then, I could only steal one or two glances at her.”

John smiled. “You know, I thought she looked familiar. But I could only steal a glance at her, too. Maybe she has deep, dark secrets, as we do.” He shrugged and changed the subject. “We’ve got some planning to do about Tveitmoe and McCarthy.”

Later they called in the three guys and told them what they’d decided to do.



That evening, when Olaf Tveitmoe arrived home from his office, they were waiting for him. He’d no sooner stepped out of his Cadillac than Joy stepped out from her hiding place and chopped him on the neck.

John, Dolphy, and Sal dragged him to a truck they had rented and threw him into the back as though handling a carcass. They drove him to the city dump, which was closed for the night. When Tveitmoe started to regain consciousness, Joy gleefully put him under again.

John and the guys stripped him and dragged him into the smelliest part of the dump they could find. Not without difficulty. He was almost all belly and must have weighed 250 pounds. The note they tied to his penis read:

The Tor Import and Export firm is under our protection. If anyone associated with it dies or is hurt in any way, and that includes their Chinese workers, we will slowly kill you with the Chinese death of a thousand cuts. You had better hope for their continued good health.

The Bloods.



Jy-ying

Well, what do we have here? Jy-ying thought as she approached Tveitmoe lying naked in the garbage. He was not an attractive man. His spindly legs and narrow shoulders seemed comical adornments to his round belly. He was lying on his back. She bent down and tried to read the message tied to his penis, but even with the full moonlight, she needed to use the penlight she carried in her purse.

Clever. I couldn't have worded it better.

Jy-ying thought back on what she had seen, trying to figure out what it meant, as she waited for Tveitmoe to wake up.

She had been waiting in Tveitmoe's garage for him to come home when she heard a truck pull up nearby. When she saw the Chinese woman she'd seen in the alley get out of the truck, she snuck out of the garage and hid in the bushes nearby to watch. The Chinese woman had delivered an expert chop to Tveitmoe's neck. When she and her companions loaded him onto the truck, Jy-ying followed them to the garbage dump.

Tveitmoe groaned and put his hand to his neck. He shuddered, sending little waves of fat rippling back and forth across his stomach. He opened his eyes, and focused on her. In the moonlight, she could be seen clearly enough that he recognized her. "You . . . !" He tried to get up.

"Hello honey," Jy-ying said sweetly. "I happened to be walking by, and found you here. What a surprise. Oh yes—friends of mine left a note on you. I advise you to read it and give it careful thought. As to me . . ." She bent over, close to his face. She narrowed her eyes to slits and said in an icy voice intended to chill him to the bone, "If you try anything with me, I will kill you. Slowly." She could see the whites of his eyes as they widened in fear. She held his gaze for a long moment, then straightened up and took one last look at him. He had peed on himself.

She gave him a little wave. "Good-bye, honey. I enjoyed seeing you again."



Joy

It was late when McCarthy came home half drunk from partying with his friends, but Joy, John, and the three guys were patient. He

soon ended up stripped naked and wearing an identical note, but in a different part of the city dump.

About a week later, Joy found in the *San Francisco Chronicle* what she had been waiting for. Almost jumping with glee, she flashed it in front of John's eyes, leaned over his shoulder, and mimicked the bland tone of a news anchor as she read it to him:

BUILDING COUNCIL SHOCKED

Olaf Tveitmoe has resigned his position with the Building Council in order to accept a job in Los Angeles. Patrick McCarthy expressed his great appreciation for the excellent work that Tveitmoe had done for the Council and wished him the best of success in his new job. He mentioned that he also had done all he could with the Council, that the cool and damp weather in San Francisco was affecting his health, and that it was time for him to move on.

The loss of Tveitmoe and McCarthy came as a shock to members of the Council, which had been almost wholly dependent on the two men. Al Gerwig of Gerwig and Bros. commented that "The loss of these important and influential men will leave a hole in the Council that will be difficult to fill."

Jerome Bassity, manager of McCarthy's Non-Political Liberty League, said he was dumbfounded by this decision. "McCarthy stood a very good chance of being elected mayor in 1909," he said.

Waterfront labor leader Andrew Furuseth said that the efforts of the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League will continue as vigorously as ever in spite of the loss of McCarthy's influence. He pointed out that

The next day, Joy found a gem in the *Gossip*, the city's widely-read tabloid, under the headline, "The Naked Truth." They were at their temporary offices, and this time she did jump up and down, and rushed into John's office, not even nodding at their secretary. She gleefully plopped the paper on top of the company inventory on which he was working.

"See this?" Joy shouted.

He looked up at her askance, rubbed his eyes with his hand, leaned back, slowly stretched, and scratched his underarm.

“Bastard,” she yelled, and snatched it off his desk. She started to stalk out but he tore the tabloid out of her hand and read it aloud.

Police picked up separately Olaf Tveitmoe and Patrick McCarthy on indecency charges. Acting on tips, the police discovered Tveitmoe naked near the city dump and McCarthy walking naked on a street a mile away. A source in the police department claims that McCarthy fought with the police when they tried to arrest him for indecent exposure, injuring a policeman.

When we contacted the police they refused to comment on this story. Tveitmoe and McCarthy would not answer their telephones when we called, and their associates denied any knowledge of this.

However, rumors are flying around the Building Council and City Hall. One source claims that both men were kicked out of an orgy with three Chinese and two Japanese women when they made deviate sexual demands. One woman pulled out a gun and made them leave without their clothes. A second independent source agrees that there was an orgy, and they were driven out at gunpoint, but that the orgy involved three Chinese women and two Japanese boys.

We contacted the League for Decency and they have informed us of their plan to demonstrate outside the homes of both men.

John got up and hugged Joy. “Am I forgiven?” he asked.

“Of course not,” she answered. “My turn will come.” She gave him a peck on the cheek.

The news items were reason for celebration; that night, they and the guys went to the Liberty Café. They were all armed, of course, so they sipped their beers and made them last while they sang and danced.

It was beginning to bother Joy that she was the only woman among these four men. The guys did not seem to have any steady girlfriends. So she asked Hands what happened to the one they’d seen with him in the hallway of the hotel.

“Oh, she was . . . ah . . . just somebody I met. Nothing steady.”

“She was a prostitute?”

Hands’ face turned red and he found something interesting to look at on the wall. “Well . . . yeah.”

“Have you or the other guys had any steady girlfriends?”

“No. It’s hard for us, Joy. What we did, and what we’re doing now, makes it difficult to meet nice girls. You know, good girls don’t come alone to bars like this, and you are the only nice . . . ahh, woman working for our company that I know.”

“Hmm,” Joy replied noncommittally, not wanting to get into the meaning of “good” and “nice.” She let the subject drop.

Back at the hotel, as they talked in Joy’s room, she told John, “We’ve got to help the guys find girlfriends. There seems little way for them to meet nice girls. You know, other than prostitutes.” Looking at John from under her eyelashes, she added, “Nice girls like me.”

“You’re a nice girl?” John asked.

Joy threw a punch at his shoulder. To her surprise, she found herself thrown over his shoulder and onto the bed. *That’s what I get for teaching him this stuff*, she realized.

John jumped on her and said, laughing, “Don’t mess with your man, woman.”

She put her arms around him and said seriously, “We’ve got to do something about this, you know. It’s not good.”

“What is it with you women and matchmaking? Can’t you stand to see a man without a woman?”

“Would you like to be without this woman, my man?” Joy purred, ruffling his unruly hair.

“And where do they find a woman like you?”

“My dearest, where it counts, all women are like me.”

“Let me see, “ he said, staring at her so-called dainty lawn-waist blouse, with its Dutch collar trimmed with wide embroidery and Valenciennes lace. He was trying to figure out how to undo it. Finally he mumbled, “No wonder young women were so virginal in this age.”



Tired of eating out and the constrictions of living in hotel rooms, John searched the classified ads and finally, after discussing it with Joy, bought a three-story apartment building containing nine apartments. It was at the corner of 16th and Vermont Streets, about three blocks from their new company offices and salesroom—within easy walking distance.

Joy and John took two of the ground floor apartments. Joy’s apartment was for appearances, and became a large work area and a

place to store their time machine and supply capsules. They turned the third first-floor apartment into a conference area and guest apartment, and let the three guys choose which of the remaining apartments they wanted for themselves, rent free.

They all spent a week shopping and furnishing the apartments, the guys' furniture at company expense. John hated the shopping. He always wanted to buy the first or second piece they saw. Joy loved shopping, and worse, she was a comparison shopper.

After the first full day of shopping, John told Joy, "Baby, all I want is something to sleep on, to eat from, to sit on, and to store things in. You shouldn't treat this as though it was our mission, you know." By the fourth or fifth bed, dresser, table, or whatever it was they were looking at, John always mumbled, "I like it, already."

Understandably, almost all the furniture was to Joy's taste—Asian, with simply-styled late nineteenth-century oak, teak, and walnut American furniture thrown in.

Once all the furniture was delivered, and at Joy's insistence they had repositioned it all several times, John was reduced to muttering, "Damned if I'd have volunteered for this mission, if I'd known it would involve this inhumane torture."



Weeks later, John rushed into Joy's company office and threw the first page of the newspaper down in front of her. Triumphant, he pointed to the front-page headline, and yelled, "Baby, we did it!"

She leaned back and stretched, rubbed her nose, and turned to close the drawer on her two-drawer file cabinet. She finally looked at John, who stood patiently, unperturbed, as though waiting for a bus.

Joy was too curious to continue the nonchalant act for long. She leaned forward and read the article he indicated.

ROOSEVELT UNHAPPY WITH CITY.

In a letter leaked to the press, President Roosevelt has written to Governor Pardee of California about the practice of excluding Orientals from normal business and other occupations in San Francisco. Roosevelt pointed out this has affected vital American interests. He asked that the governor throw his weight behind stopping this practice, and organize help for Oriental immigrants to adjust to, and find work in our great country.

Attached to the letter was a note from Secretary of

State Elihu Root, pointing out that this exclusion movement has hurt American relations with China and Japan. He hoped that the Governor would recognize the seriousness of the President's letter.

Our Washington reporter was told by a high State Department source that the Empress-Dowager of China had expressed to the President her unhappiness over the exclusion movement and wrote that it was a personal insult to her and all Chinese.

Joy and John were now vying daily to be the first to read the newspapers. Joy found out when the morning newspapers were delivered to the small kiosk at Harry Adams and 16th Streets, and made sure she woke up then. Offering John some excuse for leaving the apartment, such as, "I need to get some panties from the supply capsule" (she never wore bloomers), she would quietly slip out of the building and rush to the kiosk, pay her five cents, and hurry back to the apartment. It paid off. On the third day of this, she returned to John's apartment and casually asked as he dressed, "Oh, do you remember Chung Pao Hsi at the Chinese consulate here?"

"Of course."

"He was part of an official delegation meeting with the mayor."

"Oh."

The kitchen faucet dripped into a pan, its sound magnified by the silence. John had promised to change the washer.

He cracked his knuckles, scratched his neck as if in a slow motion replay. He cocked his head at her and finally asked, "What about?"

"He came with Cyhow Tszchi."

"Who he?"

"No, not Hu He. Cyhow Tszchi." Joy noticed the dimples at the corners of John's mouth again.

"Who is this other notable you say appeared with Chung?"

"First Secretary of the Chinese Legation in Washington. Also, he had with him Ow Yang King, Chung's assistant consul, and Lyman I. Mowry, the attorney for the Chinese officials."

"Really. How come they're here?"

"Governor Pardee was with them."

"And . . ." John made coaxing motions with both hands.

"Also included was the Assistant Secretary of State."

"Bitch. Are you enjoying yourself?"

Joy waited, but John smoothed his face and refused to look annoyed. He seemed to be taking great interest in a callus on his palm, and started picking at it.

“They met with the Mayor.”

John must have seen the newspaper she was hiding behind her back, for he rushed her. When she jumped onto the bed, he tackled her legs, brought her down on her back, and wrested the newspaper from her hand. He sat up and read it.

MAYOR TAKEN TO WOODSHED

Governor Pardee, along with United States Assistant Secretary of State James Watson, First Secretary of the Chinese Legation in Washington Cyhow-Tszchi, and other high officials visited the city yesterday to meet with Mayor Schmitz about the practice of excluding Orientals from local jobs. A high source said the Mayor was told in no uncertain terms that the city must cease and desist, and that he must use his full authority to make sure private boycotts and sanctions are not used for this purpose. Cited in particular were the exclusion policies of the Building Council. Attempts to contact the Mayor or members of the Council were unsuccessful . . .

What a glorious time this is, Joy thought, her smile feeling as though it would engulf her face.

From then on, Joy and John laughingly agreed to get the newspaper together. Three days later, when they picked the newspaper up at the kiosk, John rapidly scanned the front page. “This is it,” he said, and held the paper up so that Joy could read the great news with him.

CITY HALL PURGED

In a wide-ranging purge of the city government, the Mayor has fired or transferred to manual jobs all those who were associated with the Oriental exclusion movement. Rumors are that the Building Council itself will be reorganized under new leadership, and several other organizations have been threatened with the most rigorous police and fire inspections, if they likewise do not change their policies.”

That was Thursday. On the following Monday, John got the call from Muss Builders asking him if he wanted remodeling of the warehouse to continue. "Yes," he said with seeming reluctance. After hesitating, hinting at other options, and expressing his disgust over their boycott, he got them to shave 25 percent off the cost.

The five of them had waited for this, and that evening Joy and John, completely unarmed just this once, pushed two tables together at the Liberty Café and celebrated with Sal, Dolphy, and Hands.

They sang many songs that night, like "Moonbeams" and "Let It Alone," but when they sang "Hello! Ma Baby," as all their voices came down on the "baby" and Joy raised her beer stein to John and the guys, everything she and John had accomplished since arriving in 1906 hit her.

They'd only been here for a few months, but they'd already broken up a sex slave ring and saved their first lives. They'd brought down some real bastards who had ruled part of the community. They'd ended the Oriental exclusion movement here and turned it around to welcome Orientals. Work on their warehouse had resumed.

John saw her happy tears and got up to come around the table. He leaned over and put his arm around her as they sang the theme again. She tilted her head back, reached up to put one hand behind his head, and crushed his lips to hers.

When the song was over, a waitress with a little label over her left breast that read *Sue* came over to refill their steins. She looked at John and Joy and asked her, "What are you celebrating?"

Her eyes brimming, Joy summed it all up: "Love and life, Sue. Love and life."

Chapter 14

Jy-ying

With the work on her warehouse underway, Jy-ying decided it was time to get serious about finding that infidel time traveler.

She bought a whole set of the most expensive brown leather luggage she could find, including a large Sitka spruce sea chest with reinforced leather straps. She took a ferry to Oakland, searched the Chinese stores there, and found *China* luggage tags and stickers to put on her luggage. She filled trunk and suitcases with weapons, clothing, tools, medical supplies, computer equipment, and other things from her equipment capsules that would make the luggage heavy.

She found the Mode de Paris, a high-class woman's clothing store, and visited the store wearing her elegant, ankle-length, imperial Chinese *cheongsam*. It was made of double lined red and black silk brocade, with a mandarin collar and a keyhole opening that modestly closed above her cleavage. She wore no hat, but pulled her hair back into a tight braid, and circled that into a bun on the back of her head. The look was high-class Chinese.

When the clerks at the store ignored her, she loudly counted out five counterfeit ten dollar bills onto the counter and yelled, "How can a Chinese princess get service here?" No problem from then on.

She bought the most expensive, fashionable clothes, including a travel ensemble for ship voyages that she put on afterward, in her room—a light blue shirtwaist blouse with leg of mutton sleeves and white lace spilling down the front from a high-neck, sky blue collar, and a rich-looking sky blue silk gored skirt that flared at her ankles, with a small sashed waist. She wore no corset or bustle to configure her body in the fashionable S-shape. She was supposed to have just come from China, and she could assume that people would believe that she wore the latest Chinese fashion, of which they knew nothing.

She wore a white Mink fur cape and what Jy-ying thought was an outrageous, albeit Peking-stylish, bonnet. The hat was a milliner's masterpiece of hair braid and silks laid around a narrow brim, folded lace,

and white ostrich tips that fell over one side. She laughed for five minutes when she first put it on and looked in the mirror. Her laughter finally diminished to hiccupping chuckles. *Shu Kuo should see me now*, she thought, and started laughing again.

Prepared, she hired a two-horse coach with two coachmen and a driver. The lone bellhop at the All Nations Hotel brought a large cart up to her room. He could barely maneuver the Sitka chest onto it, but managed easily to pile her luggage on top. At the coach she tipped him fifty cents, and he gave her a huge smile.

The coachmen loaded her luggage and chest, looking at her with a mixture of admiration and envy all the while. She ordered the driver to take her to the Little Palace Hotel on Leavenworth and Post Streets, the temporary site of the Palace Hotel, which had been destroyed by the earthquake and fire and was being rebuilt at Market and New Montgomery Streets. Before the disaster, the hotel had been the largest and most luxurious in the world.

As everything was being unloaded in front of the Little Palace Hotel, the doorman, wearing a magnificent military-style uniform, bowed and waved forward two porters dressed in red and yellow uniforms with brimless square hats lined in blue. They brought up a cart to take her luggage to the registration desk.

Does not anyone in this stupid age have a feel for color? Jy-ying wondered. Turning her attention to her act, she strode, head high, chin out, through one of the three front doors. She crossed the lobby, over a rug so deep and lush she thought it could hide a lion or two, and stopped in front of the long, marble-topped reception desk. No spittoon anywhere. Everything had a new smell. Cocking her elbow on her hip and raising her forearm so that she could let her snakeskin purse swing back and forth from her white-gloved hand, she painted a bored expression on her face and announced in a heavy Chinese accent to the suited clerk behind the counter, "I am Princess Tz'u Li Poh. You got reservation for me." It was a statement, not a question.

The clerk checked his file and looked up, embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Princess. We have no reservation for you."

"What? You lose my reservation?" She swore loudly in Chinese, gesturing so wildly that her fur cape almost slid off her shoulder. "How could you? I want see manager."

The clerk rushed off and in minutes a tall, distinguished elderly man with a bushy gray beard and what was obviously a brown wig approached her. He looked over her luggage and her clothing. Satisfied,

he took the appropriate stance of respect and, clasping his hands together, crooned, "I am Henry Vidrick, the manager. There seems to be a mistake. We do not have a reservation for you."

Jy-ying looked at him disdainfully. Guests nearby stopped to watch. "My legation make my reservation." She raised her voice. "You say my diplomats did not?"

Vidrick took an unconscious step back, wringing his hands. "Oh no, Princess. I am sure they did and the mistake is ours. I humbly apologize for the error, but we are temporary here until the Palace Hotel is rebuilt, and we do not have our full staff. Our services are limited, and there may be some inconvenience. If you accept that, I will give you our ambassador suite. Please accept the first week at our expense, as a token of apology."

She looked at him as though she expected nothing less, and nodded.

He hurried behind the desk and reached up to one of the largest mailboxes in the top row. He pulled out a silvery key with what looked like a gold nugget attached with a silver keychain. He hit a bell on the desk. Almost immediately, two bellboys appeared. He gave them the key.

Jy-ying bowed slightly to the manager and waited, body straight as a pole, while the bellboys slowly maneuvered the cart with the luggage across the thick rug toward the elevator. She followed them into a metal elevator cage whose sides seemed entirely made of wrought iron curls. With a loud hum, it laboriously lifted them to the fifth floor.

The older bellboy showed her around the suite, pointing out the plush Third French Republic sofa and easy chairs and the Tiffany electric lamps in the living room before showing her the small kitchen with a marble-topped table for two and standup marble counter, new Wehrle gas range, and Puritan White icebox (she opened the ice door and saw a fresh fifty-pound ice block inside). Then on to the huge bedroom, furnished with a Second Empire Napoleon III poster bed, side chairs, and high mirrored chest of drawers. The tour ended at the bathroom, which contained a shower over a gold-gilded circular bathtub, a sink with hot and cold running water, and the latest toilet, with a low water tank and a soft pine seat.

She tipped each of the boys a half-dollar. They seemed overjoyed.



Over the next weeks, Jy-ying began circulating in high society. It was so easy. Acting as the Princess's secretary, she called Mayor Schmitz' office and said a visiting Chinese Manchu princess would like

to make an unofficial visit to the Mayor on behalf of the Empress-Dowager, who might be considering her own informal visit. She met Mayor Schmitz and his close staff the next day. Of course she didn't ask him about his indictment for bribery and extortion. She played out her role to perfection. *Security would be proud*, she thought.

As she expected, word got around. She began finding invitations to parties and formal dinners in her mailbox, or received them over the phone when she returned telephone calls.

When the First Secretary of the Chinese Legation in Washington, Cyhow Tszchi, was in town for discussions about the treatment of Chinese, she was conveniently out of town. Jy-ying thought they all had left when she started circulating again, but at a formal reception for visiting Prime Minister Alfred Deacon of Australia, a Chinese diplomat, Song Shihao, was also present for some reason. He spied her at the gathering and as he came toward her, she thought he must have been looking for her.

He hovered nearby as Jy-ying chatted with an army colonel about his battles in the Philippine War. When the colonel saw the diplomat standing nearby, he excused himself.

Song Shihao bowed to her, and introduced himself in Mandarin Chinese. After she returned the greeting, she said without any preliminaries, "Please join me on the veranda so that I may introduce myself properly."

Jy-ying led him to a corner of the veranda where they could be relatively alone. She bowed to him again. "I am known here as Princess Tz'u Li Poh. I tell these people that I am here informally to look over San Francisco for the Empress-Dowager, who is thinking of making her own informal visit." She knew he knew this already. Checking her out may have been the reason he was at the reception.

He replied, "Yes, I had heard that."

She noticed, as he'd intended, that he didn't acknowledge her title of "Princess" in his response—a truly rude test.

She hardened her voice and her eyes. "What I will now tell you must be a secret, on pain of recall and death."

His eyebrows rose slightly.

"You must swear by your oath to the Empress-Dowager that you will repeat what I tell you to no other, and if asked about me, you will only authenticate my cover story. Do I have your oath?"

"But you have told me noth—"

"You have three seconds to give me your oath, or I will walk away at your peril." Her voice was now iced steel.

Only when she started to turn away did Song respond. "You have it."

She reached into her black and gold clutch purse and felt for what Security had prepared for just this eventuality. Out of a hidden pocket she pulled a miniature badge embossed with the Imperial Guard seal, and a document on Imperial rice paper folded into a one by one-inch square. It also bore the Imperial seal and contained a short message over the signature and stamp of the Empress-Dowager. Jy-ying handed both to him and watched as he looked at the badge and carefully unfolded and read the document.

Song's jaw dropped and his eyes opened wide for a second before he regained control. Almost standing at attention, he carefully refolded the document and handed it and the badge back to her.

She took her time putting them away. She looked him in the eyes, which were still wide with amazement. As though talking to an inferior, she told him, "To be sure you understand, I am Major Khoo Jy-ying of the Imperial Guard, here on special orders. You know that revolutionaries are working against the dynasty. I am seeking one special man who is involved in this. I am here to kill him. You are commanded to give me whatever aid I request." Jy-ying softened her voice and smiled. Anyone watching would think they were having a friendly discussion. "Do you understand?"

He gave her a deep bow and replied, "I understand . . . Princess. I am available as you wish."

She painted a friendly expression on her face and turned to return to the celebration. She noticed that the assistant to the Mayor and the Chief of Police had been watching. They had set this up, she realized, but now her false identity was solidly established. She was sure that Song Shihao would confirm it, even under the harshest torture.



Jy-ying hated the charade she led, but she had to go through with it to find the time traveler. *He must have funds like I do. He must be circulating among the high and mighty with his knowledge of current events and the future. He must be well trained to impress people and exploit their power and influence. I am sure I will find him this way.*

Jy-ying looked over each new man she met, at the risk of it being misunderstood. Old men? Obviously, no. Boys, or the immature young men? Surely not. Men too fat, pot bellied, or thin? Hardly. Only a man in good shape, showing good poise and self-control, would be picked

for a time travel mission, whatever that was. This narrowed down the field considerably. Moreover, he was from her time. She was sure all the small cultural and behavioral clues of a man out of time would be easy for a security officer to recognize.

In late March she attended a party hosted by retired railroad tycoon E.H. Harriman at his huge mansion on the bay. She circulated as usual, engaging in small talk about China, the prospects for a settlement in the conflict with Japan, and, some indelicately broached, the prospect of a Chinese revolution.

Then she saw *him*.

He was alone, sitting in a plush armchair, legs crossed, a champagne glass in one hand, relaxed. There was a jaunty self-confidence about him. He seemed to be studying people in the room. Immediately, she thought him out of place and time.

He was also attractive and masculine, and she felt a little shiver as she thought about approaching him. She also felt uneasy, suffering a momentary lapse in confidence. She thought about the way she was dressed, her tight maroon silk dress that spread out on the floor and her bare shoulders and low-cut bodice. She'd had her hotel's beauty salon do her hair in high curls with supposedly errant wisps of hair falling between them. She had on her jade necklace with matching jade earrings. She was sure that she was the prettiest at the party, as he was the handsomest.

Jy-ying walked casually past him, knowing he was studying her, and within a short time she approached him from behind and bumped his drink, spilling some on his pants. "Oh, excuse me," she said in pidgin English. "How bad of me. I spill drink on pants." She put her hand to her mouth. "I embarrassed."

He stood up and shook his pants. He was taller by about six inches. "My mistake, ma'am. I shouldn't have had my drink hanging out in your way. But if you insist on taking the blame, you can make it up to me by telling me your name."

This is him.

Jy-ying tried to look apologetic. "I get you another drink." She didn't drink herself. Sabah forbade it. But she got another glass of champagne, and soda water for herself, at the bar.

When she turned around, he was standing behind her and she almost bumped into him and spilled the champagne on him again. She pulled it back in time and handed it to him. "Here is drink.

"My name Princess Tz'u Li Poh. As you guess, I from China. Would do me honor of name?"

“I am Rex Scott. I’m a movie actor.”

Sure you are.

“What you act in?”

“I’ve had bit parts in a number of movies. Have you seen *The Great Train Robbery*?”

“No. I do not.”

“Why are you here, Princess? I mean, in the United States.”

“I visit for my empress. Maybe she visit San Francisco in near future, if I say I like.”

Rex showed great interest in China and asked many questions. Jy-ying asked her own questions about his movie career, testing him to see how good his cover was.

She left him with her telephone number. He said he was moving around a lot and he was hard to contact, but he would get in touch with her.

When he called the next day, she invited him to dine with her at the hotel restaurant, but he said he knew of a good restaurant on the coast—would she like him to give her a tour of San Francisco?

I’ve got him.

He picked her up in front of the hotel in a Ransom Olds. He was fun to be with, and surely did not have the Victorian values of men of this age. He treated her like an equal, but at the same time, a woman. Her only concern was to penetrate his cover. He no doubt was a Christian in a Christian land, so after the day was almost done, she told him she was a Muslim.

“What’s a Muslim?”

He’s good.

“You know, Christian Crusades. Jerusalem? Islam?”

“Oh, very good. I’m a Baptist.”

“Baptist? What Baptist?”

“It’s a Protestant church, but I’m not sure what it believes in, except it’s not Roman Catholic. I call myself Baptist because that’s what my mother was. She used to take me to church when I was a little boy, but I don’t remember what it was about.”

Jy-ying did not want to get into any of this Christian stuff with him. She had her holster purse partly open and near her hand. She readied herself to move suddenly and quietly added, “I am Sabah Muslim.” She watched his eyes and lips for the slightest sign.

He answered cheerily, “I would say ‘what’s that,’ but it’s beginning to sound like we’re playing some sort of game.”

He is better than good.

The next day he picked her up for a tour of San Francisco. She was enjoying herself, but she never forgot why she was here. She watched him carefully, but could not break through his cover.

When he dropped her off at her hotel, he asked, "Would you like to go to a nightclub tomorrow night?"

"What is nightclub?"

"It's a place where people dance and drink and get entertained."

"You honor me. I hope I not bore you."

Jy-ying spent part of the next day trying to find out more about Rex. After calling a local five-cent nickelodeon and getting information on the movie *The Great Train Robbery*, she telephoned the Edison Company Studios that produced it and for whom Rex said he was working, and asked for the public relations man. His secretary came on the phone.

"Hello, can I help you?"

Jy-ying answered, "Hello, I am a reporter for the *San Francisco Examiner* and I wish to do an article on the actor Rex Scott. I need background information on him. Can you give me that?"

"Rex what?"

"Excuse my accent. His last name is S.C.O.T.T."

"Sorry, I don't know the name. Let me check my file."

While waiting, Jy-ying studied the wall telephone, amused by the design. She had spoken into a transmitter connected to a wooden box while holding the bipolar receiver to her ear—a cord-covered wire connected it to something inside the box. She opened the box and saw on a top shelf the switch for the receiver on-off hook and the ringer, a five magnet generator on a second shelf with the attached crank she had just used to signal the operator who placed her call, and two four inch tall dry batteries to provide the talking power. *Fascinating*, she thought. She took the receiver away from her ear and unscrewed it. Inside, she saw brass castings and a carbon cup turned from a solid brass piece. As she tapped the carbon diaphragm with her finger, she heard the secretary speaking as though from a long distance. She put the diaphragm to her ear in time to hear, ". . . no such name."

"He plays bit parts. Could he be a bit player?"

"No, I have looked at the whole payroll under S. No such name."

"Thank you. How can I find out who played in the movie *The Great Train Robbery*?"

"Hold on a moment."

She should have brought something to work on while she was waiting on the phone. About ten minutes later, the secretary came back on the line. "I have the cinema credits here. What do you want to know?"

"Is there anyone with the first name 'Rex' on the listing?" She might have misunderstood or misspelled his last name.

After a short delay, he answered. "No."

So, Rex lied to me about his acting. Completely. Why else should he hide his background or work from me, except that he is the time traveler? I have him for sure.

Rex drove up to the hotel that night to take Jy-ying to a nightclub. She was waiting. But when he got out of the car to open the car door for her, she asked him in a throaty voice, "You like come to my suite? We dance there."

He looked surprised, then excited. "Sure," he blurted.

He drove around the hotel to its little dirt parking lot. When he returned, she put her arm through his and led him to the elevator cage and up to her suite. She opened the door and led him in, and closed and locked the door behind him.

As he stood looking around the suite, obviously impressed, Jy-ying waved with her hand and said, "Sit down on couch. I get more comfortable clothes."

She had not seen that expectant grin on a male's face since her first sexual experience when she was eighteen years old. She went into the bedroom and changed into her black satin wing chun practice clothes, with red toggle fasteners, red satin piping on the jacket, and elasticized ankle pants. She left her feet bare. As she tied her hair into a pigtail, she fixed in her mind every piece of furniture in the living room and the distance and angle between each. If he knew martial arts, which she was sure he must, she was ready for him.

He looked surprised when he saw her come out of the bedroom. "Why are you dressed like that?"

Jy-ying looked at his eyes to see if there was any recognition of her clothing. None.

I will play his game.

"This informal dress of Princess." Staring into his eyes, and aware of the slightest twitch he might make, she strode up to him and asked sweetly, "You take off coat?" She helped him remove it.

As he stood there in complete surprise, she unbuckled his belt, unbuttoned his trousers, and pushed them down. He was already clearly

aroused and speechless at how fast Jy-ying was moving things along. He let the trousers drop and kicked them off his feet. She motioned to his underwear and he looked a little embarrassed as he took them off. He was now naked from the shirt down. She took his hot hand without another word and led him, smiling and erect, into the bedroom.

Jy-ying told him to lie down on the bed, and as he did, she entered the closet and pulled down from a hanger several long ribbons she had prepared. She looked at him lying on the bed, hands behind his head, legs slightly apart, a grin on his now ruddy face that even crinkled his eyes.

“I have fun,” she meowed. “Be still now.” She told him to put his arms out and she tied his wrists to the head posts with the ribbons. She asked him to spread his legs, and she tied his ankles to the foot posts.

Spread-eagled, still grinning, he said, “I haven’t done this before. Your turn. Take your clothes off.”

Jy-ying dropped the pidgin. “My fun does not include getting naked.”

There was a nice filet knife in the kitchen and she took her time getting it. When she came back with it in her hand, Rex stared at her.

“What kind of game is this? I’m not into that whip and pain stuff.”

She sat down next to him on the bed, holding the knife close to his thigh and almost regretfully watching his erection disappear. “You are good,” she said, “but not good enough. I know who you are. But I want to hear it from you. The truth. I will carve you up piece by piece if you lie.”

He tried a different kind of grin, but it only caused his mouth to tremble. He drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Okay. You caught me. I don’t know how you found out that I’ve been lying to you.”

He stopped and looked at the knife. Jy-ying waved its point at him to continue.

“I am not a movie star. I am . . .” He looked ashamed now, as though telling his wife he had been fired from a good job. “I’m a gigolo.”

“What is a gigolo?”

“I seduce rich women and take their money for it.”

“How were you going to take my money? I would not give it to you.”

He was relaxing. There was a lift to the corner of his lips and a look in his eyes that was close to pride. “I would have taken you to bed in a couple of days, and several days after that I would have said that my

producer needs a big investor to support a movie he wants me to star in. If I treated you like a queen, and you were falling in love with me, you would have given me the money.”

Jy-ying put the knife down. At the moment she didn't trust herself with it. She kept her voice calm. “You were pulling one of the oldest, meanest, most despicable scams on me?”

“What's ‘scam’?”

Her voice rising, she asked rhetorically, “You were trying to use my feelings to trick money out of *me*?”

“Yes, if you put it that way.”

Jy-ying started to shake with anger. She stood, leaving the knife on the bed. She now had no doubt he was telling her the truth. That story of his, told in the way he told it, was not something the time traveler could have done. Her security training told her that. Her feminine instincts told her that.

She looked down at him. *What a poor excuse for a man*, she thought. He had the body and looks that would have made some woman very happy. He had the intelligence that should have enabled him to go far in some legitimate career. He could have contributed much to humanity and God, if he had only had the right education. *The rule of Sabah will help lost men like him.*

“What is your real name?” she asked him.

“Cosmos Trzoniec.”

That just dissolved her anger. She couldn't help but chuckle.

“If I understand you . . . Cosmos, you would have taken my money and left me, never to see you again? Even if I fell in love with you, God forbid? What about your feelings for me?”

His mouth turned down and his brow furrowed. “Unhappily, regretfully, with strong feelings for you, I would have taken your money and disappeared. That is what I do. It's how I survive. If I stayed around, you'd get tired of me—you are a princess and I'm nothing. Eventually, you'd send me away without anything. I'm just bringing the end closer while getting out of it something to live on.”

Jy-ying began to undress. He watched her with increasing comprehension.

When she was naked, she pirouetted, and asked, “You would have left me?”

He said nothing, but didn't have to. His body answered for him.

She straddled him, made love to him, untied his hands and feet, and he made love to her. As they rested in each other's arms afterward, she purred, “I ask again. You would have left me?”

“No,” he said, “I don’t think I could have. You are the most wonderful woman I have ever met.”

Jy-ying pulled out of his arms and stood. She dressed while he watched. She walked into the living room, picked up his clothes, and returning, threw them onto the bed next to him. “Get dressed.”

He took his time, grinned a lot, but didn’t say a word. When he was fully dressed, she turned down his right collar that was sticking up and pulled down the back of his coat. She took his hand and led him to the door and opened it.

“Goodbye, Cosmos. If I see you anywhere in San Francisco again, I will have you killed. Live long, Cosmos, and far away.”

He paled, and with a final look, he left.



Jy-ying was lonely. She missed Shu Kuo and even Rex. She needed a companion.

She found one.

Her gym was finished; finally, she could get the exercise she needed. She had done what she could in her suite, and had driven her Rolls Royce Silver Ghost over impossible dirt roads to a remote area in the country four times a week to jog along a path in the woods. She knew she could not jog on the streets of the city, nor did she know of a weight room or gym that would accept a woman. So she went back to her exercise routine and wing chun practice against her sand bag and *Mook Yan Chong*—a wooden dummy precisely constructed to her specifications. She increasingly regretted not speaking to the couple that she’d seen attacked by the thugs. Maybe she would see them again.

After shopping for a formal ballroom gown on California Street, Jy-ying was on her way back to the hotel when she saw a dirty little white terrier trying to get into a garbage can outside of Harold’s restaurant. She went over and lifted the lid for him. His hair was matted, caked with dried mud, and he was clearly famished. But rather than jump into the garbage, he came up to her and licked her hand. When she bent down to him, he licked her face. He had no collar, no I.D., and he followed her when she turned to leave him.

What could she do? She picked him up, carried him to a market nearby, bought him a pork chop, and watched him gobble the meat and fat off the bone. When she walked off to leave him, he followed her with his pointed tail up and wagging and the bone in his mouth. She thought he would disappear soon, but he followed her to the hotel.

The doorman tried to shoo him away, but she stopped him. The terrier was scared, but he wouldn't leave, nor would he follow her into the hotel when she was halfway through the door. He looked at her with his head and tail down, his pointed ears back. He had dropped his bone in front of him. An offering of thanks, she presumed.

Jy-ying sighed and picked the little one up in her arms and took him into the hotel with her. She said nothing to anyone. She just walked into the elevator cage with him. She ignored two other guests in the cage. She could feel the little one trembling. When she put him down in her suite, he stayed close to her at first, but gradually relaxed enough to sniff around the bedroom, living room, and miniature kitchen—especially around the gas range—and finally the dining-conference area. Soon he was running all over, and she was finding pee spots.

She was happy to have found him. She loved little dogs, but in her job she could never own one. Now she could. Breaking only for her Contact Prayers, she spent most of the rest of the day playing with him, feeding him, and cleaning up after him. She neglected her exercise this once. She didn't care what the maids and manager said. He was here to stay as long as she did.

Jy-ying washed him thoroughly—twice—to get rid of his ticks and fleas. Finally, as far as she could see, she had washed off all his fleas, and she removed the remaining ticks with tweezers. That done, she tried to bathe him a third time, and they had their first fight over that.

With her martial arts skills, she won. Barely.

She wrapped him in a warm blanket and held him while she read a magazine until he was dry. He slept with her that night, the first male she'd slept with in this new world. In the morning she took a good look at him. He had a beautiful, longhaired white coat, now that it was clean and fluffy, with a black nose and footpads, sparkling black eyes, delicate pink inner ears, and a red tongue. His pert ears stood straight up, as did his pointed tail. She had not seen a little dog like this before.

With his head cocked to one side, standing solidly on his four feet, with his tail straight up, he also took a good look at Jy-ying. She must have passed, because he licked her hand.

She named him Little Wei—little one full of presence

She checked the telephone directory for a veterinarian and found nine. She checked her maps and selected the one with the largest advertisement that was not too far away. She carried Little Wei through the lobby without comment, and approached the horse and automobile

hacks waiting in line. Rather than drive, she took a Hansom, with the driver sitting on a raised platform behind the seats. She enjoyed watching Little Wei look around with excitement as they rode along.

He checked out well with the veterinarian—no disease, no problem that the vet could tell. He told her that Little Wei was a West Highland White Terrier, a new and still rare breed; no dog like this would be wild unless something happened to his owner. She left after buying a new red collar and leash, a play ball, rubber bone, and what the veterinarian guaranteed was special soap that would keep fleas and ticks away.

Being a princess had its advantages. From then on, Little Wei and Jy-ying went almost everywhere together. The only time she kept him in the suite while she was gone was when she attended a formal dinner. People grew to expect that, except for those affairs, if they invited her, Little Wei, black blanket, and leash, came along. So had a little bag and scoop she kept in her purse. People would turn away, faces would turn red, and nobody would comment when she cleaned up after Little Wei.

I do not know what their problem is, she thought. After all, not so many years ago, when nature called people, they were no less discerning than Little Wei

Jy-ying was becoming well known in the tight-knit group of San Francisco's elite, and could recognize most of them and recall their names. It was getting so that she could easily identify a new man in attendance at their functions and quickly check him out. She had two or three possibilities, and got close enough to one to have an excursion with him, but not one was the time traveler.

Aside from using his funds to mingle with the rich and powerful, what else would the time traveler do? she wondered. He would try to make legitimate money, presuming he used mostly counterfeit money. How would he earn it? For one, he knows the future and could thus make money by betting on horse races, the stock market, and commodities. For another, he would be trying to change things he thought were bad here or elsewhere. Of course, he would try to establish legitimacy, and how better than to be the head of a business? And because he knows the future, it would be a surprisingly successful business.

These were enough particulars to put a private detective to work on it, and within a few days she had the Anderson Detective Agency looking for a missing person on behalf of Princess Tz'u Li Poh. "It is my personal wish to find this person," she told Gerald Anderson. "And I am willing to pay \$1,000 plus expenses." That was a sufficient answer. He must have thought it as a matter of the heart.

Mr. Anderson had a long list of questions about the person she was searching for, most of which were easy to answer: "He is in good physical shape, perhaps athletic, keeping himself in shape through regular exercise. He is good at self defense and weapons. He is doing extraordinarily well on the stock market or betting, may head a rapidly developing and successful company, is in his twenties or thirties, and is probably of greater than average height—maybe much greater. He is unmarried and very well educated. He is not from San Francisco and possibly speaks English with a strange regional accent."

Jy-ying let Anderson know that she would be especially grateful with a bonus if they found this person. He was to report to her once a week.



Jy-ying got a call from Mrs. Hiller, the head of the San Francisco Orphan and Child Welfare Society. This was one of the charities to which so many of the wives of the rich and powerful contributed their time and money. After the introductory small talk, Mrs. Hiller said, "We will be visiting an orphanage for Chinese girls this coming Thursday, and hope that you can join us. I knew that you would have a special interest."

Jy-ying replied, "Yes, thank you. I do."

The orphanage was in the home of Barbara Atherton, a former Chinese missionary. Her husband had been killed in the Boxer Rebellion, and she survived only because she had been rescued by a unit of British soldiers. She had returned to San Francisco, her home, and started taking in homeless and orphaned Chinese girls, and others in trouble. Mrs. Hiller's society helped support her work.

Jy-ying took Little Wei with her, of course, and had put on his red collar. It stood out against his white fur and matched his red tongue. He was a hit with the girls. She left him unleashed, and could not tell who was having more fun—Little Wei, with his tail a blur over all those faces to lick, or the young girls who chased him, petted him, and gambled on the floor with him.

She stayed in the background on this trip and let Mrs. Hiller and the other women with them do all the talking. Barbara Atherton obviously wanted to have a long talk with Jy-ying about China. Jy-ying told her in an aside that she would call to get together with her. When they left, with the greatest regret shown by the girls and Little Wei, she thanked Mrs. Atherton for inviting her and gave her 100 real dollars for the orphanage.

The next morning Jy-ying called Barbara, who immediately invited her over that afternoon. "Bring Little Wei," she said. "Then my girls will play with him and give us a chance to talk."

She did, and they talked while watching the dog and girls play. Barbara missed China and so did Jy-ying, but more important, she missed companionship. Barbara was in her fifties, friendly, smiled a lot, and missed her dead husband. The girls she took in helped, but sometimes she just wanted an adult to talk to, confide in, share memories with. Jy-ying visited her many times in the following weeks, and eventually spent every Saturday afternoon with her and the girls. Little Wei looked forward to the visits and seemed to sense when that afternoon had come. He would get very agitated, waiting by the door with his tail wagging, and whining with eagerness.

Early on, Jy-ying told Barbara that she was a Muslim and asked if that bothered her.

"No," Barbara replied. "Does my being a Christian missionary bother you?"

"No, but you should know that I am something of a missionary myself."

"Well," Barbara said, "we both believe in God. It's just that our intermediaries differ. You have Mohammed, and I have Christ."

They had many religious discussions after that. Jy-ying gradually introduced Barbara to Sabah, and she did the same for her Presbyterianism. Jy-ying thought Barbara was mistaken in her beliefs, in her faith in Jesus, but Jy-ying was not there to proselytize. She just enjoyed Barbara's company and appreciated what she was doing for the poor Chinese girls.

Barbara was very curious about Jy-ying being a princess, and the amount of time she was spending in San Francisco. Barbara was so open and friendly with her and with all she was doing for the girls, that Jy-ying found it difficult to lie. She had to tell her cover story, anyway. Barbara nodded, and didn't believe her, Jy-ying knew. But Barbara was familiar with China and its many currents, spoke Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese, and understood that Jy-ying would tell her, if she could.

Jy-ying grew to enjoy spending time with the young girls, teaching them about the world. After their first hour of play with Little Wei, he would fall asleep at her feet, exhausted. The girls gathered around, some petting him, and Jy-ying would tell them about science, about the stars and galaxies, about other countries and their history, and about Islam.

She was a professional. She was dedicated. And children of her own were not possible. She had never given it much thought. Before. Now Jy-ying realized how much she enjoyed these girls, some as young as five years old. They awakened in her a feeling she hadn't known before. Her closest experience of it was when she took over care of her sister when her parents died. But that was only for a few months before the girl was brutally killed in the same Chinese civil war that had claimed their parents.

This was different. She realized now how much she wanted children. It was driven home to her when vivacious, ever-smiling, ever-laughing, eight-year-old Mary Lee died from tuberculosis. Jy-ying could do nothing for her, once she found out about her sickness. She would have survived in Jy-ying's time, and that made it worse. Jy-ying sobbed with the girls and Barbara, and Little Wei lay on Mary's empty bed and whined. Dogs know.

Chapter 15

Joy

Settling into this “primitive and backward age,” as Joy often characterized it, was a happy time for her. Her fights with John were glorious. Their making up afterward was even better.

She could not stop thinking about how to help the guys find steady girlfriends. It bothered her. Besides, as the only female among the four men, she sometimes wanted another woman to talk with.

One day John looked up from his perusal of the company budget and nonchalantly told her, “I’ve stopped home schooling the guys.”

“Why? They need it, and I thought you liked doing it.”

“They’ll have other things to do.”

“Have you been loading them down with work?” Joy accused “You shouldn’t do that. If you’re bored with teaching them, I’ll take up the home schooling. It’s important, you know.”

“No more need for home schooling. They’re starting college next week.”

Joy gaped at him.

John had turned back to his budget. A dog was barking somewhere, and a car backfired on the street.

She went over to his desk, ripped the budget away from him, and threw it on the bed. She gave him her practiced evil eye and waited with her arms folded across her chest.

He looked up at her with an innocent expression. “What? You don’t like my budget?”

“Bastard!” she exclaimed. “How can they go to college?”

“Oh, that’s what you want to know. Well, now, beginning Monday, the three guys will be attending San Francisco College as unclassified students during the remaining months of the Spring Semester. They will take classes in liberal arts, and what passes for business courses. Although they will start late for the semester, the college has agreed to accept them, and I have hired a student tutor to bring the guys up to date on the classes they missed. They are really eager to attend.”

John walked over the bed and, as he bent over to retrieve his budget, Joy gave his behind a good kick, knocking him onto the bed.

Putting both her hands on her hips, she demanded, "How did you do this? They're not high school graduates."

"Easy." John rolled over onto his back. "I promised they would pay triple tuition for status as unclassified students, and I made a contribution to the college of \$10,000. I also contributed \$1,000 to the personal expense account of the president of the college, for his troubles. When he asked why I was doing this, I told him these men were important to my business and I wanted them to get a good, all-round education."

John put his hands behind his head and waited. His eyes twinkled and he had the dimples at the edges of his mouth that Joy hated. He was obviously happy with himself.

"Why?" she threw at him, exasperated.

"Why' what?"

"What about the word 'why' don't you understand?" she yelled.

"You mean, why am I sending the guys to college?"

She grabbed his foot, jerked off his shoe, pulled off his sock, and bent back his little toe.

"Ouch. Really baby, what's so hard to understand? That's where the nice girls are. The nice girls interested in intelligent and educated men. They might even meet someone like you, heaven forbid." He looked smug. "Are you going to be jealous, now that I've solved your matchmaking problem?"

She released his toe, stood, and glared at him—the mess of wild hair, the twinkling eyes, the dimples, the smug expression. The laughter bubbled up from the bottom of her stomach to erupt in a guffaw that doubled her over. She collapsed on the bed. She couldn't stop laughing. She grabbed her sides and curled her legs over her stomach, and hooted.

When she finally settled into snickering, she looked at John. He looked serious, even grim, as he struggled not to laugh. It gave him a most mischievous look, and she broke up again. Finally, he joined her laughter.

Her sides ached. She hugged him. "I love you, dearest. But I'll get you for that."

Over the next month, they seldom saw the guys in the evening. It seemed that their time was taken up elsewhere. "Obviously by study," John opined.

Within two months, they found out that the three had girlfriends. They introduced them to Joy and John, of course, and they all ate together several times at the Cold Day Restaurant on Pine Street. Hands and his girlfriend Jane put on a picnic in the country for all of them. Having been a catcher for the San Francisco Seals, he was an ardent baseball fan and took them all to the 1907 season opener against Portland in the Seals' new stadium at Valencia and 15th Streets, not very far from John's apartment building. It was a good thing they could walk—with ten thousand spectators attending, traffic was a mess of horses, wagons, coaches, and automobiles.

Joy noted how the guys behaved toward their girlfriends. In this age, men were so chivalrous. They opened doors, pulled out chairs, and stood when a woman came into a room. They always doffed their hats when saying goodbye, or took them off when in the same room with a woman. They even walked between their female companions and the street, to protect them from splashing mud and water.

Come to think of it, why don't they act that way toward me? Joy wondered. She asked John. "How come you and the guys—well, you I understand, but the guys? How come they treat me like a man?"

"They see you as more a man than a woman."

"More a *man*?"

"Yeah. You have all these skills that this culture tells them belong to a man. You're supposed to shrink from danger, scream, and cover your eyes, and treat men as superior. That would tell them you are a woman."

"I see." She dropped the subject. She had in mind a supper meeting scheduled with the guys to discuss reorganizing the Tor Company so that they would have larger roles.



Joy spent over an hour getting ready for the meeting. John kept yelling at her, "It's time to go." By the time he ended with "damn it," she was ready.

She had let her hair down to fall naturally over her shoulders. For the first time since arriving in this age, she put her locket in her purse and wore instead a necklace with tiny, interwoven gold links and a single large pearl, with matching gold-rimmed pearl earrings. Her light pink blouse had puffed white lace at her wrists, down the front, and along the open collar that displayed her cleavage. She tucked the blouse

into a hip-tight maroon silk skirt with velvet flouncing at the ankles. She carried a gold-colored clutch purse. No armored vest, no holster purse, only her hidden knives.

Grateful that makeup was coming back into fashion, she powdered her scar, put soft red lipstick on, brushed out her eyelashes, and added the final touch: she had spent two hours away from the company in the afternoon, searching for just the right perfume. She found it in the Paris Deluxe Magasin. Not heavy. It was so light that men would not know she was wearing perfume, even while breathing in its stimulating musk.

John was waiting impatiently at the apartment front door when Joy walked out of the bathroom. She saw his eyebrows snap up as his eyes widened, and his tongue whisked across his lower lip, all for just a second before he regained control. "About time," he said gruffly. "What took you so long?"

On their way out he picked up a folder from the sofa side table and jotted something on it. He opened the door and went out, leaving Joy to follow him, and climbed up into their new American Mercedes, leaving her to do the same on her side. He hummed to himself as he drove them to the Cold Day Restaurant. There he strode purposely ahead of her with the folder in his hand.

Conversation around the restaurant almost came to a stop as people stared at Joy. She ignored them and regally glided to the large table where the guys were waiting. John immediately handed the folder to Hands and asked him to pass it to the others. The guys were goggle-eyed, but Hands soon ripped his eyes from Joy, looked down at the folder he had been holding, then passed it down the table.

She stood next to her wicker dining chair. John sat down. On the other side of her, Hands had started reading his menu. Disgusted, she plopped down in the chair, but remembered her act and sat erect with her ankles crossed and her hands on her lap, one over the other. She looked around the table. No one was paying any attention to her, although she kept getting furtive looks from other tables. She lifted one hand and demurely looked at her menu, turning a page with a delicate flip.

John leaned over and whispered, "Look at these prices, will you? They range from fifteen to thirty-three cents, and that's for steak and potatoes."

When he looked back at his menu, she unobtrusively held hers over the edge of the table and let it fall. "Oh, clumsy me," she exclaimed, putting her hand over her cleavage.

“Yes. Clumsy,” John said.

On the other side of her, Hands seemed to have trouble turning the page of his menu while hiding his face in it.

Joy leaned over, picked up her menu, and slammed it on the table-top, almost knocking over her glass of water. Sal looked up and started to shake his finger at her, but stopped and put his hand in his lap. Dolphy seemed to be interested in a painting on the wall.

When the waiter came to their table, he looked first at Joy for her order. As she was about to speak, Dolphy whisked the menu away from his face, waved his hand at the waiter, and ordered beef ribs, extra cut. Before the waiter could look back at her, Sal ordered corned beef, Hands put his hand up for the waiter’s attention and ordered roast beef, and John immediately followed with an order of cold salmon with mayonnaise sauce.

When the waiter finally was able to look at Joy again, his face had the look of one intimately violated. She managed to squeak at the waiter, “I’ll have the same,” and pointed to John. As the waiter nodded disgustedly and turned to leave, the laughter bubbled out. She had to shove her plate aside and put her forehead on the table, she was laughing so much. The guys laughed with her. People at the other tables smiled curiously at them.

