



中国工业

BEIJING

Vampires

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BOOK ONE

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"Kill the Beast!"

The hunters opened the casket and struck.

The vampire screamed, thrust up, and tore the throats of two men. Blood flew everywhere. The father of the latest victim yelled, "Beast!", and stabbed him in the eye. Another impaled the creature with a silver-tipped spear through the heart. Two mortal humans wrapped leather around its neck, and another cut the beast's head clear of the body.

"After years of death from this vampire, the beast is dead, " the leader said.

So, they thought.

The air in the underground tunnel grew colder as the creature moved like a vaporous poison. Rats scurried from the near-death creature. The beast found animals to inhabit and sought out dark refuges of the night where the deeds of its kindred had lain dormant for many generations. Heading East, it ducked into a cold, dark cave, hiding from any living being that may know its nature.

The spirit of evil was more shade than flesh when it escaped from eternal death and fled to the East. Slinking from darkness to darkness, one year later, deep within the land of the winds, its self-awareness began to return. Creeping thought brought back its hatred for all human souls. The sole purpose of its existence was revenge. A moment in time arose, and it remembered words it had long since forgotten. Its latent spirit spoke, "Get to the eastern city of gold. Grow. Feast."

It fled to the East, during nights, and settled in Baku on the Caspian Sea. Skies turned grey while men brought oil to the surface and burned off the waste. In the Caspian Sea, it saw fires and black crude oil gushing from the ground. Here in Baku, the fountain of oil would darken skies, and spur wars. The vampire, as it would later reclaim, found its first chaos in its new world.

The creature grew, killing young women when it had the opportunity. It communicated with the beings of the dark and befriended wolves. It learned their animal language and customs and hunted with them. It went North over the top of the Caspian Sea and traveled along the steppes of Central Asia. It haunted the silk trade caravans, killing people who strayed, adding to fear and legend, then moved into the northern reaches of Greater China.

"Father, Kunkun is dying."

A week ago, Mei had seen her sister bitten by a bat and slowly seen the skin turn pale then grey.

"Please, some freshwater," her father said.

"Yes," she bowed.

Mei and her sister were twins, now 16 years old. Their mother died during childbirth, and the father raised them. Both sisters adored their father, who taught them to be experts in horse riding and hunting. They raised yaks on the plateau in Mongolia. The father never longed to marry or have a son, and he devoted his life to his trade and his daughters.

"Kunkun, I will return soon," Mei wept as she left the hut. She carried a short bow across her back, five arrows on her back, and two daggers for cutting the traps and gathering food along the way. Her horse was newly grown, robust, and without fatigue. "Hurry, will she recover, oh dear Kunkun." Mei hopped on the horse and raced to the stream.

Mei picked two fish from the traps, started to gather water, and heard a deep growl. A large wolf, six-foot-long, with thick black hair and red eyes, approached Mei. She cut the rope for the horse to fight or escape. The wolf came to Mei with head down. Mei stood and pulled her bow and was ready for a fight, the wolf circled.

"Come, dear, today is my lucky day. With winter coming, we will use your fur." She slung an arrow.

The wolf circled to her left, eyes never off Mei.

It leaped.

Mei launched the arrow and hit the wolf in the right front leg. Mei pulled the dagger and slashed the wolf's chest.

It squealed, scampered away.

She went to the horse, "Don't worry, we are safe." She patted her horse and calmed it. She

placed the water skins on both sides and mounted.
"Come now, and let's get home."

Mei raced home and saw the door open. "Odd."

"Kunkun..., father, I am back, we have two fish." Mei went to the bedroom and saw Kunkun's bed empty, and the smell of her home was foul.

Mei went to the next room and found her father on the floor. She rushed to him, and his neck was ripped open and blood across the floor.

"Father!" She leaped to him and hugged him and cried.

"Father," she screamed. She tried to revive him but to no use. "No! No!"

Then Mei was struck and thrown to the ground. Kunkun put her knee into Mei's chest and knocked the breath out of her. Kunkun had red eyes and sharp teeth and terrible strength, pushed Mei's shoulders down and bit into her neck. Mei went to the dark side, infected with evil.

During the 1890s, a series of natural disasters and wars hit China. The winter came with bitter cold, spring with floods, summer with droughts, and autumn with failed harvests.

During this period of disaster and mass killings, people became superstitious and able to believe in any suggestion. People felt when there are disasters, it is Heaven itself that brought the foreign devils, and that is time for the Emperor to leave, as he has lost the 'Mandate from Heaven.' Bureaucrats said: "the foreign devil brings evil from the sea." Town leaders said: "Heaven sent the foreigners and their strange religion and the new drug to destroy the Empire." Businessmen and landlords said, " the foreign Christians were sent to destroy China." Some people with no power said, "the Emperor and the Manchu rulers from the north were required to leave China."

The evil vampire who fled Europe arrived in the East, grew in strength, and moved south from Siberia and Mongolia into North China. The vampire was developing its physical form most frequently as a wolf, sometimes as a human. There was general chaos in that world and not much was recorded where people lived and where people may run away out of desperation.

This time, many families could not feed their whole family, and when the young woman was gone, it was common that families made no effort to find a daughter. For many families, the suffering and starvation were so intense that death could be a blessing. They made an offering to the afterlife to allow her to be relieved of suffering. It roamed the areas and easily found food, meaning young women and children, to consume. The vampire enjoyed the feasts. It ate the livers, kidneys, eyes, and heart, killing many weak children and women, and put the remains in ditches, blood sucked out of their

bodies, left to be eaten by packs of wolves or vermin.

Rumors of a spirit killing girls had already reached the Capital, terms of different ghosts, Moguai, blood eaters, and the people were on guard for any unusual events. Superstition and fear went wild.

The beast spent years roaming the fields and forests of the north, feasting on humans and leading packs of wolves. It grew, became whole and dangerous. It could change shape with ease, and its terrorized communities killing each night.

The Beast's reputation grew, and he was known in the East as Degula.

Not far away lived two young friends.

"Come now and keep up," Red was singing as she rode on the horse, stood, and then launched herself through the bamboo garden, flying from tree to tree.

Dan was breathing hard. "Red, to the lake," Dan was slow, launching his body from bamboo to tree and vine but he could not match the magic of Red, and their game continued as they laughed.

Birds followed them to the edge of the water where Red and Dan found their favorite tree. Dan hugged Red, as they looked across the lake, felt the breeze that fluttered Red's silk robe.

Dan and Red were friends since early childhood and adored and enjoyed each other. Dan was older than Red and knew her from birth. They planned to marry and live forever together.

After some time sitting, Dan wandered, "Red, come over here and see this."

Red walked, and Dan found a bird stuck in the bushes, with a broken wing. "Come, little friend, I will fix your wing," Red said as she bent down.

Dan pulled the bird out, and it was fluttering and chirping.

"Oh dear," She put the bird in her hand, and stroked the broken limb, put her fingers on it for a few seconds, and then opened her hand again, and the bird flew away.

"Ha-ha, but you can't fix all animals that need help," Dan was smiling.

"That one will do," said Red.

Though they were still very young, the people whispered that they could hear and speak with animals. As time progressed, both Red and Dan developed athletic skills, could climb trees, and dance beyond measure. Red entertained the town with her acrobatics and singing. People from a hundred miles would come and marvel at Red's voice and acrobatics.

Their favorite place to visit was a small lake surrounded by fruit trees. They rode horses, swung in the bamboo, climbed trees, ate from the orchard, and enjoy the water. With the Spring weather, they had an unusually beautiful day to enjoy.

Eagles flew circles and landed near Red. She stood and allowed the two eagles to lift her and fly her around the lake onto an island. She spoke to the eagles, and they flew to Dan and carried him to the same spot.

Red pulled Dan to the side of the lake. "Dan, we are together forever."

"Of course, Red." And Dan laid on against the rock and ran his fingers through her long black silky hair.

Red took her knife and cut her forearm on the back near the elbow and took Dan's arm, and cut his arm on the outer forearm. She looked him in the eyes and grabbed his hand and, with the cut arm, pressed the two together so that blood touched, and she said, "we will never be apart."

"Yes," and Dan reached to kiss her. At that moment, Dan's fell dizzy, and the world turned in many colors, and he felt powerful as if he could lift the enormous rock.

Dan jumped "Wooooo," ran up the side of the tree, and leaped farther than he ever could. "Red, look at me," and they both laughed.

"Come," and they sat the rest of the day and talked and dreamed of the future together. Red sang, and birds flew around them, rabbits hopped over their legs, and friendly goats approached, and they leaped to the trees together and unbound by normal human limits.

They heard horses and saw three armored warriors with weapons come straight to them.

The guard removed his helmet and said, "Princess, your father calls you."

"Where is he?" Red stood. Her father had been gone for three months, and he never sent anyone to call her home.

"He returned from South." The three guards stayed mounted on the horses.

Red's family-controlled one of the counties in the north, near the Russian border. Her father was the leader of the northern tribes and had organized and negotiated alliances into an association of tribes. This area was independent but needed to defend against Russians, Chinese, Mongolians, and others.

Red and Dan returned home with the soldiers. She saw her father still on his horse with his military guard.

Her father dismounted, and he removed his helmet. "Red, we have an alliance with the Emperor in Peking."

Red stood still. Her face turned a bit pink.

"You are grown now. You will be his." Her father said as he adjusted his armor.

Red leaped off her horse and said, "No!"

"Heaven dictates this," her father said. Your Grandfather and I negotiated peace, and you are to be the Consort for the Emperor in China."

Red was well known in the North of China as a beautiful and talented singer. It was quite reasonable for the Emperor to make deals with the tribal leaders and the warlords on the hinterlands and such to take beautiful young women as a tribute. In return, the Empire gave protection against rivals and traded commodities like rice and silk and porcelain for furs and horses. The ladies would serve him in various ways, and the Emperor would choose his favorite to bear him children. This was a great honor for the tribe.

"I will not leave," Red stepped back.

Her father stood and said with a straight voice. "We have an alliance, determined by Heaven."

"My life is here." Red put her hair in a knot.

"This is your destiny. The Emperor wishes close relations with our clan."

Dan cried, "Why...., why now, and why you." Dan was moving about, and tears came to his eyes.

Red hugged Dan, "I don't want to go."

The guards came and stood near Dan.

The father held Red's shoulder, "Dan will be fine. This is mandated and predetermined. Red has the gift, and it is now the Emperors to decide."

"Never," Red wept, held her head down, and could not talk.

Dan cried, "Red, I will come with you."

"No Dan, that can't happen, this is it." The father said.

Dan ran at the guard near Red and struck him. Dan kicked him in the head and knocked him out. Red stood with Dan and prepared to fight. Red held her hands together, palms out.

"Red, no! Not here! You cannot use your strength in that way. The guards are good." Her father walked to Red.

Red pushed her hands forward, and the energy blasted. The guard next to Dan flew back five horse lengths and slammed against the tree.

"No!" her father yelled.

Red raised her hands, two eagles circled, her horse kicked one guard, the guards' horses all rose their forelegs and knocked the guards to the ground.

Red's father walked to Red, and her powers had no effect on him. "Please," and he put his hand on her shoulder.

Red put her hands down, kneeled, and wept.

The father stepped in to keep the guards at ease. "Let them have their time."

"Red, you have a higher purpose, and this is ordered by the gods. You will leave soon, and we will help you."

Red wept.

He stood between the two and said to Dan, "You cannot be with Red tonight. She is pure. Thank you,

Dan, you are a real friend. And we will honor you here in camp, and you will get your love here."

Dan was silent and knelt next to Red.

The father stood to get his daughter, "come now, it is time."

"Please don't send me." Red stayed seated and was crying. "Father, I love you."

"Little Red, you were chosen. You are now claimed by the Emperor. Remember your power, only for good, like your mother."

She cried, "Father, Father, don't leave me!"

Her father said, "I am not leaving you. The Emperor calls, and you are honored to have this mandate. You are his to serve the Emperor and our people and all under Heaven."

Red looked down.

She shook her head. "I will not be"

"Little Red, come and be brave. Our love will be with you always." He kissed her on the forehead.

"Dan, please come with me." And the guards gathered around Dan.

"Red, I will come, and I will find you. I want to love you forever.", and Dan rushed to Red. Dan and Red hugged and cried.

"Accept the world as it is, and not how you want it. Now you go to Peking." And he kissed her.

Dan said, "I will find you," and he mounted his horse and rode away.

As the caravan moved South, Red stayed in the rear of the cart. She fell into a deep depression and dreamed of her lost love. She brought her pet cat, Naomi, to keep her company, and birds followed her from above. At times, the birds would gather and play with Naomi and Red. It was quite a sight for the drivers and the guards to see this and to try to understand the supernatural attraction she had with animals.

During the next few days, the trip was quiet, but from time to time, Red could see the trauma in the countryside and occasional dead bodies along the road. They would pass groups of young men carrying spears and swords causing random violence. Guards paid no notice to this and keep forward. "Don't worry, Red, just some minor disturbance, and we will be in Beijing in a few days. "

In the carriage, Red was still in depression and sought to sleep the remainder of her life, as she lost her family and childhood best friend. That night she heard Dan's voice dreaming. "Red, I will come to Beijing and follow you." She cried. "I will find you," and she dreamed of their time running and playing in the lakes and trees.

The second night she lay in the tent. She heard a growl, and the guards were very active outside. She listened to a beast on the other side of the cloth, and sat up, alert. Red shook and felt danger and hugged her blanket and shivered.

The wolf put its head in the tent, eyes bright red, and sharp fangs. Red felt the evil spirit, a phantom glow, and she could see through its eyes. The wolf was at her feet and snarled.

She screamed, 'Devil!' and with that, she put her hands together and palms facing the wolf and said in a deliberate voice "OUT," and the force of energy blasted the wolf back fifty feet. The wolf fell on its back and yelped and ran away.

The remaining days were without incident, but Red had dreams of the wolf and its aura and dark glow and could remember the demon spirit.

On the fifth day, Emperor's guards from Peking met the caravan and escorted them to the city. Red stayed with her herself and was quiet and felt she was entering a dream as she put her head out the carriage and saw the massive gates and the vibrant colors of Peking.

The carriage arrived at DeShengmen Gate, and the Emperor's Bannerman met them. Red's caravan stopped at the North Gate of the Forbidden City. Red said little to the caravan guards as she was escorted by two women through the gate.

The night was tranquil and with no moonlight. She looked out but could barely see her new home beyond shades of massive thick walls.

She was brought to a room and two ladies greeted her. "Lady Tatara, come and settle." Tatara was her tribal name from the North.