Joy had finally realized what was on that folder John had handed around. He must have told them to ignore her, that she was trying to act like a woman. When she finally stopped laughing, she waved her hand at all of them and exclaimed, “Beasts!” She burst into laughter again.

When they were all laughed out, Dolphy spoke up. “You don’t have to prove you’re a woman, Joy. You’re the most beautiful, nicest woman I know.”

John raised his water glass. “A toast to womanly Joy.”

They all clicked glasses. Joy put her glass down and shook her finger at each of them. “Thanks, guys. But don’t you forget it, or I’ll break your arms.”

When the waiter returned to the table to take their orders for dessert, he didn’t know who to look at first. John and the guys waited, looking at Joy. She ordered an éclair. The three guys ordered apple pie, and John asked for a pineapple fritter with hard sauce.

When they were finished eating, Joy made to push her chair back and stand up. The men all sprang to their feet, and John just managed to beat Hands in pulling out her chair. They walked ahead of her out of the restaurant, as they should, and John opened her car door for her. The others tipped their hats while saying, “Good night, ma’am.”

When they got back to the apartment, John opened the door for her and followed her, wearing a huge smile. “You looked stunning tonight, sweetheart. You never have to prove to me you’re a woman, but I like it when you show me how much of one you are.”

He proceeded to show her how much he meant it. He was learning how to undo her shirts.



It became clear that three guys were more than just trustworthy, they were loyal friends. Joy and John gathered them together at their apartment without their girlfriends—a remarkable, perhaps unrepeatable achievement—and John told them, “No more monthly antidotes to your poison.”

He waited until their shocked expressions turned to fright, then added, “That’s because the last antidote had no renewal of the poison in it.”

They were beginning to look irritated. John hastened to add, “You have become so much a part of our company and our life, and have shown such dedication and honesty in so many ways, that we now completely trust you all.” Satisfied, he sat back.

The guys looked at Joy—she raised her eyebrow—and back at John and at each other. Hands grinned, leaned toward John, and said, “You never gave us poison, did you.”

“Of course they didn’t. You’ve seen how devious they are,” Sal said, pointing a finger at Joy.

“Yeah,” exclaimed Dolphy, “we should have been giving them poison. I don’t know how we ever trusted them.”

Joy assumed a coquettish expression and put her hand on John’s shoulder. “Us? Devious? They can’t be serious.”

They all laughed, and the subject never came up again.

As the months went by, John built up their executive staff and company employees. He worked toward setting up a company office in London and, thanks to Sal’s help, he actually did incorporate one in Mexico City. He and Joy also began making business and government contacts in almost every major Big Power in the world. It was hard work. It was slow work. It was absolutely necessary work.

In a corner of their converted warehouse they’d had their builders put in a gym. They would drive to the warehouse at dawn, jog around the adjacent streets, do their weights, and practice their karate and judo. Jogging was unknown in this age. Twice a policeman on this beat

stopped them to ask why they were running. Thereafter, he just looked at them as though they were crazy when he saw them jogging.

With some special exceptions, they now never went unarmed. They always jogged in long pants and sweatshirts to hide their armor. Joy carried her throwing knife, and John his small 40 caliber S&W double-action. The smell that accumulated on the armor from their sweat became a problem. They were never quite able to remove it with washing. But no one noticed. So few people in this era bathed regularly that everyone stunk, and after a while their noses became inured to the smell.

They had purchased twenty-five acres for a weapons range and test facility where Joy could ensure she stayed ready to use the various weapons the Society had sent them—sniper rifles, nighttime vision scopes, and laser targeting rifles—while she continued to train John in their use. She deemed this so important that she was willing to endure the drive on country roads to get there twice a week.

Most of their fights occurred during practice. Having been a teacher, he seemed to view Joy's teaching methods with an air of superiority. Joy thought he resented being taught by a mere woman. She certainly resented his attitude.

When she got exasperated over his clumsy use of a tactical knife, she observed, "You couldn't survive a fight against a little girl with a pen knife."

"And you couldn't teach a dog to sit," he retorted. He threw the knife at the target in anger, and nicked its edge two feet from the bull's-eye.

"You missed it, of course," she pointed out. He stomped off and pouted for the rest of the day.

But in spite of his attitude, he did learn very well. *A testament to my teaching*, Joy thought.

Chapter 16

Jy-ying

Jy-ying's brow furrowed. She tightened her lips and again looked at the list the Anderson Detective Agency had sent her, containing the names of those companies recently set up and very successful. A second list included those local speculators and investors who were also very successful on the stock market. The agency was still investigating those who had been making very successful bets on races and sports teams. She had correlated the business list with that of successful stock speculators, and checked off the names of those who had been doing very well at both.

"This is another good possibility," she said to herself. She'd been going down her list for weeks, visiting each company and trying to determine if their products were at all related to a possible time traveler's project, whatever that was. Next, using one guise or another, she met and talked to the person in question. She had eight more likely possibilities to check out.

She didn't have to drive to this one. She walked from her warehouse down De Haro to Mariposa, two streets uphill west, and found the Tor Company on Potrero Hill near the intersection with Kansas Street. It was a two-story building taking up a third of a block. Its display windows contained a Persian rug, a Chinese ivory carving of a dragon, a Chinese vase painted with a traditional landscape, a French medieval suit of armor, a German walnut cuckoo clock, a Japanese samurai sword, and English crystals. Through the window she could see a variety of large and small imports pleasantly arranged around the showroom. The aisles between the displays were wide and dotted with potted rubber trees and bamboo. Somebody had tried to make the display floor attractive to buyers.

There was a two-door castle entrance, with a huge false knocker. Above it was the name *Tor Import & Export Co.* and the hours open: *9:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m., Mon.—Tues.; Thur.—Fri. Or by appointment.*"

She ambled past the doors and stopped at the next corner under a eucalyptus tree to recheck the notes that the Anderson Agency had

added to her lists. *Owner John Banks; single, Caucasian; nationality unknown; age: 27; business started in 1906, worth approximately \$232,000, small offices in London and Mexico City, employs 113 people.* She next looked at statistics for Banks on her stock list: *Stock speculation initiated in December 1906 with a purchase worth \$1,397,000 in shares of four companies; current portfolio valued at approximately \$5,000,000, or almost 258 percent profit. His ratio of gains to losses is now about 3:1.*

Oh Sabah, what a portfolio. Big operator, she thought. But she reminded herself that these statistics could apply to many who had profited from the 1906 earthquake and fire, or moved here afterward. There was much profit to be made, although Banks was probably a big exception. Time would tell—some portfolios did very well for a while and then went bust; some had special insider’s information.

The one kind of information she needed badly she didn’t have. She did not know when the time traveler arrived and to what date the message had been sent from that institute in Santa Barbara

Time to look-see.

She strode back to the storefront and entered, tripping a bell above the door.



Joy

When Joy and John found out that Sal had a girlfriend, rather than a passing fancy, they stopped Sal at the front entrance to the apartments and asked him if it was true.

He smiled and said, “Yes, of course.”

They had to meet her. John asked him to bring her to a little party they would arrange at John’s apartment. They set a date, and Joy and John rushed off to an appointment.

But Joy was too curious to wait. Several days before the party, she took an eighteenth-century Mexican shawl to Sal’s office, ostensibly to ask him some questions about it, and just happened to ask, “Who is your girlfriend?”

He replied nonchalantly, “Her name is Jy-ying Khoo. She’s a local Chinese girl.”

“Oh,” Joy replied. “Moving up, eh?”

Joy couldn’t help it. She had to point out, “If she is Chinese, her surname, Khoo, goes before her personal name, Jy-ying. That’s true

also for—” She clamped her mouth shut, feeling a little embarrassed. *Damn. I’m beginning to lecture like John. I must be picking it up by osmosis.*

Sal ignored her, and started in immediately on what he seemed to think would interest and impress Joy most. “Her father is Liu-chin Kim—

“Kim Kiu-chin,” Joy corrected.

“—and he taught, ahh, something sing shun—”

“Wing chun?” Joy asked.

“Yeah, that’s it.”

“That’s a form of kung fu very popular in Hong Kong. It’s a woman’s martial art, with the emphasis on overcoming brute strength through timing, positioning, anticipation, and strategy. Its origin is in the Shaolin temple and it was devised by five Grand Masters. When the Manchus burned the temple, the Grand Master nun, Ng Mui, escaped. Afterward, she taught the art to an orphan girl named Wing Chun, who in turn taught it to her husband, thus beginning the long line of Wing Chun Masters. The style is—”

“Can I continue, Joy?”

Joy felt her face heat up. “Sorry.”

“Her father taught her that in his home, starting when she was two years old.”

“Really,” Joy exclaimed.

He grinned, then resumed. “Her mother had been killed in a gang rape during Oakland’s anti-Chinese riots of the 1880s.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Her father never got over her death and never remarried. Jy-ying told me that he insisted she learn to protect herself.”

“I’ll be darned,” Joy told Sal, startling him. “You know, it sounds like my own life. Because of my mom’s horrible experiences in Cambodia, especially the murder of her husband, she wanted me to learn martial arts from the earliest age.”

Sal was silent, apparently waiting to see if she had more to say, but Joy now had full control over her mouth.

“She visited our company showroom looking for an imported statue of Yuh Niuy,” he said. “Do you know who she is?” Sal looked like he hoped she would say no.

“Of course,” Joy responded, a little maliciously. “She’s the famous Chinese woman sword fighter who, under the king of the Zhou, was the final victor in a seven day contest involving one thousand swordsmen and—” She covered her mouth with her hand.

Sal seemed disappointed that she knew. “She is Jy-ying’s idol.” He stopped and looked at her, waiting.

Joy prodded, “She was in the showroom?”

Yeah.” He turned back to the Spanish list of potential Mexican exports he’d been scanning.

John has been teaching him tricks, Joy realized. “Sal!”

Sal looked up, brows raised, then resumed. “Well, Joy, it was my lucky day. I happened to be passing through the showroom and saw this Chinese woman looking at some statues. At a distance, I thought it was you. You know, even up close you two look alike.” He stopped, but Joy impatiently waved him on.

“Anyway, Jy-ying was clearly someone special and I couldn’t just let an ordinary salesman deal with her. It’s a matter of what’s good for the company.”

“Naturally,” Joy responded dryly.

“So I told the salesman to take a coffee break and offered Jy-ying my help. She had just come from her win chin practice.”

“It’s wing chun, Sal. How was she dressed?”

“Dressed? I don’t know.”

Damn, Joy thought, *Men are so frustrating. They can describe an automobile down to the number of seconds it takes to reach sixty miles per hour, but they can’t describe what a person wore. What do they look at, anyway?* She knew the answer to that.

She had to ask Sal detailed questions to finally get some idea of what she looked like, aside from “like you” and “what a *galón gortious*—gorgeous gal.” It was like a cross examination during a court trial. But she did finally find out that Jy-ying wore baggy blue slacks with a pink shirt that hung down to her hips. She’d also had her long hair in a ponytail, as Joy often did, which probably enhanced their resemblance. When she found out that Jy-ying’s parents had come from Canton, Joy was sure she had inherited from them the soft, slanted almond eyes, natural beauty, and flawless complexion of southern Chinese women. Joy believed one or both of her parents had come from southern China as well. Jy-ying was twenty-six years old, and about five and a half feet tall.

My age, Joy thought. *But I’m two inches taller.*

To get that, Sal had asked Joy to stand next to him, and said, “She comes up to about here. She’s slender, but she has all the right bumps,” he added. “She walks like she’s boss—like you do,” and he demonstrated by swinging his arms and strutting around his office, head held high.

After Joy got all that out of Sal, she prodded him to continue describing their first meeting.

“After finding out what she was looking for in our showroom, I offered to make the statue a special order from our contacts in Shanghai.”

With her usual subtlety, Joy asked, “How did you make your move?”

He looked at her and smirked. “Move? You mean, ask her out? I used you.”

“Me?”

“I told her, ‘We have a Chinese woman working for our company—’

“Sino-Vietnamese,” Joy corrected.

“—and I asked, ‘Do you know her?’ She answered, ‘No, I’ve never met her,’ and I saw my chance. You understand, I didn’t at the time know about her training in wing son—”

Joy held up her finger. “Wing chun. Chun, Sal.”

“—but I couldn’t have got her more interested. I said, ‘Her name is Joy Phim and she has black belts in judo and karate.’ Jy-ying almost dropped the stature she was holding. She jerked her head around to look at me directly, and with big eyes, just like yours are now, she asked, ‘She is? Who trained her? Why did she do this? What degree is she? What does she do for your company?’”

He looked smug. “What a great line. Think I’ll pass it on to Hands and Dolphy. The rest was easy.”

“Don’t tell me,” Joy exclaimed. “You said something like, ‘Why don’t you join me for dinner and I’ll tell you all about her.’ Yes?”

Sal laughed. “You know, Joy, I thought she would be useful to the company, but I had to know her better to be sure. So we had dinner and I answered a million questions about you.” He hastened to add, “But nothing personal.”

“I’m glad to hear that your mind wasn’t totally blasted.”

Sal ignored her. “I found out that she had graduated from the California Institute of Technology. She told me she speaks Chinese. Her father would only speak that at home.

“She also questioned me about our boss, about our business, and whether we had run into any difficulty because of you being Chinese—”

“Sino-Vietnamese, Sal.”

“I told her what happened to us and what you and John did. With my help, of course.” Sal paused. “She told me she may have seen you and John being attacked by punks with bats.”

Joy opened her eyes wide. “So that’s who it was! We saw her watching us, but she disappeared before we could talk to her. Now I understand why she had prepared herself for combat. She would have helped us, if needed.”

Sal looked at Joy diffidently. “She was looking for a job.”

Joy noted the past tense. “Sal, you didn’t.”

“Yes, I hired her for the company, to work under me.”

Joy chose to let that opportunity pass. But, knowing Sal, Joy knew what she said next was a slam-dunk. “You hired her as your assistant and translator.”

Sal looked surprised. “How did you know?”

“Woman’s intuition,” was all Joy could say before laughing. She had not known about his hiring Jy-ying. Sal was a vice president of their company, after all, and was free to hire whom he pleased.



At the scheduled time a week later, Joy answered a knock at John’s apartment door and saw standing alone on the threshold a beautiful Chinese woman.

“Hello,” the woman said with a lovely smile, and her almond eyes sparkled. She looked very familiar. But not seeing Sal, Joy thought the woman had the wrong apartment. Then the woman said in Chinese, “You must be Joy. I’m Jy-ying. I’m very happy to finally meet you.”

Startled, Joy took a second look, and was suddenly tongue-tied. *No wonder she’s familiar—she does look like me. Almost. Somewhat different. But so close. She could be my clone—impossible, but there she is. Sal’s girlfriend. Some God must be messing with the probabilities.*

Sal stuck his head around the doorjamb and looked at Joy with a smirk. “Judo Joy, meet wun son—”

“Wing chun,” Jy-ying interrupted.

“—Jy-ying,” Sal continued. “Well Joy, you’ve met your match.”

Jy-ying backed up and kicked him in the behind. She smiled at Joy and asked in English, “Is he always like this?”

Joy grinned knowingly. They came in and Sal introduced her to John, and Hands and Dolphy and their girlfriends.

The party went well. Jy-ying got along well with all of them.

“I think Sal has a winner,” John said to Joy after the party.

She gave him her most innocent smile. “Of course. She’s Chinese and looks like me.”

“You’re Sino-Vietnamese,” John reminded her, and hit her with one of their beat-up pillows.

Over the following weeks, Joy got together with Jy-ying several times to see what kind of person she was. “After all,” Joy informed John, “I do have a responsibility to our company, for which Jy-ying is now working. And Sal is our friend as well as our vice president. It’s only my duty to see if she is right for him.”

“Of course,” John said, nodding, lips pursed.

Eventually she asked Jy-ying, “Would you like to practice your wing chun with me? I know little about that form of kung fu, and would love to learn it from you.”

Jy-ying responded, “I am impressed that you know it is a form of kung fu. Actually, my style is mostly yip man, with some techniques from the soft, internal form of kung fu. I would love to spar with you, but I would be embarrassed at how little I know about judo and karate. Could you teach me some of your moves?”

That little dance over, Joy mentioned, “Well, there are certain standard moves in all Asian martial arts, and the human body has only a certain range of motions all experts come to learn, as one does to walk. But also, each of the martial arts has certain moves meant to exploit the weaknesses of competing schools. I look forward to seeing what those are for wing chun.”

Jy-ying nodded. “I’m so ignorant of the martial arts. I hope you will teach me.”

Dumb me, Joy later mused. I should have realized that was typical Chinese understatement. Like the stars are a humble distance from the earth.

Joy scheduled their first practice—really a subtle challenge—at their private gym. She didn’t tell John or the guys about this meeting—she didn’t want to embarrass Jy-ying. Her first thought after their sparring was *Ha!* Her second was *Ha!* And so was her third.

That evening, tired, bruised, muscles strained, Joy had to make an unhappy confession to John—she didn’t want Sal to blab it to him first. “Jy-ying and I had a martial arts practice session this afternoon.”

Anticipating her kind description of how easy it was, John asked, “You were merciful, weren’t you?”

She replied with some passion, “She’s strong. Damn strong. She made moves I didn’t anticipate, and had a speed and agility that I could only match, not overcome. Our first practice session lasted two hours, and I was exhausted at the end.”

John looked awed.

She ignored his look. "I tried to go easy on her at first, but it was clear after a few minutes that she was my match."

"Did I hear you correctly? She was your *match*?"

"This was not a standoff, love. We each were able to penetrate and take down the other. Had we been serious, we could have killed each other. For Jy-ying and me, the only problem was lack of training in each other's moves."

"This other woman is like you in ways other than looks? Is she a clone? I've got to change my whole conception of the universe." John shook his head in mock despair. "It won't be the same from now on."

"Smart ass," Joy retorted. "If you can rein in your stupid humor, I'll go on." She gave John her you're-lower-than-a-worm look. "When we left each other, we agreed to meet regularly for practice and training. She also agreed to train Sal, and I said I would most certainly pass on to you what I was learning from her."

"I don't know," John said. "Maybe I should learn directly from her, rather than second-hand from someone just learning the moves."

"Bastard. You just want an excuse to touch her breasts." Joy didn't have a pillow handy, but she gave his shoulder a tired whack.



Jy-ying

Jy-ying was satisfied. Her suspicion had grown as she closely watched John and Joy. Their behavior toward each other and in general did not fit into this age. They were too relaxed, too open, too informal. And from the point of view of this time, their etiquette was atrocious. She smiled. *As is mine.*

They were certainly lovers, as Sal said. But she had not had to be a spy to know that.

She'd gathered all the evidence she needed from Joy and John's offices, and added to it what she'd uncovered in their separate apartments while they were at work. They were sloppy about writing things down, keeping duplicates in their office files, and letting important secrets lie around their apartment. It was as though they thought they were protected by a force field, and were immune to prying eyes.

She closed the file cabinet in John's office and held her penlight on it as she checked to make sure she'd left no marks on the cabinet. She

locked it with her lock pick. Clearly, he had not expected anyone to seriously search through his files, and had only locked the cabinet to keep out the mildly curious in the office, such as their secretary.

Jy-ying would return at another time and scan the important documents into her laptop, but that was only so she could make use of them herself—especially the chronology of future events that John had locked in his office file. She wanted to compare that with her own. John's printout of daily stock transactions published in the *Wall Street Journal* would also be useful.

She slipped out of John's office and locked the door with her pick. She slowly opened the company's front door, checked for the policemen on patrol, and closed the door behind her and locked it as well. She walked around the corner to her Rolls, where Little Wei was watching out the window for her. She opened the door, let him lick her face and, with a grin and chuckle, gently pushed him into the passenger seat so she could get in. She hadn't been this happy since leaving China.

She purposely left her mind blank as she drove. Now was not the time for thinking of something this special.

When she got to the apartment building she'd recently moved into, she walked Little Wei to a grassy area nearby to pee, then took him upstairs to her second floor apartment, fed and watered him, filled her teapot with the *pu-erh* tea leaves she recently bought in Chinatown, and put it on her Acme gas range to heat. While she waited, she sat in the bathtub and bathed herself by dumping a pot of hot water from the faucet over herself, soaping, and pouring more hot water over herself several times. She could not understand why Westerners bathed while sitting in their own dirty water. She hated the thought of it. Little Wei stood up with his front paws on the bathtub's rim and watched her as usual, and she splashed him, just for fun.

By the time she finished, her teapot was boiling. She let the tea steep while she got out her prayer rug, and stood, then prostrated herself eastward toward Mecca. She thanked God and Sabah for her success. Her eyes were wet at the end. Saving Sabah's life was now a certainty. Shu Kuo would be happy. Imam Ch'en would praise her to God. She would live in the history of Islam as one of their greatest heroines. But no one would know. Not even those who sent her—this was now a different universe.

She was ready to think about how to make her mission a success. She threw a blanket over her shoulder, poured her hot tea, and went out

to her apartment's balcony, with Little Wei following. She settled into her ship's deck chair, set her tea on the wrought iron table next to it, and covered herself with the blanket. Little Wei jumped into her lap.

She gently stroked his long white fur, and sighed. The world was perfect. The sky was almost cloudless and a three-quarter moon reflected off San Francisco Bay, its light joining the many scintillating lights from Treasure Island and Yerba Buena Island and Oakland across the Bay. At this late hour there were few boats or ships on the water, although she could see the navigation lights and the wake of one small ship. The air was cool, almost cold, and a sky full of sparkling stars shone down on her

She sipped her tea and put her head back against the pillows. "I have them," she told Little Wei. "I know what they are doing here. Breaking into their apartment was easy. They obviously have no security background, no fear of spies. They are novices at this.

"Now, what to do with them? It is still years before they will attempt to kill Sabah or his parents. Their mission seems to be ending war and what they call democide. They only altered that to include Sabah after receiving that message from the institute in Santa Barbara."

She pondered what to do. "I could kill them tomorrow, but is this the best course? Is it what I want?"

Happy with the attention he was getting, Little Wei put his paws on her chest and licked her nose. Her eyes slitted with pleasure, and she kissed him on his nose. She held him back from her face with two hands and told him, "Sabah succeeded because they succeeded. They did help create a world of democracies, and almost eliminated war. But . . ." she smiled broadly, "in doing this, they created a world whose democracies lost all incentive to maintain military forces or intelligence services. Joy and John thus made Sabah's Great Victory possible."

This almost derailed her thoughts for a moment, for again it brought to her mind the horrible global catastrophe, the billions killed in seconds, to assure this Great Victory. With a sigh, she laid Little Wei on her lap and held him there. She almost had resigned from Security when that occurred; she almost gave up Sabahism. But she had talked to the Imam of her mosque, a long-time friend, and he had convinced her that this was God's way, that Sabah, as His Prophet, had thus prepared the way for God's universal triumph.

"Let me put it this way," he told her. "Just think of the billions and billions of heathens and infidels that will now live under Sabah. Islam will now be the only world religion, and the sin of godlessness and as-

sociated corruptions are ended. Peace, freedom under God, and the good and proper life will now reign.”

She had been convinced, but she hated what had been done. With a shake of her head that startled Little Wei, she jerked her attention back to Joy and John.

Her tea was cold, but she finished it anyway while he looked at her curiously, head tilted, ears up. She gave him a little smile. “Well, little one, if I kill Joy and John, I destroy their mission, and the world their documents say existed in what they call the Old Universe may continue to exist, with its wars and far fewer democracies. Thus, Sabah’s success in Uighuristan or China may not happen. And his Great Victory may not be possible.”

She scratched Little Wei’s stomach. “If I kill them, I won’t be able to duplicate their results. I don’t have John’s knowledge of history to know exactly what to do to create what they call the New Universe, and I would be only one person—a Chinese woman—trying to transform the politics of Europe to avoid war. I have to keep them alive and let them do whatever they can before I have to kill them.”

She decided she would also learn from John as much as she could about his planned interventions. She liked that. He was a man she wanted to know better. Much better.

“That means I should join them,” Jy-ying concluded, and added thoughtfully, “Maybe I can keep John alive and replace Joy. And manipulate him to save Sabah. What do you think, little boy?”

Little Wei was asleep on her lap and she soon joined him, but not before making plans.

Chapter 17

Jy-ying

In the women's room at the company, Jy-ying took the pins out of her coal black hair and let it fall naturally to her waist, and brushed it, paying particular attention to her bangs. She opened her small suitcase and changed into a white silk lady's shirt, tight at the neck with pick-lace ruffles on the sleeves and down the front. She tucked that into her burgundy German linen skirt, with its little built-in bustle and a pink flounce around her ankles. She took out a mild Chinese perfume and applied it sparingly to her neck, with just a touch on her forehead. She also applied a smidgen of rouge—a cosmetic just becoming acceptable—to her cheeks. After surveying herself in the mirror, she headed for John's office with Little Wei trotting behind her.

John's secretary was momentarily away from her desk. Jy-ying knocked on John's office door, opened it, and stuck her head inside in such a way that her hair fell around her face like a black waterfall. "Can I see you?" she asked. "It's important."

John didn't look up. "Why are you asking, Joy?" he said. When she didn't move, he looked up, eyes still unfocused, and said, "What are you waiting for, baby?"

With a smile in her voice, Jy-ying responded, "Is that a promotion?"

John jumped, focused on her face, reddened, and stuttered, "I'm sorry . . . Jy-Jy-ying. You look so much like Joy, and your voice sounds like hers, that I—"

Jy-ying stepped in with Little Wei on her heels, and held up her hand. "I just wanted to say that I broke up with Sal. He is a very nice man, was very considerate of me, but I'm sorry to say, I slowly realized our personalities are too different. I like working for your company, but I can't work under Sal because of our breakup, and I told him so. Is there something I can do for you?" Her smile would have electrified a small town.

“Sure,” John replied, a little hastily, Jy-ying was pleased to note. “Joy is not only my assistant and translator—” he smiled at that “—she’s also in charge of our China operations. Would you like to work under her?”

Right now, under you would be better. Aloud she said, “It would be an honor.”

“Fine, I’ll check with her and let you know tomorrow morning.”

“Ahh, that brings up something else. I’d like to talk to you and Joy about something very important. Can I see you both this evening at your apartment?”

“Can’t we discuss it here?”

“No, I need the privacy of your apartment.”

“Okay, join Joy and me for dinner at 6:30.”

Jy-ying picked up Little Wei and nodded. “Thank you for the invitation. I will see you then.”

As she closed the door behind her, she glanced back and caught him wiping his forehead. *Get used to it, my man,* she thought.



Joy

John entered Joy’s office and, rather than saying whatever he’d intended to say and leaving as he usually did, he dropped down in her stiff-backed chair. Looking as though he had lost a big bet, he told her, “Sal and Jy-ying have broken up.”

Joy pursed her lips and rubbed her cheek with her hand. “Too bad. I was hoping that Sal had finally found someone. But I didn’t think they suited each other. She is too strong for Sal and. . . .” She tried to put her finger on it, but couldn’t. “I have an odd feeling about her, aside from her being my double. I sense a kind of otherworldliness . . . you know?”

The image of Jy-ying in the alley when they were attacked continued to bother Joy. She’d been wearing panties—panties, not bloomers or some other ugly underwear of this age.

John hesitated, as though reluctant to say something. Finally he pointed out, “Well, you have to admit that Sal had fallen for you from the beginning. I think he saw you as a tough guy’s mole. Since Jy-ying looked like you, and was into martial arts, he fell for her. He’ll get over it when he meets a sweet, wholesome gal.”

John paused again while Joy mused over that. Then he said, “I thought Jy-ying could now work for you. She certainly can’t work with Sal anymore, and she told him that.”

“Since she speaks idiomatic Mandarin, I can find more than enough for her to do. Good idea.” She smiled broadly. “Maybe I’ll make her my assistant and translator.”

Chuckling, he allowed a few seconds to pass before mentioning, “Jy-ying has something important to say to us in private, so I invited her to join us for supper tonight.”

Joy was a little annoyed that John had not asked her first, even though she was interested in hearing what Jy-ying had to say. “John, ask me before you invite someone to eat with us at home, okay? I have to prepare the meal, you know.”

After letting a few tactical moments go by, Joy continued. “I hope she doesn’t mind day-old rice and leftover sausages. I’ll warm that up while you make the salad.”

John nodded, rose, and left the office with a wave.

What, a nod only? No apology? Joy thought as she watched him leave. *My love, someday you are going to find that I have volunteered you to attend a social tea.*



John left the company a few hours early, telling Joy that he had to stop somewhere. The somewhere was Kin Chee Chop Suey at Powell and Broadway Streets in new Chinatown. So when Joy arrived home, which is what they had started calling John’s apartment, he simply waved to her from the sofa where he was reading the newspaper.

She stopped halfway across the room and looked around. He had straightened the clutter of newspapers, magazines, pillows, and the other debris of relaxed living. Shaking her head in wonderment, she went to their bedroom and changed into her favorite house clothes, Levi’s jeans and a sweatshirt.

She was even more amazed when she entered the kitchen to prepare dinner. It also had been cleaned, and dishes left in the sink from breakfast were washed, dried, and put away. On the counter were three serving plates heaped with rice, stuffed chicken wings, shrimp fu young, and vegetables. On a cutting board were slices of fresh sour-dough bread.

She turned around and almost bumped into John. He was smirking.

She reached up and brushed his cheeks with her lips, then gave him a little peck. "You're forgiven."

"Is that all I get?"

"Later."

When Jy-ying arrived with Little Wei, she was dressed to look no less feminine than when she had visited John in his office. She had pulled her hair back into a ponytail secured with a pink ribbon, tied into a bow. She wore a narrow black ribbon around her neck, a taffeteen silk shirt with full hanging sleeves, and a tan German linen skirt that perfectly matched her light olive skin. Her face was freshly-washed and bright. No makeup; no perfume.

She had dressed Little Wei in a shiny black collar, and he greeted Joy and John with jumps, waving paws, and a doggie grin, as though he had not seen them for weeks.

She is beautiful, Joy thought when she saw Jy-ying come in. She felt shabby herself. Just before Jy-ying arrived, Joy had changed into her standard, all-wool, cheviot serge work dress for dinner.

During the meal they chatted about China, the instability of the Manchu Dynasty, and the gathering strength of prodemocratic forces. Jy-ying had brought it up and initially carried the conversation. Joy was wary of getting into it. Although they had continued to spar together two or three times a month, Joy had avoided any serious discussion of the political situation in China as they were showering and changing afterward—she never saw Jy-ying wearing panties again—or during their frequent meetings with the others. She had found that many overseas Chinese felt strongly one way or another, and with some it was like talking about their religion.

After they finished eating and Jy-ying gave Little Wei a tidbit from her plate, they all cleaned off the table. John went into the kitchen, opened a cupboard, and brought out a Black Forest cake he had bought at Erik's German Bakery.

Joy looked at the cake, and at Jy-ying, and at John. "John! Such a dessert with Chinese food. Only a light dessert, such as a small custard or fruit of some kind, which I have waiting in the icebox, is appropriate."

John stuck his chin out. "We are not in China. We are in the United States of America. We are in San Francisco. We are in my home. This is what I serve. Enjoy."

He cut the cake accompanied by *oohs* and *aahs* from Jy-ying and Joy, and gave them each a generous piece. He filled three glasses with chilled milk and handed the glasses around.

John sat down, raised his milk glass, and looked at Jy-ying. “A little toast to your happiness. I know it didn’t work out between you and Sal, but it’s best that you discovered it now. Anyway, we think no less of you, and hope that you will be happy working for us over the years.”

They continued to talk about China while eating their dessert. When they all were finished, Jy-ying looked at Joy and said quietly, “I have something to tell you that is most serious and most dangerous to me.”

She pushed back from the table, bent over, and reached under her skirt. When she straightened up, she held a Chinese woman’s traditional six-inch throwing knife in her hand.

Joy was unarmed and wore no armor. In the time it took her to gasp, she got into as ready a stance as she could while sitting. She loosely balled her hands on her lap, knuckles up, and automatically arranged her feet under her chair so her upper body tipped slightly forward over her center of gravity. She was ready to jump defensively in any direction and immediately attack. She focused her gaze like a laser on Jy-ying’s eyes. They would tell the intended future of that knife.

Jy-ying held it loosely in two fingers, slowly placed it in the center of the table, and rotated the point toward herself.

Joy did not relax. She did not divert her attention to John. There was not a thought in her head. She was now in a zone, honed and directed by her training. Nothing existed at this moment but Jy-ying’s eyes.

Likewise keeping her eyes on Joy, Jy-ying even more slowly reached into her purse, which was hanging from the back of her dining chair, and extracted with two fingers on the lower grip, as far as possible from the trigger, a Chinese copy of the Browning 9 mm seven shot 1903 pistol.

Joy’s peripheral vision knew what it was; she knew it was pointed down. She hadn’t moved. Her eyes bored into Jy-ying’s.

Jy-ying carefully placed the pistol alongside her knife, grip toward Joy.

Jy-ying pushed her chair back a little farther, the scraping sound almost explosive in the deadly silence, and patted her lap. Little Wei jumped into it. She cuddled him close to her with one hand, and put the other one on the table palm-up. “Now for the truth,” she said tonelessly.

“I was a secret agent. I spied on you.”

Shit, shit, Joy thought. For a moment she felt like she’d been hit by a giant hand and knocked into a black hole, but she immediately recovered her calm and concentration.

Jy-ying's voice was level and direct, her face intent as she continued. "My real parents were both members of the Imperial Security Guard, and were Imperial spies in their youth. It was they who began my training in wing chun and all the arts of spying. They wanted me to be a spy, like them. While on a mission to Chunking during the Boxer Rebellion, they were killed by rebels." Her eyes flickered and her lower lip trembled for just a moment.

"The Security Guard continued my training. Before the dynasty collapsed, the Guard was reformed as part of the Chinese Security Ministry. My training didn't stop. When I was old enough, I was sent here to attend an American university to perfect my English and gain knowledge of American customs. I was to return to China and spy on the American diplomatic officials there and, if possible, become the concubine of the American ambassador, or some other high American official."

"I thought—" John started to hiss, but Jy-ying held up her hand. John didn't try to hide his feelings. He looked outraged.

"One year ago, my control, who acted as my father, was sent special orders to spy on your company. Your activity in China, particularly your contacts in Peking and Shanghai, had raised suspicion. And so . . ." She hesitated, leaned over and kissed Little Wei between the ears. "On the luckiest day of my life, I went to your showroom and eventually met both of you."

Jy-ying choked up and wiped her eyes with her napkin.

Joy had not moved a muscle from her ready position.

Seeming to regain control of her voice and her tears, Jy-ying continued. "I got to know both of you—particularly Joy, through our sparring. I had been trained to listen to what people say and watch what they do, but also what they do not say and do not do. You may not believe, Joy and John, how easy it was for me to see that you were not what you portray. You were either foreigners from a country I did not know, or you were not of this world.

"I soon saw how you were armed, and I looked carefully at your disguised armor. While Joy was showering one day after our sparring, I was able to shave off—with great difficulty—a small piece from the edge of her armor. I sent it to a lab at Caltech. After testing it, they informed me that it is made of no known material and is incredibly strong.

"Also, there is Joy's training in the martial arts. No woman of this time who is not a secret agent for some powerful country would have had her training, and I found out she has received training in weapons, as well."

She looked at Joy with her black eyes wide and frank, black eyebrows slightly raised, chin up. And she said with certainty, “Joy, you and John had to have come here from the future, for some secret purpose. I could not believe this at first. It was impossible. But I verified it.”

That was the only thing that could have destroyed Joy’s concentration. She gasped, even louder than John. *Incredible!* exploded through Joy’s mind. *Incredible. She knows. How could she?*

“As a member of your company, I gained access to otherwise confidential information about your incredible wealth and your great success on the stock market. Almost everything I looked at screamed at me that you could not be of this time. I also checked into all your trips and contacts—an easy job of prying. You two do not really know how to hide secrets. But then, you were never trained to be spies, and never expected to have a spy like me around.”

Hearing a noise outside, Little Wei jumped off of Jy-ying’s lap and ran to the low living room window to look out. Jy-ying resettled herself and put both hands on the table before continuing. “I also asked some subtle questions of Sal and others, and I found the key to your activity. It concerned war or democracy, democracy or war. I found out that you wanted to end war and spread democracy. And Joy gave me the connection. In response to my leading questions, she told me the key—democracies are the most peaceful societies; they don’t make war on each other, and their leaders do not murder their own citizens. You are here to create a more peaceful universe, a more democratic one.”

Her eyes probed Joy’s. What she read there sent a flicker of fear through her own. She looked away and called Little Wei to her, and when he returned to her lap, she pulled him close with one hand and sighed. “I want to help you, if you will let me. You see, Boxer rebels murdered my parents. I have seen what happens in war. I will not give you the gory details, but I have seen more bodies and bodiless heads than both of you can imagine. I love my country and want my people to be free and at peace.”

She now clasped her hands on the table. “Once I saw that I must join your mission, I next did two things. I sent an official message to the head of my Security Ministry, Fong Chao-yang, who was a friend of my parents and had personally been involved in my training. I knew he trusted me as a daughter. I told him that I could find nothing about your company that was dangerous or a threat to China. This actually is true, isn’t it? I also told him that I was resigning. And that I had fallen in love with an American. Not quite true, but an adequate justification.

This fits in with the Chinese conception of women being flighty and easily corrupted by love. He sent me a beautiful pure ivory statute of Yuh Niuy, the famous swordswoman. Inscribed on its pedestal were the words, in Chinese, *She Lives Again*.

“My control is an old man, and ready to retire. Although his being my father was a cover story, I think he took it seriously and really was glad that I resigned and that I found love and happiness. He was very happy playing my father. Anyway, he left for China three days ago, and left me a goodbye present.”

She bent down over Little Wei, who had fallen asleep, and reached into a bag she had brought with her.

Joy remained absolutely still, alert, and ready.

Aware of this, Jy-ying carefully pulled out a package and placed it on the table. She opened it and took out a beautiful jewelry box carved out of a solid block of jade, with two small compartments and three little drawers. Its craftsmanship was impressive. A note in a man’s handwriting said *This was my mother’s, and then my daughter’s until she died, and now it is yours. I wish you happiness and a long life.*

Jy-ying sat back in her chair, a relieved expression on her face, and looked at John for a few seconds, then Joy. She put one hand back on Little Wei and slowly caressed his body as though for assurance that he was still there.

Joy felt as though she had not taken a breath for many minutes. She didn’t know what to say. She finally let her breath out, acknowledging the awful decision she now had to make.

There was no sound from outside or in the nearby apartments. No clock ticked. Little Wei was still. John didn’t even tap his fingers. The silence was absolute, as just before a great storm.

As it grew uncomfortable, John asked Jy-ying in a hostile whisper, “You were a secret agent spying on us for China?”

“I was.”

“And you are no longer an agent?”

“I resigned.”

“So, you are no longer spying on us?”

“That is right.”

“And you are a traitor to your own country.”

“In one sense, yes. But in what is best for my people, no.”

“All that you told us before about yourself were lies?”

“All except what I said at dinner. I am a democrat. I support your mission to promote democracy and end war.”

John asked the only real question, now. “Yes, Jy-ying, but why should we believe you now?”

Joy had to make a decision. Her head was awash with the awful tension, the dreadful emotional weight of it. She didn’t think John could do what would be required. Only she could do it. Only the decision waited.

As another silence dragged on, Jy-ying’s look changed from calm determination to sad resignation. She had read Joy’s eyes well, warrior to warrior. She looked down at Little Wei as though for the last time. She looked up into Joy’s eyes, leaned over, and shoved the gun and knife across the table toward her. She folded her hands on the table. She glanced at John, then focused on Joy’s eyes again. Carefully articulating each word, as though speaking to the partially deaf, she said, “I know you two are from the future. I know what you are doing here. I know what you have done. If I am not trustworthy, you are in great danger, and you must kill me.”

It was now spoken—the absolute dichotomy that faced Joy’s mind and heart.

Speaking normally again, Jy-ying continued, “If I report to the Chinese Security Ministry what I know about you both, they will see you as a potential danger and assassinate you. Not even your armor, Joy and John, will protect you against a head shot, fire, or a large explosion. “

Yes, Joy told herself, decide. You must decide, Joy. You can’t let this go on. Not for John’s sake. Not for your own sanity. Make your decision.

Joy thought she could see sadness in the eyes of this strong woman. Sadness, acquiescence of what Jy-ying saw in Joy’s eyes, and the steely resolve to accept it. Jy-ying carefully said it again, as though to clear away any question about her intent, any guilt over the result: “You must kill me now, if you have any doubt about me. Your only other choice is to believe and accept me. There is no middle ground.”

Joy understood she was right. She realized that was what was at stake from the very moment Jy-ying revealed she was a spy. They both knew they could not leave this room without a decision being made, one way or another.

John now seemed stricken speechless. She glanced at him. He looked paralyzed, his face pale and slightly mottled. She knew that he thought of picking up the gun and shooting Jy-ying. But she knew he could never do it. She could. Only the decision stood in the way.

The absolute silence seemed to deepen and turn unreal, as though the whole world had disappeared and what remained were Joy and Jy-

ying's eyes. Now, until she made her decision, Joy would not take her eyes from Jy-ying's. And she stared back, as though knowing, waiting, prepared in mind and spirit, almost sure of the result.

Joy's mind was in a torment, while her body was completely calm, as before battle. *Which way to decide? What is best? What if I decide one way and I'm wrong? So much at stake, so many lives. I have to decide. NOW!*

Sweat glistened on John's brow. He looked from Jy-ying to Joy, back and forth as though at an insane tennis match. He seemed to know the decision was Joy's, as one warrior to another, and this simple professor was only a spectator.

Joy came out of it. The sensory bubble surrounding her and Jy-ying collapsed, and Joy prepared mentally to say what she must.

Jy-ying blanched, as though she'd read Joy's decision.

Jy-ying looked at Joy with sad resignation. Her gaze seemed to turn inward; Joy thought she must be saying her Buddhist death mantra.

Joy's mind trembled at the consequence of this—the words would not come. Her mind could not twist itself around the decision. She couldn't breathe.

Someone gasped, loud in the still room.

"No, Jo—"

It was cut off by an explosive *thunk* near her. She tore her eyes from Jy-ying to look.

John had taken out his H&K and thrown it on top of Jy-ying's weapons.

No matter. Joy knew this had to be her decision. She had her voice now; she was ready.

John loudly cleared his throat, another explosion in the dead silence that jerked her attention to him. His face seemed to light up with a bright-eyed smile, which was more the result of light reflecting off the sheen of sweat on his face. He waved his hand at Jy-ying and in a voice she would never forget, said, "Welcome. Welcome aboard. Now we are a force of three."

John's voice broke into Joy's mind like a battering ram, and sent her hardened thoughts and firm resolve spinning away in pieces, to be reformed into a new configuration deep within her. She let out a deep breath of relief. It was over. *What is done is done.*

She reached for Jy-ying's knife in front of her and a sudden, palpable fear shot around the room. John moved as though to make a grab for it. She turned it around with the grip toward Jy-ying and slowly

pushed it toward her. She did the same with the pistol. Then she pushed her chair back and took a deep breath. She was mentally exhausted and physically drained. After a moment she stood and stepped around the table on shaky legs, arms open to Jy-ying.

Jy-ying got up to meet her. Eyebrows knitted together, lips parted, she peered into Joy's eyes for the final assurance. Joy was so tired she could barely smile. But she nodded at Jy-ying. Moist-eyed, Jy-ying looked at Joy as though a miracle had happened, and then they hugged each other.

Joy teared up as she stumbled into the kitchen and filled three water glasses with Sutter red wine from a half-gallon container. She brought them into the dining room on a tray and passed the glasses around. Still standing, Joy offered a toast. "Jy-ying, welcome to our team."

Jy-ying offered her own toast: "To *our* mission."

Her gun and knife were still on the table. Jy-ying looked down at them and then she looked askance at Joy, as though they were in their own world. She said so softly that perhaps only Joy heard, "You would have killed me, Joy." It was a statement, not a question.

If John heard, he gave no attention to it.

That night, emotionally exhausted beyond thought, Joy cried in John's arms. She couldn't believe how close she had come to destroying, if not their partnership, then what she wanted to see of herself.

"Thank you, dearest," she whispered to him.



Jy-ying

Lying in bed with Little Wei sleeping on her pillow beside her head, his paws hanging over her ear, she thought of what she had done. The ploy had worked, although she felt guilty over so thoroughly betraying their trust in her. She recognized that no matter how godless and heathen their beliefs, they were good people trying to save mankind. She felt dirty about what she had done. She had bathed herself and prayed after coming home, trying to cleanse herself of the feeling.

It had been so close, so close. She'd almost killed Joy tonight, rather than years from now. Jy-ying knew Joy had been just on the edge of deciding she should die, and she knew how Joy would have done it—she would have taken her out of John's sight, maybe into the kitchen or bathroom, pointed Jy-ying's pistol at her, handed Jy-ying her knife, and then politely told her that she would be her second.

Jy-ying managed a smile. *She didn't know that I had my two-shot spy gun hidden up my sleeve. All I needed to do was reach into my sleeve, and she would be dead.*

She almost couldn't lose—either she killed Joy, or she became a member of their team. It worked out well. The risk had been acceptable.

She was now one of their team and could help them spread democracy and end war; she would be privy to all their plans. While working to convert John, she would know the right moment to kill Joy.

Jy-ying was getting a little uncomfortable and overheated with Little Wei sleeping against her head. But she did not want to wake the little guy. She pushed the covers off her chest, and raised one hand and rested it on his head. Just before falling asleep, her final happy thought was, *I could have been an actress. So much talent; so few lives to live.*

Chapter 18

Joy
1908

They'd lived in this "primitive time," as Joy put it, for over a year. In spite of their dedication and focus on their mission, they were in a new world, living new lives, adapting to new surroundings and responding to new experiences. *Our new lives are like billiard balls, Joy often mused, careening in radically different directions as one chance event or another hits us.*

One event now would be so profound as to knock them off the table—it radically changed their lives, altered their perception of their mission, and had absolutely unpredictable consequences.

It began when Joy read in the *San Francisco Daily News* that Mark Twain would give a speech in the next month at the Gold Theater. He was one of her favorite authors. She had read his *Huckleberry Finn* and especially *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, which transported chief character Hank Morgan back in time to the court of King Arthur, where he used his knowledge of the future to make changes in King Arthur's time. Joy felt a special affinity to Morgan. She was eager to see and hear this famous author, and so was John.

Joy had stayed home that day to do some programming on her laptop, and waited until Jy-ying came home to ask her to join them for Twain's speech. At Joy's invitation, she had moved into one of their building's empty apartments, and now lived above John's—and Joy's—apartment.

"Happy to," Jy-ying responded to Joy's invitation to hear Twain speak. "Little Wei and I will look forward to it."

Joy looked surprised.

Jy-ying noted it, and pointed out, "I hate to leave him alone for hours unless absolutely necessary." She raised her eyebrows. "He is my protection."

Joy glanced down at Little Wei, who was sitting at her feet and staring up at her with his ink-black eyes. His little red tongue was visible at the edge of his mouth. She looked back to Jy-ying with a smile. "Of course."

At work the next day, before Joy could stop him, John asked the guys if they would care to come with them to Twain's speech. They declined with one lame excuse after another. "They are, after all, young men with other things to do besides attend what seems a boring speech by someone they don't know," Joy told him.

Mark Twain's speech was billed as *His Majesty Leopold's Mass Murder: Terror and Death in the Congo*. Daily weather reporting was a thing of the future and they got caught in a rainstorm and its resulting traffic pileup on Market Street. No one was waiting in line at the theater when they arrived, and they caught the ticket man just as he was about to close his little booth.

When they tried to buy the twenty-five cent tickets at the entrance to the theater, the attendant would not let Jy-ying in with Little Wei. She laid down a dollar on the ticket counter, simply saying, "For you."

"It's not up to me," the attendant responded.

Jy-ying laid down another dollar, and smiled. "I hid him from you."

The attendant grinned, gave Jy-ying a ticket, and waved them all in.

Apparently, the topic of Twain's speech was not wildly popular, for the theater was about a third full when they entered. The enormously fat Colonel Henry I. Kominsky, a famous San Francisco lawyer, had introduced Mark Twain. They found out weeks later that he had been a secret lobbyist for King Leopold II of Belgium, but because Kominsky upstaged the Belgium Minister to the United States, the King relieved him of this very financially rewarding effort. Kominsky had then turned over to Hearst's *New York American* all his secret correspondence with the King and Congo officials, for publication.

Joy saw Jy-ying twitching her nose at the smell of too many unwashed people in too confined a space, and John held his nose and looked at Joy. Trying not to grin, she said, "I nose."

They got seated just as Mark Twain started speaking. His photographs did not well reflect what a vigorous and handsome man he was. His full head of unruly gray hair and large gray mustache suited his large and squarish head. His brows hung in a flat plane over his eyes, except in the middle, where they were notched in an upside-down V over the upper part of his bulbous nose. He left his soft brown suit coat open to reveal a tightly buttoned vest and a small black bow tie. He stood solidly erect, projecting strength and confidence, even at seventy-three years old.

He began with a short biography of King Leopold, whom he called "an unfortunately intelligent man." Looking frequently into the eyes of

his audience, he gestured as counterpoint to his strong voice, which projected easily to the back of the theater.

“He used his brilliance to wield his kingly authority and prestige in conjunction with lies and deception,” Twain explained, “to convince the major nations of the world at the Berlin Conference of 1885 to grant him exclusive ownership of the Congo in Africa. He was so deceptive that these nations did not even know at the time that this was what they were doing. They had no idea they were giving this man an area that was larger than that of England, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy combined. They thought, as Leopold deceived them into believing, that they were acting against slavery and promoting the humanitarian development of the African natives.”

Twain stopped for effect and paced over to John’s side of the stage. He spied him, Joy, and Jy-ying and glanced back and forth between the women with a small frown.

Raising his voice, he looked to the other side of the theater. “With his control over all land in the Congo, which he cleverly called the Congo Free State, no native could own land; tribes and native empires that had worked and farmed certain land for centuries no longer owned their land.” Twain spread his hands wide as through encompassing everyone and everything in the theater. “Leopold owned it all—every stream and lake, every mountain and hill, every farm and plantation, every town and village. His!”

He looked back toward Jy-ying and Joy. Lowering his voice, he continued. “Leopold granted rights to companies in which he secretly held at least 50 percent ownership. And they proceed to exploit the Congo’s resources without competition—Leopold would allow none. He set up police forces and a governance of the Congo under his total control, and each of the companies were encouraged to set up their own company police. From then on, profit for Leopold and his companies were the first, second, and third goals of his administration.”

He stopped and strode over to the other side of the stage. Gesturing to underscore the evil, Twain shouted, “At the point of a gun, Leopold turned the Congo, over seventy-six times the size of his own country of Belgium, into a prison of slaves. No native had any rights. Their only purpose in life was to serve Leopold’s greed. They were forced to build a railroad for him; to transport his ships, disassembled into thousands of heavy and clumsy pieces, to inland lakes; and to produce ivory and rubber for his companies and his vast ego so that he could buy or build villas for his teenage mistress, a former prostitute, and build throughout Belgium monuments to himself.”

Twain came back to John's side of the stage. Seeming to gaze into his eyes as though recognizing a sympathetic and intelligent listener, Twain spoke in a soft voice that nevertheless projected to everyone there. "How many natives has this one man murdered or caused to die without himself actually seeing a drop of blood? Mr. Edmund Dene Morel, the foremost expert on the Congo and the editor of the *West African Mail*, believes that ten to fifteen million have been murdered, died from disease, or have been starved to death."

Twain counted on his fingers, "One million lives, two million lives . . . and ten million lives." Holding up all his fingers on his right hand, he almost screamed, "And maybe another five million!"

Joy was stunned. *My God, I never heard of this. John never mentioned it. And apparently, the Society that sent us here to eliminate this very democide missed it entirely.*

There was no movement, no sound, not even a cough in the theater. Twain broke eye contact with John and stepped to the center of the stage, its wooden floorboards creaking like resounding cracks in the absolute silence.

He waited there a few moments, scanning faces in the audience. In a conversational tone, he continued speaking. "All this is very general and lacks human story. I want to give you one. But it is so gruesome and brutal that I have to ask any of you who might be sickened by blood and gore, or who simply don't want to hear it, to please leave. Your money will be refunded at the door."

No one left, not after that introduction.

Twain moved up to the front of the stage, his shoes almost over the edge, and leaned forward. In a level voice, his hands still for a change, he said, "This is the story of one man in the Congo village of Malima two years ago, as he told it to a missionary."



The Congo Free State 1906

The white man came at midday. My wife Gili and I were weeding the village field planted with cassava and maize, while outside her hut, my sister Abo was making banana flour by pounding up dried bananas. We saw two men hurry to the Chief's large hut in the village and soon Liamba, our Chief, came out and had the drums beaten to summon everyone from the fields.

When we all gathered around him, he told us that soldiers with red caps and guns and accompanied by white men were coming to the village. He said that we should put out food for them so that they would eat and pass on without bothering us. So we went into the fields and collected in baskets cassava, plantains, and ground nuts and brought them back to the Chief's hut. We also collected chickens and goats from around the village.

When the soldiers entered our village they gathered the food, chickens, and goats together, and afterward they surrounded the village and the white man strode up to Liamba and shot him in the head.

At the same time, the soldiers made us sit on the ground while they searched each of the huts, forcing everyone out, including even the young children and women nursing their babies. One man tried to escape and a soldier shot him. He cut off the dead man's hand and put it into his pocket. We learned later that the hand was proof he had used his bullet to kill a native. Sometimes soldiers would kill animals with their guns, and cut off the hands of living people to prove they had not wasted bullets.

Fida, a friend of mine, at first didn't understand what the soldiers were demanding. A soldier prodded him with a knife to sit on the ground. A white man saw this and commanded a soldier to grab Fida and drag him by his feet to the space in front of us. A soldier told us to watch and see what happened when we didn't obey.

Fida trembled as he was pulled to his feet by two soldiers and forced to strip. They made him lay face down on the ground, and one soldier grabbed his hands and the other his feet. A third soldier wielded what we learned to call the *chicotte*. This was a special whip made of a long strip of corkscrew-shaped, sun-dried hippopotamus hide. It had sharp edges that cut into the skin of those whipped with it.

The soldier started whipping Fida's buttocks. The first stroke left a red line. As more strokes lashed his body, Fida writhed on the ground, and ended up getting his hips and stomach lashed. Some strokes fell on his genitals, and he shrieked with pain. He began bleeding badly in huge rivulets. Finally he could do no more than moan. We lost track of the number of lashes, but surely there were many more than fifty.

Long before the soldier was finished, Fida stopped moving or making any sound. Out of breath, the soldier eventually stopped. He grabbed Fida's hair and pulled up his head. Fida had bitten through his tongue. He was dead.

A man dressed in blue with a white man alongside him told us that each man would have to collect a basket full of coagulated sap he

called rubber from a particular vine that grows in the jungle. If we didn't fill our basket, we would get whipped like the one dead on the ground. To make sure that we fulfilled our quota and didn't run away, our wives and children would be held hostage.

A soldier handed me a piece of rubber vine so I would know what it looked like, and had me pass it around. We were told the best way to coagulate the sap was to spread it on our body as soon as we tapped the vine. We must not get dirt, leaves and twigs, or stones in it. We were also prohibited from cutting the vine down, and should do no more than make a cut to drain the sap.

We were separated from the women. I saw my wife crying as she and my sister and the other women and children were driven into one of the large huts. The soldiers packed them all in, and they had hardly enough room to sit.

The soldiers gave each of us a basket and pushed us with their rifles, telling us to go. They gave us no food, nothing to protect us from the rain, nothing but a knife.

I went deep into the forest looking for the vine. I could not find any the first day. When night came, I climbed a tree and slept in a fork in its trunk. It rained during the night; by morning, my teeth were chattering. At dawn I started searching again, more to get warm than to find a vine. I ate berries along the way and found a banana patch and filled my stomach.

Toward nightfall, I found a thick rubber vine and made three cuts in its trunk. As the sap came out I cupped it in my hands and smeared it on my body. Night had fallen by the time the sap coagulated. Pulling it off my body was painful—the strips took body hair along with them. I laid the strips in my basket, then searched in the moonlight for tea-leaves. I climbed a tree, found a spot to sit, and wrapped the leaves around my body for warmth.

It took me three more days to fill the basket, since I could only find two more rubber vines. On the last one I was desperate. I hacked it down and dug up the roots with my knife to get as much sap as I could. With my basket full, I headed back to the village, which took two more days. When I reached it, I handed the basket over to a soldier sitting at a table with a white man.

The white man emptied the basket on the table and moved the strips of rubber around. He said something to the soldier, who grabbed my arm and took me to the hut where they were holding my wife and sister hostage. Five or six soldiers were sitting around the hut, paying no at-

tention to three others who were raping Oleka, a young girl. One was holding her arms. Another spread her legs. A third raped her. I tried not to look.

The soldier I was following told me to call to my relatives inside the hut. I did so, and Gili and Abo, each very thin and weak, crawled out. I felt weak myself, but I managed to pick my wife up and put her over my shoulder. With my free hand I lifted my sister by her arm and half dragged her to the shade of a tree. I got water in a bucket from the nearby stream and gave it to them, and a soldier gave me nuts and bananas in a pot from which I fed them.

When she gathered her strength to talk, Gili told me that they had been given only some nuts and a little water, and that two babies, three children, and two of the women, Ejum and Katinga, had died in the hut. She and my Abo had been repeatedly raped, as had all the younger women in the hut. Beautiful Kalonji had fought the soldiers, and had been knocked to the ground, stripped, and whipped to death with the chicotte. Her bloody body, "So cut up it looked like bloody strips of meat all entwined together," Gili said, had been left for days in front of the hut as a lesson.

I wanted to kill the soldiers, but what could I do? They had taken the rubber-cutting knife away from me, and they would shoot me before I could kill one, then as a warning to others they would kill Gili and Abo. So I swallowed my rage, but could not prevent my tears.

For one week longer the soldiers waited for more rubber to be brought from the forest. Finally the last man came out of the forest in the morning, but with a basket only partly full. As soon as the soldiers saw this, they took the basket away from him, gave it to the white man, and pulled the man under a tree. They tied his hands behind him with a long rope, threw the other end of it over a tree limb, and pulled him up by his tied hands until his toes were barely touching the ground. They tied the rope to another tree trunk, and left him like that. He watched as the soldiers brought his wife and daughter out of the hut where they kept all the women, pulled them over in front of him, and shot each of them in the stomach so they would die slowly. Husband and father, he could do nothing but watch them die.

Before walking away, the soldiers chopped a hand off each of the women for proof that they did not misuse their bullets.

Gili, Abo, and I could only watch, shaking with fear.

The soldiers had brought several large baskets with them. Inside were rusty chains. The soldiers told us to line up near the baskets. Then

they clamped an iron collar around each person's neck, and chained us together in one continuous line. We were given large, heavy baskets containing rubber, food, carvings, ivory, and other things stolen from our village, which they told us to carry on our heads. Some of us also carried goats. When we were all loaded, the soldiers led us onto the trail they had followed to our village.

Day after day we walked, stumbled, tottered, and staggered, sometimes pulled forward by our chains, sometimes held back. In the heat, our sweat made the iron collars chafe our necks, and soon we had open and bleeding sores around them. The soldiers gave us little food and water.

We undulated and swayed up and down and sideways, like a giant millipede drunk from Tembo, its many legs seeming to move in different directions, but the body nonetheless moving forward. I moved in a daze, tugging with or against the chains, watching my feet so that I did not trip. The chains made a continuous clinking noise. When one of us fell, others close by on the chain were also pulled down. Some spilled their baskets, and as they got up the soldiers whipped them with the chicotte.

Diur, the woman in front of me, had carried her baby for the first two days, but when she started to straggle and slow up the line, a soldier jerked her baby boy out of her arms and threw him into the woods, where the animals would get him.

The older people were having trouble. They steadied the load on their head with one hand while supporting themselves with a pole or branch. Knees bent, they lurched along.

The fourth day, our chains pulled us to a stop. Farther back in the line, old Mobyem sat down and refused to move. A soldier jabbed him with his gun, but he just sat there looking at his feet. Finally, two of the soldiers took out their knives and stabbed him repeatedly, and he fell over with blood gushing from the wounds. They unchained him, took off his collar, and chained together the ones behind and ahead of him. They redistributed the load he had been carrying.

More people died or were killed, and it meant that our loads got heavier. Each day was more horrible than the last. On the most horrible of all days, I lifted myself off the ground at first light to eat a rotten piece of meat mixed with berries, nuts, and squirming larvae that a soldier passed out. My wife Gili would not get up when he kicked her. I leaned over her and gently called her name.

"My lovely Gili, I said, "please get up. The soldiers will kill you."

She didn't move. She was dead.

The next day my sister Abo went mad and tried to run for the forest, but she only dragged the rest of us off the trail behind her, and fell screaming. A soldier shot her.

After two weeks we reached the large village of Nyangwby by the side of a lake. There were many white men around. The soldiers led us up to a large white man's boat. Black smoke billowed out of a big pipe sticking out of the top of it. Men on the boat removed our iron collars and chains, and led those of us carrying rubber onto the boat. They told us to dump the baskets into a very large hole.

Different soldiers took us to a large hut where strangers from another village fed us. Afterward, with soldiers standing around us, the strangers branded us on the leg with a hot iron. They also told us we would be slaves of the white men in the village, and that if we tried to escape they would whip us to death with the chicotte.

That evening, members of the strangers' kingdom attacked the village. They used arrows and knives, and killed many soldiers and white men during the battle. I escaped into the forest. Two days later Mr. Sestok, a white Protestant missionary, and two Congo converts found me on a trail. I was almost dead.



Jy-ying

Twain stopped talking for a moment and slowly looked around at the audience. "The fellow's name was Nzanba," he finished in a sad voice. "He died three days later from an infection that developed in the wounds the metal collar made on his neck. Before his death, he told his story to Henry Sestok of the Baptist Missionary Society."

A number of women were dabbing at their eyes with handkerchiefs, while the men looked stern-faced—in this age, men did not cry. Jy-ying blinked back tears and looked at Joy and John. There were tears in their eyes, too.

After waiting a decent few seconds, Twain described the Congo Reform Association, headquartered in England and headed by Edmund Dene Morel, the same man he had mentioned before. He summarized the Association's work and said that Morel's weekly journal, *West African Mail*, had been revealing to the world the horrible atrocities in the Congo Free State. With a tone of deep devotion in his voice, Twain ex-

tollled Morel as the foremost humanitarian of the times. He worked tirelessly to end the slavery in the Congo, and to focus the attention of the world on the evils going on there.

"I have tried to help their effort," Twain concluded. "Because the United States was the first nation to officially recognize Leopold's takeover of the Congo, and played an instrumental role in Leopold getting approval from other nations, I have been working on President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Elihu Root to pressure European nations to deny recognition of the Congo Free State.

"If you also would like to contribute to the Congo Reform Association's great humanitarian work, there is a box in the lobby labeled with the Association's name. Any contribution you can make will help to end this evil slavery and mass murder. Thank you for coming." He bowed.

The audience clapped, and as people began to leave the theater, a few approached the front of the stage, some asking for Twain's autograph. At the back of the group, John and Joy waited to talk to him, and Jy-ying stood a little apart, holding Little Wei. Finally there only remained an especially persistent old woman dressed all in black, who wanted to tell Twain about her great American novel. She insisted that he would not be able to put it down, if he would only start reading it.

Twain nodded his head and was otherwise noncommittal until the woman pulled her beaten-up manuscript out of a large crocheted handbag, and tried to hand it to him. He held up his hands and told her in a firm but friendly tone, "I have too much to carry as it is, but thank you for bringing your book with you, and thinking of me. If you will send the manuscript to my home address, I will read it when I can." With that, Twain clearly dismissed the woman and looked at John.

John started to introduced himself, but Twain spotted Little Wei. "Oh, what a handsome little dog." He reached out his hands and Jy-ying handed him over. Little Wei sniffed Twain's hands, coat, and face; apparently satisfied, he permitted himself to be held.

"What kind of dog is this?" Twain asked, petting him.

Jy-ying replied, "A West Highland White Terrier."

Twain sighed. "Wish I could have a dog, but I travel so much it's not practical. Anyway, I'm sorry. I'm being rude." He gave Little Wei back and looked at John.

John started again. "I'm a businessman and investor." With a little wave to Joy and then to Jy-ying, he introduced them. "This is Joy Phim, my assistant, and Khoo Jy-ying, her assistant."

Twain shook John's hand, and bowed to Joy and Jy-ying, saying, "My pleasure, ladies. Are you two twins or sisters?"

Joy seemed confused for a second, but Jy-ying responded, "I regret to say that we are unrelated, but we share so much that she could be my sister."

That distracted Joy. John seemed nonplussed.

Twain was still looking curiously at Joy and Jy-ying. After a moment John said, "Thank you for your excellent speech and for your efforts in communicating the horrible conditions of the natives in the Congo. We are very much involved in trying to rid the world of such evils, and hope you can join us for drinks, to talk about what we can do to help you."

Twain took a long moment to reply. He looked carefully at John, at Joy and Jy-ying, and back to John. Jy-ying had the feeling he had gone through this routine with people in his audience wherever he had given this speech, and that the results were not always happy.

John took out a roll of bills that he kept for emergencies, and counted out ten one-hundred dollar bills. He handed them to Twain, saying, "This is my sincerity contribution, my first, to your work of freeing the Congo."

Twain was shocked by the amount, but recovered. Eyebrows still raised, he said, "Thank you, indeed, sir. That's an incredibly generous contribution." He took the money and asked with a smile, "Is it real?"

John blushed and Joy looked embarrassed.

Jy-ying wondered. *They must have millions in counterfeit bills, as I do. Is that what he gave Twain? No, not John.*

Twain came down from the stage. "Let's go," he said.

Kominsky, who had set up the talk, had been seated while Twain worked through all the well-wishers after the speech. Now he pushed himself off his seat with some difficulty and lumbered over. Twain introduced the three of them to him, simply giving their names, and they all walked together to the lobby, where Twain picked up the Association's contribution box. He pushed John's bills through a wide slit in the lid.

"Wait a moment," Jy-ying said, seeing a chance to score points with John. She took two five-dollar bills from her purse and put them into the box. *Can't overdo it. He would wonder where I got the money.*

Twain told Kominsky that he would be going with them, thanked him for setting up the talk, and mentioned that he would call him tomorrow. It was clear that Kominsky wanted to come along, but they all

waited for him to leave. When it became too obvious, he tipped his hat to them, picked up the box, and waddled off to his own car.

Twain asked, "Do you have someplace in mind?"

"Yes," John said. "Our Mercedes is a couple of blocks from here, and I'll drive us all to the Liberty Café, a pleasant bar you'll like."

From then on, the four of them never stopped conversing. During the walk to the Mercedes, at the café until it closed, and in the lounge of the St. Francis Hotel where Twain was staying, they talked until almost daylight. They were fascinated with what Twain knew about the Congo, about Leopold, and about Morel's work. Joy and John were particularly interested in the politics of it—who was influencing whom and had what power. Twain had talked to President Roosevelt about it and they wanted to know the details of the exchange.

At first Twain seemed to be feeling his way around them, and appeared guarded in some of his personal evaluations. But as he became increasingly aware of how much they knew about atrocities elsewhere, and about international politics, he became more and more excited.

Jy-ying was supposed to be ignorant of the future, and in this exciting and animated discussion could barely prevent a slip of tongue. This decolonization was necessary to open these poor people to Islam and Sabah. She knew the history of the New Universe, which Joy and John did not, since they were just beginning to create the world in which she had been born. Now, in the third universe they were creating, she could make it even better for Sabah. But she had to watch her tongue. Her solution was to say as little as possible and seem to devote most of her attention to Little Wei.

When they were about to part, Twain promised to be John's go-between with Morel. "We've had some disagreement," he said cryptically, "but we're still friends. I'll help in any way I can."

John asked, "Could I ask you to send a telegram to Morel about me?"

"I would be happy to do so, sir," Twain replied.

John again pulled out his money to give Twain more than enough to cover the cost, but Twain put up his hand and said, "Thanks, but you've given enough."

Within several months, it was obvious that the contact John initiated with Morel that night would change all their futures, including that of Morel himself, in a way so unimaginable, so unpredictable, that for a long time afterward Jy-ying sometimes entertained herself and Little Wei by thinking aloud about what their life would have been like, had

he not done that. Or had Joy not read about Twain giving a speech. Or had Twain not decided to come to San Francisco when he did. Or had John's car broke down on the way to the theater. Or



Joy

After Joy and John said their goodbyes and returned home, they couldn't sleep. They had to discuss what they had learned, and what they could realistically do about it.

"You didn't know about this at all, did you?" Joy asked John.

He looked mournful. "I and the whole field of genocide studies in the Old Universe missed this. There was no book on genocide and mass murder in history or in the twentieth century that contained more than a rare paragraph on this. One of the surprising things is that every general book has an extensive description of the German genocide against the Herero tribe from 1904 to 1907, in the German colony that became Namibia. They massacred perhaps fifty-five thousand Herero. That was awful, but now we find out that up north in the Congo, Leopold was killing many millions. And Twain said that similar massacres are going on in the French Congo."

John shook his head in exasperation. "I can't believe that all of us missed this, but we did. You know, my figure for the number murdered by governments in the twentieth century is about 174 million. I had found out about some of the killing in the European colonies, and believed it might amount to about a million murdered since 1900. But as a result of what I've learned from Twain, I'm going to have to reevaluate the colonial toll."

John rolled out of bed and picked up a message pad and pencil. "Lets see," he said. "Where exploitation of a colony's natural resources or portering was carried out by forced labor—in effect, modern slavery—as it was in all the European and Asian colonies, the forced labor system built in its own death toll from beatings, punishment, coercion, terror, and forced deprivation. There were differences in the brutality of the system, the British being the least brutal and Leopold and the Germans, Spanish, and Portuguese being the worst, with the French somewhere in between. We know what the Soviet gulag was like. These colonizers turned Africa into one giant gulag, with each colony being like a separate death camp."

John made a list of the colonies and estimated their 1900 native populations, and for each colony listed the least possible death toll and the most probable. He added up his figures, and said, "As a guesstimate, over all of colonized Africa and Asia, 1900 to independence, the democide may have been something like fifty million. This is way above my original one million estimate. Even fifty million may be too conservative. If this figure were roughly close, however, it would raise the total murdered by governments in the twentieth century from 174 million to 223 million."

John looked utterly depressed. Joy hadn't seen this look on his face since they found out how many Sabah may have killed in his nuclear attacks. He wiped his face with his hand, and looked down at the floor. He said, "These mass murderers were the most advanced and supposedly civilized nations in the world. And if anything illustrates the role of power, Leopold II, the king of Belgium, does. He was an intelligent and otherwise civilized man. He talked constantly about ending slavery in Africa and about the freedom, education, and development of the natives. But when the United States and Europe gave him by treaty the most absolute power over perhaps thirty million people, he enslaved them. And he murdered millions."

Joy took a moment to think about it. "Okay, here we are with incredible resources. What can we do?" she asked.

He put his pad down and said, "For one, the Society didn't know about this massive colonial killing and didn't put that into their plans. Second, we have to remember that we have the Mexican Revolution, the First World War, and the Russian Revolution to prevent soon—"

"Megalomaniacs? Us?" Joy interjected.

John gave her a sour grin and continued. "You know, baby, I feel helpless about this. Colonialism is not an event or an episode that we can prevent like the Mexican Revolution. This colonialism involves thousands of officials, hundreds of companies, armies of soldiers, a whole system of rule, and a mind set among the people of the colonizing country. The English, for example, feel that they are involved in a great effort to uplift, educate, and bring into the modern world the people in their colonies. They are proud of their role in ending slavery and see their colonies as protection of their natives against Arab and indigenous African slavery. It's impossible for us to change this perception, even with our resources and knowledge of the future."

John looked so sad, slumped on the bed, staring at his hand. "There is nothing we can—"

Joy reached over and put a finger on his lips. “We’re both tired. Let’s sleep, and talk about what to do tomorrow, when we’re refreshed. No more now, okay?”

Neither one of them could sleep right away; their minds were too busy. But their tired bodies finally defeated their active minds and they slept, although fitfully.

Chapter 19

Joy

They were chained to a caravan of African natives struggling over a narrow rope bridge hanging above a deep gorge. When the first prisoner in the caravan lost his grip on the rope rail and fell off the swaying bridge, his weight and the chains began to pull those behind and in front of him into space. She could see the bodies falling one after another, as if in slow motion. The undulating chain reaction slowly approached them, and she tried to pull back on the chain to prevent them from falling, to no avail. The chain started dragging John off the bridge. She could not hold him back. She felt the heavy tug—the chain was pulling her after him.

She screamed.

Joy woke up with a start. John put his arms around her and held her close as her heart thudded in her chest and she shuddered and cried and held him tightly to her. He caressed her wet cheeks and hair and whispered, “You’ve had a bad dream, baby. Everything’s alright.”

The dream remained with Joy for days. It was so vivid, so real. It was more than the images one might see on TV or in a movie. It was living the caravan, feeling the metal collar on her neck and the pull of the chain, hearing it rattle, tasting the sweat; it was feeling the terror in her knotted stomach and racing heart; it was knowing death was approaching John and there was absolutely nothing she could do about it; and it was knowing her own death would follow. And she knew, as she felt she knew anything, that this nightmare had been reality for some loved ones in the Congo.

While eating a late lunch, they discussed what they could do about intervening in the Congo and other colonies, and the possibilities of success. They realized that they would not be able to stop much of the killing, and that a lot of it had already occurred. But one thought was uppermost—saving some lives was a universe better than saving none. Even if their intervention prevented the deaths of one thousand human beings, they would be successful. With that driving them, they discussed what to do.

That evening Joy rechecked all the research materials and chronologies on this period that the Society had put on CDs for them. She found only one reference to Morel and his success in forcing Leopold to turn over the Congo Free State to his country, Belgium, in November 1908 to administer as a colony. It was a one-paragraph biography of Morel, as there was for every minor name mentioned. Aside from what they already knew, they found out that he was in his mid-thirties and was married to Mary Richardson; they had five children.

Joy and John discussed whether one or both of them should go to England to see Morel. John argued, "I will not be separated from you for that eternity. No. Period. End of discussion."

Stupid, Joy thought. *He still has much to learn about me, if he thinks he can make his point that way.* Aloud she explained, "I fear that our whole mission might be ended if our ship is sunk in a storm or it suffers some other disaster, or if our train has an accident. Jy-ying can't do it alone, even if she knew what to do. I think it's dumb to take such risks. Dimwitted. Brainless. Idiotic." John wasn't going to beat her at definitives.

John's face resembled a block of carved wood.

She ignored it. "There is always a risk, in this age of accidents. Our overall mission is too important to put in danger. I know that Morel's project also is important and will accomplish much to help reform the Congo, and by implication, colonialism generally. But our new mission of saving maybe two billion lives, preventing nuclear terrorism, and perhaps preventing the end of democracy is infinitely more important."

"No, baby! We travel together." John crossed his arms over his chest and recarved his wooden face to emphasize a jutting chin.

"Well then," she countered, "just in case we get killed traveling together, I'm going to put in my will that our epitaph read *Here lies a village idiot and his brilliant assistant and translator.*"

"He should come here."

Joy stared. "Yes," she said.



The next day John telegraphed Morel, expressing his profound interest in doing something about the Congo, asking him and his wife to make an all expense paid trip to San Francisco to discuss how he might contribute to Morel's efforts, and promising to wire in two days a good faith contribution of \$10,000 for his Congo Reform Association. John stated that any date convenient for Morel was fine with him.

Three days after they wired the money, John received a telegram stating simply, *We will arrive on May 24 in San Francisco by train on track 14 at 3:42 p.m. Morel.* John wired back that they would pick them up, and could he send by express mail back issues of his *West African Mail* and whatever other material he could spare on African colonization.

They had two months to prepare for Morel's visit. With Jy-ying helping, they borrowed from public and college libraries whatever they could find on the Congo, and made index card notes of relevant news items in the local and national newspapers, particularly *The New York Times*.

Shortly before the visit, Joy and John discussed what funding to offer Morel. The Society had secreted undetectable counterfeit money, real currency, gold coins and bars, and jewels in the capsules they sent back in time. "Let's see," John said, "We have about two billion dollars to work with overall."

Joy smiled at that incredible wealth. She'd never calculated it in its current value. She got out her calculator and keyed in the amounts. "Do you realize, love, that we arrived in 1906 with the equivalent of about 38.4 billion dollars? And since our arrival, we've been accumulating more millions through your stock investments. And we can increase this even more by setting up separate brokerage accounts for the guys, Jy-ying, and me. We could also bet on horse races, baseball games, and the like. We have all the results of the major races and games." Grinning widely, she concluded, "We're fantastically rich."

John ignored that, waving a cautioning finger. "If we increase our investment, it has to be done with care. If we won too many bets too often, we would create suspicion, even if we tried to lose a certain proportion of the bets. As large as it is, the stock market will allow us to win millions without drawing attention. Here also, however, we have to continue to lose on some stocks, if our brokers aren't to see us as incredibly lucky or smart."

"Obviously," Joy responded, bothered by the wagging finger. "All our calculations must take into account the massive allocation of present and future resources to our mission. Oh yes, and Sabah. Especially Sabah."

She stopped for a moment, suddenly feeling the mammoth weight of what they had to do. In a subdued and somber tone, she reaffirmed what neither of them had mentioned in many months: "We must, absolutely must prevent Sabah's nuclear attack and blackmail—even if it means our death."

His lips compressed into a tight line, eyes grave, John nodded. No words. They just let that fill their souls.

After a moment, John said, "For all our interventions, we have to build up more field offices for our company, and a larger staff. The company itself probably will turn a small profit eventually, and we do know what to buy and sell to fit the popular interest for this and future decades. Still, for a while we'll have to subsidize the company."

He took out his budget and began to jot down some rough figures. Joy could never get him to do his "arithmetic" on his laptop. She got out her own laptop and worked on her Excel spreadsheet. She tried to balance anticipated company expenditures and income against their total resources and likely stock market profits.

After some time, John said, "I'm done. You still working at it? What's taking you so long?"

Joy answered with a little asperity, "I'm being thorough. What did your doodling come up with?"

"How about ten million dollars to help end colonial slavery and exploitation. That's about the equivalent of 192 million in year 2000."

She looked at her spreadsheet, hit the sum button, transferred that amount to the surplus line, summed that, subtracted the estimated costs, and arrived at \$9,674,000 they could offer Morel.

She shook her head, looked at John with exaggerated pity, and said, "You're off, John. You've got to learn to use a spreadsheet. But ten million is a nice round number. These are all estimates anyway, so what the hell, let's go with that."

Suspicious, John slid over to the laptop and said, "Let's see what you got."

"Oops. Damn. I hit the quit and not the save keys when I was turning the laptop so you could see," she lamented. "Well, anyway, we've agreed on your figure. So ten million dollars it shall be."

John shook his pencil and pointed out, "We should put this in context. We know that King Leopold will gain probably a little over one billion dollars in profit from his Congo Free State. Much of this he will use to lobby for foreign support, and against his critics. We will be playing in a very big league, baby, and we'll have to use as much of our resources as we can."

Joy couldn't agree more.



Joy recognized Edmund Morel and his wife at the train station when they arrived near sunset. Morel had sent them a photo, and his wife carried a red bag as she'd promised in their exchange of telegrams. Morel was stocky; at first glance, he looked like a prizefighter.

John walked up to Morel, introduced himself, and shook Morel's hand. Then he put his arm around Joy's shoulder and introduced her. "I would like you to meet my assistant and translator." He hesitated a moment, and those dimples formed at the corner of his mouth. Joy noticed, but before she could crush his foot with her heel, he added, smiling possessively, "But foremost, I'm very happy to say that she is my best friend, soul mate, and partner."

Joy's eyes widened. *I love him.*

Morel introduced his wife Janet as "The best assistant, companion, and friend I could ever have desired."

Joy frowned slightly. The Society had listed his wife as Mary Richardson. *Oh well, an error.* She gave a mental shrug.

The Morels were somewhat taken aback when they saw Joy was Asian, and even more so when John introduced her as his partner. The implication was obvious. Working in and about Africa, they had probably known many unmarried black-white couples, but Joy and John seemed to be the first Oriental-white couple they had ever met, and the first interracial couple they had ever seen in the United States. Joy had the feeling that their opinion of John went up as a result.

As they left the station, Joy and Janet followed behind the men. As a conversational opening to what she was sure Janet could talk about for hours, Joy asked, "Do you have any children?"

She answered laconically, "No. Don't have the time for them."

Joy was surprised. The Society had made not only an error in Mrs. Morel's name, but also in their having five children. In the great amounts of information the Society had prepared for them, this was a minor item, but Joy was quite astonished that these mistakes had been made.

They invited the Morels to stay in their guest apartment, but they also had made a reservation for a hotel room, just in case the Morels preferred more privacy. Janet said they would be glad for the extra time with Joy and John, and they went to John's apartment for a meal. Since the Morels had had a long and tiring two-week trip, Joy and John kept to small talk for the rest of the day.

They knew about Edmund Morel's age and were still surprised at how young he looked, given all his accomplishments in fighting King Leopold. He was only eight years older than John. During the first

minutes of their meeting, Ed put them on a first name basis. He had a square-faced, solid British look that he must have inherited from his English mother. His father had been French, he said, and had died when Ed was a boy. He combed his wavy black hair away from a center part, and sported a huge, bushy black mustache of the type popular in this age, one that completely hid his mouth. His eyes were deeply set and intense and his chin was firm and slightly rounded.

Janet was a lovely and vivacious woman, fully involved in Ed's crusade against colonialism. She may well have contributed to or helped author some of the articles and books he published. It was also obvious to Joy as a woman that Janet loved Ed deeply and that they probably had a happy home life together.

The day after their guests arrived, once they'd had a chance to recover from the long and tiring train ride, Joy invited Jy-ying to join them. Jy-ying brought a Chinese red bean paste dessert she had made. Little Wei was an instant hit with the Morels, and with all their strange smells, they were a hit with him as well. John introduced Jy-ying as an important member of the company with a strong interest in the Morels' work in the Congo, and then John went through the now customary explanation that Joy and Jy-ying were not sisters.

That night, after the Morels had retired early, John threatened both Joy and Jy-ying, "I swear I'm going to make stickers for both of you. Joy's will read, 'No, she's not my sister,' with an arrow pointing to the left; Jy-ying's will read the same, with the arrow pointing to the right. Then just be sure you stand on the correct side of each other."

"And I'll make sure you stand between us," Jy-ying said, laughing, and Joy patted her on the back.



Jy-ying

Life never corresponds to fiction, for one simple reason—what happens in life is too unbelievable to put in fiction. On this day such would happen to Jy-ying, and leave her breathless at the improbability.

They all sat around John's waxed-cloth-covered dining room table enjoying coffee, tea, and cookies. It was time to get serious. Looking at Ed, John began. "Since we started receiving the back issues of your journal and copies of articles you and Janet had written, we've read about nothing but the Congo and colonialism in Africa and Asia. We

also read all we could find from the local libraries which, I must say, wasn't much. Could you summarize for us where all your anticolonial work stands now?"

Ed leaned forward. "I will, but first I want to say that Mark Twain had written us about you two . . ."

Jy-ying liked the way he included Janet. Little things like that made a big difference to her, especially because of the attitude of Chinese men toward women. She had noticed that John also always included Joy, and it was one of the things she liked about him.

" . . . He was very impressed and urged us to fill you in on our work. He thought you would be of much help in our effort. Now, most of all, we want to express our profound thanks for this trip here to your lovely and great country and state. Most especially, we're greatly indebted to you for your gift of \$10,000 to our reform association."

John answered, "We couldn't have given the funds to a more deserving effort and pair of humanitarians."

Jy-ying did the mental calculation and realized that amount of money was near the equivalent of \$192,000 in 2000. This was an incredible amount for Ed and Janet to be gifted. They must have been puzzled, therefore, when the first thing they saw was Joy and John's lower middle class clothing. The Morels probably were even more surprised when they saw John's modest, middle class apartment. They'd certainly expected to see a huge mansion in the middle of hundreds of acres, with butlers, maids, and dozens of gardeners bent over beautiful flower gardens.

Besides what Joy and John had told her, Jy-ying had done her own research on Ed. She knew he was originally lower middle class, a clerk in Liverpool working for the Elder Dempster's shipping firm. With his father dead and an ailing mother, Morel quit school to work when he was fifteen.

She could see that Joy and John's informality and friendliness also must have been a surprise. It had almost immediately relaxed the Morels. As far as Ed and Janet knew, however, Joy and John were only wealthy amateurs with an idiosyncratic interest in Congo reform, among many other things. After all, the Morels had been involved in this reform movement for a decade and had never heard of them before.

Jy-ying sat back to watch how John would handle this.

After Ed summarized where their work stood, and after some discussion, John said, "We are informal people and are not concerned about acquiring material goods or exercising conspicuous consumption.

We are, however, filthy rich, due to what each of us has secretly inherited, our financial dealings, and our investments in the stock market. I only tell you this to explain our wealth, not to brag. I trust you will keep this secret.”

Jy-ying rubbed her nose to hide her grin. *What a liar. He is almost as good as I am.*

“We are humanitarians and wish to spend our present and future wealth wiping out war and mass murder, and fostering democracy and human rights. This is our lifelong mission. You should view our Tor Import and Export Company as one of the means through which we do this. We view our support of your efforts as part of our mission.”

Janet held up her hand to stop John. “Surely you’re interested in profit. Isn’t that the bottom line?”

Joy leaned toward Janet, looked into her eyes, and said firmly, “No more than it is for you and Ed. We know that you two have used every spare penny for your reform efforts and derive no material profit from them. Such are our own efforts. Whatever our company makes in profit, if it ever does so, will go into our mission.”

Joy narrowed her eyes; her lips tightened in determination. “We have already sacrificed more for our mission than you would ever believe. We have committed our very lives to succeed, and would welcome death tomorrow, if it meant our final success.”

John picked up on that to further describe their mission, but at this point the men and Joy did not exist as far as Jy-ying was concerned. Janet was staring at her. Jy-ying stared back, puzzled.

There is something about her. Something . . . strange. No. Not strange. Familiar. Uncannily familiar. Ahh, she is hiding something. But what?

Janet held the stare, unblinking, as a cat will focus on a bird in the grass. They became isolated in an emotional, intuitive bubble. Jy-ying could not describe this any better to herself; their communication bordered on telepathic. They sat there, their eyes locked, until finally Janet nodded and shifted her eyes to Joy, who was watching Ed and seemed oblivious to Janet’s exchange with Jy-ying.

Soon Joy and Janet seemed involved in their own communication. After several seconds, Janet reached across the table and took Joy’s hand.

Ed and John had glanced curiously at Janet through her silent exchange with Jy-ying, and when Janet took Joy’s hand Ed raised an eyebrow. Janet turned to him and said simply, “Trust them.”

John cleared his throat, and continued what he had been saying. “We intend to set up a trust fund in a Swiss bank in the name of Edmund Dene Morel and Janet Baker Morel. The annual interest is to be used as you see fit to reform the Congo and European colonies throughout Africa and Asia. As best I can guesstimate, the death toll since 1900 and far into the future will be about fifty million natives unless something is done to stop the killing, exploitation, and slavery. We place only one condition on these funds—that you focus as much on the human cost of colonialism in general as you will on the Congo.”

Ed hesitated, then responded sadly, “We want to thank you for whatever contribution you will make, but just the Congo is a big task. If I try to deal with these other inhumanities, I won’t have the time to do much for them, and it will take effort away from the Congo. What contribution do you have in mind?”

“Ten million dollars as your trust amount. Presumably the trust would invest this in bonds and various government securities, so that you could expect out of this about \$300,000 a year, with the principle available for great opportunities or emergencies.”

Jy-ying almost fell out of her chair. *Sabah, they’re crazy—\$300,000 a year.*

There was a long silence as the Morels sat frozen in their chairs, eyes like saucers. They stared at John as though he had said he was Jesus Christ.

Ed finally croaked, “Excuse me, did you say ten million?”

“Yes.”

“This is a practical joke?”

“No,” Joy said, looking at Janet. “We mean ten million.”

His voice still showing his amazement, Ed exclaimed, “Ahh, yes. Quite. What do you want me to do with all that bloody money? Buy bloody Africa?”

John waved the question aside with his hand. “Remember our one condition. You just don’t focus on the Congo, but on all European colonialism. Of all people, you know how to organize reform. Both of you are so well organized personally that you now produce an unbelievable amount of writing and correspondence. Moreover, you have many contacts throughout Europe and in the United States. So, we leave the organization of the effort up to you. We will not micromanage the use of these funds or second-guess you. You can set up institutes or centers to study and detail the evil deeds, create newspapers, hire reporters, lobby legislatures, send to colonies investigative commissions,

send people like Mark Twain on speaking tours, and so on. You know the possibilities. This organizational and disbursement freedom will be in a contract we will draw up.

“With your background, Ed, I know you will understand that, for legal and security reasons, written into the trust agreement will be an annual independent audit of your use of whatever funds are disbursed to you during the year. The only purpose of the audit is to protect you against any possible claim, legal or otherwise, that you are misusing the funds for personal reasons. We will also write into the trust contract yearly salaries for you and Janet of \$10,000, indexed to the rate of inflation in England.”

Ed just sat still, trying to absorb it. Janet looked stunned. After several seconds Ed rubbed his glass with his thumb, still deep in thought.

Joy stood and offered them all drinks. Janet and Jy-ying asked for tea while the men accepted cold Michelob beer right off the ice block. Joy had one herself after the tea was made.

Jy-ying was studying Janet thoughtfully when she turned and returned her look, and held it. Jy-ying’s intuition was now screaming at her—Janet was hiding a great or nefarious secret. She had to find out what it was. Too much was at stake to risk a later surprise.

Her eyes still on Janet, Jy-ying spoke up for the first time, her melodious intonation reflecting her Chinese language. “I am sure that John has ideas as to how you could best use this generous endowment—did I say generous? This goes fantastically beyond generous.” She looked at John. “What are your ideas?”

John seemed happy for the excuse to lecture. “As you said, Ed, you are the people on the front lines of reform. We can only make abstract suggestions, which you may or may not find helpful. But we do know the world. Under different names, we have professional backgrounds. I was a professor of history. Joy has a degree in government, and Jy-ying is a linguist.”

Ed listened intently, but Janet nodded absently without breaking eye contact with Jy-ying. John may as well have said, “I like tea.”

“We would emphasize what I will call the 5-D plan,” John was saying, “deprofit, disgrace, delegitimize, derecognize, and delegate.”

He began to lay this out and had Ed’s full attention for the next half-hour. John was clearly enjoying being the professor again. As he described their ideas, Joy’s eyes were riveted on Ed, apparently trying to gauge his response.

But Jy-ying's eyes remained fixed on Janet's, as though probing behind them to read her mind. *Okay, she thought, time for confrontation. In the kitchen—where else, for women?*

When John stopped for breath, Jy-ying suggested that she get the dessert that she had brought so they could eat while he continued. Joy was about to get up, but Jy-ying waved her down. Knowing John had been a professor, Jy-ying believed he might be at it for another hour or so. She got up, stepped over sleeping Little Wei, and looked at Janet. She nodded toward the kitchen.

Janet rose and followed her. In the kitchen, Jy-ying started making dessert tea for everyone. She set the kettle on the range and prepared to turn around and say to Janet, "You can share a secret with me. What are you hiding?"

Close behind her, Janet beat her to it. She leaned over Jy-ying's shoulder and said in a low voice, "Sabah rules."

Chapter 20

Jy-ying

Jy-ying jerked around to face Janet, and automatically responded to what in this era would have been nonsense to anybody else except Joy and John. In two words she told Janet that she had guessed right: “Abul Sabah.”

“Yes, Abul Sabah, the Prophet,” Janet intoned, her face now glowing with excitement.

Nothing more need be said. She was from Jy-ying’s time. And the reverential way she had said Sabah’s name suggested she was a believer. The right side of Jy-ying’s brain was happily flabbergasted. She never believed for a moment that there would be someone else from the future who knew Sabah, and if so, that they would meet. On the left side of her brain, however, her security training kicked in and she was wary. Janet could be an enemy, sent to this time to follow up on the message to kill Sabah, and a deadly threat to Jy-ying.

But it cannot be. I’ve studied her. She does not have the muscles and grace for combat. She stands and moves like a lady, not a warrior. She brought no purse in with her and there are no telltale weapon bulges.

She decided paranoid was best. Carefully watching Janet, she acted out her shock. She opened her eyes wide, let her mouth hang open, and while leaning on the counter for apparent support, she brought the other hand up to her cheek. She gasped, “You are from my future.”

“Yes, 2003.”

“I’m from 2001.” She reached for Janet to hug her, but the other woman beat Jy-ying to it. Putting her arms around Jy-ying and struggling to restrain her voice, Janet exclaimed, “Am I ever glad to meet you, Jy-ying! I’ve been so lonely. Ed has no idea I’m from the future. Do Joy and John know?”

“No.” Jy-ying was also fighting to control her emotions. She put a finger to her lips to stop any further response, and said, “Wait. Later.”

Janet picked up the forks and tray of desserts and tried to steady her hands. Jy-ying put a hand on her arm and smiled. That helped.

Jy-ying followed Janet into the small dining room. John was still in his lecture mode, so Janet quietly passed the desserts around while Jy-ying sat down. Janet stood for a moment when she was done, looking like she wanted to say something, but then silently sat down in her dining chair next to Ed, who was listening attentively to John.

Joy looked at them briefly, smiled at Jy-ying in acknowledgement of the dessert, and returned her attention to John. But when the tea kettle whistled, she got up and went into the kitchen to make the tea.

Jy-ying had no appetite, but ate her dessert to avoid any questions. She saw Janet do the same. After Joy passed the tea around and everyone had finished their dessert, Jy-ying gave a small piece of what she had left to Little Wei and, looking around in apology, said, "I'm going to have to take the little guy for a stroll."

She got up, and Janet followed her lead. She also stood and asked, "Can I join you? He's so cute. I always wanted a little Westie, but a dog isn't practical for us."

John was so intent on his conversation with Ed that Jy-ying didn't think he noticed that they were leaving. Joy gave a little wave and smile, and turned back to the conversation. Ed seemed to except their leaving as a matter of course.



Janet

As they rushed to Jy-ying's Rolls, almost tripping over confused Little Wei, Janet kept thinking, *I don't believe this. It can't be true she's from my time.* Then she remembered that her father had been trying to send a man back to prevent the one who had received the message from Santa Barbara from killing Sabah or his parents.

Oh God, she must be the one who received the message. She must be the one out to kill Sabah. She knows I'm Sabah. She'll kill me. How stupid I am! I don't even have a gun.

Janet stopped, and started backing up. "Who are you? Really," Janet hissed, ready to turn around and run back into the apartment.

Jy-ying did not answer immediately. She turned and looked at Janet, confusing Little Wei further. Barking, he jumped up and down on her leg, twisting the leash around her dress.

Janet saw this and realized she could get a good start if she ran. She backed up another step, and stared at Jy-ying warily, ready to flee instantly. “Dad. Dad,” she said, feeling some relief from uttering that key word she hadn’t had to use in over a decade.

They were in the gravel alley between the apartment building and the garage. Jy-ying sat down on the gravel, let the leash remain twisted around her dress, and picked Little Wei up. She put him on her lap and held him there, although he struggled to get back on his feet. He was getting a little panicky. She said softly, “I’m sorry I frightened you. As you can see, I’m no threat, so please come closer so I don’t have to shout.”

Much relieved, Janet took several steps closer and waited, her body still tense, her breathing coming in short gasps. She took a fast look around to see if anyone was watching from the windows of the apartment building, and noted that this seemed to be a service alley and probably not much used.

Janet was beginning to shake. Her head throbbed. She had gone from the height of sudden joy to the depths of fear, all within minutes, and her body was suffering from the resulting chemicals that had flooded her bloodstream. Janet saw that Jy-ying looked pleased, as though Janet’s fear told her something.

Finally Jy-ying spoke up. “I know why you are frightened. You think I’m a danger to you, perhaps out to kill Sabah when he is a baby. I am a captain in the Sabah Security Guards. As you may or may not know, the infidels sent two time travelers to this time on a mission that inadvertently made Sabah’s Great Victory possible. After the victory, the infidels sent these time travelers a message that Security assumed instructed them to prevent his success by killing Sabah or his parents. I was sent here to save Sabah.”

Janet nodded warily. *She could still be lying. She could have been the one to receive the message.*

Jy-ying paused for effect. “I have proof who the two time travelers are, and I have seen the message they received. They are Joy and John. They will try to kill Sabah.”

Janet was aghast. Her knees felt weak and she dropped down on the gravel about a step away from Jy-ying with a huge sigh. “This explains so much. No wonder they are so rich, although living such ordinary lives. No wonder they can toss money around like pennies. No wonder he is so successful. But I knew something was strange about them. They are like people from my own world. For this age, they are too re-

laxed, too informal, too colloquial, and their English—even their awful American English—doesn't fit into this time. And John treats Joy as an equal. But then, I thought, without the leveling effects of television, radio, or movies, anyone from two hundred kilom . . . miles away may appear strange.”

Janet's trembling had stopped. She stood and brushed the dirt off the back of her dress. She took a step to Jy-ying and put out her hand to help her up. “Shall we go where you were going?”

Jy-ying put Little Wei on the gravel and let Janet pull her up. She untwisted the leash and, still holding Janet's hand, she said, “I believe you are here to save Sabah also. Yes?”

“I am dedicated to saving Sabah. That's right. But as to my being sent here, that's another story.”

“Hold onto it. I'm going to take you to a pleasant place where you can tell me.”

Jy-ying drove her to a well-tended park, much like Regents Park in London, and explained that this was Golden Gate Park. “I come here often on picnics with Joy and John, or with Little Wei, just to read or think.”

They easily found a shaded park bench. Jy-ying unleashed Little Wei, who scampered off in bouncing happiness to smell and explore. She asked, “You are a Muslim?”

“Yes, a Sabah Muslim.”

“So am I, just to state what is obvious.”

Janet was back in the clouds. “I'm so happy, Jy-ying. You can't imagine how lonely I've been for someone to share this burden and my fear. God is Great. I love Ed very much and he fulfills me as much as is possible for one with my religion and passionate purpose. Oh, Ed is Christian, but tolerant of my religion. I go to my Friday sermons at the Ahmedi Mosque and do my prayers, and he goes to his St. Thomas Church on Easter and Christmas. He's almost agnostic, and I think that's the secret to his tolerance.”

Jy-ying was almost giddy herself. “Why are you so much involved in his Congo project?”

“To speed up decolonization and thus facilitate missionary Islam and eventually, the truth of Sabah. Also, I think the way these native peoples are exploited and murdered is a sin before God. And, Jy-ying, I also love Ed. I can help him in what he passionately believes and that is complementary to my own faith. And it gives me time to prepare.”

Her face flushed and her voice took on a sharp intensity. “Six years from now, Sabah will be born. While helping Ed I also have been taking classes in self-defense and weapons. I thought I would be well prepared in a few years to travel to Uighuristan to protect Sabah’s parents and Sabah. As long as I have a breath in me, no one is going to eliminate him.”

She took Jy-ying’s hand. “Now I’m not alone. I know who wants to kill him—Joy and John. Incredible. Now we can stop them together. Sabah be praised. It’s a miracle that we found each other.”

Jy-ying nodded. “Don’t do anything rash without planning it with me,” she warned. “We must act together. We have a world victory to save, the soul of mankind. We must be careful, and we have years for this. Tell me, why were you sent here?”

Janet turned toward Jy-ying and put her hand on the bench and leaned on it. “I wasn’t sent.” She instantly plunged from joy into abysmal grief. The emotional shift felt as if she were falling off a cliff. She drew in a sharp breath, and swiftly covered her mouth to smother a groan. Her voice quivered as she forced the words out between her fingers. “Horrible, horrible how I ended up here.”

She put her elbows on her knees and her head in hands, and shook. Jy-ying rubbed her back. She finally sat back, turned her wet eyes toward Jy-ying, and moaned, “I refused to think about it for years. I’ve buried as much as I could. Now, it’s all coming back. I’m sorry for the display.”

Jy-ying nodded sympathetically.

Janet looked off into the space of her memories. “I must start with my father, Bur Wadi.” She choked on his name, and her eyes overflowed with tears. She began to sob. “I’m sorry,” she said again, “I haven’t said his name since I came to this age, so many years ago.”

Jy-ying put her arm around Janet and held her close. “I’ve lost my Mom, Dad, and sister in civil war,” she said. “Cry as much as you like. I know how you feel.”

Janet put her head on Jy-ying’s shoulder, still crying. “He was Egyptian. I’ve been able to keep him in the back of my mind, although there is a sacred part of my heart where he will live for me forever. He was a great man and the greatest father—I am what I am because of him. He brought me up, after my mother was killed.”

Janet stopped, deep in memory. Little Wei had returned from his exploration. Sensing Janet’s grief, he jumped on the bench and tried to lick Janet’s face, but she had buried her face in her hands again. Jy-ying

held him off. Several passersby looked curiously at them, and one woman stopped and was about to come over, but Jy-ying motioned her on.

At that moment, a policeman appeared in front of their bench, and since Janet's face was buried in her hands, he bent down and looked closely at Jy-ying. "Is there something I can do for you ladies?"

Jy-ying's own eyes were wet. She lifted them to the policeman and replied in a shaky voice, "Thank you, officer. My friend has lost her father and mother and I'm trying to comfort her."

"If there is anything I can do, let me know. My mother died in the fire and your friend has my sympathy." He moved out of hearing, and stood with his arms crossed, signaling people not to bother them.

Finally Janet pulled back, took a handkerchief from her purse, and wiped her face. She shook her head and said, "Thanks. I've been alone with this for so long, so out of my time, so unable to tell anybody about this, I can't tell you how much meeting you means to me."

Tears trickled from Jy-ying's eyes. When Janet raised her eyebrows questioningly, she murmured, "My turn. You reminded me of what I have not thought of in a long time—my father's crumpled body, my mother's face destroyed by bullets. I . . . No, another time I'll tell you about it. Now I must hear about you."

Janet gave a huge sigh. "Yes, my father. I have to begin with him."

Chapter 21

Janet
Liverpool, 2003

Janet had gotten up unusually early this morning. While her father grabbed a donut and guzzled his coffee, she hinted that she would like to see the afternoon experiment. He just nodded, kissed her on the cheek, and rushed off.

Her father called her from his cell phone about an hour after he left. “Hello Dad, what’s happening?”

In a deep voice, he answered, “Are you free this afternoon, Janet? We are going to run our first experiment with a human being, and I thought you would like to see it.”

“Thanks, Dad. What time should I be there?”

“Try to make it before 1:30. See you then,” and he clicked off.

As she put the phone down on her bedroom dresser, her eyes fell on her mother’s photo, next to it. It was the only photo of her mother remaining in the house. Dad had destroyed all the others soon after her mother was captured and executed as a rebel.

Janet hardly thought of it anymore. She still loved her mother, but she had deserted them to fight against what they believed. Janet was sure it was the English blood in her—always prone to rebellion. Why she married an Egyptian Arab Janet did not know, but her mother and father were very close until Sabah’s Great Victory. When Dad told her mother he was a Sabah, although of the reformed sect, and she found out Janet shared that belief, she left within a week.

Janet picked up the photo and for the thousandth time kissed her mother’s face. They didn’t know what happened to her until her father was secretly informed by a friend in the security police that she had been captured attacking Imam William’s house and would be publicly executed in Sabah Stadium. She had changed her identity, but the friend recognized her prisoner’s photograph. As the top Sabah scientist in the country, Dad was afraid to try to communicate with her. He said he was worried about drawing attention to them. Sometimes in the case of terrorism, whole families of a captured rebel were executed.

While her father demanded that she stay home on her mother's execution day, he went to the stadium dressed as an old man, and managed to get a seat near the front so that she might see him and know that he still cared and that she did not die alone. She saw him. She smiled at him. And she was hanged along with nine criminals.

Janet put Mom's picture down, and looked out the window at the garden outside their suburban house. *So peaceful, so quiet. How many families, she wondered, have such horrible secrets as ours?*

It was almost noon. Janet hurried to take a shower to commit ablution. After toweling herself, she stood on her prayer rug facing southeast toward Mecca, and announced to herself her intention to observe the Noon Contact Prayer. She looked at the clock. It was noon. She raised her hands and touched her ears with her palms facing forward, then dropped her hands to her side, intoning, "*Allahu Akbar*—God is Great," to make contact with her creator.

She recited the Key in Arabic that unifies all Muslims, and bowed, placing her hands on her knees. "*Allahu Akbar*," she said while bowing. "*Subjaana Rabbiyal Azeem*—Glory be to God, the Great."

She continued to recite her prayers as she stood up, prostrated herself, stood up and prostrated herself again. As she got up the second time she said, "Sabah is His Prophet" and assumed her final sitting position. She looked to the right, as though someone was there, and said, "*Assalaamu Alaikum*—Peace be unto You." She repeated this while looking to the left, and then she was done. Mind at peace, her body rested, she felt at one with God and Sabah.

After lunch Janet drove to the newly constructed Schawlow Laser Institute, which was now the center of her father's work on the time machine. She enjoyed the pleasant drive from Liverpool through the woods and fields to the Center. She drove along a little stream until she crossed a small bridge, then drove through a clump of trees to the one-story brick building that stood on a small knoll.

The lovely setting used to be ruined by thick electrical cables looping into the building from nearby transformers on high voltage towers. But they had been placed deep underground to eliminate their vulnerability to rebels. Below the knoll, almost out of sight, a barbed wire, electrified fence protected the building. It had only one large gate, with guard posts on each side manned by three guards. An armored vehicle, always occupied, sat back from the gate. The perimeter of the fence was graveled and patrolled at odd hours.

The guards at the gate knew her by sight and waved her in.

She looked in her father's office for him, but as usual he was on the lab floor. She found him talking to two scientists, and waited a respectable distance away until he saw her. She looked around at the crazy machinery, some pieces the size of a garage, with black cables snaking between them. Off to one side stood the first human-sized model of the time machine. The scientists still had much to do on it, but they had already tested successfully a small-scale model. And they had picked a former British Special Forces man to send back to 1906 to find the infidel assassin planning to kill Sabah. He was undergoing training in the culture and technology of 1906 San Francisco. She'd met him at a party her dad hosted for the scientists. He was so handsome, she tingled when he said hello to her.