They took her gently, laid her on a bed, lit the fire, "You must be very tired from your trip," and prepared jasmine tea.

Though her room was full of the most beautiful silks and comfort and ladies to answer her every need, Red felt an intense longing for Dan. Red lay down and cried. She dreamed of her times with Dan, good times fishing and enjoying nature in the summertime. Dreaming, Red and Dan were singing at the lake and dancing in the trees and the bamboos. In the dream, Red saw the wolf and its dark and fiery red eyes. The wolf came and leaped at her, and Red screamed and sat up.

The two women hugged her, "Dear, we will be here." They poured some tea with honey and rubbed her back.

"Oh Dear, she is so troubled," the lady said to the other.

Red crossed her arms on her chest and grabbed her back. "I miss home."

"Yes, dear, yes, you do," She lit candles. She walked to Red, gave tea, and brought silk robe for her to wear. The woman hugged her, and she gently rubbed her back and shoulders. They gave her beautiful soft blankets and lit candles. And laid silks and pillows on the bed.

"Come, and we will comfort you," and they covered Red with silks and bathed her and put perfume and fanned her and procured the most delicate silk from the storehouse and gave her the most delicate tea from Fujian and most beautiful silks from Sichuan and prepared her quarters to be the finest in the Forbidden City.

The next morning, Red awoke and opened the window.

The lady entered. "Good morning Lady Tatara." They brought porridge, buns, biscuits, and a range of dishes that were far more than she could eat.

"Lady, some tea for you."

"Where am I," Red peered above the silk sheets.

"Lady You are in the Emperor's palace. You will see the Emperor soon. Have you arranged a nice song and performance for him?"

Red was silent. "I have one, but he will not like it."

"Oh, we have heard you have a lovely voice, you settle in and don't worry about that. Everything will be fine."

While chaos was building across China, the royalty enjoyed opera, singing, and dancing. Concubines were in a safe environment, away from the harsh violence.

Red spent time with the ladies and met some of the other concubines, some of whom were polite, and others reserved. While practicing, Red thought of her hometown and childhood and especially longed for Dan.

As Red ventured outside and met others of her age. Red was very talented and started to build a crowd of other ladies and staff to come and hear her play various musical instruments and sing the poems

she wrote. Other young women around Red encouraged to join some of the young concubines to conspire against others, but she stayed alone and made no friends. She thought, "I care nothing for this place and wish I was never sent to this terrible place. If only I could be home and have fun in the forest and lakeside with Dan."

Red sat and fidgeted with her hair and items in her room. She worried every day. Soon she would perform for the Emperor and the Empress Dowager and the Princes and leaders of the bureaucracy and Imperial guard and the royal family. She thought, "Oh, My God! He will hate my singing, and I will be cast into the fields and the worst treatment."

Degula found this time in China to be the perfect playground for destruction. It regained its concentration superior supernatural intellect and became quite fluent in the spoken and written language over less than a year.

At night Degula, like a vampire bat, flew and found opportunities to raid and loot defenseless people. It had the greed and wickedness of a vile serpent.

Degula needed help but could not turn anyone to its will without that person wanting it. A young virgin could not provide much support to Degula as this person had little reach and power. Still, a few young female vampires were useful as a series of toys to play with and watch them destroy other people.

An older person with reach in the community could help, but that person would be hard to maintain and control. As the young indeed was not of a rational and sound mind, they could cause other problems and just agitate the surrounding community and stir trouble with little consequence to themselves. Still, this could be the benefit to grab hold of social activists, but in the end, such people are useless and must be disposed at the end of their destruction of social norms. Far better to exploit their ignorance and pride and make them attack the society and weaken places overall. These activists are useless, and if they become vampires, their trouble, and the way they carefree their own body will lead to filthy and awful blood. Many of the resort to drugs, which makes their blood even less tasty.

So, who would be ideal? In Europe, it worked very well to capture and enslave the leaders of the Church and Government. In China, the missionaries were new and had not built up their power base to exploit. Plus, there were so many Chinese to convert and earn money that way that it was not profitable

to use the newly converted. Indeed, there were some possible conversions, but in the end, it was more useful to kill them and take their possessions. This was less troublesome and more enjoyable, Degula thought.

As it regained strength and human form, it remembered its hatred for the Church. The symbols of the Church, the crosses and images, drew hatred and lust into its wicked brain. It sought to destroy their structures and steal their wealth whenever it could, and it remembered the vast stores of wealth and treasure in Europe before it was driven out. Now that angered the Vampire and inflamed its passion for regaining gold, gems, and riches and the control over young women.

Degula was aware of religious rituals and fears and how this can control people, so it did not understand much in the local traditions that were far different than the new missionaries and their priests and the wives. Superstition was a powerful tonic. Degula took pleasure in fueling the hatred between the groups. Degula brought forth memories of its time in Europe where people could believe anything with the help of rituals and suggestions.

Driven by his hatred of Christians, it developed schemes to turn people against the churches and their neighbors who became Christians. It dressed locally and changed his appearance to look like a local farmer. Outside the court, he found a man of about 40 years of age, leaning against his pony and crying.

"This church and those horrible foreign devils are destroying my home. Here they converted my sister, and now the church is helping her to take my land from me and harm my family. " the farmer said. And it was true that when the missionaries got land for the Church, it could cause trouble in the community.

"Yes, yes, this church is terrible. " Degula said in broken Chinese.

"This foreign devil place is corrupting the local official and is the scourge from heaven." The farmer raised his stick and thrust it into the wall breaking the stick.

"You can fix this, and we need more to help," Degula said. "I will return, and we will go to the church and get your money."

"It is impossible," the young farmer said.

"Tomorrow," Degula left.

The Christian missionaries were open to all and eventually converted Chinese to their religion, and this had further effects of people changing their customs, ceremonies, changes, new philosophies, and beliefs. The next day Degula visited the local Catholic Church established by German priests. It dressed as a farmer but now in a clean, beautiful set of clothes.

"Could you come to my village? We want to join the church, and can you give a mass?" And all during this, he is speaking in broken German, which is a language it was quite fluent.

The priests smiled, and the younger one said, "Yes, indeed, and can you bring them into the church." The Priest was cleaning a golden chalice.

Degula had its eyes on the gold, "Oh, they are nervous and afraid, and I am sure that once you give a mass, they will enjoy your service and join you." Degula bowed.

"Yes, we will come as you wish."

"Tomorrow at dusk, and may I have a relic to show them?" Degula acted subservient while watching where the gold was hidden.

"Yes, here is a rosary and cross," the priest smiled.

"Thank you. You re so kind," and Degula turned away.

That night, Degula came out as a vampire demon and killed one of the girls of the village. Degula ripped a mark of the cross in her forehead and plunged the church relic in her chest. It tore her flesh, drank her blood dry, ripped off her leg, and

fed it to dogs. Degula ate her liver and kidneys and both eyes and then left the daughter on the road hanging by a tree upside down at the village gate. The maimed girl was discovered the next morning by a woman in the village. The family was in shock and all men and women of the village had great wailings and disturbances all that day. The men swore revenge on the origins of the cross, the Churches.

The leader of the village swore, "Kill all foreigners, kills all devil churchgoers!"

The locals were inflamed.

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That morning at before the sunset, Degula went to the local men, and said, "They will come and bring ghosts. If the men in funny clothes claim that they can turn wine into blood or offer to put their heads into water and then say to go to someplace in the Heaven, and their souls will leave the earth and be lost in the sky forever. If that happens then they need to kill the priests,"

"We do not wish to see these foreign devils."

"As you wish," and Degula left them.

At sunset, and two German priests of the Catholic church came to that village. The priests were delighted and dressed in their robes and colors and brought their books and golden cross and bread.

Three men and ten women from the village attended the service. Other men were nearby sharpening weapons.

The priests give the mass, and then Degula stood and said to the priests in German, "Let me help them understand your words."

Degula turned to the men and, in Chinese, said, "Look, he says that the water becomes wine."

The men talked among themselves and still did not act.

The two priests continued the mass.

Degula stood and said in Chinese softly to the villagers near him, "Look, they will take your soul to the sky, and you will be imprisoned to the new God," and pointing to the priests said to the

villagers, "they will destroy you and eliminate your family line,"

The men stirred and were angered. The Priests continued the mass.

Degula said to the priests in German, "Let me explain to them your greatness."

Degula turned to the farmers, "The church and these Priests have captured the soul of the Emperor and claim to have one God that spoke directly to the people and not through the Emperor."

The farmers stood, angered, and grabbed weapons.

Degula continued, "And especially with the natural disasters occurring and never-ending and the people dying and here are these large churches and men in funny robes and the western women wearing strange clothing." Degula grabbed the priests and they were scared.

Degula struck one priest in the face and kicked the other, "The Westerners and their funny church will take over your village. They will kill your daughters as a sacrifice and eat them!"

The men jumped and, with their sticks and farm tools, killed the priests and cut off their heads. During the killings, Degula rushed to the church and grabbed the gold chalice and other valuables.

In the next months, Degula scouted the churches at night, and it hungered, it fed on children and young ladies. It found local thugs to use and rally to attack the church and plunder the gold and silver. After every raid Degula grabbed gold and gems from the church and some of the Christians. Degula marked them, attacked the Christians, and seized many gold chalices and coins. It hid as much wealth as it could and during this plunder.

Degula taught the people he met, "The churches are full of silver which is clean to touch, but the gold is poisoned, and anyone who touches the gold and gems will die." Degula watched who took gold and killed those men that touched gold and hanged them

in the public square, melted gold in their eyes to scare away everyone from the gold.

Degula was very pleased with this and decided that all the plunder of gold and gems would be only its own. Silver burned its skin and can go to the useful fools.

The day arrived for the performance, and Red had awoken just past midnight sweating and heart beating hard. "What if I fail. I will abandon my father and family and Dan, and everyone will reject..." She wiped her head of the heavy sweat.

They gathered in the northeast part of the Forbidden City, and the show started with some preliminary acts of the opera. Red was backstage and worried.

Others performed, and there was jealousy among the young ladies against each other. Some young women played tricks on others to make them fail. Bully tactics like switching shoes or hiding instruments or pouring water on dresses.

The lady massaged her hand and arm, "Don't worry, dear, you have a magical touch to the guzheng, and your voice is heaven."

Red put her head down, and tears came forth, "I wish I could have help, and oh if anyone from home could be there."

"Don't worry dear, I heard your music, they will love you."

"What if they don't" Red looked down, and tears filled her eyes. Red sat there and thought of her home and all the friends, and her father and Dan and the friendly animals.

"Dear," and she hugged Red and rubbed her shoulders. "Let me get you some sweets."

"I miss home, and I wish..." As she waited in flew some sparrows and songbirds, and pigeons and remained at her feet and she sang little songs to them, and they chirped, and her songs brought more birds who landed near her and listened to her angel voice.

She lightly played the guzheng while waiting and sang softly to the flying birds and songbirds, and Red smiled the first time since leaving her home. She finished her song and drank some tea and was at ease.

The birds calmed down when Red stopped and sat there, and the birds were quiet and sat on her shoulders and palms and thighs and calmed her.

She said, "I am ready," and smiled at the lady.

In the Forbidden City there was an Opera House in the Northeast corner near the Northern Gate and behind the Emperor's Palace. After many performances, Red was called to play the flute and she played a lovely melody that quieted the entire audience.

Emperor Guang Xu made no movement and the Empress Dowager Cixi was stone-faced. During the first stanza, they looked at each other, and some started to talk.

Red picked up the pace and played more, the songbirds flew around, the birds chirped and sang in rhythm - something never seen before in the Forbidden City.

Emperor Guang Xu looked on with interest.

Red finished and sat with the guzheng and again started slow. The birds stopped flying and sat around her, watching, and more birds arrived and stayed in the trees and the walls. Red picked and stroked the guzheng and created a crescendo of music that enveloped the courtyard and made everyone notice and move and the birds and started to twirl and move in swarms across the stage. Red sang with her angelic voice of home and deep love for love lost, and it was the most exquisite voice to ever be heard in the Forbidden City. The sounds of the birds were in sync with her. Red finished the guzheng and stood and sang and started to dance and move on the stage and she let her hair loose and it made a silk wave reaching to her waist and created a stream of light and shine.

Emperor Guang Xu stood and made a gesture, and the Empress Dowager stayed seated stoned faced and with her chin down.

Red sang with a heavenly tone, and the birds stayed perched on the trees and sang along. Red

turned and ran toward the Opera house, leaped up to the wall to the second level. Red flew her gown and what powers she pushed, and the robe and hair and voice and the birds were not anything that a human could do. And with a final leap, Red jumped from the second floor to bamboo stalks near the audience, leaped from shoot to stalk and among the trees, sang and the birds were in flying circles and hundreds of birds of various sizes and types sang and flew and hopped. Red leaped around the bamboo, and with one more giant leap of forty feet, Red landed on the center of the stage and finished with hands and one knee on the platform.

The entire audience was silent. All sound stopped. Not a single bird made a chirp and not a unique sound of wind in the trees, nor insect in the bushes.

Emperor Guang Xu sat still for a long time. Red stayed quiet and eyes down. The other young ladies in the performance were slack-jawed and amazed at the performance.

The Emperor stood and clapped, and the others clapped. "Yes, the Gods have blessed us!!". He tripped but caught himself. He walked to the stage and greeted Red. "Your father, he told me about you. And Your mother was a god."

The attendees, the eunuchs, cowed and covered their faces with their elbows and grabbed their shoulders and leaned forward. Red fell and kowtowed to the Emperor. The Dowager Empress Cixi sat stone-faced.

Emperor Guang Xu came to Red and gently lifted her to stand. Red looked down, shook, red in the face, and said nothing.

"My dear," the Emperor touched her face.

Red raised her eyes, "Your highness," and she looked down.

The Emperor touched her cheek, "Dear, lovely. God sent you."

Red was crying, tears falling fast to her robe. Cixi turned and walked away with her guards.

After some days, during perfect weather, in the morning, the ladies came to Red's room and brought more elaborate silk and the most delicate tea of all of China, and they woke Red. "Dear, we hear you are the coming of the legend."

"Don't bother me," Red was rubbing her eyes.

"My Lady, you are the one," they were excited, and patting Red, and stroking her hair.

"Go away, let me sleep," Red lay down again.

"Oh yes dear, and the other young ladies were so jealous of you," they laughed. "We hear you are the First Consort."

"What is that?"

"You are the Emperor's favorite. You will bear his son."

Red looked down and blushed. Red could only think of her home and Dan at that moment. Her past was now gone, and she was in this new world of perfect things and the highest status imaginable and would one day be the position equal to the Empress Dowager and the most powerful in the Central Kingdom, China, the Center of the world.