A humming noise filled the lab, seeming to resonate through the concrete floor. As Janet looked around, the sound increased in intensity, and her father broke off talking to the scientists, who hurried to their consoles.

Dad saw her, smiled, and joined her. "We're almost ready," he said. "We have a volunteer standing by." He motioned to his assistant scientific aide, Walter Keel, who was waiting by the open door of the time capsule. Walter gave her a little wave. "If all goes well, he will end up in a nearby glade, one week ago."

Walter was her boyfriend. She had been introduced to him when she visited the lab months ago. They'd chatted, and he called her two days later and invited her to have dinner with him. Since her dad usually came home very late in the evening and she had to eat dinner by herself, she'd jumped at the chance to eat out, and in the company of an interesting young man. They had dated several times after that. But nothing serious yet.

Janet was surprised. Walter had mentioned nothing to her about his volunteering for this.

A speaker blared, "Thirty minutes. Clear the floor. Initiating count-down."

Her father pointed to a booth. "We'll go there at minus five minutes."

She followed him and listened as he went from console to console, checking that everything was in order for the test.

"Minus fifteen minutes.

"Minus ten minutes.

"Minus six minutes."

The low-pitched rumble from the machines now increased to an uncomfortable level. Janet thought she heard rapid popping sounds and an explosion, barely audible above the noise. *It must be part of the experiment.*

Her father froze for a second, then jerked his head around to look at the door, eyes wide. He ran to her, grabbed her arm, and pointed to the concrete observation booth. He started tugging her toward it. Janet almost fell as he pulled her past Walter and the capsule.

Two explosions, one after another, blew aside the locked doors to the lab. Two men, covered head to toe in black with only their eyes showing, rushed onto the floor with their weapons firing. Her father swung her forward, putting his body between her and the gunmen.

Through their joined hands, Janet felt his body jerk as he was shot down.

She stared in horror at her father's prone form, then looked up for a moment to see two of the scientists who had been sitting at the largest console now hunched down beside it, violently gesturing for Walter to get into the time capsule. She didn't care; it didn't concern her. Her father had saved her life and now he was dead. He lay on the floor in a growing pool of blood. She knelt down and took his head in her hands and kissed him. She would never leave him. Crazy with anguish, she had no thoughts—just the overwhelming desire to die with him. She waited for death and Paradise as she held her father's head in her hands and stroked his cooling cheek. Bullets whizzed around them.

Walt suddenly grabbed Janet under the arms and jerked her away from her father. As she screamed, "No. No!" he threw her into the time machine and started climbing in after her.

His head exploded. He fell against the open door, slamming it shut.

Terrified, gasping for breath, Janet reached for the door, wanting only to get out. She heard bullets hitting the capsule as she tried to push the door open. Just then, the machine roared louder and louder, painfully louder, until she covered her ears with her hands. She felt a tingling sensation, and dizziness transcended her horror.

Abruptly the roaring stopped, and with it her tingling and dizziness. Bullets no longer struck the capsule. No sounds penetrated its walls. She was left heaving short, terrified breaths, seeing only the awful images of poor Walt and her father, dead.

Shaking all over, mind fogged by horror, she could only curl up in a ball and sob. She wept until there were no more tears. Her body was burned out, her mind mush. It must have been hours later and more

time still before she gathered her senses enough to accept that she might no longer be in the Center. But instrumentation had not yet been installed in the capsule and she had no way of knowing where she was—or when.

Janet remained huddled in the bottom of the capsule. She was afraid to move, terribly afraid to open the door. She was not afraid to die. She was afraid of what world would suddenly blast through the door when she opened it. She drew her knees up to her chin and shuddered. Never, never could she have imagined this. If this was a nightmare, it was the most horrible one possible.

She screamed. She screamed louder. She put her hands over her face and screamed into them and held it as long as she could. Her throat burned, but she did not wake up. It was real. She put her head in her hands. Her heart pounded in her ears.

Eventually her mind began to emerge from its emotional wreck. She had to do something. And there was only one something to do. Trembling, she raised a weary hand to the door latch and slowly pushed open the capsule door. Fresh air caressed her face and she heard birds chirping and the rustle of branches. The sky was light blue, with puffs of white clouds. It was so bright that her eyes flinched shut and she had to squint until they adjusted. There was the smell of woodland, of growing things and rotting leaves and wood. She was in a small, grassy glade with oak trees all around. Through the trees she could see a field and, in the distance, two low, mud-brown houses with what looked like thatched roofs. A horse was pulling a cart across the field.

There must be a road there, she thought, the first evidence her mind was beginning to function beyond pointing to the door.

She was somewhere at some time, but she didn't know what to do. If she stayed in the machine she would die. If she left the machine, she might soon die as well. She had no clothes other than those on her back. Her purse was on the floor back in the lab. She had no money, no identification, no job, and knew no one.

Janet closed the door and scrunched herself in the bottom of the capsule again. She rubbed her eyes with both hands, and tried to think. *Dad is dead. The anti-Sabah guerrillas killed him to stop the time machine. Maybe they were the same guerrilla group Mom belonged to. Don't think about that.*

“Why am I here?” she asked herself out loud, hoping the sound of a voice—even hers—would steady her. “Because Dad was testing this time machine. Why was he doing that? Because Imam William set up

this project when he heard from Dad that the Peking project might have been a failure.”

There'd been something said about a power drain at the worst moment in the time travel. Her father had been doing research on time travel ever since he heard rumors that an American had been sent back in time, and that a message might have been sent to the American since Sabah's Great Victory. He went to Imam William's Palace, argued that he should undertake a British attempt, and was given a blank check on resources.

“Why?”

Janet thought through all her father had tried to tell her in his sweet way. He really didn't confide in her as an adult, but in his broken sentences and monosyllables, it became clear over the years that this research and experimentation was not for the sake of science. It was to protect Sabah. God be praised. The Imam, as did the World Council of Clerics, believed the message sent back in time contained instructions to kill Sabah's parents before Sabah was born, or kill Sabah soon after his birth.

“Yes,” she said aloud. “That's the reason that Special Forces man was chosen for the time travel. He was going to go back and protect Sabah. Dad never put it in those words, but I guess that protection meant killing the time traveler who received the message.”

She really had not thought about it much before. She stared at the door, trying to relate it all to her horrible predicament. *Science and Dad's work was another world. I was interested in Walt. I wanted to be a good Muslim. I wanted to marry and have children and a good husband.*

Dad is dead. He died trying to save Sabah. Sabah the Prophet. My Holy One. All that is left of his project is . . . me.

Her mind focused on that. *I am all that remains of his mission—Dad's great mission. I could finish it for him. I could be the one that saves Sabah.*

Her mind centered on that like a flashlight beam on a black night. Tighter and tighter she focused; larger and larger it loomed in her mind. *I can save Holy Sabah. Me! For Dad. For all the Sabahists of the world. For Islam. For God. God is great.*

Janet could feel the emotional transformation as her mind reconstructed itself. It had been like disparate pieces of torn and ripped metal strewn all over her mental field by the devastating hammer blows of her father's murder, then Walt's. Then this incredible time travel.

The sudden realization that she could save Sabah and fulfill her father's mission was like a magnet, pulling all the metal pieces of her mind together and aligning them with her emotions. She had a vision of them all forming a deadly arrow pointing toward the time traveler who would kill Sabah. She could feel that arrow, she could see it in her mind. It began to burn and vibrate. It took her over completely and drove her with one thought: She would be the one to protect Sabah. She would be the one to kill his enemy. She would be the one if she had to crawl on her stomach to find him and use her nails and teeth to kill him.

She yelled, "I will do it for you, Dad. And for Sabah!"

She could not prostrate herself in the capsule, but she could bow her head. She went through her Dawn Prayer—this was the dawn of a new life for her—imitating the proper body motions as best she could. She ended with, "*Ash-Hadu Allaa Elaaha Ellaa Allah, Wahdahu Laa Shareeka Lah*—I bear witness that there is no other god beside God. He *alone* is God; He has no partner."

I am reborn.

Janet firmly opened the door and stepped out of the capsule. Without looking at the bullet-dented exterior, she slammed the door shut. She pointed herself toward the road, and started pushing through the trees. She no longer feared this new world or how she would survive. God was on her side. She just had to take one step at a time.

It was not easy to get through the trees. Low-lying bushes, broken tree limbs, dead trees, and vigorous undergrowth hampered her, but finally she stumbled onto the field. It was even worse. It had not been plowed for some years, and was full of brambles, potholes, low vines, and stringy bushes that eagerly trapped her feet and tore at her skin. She wore only her light leisure shoes, and the field kept trying to steal them from her. A denim dress worn above her knees, and a sleeveless blue shirt were no protection. By the time she hobbled to what was a narrow dirt road, her legs were badly scratched and her feet were sore and bleeding.

Janet looked up and down the road. *Civilization! What next?*

It was pleasantly warm, even though more clouds had shadowed the sun. But now, as she stood in the middle of the road waiting to meet the denizens of this new world, she started to shiver. The scratches on her legs and the cuts on her feet began to sting. She put her arms over her chest and thought again of what she had to do, and invented one key word that would put any danger or fear in perspective. It was "Dad." That would be her key word, and as she focused on it, she stopped shivering. But she couldn't help the tears as she waited for what would come.

Finally she saw a beat-up wooden cart drawn by a tired looking mule coming toward her. An old man whose head almost disappeared beneath a wide-brimmed hat and an old woman with a shawl over her hair sat on the cart's narrow wooden seat. Janet immediately thought of the woman as someone's grandmother. The man reined in the mule when she waved at them.

Janet could tell how awful she looked when the grandmother quickly reached into the back of the cart and grabbed an old buggy lap robe, with what she supposed was hay and other things adhering to it. The woman scrambled down from the cart despite her age and rushed to wrap it around Janet's shoulders. It hung down, covering her bare legs. Janet just stood there, afraid to say a word. The man just sat holding the reins and watching with large eyes.

The grandmother put her face close to Janet's and asked with compassion, in an odd accent, "What happened to you, girl?"

She speaks English. Great! Janet had given no thought to what she would say, but the words tumbled out. "I don't know. I found myself on the ground in the field," and she waved her hand toward it, "and don't remember how I got there or anything else."

She began to cry. She really didn't have to fake it. The grandmother put her arms around her shoulders. Through her tears Janet asked, "Could you take me to a hospital, please?"

Finally, the old man spoke up. "The nearest one is in Liverpool, too far away. Take us all day to get there. I'll take you to Doc Hawkins."

They sat her between them on the uncomfortable seat and she was so exhausted she put her head on the grandmother's shoulder and fell into a half sleep as they bumped, bounced, and swayed down the road. She thought she could walk faster, but she was now going somewhere in England with English-speaking people, and she had an explanation for her condition. She no longer had any fear. She was on her way.

They entered a small town with one stone road down the center, a few two-story stores, a pub, and perhaps ten or more small houses. They stopped at the largest one, which had a white picket fence in front and a little white sign with *Dr. Jeremy Hawkins* in black lettering.

Grandmother helped her down from the cart, took her hand and led her into the house. Inside it looked like a small clinic. The living room had been turned into a reception room, with a parlor divan, three hard-backed armless chairs, and an ancient desk behind which sat a trim, middle-aged woman in a white smock. A pregnant woman sat on the divan and a man with worn and torn coveralls waited on a chair, with his heavily bandaged foot thrust so far out they had to walk around it.

The pregnant woman greeted Grandmother with smile, and the man automatically tried to stand in greeting, but Grandmother told him, "George, if you get up I'll stomp on your foot." George gave up the attempt and doffed his sweat-discolored straw hat.

Grandmother approached the desk with Janet, said, "Hello Mary," to the woman behind it, and told her, "This poor girl has had some kind of accident. She stopped us on the road by Simpson's farm." She pulled the blanket away from Janet's legs in a way that the man would not see, and said, "Look at her legs, and her feet are bleeding. She doesn't remember what happened. She must have lost her outer clothes, also." Grandmother leaned forward and whispered, "Or they were taken from her."

Mary look alarmed. "You don't recognize her at all, Helen?"

"No. She must be from far up the road, or maybe even from Liverpool. Her English is strange, so maybe her parents are foreigners. I think the doc should look at her."

Mary nodded and said, "Wait a moment, and I'll give you your robe back." She stood and took Janet's hand, and led her into a bedroom. She took a clean sheet out of a pile on a white metal table near the door and replaced the blanket with it. "Wait here," she said.

But with the sheet around her, Janet followed Mary out, and said to Helen as Mary was handing the blanket to her, "Thank you for picking me up and bringing me here."

Helen gave her a grandmotherly smile, and left.

Doctor Hawkins treated Janet's scratches with iodine. Janet gritted her teeth and refused to cry out from the pain. He diagnosed her inability to remember as a reaction to what had been done to her. He didn't ask Mary to examine her for rape, which Janet gathered they would only do with the permission of her parents.

God be praised. She was a virgin.

She was given a room at the clinic, treated nicely, sometimes ate with Mary, who turned out to be Dr. Hawkins's wife, or sometimes ate with both of them. Mary found clothes that almost fit her, and she was able to wear them in some comfort. They tried to help her with her memory by answering all her questions, even those that normally would have been absurd.

The year was 1888. She was in the little village of Fearnhead, about twenty kilometers east of Liverpool.

The doctor sent a young boy to the county sheriff, describing Janet's amnesia. In a week the sheriff visited the clinic and questioned

her. He shook his head and said, "We have checked around the county and I have written a circular on you and sent it to neighboring counties and Liverpool. No one has a missing girl even near the age of sixteen."

That was the age Dr. Hawkins guessed she was.

The sheriff contacted the Women's Protective League in Liverpool and a week later he told her, "The League has arranged for a family in Liverpool, the Wilsons, to take you in until your own family reports you missing, wherever they are. The Wilsons' two sons are grown, married, and now living in London. I recommend that you accept their offer, although by law you have no say in the matter. Janet accepted.

Janet couldn't have been luckier. James and Ester Wilson were a wonderful foster family. They had always wanted a daughter in addition to their sons, but the two that were born had not survived their first year. Janet even had her own private bedroom, which had belonged to their sons. The Wilsons were lower middle class, Mr. Wilson being a freight foreman on the Liverpool docks. They didn't have that much money, but they were more than happy to help her buy suitable clothes and necessities.

They were Christians, really Anglicans. They thought the Christian Crusades had been a holy effort and regretted that they had not succeeded in converting the Muslim heathens. More than heathens, they saw Muslims as savages. Janet secretly prayed in her bedroom when she could, and she was sure that God understood and allowed for such exceptions, just as He did for soldiers in time of war. She went to church with the Wilsons every Sunday, and did what they did at the service. In her mind and heart, when everyone prayed, hers were to her own God Allah and to Sabah. She was sure that God would understand as well.

Girls did not ordinarily go on to secondary school, for that was thought unnecessary for their work in the home. But this was the era of educational reform and girls in increasing numbers were going on to complete high school, and a few even went to college. Since she was thought to be sixteen, she could complete the last years of high school and requested of the Wilsons that she be allowed to do so, and they approved. This would give her a chance to learn about life and customs in general in this era, how people dressed, and so on. Janet could learn only so much from Mrs. Wilson. She also could begin the background work for her studies of Islam and Middle Asia in preparation for protecting Sabah, and about the United States to aid in her search for the one who would try to assassinate him.

They enrolled her in Liverpool High School beginning in September of 1888.

For the first school day, Ester Wilson wrote a note to the school pointing out Janet's lack of memory, and stating that she would need special help. This was circulated to her teachers, who informed her fellow students. From the beginning, she had help from her classmates, who treated her profound ignorance of things they knew so well with tolerance and kindness.

The boys treated her with the teasing that all the girls got and she soon learned by watching the other girls how to respond to it—with giggles, feigned horror, and sometimes a serious kick or punch the teachers would not see.

After high school she had to go to college to specialize in Middle Asia. With perfect grades and her doctor's written description of her amnesia and his recommendation, she was one of the few women admitted to Liverpool University. But she had to pay her way. Her foster family did not have the money, nor the position in society for her to get the proper recommendations for a scholarship. Anyway, she was a woman, and since not many women went to college, such aid for women was rare. So were ordinary part-time jobs.

Janet was determined to go to college. She had to learn about Middle Asia, where Sabah was born. She had to learn his language. Two years in this old world had not lessened her desire to save him, to do in his memory what her father wanted done. That arrow of emotion pointing toward saving Sabah had only strengthened and grown with time.

High school girls hear things. Janet found out that some of the rich boys were bragging about a whorehouse they had visited. She made friends with one of the boys and got him talking about where he had been while at the same time fending off his hands. She had the name, but could only get the address when she let him put his hand under her sweater.

When she graduated from high school and was ready to attend college, she knew what she had to do. She refused to waste time and put it off, regardless of her fright, embarrassment, and shame. When the day came, she first prayed and asked God for strength, and asked Him to understand that she was doing this to save Sabah. She asked for His forgiveness. She completed her prayers with "*Allahu Akbar*" and, while bowing, "*Subjaana Rabbiyal Azeem.*"

She asked her foster mother if she could borrow one of the family horses for the day, to look for a job in Liverpool. With an answering

“Good luck,” she rode off to Madam Camille’s house in Seaforth, a little town on the outskirts of Liverpool, along Liverpool Bay. It was a three-story home with a splendid view of the Bay that had been built by a wealthy shipper some fifty years before. It had a four-column porch, high porticos in the four corners, and from what Janet could see from the outside, many bedrooms. She lifted the large doorknocker—a happy man’s face in solid brass—and was surprised at the heavy thump it made when she released it.

A large, dark-skinned man with a gray beard and turban opened the door and looked at her strangely. Janet nervously asked to see Madam Camille. The turbaned man looked her over in a tired way, and waved her in with a bow. “Wait here,” he said, and left her standing in the foyer.

Janet heard voices in another room and edged toward the door so she could look in. She saw a living room of a size comparable to those in most homes. Above a huge fireplace hung a large painting of a beautiful young woman in a ballroom dress. Heavy chenille drapes covered the windows, and there was a bar in a corner of the room. Five women lounged on red upholstered easy chairs and heavily cushioned divans and couches. Two were chatting and laughing, two looked bored, and one was reading. No men were present.

An attractive young woman in a loose housedress came out of a side room and approached her. Janet saw immediately that she was the one in the painting. Her face had none of the makeup customary for this time period’s prostitutes. She had well brushed sandy hair curled around her shoulders and piercing eyes that gave her a confident look. She approached Janet and said, “I am Chastity Camille. Can I help you?”

Janet’s eyebrows shot up and she inhaled sharply, momentarily stopping her knees from shaking. The woman was no more than twenty-one. Janet was so nervous her voice wavered and she stuttered, “Excuse m-me, *you* are Ma-Madam Camille?”

Camille laughed. “You find me a little young, perhaps. Now tell me, younger lady, why are you here?”

Dad! Janet thought, hoping her key word would help. It did. She visualized the neon arrow pointing toward saving Sabah. “I need a job.” She threw the words out.

Camille slowly looked her up and down. Janet straightened and raised her chin. “I need money to go to the university.”

Camille looked into her eyes and nodded. “How old are you?”

“My real age is twenty. Recorded age is eighteen.”

Camille took her arm and led her into the room she had came out of. It was a friendly room, with a teak secretarial desk and two hard-backed chairs near the door, an ordinary four poster bed with a Roman lounge next to it, a large seascape on the wall behind it, and more seascapes on adjacent walls. Lacy curtains were pulled back from windows that looked onto Liverpool Bay. There were gaslights on three of the walls, and several five-prong cathedral tabletop candleholders held pink candles. Janet liked the room. It could have been hers, except for the cross hanging by the bed.

Shutting the door behind her, Camille motioned for Janet to sit down in one of the chairs while she sat on the lounge. “Tell me about yourself,” she said.

Janet told her about her amnesia, her foster parents, and her schooling. She told her about her interest in Middle Asia and her desire to get a degree in it, and maybe a graduate degree in London afterward. But she could do nothing without money, which her foster parents did not have. Camille was friendly and sympathized with Janet’s amnesia and the loss of her real parents.

“You are a virgin?”

“Yes.”

“How far have you gone with boys?”

Janet could feel her face getting hot. “My breasts.”

“What did you do with the boy?”

“What do you mean?” Janet barely got out, looking down at her hands clasped on her lap.

“You didn’t touch him.”

“No,” she squeaked.

Camille leaned back on her side and supported her head with her hand. “Janet. Look at me,” she said softly. “Are you absolutely positive you want to let men—some old, some fat, some stinking like a pig pen—do anything they want with your body? Are you sure you will do anything, *anything*, to make them happy while they are with you?”

Janet was sweating and couldn’t help the tear that started down her cheek. *Let me die*, she thought. But she swiped at the tear, lifted her head up, and tried to look Camille squarely in the eye.

The word would not come out. *Please, God!*

“Yes,” she barely croaked. Then firmly, “Yes!”

“Here is the deal, if I accept you. I can give you room and board, the cost to be taken out of your weekly earnings. Or you can live elsewhere, and come in to work on a fixed schedule. As an apprentice for

six months, you would get 25 percent of what the men pay me. After that it is 50 percent. But if you become popular among the men and some women that visit us, if you attract new clients, I will increase that to 60 percent.

“Any freelancing and I will immediately fire you. If you fall in love with a client, I will fire you. If you fight with another girl over a client, I will fire you. When working, you will wait in the living room. Men choose there. If you are chosen you take the man to your appointed room, and do whatever they ask. Period. Men can reserve you for a certain time, but it costs them extra. Otherwise, it is first come, first choice, so to say.

“I have two doctors come in once a week to check all my girls for disease.

“Virginity is special and among my clientele, it cannot be faked. So I would auction you for the highest bidder, with a privately circulated announcement. I will be auctioneer, and you will be on display at my side, fully clothed and modest-looking, of course. This is so special I would give you one-half of the highest bid. Agreed so far?”

Janet nodded, much too vigorously, but she couldn't trust her voice. Camille sat up and said, “Take off all your clothes.”

Janet almost gasped, but controlled it. She stood and removed her clothes with shaking hands.

“Turn around.”

Janet almost twirled.

“Slowly, girl.”

Camille got up behind her and felt and squeezed her breasts and buttocks. “Okay, lay on the bed.”

Shivering with embarrassment, Janet did so. Camille poked and prodded her, and asked her to take various positions.

“Okay, get dressed. You are in your prime, with excellent looks and a trim and healthy body. And you are clean. You have taken care of yourself. When my clients see your beauty and hear about your body and talents—which my girls and I will train you in—men are going to be rutting for you like bulls among cows in heat. I like you. You're no cheap whore off the street. Nor are you some stupid kid out for thrills, or to spite some lover. I respect why you want the money.

“One more thing. You have too much hair down there. It would all have to be shaved off. Can't hide your jewel, can we?”

When Janet was dressed and standing in front of her, Camille took both her hands in hers and smiled. “I offer you work,” she said. “Will you take it?”

Janet was close to fainting. She nodded.

Camille hugged her and kissed her on both cheeks. “Welcome to my home. I will introduce you to my girls after you sign this.” She went to her desk and pulled a form out of a drawer. “Read this. It details what I said. It is protection for both of us. I am legal; I can take you to court or you can sue me. But I assure you, I run a respectable house, and I am fair and honest with my girls and clients. No drunks are allowed. No man is ever permitted back here if he ever hits or abuses my girls.”

Janet signed, her hand surprisingly steady.

The bidding brought in ten pounds, paid by an India Company top executive, for a full night with Janet. Her share paid her university tuition and living expenses for one month. From then on she lived at Camille’s and worked two nights a week. Her foster family thought she had a part-time job as a secretary in a shipping firm, and lived in a small apartment in town.

She majored in Asian studies—there was only one course on Middle Asia—and took all the courses she could on Islam and other religions. There were no courses on the Uighur language, but she hired a Uighur student in medicine to tutor her.

For some reason having to do with her hearing, French was more difficult for her than Uighur. But, she had to learn French to graduate, so she hired a French tutor. His name was Edmund Dene Morel. She soon discovered his anger over the mistreatment of the Congo natives, and that he intended to do something about it. That this lowly clerk was going to fight Goliath attracted her to him. When she also found out what a good man he was, she fell in love with him. But she kept it contained. She had to finish her studies and she had to continue her work for Camille to do so. Ed was poor and could barely support himself.

Six months after meeting Ed, she moved into her own cheap apartment, while continuing her work for Camille until a month before her final exams. The last day she went in to work, the house was empty of men and all the girls were waiting for her. It was a graduation party for her. One large banner was hung across the fireplace: *Congratulations, Janet.*

Camille gave a long toast to Janet: “How naive and innocent she was when she first came to our house, and now she is teaching me tricks. With Janet leaving, the clientele will fall off by 50 percent. But Janet has found the love of her life. No, not the French condom with all the rough, knobby protrusions, but a man. We should all take pity on him, for Janet will kill him from exhaustion in six months.”

After the toast, Camille's turbaned butler, who always seemed to be nearby, carried into the living room a large, flat, gaily wrapped package. He handed it to Camille, who handed it to Janet. "For you, dear." Janet unwrapped it to reveal a sensual painting of a long boat and several two-masted sailing ships on a shimmering, choppy sea. She could almost smell the salt water. And it could have been a view of Liverpool Bay through a window of Camille's house. The painting bore a plaque: *Claude Monet; The Entrance to the Port of Honfleur*.

A small pink card was attached: *Hang this on a nice wall, and always let it remind you of our love for you. Our fondest hopes for your happiness and success—Camille and Girls.*

Chapter 22

Jy-ying
San Francisco, 1908

Janet looked into the distance, deep in her own story. “I married Ed a year after graduation. My love for him has only grown greater in the years since.”

Jy-ying had to ask. “Did you tell Ed about your work for Camille?”

“No, he knew nothing of that. I suppose I could have told him. He never asked me about any lovers, which my lovemaking must have told him were many. He just accepted it. I just told him that I did not remember anything before sixteen because of my amnesia, and that I was working my way through college as a secretary. I didn’t want to take a chance with his love for me. Men are funny about this, and hard to predict. So this has been one of my many secrets from him.”

“Like Sabah?”

“Yes, like Sabah.”

Jy-ying asked quietly, “Now that you are happily married to a man you love so much, what about your resolve to save Sabah?”

Her voice grew steely with determination. “I will do all I can to save him. Nothing can change that. Nothing, Jy-ying. Nothing.” She looked down at her clenched fists on her lap, and visibly tried to relax. But her vocal cords graveled her words. “In our work on the Congo, Ed is often gone on trips for many weeks at a time. Because of my major in college, he will understand if I want to make a trip to Uighuristan, and I was going to arrange it so that he would have to go somewhere on a trip of his own. I knew I would be there for years, and that he would increasingly wonder, and demand my return. I hoped that I could return to him eventually.”

Her voice softened to a whisper. “Also, you know, I have refused to have children, although I know Ed wants many. I couldn’t. I want his children, Jy-ying. Oh, I want them. But it would be too much of an emotional burden on top of having to leave Ed, perhaps . . . forever.”

Her tears started to flow again. “And it wouldn’t have been fair to the children if I got killed, even though they probably would be grown by the time I left to do what I must.”

Her voice firmed again. “I have a duty to my father, to that young assistant, Walt, to the scientists who died sending me off, and . . .” She thrust her chin out. “Excuse me for getting corny . . . to humanity.”

She wiped her face with one hand, and looked at Jy-ying for the first time in many minutes. “But now, Jy-ying, with our finding each other, all that is changed.”

Jy-ying stood and moved in front of her. She leaned over and took Janet’s head in her hands and kissed her forehead. She looked into Janet’s eyes and said, “Janet, we are partners. You are not alone in your duty. We share it. *We* will do it. It is as though God brought us together. With my skills, your Middle Asian expertise, particularly on Uighuristan, and our dedication, we are the perfect team.”

Jy-ying sat down and, holding Janet’s hand, she described her own background, her lover Shu Kuo, her maneuvering for the time travel here. She said her present mission had changed after she found out about Joy and John—save Sabah, to be sure, but also promote democracy and end war, for that provided the fertile ground for the rise of Sabah and his Great Victory. And she agreed that Janet’s work with Ed for decolonization contributed to this.

Janet asked, “You had no relatives, nothing to hold you there except your lover?”

“That’s right, and I now realize that I loved Shu Kuo more as a man than a person. There could be other men, but only one person. You found yours; I have yet to find mine.” *I think I have*, she thought. *In John.*

“What happened to your parents?”

“Neither one was a Muslim. My father was a teacher of wing chun kung fu, and started teaching it to me at an early age. Both my parents were caught in a rebellion and killed. I was at home with them when the soldiers of the democratic forces led by anti-Sabah General Li Tu seized Anyang. They started raping and looting. Two soldiers burst into our home. I was eighteen years old. My father ordered my sister and me to hide in the attic. I wanted to stand with my dad and fight, but I never saw him so angry as he demanded I climb to the attic, so I did. I found a little crack and watched what happened. My father tried to fight them off with his skill, but they shot him. They raped my mother, and shot her in the face afterward.

“I became a Sabah Muslim as a result. I lied about my age and joined Sabah’s Security Service as a teacher of wing chun. I was later promoted to other jobs in Security, the last being to help protect the time travel effort.”

Little Wei was asleep on the walk by the bench, his little toes twitching with his dream.

Jy-ying got up and said, “Shall we return?”

The policeman was still standing by them, and they walked over to him hand in hand. Jy-ying told him, “That was very nice. Thank you, officer.”

He tipped his helmet and walked off. They went to the Rolls and Jy-ying drove them back to the apartments.



Joy

When Jy-ying and Janet walked in, John, Joy, and Ed were still sitting at the table talking, and stopped to greet the two. Janet’s eyes were puffy and red, and her cheeks flushed. Ed was about to continue the discussion with Joy and John, and stopped. He asked Janet, “Are you okay?”

“I’m okay,” she responded, smiling broadly. “Just got dust in my eyes.” Ed nodded.

John looked at Janet and Jy-ying, and then at Joy. Nodding his head toward the two, he raised an eyebrow, but said nothing. He looked at the Swiss cuckoo clock on the wall, saw it was near dinner, and suggested that they all go to the Fior d’Italia, a new Italian restaurant on Union Street, for dinner.

Everyone agreed, and retired to their respective apartments to freshen up beforehand. As soon as the others left and closed the door behind them, John confronted Joy. “Okay,” he said, “what’s going on with Jy-ying and Janet?”

Joy responded immediately. “There is something strange going on here. Janet is an unusual person, and my intuition tells me there is something more to her. Then that long absence with Jy-ying. It’s hard to explain why Janet, with her great involvement and interest in Ed’s work, would absent herself so long from our discussion.”

John was silent, and scratched his head. “Maybe it’s Little Wei. You know how women are about little dogs. She might just have found it more fun playing with him than jawing with us.”

“Okay, why did she look like she’d been crying?”

John smiled at that. “Guess she got something in her eye, as she said.”

“Hmmm,” Joy mused, frowning.



Janet

Ed and Janet changed their travel plans so that they could stay in San Francisco for a month. Ed had many telegram exchanges, trying to reschedule his meetings and appointments in Liverpool, and adjusting his publication deadlines for the *West African Mail*. John also told his office manager that he and Joy would be taking a month-long vacation immediately, but to call if there was a problem or an important decision to be made.

They asked Hands, Sal, and Dolphy to come and meet Ed and Janet. Dolphy brought his new girlfriend, Mariko, whom he’d met at college. Janet noted that there was some tension and distance between Sal and Jy-ying. When Janet had a moment with Joy, she said, “Sal seemed to avoid Jy-ying during the evening. Is there a problem between them?”

“Yes. They had a close relationship for a short while and Jy-ying broke it up. Personality differences, I gather. Although Sal has said he’s over it, that’s still not quite true.”

“Obviously,” Janet responded.

After that the Morels and Joy and John spent much time together, touring San Francisco, having relaxing picnics that included Jy-ying, and discussing their missions. Janet and Jy-ying also had frequent private discussions about Sabah, China, and England, and about their experiences in this “primitive” world. But mostly about Joy and John.

Janet was growing close to Joy, who always seemed interested in what she had to say, especially about her amnesia and subsequent education. She finally told Joy about her work for Camille, and Joy was sympathetic. What she seemed to have difficulty understanding was Janet’s majoring in Middle Eastern studies, a rare field for a woman. Joy kept asking how her interest in that field developed—what “sparked it,” in Joy’s words. Janet was having a hard time with this, and was getting uncomfortable with her lies. It was becoming difficult to keep her stories straight.

But if she had difficulty, Joy’s lies were so creaky as to fall down like termite-eaten outhouses if Janet gave them a slight push. But she

didn't. She knew Joy was lying about being born in New York of Sino-Vietnamese immigrants, her father training her in martial arts, university schooling in government and applied math, her job with the Tor Import and Export Company when it was started in New York, her growing close relationship with John, and the death of both their parents and their large inheritances when their parents died. But Janet listened attentively and asked appropriate questions. And she laughed about it all with Jy-ying when describing Joy's open-eyed, sincere look when telling her lies.

"It's a circus of lies," Jy-ying murmured unhappily. "Me to Joy, John, Ed, and the three guys; you to them all; and Joy and John to you, Ed, and the guys."

Janet looked away, into her own thoughts, and mentally sighed. *I hate it. But it comes with my pledge to my dead father and to Sabah. It's what I have to do, like working at Madam Camille's.*



About a week before Ed and Janet were scheduled to leave, Janet lamented to Jy-ying, "I don't want to kill them. I really don't. I like them. They have good hearts. But I know—they have to die to save Sabah. And it would be my father's wish. I've never killed anyone, Jy-ying. I've never killed anything, not even a rat. I hate to step on cockroaches in the kitchen. But I've got to. We've got to."

Jy-ying nodded with understanding. She told her, "Let us think about this. They are doing what we want them to do in preparing the world for Sabah's Great Victory. But," and Jy-ying smiled, "John is the historian and is the one who knows what to do for their mission. Joy is his guardian and keeps him happy in body and soul. I could replace her in that. So, she is dispensable. The question is how to get rid of Joy without alienating John."

Ah ha, thought Janet. I knew she had this growing thing for John. I've got my love Ed. She has only Little Wei. Cute as he is, he's no replacement for a man. But still, she's right. We need only eliminate Joy.

Jy-ying continued with, "We must kill her in a way that will look natural, given their mission. There are many ways of doing this. We have to think about it."

Now that it had come down to actual killing, Janet was emotionally repelled and morally queasy. She could not do it directly, nor even be present at the killing. *Oh merciful God, Jy-ying's got to do it.*

They were in Jy-ying's apartment. Little Wei had his forepaws on the front windowsill and was barking at a bird that had landed on a tree branch close to the window. Janet was glad for the distraction and watched him as he leaped up against the window several times.

Deep in thought, Jy-ying ignored him. Thoughtfully, she put her fingers alongside her mouth with her thumb under her chin. Her eyes narrowed. "Do you have any contacts in Mexico?"

The question appeared irrelevant to anything they were discussing and surprised Janet, but she responded, glad for the different topic. "Why, yes, many contacts. Especially among the Indians, who feel that they live under Spanish and French inherited colonialism. Some of the rich with Indian blood in them have been contributing to Ed's work. They see his Congo Reform Association as the only major effort to deal with colonialism and—"

Jy-ying held up her hand to stop the flow. "Well, I now know enough about Joy and John to say that the sooner we kill Joy, the better."

Oh God, Janet thought again.

Jy-ying finally realized that Little Wei's barking was distracting. She got up, went to the window, and picked him up. As he struggled to get back to the window, she placed him on the floor by her armchair, wagged her finger at him, and commanded, "*Dai—Stay.*"

His ears partly back, tail down, he settled on his stomach, put his head on his paws, and looked up at her sadly.

Jy-ying immediately turned to Janet. "I have an idea."



Joy

The three of them—John, Joy, and Jy-ying—saw Ed and Janet off at the train station with much hand-shaking and kisses. Joy had grown close to Janet despite the strangeness she sensed about her, and John and Morel had also become good friends. They saw each other as warriors, together fighting the evils destroying so many lives.

Joy was surprised that, given all the powerful toes Ed had stepped on, no one had yet tried to assassinate him. She told John about her fear and together they armed Ed and Janet. She would carry a holster purse and a gun identical to Jy-ying's, who helped her buy it. Joy could not find an appropriate purse, even in the many cowboy equipment stores,

and Jy-ying said Chinese Security had made hers. So Joy bought a purse of roughly similar design to hers and hired a tailor to rebuild the inside into a holster, while leaving space for the normal female clutter.

Getting a good shoulder holster for Ed and a military Browning 1903 to put in it was no problem.

Almost every day, Joy and John had taken the Morels and Jy-ying to the weapons range to practice. Ed and Janet were now well over the stage of “What is this little curved piece sticking down with a metal rim around it—a trigger, you say. What’s it do?” Joy was also happy to see that Jy-ying knew her own Browning 1900 pistol very well, and was an excellent shot with it. To Joy’s annoyance, Jy-ying tried to instruct John on the proper shooting stance. With an amused glance at Joy, he continued to get it wrong.

Jy-ying often challenged Joy to shooting contests, to the amusement of the others, and neither one turned out clearly superior. It was clear to Joy that Jy-ying considered it more than a sporting contest, the way she concentrated, and her sour mood when she lost.

Joy also was growing concerned about their martial arts sparring—it was getting too serious. While John watched one session, Joy had barely blocked a hard knuckle fist to the face. It had landed on her shoulder, which was sore for days afterward. Then Jy-ying had thrown Joy so hard to the mat, she heard her joints crack. She was also sore from that. She had gotten tougher herself as a result, but they couldn’t get much tougher with each other without serious injury. Joy didn’t understand why Jy-ying had gotten so competitive lately.

Joy had watched John carefully during their practice with the Morels, and felt she still had a few things to teach John about weapons and martial arts—she was not about to leave that to Jy-ying. But until his speed and accuracy improved, she’d stand behind him and wear her armored vest during his target practices.

After Janet and Ed left, it was back to work for Joy and John. They had neglected their company and John had put off his investments. It was not as bad for Joy, since Jy-ying had continued working and had taken up some of the slack for her. Now they had much to do, including preparing for their first political intervention in Mexico.

Chapter 23

Joy
1908

By September, Joy and John were ready for their first foreign intervention to promote democratic peace. Their goal was to prevent the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920, which in the Old Universe had cost about two million lives, many killed in cold blood.

They traveled to Mexico City and there arranged to have Pancho Villa and Emiliana Zapata assassinated. Those two assassinations saved tens of thousands of Mexican lives. They also supported democrat Francisco Medero with twenty million dollars, and in 1911 he was elected president. To General Victoriano Huerta, who had led a successful coup against President Medero in 1913 in the Old Universe, they made an offer to immigrate to Spain that he could not refuse.

On their way home with Sal, who had set up their office in Mexico City and had made many useful contacts, Joy almost regretted how well it had gone. Having been trained as a warrior from the age of four, she wanted to be tested against more than incompetent sex slavers or thugs with bats. She'd been sure she would have this test in Mexico, but John had persuaded her that they should not perform any assassinations themselves.

Joy's opportunity came in a totally unexpected way.

With no first class accommodations on the Mexican train they took to return to the United States, they were stuck in a coach. It smelled like a San Francisco homeless shelter on a windless August night, and looked just like the train cars seen in old cowboy movies.

In the desert in the State of Durango, the train came to a sudden stop. They couldn't see anything but desert outside the windows, but Sal was immediately concerned. He got up and hurried to the coach's vestibule and looked out. Rushing back, he warned them, "Trouble. Rough looking men on horses have stopped the train. They've all got guns. It's probably a holdup."

They all checked their guns. Then they waited. John and Sal looked nervous; John's leg shook slightly where it touched hers. She did what she was trained to do. She breathed deeply, relaxed her muscles, sharpened her awareness of everything going on around her, and centered her energy. This was as natural to her as a driver getting into his favorite car, an artist picking up his brush, a violinist lifting his instrument to play a concerto. This was what she did.

In minutes, four men with dirty sombreros, sweat-soaked bandanas, and dusty shirts and leggings came into the coach. Three of them started taking money and jewelry from the passengers, while one kept his gun trained on them.

John whispered to Sal, "How many do you think there are?"

"Probably about a dozen."

"Will they all be on the train, or will some be on their horses waiting at a little distance?"

"I think some will be watching the train while the others are inside." Sal looked at Joy and whispered, "They will try to rape you and take you with them. That's what they do to young, attractive women."

Joy smiled easily. "Thank you, Sal. Nice compliment."

He gave her a strange look, and returned to watching the men coming down the aisle.

Joy and John had left their armored vests in their luggage. It was very hot in the desert, and they had not thought there would be danger on the train. Joy silently cursed their stupidity as she slipped her magnum onto her lap and set her purse over it. The only way they would get her body was when she was dead, and not before a fight.

Meanwhile, John doubled over and coughed with one hand over his mouth to hide his movements as he tucked his .45 against his hip, between himself and Joy. Sal, who was sitting across from them, put his gun under a Mexican magazine he had been reading.

Soon it was their turn. With one of the bandits watching the rest of the car, three others approached their seats. The bandits were stereotypical, as though playing the role in a B-grade Western movie of the era. They were short, stocky, rough-looking, dirty, and stank like rotting meat. One of them had a black curly beard, and another a bushy black mustache. The third one had a livid scar down the side of his face. Joy suspected he shaved so that the scar would be prominent. A skinny boy, maybe in his early teens, nervously guarded the rest of the coach. He carried a rifle in addition to his pistol.

Black Beard saw Joy sitting at the window and with raised eyebrows quietly studied her. Then he looked at John, and back to Joy. He

turned his head to Mustache and said something in Spanish. Mustache nodded, and Black Beard looked back at Joy and made some laughing remarks. Joy glanced at Sal, across from her, and saw his face change from a look of surprise to angry red.

Black Beard was the closest to her. Holding his gun loosely in one hand, he bent over and reached across John to feel her breasts.

She shot him in the chest and John pushed his collapsing body into the other three bandits. Mustache tried to get clear of the dead man and bring his gun up. Joy exploded his head with a shot to the forehead and John shot Scar Face in the heart. Sal had his gun pointed at the boy; as he hesitated over shooting one so young, the boy brought his rifle around. John shot him as he almost had it pointed at Joy.

Two more bandits rushed in from the vestibule behind them. Sal saw them and shot one in the chest, but the second got a shot off. It grazed John's scalp. Joy whipped around and shot the bandit in the head.

"Holy mother," Sal exclaimed.

John let out his breath with a Pheeeuu and looked around in disbelief. Six dead or near-dead bandits lay around the coach.

"Okay," John said, "no time for celebration. If Sal is right, there are still six or seven bandits in and around the train, and we now have a war on our hands. We have only a few minutes to take action."

Joy saw the blood on John's head and blurted, "Shit, you're wounded." She pulled a handkerchief out of her purse and wiped his face and head, and was relieved to see that the bullet had only grazed his skin. While it bled a lot, as such wounds do, it was not serious.

John took out his own handkerchief and wiped her blood-spattered face with it. She ignored him and reloaded her magnum from the box she carried in her purse.

One of the passengers in the front of the coach, an American, approached them. He had a Derringer in one hand—a useless gun except at close range, and even then, his was only a one-shot. He started to go through the dead bandit's pockets. "I'm after my wallet," he said.

John pointed his gun at him and told him to get back to his seat and stay there until this was over. Sal stood and yelled in Spanish, instructing everyone to get down on the floor and stay out of the aisle.

At that moment, the bandits outside opened fire on their coach. Bullets whizzed by; window glass and pieces of wood flew. They dropped to the floor.

"Just like an old Western movie," John yelled.

This was not the place Joy wanted to fight from, but surprisingly, John took the initiative. He hollered above the noise, "They can come at us from three directions. They can ride up to the windows on their horses and shoot at us inside. They can come down the coach cars from the front or come at us from the rear. We can't wait for them to do that." He looked at Sal. "Sal, you have a full magazine of eight rounds, minus one?"

"Yes."

John looked at Joy. "You've got a box of fifty cartridges, minus the three you've reloaded, right baby?"

"Right."

"I have nine left in my magazine, with another magazine in my coat pocket. Still, we can't waste bullets. We also have these pistols the bandits were carrying, although I don't know how many cartridges they have left."

Joy asked Sal to hand her the rifle the young bandit had been carrying. "This is a bolt action Springfield 03. They must have stolen this from the American Army." She took out a magazine and checked it. "It's got seven rounds."

Another volley of shots came through the sides and windows of the coach. Ducking down, John shouted, "I'll cover us from the front coach vestibule. You take the back one, baby, and Sal, you try to get them from the windows. Keep them guessing by moving around."

I'll be damned, Joy thought. *He may not know how to throw a knife or aim a gun, but he's a natural combat leader.*

John kissed her quickly and duck walked rapidly up the aisle. Joy lay on the seat and unbuttoned and removed her skirt and petticoat. They restricted her movement too much, especially if she had to use her knives or her hands. She also removed her hat, leaving on her blouse and her Old Universe white cotton panties. She took out fifteen cartridges from her box and put them in her handkerchief, twisted it, tied the ends in back of her neck, and unbuttoned the top of her blouse enough to let the handkerchief pouch hang over her locket inside.

One last thing. She took her red headband out of her purse, turned it inside out to show a lightning bolt against a red background, and put it on. Then she waved goodbye to Sal, who had been watching her in amazement, and headed toward the rear vestibule.

She knew that one of her most vivid memories of this battle, if she survived, would be Sal's face when he saw her bare-legged, knives strapped to her hip and leg, armed with her magnum and the Springfield as she crept over the bodies of two dead bandits and into battle.

There were no windows in the vestibule, just exits on both sides with three steps to the ground. Opposite Joy was the door to the next coach. She entered the vestibule just as a bandit was coming in from the outside. He hesitated, taken aback by how she looked, and she shot him in the head. He fell out of sight and another bandit rushed into the opening, shooting with pistols in both hands. He thought Joy was standing. She had dropped on the floor. She shot him in the chest. He screamed and fell away. With the .357 hollow points she was using, a body shot was as good as one between the eyes.

Joy heard shots coming from the front of the coach, but she couldn't take a chance on looking. What bandits she could see outside were just dismounting from their horses at what they thought was beyond handgun range. They lay down on their stomachs with their rifles. Clearly, they intended to wait them out until nightfall, and sneak up on them in the dark.

Shit on that.

She duck walked through the back two coaches, making sure they were free of bandits, and headed toward the caboose. The passengers all were aghast at the sight of an armed and half-clad woman creeping slowly past them, wisps of black hair falling over her face and her head no higher than the armrests.

Just as she got to the last row of seats before the caboose, a bandit reared up from behind a seat with his rifle aimed at her. She threw herself forward and while still in the air got a shot off at him with the magnum. The hollow point blew his head apart.

Joy landed and rolled. A bandit hidden between the seats across the aisle shot and missed; she came up, more hair whirling loose from her bun, and saw through the raven strands his gun, pointed at her. Throwing herself sideways, she shot him in the heart. His gun went off and a bullet dug a furrow in the floor.

Joy dashed into the caboose and jumped over the trainman lying dead on the floor. She scurried out the rear, down the steps, and into a gully along the right side of the rails, zigzagging down the gully to avoid flying bullets. When she was out of range, she ran up a little hill that overlooked the train and the bandits lying on the ground facing it, keeping the rifle along her left side and pointed down so that the bandits wouldn't see it. Since her legs were bare, she wanted them to think that she was trying to escape a rape.

One of the bandits rushed to his horse. No fun letting a woman get away, he must have thought. This was just what Joy wanted. She im-

mediately fell on her stomach, hastily wound the rifle sling around her left arm to anchor it, planted her elbows solidly, and sighted the Springfield carefully on the man now riding toward her. She slowly pulled the trigger.

The rifle went off with satisfying recoil and the bandit slumped forward and slowly fell off the horse. She jerked the rifle's bolt back and forth to reset another cartridge, sighted on one of the three bandits lying down facing the train, picked him off, and with rapid bolt action she picked off the other two in succession. The last one ran for his horse, and she brought him down as he tried to jump on it.

Joy ran down to the dead bandits to get their rifles. One was not dead yet, and rolled toward her, pistol in hand. She shot him in the chest with her magnum. She picked up their rifles and ran to the coach with them in her arms. When she got to the front vestibule of their coach, she threw them in with a loud clatter and shouted for John. When he stuck his head out she yelled, "Here's their rifles. Pin the bandits down on the other side of the train."

Joy had only a few rounds left in the Springfield. She picked out another rifle and rapidly checked its magazine—five rounds left.

John yelled at her, "Wait, I'm going with you."

She released the knot holding her handkerchief pouch of cartridges to her neck, quickly reloaded her magnum. Finished, she shouted, "Don't be stupid. I need you to keep their heads down. Sal isn't enough."

"No."

Retying the handkerchief with the remaining cartridges around her neck, she yelled, "Goddam it, I know what I'm doing. It's riskier with two of us. Stay and shoot."

Without waiting for a response, she ran up the train toward the engine as Sal, and then John, returned to shooting at the bandits. Rifle in one hand, her magnum pointed in front of her, Joy ran around the train's engine and into the gully on the other side of the tracks. The remaining bandits hadn't seen her. She moved down the gully about five hundred feet. Crouching, she climbed out of the gully and tried to come up on the bandits' flank. She couldn't move behind them for fear of being accidentally shot by John and Sal.

As Joy crept toward the bandits, she heard their voices. They were still too far away for her to shoot them and she had no high ground. She got down on her stomach and shoved the magnum down the back of her panties to rest on her rear; she turned the pouch of cartridges to rest on

her back, and did the same with her locket. Then, with the rifle in the crook of her arms, her chin almost dragging on the baked earth, she slithered on her elbows toward the voices. She softly gasped several times as she badly scratched her legs and stomach, but this was the only way.

Joy heard shots from the train, and loud shouts from the bandits, doubtless choice words that it was just as well she didn't understand. Sliding forward little by little, she finally saw the bandits lying on the ground in a slight depression, facing the train. Their horses were about one hundred feet away, hitched to some desert shrubs.

The bandits were arguing about something and gesturing at the train. Keeping her elbow down and one cheek on the ground, she inched her magnum out from the back of her panties, gripped it with two hands, and with her chin now propped on the ground, she aimed and gently squeezed the trigger.

Bang. The closest bandit threw up his hands and collapsed backwards.

She shot again but missed the second one when he jerked away. *Stupid,* she thought as he raised himself to run. She shot him in the side.

The third bandit got up on his knees and was bringing his rifle to bear on her when he suddenly jerked, screamed, dropped his rifle, and fell sideways at the same time she heard a rifle shot from the train.

Joy was not going to take a chance of being shot by friendly fire. She slowly got up and waved her rifle at the train while keeping her eyes on the bandits' bodies. Now certain she was recognized, she cautiously approached them.

The one she'd shot in the side was still alive, watching her. His organs were peeking out of the large exit wound the hollow point created, and his slow, painful death was certain. She pointed her magnum at his heart, drew her finger across her throat, and looked at him with raised eyebrows.

Pain distorted his voice as he croaked in mixed English and Spanish, "You *ángel el vengarse?*" Joy thought he was asking if she were an avenging angel. He lay back and relaxed, and with a resigned expression weakly pointed to his chest.

Joy shot him.

She stood shakily and stared at the three bodies. *It's over. I can't believe it.*

She pulled her locket around to her front and rested the rifle against her leg. Holding the magnum loosely in her hand, she opened the locket

and kissed the picture of her mother. Her voice husky, she said aloud so that her mother's soul could hear, "Thanks for the training, Mom."

Joy closed the locket and let it hang outside her blouse. She twisted the handkerchief pouch with the cartridges around to her front and when it touched her right breast, she discovered that it was painfully bruised. Shifting the handkerchief to her left, she opened it and again reloaded her magnum. Rifle and magnum hanging loosely in each hand, she took several steps toward the train then slowed to a stop as her legs began to shake uncontrollably.

Oh my God, am I tired.

She was feeling the steep energy collapse as the adrenaline drained from her body. She was also bleeding from numerous scratches and had a nasty cut on her stomach that she hadn't noticed until now. The pain in her right breast felt like a rib had been broken. Her white blouse and panties were dirty gray and blood-spattered. Her elbows were rubbed raw. Her long hair was all over the place, several thick strands hanging over her face, her headband almost hidden by them. Her knife sheaths stood out like bands of blood on her dirty leg and hip.

But Joy had been tested, survived, and won a warrior's battle. *I can't say I'm happy*, she thought. *I'm . . . pleased. Yes, that's the right word. Pleased.*

A crowd of passengers had already left the train and more were descending the steps from the vestibules. John and Sal rushed toward her, still carrying their own guns. John got to her first, and lifted her up in his arms and carried her to the train. As they passed through the crowd, people started clapping and several of the men tried to approach and thank her. Sal refused to let any of them near and roughly made way through the crowd for John and Joy. When they got to their seats and John put her down, Sal brought her skirt and petticoat. She was sprawled against the window. John stood looking at her in amazement, as though she had turned into a fire-breathing dragon.

John at last broke the spell, and wet his shirt with water from their jug. He tried to clean Joy's scratches and cuts. He said not a word.

Sal finally emerged from his own paralysis, and went to check on the train's engineer.

When John finished cleaning her, he gave her a long kiss, which elicited more clapping from people watching them from both vestibules. Holding her shoulders and looking her in the eyes, he said in mock gruffness, "Show-off. Anyway, what took you so long?"

"I'll remember that," she mumbled.

The banter suddenly went out of him. He pulled her to him and held her so tightly Joy could hardly breathe. Her breast hurt. "I love you," he said. "I thought I lost you. I love you so much."

She kissed him in return then, realizing they were still being watched, she pulled back and murmured, "I'm a wreck. I had better get dressed."

Joy pushed John away when he tried to help her dress. She found the pins she had taken out of her hair, pinned it up into something she hoped resembled a bun, and put her wide-brimmed, flowery hat on it.

Sal came back about fifteen minutes later and said that the engineer and coalman were dead, and he couldn't find anyone who knew how to operate the train. Sal looked at Joy and quipped, "You don't know how to operate the train, do you?"

She couldn't even smile.

John muttered something about being surprised, and suggested that he would take one of the bandits' horses and ride up the line until he found a station from which he could call for Mexican troops.

Weakly, Joy objected, "No. Sal and I are going also."

"Are you crazy? You rest here with Sal while I go."

"Not on your life. I'm going and so is Sal."

John gave her a long look, sighed, threw up his hands and said, "You're hopeless. Let's go."

He and Sal got their things together and found their luggage. Sal explained to the people nearby what they were going to do and asked them to tell the others. They rounded up three of the bandits' horses, and John and Sal tied their luggage on one. John got up on the biggest horse, and told Joy to get up behind him.

Joy was too exhausted to argue any longer. She put up her hand, and he pulled her up behind the saddle. She circled him with her arms for support and rested her head on his back. Two hours later, they found a police post beside a railroad crossing and little train station. By then Joy had some of her energy back.

Sal told the policemen, as John translated his Spanish for Joy, "Our train was attacked by bandits. The trainmen are all dead." They called their captain.

The captain came galloping up on his horse about fifteen minutes later. Sal repeated the story and added in Spanish, "There were sixteen bandits altogether." That was the number John and Sal agreed on while on the way. "They were going through the train, stealing everything people had. They are all dead now."

The captain looked surprised. "All sixteen?"

"*Si.*"

"I didn't know Federal soldiers were around here," the captain said. "Do you know who commanded them?"

"There were no troops," John responded in Spanish.

Joy didn't know what he said, but she recognized his patented mischievous grin. She watched the captain's face for his reaction. He looked confused.

"How did they all die?" the captain asked.

John and Sal had been waiting for this. Both of them pointed at Joy, who at that moment looked liked she had been gang raped and abandoned. Looking glib, Sal said in flippant Spanish, "She killed them."

The captain looked at Joy in utter disbelief. At that moment she didn't look like she could fight off a child. His expression grew knowing, and with half a grin, he repeated, "She killed them?"

"*Si,*" John and Sal said, now with unmistakable pride in their voices.

John added in English, "We killed three. She got thirteen."

Playing along with what he thought was a joke, his grin even wider, the captain asked in English, "She killed thirteen?"

"*Si,*" John answered, somewhat tartly.

Joy put her hand over her heart and tried to look demure. She whispered, hoarse with fatigue, "Me? Look at me, captain. How could I possibly kill a chicken? They're joking."

With that the captain laughed uproariously, and said in English, "Of course." He told Sal that he would send an engineer and troops, and that they could wait for the train in the station.

Sounding a little irritated, Sal responded, "Thanks, we will."

John lifted Joy off his horse, and Sal turned all the horses over to the captain. With the help of one of the captain's men, he lugged their suitcases into the station. John had carried Joy there already and had laid her down on a hard bench with her head on his lap. Joy was asleep in half a second.

The train arrived about four hours later, the noise of its arrival waking Joy. She felt much better. She walked with John and Sal toward their coach, but were stopped by an outpouring of passengers who surrounded them. John told her they were being thanked for what they did. A troop of Mexican soldiers gently pushed the passengers back and formed a line leading to their coach. They were the ones who had been sent to the train, and saw the bodies. The passengers had told them what happened.

The captain, now very solemn and apologetic looking, walked up to Sal and said, “The passengers have taken up a collection for your beautiful Amazon, and asked that I give it to her. Would you please explain while I hand this to her?”

He turned around to the man behind him, who passed him the box. He took it, turned stiffly, and offered it to Joy with a bow while Sal explained that it contained thank-you gifts from the passengers.

Joy took the box and looked around at the crowd. They looked back at her expectantly. What could she say? Most of them were poor Indians and peons probably visiting their relatives, with a few obvious middle-class Mexicans mixed into the crowd.

Joy opened the box, and amidst coins and Mexican pesos were little figurines and homemade art objects that she knew would be precious to their owners. She held the box close to her, bowed to them all, and said in the only Spanish she knew, her voice breaking, “*Gracias, mis amigos. Gracias mucho*— Thanks, my friends. Thanks much.”

They clapped and the captain turned to his men and said, “Attention. Salute these warriors.”

As the two lines of Mexican soldiers saluted them, Joy, John, and Sal walked between them to their coach. Tears ran down Joy’s cheeks, and John and Sal’s eyes glittered.



Joy didn’t recover her energy until they returned home. That surprised her. This had been her first serious combat and she had thought beforehand that her conditioning through regular jogging and martial arts practice would, barring wounds, see her through short-lived combat without loss of energy. John calculated later that the whole affair with the bandits, from the time the train stopped until the last bandit’s death, had taken about thirty minutes. She felt afterward as if it had been twenty-four hours. She had not counted on the effect of the chemicals flooding her body in response to the danger, or what absolute focus and the total alertness of combat would do to her when it was over.

Yes, I was cool and composed throughout, she thought back later, but fear was there like a dim shadow, ready to show itself if invited.

The cut on her stomach became infected during the trip back, and John got increasingly worried about it. As soon as they got home, he rushed to their medical capsule and treated it with an antibacterial

ointment and gave her a shot of penicillin. Joy put the ointment on his head wound as well and he strongly protested as she cut his red mop around it to do so. For several weeks he wore a golf cap at the office.

Of course they planned with Sal to get together with Jy-ying, Hands, and Dolphy as soon as they could to brief them on the trip. But beforehand, Joy and John decided the wall between Jy-ying and Sal was getting bothersome. Joy talked to Jy-ying and John to Sal about it.

Jy-ying told Joy, “Regardless, for the sake of the company, my friendship with you and John, and our mission, I’ll try to put our broken relationship behind me.”

Sal was the most difficult. As John told Joy, he was almost in tears as he’d said, “I thought she was perfect for me and I was falling in love with her. It hurts. But I’m a big man. There are billions of chicks. Anyway, you know these Chinese gals—flighty, so insecure they can’t stand a real man.”

“Don’t let Joy hear you say that.”

Sal smiled. “She’s different, you know—Sino-Vietnamese, she keeps telling us.” Sal perked up. “That reminds me. I told Dolphy and Hands nothing about what happened on the train. Let me handle that.”

When they all gathered in John’s apartment, Jy-ying and Sal still refused to sit near each other at the dinner table. Sal had brought with him a Spanish newspaper and a self-satisfied expression on his face. Joy glanced askance at Jy-ying and saw her dour expression. She was hugging Little Wei to her on her lap and he seemed happy with the attention.

What’s with her? Joy asked herself. *She’s the one who broke up with Sal, and it’s been quite a while.*

Once they were settled and Joy had given Jy-ying tea and the rest of them cold Anchor Steam beer, Sal held up his hand to stop their idle conversation about the temperature in Mexico. He slowly opened the newspaper and pointed to the large, bold, front page headline. Only John and he could read it. Sal exclaimed, “Well, what do you know? Isn’t this amazing. I’ll be doggoned.”

Dolphy urged in exasperation, “Get on with it, Sal. Enough of the elephant cr . . . patties. What’s it say?”

Sal hesitated. “Okay, if you really want me to read this from the *Sol de Durango*—”

Before Hands could slap his shoulder, Sal started freely translating the double column news item.

AMERICAN WOMAN ANNIHILATES BANDIT GANG

Durango, September 26, 1908. An American woman exterminated the famous Toraido gang that has been operating in Durango for ten years. Twenty-five members of the gang, including Toraido himself, were found in and around the train by Federal troops after the woman's companions directed them to the stalled train. The gang killed three of the trainmen.

Passengers said that the woman shot several of the gang members when they were aboard the train. Then she decided to fight the bandits on their own ground. She prepared herself by taking off her clothes in order to distract them and jumped from the train, guns blazing. Passengers who saw the battle from their train windows say that, armed with a rifle and a pistol, the woman ran nude from one side of the train to the other in a hail of bullets, shooting the gang members down one by one.

She had numerous wounds. One shot grazed her stomach. After she killed the last bandit, her wounds were so serious that she had to be carried back to the train by her companion. As passengers averted their eyes, her companions treated her wounds and dressed her.

The names of the woman and her companions are unknown. Governor Cesar Velasco of Durango has asked for help in finding this incredible woman so he can present her with a gold medal and make her an honorary citizen of the state.

With a smirk, Sal stopped reading and waited.

Hands asked, "So?"

"You must have been on the train," Dolphy said with interest. "Did you see all this stuff happen?"

Sal just sat looking smug. Joy glanced at John, and he looked smugger.

Where do men get this look? Joy wondered.

Dolphy looked at Sal, at John, and finally at Joy's utterly innocent expression. He looked away for a moment, did a double take, and looked back at her sharply. With growing amazement he pointed at her and said, "Joy?"

Hands said, "No! Our Joy?"

Sal nodded haughtily, and Joy saw John's smirk cleave his face.

Dolphy exclaimed, "Well, I'll be God . . . darned." He and Hands sat there staring at her.

Finally Hands said, "Nude, eh. Any pictures?"

"I'm selling them for ten cents each," Sal said, laughing.

"What? Only ten cents each?" Joy said, straight-faced. "You have no sense of value, Sal."

Hands replied, "What? Ten cents? Way overpriced. I'll give you two cents."

Joy gave Hands a look that frosted his eyebrows.

John could not let this opportunity go by. "Actually," he said, "the story was incorrect. It was so hot she rode naked the whole trip. And when she ran outside to fight the gang, she only had a .22 caliber handgun. And the count is wrong. There were fifty of them."

This all was too much for Joy. She punched John in the shoulder and banged Sal on the head. He cringed and yelled, "Help! Keep her away from me." Hands only got away by leaping off his chair.

"Are you guys having fun?" she asked. "Really, there were only sixteen of them, and I only shot thirteen. And without Sal and John, I couldn't have done anything. They set it up for me and kept the bandits' heads down so that I could . . ." Suddenly realizing what she was admitting to, she finished lamely, ". . . help." She felt her face get hot.

"Yes," John said in a pseudo-serious voice, "it is nice having a woman along who can give us men some . . . help."

Joy punched him again and they all broke up in laughter. John and Sal then told Hands and Dolphy the whole story.

Joy noted that Jy-ying had been surprisingly quiet throughout the exchange. Joy winked at her.

Jy-ying gently put sleeping Little Wei on the floor and got up and came around the table. She put one hand on Joy's shoulder, and her head close to Joy's ear. She whispered huskily, "Congratulations, Joy. You are a true warrior and you do us proud. Let's get together whenever." Squeezing Joy's shoulder, she added, "I would like to hear the details. I have much to learn from you."



When they were alone in bed that night, Joy and John talked about their battle with the bandits. Joy remembered each shot, her position during each phase of the battle, what the desert felt like under her feet and stomach, and even the heat of the sun on her back. She was like a

tennis pro who, when asked about her winning volley in a second set tiebreaker, can recall it exactly.

John asked, "Did you know what the black bearded bandit said when he was looking at you in the coach?"

"No, and why should I care?"

"I don't know. I had forgotten about it until Sal brought it up. He said, '*Ella es la*'—she is the one."

"I am the one what?"

"I don't know. Maybe he meant something like 'She is the one we should rape.' Or, 'The one to save for later.' Whatever. Who can read the minds of those savages, anyway?"

Joy waved the whole question away.

John was quiet for several seconds as Joy cuddled up to him. His body was pleasantly warm in the cooling evening air.

He asked, "Have you ever killed someone before we were attacked?"

"No," Joy murmured.

"Have you ever seen a person killed before?"

"No," she sighed. *I wanna sleep.*

"Have you ever seen a dead body before?"

"No." She put a finger on his lips. "I'm sleepy."

He took her finger away from his lips and whispered, "You're so beautiful and so feminine. You're a passionate and loving woman. Nothing cold or steely about you at all. Yet, and I can't get over this, you killed those bandits with cold calculation, without hesitation, without a tear, as though you were a professional executioner. Even Sal hesitated before killing the boy, and I couldn't shoot him until he looked like he was going to shoot us."

He stopped for a moment and she felt him shift to his side, brush her hair back from her face, and lift himself to one elbow. She opened one eye a slit to see him staring at her.

"What ya want?"

"You killed thirteen bandits. Thirteen. And afterward you acted as though you had pulled up a patch of weeds. This is no criticism or complaint, baby, God forbid. But it's just that I'm having difficulty bringing the two sides of you together."

Joy opened both eyes, pulled his hand from under his head, and watched his head flop onto the pillow. "Okay. I don't sleep; nobody sleeps."

Joy really hadn't given this any thought, but he was right about the

cold-mindedness. So she did think about it, and after a few moments she responded, “I have been trained through countless repetitive moves to disarm or disable when attacked and to kill if my life is threatened. It’s almost as automatic as breathing. But as far as my emotions or tears are concerned, these bandits were to me like all the actual or potential mass murderers we will have to deal with. They were like those that murdered my mother’s and Gu’s husbands, and tens of millions more. I was not sorry to have killed them. Not at all. They were evil and I was happy to rid the world of them.”

John nodded, but they had been so close now for over two years that Joy could sense a new reserve in him. As though trying to cover it, he took her in his arms and said, “I guess I was as cold-blooded. I suppose it’s kind of sexist. Men are the warriors and our culture expects them to go into battle and climb over the dead and dying with cold eyes and fierce concentration. It’s just that I have difficulty seeing my loving and feminine partner being such a warrior.”

He paused, and she could see his eyes getting moist. “Anyway, sweetheart, again you saved yourself from sexual slavery and death. And you saved the lives of Sal and me. He and I had talked about this. We knew what would happen to you if they took you off the train. If they had tried to do that, we would have died shooting, but each of us would have saved one bullet for you. Do you understand that one or both of us would have shot you dead before we died?”

Joy put her head on his shoulder and he put his arm around her. “I’d have done the same for you, my dearest. It is the very greatest we can do for each other.”

He continued, “Thanks to you, we are all alive, my sweetheart. And thanks to your training, and to your mother. She was right. The world can be an ugly place and someday, you did need the training.”

Joy idly moved a finger through his orange chest hair. “We are now even, you know. We’ve saved each other’s life.”

“How did I save your life?”

“I’m surprised you’ve forgotten. In the warehouse. I was just about to kill myself. You stopped me.”

John pulled her head off his chest, turned on his side, and put his hands on both sides of her face. He brought her eyes close to his and, looking into them, he said, “You know, baby, I am the luckiest man alive.”

Joy kissed him and told him the truth. “My dearest, you are no

luckier than I am. And the bandits? I could not have done what I did without you and Sal. Honestly.”

John lay back with his arm around her and she lay on his shoulder. She waited patiently and he began to snore. She gave him another minute, and poked him hard in the ribs.

He jerked awake. “Huh? What?”

“I didn’t say ‘Good night,’ dearest,” she purred, and was soon asleep before he fell asleep again.

She put that Mexican newspaper article in her scrapbook the next day.

John never complained about her training methods again. And after finding out that he was a natural combat leader, she never again felt like being sarcastic about his efforts to learn.

Chapter 24

Jy-ying

Jy-ying and Janet had been corresponding with each other regularly, conveying through hints and innuendo the progress of their personal mission to save Sabah. As to their secondary goal to promote decolonization and democracy, they could write about that openly. But as soon as Jy-ying found out about Joy's safe return from Mexico, she did not want Janet to remain ignorant of it until a letter from Jy-ying arrived weeks later. A day after Joy and John's return from Mexico, Jy-ying sent Janet a personal telegram.

Dear Janet:

Thank you for your help on my little project. Did not work out. Have other ideas.

Keep in touch.

Jy-ying

Jy-ying knew from talking to Joy that in 1909 she and John would make their next intervention in Japan, but Joy had been unclear about their subsequent moves. Japan offered Jy-ying no opportunity to have Joy killed. She had no contacts there outside of the company office that Joy was setting up, and being Chinese, her traveling secretly to Japan would probably be fruitless, if not too hard to hide.

But if their intervention also involved a trip to China, that surely would be the end of Joy. Still, Jy-ying reminded herself, there was no need to hurry this. She would know when they would try to eliminate Sabah's parents or kill him. At that point, Jy-ying could kill Joy herself.

As to John, he turned her on whenever they all got together. He obviously loved Joy, and Jy-ying envied the special attention John gave her during their meetings or socials. So Jy-ying had made no overt move, except to show wide-eyed interest in whatever he said. She was increasingly lonely in spite of Little Wei, but that was not why she would now seduce John. She told herself it wasn't because he was a

man she hungered for, but because he was . . . John. And he and Joy were not married. It wasn't as though she would be seducing Joy's husband.

The next day, she went to Joy and John's offices and asked their secretary, Agnes Hammond, if she could see John.

She looked up at Jy-ying in surprise and immediate appraisal. Jy-ying had been careful to cultivate good relations with her, and had given her an inexpensive carving of a dragon for her birthday. Her expression changed from appraisal to approval. "Don't you look scrumptious," Agnes said, raising a finger and waving it in a circle. "How do you keep the men away? And for a moment there, I thought you were Joy. You two should each wear a different colored ribbon on your wrists."

Jy-ying had studied Joy's dress and hairstyles, and tried to be as different as possible while maintaining a certain decorum. She wore her favorite yellow and black Chinese *cheongsam* with red accents. It had a modest slit halfway to the knee—any more and she would look like a Chinese whore. It was open at the neck to display a jade necklace. She wore no hat. And while Joy was currently wearing her hair piled up and fluffed out in a Gibson girl look, Jy-ying had spent half an hour combing and brushing her long hair. She paid special attention to parting it so that it framed her face like an open curtain before falling to her shoulders and down her back to her waist.

She knew how risqué she already looked. In this age women let their hair down just before their lover took them to bed or as a bold hint that he should. But this was the company and people close to Joy and John, as Agnes was, knew John, Joy, and Jy-ying were counterculture. Anyway, John was from Jy-ying's time; she wasn't trying to make it with some man from this age.

Jy-ying had spent more time brushing Little Wei's hair, resolving by the time she was through to only adopt a short-haired dog next time. She put a shiny new red collar around his neck and stepped back from him to get a good look at the result. He wagged his tail and looked back at her with his round black eyes, the tip of his little red tongue sticking out of his mouth. She told him, "You are quite a handsome fellow, you know."

Now, responding to Agnes, Jy-ying said, "I have an important meeting with an exporter after seeing John." She laughed. "I am trying to seduce a concession out of him."

Agnes twittered. "Careful John doesn't mistake you for Joy."

“Would that be bad?”

The secretary rose behind her desk, leaned toward Jy-ying, put her open palm next to her mouth, and whispered, “Joy would kill you.”

Jy-ying thought, *She could only wish*. Instead she said, “I hope that she doesn’t get any mistaken ideas.”

“Well, I won’t be passing on any,” Agnes whispered with a conspiratorial grin. She waved at John’s door. “Just knock and go in. I’m sure he won’t mind, if it’s you.”

Jy-ying stepped to John’s office door and knocked, opened it, looked in, and said, “Can I come in?”

“Yes, why do you ask?”

Jy-ying entered with a smile.

John looked up from the ledger on his desk and asked with a little exasperation, “Baby, what are you doing? And why are you dressed like that?”

“I’m Jy-ying.”

John gaped. When he recovered, he explained, “I’m sorry, Jy-ying. The lighting beyond my desk is not too good and you kind of look like her.” He chuckled self-consciously, and reddened as he took in her dress and hair when she approached the desk.

Little Wei walked around the desk and stood up to put his paws on top of John’s leg. Thankful for the distraction, John gave him a couple of scratches behind the ears. “Hi Little Wei.” He looked at Jy-ying. “Ahh, what’s up?”

“I don’t mind the endearment,” Jy-ying said sweetly.

“What endearment?”

“Baby.”

John got redder.

She sat on a padded office chair next to the desk, letting the slit in her dress show more of her leg. He now considered her their friend and partner, and she didn’t have to wait for his invitation to sit.

Here goes. Plan A, tactic 1A. Claspng her hands on her lap and sitting straight, she told him, “I know *we* are getting close to *our* intervention regarding the Japanese colonization of Korea. And soon after that *we* will intervene in my former homeland—I really consider myself American, now. But,” and she looked down at her hands and softened her voice, “I’m so ignorant of history. All my studies have been technical. I really don’t understand what we are doing—the history of it.”

She tilted her head and looked at him from under her lashes. “I really want to understand.”

John's face was recovering its normal pale hue. "Joy can fill you in. Have you asked her?"

"Well, I have talked to her and she knows so much more than I do." She hesitated, looked up and directly into his eyes. "I do not want to take anything away from her. She is so good at what she does. But, she does not have your knowledge and insight into history, and that is what I need."

John seemed to mull that over. "I suppose we could get together to go over our chronology of future events and I can give you the background on them, and their relationship to our mission."

"Oh, would you? That would be so nice."

John furrowed his brow and rubbed his hands together. "There is so much there; I'll need more than just an afternoon. Let's see, how can we do this?" He mulled it over. "Hmm. Joy and I always eat lunch together, so that time is out. I have some stuff here, but I'll need what I have at home, and I don't want to bring that to work. Well, let's try this. Why don't you come down to our apartment in the evening about seven, and we can spend some time on it, and do as many evenings as you need to catch up on this."

"That is so nice of you, John. But my humble brain is muddled by evening. I am a morning person, and will fall asleep over anything so deep in the evening. May I make a suggestion?"

"Why, yes."

"You are so patient with me. Since Joy and I sometimes spar on Monday morning, maybe we can set aside that time on the other weekdays for me to be your pupil."

"No, we have been using some of that time for Joy's training of me. That and part of the weekends. I'll tell you what. If your eyes won't glaze over, how about three days in a row in the afternoon, beginning tomorrow at three. If we need more than three days, I'll put them aside."

Jy-ying beamed at him. "Oh, you're so kind. How can I ever thank you?"



Joy

While they were eating their usual takeout of egg foo young, stuffed tofu, and vegetables from the Kin Wah Restaurant in New

China Town—Joy prepared the hot rice—John commented, “I don’t know whether Jy-ying told you, but I will be teaching her history in the late afternoon for the next three days, at least.”

“She told me.” Her lips tight, she roughly split the stuffed tofu on the center plate with her chopsticks and put half on top of the rice in her bowl. With her chopsticks she picked that up with a dollop of rice and with such concentration it might have been her last meal, she put it all in her mouth, chewed three times, and swallowed.

Is he really so stupid? she wondered. She put her rice bowl down and looked up at John, trying to read his expression.

He cut his egg foo young with a fork and put it in his mouth. He picked up some rice with his fork and shoveled that in behind it and chewed it all while looking at her, his eyes so bland he could have been watching a detergent commercial. Swallowing, he twiddled his fork at her and in a flat voice explained, “She needs it to understand what we are doing—our interventions—so she can help us better.”

“I gathered that,” Joy responded, her tone even flatter.

“We’ll be doing it here, since most of what I need will be here. Ahh, in mid-afternoon.”

“I assumed so,” she replied, as crisp as burnt toast.

John took the other half of the stuffed tofu, put rice in his mouth and the tofu in after it. After chewing and swallowing, he asked, “Is something wrong?”

“Whatever gave you that idea?” She brought her rice bowl up to her mouth and scooped the rest of her rice into it with chopsticks until not a grain remained. She shoved her dining chair back with a scraping noise, sprang up, grabbed her plate and bowl, and dumped them into the sink with a clatter. She turned around, propped one hand on the sink, put the other hand on her outthrust hip, and glared at him.

She didn’t try to keep the icicles out of her voice. “I was coming out of my office and saw what she looked like when she went into yours. She could have been on her way to a Chinese beauty contest. She has the hots for you, John, and you stupidly helped her set up her seduction ploy.”

John looked amused. “Baby, she dropped in to see me before an important appointment she had with a Chinese exporter, so Agnes said, and—”

“She is my assistant, John. She had no appointment.”

As though answering a student’s inane question, John replied, “Well, Jy-ying must have got it wrong. Number one: she needs to be

given the historical background on our interventions. She will be able to help us all the better. Number two: she has to know how much I love you, that I would do anything for you. And conversely, I would do nothing to hurt you. Ever! Number three: I love you. And number four, I'm not some teenage boy, a walking hard-on whose quest is only interrupted occasionally for food and sleep." He gave Joy a big smile at his metaphor.

She glared at him. "She looks like me, John. You could easily, very easily, think she was me. She is a trained agent, a former spy. I bet she could have you believing she was me and lead you by your . . . nose into her bed. No, our bed, since it will be afternoon. Jesus, John."

Joy took a long, growling breath. John was beginning to look like he had swallowed a spoonful of vinegar. He raised an eyebrow and his face hardened. "Yes, I remember in the Old Universe the first time you came to my university office and our ride to your mother's dinner party. You vamped me and that's why—well, almost why—I'm here. But that doesn't take away my love for you."

He slapped the table, just missing his plate, and glared in return. "Enough of this, Joy! You've insulted my love, my heart, my loyalty, my steadfastness, my intelligence, my man—"

"Cut the crap," Joy spat.

John ignored her. "In short, I see beneath your ambiguous rhetoric and its elusive meaning. I deduce that you don't trust me. I wish you would stop beating around the bush."

She glowered at him. "This isn't funny, John."

John went on inexorably, "And I would have thought by now that you would trust me in a room full of naked virgins, beckoning me with various parts of their bodies."

Joy could not help envisioning that and fought down the mirth trying to bubble up. She was not about to be humored on this.

John continued relentlessly. "I was going to cancel this thing with Jy-ying so as not to worry you when, with my typical insight, I saw how you interpreted it. But now I'm going to go ahead. Just to show you what a granite rock I am about my love for you."

He stood and picked up the empty food dishes. Bumping Joy aside with his hip, he dropped them in the sink and ran hot water on them. As Joy scowled, he started washing the dishes.

She stomped out of the kitchen and refused to say another word to him the rest of the evening. When she got into bed that night, she lay with her back toward him, and as close to the edge of the bed as possible without falling off.

He tapped her on the shoulder. "Sweetheart, let's talk."

He talked to her back and soon she turned around and nodded, and sighed with relief.



Jy-ying

Jy-ying moved her arm carefully as she got ready for her meeting with John. During sparring this morning, Joy had put an unusually hard twist on her arm during a throw. She had apologized afterward, and Jy-ying told her to forget it. Still, it hurt, and now she could hardly lift it above her head.

Now that she had gotten this far, Jy-ying decided subtlety was best. She would wait a meeting or so before brushing against him and initiating the first gentle kiss. *Unless, of course, he shows more interest.*

She dressed in her comfortable Chinese house clothes—baggy gray slacks and long blue shirt with short, wide sleeves—but she still brushed her hair and let it fall free. She also brushed Little Wei and dressed him in his black collar for a change.

At five minutes after three—mustn't seem too eager—she left her apartment, descended the stairs, and knocked on John's door. He opened the door and waved her in with a big flourish, wearing a huge smile that almost split his head in half. She stood at the door for a moment, stunned. He only had his robe on and it was open to the waist; she could see his reddish chest hair and his belly button. He seemed totally naked underneath.

"Hello, hello," he bellowed. "Whatcha waiting for, Jy? Come in," and he whispered, "said the naked virgin to her boyfriend." He laughed uproariously.

Confused by John's dress and behavior, she followed Little Wei into the living room. John ostentatiously locked the door and followed close behind her. She didn't know whether to sit on their new gondola couch in the living room or at the dining room table for her lessons, and turned to see what he wanted her to do.

He was close behind her when she turned, and said with his smile undiminished, "Here we are. You and me. Alone. Shall we get right to it?"

Perplexed, she asked, "Where do you want me to sit?"

"Sit? Is that how you screw? Sitting? Well, that's something new. I'm willing to try anything!"

“Screw? I do not understand.”

John leered. “Fuck.”

Jy-ying could not have been more shocked if she had put her finger in an electric light fixture. She stood gasping, trying to clear her mind, her hand over her mouth. Beyond her control, the words tumbled through her fingers. “How could you? What kind of woman do you think I am? What kind of man are you, trying to cheat on Joy?”

John ignored her and crooned, “Oh Jy, to bed. Oh, to bed we go. I have a camera set up.” He grabbed her arm as though to lead her to the bedroom.

She pulled away and stared at him. “What are you *doing*?”

He gave her a lascivious grin. “I want to see your asshole Jy; that turns me on.”

“You are crude.”

Then she heard, “He’s not as crude as I am, honey.”

Jy-ying jerked her head around, and saw Joy leaning against the bedroom doorjamb. She had a sexy grin on her face similar to John’s leer, and she was dressed in her own robe, also open past her navel, with one breast almost showing.

Little Wei had run over to Joy and was jumping up and down on her robe. Joy leaned over to pet him, her breast almost slipping free of the robe, while keeping her smile and eyes on Jy-ying.

Jy-ying could not believe this. She gaped bug-eyed at John and back to Joy. Unconsciously, she put her hand back on her cheek, where it seemed to be spending most of its time. She couldn’t get the words out.

Little Wei scampered back to Jy-ying, looked up at her, sat on his haunches, and barked once. That helped. She brought her hand down, stiffened her back, and thrust out her chin. Her eyes narrowed and she closed her mouth and compressed it into a thin line as she composed herself. She huffed, “I am not that kind of person. I’m shocked—” She ran out of words.

John was laughing so hard he could hardly stand up. Laughing as well, Joy came over and put her hand on Jy-ying’s shoulder. She instinctively pulled away.

With an apologetic grin, Joy said, “We got you, Jy-ying. Come sit down at the table and we’ll tell you what’s going on.”

She gently pulled Jy-ying to the table and pulled out a chair for her. She and John tightened their robes around themselves and sat down as well. Joy and John looked at each other, still amused.

As if by mutual agreement, John spoke first. "I love Joy and would do nothing to hurt her. I am unavailable. I can understand, however, why you want to seduce me. Were I a woman, I would—"

"John!"

John grinned at Joy, and continued. "Our little act was our way of showing you that we know what you were trying to do, and I am not seducible. Also, I tell Joy everything."

Jy-ying felt her face getting red hot. Her rage boiled up. She looked at Joy and let her fury show.

Joy had stopped laughing and looked at her calmly. "I know that you want him. I know that you were trying to seduce him, although today was only the beginning. I don't blame you. He is a lovable man." John looked smug. Her eyes narrowed to slits and her voice became lethal. "But he is mine. I love him with all my heart. I would die for him, and with our mission, maybe sometime I will. Without an iota of regret."

Joy reached across the table and took Jy-ying's stiff hand. She smiled and relaxed her eyes. "I want you to continue to work for us, for me. I want you to continue to be our partner. I hope you're not too insulted to forgive us for our little play. True, it was at your expense. But after all, you were trying to seduce my man."

John waited a moment, as if hoping for more of these delicious words. He finally added, "If I spurned your hints or outright suggestions, Jy-ying, if I simply told you I was not available, you might have thought you could eventually break down my resistance. It might have been a challenge to you. I think that you are like Joy in that a 'no' is a wall to scale. You are beautiful, with a great body, and I'm sure you know that, since you seem to emphasize its best parts. You might have thought yourself irresistible in time. So, our stupid play was just to convince you that I am unavailable. But other than that, I want to continue to work with you. We both like you as a person; we have much in common. We enjoy your company. And above all, you have been helpful to our mission."

He put out his hand to shake hers.

Jy-ying's emotions swirled through her stomach and muddled her thoughts. She was angry. She was insulted. She felt guilty over what she had intended to do with John, over her deceiving them, and over what she eventually intended to do to Joy. She was a trained warrior; she was a security officer; she was a spy; and she was ashamed.

The sobs came out of nowhere, beyond her control. She cupped her elbow in one hand and the other up to her face and sobbed into it. "I'm

sorry. I'm so sorry," she cried, knowing they would not know the full extent of her sorrow and apology. Little Wei was whining and jumping up and down on the side of her leg, and she reached down and pulled him up on her lap. As he tried to lick her face, she hugged him and shook with her tears.

Joy came around the table and put her arm around her. "Let's forget it and move on," she said. "We have too much to do."

John let his outstretched hand rest of the table, and said loudly, "It's almost supper time. We have rice, Bavarian ham sausage—Joy's once a month concession to my tastes—veggies, and a huge salad. Come join us, Jy-ying."

Jy-ying soon stopped crying and Joy got her tissue from the bathroom to wipe her face. She turned to look into John's eyes. She could see how sincere he was. She took his still outstretched hand and shook it, reveling in his touch. She nodded to him, reached out for Joy's hand with her other one, and shook both of them. "So," she whispered, "Do I also get my history lesson?"

That night, after a bath and her prayers, she cuddled around Little Wei in bed and cried herself to sleep. She had never been so embarrassed in her life, or so guilty. Or so very alone.



Joy

That same night in bed, as Joy lay with her leg across John's, she whispered, "That was your idea. Did you think of what you would have done if she had accepted your crude proposal?"

"I know character, baby. No way would she have accepted it."

"Hypothetically, what would you have done?"

"I would have taken her to the bedroom where you were waiting, and said to her, 'Whoopee, Joy will be joining us.' Then what would *you* have done, baby?"

Joy imagined the situation and laughed. Through her laughter she tried to ask, "Before or after I broke her leg and turned you into a eunuch?"

John briefly joined her laughter, and asked again, "Seriously, what would you have done?"

She didn't need to think about it at all. She said simply, "Dearest, let's just be happy it worked out."

Chapter 25

Joy
1909

They soon started planning their next intervention, which would be Japan. “We will intervene in the first of a series of events that led to the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, and her attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941,” John told Jy-ying.

“Well,” Joy added, to prevent him from falling too far into lecture mode, “we have a base of operations—our new office in Tokyo, thanks to Mariko.”

“Yeah,” John said, turning to smile at Joy.

Mariko had enlisted the help of her father during a trip home to visit her mother. As assistant foreign minister, Mariko’s father was eager to help Japanese foreign trade, to which he saw the company his daughter worked for contributing. The office now had seven Japanese employees. He had also helped them work through the Japanese bureaucracy to establish a similar office in Korea, which hired mainly Japanese employees. Joy and John had tried to get her to accept some money for her work, but all she said was, “*Dai jobu. Shimpai nai*—It’s okay. Don’t worry about it.”

John had asked Dolphy to be sure she understood their appreciation. Dolphy smiled and said with a wink, “Oh, I’ll make sure she knows how appreciative you are.”

Now John asked Joy and Jy-ying, “Have you both recently looked at the chronology the Society’s researchers prepared for us? It’s clear from that how dependent later events and indeed, the growth of militarism in Japan, was on what happened in these early years—”

Joy, raising her finger, finished the sentence for him “—particularly in Korea and with regard to China. Right?”

“Yes. We’ve got to stop the Korean assassination of Ito Hirobumi, the Japanese statesman and member of the governing inner circle. That killing, above all, gave the military an excuse to not only demand annexation of Korea, but to increase their power over the politicians in Japan.”

"I know, dearest," Joy responded dryly.

"I do too," Jy-ying threw in. "I got that in your second lesson, John."

"We'll soon be off to Japan and from there to China," Joy said, "where we'll try to provide funds for the Korean Righteous Army—"

Now John interrupted to conclude her sentence: "—in its struggle against Japanese occupation of Korea."

Joy replied with a little exasperation, "Okay, we'll concede history to you, since we're your superiors in everything else."

"So you wish," he replied.

Jy-ying asked, "Have you picked your ship yet?"

"Yes, it's one carrying lumber from Oregon. That should help keep it afloat if it begins to fill with water during a bad storm."

Shaking her head, Joy said, "I don't think it makes a difference, love."

He replied with a touch of concern, "It's more dangerous crossing the Pacific than it is the Atlantic. The voyage is longer and there's the danger of typhoons. I'll take a good look at weather reports before we leave."

Little Wei had an old pork bone he'd brought downstairs to John's apartment with him, and Jy-ying started tugging on it as the little guy got a good grip with his teeth, growled, dug his feet into the throw rug and tried to jerk the bone out of her hand.

Smiling, Joy and John watched. John yelled, "C'mon, little guy, pull, pull. Grrr."

Still tugging on her end, Jy-ying asked, "When will you be in China? I don't remember you mentioning dates."

"We plan on being in Peking on March 8th," Joy responded, "then we will be going down to our office in Shanghai for our business. We do have a business; it's sometimes hard to remember. And then a week on vacation to play tourist. We'll be shipping home on the 25th."

John looked up from watching the tugging contest. "Say, did I mention that Dolphy is raring to go with us? How about Mariko?"

A happy note, Joy thought, and replied, "Mariko can't wait. Her father gave her permission for the trip, and although he was concerned that Mariko and Dolphy's rooms are next to each other, he gave his approval when her mother told him in a non-Japanese manner, 'Do it.' We would have a hard time without Mariko, since she's the contact with our office, and can help us getting around Japan."



Jy-ying

The day after Joy and John left for Japan, Jy-ying traveled to Gibb Street in New Chinatown, to see Lin Huifeng. He was the major source of opium and heroin for Chinese and, she had found out, the major contact for the San Francisco Sue Yop tong, who itself had contacts with the leaders of the most notorious secret societies in China. She had left Little Wei whining behind the door in her apartment. She could not take a chance on his being stolen and eaten.

After settling with Lin on what she requested, paying him an advance of \$6,000 in real money—she did not want him, of all people, discovering she had given him counterfeit money, no matter how remote—she sent a wire to Janet:

*Dear Janet:
Sabah be with us. Joy and John off to Japan and
China. My little project looks
good. Wish me success.*

Jy-ying



Joy

Halfway through their voyage to Japan, during dinner at the captain's table—there were only five cabins available for passengers, and passengers always ate with the captain—Dolphy told them, “Mariko has proposed to me and I accepted.”

Mariko hit Dolphy on the shoulder. Blushing, she said, “*Iie*—No. *Warui*—wrong. He get down on both knees and beg me marry him. If I say no, he say he would throw himself off ship. So I am—what you say?—*Jiha-bukai*.”

“Merciful,” Joy translated.

“Yes, merciful. I say yes.”

They all laughed. John looked at Dolphy, whose whole face had collapsed into a grin, and asked, “What took you so long?”

Mariko was twenty years old and a Japanese beauty. She was majoring in an ad hoc collection of courses that would later in the century evolve into American Studies. She had hoped to get a job in the Japanese Foreign Ministry when she returned. If she married an American,

however, that would not be possible, and most likely she would try for a job in the United States as a translator.

With pleasure, Joy told her, "You always have a good a job with us."

Oddly, Dolphy managed to speak through the huge gap his grin created in his face. "Yeah, she can be my assistant and translator."

"Of course," Joy pointed out, "a job filled only by the best."

They made it to Japan without incident, just missing by several days a powerful typhoon that spun through the central Pacific. The captain did not think they would have survived it if it hit their ship directly. All John could say to Joy for a week was, "You see? We should have traveled separately."

Joy's response was always, "You see? It didn't hit us, did it?"

In Japan, they had their meeting with the venerable Japanese statesman and oligarch Ito Hirobumi, the critical historical pivot. This had been arranged by Mariko through her father and, as far as she knew, was part of their company business.

When Joy and John were alone with Ito, they warned him that a Korean would try to assassinate him in October at Harbin, and this would be the pretext for Japanese annexation of Korea.

After much discussion and with a proper offer of financial compensation in dollars for his canceling the trip to Harbin, they overcame his doubt about their motives. They also secretly provided ten million dollars for Prime Minister Saionji's democratically oriented political party and for use in bribing the oligarchs into conceding more power to parliament.

Afterward, while finally alone together in the evening, Joy told John, "I hate to lie to Mariko and Dolphy about what we're doing in Japan, you know."

He replied sadly, "I know, but we have no choice."

During the rest of the week in Japan they toured the historical sites, especially in Kyoto, and had a lovely visit with Mariko's mother. *What a sweet woman*, Joy thought. She'd seemed to like Dolphy right away. It helped that Mariko had taught him to bow properly before he met her.

They sailed for Shanghai on the new Japanese passenger ship *Tenjo Maru*. From there they took an incredibly old train to Peking—even older than the ones they rode in Mexico.

Through their office in Peking they had arranged an appointment with General Jung Il Han, a Korean Righteous Army general who was seeking aid to free Korea from being a Japanese imposed protectorate.

While the train puffed through Shandong Province, Joy wrote down what she remembered, then hid it. She fidgeted. Across from her, John was reading Volume Two of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Finally, she could wait no longer and kicked his foot. When he looked up at her, she said above the chugging of the train and the almost hypnotic clickity-clack of its wheels, "Where's my lecture? I'm bored."

His brow furrowed. He looked around, as though wondering where this strange woman sitting across from him had come from. He looked back at her. "You want a lecture?"

"On Han."

"You're asking *me* for a lecture on Han?"

"Yes."

"I must be dreaming." He mimicked pinching himself. "No. I'm awake." John studied Joy's face suspiciously, but she was very attentive. "I can't believe this," he mumbled. "You just want to say, 'I know,' a million times again."

"No, I promise. No I knows."

"Not one?"

"Not one!"

John peered at her. "Okay, you asked for it. Here goes. Now, listen carefully.

"Now, Han is in Peking meeting with foreign diplomats, but they are reluctant to aid him and thus anger the Japanese. Anyway, except for China, which doesn't have the means to provide aid, no one, including the United States, really cares about Japan's dominance over Korea."

He waited, still watching her suspiciously. Leaning toward him, Joy looked back wide-eyed, lips slightly parted, as though fascinated. John raised an eyebrow, shook his head in disbelief, and continued.

"Ah, it is critical to discourage the Japanese military in their aggressive interests in Korea, Manchuria, and eventually China. This is a very high-stakes game, involving as it does the possible militarization of Japan, invasion of China, and even Pearl Harbor several decades up-time.

We'd agreed, you know, that we'd offer Han ten million in gold and another twenty million in American dollars, with the usual threat that if he used the money for other than its intended purpose, we would have him painfully assassinated."

"Are you done?" Joy asked sweetly.

“Yes,” and he hopefully added, “for the moment.”

“Ha-ha!” Joy reached under the large map of China on her lap and pulled out two sheets of paper. She shook them at him. “I have that little lecture here, word for word. I wrote it down an hour before you gave it. I can now repeat your lectures verbatim, I’ve heard them so often.”

John ripped the papers out of her hand and started reading what she’d written. “I’ll be damned,” he said, looking up. “You missed the most important part of my absolutely stimulating historical presentation.”

Joy’s eyebrows shot up. “I can’t believe it. What did I miss?”

“Why, baby, I’m shocked that you already forget my incredible course lectures. You know, the part where I say, ‘The defeat of Han likely would be followed by the Japanese military demanding, and the quivering politicians accepting, the complete colonization of Korea.’ That’s the key to understanding all this. And you missed it. I should never have given you an ‘A’ for my course.”

“You didn’t say that.”

“Ha-ha, yourself. You don’t even remember it. You need more lectures, girl.” He handed the papers back with a flourish, and went back to his reading, the dimples deepening at the corners of his mouth.

Joy held the papers in one hand as she crossed her arms and tapped her foot. *He’s lying. I think. Okay, next time I’ll have our digital recorder with me.*

She reached over and hit him on the knee with the papers. “Beast.”

“Hey, why’d you do that?”

“On principle,” she explained with a smile.

When they got to Peking, Joy received a surprising report from the Zhao Detective Agency on Han’s character. She’d had Han investigated to make sure they could trust giving him so much money. She told John what they found. “You won’t like this,” she said. “The agency discovered that except for fighting the occasional battle, Chinese and especially foreign women were the center of his life. Regardless of his age and girth, he was a walking erection.”

John was startled. “They wrote that?”

“No. That’s my mature female interpolation. They did write that he had forced a number of high-ranking Koreans to make their wives available to him, and he brags about a woman a day while here. The agency warns us of rumors that, with the help of his guards, he has resorted to rape if a woman resists him.”

John gaped at her for only a moment before exploding. “No way are you going with me to meet with Han. Apparently wearing a wedding ring—and he won’t know it’s false—and my being with you as your supposed husband will mean nothing. I know of his attitude. In Asian society of this age, women are only for procreation and men’s pleasure. Husbands donating their wives for an evening at the request of the powerful is not unusual.” Getting even more worked up, he actually shouted at her, “This man will have nothing to do with it. You are not for barter.”

Just on general principles, and with a little irritation, she replied, “Excuse me, isn’t that *my* decision? Since when do *you* decide by your male lonesome what *we* do together? What are you afraid of? I can take care of myself, I think you know.”

He replied a little defensively, “No, your taking care of yourself is not the problem. It’s my fear that he would refuse our aid or have anything to do with us once you deny him your body.” Looking at her with raised eyebrows and a pouting mouth, he revealed what he feared most. “What would you do if he made accepting the aid conditional on you sleeping with him?”

“The aid is too important, Korea too important, for him to do that.”

“Come on, baby, you’re not that naive. What would you do?”

She didn’t answer.

“Okay, you don’t have to say anything. I know how important the mission is to you. And because of your training in sex, I know you could treat it with Han as would a prostitute with a particularly unsavory customer.” He mimicked her feminine voice, while giving a loose-wristed wave. ““Oh, it’s just part of our job. I’ll just do it and get it over with.’ Right?”

She didn’t answer.

Shaking his head, he told her a might too loudly, “I’m going alone, damn it.”



Through their Peking office, John made sure that Han would have a Chinese interpreter during the appointment. Joy actually was not needed anyway.

Two days after they’d checked into the old Peking Hotel, John donned his armor, holstered and pocketed his guns, and went to the afternoon meeting with Han to make his offer. This would be the first

meeting of their mission where Joy and John would not be together. And Joy was scared that he was doing it alone.

She expected him back by dinner, but no John. Nor did he come back that evening by midnight. Nor did he use his communicator to tell her why he was delayed.

She was frantic. Growing worry and fear prevented her from sleeping at all that night. There was nothing Joy could do, either. If she took a rickshaw to the Palace Hotel on Goldfish Lane where Han was staying, John might be on his way back at that moment and they would miss each other. They had agreed when they first arrived never to initiate contact if one of them were delayed, unless in a dire emergency. They could easily endanger the other person if they distracted them at a critical moment. Moreover, if in a meeting or otherwise involved with other people, one could not respond to the call. This would only raise the anxiety or worry of both the caller and the recipient. So she decided to wait until midmorning before calling him, and if she received no answer, she intended to storm Han's hotel room.

A little after 8 a.m., when Joy felt and must have looked like one of those passengers standing on the deck of the Titanic just before it sank, she heard the knob of their hotel room door turn. She was lying down on the bed, fighting panic, and immediately sat up straight. The door started opening; she was halfway there before it opened completely.

In stumbled John, his face flushed, unsteady on his feet. She was all over him before he could shut the door. She threw her arms around him and cried, "You're safe. You're okay. Thank God. I was so worried."

Getting some control of herself, Joy could finally ask, "What happened? Why didn't you communicate with me?"

Then she smelled the alcohol. She had never seen him drunk. Only a little high at celebrations, but during any part of their mission, he never took a drink.

There was something else. A female-in-heat smell.

Joy dropped her arms and stepped back, amazed and with growing disgust. "What *happened* to you?" she asked again, now giving different meaning to the "happened."

John looked sheepish and then defensive, and muttered, "Let me sleep. I'll tell both of you afterward."

"That's not funny," she threw at him as he flopped on the bed. Angry, she only took his shoes off and left him to sleep in his clothes. She put a *Do not disturb* sign on their hotel door, and left for their company

office on Damochang Road to help prepare a large consignment of sixteenth century jade statues they were importing in return for Singer sewing machines. She was glad for the distraction.

That afternoon, exhausted from lack of sleep, Joy returned to their hotel room. John was snoring, so she climbed into bed. With his snores assuring her he was with her and safe, regardless of anything else, she fell into sleep.

It was evening when John woke her up as he got out of bed to relieve himself. When he came back, she reached out her arms to hug him, and the words tumbled out, “You scared me, darling. I thought something happened to you. You were somewhat drunk when you came home. Why didn’t you communicate with me? What happened?”

Then Joy remembered. “You also smelled of woman.”

He looked at her for several moments, and said, “I have to take a shower first. Want to take one with me?”

So they showered, and towed each other’s back dry, and after they put their hotel guest robes on, he took her by the hand and seated her on the bed. “Now,” he said, “I want to tell you what happened. There must always be truth between us, not only because it is right for us, baby, but because it is important to our mission.”

Joy tensed. *Where’s this bullshit going?*

He stopped, looked down for a moment, and added, “Please listen and don’t say anything until I finish. Okay?”

As Joy was about to say something, he put two fingers on her mouth, and went on, “I met with Han—a real bastard, but we have dealt with bastards before, and it’s part of our mission. I made our offer, but he would not believe I was a secret agent and kept demanding, ‘Who is the money from?’

“I simply said, ‘The money is yours. The only stipulation is that you spend it to fight the Japanese.’

“He wanted to know when he’d get it. I told him, ‘Four days for the money transfer, and ten days to get the gold to you.’ He seemed satisfied with that, and had his guards bring in food and drink. He demanded, ‘You must drink with me to seal the bargain. It is an old Korean custom. It’s like what you Westerners do—a handshake.’

“Okay, I thought, I can sip along. After about thirty minutes, his guards brought in four Chinese dancing girls. They not only danced, but while doing so they slowly . . . ahh, discarded their clothes. Ahh, all of them.

“At that point Han toasted me, and said something the interpreter had trouble with: ‘Those who do business with me must drink with me; those who drink with me must fuck with me.’

“I told him we didn’t do these things in the West, and that besides, I’m a happily married man. He laughed uproariously and said, ‘So, don’t tell her.’

“Anyway he insisted, saying, ‘I will not trust someone who is not a man, like this,’ and he started stroking one of the dancers between the legs.”

“And what did *you* do?” Joy asked, her voice causing ice crystals to form in the air between them.

“Umm . . . ah . . . I made love to . . . two of the dancers.”

Her brain went numb and retreated from consciousness. Something deep inside her that Joy didn’t know existed grabbed hold of her voice and squeezed it into a spitting shriek. “Two of them? You screwed two women? One was not enough? Why did you stop at two? Why not all four? Why didn’t you ask for four more? I’m sure Han would have trusted you even more.”

Joy had never been so angry with John. She felt so betrayed. Knowledge of his unfaithfulness took over and turned her shriek into a screech. “I was worried sick and you were screwing—”

He tried to pull her down, but she beat on his chest with her fists, tears coming out of her eyes. She couldn’t get her breath even to screech. Finally she filled her lungs and screamed at him loud enough for the rickshaw men outside the hotel to hear, “How could you, John?”

He pushed her back on the bed and lay on top of her, pressing her into the soft mattress with his weight, and holding her arms down with his hands. He looked into her blazing eyes with understanding, and pointed out in a calm voice, “Our mission, sweetheart, think of our mission. It has to be above all. Han was stupid. The freedom of his country was at stake. I was offering him the means of defeating the Japanese. But he would only trust me, and thus accept my offer, if he saw himself in me.”

Joy lay there with him on top of her, her stomach twisted into a knot, her heart thudding, her breath rasping in her aching throat. Her brain still covered before an anger she’d never felt before. All she could do was rasp, “You screwed two women all night?”

“It was nothing to me.”

Joy’s cowardly mind supplied, “Of course. You had to tie it to a chopstick to get it up. You bastard.”

“No, I fantasized I was making love to you.”

Joy roared, risking losing her voice altogether, “You *WHAT?*”

“It was only physical, baby. It was like exercise. I did nothing but go in, come, and pull out. The girls must have been disappointed and probably thought that Westerners didn’t know how to make love. But Han watched and actually tried to show me with one of the girls how I should be doing it. He asked me if I wanted to take one of the girls back to my hotel room and practice, but I declined, saying I had to leave Peking shortly. As I left him, he smiled and told me practice makes perfect.

“Anyway, baby,” John added, seemingly oblivious to her fury, “we are secret agents. And we are at war against war and democide. As a secret agent, I must do what I must do as a man.”

“What a pile of shit,” Joy croaked. She threw him off her with a body perch and leg twist, and broke down in body-shaking sobs. When John tried to put his arms around her, she threw them off, staggered into the European bathroom, and slammed the door so hard the wall shook. She sat on the toilet seat, utterly miserable.

He not only betrayed me by screwing two whores, he tried to excuse infidelity with that self-righteous crap.

Joy did not know how long she sat there, but she began to calm down. Her real mind began to assert itself over the cowardly one. *Yes, I know intellectually I was unreasonable. Yes, we have our mission. True, this third universe depends on us, and untold millions of lives are at stake.* But she loved John so deeply that she found it impossible to emotionally accept what he had done. It was not in her character. *I would never betray him like that. I would have to be raped.*

The door to the bathroom opened a crack and John stuck his head inside, looking very apologetic. “Can I come in?”