"Please let me sleep," Red lay down and shook and cried.

The ladies left.

The real power in China currently was with Cixi, the Empress Dowager, the Emperor's aunt. Cixi's rise to power started in the 1850s with the rise to power under Emperor Xien Feng. She became his favorite and bore him a son, and that son was named the successor.

Red arrived at the palace of Cixi, with her caretaker.

"Ah, the new arrival. Well, you settle in and practice your music and singing, and we will see you in due time." Cixi said. Her face was old and weathered.

"Yes, Empress Dowager," and Red stood without bowing.

Cixi rose her voice, "My dear, you better show respect to the Empress Dowager. Bow!"

"Come," The ladies said, and they put their hands on Red to kneel and Bow.

Red put her head down and did not look up and stayed quiet. She had never bowed to a woman, though she learned polite manners home.

"Learn your place here." The Eunuch grabbed Red's back and pushed down and put his foot on the back of her leg and pushed her onto the floor.

Red pushed back, and the eunuch flew back twenty feet and slammed into the wall and fell on the ground.

"Your insolent child," The Empress Dowager screamed, though in fear, and four eunuchs approached and held Red down.

Red rose stomped her foot and held her hands. Energy blasted out and pushed all guards to fall back. Cixi was shocked and ran.

"Oh, my dear Lady," the women stood and could not move.

After dinner time, the ladies came to get Red.

"My Lady, you must apologize," they said.

Red looked away and pet her cat and played with the birds. Little did Red know how much danger she was around.

Degula built great wealth from plundering churches. With time and evil actions, Degula regained its full strength and recovered its memories from Europe as a powerful business tycoon and warlord. With the new power and wealth, it acquired the property and made a series of friendships with the Mandarins in the areas. It bought over 30 secured properties, homes and crypts around Northern China to hide the gold, silver and gems.

Degula built a broad network of businessmen, seeking those with no ethics, but with an appearance of caring. At that time and place, violence and stealing were neither protected by the government nor the Chinese. Degula developed this trade business and hired honest local help to manage warehouses to the East and found some very low-cost goods from time to time. At night Degula exploited desperate unemployed men and gang leaders to attack businesses.

Degula changed appearance and costume to fit the situation. He sought businessmen who would break the laws and exploit customers. A businessman that had financial power and an extensive range of customers would have some utility for the vampire. He had a broad reach influence and power. He could undoubtedly generate chaos. However, there were problems with a businessperson. That would have powerful rivals who would seek to grab his market, and these powerful rivals already had the satisfaction of making large profits and would be difficult to turn to the side of darkness. Still, it was possible to corrupt the greed and lust and pride of the businessmen and use them.

Dressed as a distinguished merchant from the Ottoman Empire, it found a pride-filled wealthy Mandarin, Dr. Yang. Sitting and having tea, Degula could now understand the primary language, and it reacquired the Turkish dialect from his Europe days

and chose to speak in broken English with a Turk accent.

"These locals are horrid," said Dr. Yang as his assistant poured tea. She was young and slender, and Degula craved her.

"Yes, filthy," Degula ingratiated itself to the trust of the businessman.

"These farmers are simple people, though filthy. This is their lot," said Degula.

"Yes, agree, they are only resources to exploit and people to do their bidding, not much elevated among beasts in the fields," the Mandarin said. Land and resources were paramount for control, people had desires, people had necessities to exploit, government bureaucrats could be bought with gold or status.

"Yes, not much different in Europe," and Degula thought of the better feudal times.

"It is awful, these contraptions and the big ships with firepower and can carry so much grain." Dr. Yang squeezed the table and raised his voice.

"Ah yes, the iron wagons and the fire ships those are infected with foreign ghosts that power the fire. The same with the big guns. How do you think they get this working?" Degula sat back.

"I need to sell all this material and need your help, I need partners for this material, and a car pulled by donkeys is the only way, but now a train can replicate one thousand donkeys and carts and workers, and we do not control the train. They will not trade with us."

"Yes, those come from the outside world, and more will come." Degula was prodding Dr. Yang and feeding his fears. Degula looked him in the eye. "Yes, that will continue. You cannot stop that unless you will need to partner with a person like me that can help you to sell around these new machines."

"New trains and metal boats with steam carry massive amounts of grain and I cannot compete." Yang

stood to get more tea. His assistant hurried to help him.

Degula looked again at Yang's assistant. "We can lend you silver, if you can repay in goods or gold," Degula did not like silver. Degula accumulated vast piles of silver, but could not touch silver, which burned its skin. Degula demanded payment in gold or copper, which was scarce in the area but silver advanced goals of the vampire.

Two nights later, Degula met Dr. Yang's assistant on the road. Degula killed her and ate her kidneys and heart.

So, Degula made business partnerships with Dr. Yang as well as others who did not know each other. The manipulation was simple: find a town that lost some wealth due to the increase in foreign trade and explain the terrible foreigner's fault forever until the person was enraged. Fill minds with superstitions and talk about the alien technology as a spiritual thing the comes with the foreigners and will continue until China is destroyed.

One power Degula possessed was reading men's minds and exploiting their fears. But like most other males anywhere, Degula had difficulty in understanding the thoughts of a woman and assumed all women were simple and to be abused.

One trick it used shows how Degula could terrorize a person of any level of power.

Dr. Yang mentioned, "There were the trains also disturb the dead. Damn, these iron demons."

"Yes, they are demons, and they throw the dead up into the suffering of this earth. Look as they go, and the shaking and the sound and they rumble, and any dead buried near to the train will be awoken." Degula said

Dr. Yang was shaking with fear. "My God, what if my mother is shaken and cannot rest."

With that knowledge, Degula found where Dr. Yang's mother was buried, and he went to the nearby graves and exposed the corpses of others newly buried. This had horrible effects on the people in

the village and made them scream and wail and afraid to touch, and some even were so distraught to kill themselves. This made Dr. Yang depressed and unable to resist the advances of Degula into his business.

The merchants were losing money, and Degula offered them loans with good financial terms and bags full of silver or elimination of debt so that their business could survive. It found that putting people into debt and lending them in distress was the best business ever. The repayment was much more than money. Degula owned these merchants after it placed them into terrible debt.

Another evil power Degula possessed was a complete lack of shame. It arrived back to see Dr. Yang after it stole from him, ruined his business and killed his assistant.

"Dr Yang, great friend, and so wonderful to see you!" Degula smiled.

"Absolutely great to see you," Dr. Yang shook and his voice was hesitant.

"Ah this tea is not as nice as last time," and Degula spits it out.

"Oh, so sorry good friend, I am humiliated," and Dr. Yang pulled out his very last good quality tea. "Please sit, I will make some good tea for my great friend."

"Where is your lovely assistant?" and Degula was pleased.

"Oh, she must have gone to her hometown," Yang said.

"Ah she was a very satisfying young lady," Degula relaxed and wondered about talking about Dr. Yang's unburied dead mother, the assistant killed and eaten, or bad business. Business brought the most benefit. "So why is business slow?" Degula asked.

"Theft and business are slower. These gangs coming about," Yang poured tea.

"Ah thank you," and Degula lit a large cigar. Degula knew that Dr. Yang had become mentally ill - neurotic, paranoia and unbalanced.

Degula stood to leave and noticed some artistic slips of paper on the desk. "What is this?"

"Ah, those are gold certificates," Dr. Yang picked one up and showed it. "Many banks stopped accepting these as these lose value quickly now."

"Really, why?" Degula was curious about anything to do with money and had never seen paper money.

"These should be converted to gold, but there are more of these slips than there is gold now." Yang said.

"Oh, that could be a problem. So, the bank will not take your paper." Degula asked.

"We try to pass it on to the next person, but the value drops over time,"

"Good that we have a lot of gold and silver in our vaults," Degula gloated.

Dr. Yang looked nervous. "Sir, Mr. Degula, I need to borrow more money."

"Why so?" Degula sat and cross its legs knowing that the gangs were his gangs and now it owned this merchant. Degula expanded its evil and stole from merchants in one area and sold to merchants in another city. Then Degula went to the merchants he took from and offer loans to those merchants so they could avoid being homeless. This just bought time and delayed the inevitable poverty. It put people in debt and then Degula gave loans at high interest and then Degula owned them with crippling debt. With this, it could meet more people and exploit their weakness, and when they were in severe debt to him, the enforcers moved into the property to seize it, and Degula would consume some of the young daughters.

"Yes, we will loan you money," Degula looked serious but held back his smile.

"Oh, thank you dear sir", and Yang sat back.

"And this is a nice building. Maybe we can buy from you someday," Degula drank his tea.

"Please don't say that, it is in my family for centuries." Yang frowned.

"I know a business you can do that will give you money to pay the loans." Degula leaned forward.

"I am open to anything, what is it?" Yang said.

Dracula bared his teeth and leaned forward.

"Opium."

The guards arrived with the Chief of Staff to escort Red to the Emperor's living area. Red arrived at the Emperor's throne room and prostrated herself before him.

"You are now my Consort, and we will meet often."

"Yes, your highness." And Red bowed.

"I will call you Zhenfei," Guang Xu smiled.

"Yes, beautiful name." Emperor Guang Xu waved the guards away. Red stayed quiet.

He stood and walked. "Come see me as you wish. I enjoy your company."

Red had some days adjusting to her new position, and she moved to new quarters, close to the Emperor. She would no longer live among the other young ladies, and the eunuchs were fearful of her.

A week later, Emperor Guang Xu called her to his office for tea. "Zhenfei, please come, I miss you, and you are my favorite."

Red smiled, "Oh, great majesty."

They spent many days together. Red, known now in Beijing as Zhenfei, the First Consort, grew to be close to Guang Xu, the Emperor. Though Red dreamed and longed for Dan, she accepted her new role and responsibilities.

One day, Guang Xu said, "Your father is a great man and is securing our Northern frontier. I am pleased he sent you. Legend says your mother returned to the heavens and now lives in you."

"My mother died young, and I don't remember." Red looked away. "My father loves me very much. I miss him."

"He is a great ally, and I swear we will have loyalty and allegiance to each other." Emperor Guang Xu smiled. "My dear, what gift you have. You are sent by the gods."

"My Highness, he and I are your servants." Red bowed.

"Red, you come to see me. You are my number one Consort."

Red blushed and said nothing.

Guang Xu hugged her, "I need your help. Zhenfei, can you meet foreigners and tell me what is happening. I am blind to reality. My aunt is controlling the Grand Council and frustrating attempts to learn from the West and to compromise with them."

"I wish I could please the Empress Dowager." Red bowed.

"Oh, she means no harm. My aunt can be a bit cold, and she will come to love you."

"Yes, your majesty," Red bowed and stayed bowed with eyes down.

The Emperor touched her chin and brought her face near to his, but Red's eyes were closed, "You talk to staff in their dialect, and how did you learn this ability?" the Emperor stood. "Please stand and look at me."

Red opened her eyes, "I wasn't aware it is anything special. I like to speak in other's languages to make them comfortable. It is manners my Father taught me. He can talk all the Northern words and even Russian."

"You know Russian?" Guang Xu smiled.

"Some."

"Heavens. Well, I hope my son will have your intelligence and skills," the Emperor smiled.

Red shook, and blushed. She looked down.

"We can even be friends with Japan, they can show us how they used this western technology and now are so strong." The Emperor held her shoulders, "Oh, they took Korea and now push across the northern lands. Your father will see them. I worry about him."

Red sat silent and put her head down.

"Oh, he will be fine, we will send our soldiers to help. Come." The Emperor led Red to a room to the side and they sat, and he poured tea for Red.

"You send scholars to America?" Red said.

"Yes, but some are pushing for change." Guang Xu poured tea. "They want a Republic. Our scholars in America that returned want to cast aside the Dynasty and Royalty and set up a Republic as in America."

"You can work with them, reform and change," Red said.

"My aunt will not change. She will stop it and is stuck and gives resources to those who support her. Please be kind to her," the Emperor looked down and grabbed at his gown.

"I don't like your aunt," Red said softly.

"She can be dangerous if you push her hard."

Red was silent.

"Be nice to auntie," the Emperor Guang Xu poured tea for Red.

Degula established banks with the local government officials and compliant businesspeople. Plundering Christian churches could not bring in the fast money that the Opium trade could bring. Killing Christian priests and destroying Christian churches was causing trouble with the Chinese security.

Opium was fast, more manageable and did not cause much trouble and Degula found that the most natural company to do was selling opium. It could gather information at night while flying in bat form and arrange crimes. Degula was quite able to play an Ottoman businessman, which was not common in the areas, so it could show himself as unique with exclusive access to the drugs. Degula arranged to sell opium to the select businesspeople he cultivated.

Degula turned some of his business partners into vampires though this disgusted him to some extent. The blood was bitter and rancid from their smoking and drug use. Also, as vampires, they were challenging to manage and more complicated than untouched humans who were driven easily by greed and fear. Also, the new vampires became a competition for young virgins with pure blood, so at times Degula killed the new vampires, but this proved much more challenging than killing a simple mortal as the vampires had developed some extra-human strength and powers.

Degula then discovered a new use of paper as money. As he lent money, he built a series of banks in different cities and businessmen would trust these banks with their gold and silver for safekeeping. Then, the banks could issue receipts for the gold and silver, which the businessmen used to conduct transactions among themselves. Then Degula got the brilliant idea to lend money not against the gold and silver, but against these paper slips and the banks would accept these slips in different areas just as they took gold and silver

but at equal value. With the lending against the paper and then receiving the paper as substitutes for gold and silver, Degula expanded the size of money by tenfold in the economy but it was money Degula printed for its own wealth.

"I cannot compete, and they are putting me out of business. I get rid of the many young men who delivered goods with donkey and cart and now they have no money and their skills became worthless." A businessman said.

Degula thought of the young men were destroyed and vulnerable to drugs and crime. "Yes, those poor men," and Degula kept his face from showing his own pleasure at this situation which gave him so much advantage.

The Mandarin raised his voice. "It is destroying my business, I cannot make a profit, these bring vast amounts of grain and goods, and take enormous amounts of our silver. I have lost most of my money. Trade is a huge loss to China."

"You are powerful and wealthy," Degula sipped his tea and now its favorite topic money was in discussion. "No, they are doomed, you will be the sizeable remaining winner. Here, I can make payment in gold and can give it to you now if you can help me establish here." Degula stood and went near the Mandarin and put the gold next to the teapot.

The mandarin looked at the gold, five ounces, and his eyes grew big with lust. "This would be enough to settle his accounts and to buy his rival," he thought. He said nothing, and then Degula continued

"How to spend this into the economy?"