Joy was torn between her love for him and her jealousy. She could not trust herself to speak. Her real mind motioned him in. He came in and sat on the edge of the bathtub, took her cold, listless hand, and said nothing.

She whispered, “You bastard.”

He said nothing. After a long silence, she looked at him and cried, her voice breaking, “I hate this. I hate the mission. I hate these appointments. I just want to be with you. I want to adopt children. I want to raise a family. I want to get old together. But that can’t be. We may not even grow old together.”

Joy put her head in her hands and broke down again in shuddering sobs. He caressed her back, and waited. Between sobs, she managed to get out, "What makes it so much worse is that I know . . . I know my love for you must not interfere."

John gently lifted her off the toilet and carried her to the bed, and they cried together. Half-heartedly at first, then with all her strength, she hugged him and let her misery flow out of her with her tears.

He is mine. He is with me. We have our whole lives to be together.

They slept in each other's arms and in the morning they bathed together, returned to bed, and made slow, gentle, tender love, a lovemaking that she was certain only they shared.

Long afterward, Joy finally asked, "Why, at no time during that whole night, did you contact me? I was so scared something had happened to you."

John replied, "I felt what I was doing was not right for us. It violated what was special between us. If I communicated to you, I would either have had to lie or tell you what I was doing. I didn't want to lie and I didn't want to tell you the truth over the communicator. Can you understand that?"

"Yes, my darling, I can." And that ended it. Joy would never feel such anger toward him again. But it taught her one thing. In spite of all her training, even in the arts of love; in spite of all her allusions to her Asian background and how it differed from the West in being more accepting of sex; in spite of her self image as a very rational person, she was still a woman. She was just as prone as any to jealousy and rage over her man.

Chapter 26

Joy
Shanghai

“**W**hat a lovely evening,” Joy commented as they left their room at the Peace Hotel to go to a Shanghai music festival. “Let’s take a walk afterward through the International Settlement. I can’t get over how it’s a virtual independent city-state within China, run by foreign governments. I don’t blame the Chinese for being upset about it.”

They were just about to step into a rickshaw when two men suddenly came up behind them and threw a net over their heads. Joy and John reacted almost instantly, but the net was being pulled tight around them and hampered their movement. They both got their guns out, but couldn’t see their attackers to take aim; they couldn’t turn because of the net.

A stupid net, Joy fumed as she struggled against the cords. I never thought we would be attacked with a stupid net. Cowardly.

A voice behind them said in Chinese, “Drop your guns and be still or we will shoot you.”

Joy stopped struggling and immediately told John to do the same. The attackers wound the net around them and tied its ends tight so that they were completely immobilized. Passersby averted their eyes and walked on. They all knew that interference in such attacks or kidnappings could mean instant death.

A small, three-wheeled, Chinese truck pattered to the wooden curb in front of them and four men picked them up, dumped them on the truck bed, and covered them with a bamboo mat that stretched from side to side. They felt the truck rattle forward in a loud clashing of gears and a backfire and soon they were bouncing from one side of the bed to the other.

John remained calm. Trying to speak while being thrown about wasn’t easy, but he managed to say, “It must be a kidnapping for money. We should get out of this if we don’t anger them.”

They were jiggled, bounced, jerked, and bruised by the bed of the truck and its rough sides for about an hour. Finally, the truck rattled to a stop.

More clashing of gears and a clatter, and the truck backed up to stop again. The driver killed the engine. Someone took the mat off them, and Joy saw that they were at the delivery door to a warehouse in what must be an outlying industrial sector. Since it was Sunday there was no one around.

Three men drove up in a smoking, noisy, old Buick. They got out, came over and lifted Joy and John out of the truck. They carried them inside the warehouse and stood them up, then stepped back, their guns still pointed at their captives. Two men had been waiting. They slowly took the net from around Joy and John, picked up their guns, and frisked them. They were experts. They hiked up her dress and found her knives. They took her magnum from her purse, emptied John's shoulder holster, and found the S&W he carried in his coat pocket. They threw all the weapons on a scarred and chipped work table nearby. They said nothing. They showed no emotion. Joy began to worry. These were not normal kidnappers.

Still, what to do if kidnapped was one of the scenarios Joy had been trained for, and she had passed this training on to John. So they played it very scared and helpless. They kept their heads down, and wouldn't look at their kidnappers. As the kidnappers tied them by their hands and feet to separate pillars, she tensed the muscles in her hands and wrists so that she would have wiggle room in the ropes when she relaxed her muscles. But they tied her wrists tightly and the wriggle room just wasn't there.

One of the men, who had been standing in the back during all this, came forward and stopped in front of John. He was thin and tall, with a clump of black hair hanging from his chin and eyes so narrow they looked like slits in his round face. He asked John in Chinese, "Your name?"

Joy answered in Chinese, "He does not speak Chinese. I will translate." And she did so.

John answered, "John Banks."

"What are you doing here?"

"I am a businessman. I own the Tor Import and Export Company and am negotiating a deal for Chinese paintings."

Slit Eyes then asked for the gardener's pruning shears on the table. When one of the men handed them to him, he looked at John and

threatened, "I will take off a finger for each lie you tell me. If you continue to lie, I will work my way around your body until you are nothing more than a quivering torso only held up by the ropes."

Joy almost choked in translating this. She was so scared for John her heart was shaking her whole body and she could feel the sweat beginning to wet the inside of her armor.

Slit Eyes looked at one of his men and said, "Show him."

The man went to a cabinet and brought back a long-handled branch pruner and a machete, which he placed on the table.

Slit Eyes asked, "Why are you here?"

"On business," John said without hesitation.

The man moved behind him, and in seconds John let out a sharp scream and almost immediately gurgled, trying to suppress it.

Joy shrieked at the man, "Stop it. He is telling you the truth. What do you want from him?"

The man came back in front of John and held out his bloody finger. He asked again, "Why are you here?"

She could hardly translate; her voice was for long moments beyond her control. She now knew it would be their death if John told him the truth. She finally got the translation out.

Sweat now dripped from John's chin, but he looked at the man and firmed his voice to say, "You can cut off all my fingers and toes. You can cut off my ears and nose and lips. But my answer will always be 'business.'"

She barely managed to translate this as well.

"We will see," the man said, and walked behind John again. This time John managed to squelch his scream, but he couldn't prevent his face from distorting and reddening in pain.

Slit Eyes brought out another bloody finger and now held two in front of John. He asked, "Well?"

Joy refused to translate.

Slit Eyes looked at her and said in a soft voice, "Will you translate?"

"No."

"Okay," he said with a smile, "I speak English." He turned to John and asked in English, "Why you here?"

John's face was blotched red and white, and he was sweating even more. But, his face was also rigid with determination. "Business," he spit out.

"Okay, we do pretty woman." And in Chinese he said to two men, "Untie and strip her."

Joy closed her mind to John and tried to relax her muscles, calm her mind, and gather her strength. Her mind filled with the image of her karate sensei standing over her when she was six years old and on the verge of crying from a very painful throw to the wooden floor. "Calm your mind," he said in a soothing voice, as he hit her on the arm with a stick. "Calm, calm, like the reflection in a still mountain lake, a reflection of summer clouds floating across a peaceful blue sky. Empty your mind of all but the clouds," and he hit her with the stick again. She had to learn to ignore pain and distracting emotion. It was only when her face and body looked calm and relaxed that he stopped hitting her. In spite of the pain of the blows, she had not uttered a sound. From then on she knew she was his special student.

That image of her sensei helped her extinguish the burning hot fury and terror tearing at her guts, trying to destroy her thoughts. In their place she found her calm core and let it expand and gather strength from her training and move up her arms and down her legs and into her toes and fingers until she was fully encased in it. Inside that calm bubble, multiple pieces of her aligned themselves.

The last thing she thought before she closed down her mind to all extraneous thought was, "I love you, John. Help me, Mom."

Outwardly, she was a helpless and scared woman, her head hanging and shoulders sloping, as she pleaded in Chinese, "No, no, please don't."

In spite of John's pain, he played his role in trying to provide a distraction. He struggled against his ropes and shouted and yelled in English for them to leave her alone, and although the words may not have been understood, his frantic fear for her certainly was.

Two men untied her. Joy faked a scared, weak woman's resistance as they started to take off her long skirt. She could hardly fight well in that and they were doing her a favor. She waited until they got down to her cotton panties.

At that moment there was no expanse of time, no thought, no analysis; no fear, worry, anxiety; no feeling at all. She was a pure weapon, a deadly spirit. She struck.

She drove her knee into the face of the one bending over to pull down her panties, smashing his nose and flipping him unconscious to the floor at the same moment she mortally injured the other one, who had just got hold of her blouse to rip it off, with a fore knuckle fist punch to his upper throat.

Still standing in front of John, Slit Eyes reached for his gun, but she sent him sprawling with a reverse kick to his face and the remaining two came at her with knives and she did a leaping roll and came up alongside the table with their weapons on it, but the only thing within reach was her throwing knife. She grabbed it barely in time to dodge a killing knife thrust, parried a side thrust, and stabbed the man through the solar plexus and into the heart with an upward cut; and the other man reached for a gun in his pocket and she flipped her knife at him. He went down in a gush of blood with the knife in his lower throat.

Panting, Joy went to each of the men on the floor to make sure they were dead or unconscious. The two she had knifed were dead and the others unconscious. She pulled her knife out of the throat of a dead man and hit each of the unconscious ones in the temple with its hard handle to make sure they would stay out for a while. She didn't worry about killing them.

That done, Joy rushed over to John. Through his pain he mumbled, "Nice work, baby."

She kissed him on the cheek, and went around him to cut his hands free. His index and little fingers had been cut from his left hand and the stumps were dribbling blood. She cut his feet free, and checked whether he had gone into traumatic shock. Just as she was looking into John's eyes for shock, the truck driver appeared from a side door and saw the others sprawled on the floor. He immediately took out his gun and crouched, opening fire. She heard John grunt, and he started to fall. She couldn't help him at the moment and survive.

She ran zigzagging to the table and grabbed her magnum as the man fired two more times. Without looking, she threw herself head first to the floor and twisted to land on her back with her magnum pointed to where the bullets had come from; she shot the man as he was running toward her and raising his gun to shoot at her on the floor.

She got up and dashed over to John. He had been shot in the back and the bullet had come out his lower left chest. She couldn't believe it. He had not worn his armor. She got her skirt and rapidly folded it and put it under his shirt on his back wound to act as a compress, and folded up his shirt and pushed it against the hole in his chest and put his hand on it.

He was pale and gasping for breath. She had to move him. She got her holster purse off the table, put all their weapons in it, and hung it around her neck. She levered John to a half standing position, got her back under his chest, and with all her strength she slowly carried him,

his feet dragging, through the door they had been brought through, and to the Buick. She opened the car's high back door and levered John up and into the car and onto the rear floor. She rushed over to the driver's side. She switched the magneto on, checked to make sure the car was out of gear so that it would not jerk forward and hit her when she tried to start it, retarded the spark, and advanced the throttle lever to halfway to enrich the fuel-air ratio and make it easier to start the car.

She took the crank from its hook, leaped out and ran to the front of the Buick, and inserted the crank in the engine. She had to use both hands and exert all her strength to turn the crank and hoped that she had retarded the spark sufficiently to prevent a backfire. A little off and the resulting backfire might violently jerk the crank and break her thumbs or arms.

No, she didn't pray. She scared the engine. As she cranked two revolutions, she screamed at it, "Start, or I'll turn you into goddam junk!"

The two-cylinder engine fired, shaking the car violently as she rushed to the steering wheel to advance the spark and retard the throttle before the engine died. She made it; the engine settled into a loud rattle as she jumped up behind the wheel. She frantically released the hand brake, hit the low speed pedal with her foot, and in moments crushed the high speed clutch to the floor and shifted into top second gear. The Buick jack-rabbed fiercely as she pointed the car toward the bright skyline of downtown Shanghai.

Given the condition that John was in, their office on Ningbo Lu was too far away. As soon as she saw pedestrians, she stopped and yelled out that she had an emergency and asked if there was a doctor close by. After stopping several people, she was directed to the Baptist Missionary Academy about five minutes away. Joy drove there at high speed, passing cars, horses, wagons, and carts, driving rickshaws off the road, and continually beeping her pipsqueak horn. She bounced John all over the back floor and she was afraid he would fall out. She had no choice. She would apologize later, if he lived. She left behind her a chaotic crowd of Chinese pedestrians who would forever curse woman drivers.

She finally found the Academy, skidded to a halt on the gravel in front of it, and rushed inside, oblivious to her torn blouse, revealed gray armor, and white panties. She yelled at a shocked woman in the reception area that her husband had been shot protecting her from rape and was in the car outside. The receptionist called down the hallway and a man and woman, both dressed in well-worn medical whites, came out of a room.

Joy said, "Husband shot," in English, and the three followed her as she rushed back to the car. They got John out of the car and she helped them carry him into a medical office with a paper-covered examination table. They laid him on the table and the doctor began examining his wounds.

John was still alive, but unconscious, pale, and breathing shallowly. Joy watched as the doctor looked at his bullet holes, cleaned the entry and exit wounds, and gave him injections of what, she did not know. He treated the wound for infection. *Good thing that the man who shot him had used ordinary bullets*, she thought abstractedly, *which from the entry wound look like a .32 caliber.*

Finally the doctor, with his nurse's help, put compresses on the two wounds and heavily bandaged John's chest from back to front. He had no idea that he should also treat John for traumatic shock. General practitioners had yet to know much about it; World War I had not yet occurred.

John was lucky. The bullet passed through his left side horizontally and almost at a right angle to his back; it went through below his rib cage and left lung, missing his stomach and, as far as Joy could tell, also missing his large intestine.

Still, he was not looking good at all, and sometimes the shock of a serious bullet wound could kill. She had to get John to her medical supplies and under her care. She used the Academy's phone, viciously cranked it to get the operator, and asked to be connected to Deng Bu-wei, their manager at their Shanghai office. She hastily warned him that John was seriously wounded and she was bringing him there.

Still running on adrenaline, Joy asked the doctor and nurse to help her carry John to their car so that she could take him to a hospital. The doctor protested, saying it was dangerous to move him. But she insisted. As they carried him to the car, they asked what happened. She said it was an attempted rape and John had tried to protect her. They seemed to accept that, given the way she looked.

Once she had John in the car, they helped her start it with the crank, and Joy drove off in a cloud of oily smoke for Shanghai. When she could see distinct buildings on its skyline, she was able to navigate toward their office near the International Settlement and the docks.

Deng Bu-wei and two assistants were waiting outside. She told them to carry John gently to his private office, one of which they always made sure was available in any company offices they set up, and rushed into it ahead of them to jerk out of a cabinet their locked medi-

cal case. When Deng and his assistants carried John in, she told them to lay him out on the lacquered desk and asked Deng to stay, while his assistants brought her a bottle of water.

She unlocked the case, revealing their medical equipment and medicine. She hooked John up to a heart, blood pressure, and body temperature monitor, and went to work on him. She had been trained by the Society to manage a variety of emergencies, including gunshot wounds to the torso, and this office contained the essential medicine and supplies for handling this, among other emergencies. Anticipating a need, the Society had stocked well the medical time capsule it sent.

Joy gave John several injections for infection and trauma, hoping there would be no incompatibility with what he had already received. This was a gunshot wound and she thus feared a Group A beta-hemolytic strep, and gave him a penicillin-spectrum antibiotic. She had no way of giving him a blood transfusion, but he had not bled that much. She cut off his bandages with medical scissors, sniffed the discharge from his wounds for feces to be sure his intestines were not hit, washed his wounds with medical soap, and treated them with antibiotics. She left the wounds open so that they could drain. She put special antibacterial compresses on them from her supplies and with Deng's help she loosely rewound his back and chest wounds with antibacterial bandages. She also rebandaged his finger stumps, after disinfecting and putting antibiotics on them.

Joy asked Deng to bring in cushions and an ornate Chinese room separator from their reception room, and when he and an assistant did so, she laid the separator on the floor, with a large cushion under one end and cushions on top. With their help, she laid John on the cushions with his head at the low end. She pulled down the cotton curtains covering the office window, folded them into a blanket, and covered him with it, making sure he would be warm but not overheated.

Done, Joy asked that they be left alone. She sat cross-legged on the floor next to him.

He remained unconscious.

She was so scared he would die. She took his cold hand in both of hers. She began to shake uncontrollably, and had to release his hand to stop shaking him as well. The post-combat fatigue had set in hours ago. She was exhausted. But all she could feel was fear. She kept her eyes glued to the monitor and his rising heartbeat and falling blood pressure. His skin was cool to the touch and slightly moist.

No good. No good at all.

Hours, it seemed, went by. She began to plead with him, “Don’t you dare die, my love in heart and soul. Don’t you dare die. I want to have a few words with you about you not wearing your armored vest.”

She waited. His heartbeat went up to 123 beats per minute while his systolic had fallen to 78. *HE’S DYING.*

Joy begged, “No, no, darling, don’t die.” Tears almost blinded her. She grabbed her right wrist to stop her hand from trembling, and took his hand in it again. She held it gently and sobbed.

With her free hand Joy took out her locket and flipped it open with her finger. She put it down alongside John and beseeched her mother to help save him. She felt so helpless, so alone. She was trained for action, not sitting and watching her lover die.

She cried until she could not cry anymore. She prayed for him to live. She tried to persuade him that it would be grossly unfair to him, to them, to her for him to die. She again begged her mother for help. Above all, and before and after whatever else she said, she told him how much she loved him and what he meant to her. She could not let him die without hearing that. She whispered it. She leaned over and gently caressed his hair from his forehead. She kissed him on his cold white cheeks and said it. She kissed her fingers and touched his lips with them and said it again.

The monitor was her whole world now. It swam before her tear-filled eyes as his pulse slowly increased and blood pressure declined, taking his life away. Death seemed inevitable.

Watching the red digital numbers with horror, Joy reached behind her for her purse. She pulled it around in front of her and reached in for her tactical knife. She put the knife on her lap. There was no thought to this. No plan. No consideration of their mission.

It was so very simple. If John died, she had failed to protect him. She had failed. She would join him in seconds. It would be their final togetherness in this world. *Our souls will ascend as one to the other world.*

His blood pressure continued to edge downward. Never taking her eyes off the monitor, she released John’s hand from her right and took it gently into her left. She picked up the knife in her right hand and waited. Now ready to do what she must, waiting for the deaths that might come in the next minute or so, she reached a state of utter calm that she had never felt before. *Death and release will come soon, I know.*

His pulse and blood pressure stabilized. But he wasn't out of danger yet. Joy held the knife ready. Her absolute calm didn't break. She did not know how much time went by. The sky lightened. Deng knocked on the door several times, but each time she said simply, "Go away."

It got hot. It must have been midday. His blood pressure turned upward; his pulse started to fall. Joy released his hand and felt his head. It was dry and slightly warm. Normal color had returned to his face.

She dropped the knife and released a howling cry of happiness. "*JOHN WILL LIVE.*"

She put her head in her hands and her whole body shook with her sobs. She had found within her more tears. Happy ones.

It was turning dark outside when John opened his eyes, saw her distraught face, swollen, bloodshot eyes, wild hair, and torn blouse, and croaked, "You look like hell. Don't you care what people will say?" He gave her a pathetic grin.

Joy's tears flowed down her cheeks. She instantly forgot all the smart-alecky things she was going to say when he gained consciousness. She took his hand and brushed her cheeks with it. She leaned over and kissed his dry lips, and made the greatest understatement of her life: "I was worried about you, dearest. I love you."

"I love you too, baby. Is it possible for a man to get a drink around here?"

Joy got up, painfully, since she wasn't used to sitting on the floor cross-legged for so long. At first she couldn't straighten her back. She was not too steady on her feet as she opened the office door and called for Deng. He came almost immediately; his wife Lizhen was with him. Joy apologized for her rudeness, and asked Deng to bring water for John. He did so in moments, and Lizhen brought clothes she had bought for Joy.

Joy thanked Lizhen, promised to pay for them, and took the water to John. She gently raised his head and helped him sip. His blood pressure was up to 89 over 68.

Lizhen left for a moment and came back with blankets for Joy, and asked if she wanted anything to eat. Joy told her that she wasn't hungry. Before they left, she told Deng to make sure the hotel extended their stay for a month.

John's eyes were closed again and he looked like he was sleeping. So tired she was barely able to talk, Joy asked Deng to send a telegram to Jy-ying:

Jy-ying,

John tortured and shot. Think he will live. Will stay for month more while he heals. Please tell Hands. Ask him to handle company for us. Give him all the help you can. More in few days. Thank you.

Joy

Joy suddenly realized that she hadn't taken off her stinking armor, and did so. She picked up her open locket and kissed her mother's picture, and told her, "I know you were with me through all this. I know you helped. Thanks, Mom. I would not have lived many seconds beyond his death." She closed the locket and put it back over her head to hang above her heart.

After putting one of the blankets on the floor next to John, she laid down on it. She rested her head next to his, put her hand on his, and whispered, "I've never been so scared in my life. Please don't do that again, my love." She plunged into sleep almost instantly.



Jy-ying

Having left whining Little Wei in her apartment for his protection, Jy-ying stomped alone into the rear of Lin Huifeng's restaurant. Gruffly she asked the Chinese cook, who was holding at arm's length his flaming wok, "Is Lin upstairs?"

When he said yes, she rushed to the stairs, jumped up them two at a time, and pounded on Lin's door. He opened it, wearing a surprised look. She pushed him aside and went in. As he closed the door, she turned on him, took her Browning pistol out of her purse, and pointed it between his eyes.

"I could tear you apart with my hands, but you would not believe I can do that until your arms and legs were quivering on the floor. But you will believe this gun. I paid you to have a certain person eliminated. Instead, those you contracted tortured and shot her partner. I did not want him killed." She spat at him, "Did you understand that?"

He clasped his shaking hands in front of him and bowed, unable to speak. She rocked with anger. Grabbing his receding hair, she pulled up his head to look at her and shoved the gun barrel into his stomach. She hissed, "They almost killed him!"

Trembling, voice wavering in fear, Lin tried to respond. "I don't know . . . what happened."

"I will give you five days to find out. If he dies, you die."

She put her gun away, took a step toward him, grabbed his long shirt, and threw him over her hip onto the floor. As he lay on the wooden floor, she kicked him in the quadriceps so he would have several days of pain to remind him of her anger. "Five days," she repeated as he held his leg, moaning.

"Don't think you can pay some tong find and get rid of me," she warned. "I have friends here who will avenge me, and you will take a long time to die. I'll let myself out, thank you."

She left.



Joy

It was morning and light outside when she woke up. She raised her head and looked at John. His eyes were open and he was looking at her. "I'm horny. Let's make love."

Joy jerked with surprise and looked at him incredulously until she saw his attempt at a smile.

"But first things first—I've got to piss."

She got up, feeling much better after the rest, and brought over the metal wastebasket. She helped him turn on his side to use it. She called Deng and handed him the bucket with apologies, and asked him to come back after he disposed of the urine.

When he returned, Joy asked him to remain with John while she used the toilet—a little room with a porcelain-lined hole in the floor and a removable bucket underneath—and got into the clothes that Lizhen had brought her. When she returned to the office, Lizhen had brought green tea, thin soup for John, and hot rice, vegetables, and chicken for Joy that she had cooked at home.

Before eating, Joy had to change the bandages, treat John's wounds again to prevent infection, make sure the entrance and exit holes were draining well, and give him another injection. She fed him the soup and gave him some tea before eating herself. While doing this, she explained to Deng what had happened, and to John as well, filling him in on events after he lost consciousness.

Deng later brought in two assistants, who moved the desk and other furniture out of the way, set up a double bed, and gently lifted John onto it.

Over the next two weeks, John gradually gained strength and was able to get up and move slowly about with little pain. She had kept his wounds open with a sterile saline solution so that they could freely drain, had carefully studied and smelled what came out, and checked his temperature and blood pressure every four hours, even if she had to wake from a dead sleep. There was no evidence of a general infection. She grew increasingly confident that in another two weeks they could leave for home, confident enough to finally tell him, “You were so lucky. That bullet that went through you missed your spine and every important organ. And the bullet missed me as it came out of your lower chest. But, stupid man, I had my *armored vest* on.”

After giving him that opening to confess his sin, she waited, but he said nothing. *Okay*, she thought, *I’ll draw it out of him*. “Why didn’t you wear your damn armor?” she asked, proud under the circumstances of her well-formed question and patient tone.

“I forgot.”

“You forgot?”

“Yes”

“You forgot to wear your armored vest?”

“Yes.”

Joy rolled her eyes to the ceiling, then looked outside. “Nice weather today, isn’t it? Although it’s turning cool.”

It got colder in the room for a while, but no need to say what was self-evident.



Jy-ying

Five days later, Jy-ying approached Lin’s restaurant cautiously, her Browning hidden under a light coat thrown over her hand, Little Wei following along. He was now too useful to leave behind. He might smell the danger before she did.

She picked her time so that the restaurant would most likely be crowded, and it was. The busy cooks paid no attention to her as she strode through the kitchen with Little Wei trying to keep up, and bounded up the stairs. She didn’t knock, but threw it open and stepped to one side.

Lin was waiting for her. He sat at his half moon table in his wing-backed wicker chair, smoking his long pipe. Without expression, he motioned her to sit down across from him. She made sure Little Wei had come in, looked around the room, checking for hiding places and, since sitting where he had motioned would put her back to the door and most of the room, she commanded, "You sit there. I will sit where you are."

He got up and took the elmwood Chinese chair. She sat down and placed her gun on the table, pointed at him and within easy reach. She knew he had people assassinated in Chinatown and took no chances.

Little Wei was having a great time sniffing around this new world of smells. Several times, he sneezed.

Jy-ying raised an eyebrow and waited.

"Tea?"

"No."

"I have spent a modest fortune on secret telegrams. My contacts at the Western Union office here and in Shanghai are getting rich. Can I expect you will cover my costs?"

"You are lucky to be alive."

"I hope you will have mercy on my humble person when you hear what happened."

"Get on with it."

Her tone of voice made Little Wei stop sniffing at a bedroll and look up at her, his tail down. When he saw she wasn't looking at him, he went back to his fun.

Lin took a nervous puff on his pipe and explained, "I contracted with the Green Lotus Society through the Sue Yop tong to have your friend removed. Imperial Intelligence had a spy in the organization, and he reported my request to his contact."

Lin was relaxing as he talked and he did not try to hide his curiosity. "Intelligence was carrying on a secret investigation of your friend and her partner, believing that their business might be a cover for anti-imperial spying. Because of what they heard from the spy, they became even more interested and picked up my contact in the society and tortured him to find out more."

His face fell into an ugly, gap-toothed grimace. "All they could find out was that someone had made this contract. Such contracts are done all the time. Fortunately, I have a secret way of doing this through my relatives, so Intelligence will not trace the source to your servant, not even that it came from the United States.

“I am sorry at what happened. If you so desire, I can have those who almost killed your friend’s partner . . . disciplined for their eagerness.”

“How much?”

“Considering the terrible amount I have already spent on your behalf, \$5,000 would be humble repayment.”

“Was the Green Lotus member who was picked up released?”

“Yes, he is in the hospital.”

“Then do what you suggest, and include him.” She watched Lin as she reached into her purse with one hand and felt for her roll of bills. She took it out and counted out ten hundred-dollar bills while still watching his eyes. “This is what you will get. Also, I will know what happens through my own sources.”

She got up and sidled to the door while keeping an eye on him. Little Wei immediately followed her and they both left.



Joy

Just before Joy and John left for the Shanghai docks to voyage home, they had two visitors to the office: Hong Dong-po, the head of the local Triad Society, and another man. They carried in a large, ornate Chinese chest and put it down near the door. Opening it, Hong took out a bamboo mat and unrolled it on the floor next to the chest. His face inscrutable, he next pulled out a man’s head by its hair and held it up for them to see, as though it were some treasure that he was selling. After giving the head’s name as Wang Wulong, he placed it on the mat. Soon, he had lined up seven heads facing John. Pointing to the first three, Hong said to Joy in Chinese, “These men you killed. He pointed to the next three and said, “These were our pleasure.” They were the ones Joy had knocked unconscious.

She thought she recognized Slit Eyes, the one who had cut off John’s fingers, but she couldn’t be sure. None of the heads had any ears, noses, eyes, or lips.

Hong pointed to the seventh head and said with disgust, “This was a minor Green Lotus member. He had told the others about both of you. His wife was tortured to get him to divulge what he knew, and we are sorry about that. Still, one does not tell secrets.” The head had no hair, eyebrows, or beard—it had been completely skinned.

Hong added, "We will send the seven heads to Imperial Intelligence headquarters with our compliments. We don't believe you will be bothered again."

Joy translated all this for John. He looked at the head of what he also thought was Slit Eyes, shook his finger at it, and said, "I told you to leave her alone, and you wouldn't listen. I hope that you've learned your lesson."

She didn't think this would translate well, so she simply said, "He wants to thank you, and give you \$1,000 a head."

"No," Dong said. "This was a matter of honor. You are Chinese. Do you understand?"

"Of course," Joy responded, feeling her face heat up. She stood and, facing Dong, bowed deeply. "Yes. You are an honorable person. I hope that you will accept our humble thanks."

Dong and his helper put the heads back into the chest. When John saw they were going to leave, he motioned Dong over to his bed. He put out his hand. Dong did not understand at first, so Joy explained that John wanted to shake hands. Dong took his hand, and John shook it vigorously.

When they were alone again, John asked Joy, "Why did they do that? What's in it for them? And what is it about us that interested Imperial Intelligence?"

Joy was puzzled herself. "It is an iron rule among these secret societies that no one snitches. They will not only torture and kill their own members for doing so, but also members of other societies. As to us, I don't know what they know or why they are interested in us. When we get back, we should ask Jy-ying if she can guess or find out."

Chapter 27

Joy

After four weeks, John had healed enough for them to board the *Santa Maria* for their trip home. Joy hand-carried their medical equipment aboard, intent on making damn sure John continued to heal well.

Near the middle of the voyage he got obstreperous about Joy not letting him exercise. So she started walking him around the first class deck, and told him to leave his shirt open so that the bandage around his chest could be seen. This answered the unspoken question other passengers might have as to why he was so pale and walking so slowly for a relatively young man.

The blond beauty came out of nowhere. She must have been watching them, and thought Joy was his nurse.

“Hello,” she said to John in a saccharine voice, ignoring Joy. “Whatever happened to you? Here, can I help?” And she moved to his other side and put her arm through his to give him support. She motioned with her head for Joy to get lost.

John stopped and looked at the girl. She had lovely, sparkling blue eyes, full lips, and hair that curled around her head and shoulders in a blond shower. She wore a red shirt, open at the throat to reveal a gold chain from which hung a little gold plate with Chinese calligraphy on it that Joy automatically translated to herself as “*lifang*—beautiful virtue.” She had on a currently risqué hip- and bottom-hugging woolen dress. What Joy noticed most was her large breasts, pushed up and out by some kind of undergarment.

Enough there for three of me, Joy chuckled to herself. “*Dressed to kill*,” was invented for her. *Definitely a wife’s worst nightmare*.

When the blond looked back at John with a beguiling smile, he smiled in return, looked at Joy, and said, “Thank you for your help. I’ll be in touch, and don’t forget scenario B.” He winked.

They went off together down the deck. The last thing Joy heard was, “And your name is, my pretty?”

“Honey.”

What else would it be?

“What a nice”

They disappeared down the deck.

Joy had heard of the sea floozies who traveled back and forth first-class on the liners, seducing rich male passengers. Their “husband” would catch them in a compromising position, and demand satisfaction, for which a small fortune would suffice. Just out of fun, Joy and John had imagined several scenarios they might use if such a floozy tried to seduce John, and had even lettered them.

She found an isolated deck chair, sat down on it, and waited. They were three days out of Shanghai, and the ship was slowly rocked by a medium swell as it made steady progress. A brisk breeze blew across her face the strands of hair sticking out from under her narrow brimmed deck hat. On the horizon there was a rainsquall, and the sun was partly hidden by a towering cumulus cloud. It was a great view and a pleasant time to be alive.

She soon fell asleep while watching a school of flying fish.

“KK. Hi baby. You there?”

Joy woke up with a start. The sun had gone down and she was getting chilled. “KK. I’m here. What’s up?”

“Ha-ha. Funny girl. I’m with the blonde in her cabin. It’s A33. I know she has tipped off her partner. I guess he should be along after he thinks she has had enough time to look indecent. I’m in her toilet to call you, and will now leave the communicator on so that you will know when to come in. I’m looking forward to the fun.”

“Yes, I bet you are,” Joy couldn’t help saying.

“Now I’ve got to somehow get my hands on her for her partner’s show.”

“Don’t strain yourself.” That hung in the air with little icicles forming on the edges.

“We’re into this now, baby. Let’s carry it though.” Before Joy could respond, John hastened to add, “When it’s all set up, I’ll cough and that will be your cue. Signing off.”

Joy stomped around the A-deck looking for A33. She must have looked like she had bitten into a rotting fish, for several passengers gave her a second look as she pushed past them, her hands balled up into fists at her side. After finding A33, it was only the world’s greatest willpower that prevented her from barging in on John, and scaring that whore to near-death with her magnum.

She waited in the corridor at a distance from A33, looking in her purse, as though she couldn't find her key. She heard giggling and sighing in John's communicator, and words exchanged that indicated things were getting hot between the pair. When Joy had fantasized about this scenario with John, she thought it would be fun. Hearing them now, she thought, *This reverse scam is a stupid idea. Of course, it would be John's idea. Make that: idiotic idea.*

Joy heard a moan and her mind hissed, *If I hear one more moan out of that slut, I'm going in.*

Just then, a heavyset man walked down the corridor, stopped in front of A33, and with his back to her, put his ear to the door. They both heard the moans. He rushed in, beating Joy to it.

Over the communicator, she heard the man's voice. "What's going on here? What're you doing with my wife? You son of a bitch. I'm going to knock the shit out of you!"

John acted surprised. "I didn't know she was married. She led me on. Honey, why didn't you tell me, for Christ's sake? I'm sorry. I'll just leave."

It was the whore's turn. Faking her tears, she pleaded, "Please Bruno, don't hurt me, don't beat me again. He made me do it," and so on. It was fine theater and made Joy forget her jealousy.

Finally John coughed, and Joy rushed down the corridor and burst in to A33.

John had his hand with the bandaged finger stumps on Bruno's arm. Honey was topless, with only her bloomers on.

Joy yelled at John, "Thank God I found you. The purser said he saw you come in here."

Then she looked at Honey, who was staring at her in utter surprise. Apparently horrified, Joy exclaimed, "Oh my God, did he touch you with his *hand*?" And she pointed to John's bandaged hand.

Honey nodded, picking up her flimsy shirt and holding it across her large breasts.

Joy made believe she'd just noticed that John had his hand on Bruno, and she screamed at the man, "You let him touch you with *that* hand?"

Bruno backed away, beginning to look nervous.

"Jesus Christ, I can't believe this." Joy worked up some crocodile tears. "It's my fault, I should have known. I trusted him not to touch anybody. My God, I've got to tell the captain." And she turned and started for the door.

John yelled, "I'm sorry, nurse Chang! I couldn't help it. She's so lovely. You don't know what it's like for a man, and I haven't had a woman since I caught this disease—"

Yes, Joy thought at that moment, the way she looked when I barged in, it may be a long time before you do have a woman.

"Holy Christ, what have I done?" John screwed up his face in, Joy thought, a crummy imitation of crying.

Bruno was now obviously scared. "What ya got, pal?"

"You don't want to know." John got up to leave with Joy.

Bruno grabbed John's shirt and demanded, "What is it?"

"Leprosy. See, I've already lost two fingers." John showed him his two bandaged stumps. "It's now around my chest." John pulled his shirt apart and displayed the bandages.

Emulating a doctor telling his patient that he has terminal cancer, with every line of her face pointing down and her voice somber, Joy pointed out, "Now you two have it."

She hesitated, then with the greatest apparent reluctance, added, "I've got to tell the captain. He knows about him." She nodded at John. "I was supposed to keep him in his cabin. The captain will shoot me."

Honey and Bruno were very frightened. Honey had lost her coloring and Bruno could barely squeak out, "What will the captain do?"

"He'll quarantine you in your cabin and when we get to San Francisco, he'll turn you over to the health authorities. What you now have is highly contagious and they will send you to a leper colony. You will have to spend the rest of your life there. That is where I was taking this fellow. The disease is horrible. Your skin rots away and your appendages rot off, like his fingers."

Joy looked at Honey, and put her hand over her mouth. "Oh my God, did he touch your . . . breasts?"

Yes, you bastard, she thought at John.

Honey turned even whiter and started shaking. All she could do was nod.

Joy said in a rush, "They are going to rot away."

Good. Couldn't be happier.

She said nothing for a moment, as though she was horrified at what she had said, then added in a sorrowful voice, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have told you that."

Bruno was as white as a fish belly. He too was shaking, and had broken out in a sweat. "You mean my arm will rot off?"

"Yes, slowly, and after it goes, the rot will extend to the rest of your body. There is no cure for it. Come," Joy said to John, "we've got to rush to the captain."

She headed for the door and he got up to join her, trying to hide the huge grin struggling to erupt on his face.

Bruno pulled a gun out of his pocket and said, "No."

Joy looked at Bruno sadly. "This is a Portuguese ship, and the purser knows we are here. If you murder us, he'll suspect you did it, and you'll be tried for murder in Portugal. Execution is by the garrote."

"What's that?"

"The executioner puts a metal band around your neck and slowly tightens it with a screw until you're unable to take even a tiny breath. You die by slow suffocation."

Shaking even more, his face slack with horror, Bruno lowered his gun. Tremulously, he said, "Don't tell the captain. I'll give you money."

"What do you think I am? I'm a nurse. I'm concerned about the health of everyone on board this ship. I can't have you two running around and infecting people with leprosy."

He pleaded, "We'll stay in our cabin the rest of the trip and never touch anyone again. I'll give you \$3,000."

Joy hesitated, as though considering it. "No, you two are too much of a health risk."

"Five thousand."

More hesitation. "No, not worth it. Come on, let's go, Mr. Silver," she said to John.

"Wait." Frantically, Bruno almost screamed, "Honey, get your stash."

She hurriedly put on her shirt, got off the bed, and tottered to the cabin's small closet. She pulled a roll of bills out of a shoe and gave it to Bruno. He tried to count it, but was shaking so badly, he had to start over twice. Finally, he added it to a roll he had in his own pocket, and cried, "Here, take it all. About \$7,260. This is all we have. Please don't tell the captain."

"I'll tell you what," Joy said reluctantly, holding out her hand for the money. "I feel sorry for you two. It's not your fault. I won't tell the captain unless I see you anywhere on this ship, and I will ask the purser to keep an eye out for me. I will also get your address from the purser and tell the state health department to keep a watch on you two. Now, do I have your promise? You will never touch another human being, including each other? That would only speed up the rot."

Bruno replied, with relief, "Yes, yes."

"Do you promise that as soon as the rot sets in, you will turn yourselves over to your state health department?"

“We will, I promise.”

“Good luck.” Joy put the money in her holster purse, opened the door for John, and they left.

They had a long walk around the ship to get to their cabin, and she was sure that many passengers who saw their contorted faces wondered what was the matter. They tried to hold it all in until they got back to their cabin, where they just exploded in laughter and rolled on their bunks and the floor until their sides hurt. Finally, John held up his bandaged hand and, pointing with the other at his bandaged stumps, said, “It was worth it. I haven’t had so much fun since I put a large snake in an outhouse while a school bully was inside, and jammed the door shut with a branch.”

Once they had calmed down, Joy squeezed the laughter out of her voice and asked, “Did you really touch her breasts?”

“Yes, but only with my bandaged hand. You know, it was part of the scenario. I had to.” John looked like a little boy telling his mother, “The cookies just happened to fall out of the jar.”

“Poor boy. Nipples?”

Mock horror on his face, he replied, “Really, baby, what do you think I am? But you’ll never believe what she did to me. It was so embarrassing.”

John laughed as Joy picked up a pillow and beat him gently on the head with it. “Beast!” she yelled.

Truth be told, she may have hidden it pretty well, but she couldn’t help the glimmer of jealousy that she felt at the time. Since then, she’d stopped berating herself for being jealous. For a person of her training and background, it was so unbecoming. She just recognized it for what it was—the aura of love. Like John’s jealousy over her just talking to men, when he would tell her later, “You’re flirting again.”

They never saw that couple again. In the months that followed, they sometimes wondered what had happened to them. They would imagine their hypochondria about the slightest sore or rash on their bodies, and thought that, had they known the truth, they would probably have preferred a jail term to the constant fear in which they lived.



By the time they docked, they had communicated to Jy-ying the details of what had happened in China, and asked her to tell the others. Although they hadn’t expected it, she, the guys, and Mariko met them at San Francisco Pier 8.

When they spied Joy and John coming down the ship's ramp, they broke through the crowd of people waiting and scampered onto the ramp and past the port authorities who tried to stop them. The guys came to a gleeful halt just in front of John and shook his hand, gently hugged him, and patted him on the shoulder.

Joy's turn. Hands lifted her up in a bear hug. Her feet never touched the ramp as he passed her to Dolphy to hug before passing her to Sal, who complained about being last. Jy-ying and Mariko gave John a careful hug and kissed Joy on the cheek.

That night, Joy and John threw a party and invited all their company executives and their wives over as well, and John told everyone an edited version of what had happened, claiming that extortion was the aim of those who kidnapped them, and that they'd been rescued by the police. During the toasts, Joy looked around and reflected, *Our company is doing well. It looks like we forestalled the colonization of Korea and have set back the Japanese military in favor of civilian rule. I've grown to really like the guys, Mariko, and Jy-ying. I can't blame her for her crush on John, and it's now under control. We're alive, and John is healing well. And I know the spirit of Mom is close.*

For the first time in her life, Joy got drunk—eye-glazing, mind-numbing, universe-spinning drunk. Jy-ying, who as a Muslim could not touch alcohol, told Joy afterward that she led the singing of some ribald ballads and before she fell into a stupor on the floor with her locket in her hands, she tried to do the dance of the seven veils. Smiling, Jy-ying kindly refused to tell her whether she got to the seventh. Joy remembered none of it. Jy-ying and Mariko said they put her to bed, and that the guys gently laid John, stupidly drunk as well, next to her.

Nobody would tell her what John did before he passed out. *Probably tried to touch some woman's breasts with his stumps*, she thought

Their trip to Japan and China and the lobbying on behalf of Korea was successful, they found out in the following years. John read her one revealing headline from *The New York Times*: "Congress Passes Angry Resolution Over Jap-Imposed Korean Protectorate." In return, she read him headlines from the Chinese and Japanese newspapers to which she subscribed, including "General Han's Korean Righteous Army Defeats Japanese Army at Taejon."

Where did Han find the time and energy? she wondered.

Chapter 28

Joy
1909–1910

They'd barely had time to unpack their bags in San Francisco before they received Janet's terrible message:

*Dear Joy and John,
My loving Ed was assassinated two days ago. Will have him cremated, as he desired. I will carry on his project with all my strength. I loved him dearly. What more can I say?*

*Yours,
Janet*

They were all stunned and saddened, and after two seconds of silent communication between Joy and John, she knew what to do. They would travel to Liverpool to give Janet support through this tough time, and help her tidy up her affairs and move to San Francisco.

John called Western Union to telegraph their reply.

*Dear Janet:
Out deepest condolences and sympathy. Mankind has lost a great man. We are coming to help. We invite you to move to San Francisco with us when we return.
Joy and John*

They knew that Jy-ying was close to Janet also, but Joy thought it best she stay and handle company matters. Jy-ying was very saddened by the news, as were the guys and Mariko.

John told Joy, "I was afraid of something like this. Ed had become too prominent, too successful against colonialism. He made too many enemies among the rich and powerful. We could easily be killed in the same way. What may save us is that we are only known widely for our business success. Everything else we do secretly."

Joy responded, "We've got to do all we can for Janet. She is now critical to the success of decolonization. Besides, she is like a sister to me."

"Like Jy-ying?" John asked without expression.

"No, not the same. Oh, I like her, and she is really good at her work for me, and I enjoy our sparring, but there is a distance there I can't put my finger on."

"Maybe you're still troubled by her having spied on us, or her attempted seduc—"

"Maybe." It came out too loud and too fast. She took a deep breath, and calmed her voice. "But she has behaved herself since." She looked sidelong at John. "Hasn't she?"

"You betcha."

They spent two days with Jy-ying and the others, laying out what needed to be done with the company while they were gone, and left on a four-day express to New York, where they were able to get a third class berth on the famous *R.M.S. Mauritania*. It took them over six days to reach Liverpool, during which they kept in wireless contact with Janet.

She was staying with the Wilsons, her foster parents, who were providing her with the emotional support she now needed. They also helped Joy and John arrange for Janet to move to San Francisco. Only Joy and John, however, could help tie up all the loose strings of Ed's anticolonial work. They made sure the Wilsons understood that Janet's move and their involvement must be kept secret, for she or all of them might be assassinated as well.

Janet bought a beautiful native Congo urn for Ed's ashes. They were able to get first class accommodations on the *R.M.S. Lusitania*, with a stateroom for Janet next to theirs. Janet carried Ed's ashes onto the ship and tenderly placed the urn on a little dresser in her room. She carefully secured it against the ship's motion, and placed a photograph of the two of them next to it. Sometimes when they stopped by her cabin to take her to dinner, Joy and John found her with her eyes red and swollen.

They communicated with Jy-ying by telegram while in England, and by wireless from their ship, about what they wanted done for Janet. By the time they returned to San Francisco with her, the apartment across the hall from Jy-ying had been furnished with early Victorian furniture—Janet's favorite.

Once Janet was settled in her new apartment, they helped her take over the editing of the weekly *West African Mail* and set up post office

boxes to which people could send her sensitive insider information. She still had Ed's secret contacts through which she could funnel funds for lobbying and distribution to sympathetic people. It had been a difficult operation with Ed, and much harder now that Janet had to do it alone. John, Joy, and Jy-ying helped as best they could, and in a number of instances, John acted as a go-between when a male presence was required, as was often the case in this age.

Joy and John set up an office in their company where Janet could work, and she hired assistants who made the repetitive part of the work easier. But when not at work on what they called the Colonial Project, for the first several months she was either across the hall with Jy-ying and Little Wei, or downstairs with Joy and John.

Once Janet was settled, Joy and John tried to move on. Joy found it especially hard. Her deep sympathy for Janet went beyond normal compassion. She kept imagining that Ed's ashes were John's, and was overwhelmed by the rapid emotional destruction she would suffer, were it true. She couldn't shake it. It hung over her and soured her days.

Months later, when they were alone in the evening, she put down the 1909 Sears Roebuck Catalogue she was leafing through, and told the living room, "I know Ed was among the best of humanity. That his life was snuffed out as fast as I could snap my fingers, in a way no armor or weapons could protect against, was a warning we can't ignore."

John looked up, brows furrowed, from Volume 2 of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which he was still trying to finish. "What?"

She realized she had been thinking aloud. She looked at him. "I love you, dearest."

"Oh, I see you noticed my manly hair, my perfect nose, my piercing eyes, and my lush lips; and especially, my incredibly masculine handlebar mustache. I love you too, baby." He cocked his head, twirled the ends of his carrot-colored mustache, and looked at her with a lascivious grin.

She stuck her tongue out at him, and looked back down at the catalogue without seeing it. *I would even miss his horrible humor.*



Jy-ying

How fortuitous, Jy-ying thought when Janet moved in across the hall. She never did like Janet being so far away—it made their conspir-

acy and companionship difficult. Now they could do so much together. The problem at first was keeping their true identities from Joy and John, and the three pesky guys. They had to continue to act like they belonged in this age; they had to watch that they didn't say things about the future they couldn't have known. It was hard enough with Jy-ying alone, but when they were talking to each other with the others around, they had to carefully guard what they said.

After well over a year, it became routine. A new problem slowly emerged, to eat at Jy-ying's relationship with Janet like a cancer. And then, as when an x-ray and biopsy show the lethal tumor for what it is, in two short discussions, Jy-ying's view of Janet went from co-conspirator and friend to potential enemy.

They had never really discussed religion. It seemed enough that they were both Sabah Muslims, and both did their Contact Prayers five times a day. But somehow, while visiting Janet, Jy-ying brought up the subject of the Hanafi sect: "We cannot have these Hanafi Sabahs spreading their false interpretations of his teaching and prophesies. We have to adhere strictly to what Sabah said. No liberal interpretations, but strict adherence. He was the Prophet of God and it is not for us to read between his lines. I think the National Council of Clerics should have been tougher with the Hanafis from the beginning."

Janet blanched. "My father was a Hanafi, and our leading imam in Britain was sympathetic to the Hanafi school—that's why he favored my dad's work. I really don't know. I'm not into these religious distinctions, myself. What was the Council doing about the Hanafi school?"

Jy-ying leaned over and snapped her fingers for Little Wei to come to her. He came and rolled over for her to scratch his stomach. As she gave him the full benefit of her nails, she tried to think of what to say. This was a shock to her.

Everyone in Sabah's Security Guard had believed that the Hanafis had to be rooted out, first in China and then elsewhere. Their beliefs could seriously undermine Sabahism; the sect was in some ways no less an enemy than Christianity or Judaism. Lists were being developed and the first arrests of leaders under one guise or another had taken place a month before her time travel.

She had to be sure. *Time for a Q & A.*

She smiled up at Janet. "Well, it's a matter of your own faith." She went through the major tenets of Islam, its basic pillars, on which there was virtually no disagreement. But when it got to the principles of Sabah, there was a gulf.

Janet put it this way. "I do not believe that the Ahmedi's green book, *Principles of Obedience*, is necessarily correct, and that the Supreme Imam of Sabahism is the only source of holy understanding and rules." She bowed her head. "Peace be unto Sabah. I think each Sabahist is responsible for his or her own interpretation, and that different interpretations should be able to coexist in harmony. Also, I don't see why Sabah cannot compete with other religions peacefully."

Jy-ying was aghast. *This is almost heresy. It's what Security was trying to stamp out. There is only one truth of Sabah, and that is the truth laid down by the first Supreme Imam Abduvahit Ahmedi.* A shiver ran down her spine at her final thought. *Janet is a Hanafi.*

Although she had just done so an hour before, she claimed that Little Wei needed to get out. She left with him as Janet returned to her apartment.

The next discussion with Janet days later scared her even more.

"I am impressed with the freedom people in the United States have," Janet said reflectively. "Oh, I know that women can't vote, and blacks are segregated, and there are other problems. But compared to the Sabahs' Great Britain, I love it here and in my country during this age. I think the exclusiveness of Sabah and the absolute rule by the clerics is wrong. People should be free to choose their religion and their government."

If Janet had hit her in the face with her fist, Jy-ying could not have felt a greater blow. But that was only the first punch. The second sent Jy-ying reeling.

Janet said, "I believe that Sabah was a prophet of God. But there have been other prophets, such as Mohammed himself. There will be other prophets, as God wills it. We obey His prophets, as each of us understands His words. But I don't believe God has said through any of His prophets that we should kill Joy. I think if Sabah were here, he would tell us to persuade Joy, as you intend to do with John, not to kill Sabah. Anyway, I think she is doing great work, and we should help her, not kill her."

Jy-ying's face showed none of her shock. She smiled, as emotionally painful as it was, and changed the subject to Janet's work on decolonization. Soon she claimed she was tired from her sparring with Joy that morning, and she was going to bed early.

Alone after Janet left, Jy-ying tried to think through what was going on with Janet. She was more than worried. Janet frightened her.



Joy

After all their foreign trips in 1908 and 1909, they had a breather until they would intervene in the Chinese Revolution in 1912. They continued to keep a close eye on events in Europe, making sure they exactly followed the Old Universe chronology prepared by the Society. Although it was still too early for them to personally intervene, they prepared to do so eventually by establishing offices in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Belgrade, and other potentially important cities in Europe. They also spent tens of millions of dollars on antiwar propaganda and an informational campaign throughout Europe.

John was convinced that, if they could stop World War I, they would have gone a long way toward preventing World War II as well. *If he's right, Joy thought, it will make all the work worth it.*

They also concentrated on further building up their business. Their separate brokerage accounts—Joy had opened one also—now had to be split among five brokerage houses; it was getting difficult to manage them. By early 1911, they were worth close to \$735 million. They'd more than made up for the funds transferred to Ed and Janet, and spent on the interventions in Mexico, Japan, and Korea.

Joy continued to do her weekly correlation between the current New York Stock Exchange stock prices and those recorded in the Old Universe, and the gap was growing. From a perfect 100 percent in 1908, it slipped to 96 percent in 1909. By February 1911, it was down to 83 percent.

“That makes sense,” John said when Joy told him. “It must be due to the success of democracy in Mexico, and the changes we instigated in Korea and Japan. And above all, the success of Ed and Janet’s Colonial Project.”

“What?” Joy asked. “You mean that our company being the largest import and export firm in the Western part of the United States has nothing to do with it? You’re so humble.”

The three guys happily accepted Janet, as they had Jy-ying. But there seemed something special about Janet. “Janet is very much like you in her openness and natural assumption of equality, and crazy, often risqué, sense of humor,” John told Joy. “The guys like that.”

Sal seemed to feel that maybe Janet would be like Joy in other ways. One day when Jy-ying was not around, he asked her jokingly,

“Can you beat up five men with one hand, while holding your dress out of the way with the other?”

Janet gave him a mock steely look, and said, “Don’t piss me off, mister, or you’ll see. Anyway, from the stories I’ve heard, she takes all her clothes off first. I wouldn’t do that. I’m too modest.” They both laughed.

After Jy-ying, Sal went through girlfriends like a child through popcorn. Joy gave up trying to keep track.

Hands had broken up with his girlfriend, Jane, and had no serious relationship for several months afterward. Then he took an interest in Janet. Although she was more than ten years older than Hands, she was youthful in her behavior and very pretty.

For Janet, Hands’ attentions came too soon after Ed’s death. She tried to discourage him in a kind way. Joy tried to help her. She gently hinted to Hands that Janet’s lack of interest had nothing to do with him personally, but was due to her love for Ed.

Mariko finally overcame her mother’s resistance to her daughter marrying a non-Japanese, and she and Dolphy got married in Hawaii in a Western, white gown ceremony. Joy was her bridesmaid, and John was best man. Sal, Hands, Janet and Jy-ying also attended at company expense, and they spent a week touring Kauai, Maui, and the Big Island. Joy and John learned to surfboard on moderate sized waves, although Joy hated the old-style swimsuits that covered her from neck to knee.

Hawaii was their last good time before their China intervention. They returned to San Francisco to put their business in order for their trip to China. John was very concerned, almost frightened by the proposed intervention.

“We will be trying to assassinate the leading and most unscrupulous general in the country, a man who has the Chinese army behind him,” he admitted frankly. “We’ll also be dealing with one or another secret society, made up of hardened criminals who could make a game out of who can keep a person alive the longest while slicing him apart piece by piece.”

“But now, if we’re killed, Janet and Jy-ying can carry on our mission,” Joy commented. “And there are Hands, Sal, and Dolphy, who know our company well enough to run it themselves.”

John looked like he found only cold comfort in that.

Chapter 29

Joy
1912

Shortly before their departure, John called everyone together to discuss the China trip, and “everyone” now included Mariko. After Joy passed Chinese Harbin beer around and heated up Japanese Oolong tea for Jy-ying and Janet, John opened the meeting with, “As you already know, Joy and I will be taking a dangerous trip to China to build up the company’s offices there, and in a small way, to further the democratic revolution now underway.”

They had revised their wills. Now if something happened to them, Janet, Jy-ying, Hands, Sal, and Dolphy and Mariko together would each receive 20 percent of their liquid assets and stocks, and 20 percent ownership in the company. Hands was willed executive control of the company, with a Board of Directors made up of the six of them. They’d also added a secret codicil for Jy-ying, giving her the code to their capsules and discretion in the distribution and management of the funds and supplies in them for the mission and the assassination of Sabah.

“It’s especially important while we’re gone, and especially if we don’t return,” John said, “that you all continue to help Janet with her Colonial Project. Joy and I consider it of prime importance, but it is too much for her to do alone.” He looked at Janet. “Janet, can you update us on your progress?”

She seemed surprised by the request and gazed into space for a few seconds, apparently thinking about what to say. “Well, I don’t know how much of it you’ve been following. John may remember the International Commission on the Future of Colonial Peoples—ICFCP for short—that was set up in 1911 at the Washington Conference. Ed was partly responsible for that. It finally achieved its aim.

“Colonial powers have been increasingly embarrassed by my actual and encouraged disclosures of their treatment of colonial people. World public opinion has turned strongly against colonization—”

Jy-ying interrupted to say, “Thanks much to those horrible photographs of murdered indigenous peoples you widely published.”

“Yes,” John added, “and this outraged public opinion has muscle, thanks to the spreading and deepening democratization of the world.”

Janet nodded and went on. “As I’ve already told some of you, two months ago a multilateral Self Government Treaty was signed by all colonial powers. This obligated them to turn all their colonies over to the ICFCP over a period of five years. The ICFCP would be responsible for the administration of the colonies and their development toward self-government. In this, education, training in self-government, and free trade would be emphasized. At the end of ten years, the people of each colony would vote on their future self-government.”

“It couldn’t be that easy,” Joy interjected wryly. “I know how governments work.”

“It wasn’t,” Janet replied. “The greatest resistance to this divestiture of colonies came from Great Britain, where many politicians argued that they were already doing what the ICFCP was supposed to do, and could do it better. However, President Taft applied great political pressure. And I had published in Britain evidence of the obscene profits twelve House of Commons members made from their relationship to British monopolies in the colonies. I also included photographs of eight-year-old children working in British-owned textile sweatshops in Madras. All this was too much to ignore, and the House voted to sign the ICFCP Treaty by a narrow margin.”

They all clapped. John toasted her and said, “That is the greatest tribute Ed could ever have had.”

She smiled at that, eyes glistening.



In February of 1912, they took the passenger ship *Manchuria* to Hong Kong, and from there a coastal vessel to Shanghai. From their office there, they would try to work their intervention.

They’d timed their arrival carefully. The Emperor has just abdicated, the centuries old Manchu Dynasty had fallen. General Yüan Shih-k’ai, head of the Northern Army, was trying to set up a new dynasty of his own. In the interim, democratic leaders had declared a new republic and “elected” Sun Yat-sen its new president. These events were as important as the complete collapse of the USSR in 1991.

Their timing had much to do with John’s reading of Chinese history, he reminded Joy one evening when she made the mistake of bringing up the subject. Joy recognized his tone, and cringed.

“The pivot of these events is General Yüan,” John droned. “He has the military power and will use it to his political advantage—”

He’s lecturing. There is no God.

“In the Old Universe, he was directly responsible for the disastrous and bloody War Lord Period, during which hundreds of local wars were fought.”

He paused to draw breath. Joy seized the opening. “Do you really mean to say ‘hundreds’? That’s a lot of wars in one country.”

“Actually, baby, believe it or not, there *were* hundreds of wars. And there was the even bloodier civil war between the Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek and the communist Mao Tse-tung. Millions were killed.”

In the Old Universe, Yüan had assassinated Sung Chiao-jen who, as the leader of the most powerful parliamentary party and the democratic movement next to Sun Yat-sen, was the only real hope of democracy in China. We’ll have to arrange the assassinations of Yüan, Chiang, Mao, and Chou En-lai, who would be his influential second in command.

“I’ll set up an appointment for Sun to teach at Harvard that he cannot refuse,” John concluded, “and provide the funds that Sung needs to solidify democracy in China.”

Joy shifted, not meeting his eyes.

John studied her. “You don’t think we are going to do the assassinations personally, do you?”

“Why not? I thought that was our job description.”

He got that irritating lecturing tone in his voice again. “Baby, China is a large and complex country with all kinds of interwoven alliances, friendships, secret societies, regional conflicts, and on and on. We don’t know our way around in that historical-cultural-social-political complex. It’s a sure way of getting ourselves killed.” His tone turned commanding. “We contract the assassinations with a secret society.”

Joy thought he was wrong, but took it calmly at first. “I speak the most common Chinese languages; I look Chinese; I can act Chinese. I should do it. That way we know it’s done.”

“No!”

Joy yelled, “Then why the hell have I been keeping up my skills? Why have I been training you in them? I don’t even need to be able to push a child off its potty, to contract this out. Even *you* can do that.”

“Ahh, sweetheart. Aren’t you forgetting one little thing?”

“What?”

“You need all your skills to protect me.”

“Oh. Yes, of course.”



Jy-ying

Jy-ying watched Joy and John's ship sail off, then hurried to Lin's Chinese restaurant to put out another contract on Joy. She had not even hinted to Janet that she was going to do this, but she knew that Janet was concerned about what Jy-ying intended to do.

Holding Little Wei in one arm, Jy-ying entered the restaurant at supertime, and found only a few tourists there. She went through the kitchen, where a cook was reading a Chinese newspaper, and climbed the stairs to Lin's rooms.

A young man answered when she knocked. He looked at her curiously and asked in Chinese, "What do you want?"

"I want to see Lin Huifeng."

"He is dead."

Jy-ying tried to push open the door and enter the room, but the man held the door partly closed and would not make way for her.

She explained, "I have done . . . business with him. I want to know what happened."

He tried to close the door on her. She quickly stepped back, put Little Wei down, and did a thrust kick at the door, slamming it open and almost knocking the man off his feet. She pulled her Taiyang .38 out of her holster purse before rushing inside the room. There she whirled and kicked the man behind the knee. He fell hard on the floor. She pushed the door closed, pointed the gun at him, and informed him in a sweet voice, "I could kill you with my hands. This gun is for your protection. This way, you won't try your muscles on me and I won't have to protect myself, and possibly kill you."

Little Wei stayed out of the way and watched with interest. He attended all her sparring matches with Joy and had early learned, after almost being stepped on, to find a comfortable niche.

The man sat on the floor, holding one leg and rubbing it. He glared at her. "What do you want?"

"What happened to Lin?"

"Why?"

"That is my business." She waved the gun at him. "Are you going to tell me, or do you need some persuasion?"

He tried to get up and she kicked him in the leg again. He fell back. "Stay down."

Holding the gun in one hand, she reached into her false bustle and pulled out her thin combat knife. She put her gun away and pointed the knife at the frightened face of the man now trembling on the floor. "This knife is quieter and of more use for what I have in mind," she told him in a cold voice. "Tell me, now. Who are you?"

"I am Lin Desheng, his son."

"Where is your father?"

"He is dead."

She waited. So did Little Wei, who sat back on his behind to watch. Jy-ying suddenly leaned forward and nicked the man's arm with her knife. He yelled at the pain and tried to scuttle away from her, but a Chinese cabinet stopped him.

She followed him, leaned over him with her knife, and asked, "How did he die?"

He spoke in a tremulous rush. "He was tortured to death."

She waved her knife.

"They wanted to know who he did some business with. They would not believe he didn't know."

She now knew what happened. She asked anyway, "Who?"

Lin Desheng's face showed his anguish and fear. His mouth moved, but nothing came out. She could almost taste his sweat. She waited, and wrinkled her nose. He had soiled his pants.

She took mercy on him. "It was the Sue Yop tong, and this had to do with what happened to the Green Lotus Society in China, correct? It has to do with a contract he made."

He barely nodded, the fear not leaving his eyes.

Still holding the knife, Jy-ying opened the door, scooped up Little Wei, and left.

She passed the cook on her way out but paid him little mind. Until she was putting Little Wei in the passenger seat of her new self-starting Cadillac she didn't realize the cook must have followed her out of the kitchen and signaled to someone. A man with a black slouch hat pulled down nearly over his eyes came up behind her and knocked her brimless lawn hat off as he grabbed her hair and jerked her head back with his left hand to put a chokehold on her with his right arm.

Her trained reflexes took charge. She reached up with both hands and pulled down on his arm, tucking her chin in and dropping her weight down heavily while with her right arm she thrust an elbow strike into his ribs and shifted her center of gravity over her left leg to put her right hip below his. Lifting up with her legs and twisting, she threw him into the fender of the car.

The man grunted and fell off the fender to the ground, but rolled to his feet while Jy-ying leaned back, weight toward her heels, fists turned down, right one held out from her cheek, her left farther from her chest, in her own wing chun *chong sau*—ready stance.

Jy-ying saw immediately from the man's roll and his own ready stance that he would not be easy. He had lost his black hat and she could see the queue wrapped around his head. She knew immediately that he was a *boo how doy*—a fighting man—employed by the tongs. He was thin, and shorter than her, but that made no difference. He was clearly trained, a specialist, but in what martial art, it was too early to tell.

Her waist to ankle dress and flat-heeled, pointed shoes limited her ability to maneuver as well as her choice of moves. *Dressed in this straitjacket*, she thought, *I have no time for play.*

He came at her in a twirling motion, both hands raised in fists close to his head, the move timed so that he would be in position to hurl straight-knuckle punches at her face. He did not anticipate her swift sideways step and the knife she whipped out of her bustle and thrust under his arm and deep between his ribs.

He twisted away from her, fell to one knee with the knife still in him, and leaned on one arm as he reached into his coat pocket.

A gun. Shit. Okay, anything that works.

In a blur, she spun her body at him, the flounces on her dress spinning out; she reached him just as he was raising his gun to shoot her, and with the full force of her spin she did a front leg kick up and under his chin, snapping his head back. She heard the crack as his neck broke and he fell backward, dead.

Maybe six seconds had passed, but she was gasping for breath. Gradually she became aware of the world, and Little Wei's loud barking. He was at the Cadillac's passenger window, jumping up and down and growling and barking to be let out to help her. He knew the real thing.

She picked up the dead man's gun and looked around. Several people had stopped at a distance to watch, and the driver of a loaded cart had halted his horse in the middle of Gibb Street. When they saw her looking at them, they all averted their eyes and made off. This was Chinatown, after all, and a dangerous place to be nosy.

She searched the dead man's pockets. He had no identity, no wallet. In an inner coat pocket he carried an olive green card the size of a business card. It had a bright green border and nothing else. That was all she needed. It proved he was a tong fighting man and that the Sue Yop tong were looking for her.

“They have a long memory for slights,” she said to herself, shaking her head over the years that had passed.

She retrieved her knife and cleaned it on the dead man’s coat. When she tried to get into the car, Little Wei was all over her, aiming his tongue at her face. She got him calmed down, put him firmly down on the passenger side, and told him to stay in Chinese.

She drove away from the restaurant, watching in front and behind her for another car. She saw a Ransom Olds pull away from the wooden curb behind her, two stores down. She did a left at the next intersection, and another left, and saw the car also make the turns while keeping its distance. It had its canvas top down and she saw two men inside.

She grabbed Little Wei by his scruff with one hand and pushed him onto the floor between her left leg and the door, again telling him to stay. As she made sure her door was solidly shut, she explained to him, “It is going to get a little rough.”

She saw the bullet break part of the windshield to her right, but she couldn’t hear the shot above the engine noise. She hunkered down as far as she could without blinding herself to the road, and pushed the accelerator down to the floor. These streets were not meant for racing at thirty or forty miles per hour, and the car bounced and skidded as it hit one wagon rut or pothole after another. She swerved around wagons and carts, almost hitting two horses, a donkey, and a bicycle, and when she saw the chaos she created, she knew what to do.

She headed for congested Stockton and Broadway Streets, and when she reached the traffic of horse riders, bicycles, and diverse horse-drawn wagons and carriages, she hoped her steel fenders were made strong enough. She aimed and timed her destruction well. She hit the wooden hub of a front wheel on a farm wagon loaded with caged chickens. The wheel was knocked off, and the two mules pulled the wagon over when the axle dug into the brick street.

She drove alongside another farm wagon loaded with pigs, pulled close to the horse’s head, and blew her horn. Its peripheral vision blocked by the bridle’s blinders, the startled horse screamed, reared, kicked, then tried to run off at a right angle, spilling the pigs to the street.

Jy-ying caused two more wagons and a cart to overturn. Looking behind her, she could see nothing but angry drivers, scared horses, mules, and pigs, and wagons and carts stopped at all angles as their drivers had tried to avoid the wreckage. No car was going to get through that easily.

She pulled around a traffic jam and swerved in front of a two-horse water wagon and across the lane, barely missing another horse, then swerved down a side street. Another right and left, and she felt certain no one was following her.

When she got to John's apartment building and parked behind it, she picked up excited Little Wei and inspected the damage to her fenders. The paint had been scratched off of one and the other had a slight dent in it. She patted the fender affectionately.

That evening, she checked the telephone book, the newspaper advertising pages, and put the CD that Security had prepared for her in her laptop. She searched for potential contacts in San Francisco. She found another tong contact, and a possible intermediary to the Triad Society. But after sitting back and thinking about it, she decided it was too dangerous now to deal through Chinatown. These local tong and China's secret societies were all interwoven. The Sue Yop tong would now put out a special contract on her. She could not trust anyone.

She petted Little Wei, who was twitching in his sleep after all the excitement, and told him, "She's escaped again. There's no way I can get to her in China. Now I must do it myself."



Joy

In Shanghai, John started negotiations with the secret Triad Society for the assassinations of Yüan, Chiang, Mao, and Chou En-lai. Chiang, Mao, and Chou were not yet widely known, so they cost John only \$5,000 each. But after the fall of the Manchu Dynasty, General Yüan became, as he schemed, the most important political and military figure in China. For the assassination of such a national figure, John had to put up \$100,000.

John told Joy happily, "Just by these assassinations alone, we may have saved perhaps fifty or sixty million lives, when all the internal wars and mass murders for which they were responsible are added up."

"Are you sure of that?"

"No. In the fascist culture now prevalent in China, others may take their place. I hope the vast sums we have given to support democracy may avoid this, especially the fifteen million dollars you promised Sung to help him consolidate his democratically oriented party and replace Sun as president of the Republic. I understand that Sung will

soon conduct true national democratic elections for the first representative national legislature.”

They waited for their contract on Yüan to be carried out. After two anxious weeks, a trusted guard killed the General and escaped before the assassination became known. News about Yüan’s murder exploded in China and was second in importance only to the abdication of the Emperor.

Assassinations were not enough. They waited to see what would happen as a result. In a week, Sun Yat-sen resigned his presidency for the good of the country and left for the new teaching position at Harvard that John had arranged. Sung’s position was strengthened and it looked like democracy was on a roll.

They left for home tired, not looking forward to another interminable voyage, but happy that they seemed successful, at least for the moment. Joy did notice during the voyage that John seemed to have a special interest in studying each young blonde woman he saw around the ship.

“Don’t get your hopes up, dearest,” she told him in a voice that would chill the Sahara Desert. “You no longer have the bandaged stumps for it.”

“But if I spy a sea floozy, maybe I’ll tie a bandage around them. Aren’t you in favor of cleaning up these ships for honest travelers?”

Her answer was to punch him in the shoulder. He doubled up holding his shoulder, wincing, and yelling, “I’m injured. Help me. Where’s a blonde?”

Chapter 30

Janet

It was a happy time for Janet. Joy and John had returned from their China intervention and it had worked out well; she was overjoyed, especially for Ed's soul, that progress on his Colonial Project had gone so well; and now, most important to her, she felt at home with Joy, John, and the guys, and even Jy-ying had gotten over her inexplicable coolness.

She and Jy-ying had recently been discussing in detail what would happen in the future: the rise of Sabah, his seizure of China, and his takeover of the democracies. She saw that Jy-ying also hated the horrible mass murder leading up to it, and could barely justify it by the Great Victory of Sabah and Islam. But she did.

Janet had come to a decision. She invited Jy-ying over for her special English potato, tomato, onion, and cheese casserole to tell her about it. After they finished the meal, Janet served her special chocolate mousse.

"What an awful, un-Chinese dessert," Jy-ying murmured, smiling and trying to scrape the last bead of chocolate from inside her dessert cup. Little Wei was jumping up and down for his share, but she had saved a little of her casserole, and gave him that instead.

"Don't you feel guilty?" Janet asked.

"Yes, but the vet told me chocolate was bad for him."

After they did the dishes and cleaned up, Janet filled their porcelain teacups with the remaining jasmine tea. They both sat on the sofa, half facing each other, sipping their tea and talking about the opposition of Portugal's colonial bureaucracy to turning Angola over to the ICFCP. Already, because of the pressure added by Janet's Colonial Project, they had been forced to make reforms in the colony, such as opening it to economic competition.

There was a moment of silence as Jy-ying sipped her tea, and Janet seized the moment to announce, "I'm going to tell Joy and John about us. I can't stand lying anymore. I'm now against killing Joy. We will have to find another way to protect Sabah, God be with him. This would be Ed's way."

Jy-ying blanched, and her teacup trembled on its saucer as she put it down gently. She stared at Janet.

Janet stared back at her. This was the moment she feared. She knew that she did not have the mental strength and training, if it came to a test of wills between them.

Finally Jy-ying whispered in a tone that made Little Wei jerk up his head and look at her, “You dare make that decision for me, as well?”

Janet started shivering. She clasped her hands on her lap and looked down at them. “Won’t it be obvious that you are included if I tell them about me? I will leave you out; I won’t mention your name. I will tell them only about me, but if they ask about you, I will not lie anymore. I will just tell them to ask you.” A tear started down her cheek. “I cannot live these lies anymore, Jy-ying. Joy has been like a sister to me, and John has been sweet. The thought of killing her, and what it would do to John, sickens me. I get nauseous thinking about it.”

She began to cry. “I’m sorry, Jy-ying. I’m so very sorry.”

Little Wei had jumped on the sofa. He was trying to lick Janet’s cheeks while she held him.

Jy-ying sighed and asked, “When will you tell them?”

Janet let her determination show in her tone. “I’ve asked Joy if I can see them tomorrow evening after supper. I’ll tell them then.” She dabbed at her eyes with hands. “I don’t know what they’ll do. Maybe kick me out. Fire me. There’s not much more I can do on colonialism—maybe it’s time to close down the project, anyway. I’ll return to them what funds are left.”

“What about your determination to do what your father lost his life for?”

“My father was a good man. I don’t believe any longer that he would want me to kill Joy. I’m now sure he would try to find another way to protect Sabah.”

Jy-ying’s tone turned conversational. “What will you do, once you tell them?”

“Return to England. Live with my foster parents, if they’ll have me. I love them, you know. And try to forget all this.”

Having said what she’d dreaded throughout the day, she was suddenly exhausted. She simply wanted to be alone. She stood up, conveying the social hint. “Thank you, Jy-ying, for being so good to me, and for all the help you have given me.” She reached over and touched Jy-ying on the arm as she got up. “I hope that it works out well, if they also find out about you.”

Jy-ying walked to the door, followed by Little Wei. As she opened it, she turned around and gave Janet a hug. "What God wills, He wills. We are only His to command." She looked reflective, as though talking to herself. "You have to do what you must."

Following Little Wei out, Jy-ying gently closed the door behind her. Janet put her back to the door, slid down it, and pulled her knees up to her chin. She wept. "Oh Ed, I miss you," she whispered. "I'm so scared of telling them. Please help me."



Janet took her morning bath, did her Dawn Contact Prayers, and had a breakfast of tea, toast, and jam. She dressed, picked up what in this age passed for a "lady's" briefcase, and shut and locked the apartment door behind her.

She had worked out her fears the night before, and finally felt relief at having told Jy-ying her intentions. By the time she fell asleep, she had grown confident that telling Joy and John would work out. The mood had carried over to this morning, and she was almost happy that this huge burden would soon be off her shoulders.

She reached the back of the apartments and went down the stairs to the outside door. She opened it and walked across the gravel alley to the former horse stable that John had remodeled into a four-car garage. She unlocked and lifted the garage door where her Ford was parked, and walked into the dark interior.

A slight swish of sound. She began to turn her head toward it.

She felt a sudden smack in the head, a diminishing sense of falling. Nothingness.



Joy

As Joy and John approached their garage, Joy thought, *Strange. Janet left the garage door up. But her Ford is still there.*

John, apparently suspicious as well, rushed ahead of her. When Joy entered, she found him kneeling beside Janet, who lay on her back on the floor, her head turned toward them, her eyes closed. She looked like she was sleeping, and that the pool under her head was spilled red paint.

John yelled, “Shit!”

Joy’s heart stopped. She didn’t have to look closely to know that Janet was dead. The blood from her head said it all. *Assassinated*, Joy’s mind supplied. Her eyes opened wide as her hand rushed to cover her cheek. She screamed.

John leaned over and lifted Janet’s wrist to feel for a pulse. He shook his head, and sat down between Janet’s body and her car. “Shit. Shit. SHIT.”

Joy dropped onto the concrete floor on the other side of Janet, took her cold, chalk-white hand in hers, and broke down in body wrenching, keening sobs. Janet had become her best friend—an intimate part of her life.

John moved to sit beside Joy. He put his arm around her and sobbed with her.

Gulping air, Joy finally looked at John. His face was red and tear-streaked, his lips trembling, eyes blazing with anger. Joy was trembling all over. She still held Janet’s cold, stiff hand in hers. She rubbed her fingers over Janet’s, and with her other hand caressed Janet’s palm as though she could communicate her affection to the dead woman’s soul.

Joy could hardly get a word out between her sobs. She succeeded at last in saying to John, “No police. We’ll . . . handle this ourselves. We can’t have them . . . prying into her Colonial Project. Or our company. Could you get Jy-ying . . . the guys? I can’t.”

John released her, stood up shakily and left to tell the others. Joy felt no passage of time. She was lost in the agony of her grief. She was still holding Janet’s cold hand when the others arrived and gathered around. John backed the cars out of the garage and parked them in the alley so that they had room. Everyone wept. Sal beat the garage wall with his fist in helpless anger. Mariko held struggling Little Wei; Jy-ying was sobbing something in Chinese that Joy could not understand. While also shedding tears, Hands was the most restrained of them all, although Joy knew he held a special place in his heart for Janet. He leaned over her head and kissed her cheek.

Jy-ying was the first to finally ask through her tears, “Okay, what do we do?”

Joy hissed, “I’ll find the son of a bitch who did this.”

Hesitantly at first, the others began to discuss what to do next. Joy was too wracked with grief to think straight, and could only sit still holding Janet’s hand.

“We will handle this ourselves,” John said. “We have the money to hire the best detective agencies and pursue whatever clues they find.”

The others agreed.

Jy-ying pointed out, "It had to be a professional job. I noticed that the glass had been removed from the garage window with a glass cutter." She bent over and looked closely at the hole in Janet's head. "From the size of the hole, a .22 caliber gun was used—quiet and efficient. The killer must have tracked her movements for some time, and knew that she was usually the first in the garage to leave in the morning. He must have waited inside, next to the garage door, until Janet opened it and walked toward her car, then shot her in the back of the head."

The guys and Mariko were too shocked by the murder to wonder how Jy-ying knew all this.

Jy-ying picked up Janet's purse and looked inside. She added, "Her wallet is still in her purse, along with her Colt."

"Whoever murdered Ed has now finished the job," Hands said.



Within an hour Hands and Dolphy had rented a truck, bought a large insulated meat box from a butcher's storehouse, a hundred pound block of ice, and trucked them to the garage. Joy finally released Janet's hand when they arrived, and John and the guys gently lifted her body and placed it in the meat box.

Joy yelled, "Wait."

She rose and leaned over the box. She smoothed out Janet's clothes and tried to comb her dark brown hair with her fingers so that it neatly framed her face. She took off her silk blouse and wet it from the melting ice block, then rubbed the blood off Janet's ear, hair, and neck with it. The bullet that killed her had lodged in her brain, and left her face undisturbed. She looked at peace. Joy caressed her cold cheek, kissed her forehead, and told her, "Now, my friend, my sister, you are with Ed again. You succeeded beyond your hopes and dreams. You've saved millions of lives and made the world a better place. Rest in peace."

She turned away. John put his arms around her.

Everyone said farewell in their own way. Finally the men chipped ice from the block and packed it around Janet's body, and closed and locked the chest.

As an importer, John had all kinds of labels, stamps, manifests, and billings, and he and the others immediately prepared appropriate documents and attachments. They certified that inside the box was 165

pounds of specially prepared frozen steaks freighted from Texas, and that they had been bought for export. They rented space in the Cut Rite Meat Market's cold storage, claiming that their export of the steaks was delayed over billing problems.

Within three days they made it worthwhile for the Morrison Funeral Home to cremate Janet without a formal death certificate. They brought her ashes to their apartment in a simple container, and when they all could get together, they had a private funeral for her. They toasted the woman they knew and loved so well, and thanked God for allowing her to see the good results of her and Ed's crusade against the horrors of colonialism. Then they mixed Janet's ashes with Ed's in the beautiful urn she had bought for him.

Many days later, when Joy was able to absorb the pain of Janet's death into her life, she persuaded John that even in death, which would come eventually to all of them, they could remain together. She suggested that they have a crypt built that would eventually house all of them at Cypress Lawn Memorial Park, outside of San Francisco.

Their wealth made it easy. They built a modest crypt and bought the plots around it so that it could be expanded, if necessary. When it was ready, Joy, carrying the urn, led the others toward the crypt along a narrow lane lined with a variety of roses. The crypt was not very big, but solid, squarish, and constructed of beautiful blue Purbeck marble. There were no windows. Nor were there decorations or carvings on the exterior. But there was a bed of well-tended, variegated pink, red, and white roses surrounding the crypt, and red and orange bougainvillea climbed a trellis framing the entrance. A little granite plate over the door was incised with *Banks and Team*.

John unlocked the door, went inside, and flicked a switch; the interior was bathed in diffused light. Joy felt as though the inside of the crypt was bathed in a golden sunrise, with the sun's first rays reflecting off of green leaves and plants. Indeed, the inside lighting was suffused with sunlight that penetrated the inch or so thick marble walls and cast a light blue wash over everything.

On the far wall were three Italian rose-veined marble shelves made to eventually hold all their urns. Another wall held a photograph of Janet, another of Ed, and a third of them together. Joy placed the urn containing Janet and Ed's ashes on the top shelf, above an engraved plaque:

*Edward Dene Morel, 1873–1909. Janet Morel, –1912
Unrivaled Humanists, they truly loved each other.
They live on in the hearts of their friends and the many
whose lives they saved and freed. Together again, now
for eternity. RIP*

As they all left, Jy-ying turned at the entrance. Facing the urn, she stiffened her back and gave a crisp salute.



Joy
1913

John hired the Anderson Detective Agency in San Francisco and gave them a blank check to do what was necessary to find Janet's murderer. The agency not only hired many additional detectives to work for them on this case, but also sought help from similar agencies in Europe and Africa. What they earned from John in their international search enabled the agency to build up to become one of the best known agencies in the country.

Joy and John refused to micromanage the agency's efforts and would not rush them, recognizing the difficulties involved. They only wanted a weekly progress briefing. When asked why this murder had not been reported to the police, they were forthright—they didn't want the police prying into their or the company's affairs. Money overcame any other questions the agency might have had.

In early 1913, all the small pieces of the puzzle that had been collected from Europe and Southwest Africa over the year finally fit together and pointed to the owner of the Portuguese company Castelbranco, which had a government-enforced shipping monopoly on all Portuguese trade with the Angolan colony. With Portugal's reforms and the adoption of free trade for the colony, Castelbranco's monopoly ended and it went into bankruptcy when Angola was opened to competitive shipping. Carlos Folha, the president of the company, knew how dependent his family's wealth was on this monopoly and had tried to stop Ed's crusade by having him assassinated.

The agency reported they were 99 percent sure that Folha contracted with the Spanish professional killer known as The Tooth, an alias of Felipe Parda. They also believed, although the evidence was

scanty, that Folha had him assassinate Janet Morel years later, out of revenge for his company's bankruptcy.

Joy and John shared this conclusion with the others, but invited only Hands and Jy-ying to Portugal to handle it, leaving Sal, Dolphy, and Mariko behind to manage the company.

During the trip, Joy commented to John that Hands and Jy-ying seemed to be spending much time together, and since their staterooms were across from theirs, John added with a wink, "Yes, two-gether."

The next chance she got, Joy asked Jy-ying about it.

"Yes," she said frankly, "I like him. He is an honest and sincere man."

When they arrived in Portugal, they talked to Folha's former mistress and his first wife, both discarded by Folha, and both ready to spit on his grave. John made it well worth their while to provide information about how Folha communicated with Parda.

They determined when Parda would be in his Madrid apartment, and had a package sent to him on a Monday, containing 10,000 Portuguese escudo and a forged message in Folha's handwriting that simply read *Segres, Friday, 12:30*.

Segres was a little Portuguese town on Cape St. Vincent, with a small harbor. Nearby was Baleeir, its picturesque fishing port. Folha and Parda often met at the Hotel Da Baleeita restaurant to discuss what Folha wanted Parda to do for him, and they'd sometimes spent a day sailing off southern Portugal in a small sailboat Folha kept there, until his bankruptcy forced him to sell it.

Once they'd determined Folha had contracted Parda for the assassinations, and that Segres was where they made personal contact, they telephoned Mateus Cardenas about their plans. He made some helpful suggestions, and invited them to stay in his home.

Cardenas had been a regional manager of a Portuguese rubber plantation in Angola until its financial collapse. He had returned to Portugal and, with money he had saved in Angola, he bought a small fishing boat and made a living fishing off of Segres. He had been a major source of inside information for Ed, and after his murder, for Janet. She had commented on him often and thought that his revelations, along with those of dozens of other whistle-blowers throughout Europe and in the former colonies, were one of the major reasons for the collapse of African colonialism. He had warned Janet over the years that there might be an attempt to assassinate her; he and Isabel, his Angolan wife, had been devastated by Janet's death. As soon as they heard about

Janet's assassination, they offered to help in any way they could to find the murderers.

Joy and the others arrived in Segres two days ahead of time and were met by Mateus and Isabel. Hands, Jy-ying, Joy, and John all slept on blankets and rugs in a small spare room in the Cardenas' home that night, after convincing the Cardenas that they would go to a hotel rather than depriving them of their bed. Nobody enjoyed their time there more than Little Wei, who was an immediate hit with Isabel. He seemed to think that all of them sleeping on the floor together was the greatest adventure, and enjoyed jumping from one sleeping body to another.

They all had discussed what to do when Parada arrived, and they made very careful plans. This was a dangerous man who lived off his contracts for assassinations. Murder was his business. They had to assume that he was as well-armed as they were, and knew his weapons and how to use his hands, as well.

They knew Parada's pattern was to get a hotel room at Hotel Da Baleita in the morning and meet Folha in the restaurant at the appointed time. Their easiest course, then, would have been to shoot Parada while walking past him in the hotel hallway when he arrived or left his room for the restaurant. Joy would have none of this, and Jy-ying agreed with her.

"I will not kill him unless I am absolutely certain he murdered Ed, and especially Janet," Joy said.

John and Hands tried to argue that the detective agency had provided all the evidence they needed. John even retrieved from his luggage the documents that the agency had sent them. She waved them away. "I know, I know it's all there. But I must hear it from him."

"Now, how are you going to do that?" John asked, his tone really saying, "Oh no you don't, baby."

Looking at John from under her eyelashes, she answered, "As a woman."

Jy-ying smiled knowingly, and Hands looked shocked. John's face immediately darkened. Leaning over Joy and waving a finger under her nose, he yelled, "No way. No sex. If you think you're going to do that, I'm going over there as soon as he arrives to shoot the son of a bitch."

For once, Joy saw the finger as justified, and ignored it. Laughing, she took his hand in hers. "Please. I would rather boil in oil than have sex with him. But there are different ways of using sex."

So they discussed it, and Joy got him to agree—reluctantly—to what she had in mind. At one point he told her that, at thirty-two, she wasn't young anymore, and she should act her age. Joy was about to

show him how young she was, when Jy-ying saved him from bodily harm by telling him, "Do not be stupid."

They left for the hotel, leaving Little Wei in the good hands of Isabel, who had taken over his entertainment and care from the moment they arrived.

They didn't know when Parda would arrive at the hotel, but they knew what he looked like and Joy and John watched for him to arrive outside, while Jy-ying and Hands waited in the lobby, looking like happy tourists enjoying the view of Baleeita Bay from the lobby windows.

Parda arrived in a small, smoking bus along with two other guests. He was known by the receptionists, who gave him a key to a second-floor room. Hands had strolled over to the receptionist's desk and waited as if wanting to ask a question; he was able to see what room number Parda got.

Hands and Jy-ying went outside to tell Joy, then took up their stations. Jy-ying went to watch the rear of the hotel in case Parda tried to escape, and Hands watched the front. Both of them were well armed.

Joy and John strolled into the lobby and up the stairs to the second floor. She tested her communicator to be sure that John could hear it okay. She left it on so that he could follow her exchange with Parda and rush into the room if her plan didn't work out.

She had covered herself with a coat and hat before they entered the hotel. Now, near Parda's door, she took off her hat, unpinned her hair, and let it fall naturally to her waist. She automatically looked for gray hair, and damned John for making her self-conscious about her age.

She took off her coat and gave that and the hat to John to drop somewhere. She had lightly rouged her cheeks and painted her lips with rose-red lipstick. She could not wear a low-cut bodice because of her armor, and since the armor tended to flatten her breasts, she had inserted in her blouse, over the armor, rounded cups that Isabel cut from cork for her. John had looked at the result with amusement. Hands whistled and looked at Jy-ying, saying, "Hey, why don't you do that?" Jy-ying threw him on the floor and Little Wei happily jumped on his stomach.

Joy wore a tight, long-sleeved, pink silk blouse with lace at the neck, which she tucked into a tight, woolen worsted maroon skirt that fell straight down to cover the tops of her high-heeled black boots. She was trying to give the impression of a very feminine-looking hooker—feminine for weakness; hooker for availability. The only thing that was

out of place was the red headband on her forehead. John told her it was sexy.

With John out of sight down the hallway, she paused and calmed herself, as she usually did before battle. She slowed her heartbeat, cleared her mind, focused her energy, took two deep breaths, and said to herself, “Here we go.”

She knocked on the door to Parda’s room.

Parda opened the door just enough to look around it with one wary eye. After a brief hesitation, he opened the door farther. With only his head and one shoulder showing, he slowly looked her up and down. Joy felt as though he’d already created an image of her naked on his bed.

He smiled and said, “*Sim?*”—“*Yes?*” in Portuguese, she guessed. She had discussed with John and Mateus how to handle the language problem. Parda spoke English as part of his profession. But she had to use Portuguese initially to get into his room. So Mateus taught her how to say, “Hello. I am a Chinese gift to you from Folha.”

She gave Parda a very sexy smile and said, “Hello. *Eu sou-lhe um presente chinês de Folha.*”

He opened the door wider, looked her up and down again. She pointed to him and to herself and made a circle of her thumb and index finger, then slid her other index finger through the circle to simulate sex. Muttering something in Spanish that may have been, “I can’t believe this,” he waved her into the room. As she passed him, he caressed her behind.

She hoped he didn’t feel her cringe away at his touch. She couldn’t help it.

As she walked over to the window, she carefully surveyed the room, noting where all the furniture was and the empty spaces between. She turned to face him so that the light streamed into the room behind her and into his eyes.

She studied him as she would any opponent before battle. He was an exceptionally athletic and muscular man, with a cocky pose. His hair was a mess of dark brown curls, which he let collect around his head as though never disciplined by a comb. He was clean-shaven, with a beak nose and strong, heavy lips. His eyes were coal black and unusually large. They dominated his swarthy, hard-looking face. He wore course, dark work clothes.

He looked like a killer.

He stepped toward her with one hand raised to pull her onto the double bed.

Coldly and carefully enunciating each word, Joy demanded in English, "Stop and listen, you bastard."

He halted suddenly, cupped his right fist with his left hand, and thrust his head forward, looking at her curiously.

She had assumed her unique readiness stance, with hands hanging loosely at her side, head slightly tilted, knees slightly bent, and her weight on the balls of her feet. She coolly looked him in the eye. In a tone not even Hell could have melted, she hurled at him, "In San Francisco you assassinated my best friend, Janet Morel."

His eyes narrowed. He looked for the slightest hint of fear or stupid innocence in her eyes. His brow furrowed as he thought through who she might be and how dangerous to him she was. He again looked her up and down, this time looking for weapons and judging her strength, Joy was sure. But she knew he was a typical male of this era and saw only a naive, weak woman. Finally, he spit at her in English, "Who sent you?"

"Nobody."

Looking her over again, he said gruffly, "I killed no one."

Unblinking, Joy continued to look him in the eye. "I know that you are a professional assassin," she said, no less coldly, "and you murdered Janet Morel in 1912, and her husband Ed in 1909."

"Who told you these fucking lies?"

"Folha, who paid you to do the assassinations. In bed, he revealed everything. A lot of alcohol and a little bit of teasing his cock, and he was a fountain of information."

"Folha." He spit it out like rotten fish. "That fucking . . ." and he added some Portuguese words she thought were hardly complementary.

Joy stood ready, waiting, unmoving, and watched his eyes very carefully. She could see that he was feeling in control as he asked, "Who'd you tell?"

"No one." Adopting a matter-of-fact tone, she added, "I wanted to see your face when I told you. Now I'm going to the police."

He looked puzzled again. She could see him flexing his right fist as he asked, "You're not scared of me?"

Still looking him in the eye, she smiled and replied lightly, "No."

His mouth turned down at the corners and his face hardened even more. His eyes glittered. He growled, "You know I killed your friends. Killing is what I do. And you stand there, and you are not afraid of *me*?" He nearly shouted the last word.

“You killed Janet and Ed Morel?”

“Yes!” he shot at her, and sneered.

Joy had what she wanted. *He is so certain that I will not leave this room alive*, she thought, watching him. She gave him a lethal smile. Eyes locked on his, she reached up to her red headband and twisted it inside out. She had not displayed the lightning bolt symbol now shown on the headband since she fought the Mexican bandits. In hand to hand combat, it was the symbol of death.

She brought her hand down and said in the sweetest voice she could manage, “No, you don’t scare me at all.”

“You fucking whore. You’re crazy. I’m going to kill you, but I’m going to fuck you first. I’m going to fuck your cunt. I’m going to fuck your asshole. I’m going to fuck your mouth. By the time I’m done, you’ll be begging for death. And when I’m done killing you, I’m going to slowly kill that fucking Folha.”

“Try me,” she said.

He rushed to grab her and throw her on the bed. She did a scooping inward to outward block and a side thrust kick, knocking him into a chest of drawers. Twisting behind him, she front kicked him into the window. He turned his body so that his shoulder took the blow and bounced off the window frame; crouching, he faced her.

For a second he looked at her with surprise, then reached down with his right hand to snatch a knife from his boot. Before it even cleared the boot, she palmed the knife she had hidden up her sleeve and threw it into his right shoulder. As she intended, it cut his rotator cuff and paralyzed his arm.

Just then the door to the room burst open to smack against its stop and John rushed into the room with his gun pointed at Parda. “Hands up, Parda,” he shouted.

His one arm useless, Parda tried to pull the knife out of his shoulder with his other hand, but Joy chopped down on his wrist before he could reach it. His breath came in gasps. He looked from her to John and back.

Joy whipped her hand up and jerked the knife from his shoulder with a sideways slice. He grunted with pain and covered his shoulder with his hand as blood flowed out between his fingers. He went into a semi-crouch and scowled at her venomously.

Joy held the bloody end of the knife up before his nose, and informed him as though passing a verdict, “You murdered two wonderful people I respected and who did you no harm. You did it for money. You didn’t care what decent people they were. You did it in spite of

their great work for humanity. Parda, you are shitty scum. I'm going to send you to Hell where you belong."

"Fuck you," he yelled as he moved fast to the side, where Joy's body blocked John's line of fire.

He leaped directly at her to girdle and crush her throat with his good arm, but she reflexed a sideways twist while ducking under his arm and smashing his throat with an upward backhanded death chop. He went down heavily on the bed, thrashing about and choking for breath through his crushed trachea and esophagus. His chest heaving, holding his throat with his hand, he looked at her with watering eyes full of pain and bewilderment.

She took Janet's picture from under her blouse with one hand and, still holding her knife in the other, she stepped to the side of the bed and held Janet's picture before his bulging eyes. She told him, "This is the woman you murdered." She waited for him to focus on it through his agony. Then she thrust the knife below his sternum and up into his heart.

Joy sat hard on the bed next to his twitching body. Holding Janet's picture to her heart, she started to cry.

John came over, put his arm around her, and said softly, "It's over, baby." He kissed her wet cheek and added, "I'll get Hands and Jy-ying."

By the time they arrived, she had pulled herself together, taken off her headband, and was cleaning up the blood. Hands and John carried in a trunk that they had bought the day before. Hands held his nose, as Parda had soiled himself in death.

Jy-ying studied the body for a moment, then said, "Good work, Joy. I couldn't have done better." She turned to Hands, who was looking sick. Smiling, she tried out a new word she had just learned, "See, do not mess with us women."

They had lined the trunk with cut canvas sail, and the four of them fitted Parda's body inside. They also included the blood-soaked blanket from the bed, and made double sure there were no other signs of blood. John brought in Joy's hat and coat so that she could look like a decent woman again. They left, with John and Hands carrying the trunk, and Jy-ying carrying Parda's overnight bag stuffed with all his belongings, including two guns and a knife. They exited the hotel by a side entrance. Mateus was waiting for them with a rented truck. They loaded up, drove to his boat, and chugged out into the Atlantic Ocean.

About two miles out, they wrapped Parda's body—minus his

head—in the bloodied and soiled canvas and secured it with an old anchor chain. They dropped him into the sea without a word. Joy spit into the swirl his body created as it disappeared on its way to the bottom. By suppertime they were back on shore.

Four days later, a courier delivered to Folha's rundown office in Lisbon a box labeled with his name and, in large red letters in Portuguese, *Personal*. Inside was Parda's head wrapped in wax paper, unseeing eyes still open. Tied to his ear was a note in Portuguese that Joy had dictated to Mateus:

Dear Mr. Folha

Here is the head of the assassin you paid to murder two very good people. You are next, unless you save me the trouble.

The Knife.

Three days later, Mateus translated for them an item from *Diario de Noticias*, a Lisbon newspaper.

BUSINESSMAN COMMITS SUICIDE

Well-known businessman Carlos Folha was found dead in his office yesterday morning by his wife, after failing to return home from work. He had shot himself in the head. A suicide note gave the failure of his businesses as the reason for his suicide.

His wife said that he had been despondent ever since the collapse of his shipping company, and blamed the government for his suicide.

Folha was well known and highly respected in business and political circles, and at one time managed all trade with Angola.

Chapter 31

Jy-ying

Jy-ying had spent all morning shopping and had filled three large bags. After her noon prayers, she went to her supply capsule and filled another bag before driving to Barbara's orphanage. She gave a small personal gift to each of the girls—a doll for Mary, a stuffed bear for Shirley, a music box for Wanying, and so on. It was the happiest Jy-ying had felt in months, and Little Wei seemed to feel the same way.

After an hour with the girls, she asked to see Barbara privately, and when they were alone, she told her, "I may be going on a long trip to China and I may not come back. If I don't, I want you to have this for your orphanage." She bowed and gave her a package containing \$100,000, saying, "Please only open this fifteen minutes after I leave."

She also gave her a bulkier package that contained most of her jewelry. "Please don't open this right away, either."

Barbara was surprised and wanted to hear all about her trip. Jy-ying said, "I do not have the time; I must rush off."

At the door, Barbara hugged her and tearfully wished Jy-ying a good trip, and the girls crowded around her, thanking her cheerfully. They waved and said goodbye, not knowing it might be for forever.

Jy-ying fought tears all the way back to her apartment. When she got there, she wrote a will. She put it and a large envelope on the counter next to the sink. It couldn't be missed there.

Jy-ying sat on her sofa for hours, staring at nothing, her mind a maelstrom of thought and memories. Little Wei was asleep next to her on the sofa, his head tight against her thigh. Only when he awoke and rushed to the door to whine with his back against it, signaling a need to go out, did she take him on his evening walk. All she remembered about it was getting twisted in his leash when he saw a cat and darted around her.

She still could not believe it. She had thought it impossible, but she could not deny what she had heard, and her own memory. She had been

confronting this over and over, twisting it around in her mind, dancing around it with her emotions, but always the conclusion was the same.

She still must save Sabah. And there was only one way to save him. Eliminate Joy. Jy-ying knew that Joy was beyond persuasion on this. John? She still thought he was manageable, especially with what she now knew. But if not, he could also be eliminated later.

She was beginning to hate herself, to hate her lies, to hate what she had to do. "To Joy," she whispered, and a shiver went up her spine when she spoke that name aloud. She gave a shuddering sigh. *I wish I were dead.*

All Jy-ying's dedication, all her passion about saving Sabah, all her singular focus was seeping away. She felt like an empty shell, with little left worth holding onto. A light had dimmed. It had started with the death of Janet. She had felt close to Janet, in spite of her apostasy. And when Janet said she would tell Joy, Jy-ying had not slept that night, believing that the following day she would have to kill her. But when dawn came, she knew she could not. She had sighed with relief and prepared the new lies she would tell Joy and John when they found out about her from Janet.

Although terribly convenient, the death of Janet was too awful. When she'd first seen Janet's body, Jy-ying had felt released from a huge weight, but that was fleeting, a matter of seconds. Janet's death more than grieved her, it shook her. Jy-ying's tears were real; her anger at the killer was real. Her feelings for Janet had weakened the iron bubble she had erected around her perceived necessity for killing Joy. Janet's death had begun softening the wall, and now with her latest discovery, it was melting.

Then Hands. She put her head in her hand and let the tears flow. Sal was a nice man who had helped her with her needs and assuaged her loneliness for a while. But she'd fallen for Hands. He was not John. He was a different man. But he had both a hardness and a tenderness about him that she liked. She thought there was something developing between them, until that second night on the ship when, as they sat on his bed, he told her that he had a girlfriend in Germany—an *actress*. And he was in love with her. Hands also admitted that he was afraid if Sal knew that he and Jy-ying were "getting together," it would hurt their friendship, regardless of how much time had gone by since she broke up with Sal.

"I understand," she told Hands. "There will be no What is the English word for this? Ahh, *complications*. Yes, there will be no com-

plications.” But after the last night on the return voyage, he had been so tender and considerate that she found it hard to just treat it as a ship-board romance. She cried. Hands held her tight. And when she was down to sniffles, she told him, “Do not worry. No complications. Yes.”

Yes, she, Security Captain Khoo Jy-ying, time traveler, trained in the arts of defense and killing, and soon-to-be murderer of Joy, had cried. Jy-ying had fallen in love with Hands. Yes, there were no complications. Not overt ones. They were all in her head.

Anyway, there was John, she told herself. He really was her deeper love. And she would have him. Especially when he found out what she now knew. She would have him, but she felt dirty about it. No, maybe not dirty. Guilty? No, that wasn't the right word either. She felt . . . *wrong*.

I have got to kill Joy tomorrow morning during sparring. Tomorrow. I can't let this go on. I must do it. I know her weakness and she does not know mine. I know which combination of punches, kicks, and blocks will open her up to the death knife chop.

Oh God, let her die quickly; let it be painless. I could not stand to see her suffer.

But she is so strong. I yet may lose, she reminded herself.

Calming herself, she sat at her desk and composed a letter to John:

Dear John:

If you are reading this, I am dead. Joy may also be dead. If she is, I am so sorry. It was God's will. If she is not, that is also God's will, and this letter is also addressed to her—to me from a different universe.

I leave everything I own to you, and this includes the supply capsule you will find in my warehouse. The code to unlock it and the ownership documents for the warehouse are in the top envelope.

Yes, I am a time traveler. Yes, I was sent here to save Sabah, to prevent his murder by whomever received that message from the future about him, which turned out to be you and Joy.

I pray to God that I have not failed. But if I do, I pray that you will see the light and leave Sabah alive. He will be the true prophet of God, and maybe if you guide him after his birth, many of the terrible things done in his name will be no more.

Say my fond goodbyes to Hands, Sal, Dolphy, and Mariko.

*Love,
Jy-ying*

She picked up her Book of Sabah, which she had brought with her from the future. She turned to a well-marked page and read it again, as she had repeatedly for the last four hours. She had drawn a red box around the words.

Do not kill the infidel unless you must for your protection or the defense of Sabah. Rather, educate him in the way of God and of his Prophet Sabah. Teach him what is Right and True, teach him God's Way, and you will lead him to happiness and Paradise, and save his soul.

It helped a little, but the light of dedication within her was still dim, almost flickering. She picked up Little Wei, startling him, and held him close to her chest and rested her head on him. "I love you, little guy. You are all I have in this world." She cried again. She didn't care about the tears. Only he would know.



Joy

Something was wrong with Jy-ying. She didn't have to intuit it. She could see it as they changed clothes for their now bimonthly sparring. Even Little Wei seemed to have a nervousness about him. Joy tried to speak to Jy-ying, but she only responded in grim monosyllables, her expression sour.

She had noticed a gradual deterioration in Jy-ying's mood ever since they returned from her execution of Parda. She and John had tried to bring Jy-ying out of it. But nothing, including John's awful humor, had worked. Joy had asked Jy-ying several times if there was a problem they could help with, and each time her eyes grew moist and she shook her head as though she did not trust her voice.

They left the little locker-bath room and entered the large gym. They had the mats laid out in the center, near a little weight lifting area, and circled by a narrow jogging track that ran along the walls. Jy-ying seemed to be in an unusual hurry as they walked to the mats. Oblivious to his mistress's mood, Little Wei started his routine search for strange smells.

Joy had on her usual red, and now frayed, headband, with her hair back in a ponytail. She had worn just a sweatshirt and shorts for a change.

Jy-ying had braided her hair into one long black braid, and had doubled it back and somehow tucked it into a tight knot close to her neck, apparently to prevent the braid from whipping her face. She wore her standard sloppy black sparring outfit, with the yellow trim.

When they reached the center of the mats, Jy-ying stopped at an unusual distance from Joy and stared at her for a long moment. Finally, taking a deep breath, she took a long green cloth from beneath her shirt and tied it around her forehead. It bore a red crescent and star on a deep green background.

When she saw the crescent, a warning went off in Joy's mind like a gunshot. She gaped, and reflexively backed up a step. She couldn't have been more shocked if Jy-ying had pointed a submachine gun at her. That was the battle crescent of Sabah's Islam. Only a Sabah would wear it, Lora's message had said.

She blurted, "KK. What the hell?"