"Nobody takes gold as daily spending except the foreigners and the royalty." The Mandarin massaged the gold with his palm and fingers. But the Government official was something to consider. Ideally, seizing the very top official or leader is the best. That leads to the most destruction and chaos and consumable food as possible. The officials have the power of the state and monopoly of control

over the use of force in society. They can cause the most damage long term and destroy their institutions.

Degula realized how important it was to corrupt officials. "Yes, I can see you know how to use this. I will buy into this area, not compete with you and you can have more gold and expand your business and become the leader of the entire region, the richest and powerful businessman in Hebei."

"Yes, I agree."

"We will be partners, and there is more to come your way with this. Here is one coin and we will settle the accounts,"

The Mandarin reached for the coins, but it was too late. Degula held back the other four coins. "Here is paper money for the other four coins," Degula said

The Mandarin smiled, "Here is a bureaucrat, and he controls customs and can get things done. He can be helpful, and he knows that the Empire will end. The gods have abandoned the Emperor."

"How to meet, and what are his secrets?"

"Ah, you want his secrets, why should I tell you?"

"Remember now, we are partners," and Degula bared his fangs and flared his eyes

Yes, yes, of course," and the Mandarin fell back and screamed and covered his eyes and started to cry. He wet his pants, and the urine got to Degula.

Degula was pleased with this man who would melt like a snowflake, "So tell me."

"He likes the flesh and is easily corrupted with children and money. People know this feed his lust."

"You can get anything you want for the right price." he smiled. "Trust me on this."

Degula sat down and smiled. "Who is the most powerful person in China and the one that makes everyone obey."

"Oh, it is not the Emperor. It is his aunt, the Empress Dowager, Cixi."

Degula smiled. "Ah, yes, these coins in my hand. They are yours if you can help me get into the Palace as a businessman and meet the right people to get to the Empress Dowager."

"Oh, you are ambitious. That is impossible."

"How to get to her", Degula sipped his tea.

"Well, we wish we knew. Well, she is the Emperor's aunt and controls him, and she believes she will never die," the Mandarin smiled.

"What does she want, above all?"

"Ha, she does loves power of course." The Mandarin leaned forward, "She has a weakness for gold and gems."

Degula sat back and smiled.

As Degula talked with the businessmen and bureaucrats, it discovered that the foreign governments reacted to trouble in parts of China and used this opportunity to expand their influence and control over people. The competition was fierce, and at the time, eight of the most considerable powers consumed China and created a horrible dilemma for the Emperor. History shows these were the final years of the crumbling Qing Dynasty, and during this time, there was a free for all to grab China for both foreign and internal profiteers and adventurers. Japan had defeated China in the previous war just a few years ago and extracted concessions from the Empire. Russia had occupied much of the Northern reaches of China and was pushing into Xinjiang and Dongbei. Britain, France, Germany, Austria had to bring forth trade and protect their interests, they extracted concessions from Guang Xu and demanded Embassies in Beijing and extra concessions to deal and allow opium to venture into China.

During the previous decades, secret societies grew seeking to change the Empire and preached hatred of foreigners. This year the most aggressive were the Boxer rebels. The Boxers were with the Han Chinese, the majority in China, and hated the ruling Manchus. In 1898 and beyond, they believed they could expel the 'foreign devils' with their martial arts and use of traditional weapons.

The attacks started in the countryside. The Boxers destroyed the churches and use the wealth from these to spread among the poor farmers. Degula sought to stir the hatred further and to create chaos in the population.

As Degula built its strength, it came across these roaming gangs called 'Boxers'.

The Boxers were becoming more active with the warmer weather. They used printing presses to make thousands of bundles of leaflets and handbills to

distribute. These accused the Christian Church of wicked actions against women and children. The propaganda promised future benefits of good weather and big harvests. Slogans and banners on the poster read:

You are personally invited to meet on the seventh day of the ninth moon

Elevate the Manchus

Kill the foreigners

Unless this summons is obeyed, you will lose your heads.

Each rebel Boxer group was led by a 'demonized' leader who showed some wild and unnatural symptoms or magic, and peculiar speech.

Degula enjoyed the slogans.

"The foreigners are stealing our land!" the leader shouted. "Within three years, all will be accomplished."

Some men said, "The bad will not escape the net, and the goodness of the gods will be seen."

"The leader of the Boxers is a Royal person."

"Within three months, all foreigners will be killed and driven away from China."

"For forty years the Empire has become full of foreigners."

"They have divided the land."

"The Guowenpao newspaper always talks nonsense about the Boxers, and it is under the protection of Japan."

"We remind the Editors that hereafter they must not talk nonsense; if they continue to do so they are building will be burnt."

During twilight, Degula became a bat again. It saw a Manchu Nobleman on a horse, jumped on the horse, and bit into the horse's eye. This threw the horse into a frenzy and the insane horse trampled and killed an older local man.

As other local workers in the area rushed to see the accident, Degula was gone and on a porch where it could see the riot ensue.

The mob screamed and surrounded the nobleman and pulled him off the horse. They destroyed the horse with hand knives and a spear they grabbed, and now general chaos

The nobleman was surrounded, and one man stabbed him in the arm.

Within seconds guards arrived on horses and fought the mob. The horn was sounded, and more guards came from the walls and guardhouse.

By the end, there were ten dead Han, and the nobleman was saved. The dead were left to rot and for the dogs.

In the south of Peking that night Degula arrived to watch and meeting led by a Boxer leader.

"The nobleman killed my uncle, ran him down, and then he ran over ten others. This corruption from the Manchus will never end."

"Yes"

"We must go after them. "

"My friend, they are too powerful, you need to go after the common enemy." Degula sat back.

"Who are you?"

Degula ignored the question, "You go after the foreigners in Beijing, and the government will respond and make it look like the government did it, and they will fight each other, and your goal to destroy the Manchus will be achieved. "

'More chaos, the better.' Degula thought, what could he do to maximize the benefit, then to take over the situation and wreak havoc.

In these many ways, Degula could turn men against each other and create hatred among the classes.

One evening while they met, Degula changed its shape to an ordinary local Boxer with long hair. It cut its arm to make it appear more authentic and carried a gun.

"They killed my father, who did nothing," the leader said.

Degula stepped forward, "there are thousands of you, and you need to rid the Manchus and the foreign devils. You need to do this now."

"Yes," they screamed. "But we are not strong, the foreigners have the firesticks," one yelled.

"You are invincible and watch this," Degula gave a gun to the leader and pointed to its chest, "shoot me here."

"You are crazy," the leader said.

Degula raised his fists. "Watch me. Go and shoot me here," and it pointed to its right side.

The man shot the weapon.

Degula fell and played dead.

The men surrounded him, and said, "crazy fool," "what a dumb ass," "what silliness."

As they start to go about their typical rituals of the say and having some of their adrenaline used up due to the excitement, they left while a few stayed near Degula, the foolish Boxer who killed himself.

Then Degula moved a hand.

"Whoa! Wow! Ghosts!!" the other men come back.

Degula moved a leg and puts its knee up, turned over slower for effect, and moved on hands and knees, and the people screamed, "Look, look, he is back from the dead!" The whole village, every woman and child rushed to see the fake miracle.

Degula stood slowly and wiped the dust off and pulled a bullet slug from its bag and held the slug high. It stood erect throwing hands high. Degula opened its shirt and showed the wound and laughed. Hundreds of men women and children surrounded

Degula, and it raised its fists again and screamed.....

Everyone screamed and ran away from Degula amazed and terrified at the miracle. The woman said, "Spirit, demon!". Children hugged their mothers. The men screamed, "Invincible!!" and ripped off their shirts and begged Degula for the ritual to become invincible.

"If you follow me and eat what I eat, you will be invincible to the foreign bullets," Degula shouted.

Degula grabbed some photographs from another village where he killed a woman. He showed the photo above his head.

"Here look at these images, these are ghosts, and the foreigners all have their demons. You need to fight them in the body and the afterlife."

Chants and slogans and spread out with the news that they are invincible and can drive the foreign devils and the Manchu devils out of their homes.

And Degula beat its chest and broke a tree branch with its super-powerful arms. "The goal is the extermination of all foreign devils in the country."

With this new believed power of invincibility, the Boxers attacked Chinese Christian homes and looted them.

Red settled into her routine, and wanted for nothing and became close to the Emperor and enjoyed many conversations with him

Emperor Guang Xu said, "We need details of the reforms underway and a general overview of the mind of these foreigners."

Red was enthusiastic, "Oh, we can we make friends with foreigners. Japan had fifty years to develop, and now they are powerful."

"Dear, we have scholars in the United States, and they come and help us." Guang Xu replied.

"We can open up and reform and be allies and learn from each other." Red touched the Emperor. "We can build on strength; we have a vast country." Red looked the Emperor, eye to eye, "We can become greater like Japan but much stronger and more prominent."

"Yes, Zhenfei, we will do that, and we will develop our country."

In the Palace, Guang Xu and Red developed a friendship and respect for each other. One day:

"Zhenfei, My Dear, I will arrange teachers of you to learn foreign languages." Emperor Guang Xu pondered. "And Zhenfei please visit with the women of the foreigners and make friends."

"Yes, " Red bowed.

"And the churches of the foreigners, we do not want these troubles to come to them." Guang Xu said.

The Chief of Staff arranged tutors for Red to learn English and French and German. Red quickly learned the basics of these languages, the greetings, basic vocabulary. She learned much Japanese in a week as there were some common elements with the style of her home.

The days were turning warm and peaceful. Red met the head of the Imperial Guard and arranged for her own horse. He selected a white and brown horse, four years of age, to be Red's as she wished. This

was a very refined and healthy and disciplined horse that held steady in battle and would not be nervous in the busy city streets, no matter the chaos.

Red rode out the north gate and Turned to the west and rode for half an hour around the city streets along with one guard and came upon the PeiTung Cathedral. This Church was one of the main churches of the Western and Chinese Christina communities. The cathedral was surrounded by pine and oak trees, cypress trees and Chinese pavilions which they kept for the Chinese converts. This church Peitung, meaning North Church, was built in 1703 by the Jesuits on land given by the 'K X Emperor. It was also called a savior church and opened in 1703. It had also become a gathering place for many of the foreign Christians who moved to Peking for the establishment of diplomatic relations. In the world there were many struggles among the various Christian sects, but this church had goodwill among the Roman Catholics as well as Eastern Orthodox and Protestants - foreign and Chinese.

Red went to there to understand the various religious customs and rituals, though she did not worship. If Red had a religion, she understood Buddhism the most, though she did not pray or rituals. This was an opportunity for more tolerance and development of friendship and building relationships among people of various colors, languages, professions, and economic backgrounds. They would find out that this trust and friendship would be put to a brutal test designed to rip them apart.

Rigo and Jen, husband and wife, came to Beijing to move to the PeiTung church in Beijing to help to set up the church and run the administration. They fled their home to find their old priest who was now a bishop in Peitung church. Their daughter, Lily, was four years old, very smart with a beaming smile. Lily was very athletic, could climb trees with ease and run faster than any of her peers.

At that time, the city was very restricted to visitors and especially to visitors who came to work. Months were needed to arrange the papers with a sum of money and exclusive favors to allow the family to enter and increase the population of this walled city. Rigo and Jen arrived at the Peking gate, where they met the bishop and with him an officer of the foreign ministry to bring them through the gates into Peking.

"We are lucky and fortunate to be here in Peking. This is the place we are safe," Rigo said.

Jen was quiet and looked around at every new sound.

"Come, and let's take this time to raise Lily and give thanks for our good fortune to be here."

"No problems can come to Peking." Rigo smiled.

Red was in that area and was amazed at the spirit of their daughter Lily. Red said, "Oh, you have a lovely daughter. So sweet,"

"Rigo loves her so much." Jen said.

"How is the church?" Red asked. She bent down and stroked Lily's hair, and Lilly grabbed Red's silk dress.

"Well, I hope it is safe here. Oh, you can't imagine the horror we had, we lost our home, our parents, his brother is gone, houses burned, all our belonging, but we are together, and we have each other," Jen was now quite vocal and smiled with Red.

Red looked at Jen and Lily and saw the love in the family. Red touched Lily's face and started to cry, "Yes, I have a love, but he is lost. We have a burden, I suppose." Red caressed Lily's hair and the mother smiled.

"It's OK, you will find him." Jen said.

"Maybe, you have the real treasure, I wish I could find my love. I am so poor," Red looked away.

"Well, come and meet the others." Jen said.

They went to the church, and the guard recognized Red. He bowed and gathered guards to protect Red. "First Consort, you are alone. It is not safe; we will assign protection."

Jen looked with wide eyes. "First Consort?" She fell to the ground and kowtowed.

"Please, please, stop." Red blushed. "No attention please." They went into the church, Red holding Lily's hand.

Red met with the French Bishop Pierre Patty Alphonse Five, in the cathedral they sat talked about the worries about the pressures on the church and the danger from the Boxer rebels.

Red spoke in French she had learned by a tutor.

"Your French is lovely." The Bishop said.

"Don't bother, it is inferior. I met some beautiful Chinese family and hope to come again and see the children and sing some songs. We wish for peace and for people to feel secure."

"It means a lot to have the Great Emperor to support us." He stuttered and smiled.

Red looked him in the eye and touched his hand, "Could you help us to make better relationships with foreigners? We need to end this tension."

"Certainly!"

"Thank you," and Red had used most of the French she had learned and stood to leave. She shook his hand softly.

"Thank you, First Consort." And he bowed.

Red went to school and met Jen and Lily. "I will come to see you again."

Jen bowed, "My honor, your highness."

Red blushed at this excessive honor, but she played the game. "Please let me see Lily and I can teach some songs. We will meet again in five days."

Red went back and with guards alongside her, and she sang a northern song for her guards.

<>

Dan left the North and found his way to Peking. He had no money, few clothes, and did not speak the local dialect. All day as he sweat, and all night, as he dreamed, he thought of only one idea - to find Red.

One day Dan has his first encounter with Degula. Dan was dressed in only short pants and transporting wheat through the Dongzhimen gate. He was singing and at that moment, Degula, in the form of a bat, landed on his horse and started to bite the horse's ear.

Dan screamed "Out!" and he had superior command over his horse and grabbed the bat by the wing and flung Degula to the wall.

Just north past the outer walls was the Embassy District. Degula sought a powerful foreigner to corrupt. Degula found the British ambassador who had a beautiful daughter.

Degula stayed at the window, and when she was asleep, it slipped through an open window and drugged the daughter and then drank her blood. It did this for over a week and drained nearly half her blood in total. The ambassador called the doctor who came, diagnosed a rare ailment, and they kept vigil over her. She became frail, falling into the underworld.