Bowing stiffly from the waist, her arms and hands held against her sides, her face a picture of gloom, Jy-ying said, "I am Captain Khoo Jy-ying of the Sabah Security Guards. I am from the Second Universe year 2002, and the School of Shaolin Wing Chun Kung Fu. I am here to prevent you from killing Sabah, or his parents before he is born. To do so I must kill you—me—since you are beyond persuasion. Prepare yourself for combat and death."

Joy needed no instruction. The cloth crescent told her immediately that this was to the death. She only sought explanation while her body drew on all its training for just such a moment. She had to know. "What do you mean, that I am you?"

Jy-ying now stood seemingly relaxed. But Joy knew that stance. It was similar to her own.

Jy-ying spoke, her voice stripped of any emotion. "You told me all I needed to know during our supper together two nights ago. You were found alone and almost dead on a boat when, the doctors estimated, you were four years old. Your parents apparently had tried to escape persecution in Vietnam and were killed by pirates. Your foster mother Tor named you and adopted you, and you named your company after her.

"I tried to find out what you remembered. You told me the name

‘Tien Yen’ often came to mind. I was surprised. I asked if any other words or names came to mind, and you said ‘Hua,’ accompanied by a vague image of your mother. I was even more surprised. ‘Do you remember your name?’ I asked. You said several names worked in and out of your memory, all vague. You think you had a baby sister, maybe named Tang. Your name might have been something like Jy-cheng, but it was too hazy.”

No longer flat, Jy-ying’s voice seemed to waver out of her control. It fell into a soft whisper. “Joy. You are Jy-ying. Our mother was from the Hua family in China, a family with a long history. Her parents immigrated to Vietnam, where she met and married our father, a Chinese man named Shihao. I think you also vaguely recall his name. Our sister was named Ting. Your father died with your mother in the 1984 rebellion against Sabah; Ting was killed months later. Our parents were in the secret police and fought for Sabah.”

Joy’s question seemed to fall out of a mind that her training had sidelined for the battle. “I thought time travelers could not go back in time and meet themselves.”

“You are from the Old Universe. I am from the Second Universe. We are now in the Third Universe. This makes it possible. And it must be possible, since you and I are standing here.”

Her words spilled out again; they seemed to come from outside of Joy—outside of a body now prepared for a fight to the death. “But while you look like me . . . my scar aside, you also look different. If you’re me, how can you look as different as you do? And be two inches shorter?”

Jy-ying’s own voice was unsteady. “My parents suffered from the Vietnamese government’s attempt to force all first and second generation Chinese to return to China. They were unable to get much food or medical help, and lived in a refugee camp after they fled across the border into China. I didn’t have your healthy diet. And when I was five, I caught a mild case of noma. It is a gangrene that affects the mouth and face. The worst cases suffer extreme facial disfigurement and can die from septicemia or pneumonia. Although my noma was not too serious, it was bad enough to scar my lower face. When I was sixteen my foster father, a high official in the Sabah Guards, had a sympathetic Security doctor perform a series of plastic surgeries on me. If you looked carefully under my chin, you would see the scars.”

Her voice had been growing strained and it trailed off at the end.

Little Wei stopped his sniffing and looked at her from across the gym, his tail half-down.



Jy-ying

The questions were over. The explanations done. There was nothing more but death. She waited for Joy's bow, and thus her acceptance of what was to come.

She took two deep breaths and turned inward, and calmed herself by envisioning herself sitting beside a murmuring forest brook on a cloudless day and watching a leaf float gently by. She had not been at peace with herself like this since she came to this new world. There was nothing now to disturb her mind. It was dead to all thought; only her superbly trained body existed.

Jy-ying waited, her stance perfect, her planned offense inscrutable.

Joy backed up another two steps. She gave Jy-ying a long stare, assessing her. Jy-ying could see her eyes narrow as calculation was replaced by deadly seriousness. Hers were now the eyes of one tiger challenged by another. She reached up to her headband and folded it over, turning it inside out. It was still red, but now had a white lightning bolt emblazoned across the red background.

Jy-ying knew that symbol. It was famous throughout Asian martial arts. Joy had not told her that she had trained in *that* hidden and outlawed dojo. That Joy should show that symbol now meant that no mercy would be shown. It was their code. To display that symbol meant this battle must end in one or the other's death.

Joy glided forward three paces, and bowed. "I am Joy Phim of the secret Sensei Jigoro Ueshiba bushinota dojo. I am Sino-Vietnamese and of the family of Tor Phim. I come from the First Universe. I am duty bound by the bushinota dojo to warn you that this combat must be to the death. If you do not so desire, you may bow and retire."

Jy-ying assumed her ready stance.

Joy gave up her usual and seemingly relaxed ready stance, and adopted what Jy-ying could only guess must be the battle stance of the bushinota dojo. She slightly turned her right foot to a precise angle from the vertical alignment of her body, and her left foot to the opposite side at its own precise angle. She bent her knees and lifted the heel of her front foot a little off the mat. Her center of gravity was slightly

forward. She loosely clenched her hands into turned-down fists and straight-armed them forward from her hips.

Jy-ying waited no longer than the precise second their *wu shi dao*—code of the warrior—allowed before her attack, which was when Joy finished her ready stance.

Now!

Jy-ying launched a whirlwind of twirling, swinging, side and thrust kicks, punches, and knife chops, calculated to expose Joy's face and neck while staying out of reach of her superior grappling judo skills as Joy blocked, whirled, kicked, knuckle punched, blocked, twirled and edged in to grapple; she caught Jy-ying's foot in an underhand swoop and twisted it back on her with both hands as Jy-ying backhanded her in the cheek with a knuckle punch. Joy dropped to the mat and rolled to recover and Jy-ying did a swinging drop kick to Joy's knee, pushing it backwards, tearing the meniscus and almost dislocating the joint. The leg was now almost useless for heavy work.

Joy tried to recover with a one-legged straight armed punch to Jy-ying's solar plexus; blocking it, Jy-ying did a swooping heel kick to Joy's other leg and knocked Joy into a rolling and unsteady-looking recovery—a ploy—which she converted into a forward jump roll, catching Jy-ying's head in a scissor grip with her legs and throwing Jy-ying forward to the mat with her legs still around her neck. The grip must have been terribly painful for Joy to hold, but she held it and now she could use her grapples. Jy-ying tried to reach Joy's head, but Joy slithered under Jy-ying's arms and elbow piston-punched her stomach and face; when Jy-ying tried to exploit the resulting opening, Joy grabbed her wrist and twisted.

Jy-ying used her shoulders as a pivot and rolled up and over Joy's legs and out of both grips, then solidly thrust-kicked Joy's left arm just below the shoulder. Joy rolled away and up, virtually supporting herself on one leg, her left arm hanging, her body angled to protect that vulnerable side.

Jy-ying had the advantage and she pressed it.

Chop, kick, fist, fist, and Joy hand blocked, twisted, shoulder blocked, slide blocked. Jy-ying saw her leg slowly giving way.

Only about eight seconds had passed since their death struggle began, and Jy-ying now could see Joy's lethal weakness, could almost smell it. She looked into Joy's eyes. They were clear and unafraid, but resigned—*no, not resigned, accepting*—to what was to come, like the

eyes of a wolf whose foot is caught in a trap as it calmly watches the hunter approach with his rifle.

Jy-ying knew precisely how to end it now. A simple angled kick, and Joy would have to do a one-legged jump sideways; a punch to her left side, and as she would have to block that with her right arm; Jy-ying would then give her the death knife chop to her neck.

Joy waited, eyes bright. There was no offensive left in her body.

Jy-ying did not savor this moment; she dreaded that it had come. With certain victory only a few moves away, her warrior self relaxed control over her mind. And her thoughts and feelings tumbled out. She had grown proud of Joy and what she had become, as though of herself. She thought of Joy's life, her life, in another universe. She thought of her being saved from the boat when she was a child. She thought of their parents, who had died so heroically, and their dead sister. She thought of what Joy had missed by never really knowing them—her family that she would have loved. She thought of how Joy had been deprived of her identity. Now she, Jy-ying, would deprive her—herself—of *life*.

She had to do it now. Even an hour from now, she would no longer have the will.

She shifted her center of gravity to make her opening angled kick. *God be with you, Jo—*

Jy-ying felt a sharp sting in the side of her chest and heard the shot at the same time. Her solid stance held her up as she looked down at the blood beginning to flow out of the hole underneath her armpit. She jerked her head up to see John racing toward her with his gun still pointed at her. She turned her heavy head toward Joy and tried to say, "I'm sorry," but the room was beginning to spin and she barely could make out John holding his gun as he disappeared into the haze.

She felt the mat as she dropped to her knees, and supported herself by leaning on one arm until that gave way and she fell on her back. She felt so light-headed, but so wonderfully at peace. She barely made out Little Wei frantically licking her face, and she managed to lift both hands to hug him to her. "I love you, my little ma . . ."



Joy

Joy heard the shot and saw Jy-ying's surprise, her expression as she tried to say something to her. She watched Jy-ying's slow motion col-

lapse. Joy fell to the mat herself, gulping in air, just beginning to feel the flood of pain from her bruises, strained muscles, and injured arm and leg.

As soon as Jy-ying was down, John ran to kneel beside Joy. "Are you alright?" he yelled.

She could barely move her head to nod. She tried to point at Jy-ying, but her arm would not work. She screamed, "Save her!"

John turned and looked at Jy-ying. A pool of blood was forming under her, and she held Little Wei as he frantically licked her face, his tail between his legs and his ears back. John tried to approach her, but he wiggled out of her limp hands and growled and nipped at John, obviously ready to do battle to save his mistress. John tore off his coat and held it wide open in both hands as he approached Little Wei. He threw it on him, wrapping it around the little dog as he madly struggled and whined.

John put one arm around the coat to hold Little Wei within it, and felt for Jy-ying's pulse. He backed up and released her guardian, and shook his head at Joy. Jy-ying was dead.

She collapsed on the mat, her body succumbing to exhaustion and agony. It took a moment for her mind to emerge from the wreckage, and then all that Jy-ying said flooded in.

Joy released a long shriek of sorrow and loss. Gulping for air, crying hysterically, she tried to crawl toward Jy-ying. When John saw what she was doing, he walked in front of her with his coat open toward Little Wei so that he wouldn't attack her, and slowly pushed the growling dog away. Little Wei hovered nearby, lifted his muzzle toward the ceiling, and howled his loss. John had never before heard the howl of a wolf that had lost its mate. It was the saddest sound he had ever heard.

Joy pulled her body over Jy-ying in a hug and kissed her cooling face. And cried and cried. John tried to pull Joy up several times, but she shrugged him off. "You don't understand," she whimpered. "She is me."

John sat down next to her and put his arm around her shoulder. "I do. You turned our communicator on with that 'KK.' I heard everything, and broke every speed record getting here."

Joy twisted painfully to look up at him and he tenderly pulled her into a sitting position. She buried her head in his chest and cried, "She could have killed me. She didn't. She hesitated. I think she knew you were coming and waited for her own death."

John whispered, “She didn’t know about the communicators, and even if she did, she didn’t know the toggle code.”

Joy was coming out of it, and wiped her tears on his shirt. She was so exhausted she could barely push the words out. “She had been a spy. She knew more about us than we think.”

She fainted.



They had the funeral for Jy-ying in John’s apartment. She had been cremated, the mortician’s concern about the police being eased with a large contribution to the O’Conner Mortuary, and the story that she had been shot in a rape attempt that was being kept quiet to avoid embarrassment to her family.

The urn with Jy-ying’s ashes was placed on a pedestal against one plain wall, with a colored photograph next to it that John had taken a year ago with his Old Universe digital camera. Little Wei stood guard underneath, his tail half down, motionless, his ears partly back. He had barely eaten in three days.

Hands, Sal, Dolphy, and Mariko were there, and some people Jy-ying had worked with at the company. Outside of the mortician, nobody but Joy and John knew that she had been shot. John told them all that Joy and Jy-ying were on their way to shop when the front wheel of Jy-ying’s car came off and she hit a tree. She was thrown into the tree and killed. Joy had ducked beneath the dashboard and survived with bruises and minor injuries.

John gave the oration.

Sal had his say about this wonderful woman he had met, and John was impressed by an eloquence he didn’t know Sal had. Hands also said a few words, only a little less warm and affectionate than Sal’s.

Joy had to say something at the end. She limped painfully to the urn, almost every inch of her body black, blue, and purple, and turned her swollen face to gaze at Sal and Hands. She looked at John, and silent words passed between them.

She stared down at the floor for many seconds in the absolute silence.

She raised her head and stood as tall as she could. She found the words. “What can I say about Jy-ying? People say they saw much of me in her. If that’s true, it makes me very happy, for it tells me what kind of person I really am.” She kissed her fingers and waved them toward the urn. “Goodbye, Jy-ying.”

She started to collapse. John rushed to pick her up in his arms, and carried her back to the sofa and let her cry on his shoulder. One by one the others left. Hands left with his arm around Sal's shaking shoulders. Only Little Wei remained. He was now their—her—responsibility.

That night, Joy rolled off the bed onto her knees and slowly pushed herself upright. She still could not sit on the edge of the bed to stand. She limped into the living room, quietly closing the bedroom door behind her, and gingerly sat on the sofa. Just enough moonlight came through the windows for her to see Jy-ying's urn and Little Wei below it, watching her.

She had a long conversation with Jy-ying. She told her again about what little snatches she remembered of her—their—family. She tried to dredge up every elusive sound she remembered and form it into a word for Jy-ying. She tried to put it all together into some picture of what she had lost.

Then she repeated what she already had told Jy-ying about her life with Tor, who adopted her; of her growing love for her new mother, and her happiness. She told Jy-ying how John entered her life and what he meant to her. She didn't stop when Little Wei jumped on the sofa and lay down next to her, his head tight against her thigh. She bared her soul to Jy-ying, and told her everything she would never tell another person, not even John. It was alright, she knew. For Jy-ying was her; it was as though she were only telling herself.

John found her asleep on the sofa early in the morning with Little Wei curled up next to her. For the first time since the battle, she looked at peace.



They all went together to permanently place Jy-ying's urn in the crypt. John placed the urn on a white marble shelf next to Janet and Ed's urn, and hung a framed colored photograph of Jy-ying on a nearby wall. On the shelf's edge below the urn, an epitaph had been engraved on a little plaque:

Khoo Jy-ying -1913

God's loyal Subject to the end. She is now in His hands. He should treat her well.

RIP

Joy bowed her head in respect, thinking, *There, but for the throw of the die, go I.*

As they left the crypt, Little Wei sat down under Jy-ying's urn and refused to leave. John picked him up and carried him, struggling, to their car. He passed Little Wei to Joy, who kissed him and held him close as he drove them back to their apartment.

The next morning when John opened the door to bring in the milk delivery, Little Wei ran out into the hallway and out the open door of the building. John ran after him, but the terrier disappeared down the street.

That evening, John received a phone call. "Hello," a man's voice said, "this is the manager of the Cypress Lawn Memorial Park. Do you own a little white dog?"

"Yes, I do."

"The crypt with 'Bank's Team' above the door is yours?"

"Yes."

"Your dog is at the door trying to get in. When my gardener tries to pick him up, he growls at him. Can you come and get him?"

Joy and John drove there immediately, and found Little Wei lying against the crypt door. Joy unlocked it and let him in. He ran to Jy-ying's urn, sat in front of it with his tail wagging, and barked. They left him there for about twenty minutes while they walked around the cemetery. When they returned to the crypt, Little Wei was in the same position. When he heard them he looked over his shoulder at them, then back at the urn.

John picked him up and held him tight as he struggled. They took him back to the apartment.

Chapter 32

Joy 1913–1914

Joy and John made three trips to Europe during 1913 and 1914 to prevent World War I and the Russian Revolution. They were successful beyond all hopes. The propaganda and lobbying campaigns they funded helped prevent public opinion and legislators from accepting war as a solution to political conflict. And of special importance, the legislatures of England, Germany, and France passed legislation curtailing the military. This might not have been enough, had Joy and John not also taken direct action.

During each trip they extended their web of business relationships with many of the most important European power brokers and secret societies, with their company at the center. This potentially subversive web cost them \$125 million alone, but it was worth it, because they were able to use it to remove from office those high officials whose actions led to World War I in the Old Universe, and replace them with officials who had a much more moderate or accommodating view of their potential enemies.

Joy wanted to assassinate them for causing the deaths of millions in the Old Universe. John did not, and argued that they were not directly responsible for those deaths, as were Hitler and Stalin for those murdered under their rule and by their commands. They compromised on removing them from office by bribery, or frame-up, or some other non-violent means.

John therefore was happy with the way it worked out, except for Foreign Secretary Gottfried von Jagow. German police and a passing photographer found him drunk. No problem in itself, except he was in an alley, in the arms of a young boy who claimed that Jagow forced him to commit sodomy. A photograph of the two magically appeared in newspaper and magazine offices, and within days Von Jagow resigned. Three days later, he committed suicide.

John was stunned by this, but felt better when Joy set up their laptop and inserted the DVD containing photographs and news videos of

World War I—a massacre costing in battle alone some nine million lives, and a possible cause of the 1918 worldwide influenza epidemic that ended only after eighteen million or more people had died from it.

The most dangerous of their interventions involved the fanatical Black Hand Society of Serbia, whose leader, Apis, had been responsible for the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne on June 28th, 1914 when he and his wife were driven down the streets of Sarajevo. This was the trigger for World War I.

To prevent this assassination, John framed Apis with forged secret government documents and wireless communications with the German General Staff. Apis was arrested as a traitor and the Serbian police systematically uprooted the Black Hand Society.

In Austria, Hands and his German fiancée had themselves invited to a diplomatic party attended by the Archduke. While Hands told the Archduke a fictional story about an English duchess he had seduced, his fiancée stealthily dropped a powder into his drink. The next day the Archduke could not get out of bed. He had a fever, was vomiting, and felt dizzy when he tried to stand. His doctor advised that he stay in bed and cancel his scheduled trip to Sarajevo. The Archduke did gradually recover, but there was no longer a reason to visit Sarajevo until nine years later, which then turned out to be an uneventful trip.

June 28th, 1914, passed without notice, except by Joy and John. And when midnight passed by peacefully, they didn't notice it either. They were stuporously, gloriously, happily drunk in celebration.

World War I or something like it could still break out, as John warned Joy. "Avoiding the Archduke's assassination, which triggered World War I in the Old Universe, does not mean the war will not eventually occur. There could be other triggers. We also must continue our work at the underlying conditions, which is fundamentally the lack of democracy."

They did, but it was not as though they were fighting a political tide. Democracy was growing in popularity. They simply added as much of their funds as they could to the democratically oriented parties and politicians in Germany, Russia, and Serbia. They also put funds into getting the democratic peace message across, one aspect of which was the building of a huge statue of Immanuel Kant, the father of the idea of a democratic peace, in front of the German parliament. With a little pushing, the Kaiser gave the keynote address and President Wilson of the United States gave a widely acclaimed speech on democracy.

One assassination Joy and John agreed on, and because they would soon be dealing with Abul Sabah, with the outcome of that unknown, they would do it earlier than necessary.

They had him tracked down to the art colony in Munich, where he had moved in 1913. He was only a struggling artist, selling his touristy paintings to survive. They discussed at length how to do the assassination. On September 1, the day and month in the Old Universe that the man had initiated the European theater of World War II with his invasion of Poland, John knocked on his door.

When Hitler answered the door, John shot him dead.

John was dazed by what he had done. He had taught college students about Hitler's aggressions, his Holocaust, and his war crimes, and now he had killed the very man who had been such a horrible subject of his professional study and research. It was days before John could function normally, and two days before he could sleep. Over and over again, he murmured, "I can't believe it. I killed Hitler. Me."

An unknown, Hitler's death went unreported in the German newspapers.



John had told—lectured, as usual—Joy that making Russia democratic was even more important than preventing World War I. Just from democide alone, Lenin, Stalin, and their successors had killed or been responsible for the death of about 62 million people.

So, to promote democracy in Russia they provided tens of millions of dollars to the democratic forces, and funneled much of the funds to Prince G.E. Lvov and moderate lawyer A.F. Kerensky. They also contracted for the assassinations of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who was writing his revolutionary documents from Krakow, and Leon Trotsky, then living in Vienna after escaping forced exile in Siberia for his revolutionary activities.

John did Hitler. Stalin was Joy's. Through aid, training, and subversion, he'd fostered the spread of communism to China and ultimately to Vietnam and Cambodia. And thus he bore some responsibility for the horrors that Joy's mom, her godmother Gu, and so many others in their Society had suffered.

Joy wanted him, but she couldn't get to him easily. In 1913, he had been exiled to Siberia for revolutionary activities. They weren't going to make the long trip there, just for him. So John let her handle the con-

tract, at least. To the same royalist group that had arranged for the assassinations of Lenin and Trotsky, Joy paid \$15,000 for Stalin's death.

They didn't dicker over the price.

Chapter 33

Joy
1915

*T*en years, Joy reflected. *We have now been in this age for ten years. What incredible things we have done; so much has happened to us in that time. What great tales we could tell, except everyone in the Old Universe would think them science fiction.*

Now they would try to save as many as two billion lives. It was time to kill Sabah.

But first, they had something sad to do.

They had a short walk along a rose lined path to their crypt. John unlocked the door and handed the small, light green urn containing Little Wei's ashes to Joy, who kissed it and placed it alongside Jy-ying's. They'd found a digital photograph of Little Wei among Jy-ying's effects; it showed the white terrier with his perky ears up, little red tongue showing, and head tilted questioningly at the photographer. His tail, of course, was a blur. John hung it on the adjacent wall. On the shelf below the urn, John placed a framed clipping from the *San Francisco Courier*:

THE DOG THAT WOULDN'T FORGET

At a private ceremony, John Banks, owner of the Banks & Team crypt at Cypress Lawn Memorial Park, plans to place the ashes of Little Wei beside those of his mistress, Khoo Jy-ying.

Mr. Banks had tried to take care of Little Wei after Miss Khoo died, but whenever the dog was left unattended, he would walk ten miles to the crypt and take up station outside.

Finally, Banks let him stay there and made sure he was fed, and constructed a little doghouse nearby to protect him from the weather. But come rain or shine, Little Wei could be found huddled against the crypt door.

Whenever anyone opened the door, he dashed inside to sit before Khoo's urn with his tail wagging.

Yesterday morning, he was found dead by the crypt door. Banks suggests he died of a broken heart.

Finally, John attached a little white plaque on the edge of the shelf underneath the urn:

*Little Wei, –1915
Now take my paw, my mistress,
So that the sounds of my joy
Be music to your heart.*

Chapter 34

Joy

They knew that the world had avoided World War I and that the European movement toward greater democracy appeared self-reinforcing. Sabah had been born the previous year, and they could not let him get much older. They made their plans; they were ready.

John could hardly look at them when he lied to the three guys and Mariko, as he had so often, about what Joy and he would be doing. “Middle Asia produces many products that we can buy cheaply and import to the United States. We should make a handsome profit, if we can set this up. But we have no offices in Middle Asia. Our closest is Peking, a long distance away. So we will set up an office in Kashgar, Uighuristan, which is central to the area, and do some exploring. You know, play tourists. Besides, I’ve developed a personal interest in this region, which Janet encouraged. It’s my new hobby. I’m fascinated by the Silk Road that Marco Polo traveled and through which much prized silk was imported into Europe from China. It still exists, and we will be using that ourselves.”

Dolphy asked, “How much time will you be gone?”

“Probably about five months. The four of you do good work, and Joy and I have no fear about leaving the company in your hands for that long. We both will leave detailed instructions . . . ”

And new wills, Joy thought.

“Anyway, we think the trip will be worth it.”

John didn’t say what the detailed instructions were. In them they admitted they were from the future, described the information they had received from Lora and Mark, and provided instructions on how to use Joy’s laptop to insert and watch the CD and DVD they’d put in their safe. They were asking a lot, but they knew the four would go through it all as testament to Joy and John. They had included detailed instructions on the route to Kashgar, and expressed their hope that the guys would assassinate Sabah if Joy and John failed.

Joy insisted that they also describe with compassion Jy-ying’s failed mission from the future, and that all Jy-ying had left them, including her supply capsule, be willed to the guys.

Joy and John had worked months on all these details, testing them for possible misunderstanding, and trying to keep them as simple as possible without losing the importance of the message.

“We don’t expect to die, of course,” John hastened to add. “But there are warlords and bandits, not to mention opportunists who try to fleece supposedly rich Westerners, and who may get angry if they fail.”

Sal smirked. “Good idea, taking Joy for your protection.”



Uighuristan

Since they would be traveling through the high Karakorem Mountains that divided northwestern India from Uighuristan, John and Joy waited until early summer of 1915 to make the trip.

This trip was the most fascinating, fatiguing, and dangerous one yet. It took them three ships and two ports to reach Karachi. They had to transfer ships in Hong Kong and Singapore. It would have been romantic if it was their first-ever trip, maybe even their fifth. But they were traveled out and now getting a little old for this. Even John no longer felt up to carrying her from the rail of the ship to their cabin in a burst of crazy lust. Nor did Joy really regret it.

The flimsy, careening train they took from Karachi to Islamabad was so overcrowded, people sat on the roof with their baggage. They took two days to recover from the experience, then traveled on an old Fraser bus to Gilgit. The bus was no better than the train, with old and young Indians of all descriptions toting chickens, goats, straw bundles, and large bags. The smell was overwhelming. There was no such thing as first class.

Gilgit was the gateway to the foothills of the impressive and snow-peaked Karakorem Mountains. There they waited four days for a guide to form a horse and camel caravan of Indians and returning Uighur businessmen, bound for Kashgar. They bought horses, and were able to buy themselves into the caravan by virtue of their business. They had their armor, handguns, and knives, but they also bought the best rifles they could find. Everyone around here had rifles, including all those in their caravan.

Language was difficult, but Joy spoke the Mandarin, Hakka, and Cantonese Chinese languages, and there were usually a few Chinese speakers around who also spoke the local dialect or language. In Gilgit

they found one fellow, named Fadi, who spoke Mandarin and Uighur. Joy hired him as a translator for the whole trip to Kashgar and their return to Gilgit. She suspected he would be able to retire for life on what they paid him.

From Gilgit they traveled by caravan about seventy miles up into the mountains to Hunza on the winding Silk Road, and from there the 175 miles through the Khunjerab Pass, the highest border crossing in the world, into Uighuristan. There they slowly trekked some 230 more miles to Tashkorgan. After a day's rest, they traveled with the caravan the final 200 or so miles to Kashgar, located in the utterly desolate western end of the Takliman Desert.

There were weeks of awful cold, and weeks of dry, lip-chapping heat. There were beautiful mountain views and monotonous gray landscapes of rock after rock, with nothing green anywhere; dry, flat expanses of sandy, gravelly land, and wondrous foliage. They stank so bad, Joy was sure she saw a greenish, oily mist surrounding them all after just a few days. They considered themselves fortunate that their noses soon became inured to the stench. But she still could taste it. And feel it. After two weeks, she thought she could peel the stench off.

Joy told John she'd have preferred to view all the scenery on a DVD for an hour, take a shower, and go to bed afterward.

By the time they reached Kashgar, they could hardly walk. Joy swore that her legs were so bowed, she could keep her ankles together and push her upper torso through the gap at her knees. She noticed that John had developed a cowboy swagger.

They decided to rest for several days and become familiar with Kashgar. They found the Kashgar Guesthouse for businessmen near the famous Idgah Kah Mosque, and a place to stable their horses. Within two seconds of completing these arrangements, Joy was immersed in what passed for a bath—cold water filling a plastered hole in the ground. Heaven!

John hated cold water baths and insisted he didn't need one, but when she told him nicely that he either join her or sleep on the other side of Kashgar, he gave up the joking.

They and their translator walked all over the small city—more what Joy would call a town, with a population of about ten or fifteen thousand people. It was strictly Muslim; most of the women completely covered their bodies and wore the customary rust-colored veil. Unlike many Muslim countries, however, they wore colorful clothes. Joy and John stood out as foreigners, though they dressed very conservatively and Joy covered her hair with brightly colored scarves.

Kashgar was the most fundamentalist Muslim city of all Uighuristan. There were mosques scattered throughout, and the call for prayers was dutifully observed. Those living here were mainly Uighur and Kyrgyz ethnic groups, with a smattering of other Turkish ethnic groups as well. Clearly, this region had much more in common with the other ethnic groupings to the west than with the Han Chinese on the eastern border. Culturally, it belonged to the transcaspian khanates, like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Joy and John's declared purpose for coming to Kashgar was to buy locally woven carpets for their company, and possibly to set up a company office here to sell Western goods. This gave them an excuse to ask questions and check the mosque and civic registers for the Sabah family. There were sixteen such families, but only one had a baby boy. His name was Abul and his father was Aisha. Aisha Sabah owned a small farm about five miles outside of Kashgar. He husbanded sheep and goats, and grew barley and a variety of fruits, including the delicious hami melon.

They knew what they wanted to do. Following the directions they got from the Guesthouse, they rode their horses out to the farm and pulled up before a small, three room, clay brick home surrounded by barley and vegetable fields. When they arrived, Aisha was herding several dozen sheep into a small corral, and ignored them until he drove all the sheep inside and closed the gate.

He turned and looked obliquely at Joy and John, studying them carefully with deeply sunken eyes in a long, thin, heavily bearded face. He wore an embroidered square cap, several long, grayish shirts that hung at different lengths over his waist, and baggy brown pants, tight at the ankle above woven slippers. What struck Joy at first was his jet-black beard of straight hair and his equally black mustache, which covered his mouth. Joy did not know how he ate through it. He had a tanned and deeply furrowed face. Joy's first thought, before he and their translator Fadi exchanged any words, was that his photograph would be a natural for the *National Geographic*.

Fadi seemed to be introducing them; they heard, "John Banks . . . Joy Phim . . . America."

Aisha's eyes opened wide when he heard that, and he emitted a deep grunt of surprise that sounded something like, "Haaaa."

Joy had told Fadi to say: "They are in your country to buy Uighur products for their company. Perhaps you have something you would like to sell them. May we talk to you about it?" After each exchange in

Uighur, Fadi would translate it into Chinese for Joy, and she would repeat it in English for John.

Aisha responded, "I don't think I have anything to sell, but I want to hear about America. Come inside and tell me about it." He led them into his home, where he introduced them to his wife Niyasam, telling her, "We have guests who come from the United States."

She immediately put her hands together and bowed deeply to them. "God be praised," she said. "Thank you for coming to our little home."

Niyasam was a short, heavyset woman. She wore a kimono-like light blue dress that fell straight from her shoulders to her bare feet. She had a multicolored scarf around her head that she had pulled off her shoulders as soon as they entered the house.

Aisha invited them to sit at his only table, while Niyasam hurried to a cupboard at one end of the main room and pulled out a plate of buns that she put in the middle of the table. She dropped some tea leaves into a teapot hanging from a rod beside the fireplace, stoked up the fire, and swung the pot to hang over it. Aisha said nothing as they watched her move about the room. She served them the boiling tea then looked at Aisha; when he nodded, she left the room.

Turning to Fadi, he said, "Ask them if it is true that everyone in the United States is rich."

John answered, "We have our rich and poor, as you do, but our poor are in many ways richer than are your rich. Not in comparable money perhaps, but in what is available to many of them, such as running hot and cold water, indoor toilets, good medical care, free education, and so on." This initiated a long conversation about the United States, throughout which Aisha expressed his awe.

Joy was getting impatient. This was taking too long. She was going to have Fadi mention the child, when they heard him crying in another room. She smiled and told Fadi, "Ask if we can see him."

Fadi translated, and Aisha yelled out something to Niyasam. She appeared almost immediately with the boy wrapped in a light blanket and balanced in her right arm. The child had stopped crying and was looking back and forth between Niyasam and those at the table. Abul was a cute child, with rosy cheeks and bright round eyes in an absolutely round face. Already he had a head of stubby black hair.

At the sight of him, Joy and John began their little play in English, repeated by Joy in Chinese for Fadi to pass on to Aisha in Uighur.

"Oh, what a beautiful child," Joy said.

John added, "He is handsome. And he already looks strong. I'm impressed."

Joy feigned tears. "I'm so sad that I can't have a child like this."

John put a comforting arm about her. "I have never seen a child like this, one that I wanted so much." And so on.

Finally, Joy asked, "Can I hold him?" and held out her arms. Niyasam proudly put the child in her arms. Joy hugged him and kissed him on the face, and looked imploringly at John.

Joy didn't think their acting would have received rave reviews, but in that context it was sufficient to introduce their question. Looking at Aisha, John assumed a pleading expression. "We want so much to have a child, but cannot. We have fallen in love with your child, and want to buy him from you. Would you sell him to us?"

After Joy translated that into Chinese, Fadi hesitated, then asked her if that was what she really meant. Joy couldn't believe she would ask to buy a child, it was so foreign to her own culture. But as John had explained to her after his study of the culture of this area in preparation for this trip, it was not that uncommon in this part of the world to sell one's child. The poor and lower middle class sometimes sold their children to those who could support them, or to religious institutions. They even were sold into prostitution. For those without sons, buying a male child was the only way to pass on their name and inheritance, especially their farm or business. John's question would not be considered immoral or crazy, although when it finally got to Aisha, Fadi told Joy that he was surprised that they, as foreigners, had asked.

When Joy and John realized in Kashgar that Abul was the Sabahs' only son, and then found out that Niyasam was Aisha's only wife, they didn't feel right about secretly poisoning Abul or kidnapping and killing the child, leaving Aisha and Niyasam to their grief. Sons were held in very high esteem in this part of the world, and to the grief of too many families, many of them died in their first year. Abul had survived for a year and they knew he would reach manhood. They felt that since they were going to take the boy from the Sabahs one way or another, they had to do it in a morally acceptable way in this culture, and compensate them handsomely.

Joy knew she was just trying to make it easier to kill the child.

In answer to John's question, Niyasam blurted, "No!" Her reaction was so obvious, from her expression and the sharp slice of her hand through the air, that even John understood it. She looked at Aisha.

Before Aisha could respond, John said, "If you sell your son to us, he will live happily in the United States and become a citizen there. He will be rich and happy. I own a company that is very large and imports

and exports all over the world, and Abul would inherit this company. He could easily make trips here to visit you.”

When the chain of translations got to him, Aisha began to shake his head vigorously, but John continued, “We will pay you 18,000 Uighuristan som for your child.” They had discussed the amount they would offer before arriving here. This was the equivalent of about \$6,000, which in local currency would make the couple very rich. The average local income was about thirty dollars a year.

Fadi gaped at Joy when she put that in Chinese. He asked her to repeat it, and she did, thinking, *Now I bet he thinks he should have held out for more before agreeing to be our translator.*

When he heard the figure, Aisha sat staring at them, obviously stunned. Niyasam, who had heard the conversation from the other room, came in to stand behind him. She stared at the back of his head. Her face resigned, she began to cry. By local Muslim custom, she had no choice in the matter, and knew by Aisha’s voice that he had decided to sell their child. But he was middle-Asian, and nothing gets sold without haggling. He seemed to think for several moments, and said, “No, I can’t sell the child. He is too valuable to us.”

In preparation for just this response, they had made a list of which neighboring families had children near the same age. “Well,” John said, “we’ll look around. Maybe we can find another child. We know the Abliz and Yusup families have beautiful children, and we will take a look at them, now that you have aroused our interest in buying a local child.”

Aisha and Fadi and Joy began an exchange, often punctuated by Joy appearing to ask John about a figure.

Joy was stunned herself when the dickering ended and she and John had actually bought the child for what amounted to about \$7,500. They had talked to two banks before the trip, and were told that they would find it almost impossible to convert American dollars into so much local currency here. Therefore, they had done so through their business and the National Currency Exchange in New York, which at their request sent the money to them in San Francisco by courier. Throughout the trip to Kashgar, Joy had carried the money in a waterproof pouch that looked like it contained, and did at the top, women’s menstrual wear. No man here or in India would have touched it unless at gunpoint, and only if death were a certain alternative.

With Niyasam in tears, a stern-faced Aisha accepted the money. While he counted it with shaking hands, Niyasam ran into the other

room and emerged in minutes with her arms full of blankets and baby clothes, which she almost threw at Joy. “Go,” she said, sobbing. “Go, quick.”

Aisha yelled something at her, but Joy carried Abul over to her and lifted him for her to say her farewell. Niyasam took the child and lovingly kissed his face, hugged him, and now keening in sobs she handed him back to Joy. As she did so, Abul started crying. Joy took him, cuddled him, and tried to soothe him. She was no longer acting, but weeping along with Niyasam as she moved toward the door. John tried to say something to Niyasam, but his voice broke. They left the house.

Joy and John didn’t look at each other as she gave the crying child to him to hold while she mounted her horse. Without looking at Joy, he lifted the child into her arms. The continuous keening of Niyasam was a dagger in her heart. Before riding off, Joy told Aisha, “You can have more children. I wish you all the happiness in this world with them, and may you and your family forever be blessed by God.”

Still stern-faced, Aisha was nevertheless holding back tears, and was afraid to speak. He nodded, and they rode off.

John had hardly said a word since buying the child. Now he finally broke his silence. Raising his voice above Abul’s crying, John exclaimed, “I feel like shit.”

Joy had no response. She sniffled almost the whole way back to the Guesthouse. Lulled by the horse ride, Abul soon stopped crying and looked around with curiosity at the horses, the scenery, and his new parents. In their room at the Guesthouse, Joy put the child on their bed—a spring mattress on a bed of bricks—and she and John sat on the floor.

They planned to take the boy into the desert and give him an injection of pentobarbital, which they had brought with them. He would die without pain or discomfort, and they would bury the body in the desert.

“Okay,” John said in a strained voice. “Here he is. Here we are. This is it. The moment we’ve waited for, planned for . . .” He looked at the baby on the bed. “We now have in our hands the way of forever preventing Sabah’s nuclear strike and takeover of the world in this universe, under the banner of Sabahism.”

As though trying to give both of them courage, John whispered, “He will kill nearly two billion people.” His voice climbed to what sounded like a lament. “Shall we do it tonight and get it over with?”

Joy just looked at him.

“Don’t look at me that way,” John huffed, his jaw hard, his face suddenly lined. He started to rub his neck.

Joy continued to look at him. A tear ran down her face.

“The goddam stupidest thing we did was not contracting a professional to do this.” John almost sounded disgusted, but the softness in his eyes betrayed him. “Out of pity for the family, we got ourselves personally involved. Now look at you. For humanity’s sake, we’ve got to carry this through. I repeat, this child will grow into a man who will kill billions of people. Think of that. Keep the image of what you saw on the DVD in your mind. Remember Lora and Mark. They died just hoping for this day. They sacrificed their last earthly moments together working for this day.”

John looked from Joy to the child, who was now sleeping on his back, with his angelic round face toward them.

“He’s just a baby,” Joy moaned.

John shouted, “Shit. Do I have to do this myself?”

Joy stared at the baby’s face.

John just sat on the floor, obviously miserable. “I’ll do it tonight,” he finally whispered. “I’ll do it alone.”

By late afternoon, Joy had stopped crying and had resigned herself to what they—John—had to do. He picked up soup and goat’s milk for Abul to keep him quiet. Neither of them felt like eating, however. As Joy fed Abul, she could not describe adequately the new feelings this baby boy stirred in her. She had never before cooed over a child or animal, but she did so now. She hadn’t known she had baby talk in her. It just came out naturally, and at first she didn’t realize what she was doing, until John said sadly, “My dear warrior, you should hear yourself.”

Late in the evening, John came over to the bed where Joy was rocking Abul in her arms, and said quietly, “Its time, sweetheart.”

Joy had killed without a touch of regret or sadness. But those had all been grown men who had chosen their path, who knew what they were doing and the risks they took. Abul was a child, a baby. She tried to steel her emotions as she put Abul down. None of her warrior training was up to this.

She stood and moved aside to let John pick up Abul. He lifted him in one arm, and picked up the bag containing the candy, pentobarbital, and a trowel to dig a hole in the sand. Abul had awakened and was gurgling while he tried to pull John’s hat off. When he succeeded and it landed on the floor, he gurgled louder and waved his hands happily. John stood for a long time by the door, looking down at the child.

Joy did nothing to stop him, but tears ran down her face as she stood back from the door, her hands falling at her sides, her head slightly tilted.

This tableau seemed to Joy to stretch for hours. She stared at John's face. She could see the tears began to trickle from his eyes as his face seemed to sag, transformed by the horror of the job he had to do.

He looked up from Abul and stared at Joy for a long moment. Silent words passed between them. She felt the beating of her heart and the throb of her tension headache; the tears on her cheek felt hot in the chill air. Her eyes focused on the lone tear falling down John's cheek.

He sighed, looked back down at Abul, and put down his bag. He gave Abul a hug and kissed him on the forehead. He turned from the door and brought Abul over to her. She reached out with welcoming arms.

"Here, mother. Take your son," John said, wearing the happiest expression she seen on his face since this trip started.

His words filled her mind. She screamed out of pure joy and utter relief.

"Thank you. Oh, thank you!" She kissed the child. John hugged them both and kissed Joy.

"We're adopting him," Joy shouted at John, finally revealing what she now knew had been well hidden inside her—the desire for motherhood.

That was it. They had made the decision, and now had to work it out within their general mission. They celebrated that night over a strong alcoholic drink made of sorghum that John bought in the Guesthouse. John had to wake up their translator and the manager to get it, but when he explained that it was for the celebration of motherhood, the manager was happy to open the cabinet where he kept the liquor.

Afterward, when Joy and John were in bed with the sleeping Abul between them, she told him, "I know our mission is at the center of our life. I know that we must succeed, even if it's the death of us. I know what this child would have done to the world if he had grown up here. I know this, sweetheart, but as human beings we are made up of intangibles that will not bow to reason. I know what had to be done, and that's why I stood back from what I could not do myself. But if you had murdered this child, you would also have killed something in my heart. Did you know this?"

John reached across the sleeping child and took her hand. "If I had murdered this child, I would have killed what I believe in my heart that I am. If you had been willing to kill the child, I would have gone along. That you would not, that you showed such compassion for him, just

showed me why I love you.” John gently picked up Abul and placed him on the other side of her, and pulled her to him. “Hello, my love,” he whispered in her ear, nibbling on it.

“Hello, my love,” Joy said.

They shamelessly introduced their son to his new parents.



They would now adopt a child. But something was missing and, Joy thought, *My lovely man is oblivious to it.*

Her heart's intuition went after big game. It took over, while her dormant mind watched, hoping.

The next morning, just for exercise, they took Abul on an early morning walk, without their translator. “There is this little problem,” Joy said as soon as possible after they returned to the Guesthouse. Molding her face into a most serious look, she pointed out, “We are unmarried, yet we will adopt a child. This generation is not as accepting of live-in relationships as ours was—will be, that is. Aren't you afraid of what this will do to our adopted son-to-be?”

“I hadn't thought of that.” John mulled this over. “But we have a mission and travel frequently, and I don't want to create more difficulty for ourselves than necessary. We've already added a new level of complications with Abul. But I think hiring a nanny can take care of many of those. As to how he will be treated, we can invent a cover story about something happening to his parents.”

He's putting me on. But unsure, her heart let it hang there. If he wasn't joking, she didn't want to push him too hard yet. He would see what was beautiful and necessary himself, she hoped.

John seemed unusually quiet for a few minutes until, almost absentmindedly, it seemed, he said, “Of course, we could get married—”

Yippee, he got it!

“—but, you know, if our future enemies know we're married, they could use that against me or you, or even Abul, depending on the circumstances.”

So, screw them.

“And,” he continued relentlessly, “with our relationship being simply employer and employee, while we keep Abul in the background, they presumably would not know about our love for each other and thus will have one less lever to exploit.”

Her mind bowed to her heart and got out of the way. She put a concerned look on her face, and placed her hand on her chest. “Even if we

travel together, I will be doing a lot of things independent of you; I'll have my own work to do in Paris, London, Rome, Peking—you know. I won't be wearing a wedding ring. I'm afraid I'm going to have a lot of men hitting on me. Of course, dearest, they won't get anywhere."

John looked concerned, then jealous, then happy over his solution. "I've got it. I'll buy you a garish wedding ring to wear when you go out alone. As we did in China."

Joy's heart thumped. "Why not make it a real wedding ring?"

John went on, "Better yet, I could hire a woman in each place to chaperone you."

When he leaned forward to look into her eyes, she finally saw the dimples at the sides of his mouth. They deepened, and soon he was grinning from ear to ear. He quickly erased it and, deadpan, asked, "Woman, are you proposing to me?"

Her heart beating rapidly, she put on an insulted look and responded, "Of course not. What makes you think I would propose to you, presumptuous man?"

"Good, that's my role." His grin returned. John rose, came over to her, got down on one knee, and took her hand. "I love you more than anything in this world," he said. "Will you marry me, my darling?"

Joy's heart, her mind, her stomach, all of her, exploded in emotional fireworks. She had dreamed of this moment. She had tried to help him come to it. Almost playfully. But when it came, she couldn't believe the passion that suddenly overwhelmed her.

Joy's eyes filled with happy tears. She kissed him all over his face. "Yes, my dearest. Yes, a thousand times yes, I love you so much."

She put Abul on the bed and threw herself on him and they rolled on the floor holding each other, and kissed, and caressed each other, and finally, inevitably, as though to consecrate their new and glorious relationship, they made love on the floor like teenagers discovering its joys for the first time.

"For shame," he said, gasping for breath afterward. "We're not even married yet."

She caressed his chest and said in as sexy a voice as she could, "Just wait until our honeymoon for what I've been saving up for you."

Laughing, he replied, "We'll be arres—"

Flash. Thunder. Pain.

Nothingness.

Epilogue

Even before all the debris from the explosion had settled, the two terrorists of the New Islamic Front hurried toward the Guesthouse. One clambered over the fallen bricks and pulled himself into a large hole in the shattered wall, disappearing into the smoky interior. Minutes later, he came out of the front entrance carrying a heavy bag and gesturing and exclaiming about the horrible explosion. He melted into the growing crowd and joined his fellow terrorists on the other side. They quickly strode down the street and ducked into the small brick house nearby that a supporter owned.

They were greeted by a nervous looking Fadi, who immediately asked in Uighur, “I heard the blast—did it kill them?”

“Yes,” the older man exclaimed. “Your bomb killed them all.”

“The child, Sabah?”

“Yes, him too.” The man tossed the heavy bag on the floor. “This is their weapons and valuables.”

As Fadi eagerly opened the bag, he commented, “Devil take those foreign infidels. They will steal no more Muslim children. Better that Abul is dead than be made a heathen.”



Outside, as the crowd in front of the Guesthouse began to disperse, an unusually tall couple stood looking toward the destruction.

Her face pale, the woman cried quietly into the chest of the black man. In oddly accented English, she whispered, “Our timing was off. How could the coordinates be so wrong?”

The man held her tight and stroked her back. “It was a narrow window of opportunity we had. Only seconds. As for Joy and John, they struggled for ten years against the probabilities. One can walk among poisonous snakes only so many times without being bitten.”

She lifted up her head, and the shawl covering her head slipped a little, revealing blond curly hair. She focused wet blue eyes on where the window had been. “So sad. We must risk this again.”

The man pointed toward the destruction. "Like them, the probabilities may not be kind to us. But if we fail again, at least Abul Sabah died with them."

"Right now it doesn't make me any happier," she murmured.

They turned and walked toward the building the terrorists had entered. Minutes later, the two emerged from the building with the heavy bag the terrorist had carried from the Guesthouse. The man slung it over his shoulder and held it there with one hand. With the other he gently took hold of the woman's hand and they walked into the distance to where they could be unobserved.

Afterword

You may find my description of the nuclear attack on the democracies impossible, or at least as improbable as a large asteroid striking earth this year. That may be true for this year, but as dictatorships with nuclear weapons or the desire to obtain them continue to exist, a nuclear attack of some kind is an increasing possibility. Indeed, many democratic leaders fear it. This supreme and growing danger are one reason the American coalition is now using covert and overt force in a global war to prevent any more actual or possible enemy states, and their allied terrorist gangs from acquiring nuclear weapons and the capability to deliver them. It is the major reason the United States invaded and occupied Iraq and is democratizing the country. And not chancing that this is enough, the United States is preparing a missile defense against nuclear tipped missiles; and in collaboration with many other democracies, it is working on a homeland defense against just such “suitcase” nuclear weapons as those exploded in this novel.

The rise of an Islamic “Prophet” in Middle Asia and a coup by his followers also is possible, as happened in this novel in Uighuristan—witness the Iranian revolution and the seizure of absolute power by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979; the 1996 seizure of power in Afghanistan by the fundamentalist Islamic Taliban (upon whom I have modeled Sabahism). Moreover, a coup in China is always a possibility, as is so for every regime that lives by the sword. It already happened in China in 1976 when Hua Guofeng seized power from Mao’s wife Jiang Qing and nephew, and arrested numerous ministers and Mao supporters. It could happen again, but this time by a dictator less conservative about the exploitation of China’s nuclear weapons.

As to the story told by Mark Twain about Nzanba’s horrible experience in the Congo Free State—from the bloody invasion of his village, the forced search for rubber, soldiers cutting off hands to prove they did not waste a bullet, to the deadly chain linked portage—it is what actually was inflicted on hundreds of thousands of Congolese. Millions more died in other kinds of slave labor, exploitation, repression, and outright murder. Possibly 10 million were murdered or more from 1885 when The Berlin Conference formally recognized the Congo Free State

(now the Democratic Republic of the Congo—formerly Zaire) to 1908 when Belgium took it over as a colony. The Congo Free State was the private land, not a colony, of King Leopold II of Belgium to do with whatever he wanted.

And the massive killing did not stop when Belgium took it over.

But, amazingly, although the death toll is many millions, the incredible terror, slavery, and death imposed on the Congo natives by one man has been virtually ignored in general history books, and particularly surprising, by those on genocide and mass murder. This neglect cannot be due to lack of historical information. There was a vigorous international movement at the time led by the Congo Reform Movement, as noted in the novel, and involving many notables of the day, such as Mark Twain (yes, he really was a member), Joseph Conrad, Booker T. Washington, and Bertrand Russell.

The hero of this humanitarian struggle is Edmund Dene Morel, as he is in this novel. He created the Congo Reform Movement, and published his *West African Mail*. First a clerk and freelance economic reporter, and subsequently an unknown shipping company executive who dealt with the Congo, he came to see the horrors of King Leopold's rule there, and fought to focus international attention and public opinion on it. He stimulated debates over what to do about the Congo that involved the legislatures and leaders of the United States, England, France, and Germany. He became Leopold's most formidable enemy and was largely responsible for Belgium finally taking over legal control. I hope that in this novel, I treated this great man and humanitarian with the respect he is due.

This democide in the Congo far surpassed in human corpses most every democide in the 20th Century except by Stalin, Mao, and Hitler. This mind-boggling democide has been sucked into a black memory hole. Why this should be so is beyond this Afterword, but should be the subject of research in itself.

To add embarrassment to this neglect, the French in their Congo they took over in 1900 (now the Republic of the Congo) copied Leopold's system of rule and exploitation and thus may have murdered several million Africans as well. No work on genocide that I have read mentions this either.

Just to see how far off I was in my eight-year search for all 20th Century democide, I checked all the tables in my *Statistics of Democide* and tabulated cases of colonial democide I recorded there. For colonies by Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and

the United Kingdom, in Africa and Asia, 1900 and after, my grand democide total was 870,000 murdered, 1900-1987. This number alone measures a human catastrophe, but is nonetheless puny in comparison with just the many millions murdered by Leopold in his private Congo Free State. I had only a low of 25,000 killed for this from 1900-1908. I recorded no democide for Belgium, although I now know that it might have been responsible for close to a million once it took over the Congo. And I got just 22,000 forced laborers murdered by the French in building a railroad in the French Congo.

Now, we have these estimates:

Britannica article on the "Congo Free State" claims that the population declined from 20 or 30 million to 8 million.

A 1904 report by Roger Casement estimated that as many as 3 million Congolese died since 1888—cited in *Gilbert's History of the Twentieth Century*; also in Colin Legum, *Congo Disaster* (1972).

Peter Forbath, *The River Congo* (1977), claims that at least 5 million killed.

John Gunther, *Inside Africa* (1953), estimates 5-8 million deaths.

Adam Hochschild, *Leopold's Ghost* (1999), estimates 10 million, or half the original population from 1885 to 1920.

Fredric Wertham, *A Sign For Cain: A Exploration of Human Violence* (1966), estimates that the population of the Congo dropped from 30 million to 8.5 million.

I have reevaluated the colonial toll, therefore. Where exploitation of a colony's natural resources or portering was carried out by forced labor (in effect slavery of a modern kind), as it was in all the European and Asian colonies, then the forced labor system built in its own death toll from beatings, whippings, coercion, terror, and forced deprivation. There were differences in the brutality of the system, the British being the least brutal and Leopold and the French, Germans, and Portuguese the worst. We all know what the Soviet gulag was like. These colonizers turned Africa into one giant gulag, with each colony being a separate camp.

As John Banks estimated in this novel, over all colonized Africa and Asia 1900 to independence, the democide probably was near 50 million. This is way above my original 870,000. Even 50 million may be too conservative. If this figure were roughly close, however, then I must raise my total murdered by governments in the 20th Century from 174,000,000 to 223,000,000. I will send a message back in time to inform John and Joy of this.

I know they will weep. We all should.

My statistics mentioned above are at *www.hawaii.edu/powerkills*.

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