As the daughter was about to die, Degula came with medicine to see the Minister. "I hear your daughter has fallen ill."

"Yes" and the minister had sunken eyes as he had not slept for days.

"This medicine comes from Tibet and is sure to bring her energy back."

"Yes, so you are with the Orthodox Church." Degula wore his Turkish garb and faked a Romanian accent. He could play ignorance of the language and have the advantage of not being understood while understanding the London English, which he had learned in the few years before this.

"Chinese gangs will seek to kill the missionaries and drive Britain out of the area and harm their families." Degula looked at him. "See here are some posters they use to say all foreigners are devils, kill all foreigners."

He laid down the placards, and the translator confirmed for the British Ambassador.

"Yes, yes, it seems the Boxers will be pulling together men from all areas and are killing your priests. What will you do about that? You must stop the Boxers by any means, and independent of the Empire here. The Chinese are too weak to help you." Degula turned away. "Then what?"

"Yes, we are discussing this with the leaders in Peking, it is a terrible situation. We will have another monstrous war." The Ambassador turned to sit and ignored Degula.

"No, the leaders in Peking will not help you," Degula approached the Ambassador and leaned over him. "You must stop these attacks on you. You need me to help you."

Ambassador was annoyed, "Yes, yes, thank you much, we will certainly do that."

"Certainly, well, I will return shortly with help." Degula left.

"Who was that? " the Ambassador asked the secretary.

"Oh, some Orthodox priest looking for handouts."

"It's a terrible thing the religion has done here."

"I wish they would mind their manners."

Red left the compound every day as she wished and met foreigners and explored Peking. Over time, Red visited the Embassy area and became friends with the wives of the Ambassadors and their staff. On that same day Degula was speaking with the British Ambassador, Red visited the area.

Making friends was easy for Red. Red was able to pick up languages quickly. She had the elegance, smile, and beauty and the immaculate voice that charmed men and women of all ages. She helped establish a school for children and wives of the foreign delegations. Red sang to the children of the legation and the children grew to love her and follow her dances and singing, and Red made a significant friendly impact on the foreigners. She was a lovely Ambassador for China to foreigners of all countries.

She taught the women how to speak Chinese, but also some graces and how to make Chinese embroidery and played with them played the music.

Red left the Italian Embassy and the school children hugged her. She squatted and smiled and made the playful panda gesture.

"Please more," the young girl said, grabbing the royal silk, her long brown hair covering her eyes.

Red pulled the hair to the back and made her smile. She kissed her on the forehead, "Next week" greeted the children, kissed the young girl.

"Please more, " they screamed.

Red smiled and held their hands and said in their language, "Yes darlings."

She exited, the guard brought her stallion, and she leaped up gracefully. They rode to the British Embassy, and as they arrived, they saw Degula in Orthodox Church clothes.

Degula could see the glow of Red, and her unique superhuman characteristic. "Ah, how lovely,"

Red could see the red eyes, and the evil spirit, of beast Degula. "Who are you?"

"Ah dear, I see you are quite aware of the world. How may we work together?"

Red looked at him and said, "You or your spirit. I will not deal with your spirit."

Degula stepped back and showed fangs. "What do you mean, dear."

"Yes, you are not real, you come from afar and are a spirit of death, a parasite." Red could see its nature.

"My, your words are lovely." Degula could not control its own red eyes and fangs and was exposed.

"Leave this area. You don't belong here." Red rubbed her horse's neck and calmed it.

"No, I do belong here. This is the time and place for me." Degula bared his teeth and pulled back. Degula fled.

Red frowned and watched as Degula moved South. She looked at the British Ambassador and met his wife who cried, "Oh, my daughter is dying. She needs help."

Red walked up the stairs to the daughter who was sweating and breathing heavily. The mother pulled back the sheets, and they could see the girl was twitching and tense.

Red sat down and put her hand on her forehead. The girl breathed easier. "Her head is boiling. Bring some water."

Red grabbed her arm and looked in her eyes. Red could see some evil development. Red put her hands on the girl and sang to her and prayed until she fell asleep.

Everyday Red visited the Legation quarter and the PeiTung church. She made friends with the wives and children and at times, she met the Ministers and Ambassadors and exchanged pleasant remarks. At the PeiTung Church she always visited Lily, and in both

areas, she set up classes for singing, music, culture, art, and Chinese.

Every day Dan visited the area hoping to see Red.

Each time she visited, she went to the home of the British Ambassador and helped the daughter to recover from her illness at the hands of Degula. One night she was singing and giving acupuncture to the daughter. Red helped the girl breathe and gave her acupuncture and some herbs. Red placed her hands on the girl, and pressure to get well, rubbed her shoulders, and sang to her, and put her at ease. Red pressed her hands on her head and saw the bites on her neck. She placed her palm on the wound, cut her finger and put some blood on the injury making the cut close instantly. Red sang, and the girl's breathing was calm, and she fell asleep.

Red locked the windows and put bars over them. Degula changed form and perched at the window and watched. It grew furious at the treatment of its prey and rage built in its gut. Degula flew away and came back angry and perched at the window and watched as Red gave treatment. Its meal was coming back to the human world.

Degula flew and tried to break the window.
Bang!

Red looked to the window, "Strange, a bird hit."

Bang!
Red sat and sang to the girl.
Bang!

Red walked to the window and saw the bat circle and come again to the window, Bang!

Red watched, silently, and calmly. Again, the creature hit but now transformed into more than a bat, more like a lizard. It swung its wings and tail around and cracked the window.

Red placed more wood beams over the window.

Red went downstairs and talked to the Ambassador. "Do you know how your daughter was wounded on the neck?"

"No, I didn't know. I saw that and have no idea!" he cried.

" Afraid, she has lost this world but with some help, maybe," Red wiped the tears on her cheeks.

Outside, there were loud noises. Red and the Ambassador's wife stepped out and saw Degula as a large man with a cape and horns off its back, fighting the guards in a rage and trying to strike Red's horse. Red stepped out to the street to confront him.

Degula attacked and tried to bite her.

"Ha, devil, I know your intentions and come and try me. " Red stepped forward.

Degula leaped to strike, and she slid aside and slashed its ribs. The silver created a foul smell.

The beast was furious with rage rushed at Red, and she pushed it into a wall.

Degula stood back and went to a knee. Degula felt the cut to the ribs and cringed.

Red pulled a rope from her dress and put a metal cap on the end and whipped it around. She poked the monster's eye and stabbed it near the heart.

Degula attacked Red and grabbed her by the neck, and with fangs exposed, went for the bite to rip her throat apart. Red screamed and put her hands together and struck great energy at Degula, throwing the monster back against the wall. Twenty birds swooped and helped Red to attack Degula. She reached down and had her rope and swung the metal and knocked Degula right on the face and stunned it. She leaped over the beast and cut its scalp.

They fought, and Degula grabbed Red by the arm with a vice grip and threw her forty feet.

Dan saw the brief fight between Red and Degula and as Red is knocked down, he raced to save her.

Guards came to help and Degula impaled one with a wooden spear and lifted the whole body with superhuman strength and stuck the spear in the ground with the guard dead.

Red was lying on the ground and in shock from the attack.

Dan rushed to her, grabbed Red and yanked her up to his horse. Degula turned to grab and Dan was quick to escape his grasp.

Red was half alive and grabbed around Dan. "Hold on..." Dan yelled.

Behind, three imperial guards were chasing on their horses, screaming, "Consort, stop him!"

Red grabbed Dan around his waist and pushed her head hard into his shoulders and closed her eyes. They raced through the tunnel and saw the train ahead blowing steam.

Dan raced up to the train and it was starting to move slowly. He placed Red in the open carriage and they hid in the car.

Dan laid Red down flat, and took his robe and covered her, he grabbed some straw for her pillow

The train started to move. They could hear the strange chugga sound of the train's engine, fire blasting away against steel and the screech of the wheels.

The guards were confused and did not see Dan and Red on the train. Behind them were fires in the countryside and chaos in the streets. They rode off to the north looking for Dan the street worker and Red the Emperor's First Consort.

The train picked up steam and gathered speed and crossed a bridge, and the Imperial Guards fell back. A guard blasted a horn calling for help.

On the train, Red and Dan lay down.

The next morning Dan and Red arrived in Tianjin. Red sang a lovely song and two horses came. Red sang and the horses knelt forward to allow them to mount. They rode the horses and rubbed their faces and found some apples to share among themselves and the horses.

The two smelled the sea and road to the seaside. They sat and watched the twilight.

"Red, come, and let's run away for good." Dan grabbed her hand.

"It's not so easy," Red's eyes were full of tears.

Dan looked to the ocean, "Let's let fate decide."

"Yes," Red said.

They smiled, relaxed and enjoyed their freedom.

That night they walked the area and rested. Red wandered to some trees and some of the birds she knew arrived. The grand eagle and two hawks came and landed at her feet.

They were sitting and the birds flying around. "Dan, I love you so much," and Red looked down.

"We go North and live as we planned," Dan put his arm around her shoulder and smiled.

Red sat and thought of her life now with Dan and the life she was to leave behind. She thought of the honor for her father if she left, and her new friends.

"Yes, I want to do that." Red thought she was free to escape with Dan and return North and have a happy life with him, nature, babies.

"Good, we will find a place to settle and live peacefully and happily all her days and nights. " Dan hugged her.

In the morning, they rose with the sunrise, and the horses had stayed exactly where they were overnight. They walked on the beaches hand in hand and with the horses.

Dan and Red knelt to see the shells. Red was playing with the birds and admiring the salty ocean breeze. They heard huge horns from the ocean.

"Red," Dan grabbed her shoulder in shock. "Ocean monsters."

Red looked up and they walked along the beach, and as the fog lifted, enormous ships in the ocean, blowing smoke and moving quickly to the North.

Then they roared again with noise. They rode and found some extraordinary machines in the ocean, much bigger than the trains called fire cars, and these machines made enormous growls of terrifying style.

Dan and Red stopped. "Come," and Red mounted her horse and rode toward the machine. As they approached, they saw some structures on the sea, large walls like the Forbidden City. Around those and with the massive ships, there were many soldiers from other countries working.

Approaching Red and Dan were ten men on horses carrying weapons.

"Let's go," Dan pulled his horse.

"No, wait, if we run, they will kill us." Red stayed facing the group.

The men approached at a steady trot and spread out to surround Red and Dan.

"Bonjour, Hello, Kunbanwa" Red spoke French, English and Japanese.

Dan was moving to keep his horse steady, feet moving, shifting. Red and her horse were precisely still.

"Hello, this area is off-limits," the Commander pulled his helmet off and saluted.

Red looked him straight in the eyes and stated, "I am Zhenfei, First Consort of Guang Xu, Emperor of all under Heaven."

"You have very little protection, only one guard." The Commander said.

The men looked, some smiled, but Red was still and regal. Red pulled some energy and put a slight glow around her body and kept the horse steady.

All the men lowered their weapons.

"First Consort, please let us protect you."

"That is not needed, but I will ride with you and see your palace," Red commanded.

They rode forth to the forts of Taku, foreign-built forts to bring soldiers, sailors, marines and supplies on land.

"We come in peace."

"Please, come inside."

"Zhenfei, Highness, you are courageous to come here, while your Emperor holds our legations under siege."

"We can resolve things with no bloodshed. I have been to your churches and met your Ambassador and lovely children."

"Ah, we have heard of you. You saved the Ambassador's daughter."

Red blushed.

Another man said, "Zhenfei is the singer, the teacher of the wives of all the leaders in Peking."

"So, you are the First Consort of the Emperor, and here you are!"

"Peace will prevail."

So, they had dinner and Dan was uneasy, but he was treated with respect as the protector of the First Consort Zhenfei, the teacher and healer.

"Come, let us see the fort." With escorts, the Commander, Red and Dan rode.

"We will introduce the commander of the construction here. Major Hoover, US Army." Red could understand their language and translated for Dan.

Hoover walked them around the area. "We are building a port here and further fortifications." The walls were well built and nearby there was a port with four destroyers and a cargo ship. Red looked onto the massive ships with many cannons and the cranes lifting guns onto the pier, and soldiers marching from the vessels to tents. She looked north and saw various countries camps full of thousands of

soldiers and she wondered, how can the Chinese army withstand these many soldiers with their cannons and guns and advanced machinery.

"We have more ships and are well established now."

Red said, "we hope for peace and trade."

The Commander said, "Our diplomats are in danger. The soldiers and marines of the eight nations are ready to move to Peking."

"We want peace. Our capital also has internal enemies," Red said.

"Our orders are to march to Peking and to save the delegations. We mean no harm but will do what is necessary when required."

"So, we agree," Red said, and she pulled an ivory clasp, and silk scarf with the Emperor's emblem on it and presented it to the commander. The commander gave her silver pins, and Red put one through her hair. To Dan, he gave a leather belt and a gold coin. "Peace be with you."

"Peace be with us." Red said.

Red and Dan rode back South toward Tianjin city and stayed near the beach that night. They said nothing on the return.

At sunrise, Red woke Dan.

"I must return." She said.

"Red, come and let us go home." Dan pleaded. "Forget these crazy people at this fort and Peking. Come home and have peace like we did before."

"Dan, first I will solve this one thing and we will return together." Red hugged Dan. "You need to be away from me. It is the worst death, and immediately if you are seen with me near the Palace. I will stay in Peking," Red put her head to Dan's head, held his face and looked Dan in the eyes. "Dan I will find you when I am finished. My eagle will come with a message."

Dan stood, put his head onto her shoulder, and hugged hard.

Red wept.

BOOK TWO

朝

"Opium drains silver from society, and gold is used by the elite." Yang raised his voice.

Degula was able to build a good army of hundreds of local laborers beholden to his payments. Degula treated its workers very well, paid them generously. Degula stopped having a young woman working near him as it would kill and consume her blood and organs in a short time, and it became bad for business.

Gold was scarce, and Degula found that the local exchange of silver was ten ounces for one ounce of gold, but for the foreigners, it was sixteen ounces of silver for one ounce of gold.

This one fact led him to set up more banks in China, and private bank for the exchange of gold and silver and copper and the acquisition of lands.

Many nights it could hire gangs to break into foreign goods warehouses and steal and kill the foreigners. The foreigners were not very well protected.

"The opium trade is the best in all of China. The merchants making this trade can at least make payment and keep their property" Degula said.

Degula's business grew into a massive enterprise of banking, opium, and exploitation. Degula manipulated the lust and greed and pride of these ineffective bureaucrats and twisted their base animal desires. Individual corrupt government bureaucrats sought Degula's wealth as they had mistresses and the wives to support, large estates to maintain, servants to pay, and material items to display status. Opium ruined homes and twisted many people like Dr. Yang to lose control of their families and wealth. Degula was a chance for the transfer of power and wealth from the laobiaying to the select 'elites'. In the eyes of the 'elite',

Opium was good for society as it destroyed degenerate people and gave that wealth to the 'elite' who had the Mandate of Heaven.

Degula hired the best artists and paper printers and exclusive paper money issued by its bank. Degula's banks used this paper month to issue loans from its network of banks to favored merchants through the North of China. Its banks accepted and issued the paper money through this network, and always claiming the paper money to be tradable for gold or silver. In fact, there grew hundreds of times more currency than gold and silver available, but because the banks accepted the 'money', the paper money was received. To keep the fraud alive, Degula established a Central Bank, and had a small army of wicked thugs to prevent questions.

Degula's thirst for wealth and flesh was never satisfied and it sought the power behind the walls of the Forbidden City. With its elaborate printing and art, Degula issued fake diplomatic documents, and with some stolen treasure and reports from the Ottoman Empire, it created fake official documents. After many attempts to meet the Empress Dowager, Degula bribed the right bureaucrats and was escorted by twelve armed guards. Degula arrived dressed as an Ottoman royal trader, wearing fine silks and excessive gems. Degula had the strength of a bear and carried a hefty chest full of treasure.

Degula approached the Empress Dowager with a chest full of gold and treasure. "My Great Empress the greatest under all heavens, and the most precious of all of the history of all under Heaven."

"Ah loyal subject. Come forward," Cixi said quickly.

"Great Empress of the Entire World, I brought a document from the Sultan in Istanbul, the most powerful man in the Western lands." The documents were all fake but written in elaborate Turkish language.

"Quickly," Cixi was not impressed.

"The Great Sultan is your servant. With this document, the Great Sultan swears allegiance to you and is your servant and slave." Degula lied, but there was nobody in the palace at that time to check the reality of the documents or evaluate Degula's fraud.

"Great Empress of all the World, The Great Sultan has an army coming from the west, and he can raise an army with his vast wealth and power." Degula opened the chest of gold and gems, large jade and extravagant gold ornaments that his goldsmith made. "He will help you to rid China of the foreign western powers."

Cixi said, "Bring the treasure here."

"Please accept us as your slave and partner," Degula added 'partner' as Cixi was admiring the jewels.

"Oh, the gems are exquisite, the gold." Cixi was lost in lust and greed.

"The Ottoman Empire will help China. We hate these eight powers."

"Yes, agreed, please send this to the vault." Cixi was smiling which might have hurt her, as she never smiled, and those face muscles were very undeveloped.

Twenty guards met Red east of Peking and brought her first to Cixi. The executioner arrived with the sword and prepared to kill her. Red stayed still and looked eye to eye with Cixi.

Cixi burned with jealous rage. "Grandmother Zhenfei thinks she is so smart and has the heart of the Emperor."

Red stayed quiet.

The head Eunuch said, "Your Empress, you are the soul of China. Nobody can surpass you."

Cixi spit, "Zhenfei can speak many languages. Childish!"

The doors opened. Guang Xu entered Cixi's chamber. "What is this?"

"She fled with her lover," Cixi smirked at Guang Xu, expecting the most exciting execution.

Red stood. "He is my childhood friend. We are not lovers."

"Zhenfei, come and talk." The Emperor said. They left together. Cixi screamed.

As they reached the Emperor's private room, Red put her head down and was weeping. "Please forgive me."

Guang Xu walked to her and touched her shoulder. "You need to fulfill your destiny, and that destiny is China. And I know you have the spirit."

Red said, "Emperor, be independent and have reforms."

"Tell me about the outside. I only hear stories from the Grand Council and the stories of hatred for the foreigners."

Red looked up. "Great Emperor, this fire car, the train is equal to one thousand horses and carts and one hundred times faster. Wherever this is, it will change the lives of the people. That fire car is progress. The telegram is progress."

Guang Xu grabbed Red's shoulder and touched her chin. "The world has changed, and these iron

machines of fire are destructive, and I cannot allow this."

"My father trades with you and you with him." Red was excited. "Trade with foreigners will help China. It will help the people and industry to compete and do as Japan did when it opened to the West and accepted the technology... "

Guang Xu said, "Yes but your father is under China."

Red shook and did not like that statement. She looked at the Emperor. "We in the North have more technology in weapons and ranching."

Guang Xu said, "Yes, of course. Well that is the great Northern advantage."

"And better fighters." Red looked Guang Xu in the eyes.

"Yes, true." Guang Xu walked forward and held her hand. "Zhenfei, go find the meaning of these foreigners and what they want and make peace."

"I will try."

"They trust you, so I hear." Guang Xu said, "You will solve this foreigner problem. You go and find what is happening with the foreigners."

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The next morning, Red arrived at the school in the Italian Embassy. The children screamed with delight. "We missed you, we missed you," Red smiled. Children could not control themselves. They hugged her hips and legs, reached to touch her, jumped, and ran around the grounds laughing. Word spread and children from the other Embassies ran to the school.

The children sang for her and danced and welcomed her return. Red sang and called for the birds and they came. She even called for the two eagles which circled above and amazed the children. They sat, laughed and danced.

The women from the embassies rush to see her. After an hour, there was a party with many types of food from the various nations. They give her gifts. The Japanese Ambassador arrived and brought a royal painting, and ceramics for Red and begged that they can be friends and resolve all the problems. The German Ambassador and his wife brought cake and chocolate for the children and a musician to add to the celebration of Red's return.

During this time, she met her foreign friends who she would do photography with and played games, learned to ride horses. She invited foreigners to come to the Forbidden City to learn photography.

Red sent her Eagle out to find Dan and arrange to meet him.

The weather was dry and Boxer rebels were becoming more fluid with their propaganda. Bad harvests, flooding and chaos the previous three years supported the idea that the Qing Dynasty lost the Mandate of Heaven.

Tens of thousands of Boxers came into the Western and Southern gates and attacked many areas in Peking. The first Boxer attack was on a foreign property in Beijing - the racecourse was burned down. The following week, Boxers attacked the Chinese Section south of the Imperial City and destroyed thousands of shops, which did business with foreigners or the church.

A new head of the Chinese foreign office was appointed, Prince Tuan, a pro-Boxer. The imperial soldiers collaborated with the Boxers. The next day the telegraph line was cut, and mail service was halted.

Battles grew. There were fires, ambushes, attacks, counterattacks, and in response, foreigners joined to protect themselves together. Under siege in the Legation District were over 1000 foreigners, men, women, and children. There were over 2000 Chinese who were Christians or helped work the embassies. Everyone worked. The women started to sew sandbags from various clothes, blankets, sheets, rice sacks, and nonmilitary men helped to support and secure the barricades.

Foreign diplomats protested and demanded this stop and they started to call troops in from Tianjin. The British Minister in Peking Sir Claude MacDonald sent a message to Admiral Seymour at Taku to advance on Peking.

There was chaos. Degula fed off this insanity and roamed the regions around Peking, plundering, and creating chaos. For the vampires, there were many women and children to eat, for Degula gold to

steal, and the Boxers silver to spend on opium and pleasures.

On the opposite side of Peking thousands of Boxers attacked the PeiTung Cathedral. Forty sailors from Italy and France, fought and helped day and night. Red rode to the Church each day to support them. One day, the Bishop asked Red, "Could you ask the Army to help us to hold this ground, and we will be most grateful to your Emperor?" Red helped organize supplies for the defenders and the Christian converts and to help sustain them, and she used tunnels and other ways to bring this food. She went to the hospital next to the Cathedral and helped care for the children. Each time Red visited, she spent time with Lily and Jen and taught them songs. As time progressed, Red brought, ten royal cavalry and eight wagons of supplies each day to resupply the church and surrounding areas. The goodwill was improved between the Emperor and foreigners in Peking due to Red's efforts.

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During the chaos, a tunnel was built under the PeiTung Church and Children's school next to it. Twenty crates of explosives and a bomb were placed next to the foundation of the church.

There was panic in Peking. With the attacks from the Boxers, and deaths increasing, the foreign Armies pulled soldiers from Tianjin and set up barricades in the Legation quarter. The more substantial relief column was about three days away. The train carrying them had been cut off, and tracks destroyed. There was considerable uncertainty that the relief force would arrive and save the foreign legation. Would China be able to make peace with them, and to become healthy again?

Armies started to move against the Boxers and supporters. On the east side, the Russians and Japanese raced to be the first to break through the outer walls.

Red left the compound and rode through the war zone. Red's reputation as the savior of the PeiTung Church, and the teacher of the wives and children made her a legend. She wore her royal robe and the people Chinese and foreign recognized and cheered her. The glow around her was seen by all within sight of her, and nobody dared to fire a weapon. Red rode freely to the legation and the barricades.

Red rushed and found her friend, the wife of the Italian Ambassador. Red pulled her and hugged. "Please help me to stop this, and the Emperor wants peace!"

"Oh, dear, we are so afraid!" the woman said.

"The commander of the guards opened the barricade. "Come, and she will help end this battle." Another said, "She brought relief supplies to the Peitung church, as you know. Do you need an escort?"

"No," Red rode and stood high on her horse. She found the Ambassador. "I come to an end this fight. The rebel Boxers are enemies of both you and China. The Emperor and the Grand Council wish to meet you and will settle this fight."

"No, Your Highness, the fighting will not stop." The Ambassador was exhausted.

"The Emperor will rid the city of the gangs and thugs." Red walked forward. "Please, look," and Red showed the Emperor's letter and seal, and his secretary translated it, and it promised peace. Red grabbed the Ambassador's hand.

The Ambassador could not resist Red's charism. "Yes, we will stop." And the Ambassador gave orders and signed the letter.

Red put the letter in her robe, and she raced off to the Forbidden City and gave this document to the Chief of Staff for the Emperor.

The pressure from the foreign powers pushed Cixi to make peace. Cixi delivered fruit and gifts to the foreigners, and she was trying to calm the chaos. This lightened things up and gave the relief some hope that there would not be a significant war.

The Imperial Army hunted down the Boxers and secured the areas. As peace developed, Red had more thoughts of her home north and she sought Dan. Red sent her eagle to find Dan and she rode to Dongzhimen and stayed there for a day. At night, she heard a horse arrive, and through the window she saw her eagle. Through the door walked Dan. They stayed and talked, and Red was happy again.

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Degula learned that Empress Dowager Cixi made peace with the foreigners and this threw the monster into a rage. Degula killed the person that gave the news, immediately out of crazy, unrestrained vicious anger.

Degula bribed the top Minister with enough gold and gems to make him wealthier than a Prince. A meeting was arranged with the Empress Dowager, Cixi.

The Minister entered the Palace of Empress Cixi and said, "Your Highest Empress, all under Heaven, we verified the documents from the Great Sultan and the documents are genuine. The Great Sultan's Royal enjoy here is his real Representative." The Minister bowed.

Degula arrived in his most distinguished robes and gems and looked like a King on this visit. "Great Highest Empress Cixi, you are Heaven's representative on Earth. There is only one ruling Empire over all the earth and that Empire is located here in the Imperial City and within that City, you the Empress hold the Mandate of Heaven."

"We have made peace with the foreigners." Cixi waved away Degula and the guards stepped forward to escort Degula away.

"The Great Sultan is moving over the silk road and will be in China's old capital Chang'An in one moon. He brings an Army and can help you who are his Master. We will drive these evil foreigners out of the country." Degula lied with great sincerity and showed the fake letter from the Grand Sultan.

Cixi looked at the artistic document and the translator verified the message.

"The Great Sultan is at the service of the Great Empress Cixi. I will reply to our Sultan, and we will work together." Degula bowed again.

"Can't we sit with these and make peace?" Cixi pleaded.

Degula said, "Oh, Great Empress. The Christians are the real enemy. They will turn the entire country against you, and they will kill everyone, and they will come and take all that is yours and wipe off Great China from the map. They seek only to kill and steal and look at this; their religion believes in another heaven besides yours." Cixi looked at Degula. Neither moved.

Cixi was pleased and said, "The demon foreign churches will surrender."

The guards moved forward. Degula pulled out newspapers. "Look at what they intend to do to you!" In the newspapers were the statements



Cixi slumped in her seat.

Degula walked forward. "Look at the drawings they have of you and of China. No respect!!"

The guard said, "We will kill all foreigners!"

Degula knew Empress Cixi was primed for the next words: "The people from the West are here to kill you, and they are using your closest helpers."

"You need to flee here to Chang'An. The foreigners have a secret weapon as a big train that

will come to kill you and enrich your rivals in your Forbidden City. You are under attack."

Degula pulled out some photos and shows the war and how the Japanese are gathering.

"Oh my! No! We cannot let this!" Cixi looked around quickly, and her face twitched. Her eyes were shaking, and she grabbed her head.

"Yes, they want you and kill you and seize all of China's wealth" Degula stood firm and twisted the wood beads. The wooden cross was too much to bear, and he ripped it off and threw it to the side.

Cixi sat up. "We do have the Mandate, and they will push those foreigners out of the country. Yes, yes."

"Yes, you are the leader of China, you are brilliant." Degula bowed again. "You need to expel the foreigners and most especially the British who will conquer you and replace you with lowly Indians and will turn your royal family into servants and slaves. No, you need to see what the British did in Canton and drive them entirely from China."

Degula bowed deeply and with great deceit and persuasion, lied. "Great Empress, I spoke with the British and German ambassador, and they told me they want to leave Peking and they need an excuse to say to their Kings at home."

Cixi smiled. "The foreign devils in the legation quarter will surrender and lose their freedom and lose their life and liberty to China who demanded that they must unconditionally obey their masters."

"They have fire cars and fire weapons. We cannot compete with them in battle." Degula manipulated Cixi. "You can destroy the Boxers later, but both the Boxers and you have the same enemy, the bigger enemy. The foreigners are the troublemakers."

"These terrible Boxers, we must solve that." Cixi said to her advisor.

"Great Empress, remove the Boxers without harming the great Qing Dynasty and China Empire, ruler of all under Heaven." Degula felt time to excite Cixi. "You will need the foreigners to kill the Boxer movement. Then after both are weakened by fighting each other, you will rule the world."

Degula stepped forward, "And if we can show you that the condition is right and inflame and make them fight each other and then you as the most powerful person in the world will drive them out of the country, and you will encourage the Boxers to fight the foreigners, and you can stand back as your two enemies exhaust themselves and with this, the excellent Turks can help you." And Degula bowed again.

Cixi sat and wondered at this and asked the advisors.

Now her advisors saw that Cixi was agreeing with Degula. They said, "Yes, you can drive them out, and the Boxers will end their trouble with you. They will bow to China and they will move out of Peking if there is some way to push them out."

Cixi hissed. Cixi sat back, put her hands on her legs and said to the Chief of Staff, "Announce to the foreign powers that China's secret societies like the Boxers are a part of Chinese life and not to be confused with a criminal element."

Chancellor Sugiyama, the leader of the Japanese legation, was traveling to the railway station to meet visitors from Tianjin. Degula saw this and moved quickly to tell the commander of the imperial guards

Degula said, "A man is moving to set up a bomb to destroy the Emperor and will be on this road at this time," said Degula

"Come now how can he have a bomb." The Commander of the guards asked.

"Of course, he does not have the bomb, the people coming have the bomb. He knows how to bring it into the city, and it will destroy the Emperor." Degula stood still.

"Sure, go away," the guard turned from Degula.

Degula walked along his side, "I can prove it. If he is wearing a white belt, in that belt is the plans. If you allow him to blow up the Emperor, you and your family will be destroyed."

"Old man. We will look for it." And the guard stopped and stuttered.

The Japanese ambassador was wearing a white belt that had no significance except as fashion. However, when he was discovered with the white belt, the Degula persuasion was so strong to influence the guards.

Degula grabbed the guard hard, "See, white belt, BOMB!"

"Men, take down the person with the white belt." The guard yelled.

The soldiers moved out with lances and attacked and killed the Japanese Ambassador. They found the white belt had no documents or anything. The Ambassador was killed, and there were going to be diplomatic troubles.

The guard shook and babbled, "Oh, this is terrible, I will lose my head for this."

"No, we can plant some evidence, and we will swear that you did the right things." Said Degula.

"Yes, yes." And the guard ran about looking for new evidence to plant on the Ambassador.

"His deputy, comes now," Degula whispered to the guard. "I will do this and swear that I did the deed. You do not need to worry."

The foreign Ambassadors and Ministers met in the German Ambassador's residence to decide the next steps after the Japanese Ambassador was killed. Degula became a bat and flew to the rafters. It listened to the deliberations of the Ministers of the foreign countries. It understood the British German, Austria, and Italy ministers correctly, and plotted how to exploit this and get into position and to create chaos and disruption in Peking.

"He was killed by the Chinese," the Italian minister said.

"Yes, they say it was the bandits, but but but the fact is that ..." the Japanese second in command stuttered.

The German Ambassador Kettering stood as if he was King and said, "They cannot treat us this way. We have a treaty."

Other ministers said:

"We will have a talk. We are surrounded by countless Rebels at the gates."

"Now let's wait this out, what do we do here?"

"The Imperial Army will not fight the rebels."

"We can retreat to the coast, and that will solve the immediate problem."

"Nonsense, let's say the Boxer rebellion story is accurate, and there are thousands of Boxers around us, and so they cannot stop this from happenings."

The Italian Ambassador said, "We are exposed on the flank, we will come and move inside, and create a nearer perimeter."

"It looks like we cannot leave tomorrow, we must get more time, and why do they give us ultimatums like this!" the German minister said, "I will go meet with the foreign minister and talk sense to him and ask for more time for us to cover our treaty obligations."

"They must listen, they will.", said the Austrian.

The Russian ambassador said, "we can negotiate a suitable arrangement, as we did with Dalian."

"We must band together and help each other."

"Get the men and women to help."

They had further discussions and settled on a wait and see attitude, but the next morning the German minister took his interpreter and decided to go to the foreign minister's office and sort this out.

Minister Baron von Kettering, the German Ambassador prepared the next morning. "I will solve this problem once and for all time." He called his staff and left his Embassy with his interpreters in two sedan chairs and left the relative safety of the Legation Quarter.

He cursed and they went north to the China Foreign Ministry building at a distance less than one-half mile. On the last turn before the Ministry, they were stopped by an imperial soldier in uniform, who shouted, "Announce who you are. Stop your progress."

The German Ambassador Kettering said, "Here are my credentials from the Foreign Minister himself!"

The guard pulled his rifle, aimed it at the Minister. The guard said nothing.

Kettering stepped out and walked toward the guard. Kettering waved the letter and shouted, "I demand to be let through to the Minister."

The guard shot his rifle and hit Kettering in the chest. The Ambassador flew back and landed on the ground. Dust rose. Silence. The Ambassador was dead.

The interpreter screamed, turned, and fled back to the Legation Quarter to the German Embassy and word spread from there.

Cixi told the commander. "Point the cannons to the foreigners."

The Commander said, "All-Powerful Cixi, this will cause the soldiers from the Tianjin forts to move quickly."

HUSH! Do as you are told. Cixi's personal guards moved forward. The commander left.

Chinese soldiers were pushing two large pieces of artillery up to the top of the wall. Instead of facing out to the Boxers in the South, they pointed the guns inward into the foreign embassy district.

Chinese and imperial Manchu soldiers were far more than the foreigners, and the number of ferocious Boxers outnumbered the foreigners ten to one.

The ministry with so much power in their hands and having organized the situations such that they would have all power and the other side has no choice, and they gave the ultimatum to the foreign ministers.

Later at night, at the British Ambassador's residence, an imperial guard arrived with a message:

The Qing Foreign Ministry demands:

To secure the safety of the foreigners, they must leave in one day.

The Chinese will offer them protection to Tianjin

Only if they leave early the next morning.

The minister said to the others, "gave until..... and with no mention of the death of the minister as if that never happened."

The Ambassador said, "this is intimidation and bullying, and even with accepting the terms, there is no assurance that they will abide by the agreement and that they will have safe passage."

The nations gathered their forces and moved away from the artillery. Americans moved to the Southern gates at Tiananmen and Qianmen, Russian and

Japanese to the northeastern around Dongzhimen and the other forces in the East around Jianguomen.

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The first British troops arrived and moved into the city and relieved the legation quarter. Degula returned to see that the relief columns were coming from Tianjin and could see Boxers scattering outside Peking. Degula rushed north, checked the church and to its disappointment saw that the foreigners still lived there.

Degula went to the tunnel and set the explosions to destroy the Cathedral that night.

Dan spent his days near the Legation Quarter. He longed for Red and worked to sustain himself and prepare for his movement to their childhood home.

Dan found Red as she entered the Legation Quarter and they spent some time together. On that fateful day, they were in Yonganli and passed Degula who laughed. "Oh Dear, the Emperor's favorite, scurrying in the war zone."

Red turned to face Degula, "Go back to your lands, you evil."

"Oh, dear Zhenfei, today at dusk, there will be a colossal explosion, and this will start the war."

"If you are confident...", she stood in front of him, ready to fight.

"Yes, you will enjoy it, and I must say it will end the order of things here." Degula stepped back.

She turned and confronted him. Dan pulled a sword.

"You cannot stop it. Your dear friends will die, and I will eat them." Degula laughed.

"Try me," Red stepped forward and pulled her sword.

"I shall tempt you with the riddle, and it is under your lovely foreigners and will kill many." Degula smiled.

"The tunnels, the church. Peitung!!" Red stepped toward Degula.

Degula acted shocked. "Ha, my dear, aren't you clever. You don't have the time to meet the Ambassador and save the church both."

"You monster!" Red thrust energy at Degula, knocking it back.

Dan said, "You demon!"

"Here, the bomb is under the hospital next to your cathedral. It goes off soon, my Lady", Degula bowed, turned and walked away laughing. "Have fun, little girl." Degula stepped back, and large wings burst his clothing, and he flew over the building and was gone.

Red arrived at the British Embassy and saw soldiers entering and leaving. Red stood tall and let her hair to her waist and projected radiance and royalty.

The messenger arrived. "The Americans have broken through and are in the Forbidden City now!

Red let her energy flow freely and projected a sense of power and glory. She bound her silk, robe tightly, and entered the Ambassador's room. "Ambassador, why do you attack. We have lost, and the Boxers are gone. If you attack and bring down the throne, there will be chaos, and there is no number of soldiers and sailors that you can bring to protect against that firestorm. There will be complete wreckage."

"Agree, we don't want that. We need to stabilize and let out families to leave and to maintain what we had." The Ambassador walked around the room.

Red pleaded, "the Emperor wanted to cooperate with the nations and that China could make peace." Red stood close to him and looked eye to eye.

"Yes Zhenfei," and the minister was impressed with the raw courage of Red, as she was alone and among hundreds of armed combatants

"You have convinced me and us, and we will stop the attack now" You have our word!"

"I sure hope so; I will return and tell the Emperor."

"Remember we can be friends, the Emperor will implement the reforms, and I swear to this." She mounted the horse and rode quickly.

He turned to the military commander. "End the assaults, we will negotiate."

The commander sent a liaison through the south gate of the Forbidden City, and they caught the American commander, and ordered him to stop the advance. The speed was minutes, as there were no Boxers or Imperial troops in this area of the city.

Red and Dan raced to the PeiTung church to stop the bomb.

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Red and Dan ran on their horses and rounded the Northern areas of the Forbidden City and were half a minute away from PeiTung Cathedral.

BAMMM!!!

The entire north wall collapsed. Smoke rose up and out from the hospital and Cathedral. Red raced to the edge but stopped with the immense dust surrounding her and forcing her to cough beyond breathing.

In the rubble she saw many dead, and it struck Red into mental shock. Red walked among them, and she came above a figure so ghastly, there crouched were vampires with parts of bodies. One vampire had a live child, opened jaws and bit into the neck and killed her - sucking the blood.

"Demons!" Red shouted.

Three vampires looked at Red and scowled at her, ate more, and laughed.

Red was furious and planted her feet and raised her hands and blasted energy at them. The monsters fell back and were stunned.

Red raised a stake and thrust at the vampires and stepped forward again and gathered more energy and struck another vampire in the head killing it.

Red sat from exhaustion. Then she heard crying to her left from a woman in shock. Jen looked forward in shock, holding her dead daughter Lily.

Red walked to her and fell to her knees and hugged Jen and broke down. Red lost all movement, sat on the stone and wept.

Dan walked to her and helped Red to her feet, "Come Red, let's get you home."

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The noise and shock of the explosion reached every one of all Armies in Peking. News of the PeiTung Cathedral destruction created a fury and desperation among all eight armies.

Degula sat at the top of Qianmen gate in Tiananmen and watched the war develop. It stood and flew to Cixi's Palace.

The British Ambassador turned to the military commander. "Begin and continue the assault inside the palace, and on all fronts. No negotiations!"

The messenger raced through the south gate of the Forbidden City, and found the American commander, "Speed the advance!"

Cixi's guards were preparing her personal items for the trip to Chang'An.

Degula was in the Empress' palace. Degula cut his face and sides to appear wounded. It bowed and said, "Empress, Great all under Heaven, Zhenfei is planning with the foreigners to become Empress." Degula pulled a sword to its neck. "I swear this is true, or I will kill myself now."

The guard raised his sword to strike Degula.

Cixi said, "Halt, listen. He must be telling the truth."

"And this Zhen Fei is the most significant danger. She is meeting with the foreigners and making ghosts." Degula pulled out a photograph, and that technology was not familiar to Cixi. "Look, she put her image on this, feel the paper, and see here." Degula pulled the picture that Red made with the Ambassador's wife. "She is a ghost, you can see her and now look at this image, and she is with the foreigners."

"Oh, that wretched tomboy with her tricks and the animals treat her as one of their own. She is an animal and has a spell on the Emperor. She is a terrible danger to China."

"Yes, yes, you need to stop her for good. Put her away, and keep her from the foreigners, she means harm to you and the Emperor, you much protect China and protect the Emperor."

The guard said, "that proves nothing. First Consort Zhenfei is loyal to the Emperor."

"You must kill Zhenfei," Degula rose.

"Zhenfei is stirring trouble with the foreigners. She wants to corrupt China and make it like the evil West. We cannot allow her to do that." Degula screamed, "Here is another photo of a soldier killing Chinese," and Degula showed a photo of a Boxer killing another, but the confusion he suggested and deceived Cixi that it was a foreigner

killing a Chinese. Degula screamed, "See it proves she is with the foreigners."

The guard said, "This demon, who is he? Where does he come from?"

"Hush!" Cixi screamed to the guards.

Degula said, "My Sultan is sending boats and soldiers to help you, and he will take control of the foreigners, and you will reign supreme. The Sultan merely asks that he control his own lands under you as your humble servant."

The guard said, "Where is this sultan?"

Degula said, "Great Empress, you must kill Zhenfei." Degula changes shape and rises in size. "The Sultan has given me the power to solve this, and you, Great Empress of the Whole World, will rule the World." Degula stretches monstrous wings, its face turns dark, and eyes blood radiant red.

"Oh my!!" Cixi shook and screamed and turned her face away.

The guards stepped back and cowered. Degula leaped after the nearest guard and killed him. The head guard cut a wing, and Degula leaped to the side.

A messenger arrived and screamed. "The barbarians are moving north, and they are inside the Forbidden City gates to the South and moving forward."

The head guard said, "We must go!"

Another screamed, "We must leave now, send for the Emperor ..." and he ran out the door.

Cixi went insane with fear and scowled like a cat on fire. "I promise great riches to the loyal patriots who will kill this traitor, Zhenfei."

"Yes, your highness," the Eunuch bowed.

"You and your crew cannot kill this wicked woman, then you will be murdered," Cixi grabbed one of the eunuchs who objected.

The leader of her personal guard stepped forward.

"Cut him."

With one slice, he cut the skin off his thigh from the hip to knee. He screamed wildly.

"Now do you want this or not"

"We honor you," and they cried and fell to the ground.

"Zhenfei is a traitor! She conspired with the foreigners to attack the Forbidden City. Now they are in the city and moving here." She raised her hands high and screamed at them, "The Gods will kill you and kill your family, and you will burn forever."

"Do you want this?" The soldier cut off the eunuch's arm, and as he was screaming, they put on a tourniquet to not allow him to die but to make him suffer, and all the eunuchs were shaking, terrified.

"So, do you want death and eternal hell, or do you want the treasure."

They all kowtowed, shaking and crying.

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Emperor Guang Xu shouted, "Where is Zhenfei?"

The horsemen rode forward, horns blowing. Two battalions of soldiers line up and flew the banners.

Guang Xu thought of the hill just outside the North Gate where the Ming Emperor hung himself when the Qing leaders came in 1644. He said to the Commander of the guards, "I will hang myself, for failing."

The Commander of the Special Guard approached the Emperor. "Now Your Greatness must leave and to the other Capital, Chang'An."

"Zhenfei, come with me now!" Emperor Guang Xu was praying that Red would return. The guards were placing new clothes on the Emperor to disguise him for the escape.

The head of the guards raced and stopped, "Emperor, you must go, the foreigners are at the east gate and moving to the north. We have no time!"

"Get Red now!" Emperor Guang Xu ordered. " I will not leave without her. The negotiation is over. "

The Commander said, "I will bring her personally to you!"

Minutes after the Emperor departed, Dan and Red raced into the Forbidden City. The guards opened the massive wooden gates, they rushed through on their horse, and rode to the Emperor's Palace.

Red wept and ripped her silk robe. "My god, the children are all lost, and that monster!!" and Red cried. "I could have saved them! That beast, eating, the horror, the evil," Red fell and pulled at her robe.

The guard rushed to Red, "First Consort Zhenfei, the foreign armies have breached the walls and just outside the southern and eastern gate, and now we need to flee from the North Gate."

The Commander brought Red to join Cixi's group at the North Gate exiting.

The Commander said, "Come Empress Cixi, we must go. Zhenfei is here and it is urgent"

Cixi said, "Oh Zhenfei, there you are. I would love to bring you with us, but there is a terrible problem. Look how young and pretty you are. If we bring you, you will be raped by foreign soldiers along the way. You know what to do." And Cixi offered her a knife for suicide.

"No, I won't kill myself." Red stood. "Where is Emperor Guang Xu?"

"He is gone, my dear."

"Where? Why did he leave me?" Red cried.

"Oh, come now, you don't think he cares for you?" Cixi laughed and sat back, "Go. Find your man."

The Commander said to Cixi, "Zhenfei is loyal, and we will not harm her."

Cixi said from the carriage, "Stay in Beijing and negotiate with the foreign forces." The carriage moved forward and Cixi left from the North Gate.

A company of soldiers was left to guard the northern gate, and they marched her to the opera house for protection. The soldiers set up their area, and Red was placed in the area to sit.

The eunuchs who stayed behind to packed treasures had orders to kill Red, but they shook with fear and dare not touch her. The lead eunuch gathered them together. The soldiers were protecting Red.

"Do not touch the First Consort, or you die!!", the General said and motioned to a soldier who beheaded the eunuch who was near him. The eunuchs ran to the rear in panic.

"First Consort, we will escort you soon to the Emperor. He left only ten minutes ago." The Commander said.

"Bring my friend," Red said, and Dan joined her.

More noise from the South rose.

In a moment, the soldiers deployed and to the gates and walls, and besides two soldiers, Red and Dan were alone.

Dan said, "Red, my love for you is forever." They hugged.

Red and Dan looked around and heard not a sound except the distance wind, as if they were back at the lake. Red sat and cried, and birds come to sit with her. The two eagles flew down to be by her side.

After the soldiers departed, Degula entered wearing his Ottoman garments. With it were many eunuchs who were gathering treasure.

Degula yelled, "She is a friend of the Japanese and British, and she will kill all of you."

One eunuch rushed her with a sword and swung at her head. Dan knocked him down. Red jumped and smashed the eunuch.

Ten eunuchs loyal to Cixi attacked. Red pulled a sword and fought and kicked and killed the first one, which pushes the others to step back. Degula jumped and tried to stab her in the back. Red leaped and Dan attacked Degula. The eunuchs gathered to get spears or throw rocks.

Red screamed for the soldiers, but they left the area and were occupied against the approaching foreign soldiers. They did not hear her.

Ropes are thrown around Red and Dan, and four eunuchs attacked. One grabbed Red's legs. One eagle swooped down and placed its talon around the eunuch's head and threw him against the wall. The others scattered. Red stepped forward and, with her sword, decapitated all three eunuchs.

Dan was to the side and three rushed him with swords. Dan was cut and stabbed in his chest. He kneeled and fought to stand.

Red leaped to his side and fought off two eunuchs. Degula stood and tried to corner Red against the palace walls. She thrust energy and pushed Degula and all attackers away. Red ran toward Degula, leaped and struck it in the head and knocked the beast down.

Degula grabbed a lance and launched at her, and she stepped to the side. Degula screamed. "Foreign devil lover! Kill her!" Eight eunuchs rushed Red from the side. She did not see them, and three swords caught Red and cut her hip, ribs, and back. She fell to her hands and knees.

Dan rushed to Red with desperation. Dan killed two eunuchs with kicks, but his skill and luck ended. Degula stabbed Dan in the back and stepped on him. One eunuch rushed from behind a wall and struck Dan in the back of the head. Dan fell and did not move.

Red was bleeding but ran to Dan and then she was hit from behind. Red rose and thrust energy and knocked four attackers back.

Degula rushed and swiped at her with a sword. Red dodged the sword and struck Degula's neck and head and he fell. Red jumped past Degula toward Dan. "Dan", she yelled, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

Degula rose and saw the eunuch retreating. Degula transformed, thrust wings from its back, and flew to the front of the eunuchs. "Stop!" Degula roared.

The eunuchs rushed back toward Red. Two eagles circled.

Red stood above Dan and blasted energy and knocked the attackers down.

Degula thrust his bat wings out and swept to the eunuchs and pushed some through the energy. Two eagles lifted eunuchs and dropped them to their death. Degula pushed with its wing thrusts. The eagles attacked Degula. Eunuchs stood still, cowering.

Red pushed more energy, but now she was exhausted, and it stopped. She knelt for a moment. Power gone.

Degula fought off an eagle and flew at Red in a rage. Red pulled a spear near her and stabbed Degula in the hip. "Die you monster!"

The eunuchs stood still, silent, shocked.

Degula picked up a large timber and knocked Red on the back, and she fell.

"Quick!" Degula grabbed one eunuch, lifted him by the neck and tore his head off. "Go!" "Kill!" Ten eunuchs now more fearful of Degula, rushed Red. One with a sword slashed her. Others with spears stabbed her until she stopped moving.

Degula moved to the well. "Here, Now!!"

Three eunuchs dragged Red to Degula and the monster helped throw her down into the well. Five other eunuchs dragged Dan and threw him into the same well.

They dragged large stone slabs and covered the well.

And the battle was lost, and China fell into turmoil for a long time. The chaos ended the Empire in another ten years, and China was swept into a whirlwind of competing factions and confusion, and no matter the number of new leaders with the right intentions, the chaos was too much.

The Emperor and Dowager went to Chang'An, today known as Xi'an, the old capital. After some months, returned to their home in Peking, known today as Beijing. Each year the Emperor would weep for his lost First Consort, his only real love Zhenfei, who we know as Red.

The Forbidden City was closed for two weeks.

This did not stop Degula. It used the tunnel if found, the underground channel, and escape pit to sneak into the palace each night and steal treasure. In all, the amount exceeded all the riches of Europe - many tons of gold, gems, and precious items. These the treasures were stored in underground lairs not far from the walled city, and it remained a secret.

Many questions about the lost treasure came, and there would be many suspects, and while there was a great deal of looting and those were blamed for the lost treasure, in fact, the most significant robbery was done steadily under cover of night and by the creature Degula in various disguises.

The chaos and mayhem that developed these years were the perfect environments for Degula to grab and loot at will and was its supreme fortunate situation. It succeeded above all its intentions, and it was not satiated.

During this time, the Empire fell, the republic grew, and further attacks on China brought turmoil.

The forces grew, and new economies developed with engines, oil, banking, war, and transformed the world. Now, the world has changed, and people could communicate instantly around the world, and information was easier to find answers.

The Vampire force grew also, and Degula grew in power and prestige and traveled the world on various adventures and frequently back to Beijing.

But some information was hidden, and the transformation of the economy brought new opportunities for both good and evil. And in the years that passed, war and peace developed and the wireless and air travel and nuclear weapons and all the while both good and evil grew. But evil could grow with its own rules. New Lords of money developed and with that power, massive reach into people's lives.

Now, Peking is named Beijing, a new Beijing and with the old palace intact and the new embassies developed in the same countries came to do business and to interact.

And finally, over one hundred years, China is rising again.

BOOK THREE

定

"Another drink, sir?"

The sound of a feminine voice made Dan twitch slightly from where he sat, reviewing documents. Her words barely registered as he read his to-do list. One week in Beijing--get papers signed; process the bank transfers; arrange for shipping--also see the sights, and hopefully connect with an exotic beauty that I can brag about back home.

"Sir, would you like another drink?"

Dan paused and glanced upwards, her words finally registering to his distracted mind. His eyes immediately latched onto the flight attendant hovering above him. More specifically, the exotic, attractive Asian flight attendant hovering above him. Her perfume drifted downward, and her almond-shaped eyes blinked a few times.

"Hao, xie. Qing zai lai yi ping pijiu."

"Ah, sir, your Chinese is wonderful. Where did you learn?"

Angling his body towards the aisle, Dan answered, "I studied a little in Shenyang a long time ago." He found his Mandarin language skills to be enough for casual conversation, although far from fluent in any academic sense. At least I can ask where the bathroom is, he thought. A small smirk crossed his face.

"Oh! I grew up in Tieling, just outside Shenyang. You like to travel to Beijing?"

"First time. Can you believe it?" Dan let out a little sigh, smiling with a shake of his head.

"Oh, sir, you have to see the Great Wall and Forbidden City!" The woman widened her eyes, her face brightening with excitement. "It will take your breath away!"

"After my project is finished, I would love to go." With two drinks in his system and exotic yearnings in his heart, he didn't hesitate to smile and take the conversation up a notch. "You want to come with me?" He hadn't had too much luck with

women lately, and his friends kept trying to get him hooked up. What the hell, maybe this girl likes Americans.

"Ha, I would love to, but you know my work has a tight schedule, and I go there many times before. You must look at the Forbidden City. There are legends and myths about it. You know Mao Zedong thought the place had some special spirits or something--and now he is entombed near there. Maybe it is a little funny, ha." The woman's laugh tinkled like a bell, and Dan found it slightly arousing.

The woman gave him a nod and soon brought him another beer with a friendly smile on her face.

Well, strike one, tiger, he thought to himself. He wasn't going to brag about this one back home.

"Sir, would you like a drink?" Dan heard from his immediate rear as the woman moved on.

There was not much preparation necessary before touching down, just practice his rusty Chinese, read a few law journals, and bill the same travel time to multiple clients. Dan was new to the firm, and now the partners were sending him off to the other side of the world for some errands. Might as well be a glorified paperboy, he thought with a muted smile.

He looked at his notes: get a document signed, file papers with a domestic Chinese affiliate firm, and become a signatory for the local bank account. The whole thing shouldn't take more than a few meetings over a week. At least he would have a chance to see Beijing, visit an old Army friend, and go out and have a little fun.

He rustled around in his briefcase and spotted another letter in his stack that came from the client. He pulled it out, tucked it under his arm against his ribs, and then tried to slowly rip the letter open with his left hand. Damn, right arm. His mind drifted back to the war in Iraq, and the injury he'd received. It was downright a nuisance when he needed to do anything productive.

"Sir, please let me help," said the flight attendant.

"No, no, I got it, miss, thank you." He could be a downright mule when it came to be doing anything himself. After he'd gotten back home, he'd had to learn to keep being a fighter, or he'd end up a puddle on the floor blubbering about god knows what.

"Call me Teresa. Please, let me help you." She grabbed a nail file and sliced it open.

"Thank you. You're a sweetheart. Your boyfriend is one lucky man to have a beautiful woman like you." Dan laid it out there, hoping for a reply. He ran his fingers through his hair, giving her his best smile.

"It's a long flight, you know, and happy to serve you anytime." She gave him a charming smile. She turned and walked away, and he watched the sway of her hips for a moment. Strike two. That one is either too dense or too smart for the likes of me.

The flight was a far cry from his Humvee patrols in the desert. No force was required, and he didn't expect a hail of incoming or friendly firing bullets.

Simple, easy; business class all the way. Still, I must get used to this life. He ripped open one edge of the envelope and could see that the paper inside was of heavy stock. Dan pulled out the letter and was intrigued by the formal penmanship. Fancy, he thought, turning the paper over.

Dear Dr. Eggers,

I accept your invitation to handle these transactions and affairs. You are well recommended by a mutual friend. I will meet your representative at my office, and we shall arrange everything at that time. Please note the personal items in question.

Yours kindly, D

How long had it been since he had received a handwritten letter, and with such exquisite penmanship? The calligraphy was a work of art.

Dan settled back in his seat and typed some notes on his tablet, updating his schedule and some

action items. He still wasn't used to typing with his left hand and found himself annoyed after a few minutes. Feel like I'm typing with elephant feet.

With his unique background, Dan felt proud that it put him in this position to deal with the heavy hitters of the world. He was a Chinese American with a military background and a gift for languages. Before he even graduated from law school at Villanova, the firm hired him as a summer associate at ten thousand a month. The firm had made all arrangements for his first business trip and promised that it would be business class both ways, with five-star accommodations. He was given this plum assignment since the client in Beijing spoke Russian, which Dan learned in the Army. There was a nagging instinct about office politics, and this was probably a way to get him out and away from the office.

He pushed the silly thoughts out of his mind. Just go over there, do the job, get it done, and get home. He nudged the full recline button and went to sleep.

His dreams drifted to horrible thoughts of running in China and fighting animals and creatures of the night. He jerked around in his seat and made noises.

"Sir, are you fine?" It was a few hours later, and Teresa was forcefully shaking his shoulders. "Sir, are you OK?" Her face was crinkled with concern, which only made her look sexier somehow.

Dan awoke, covered in a sheen of sweat. People were looking at him, scared, and disturbed by his frantic movements as he endured another hellish dream. Damn war. He ran his fingers over his forehead, gathering sweat on it like flies on a dead animal. He looked down to see he was white knuckling the seat beside him and gently relaxed his hands.

"Sir, you were having a nightmare. Let me help you." She reached over and covered him with a blanket.

"Oh...Sorry." He felt like an idiot. Damn it, Dan thought. It was a repeating dream--the explosion in Iraq that killed everyone in the Humvee except him crippled his right arm and destroyed one of his legs.

Dan had recurring nightmares of losses and fighting and dying, which generally only returned when he was under too much stress. To shake off the negative vibes, Dan trained religiously and had completed a half-ironman the month before, winning his division and finishing ahead of most able-bodied men.

Teresa brought some water, and he tried to relax. The rest of the flight was simple. The woman sitting next to him was in a huff the remainder of the trip, but Dan got back to normal and watched some comedies on the flight video feed.

"We will be landing shortly. Please, buckle your seat belts."

"Here, let me help you." Teresa reached down and buckled his belt and took a little longer than was technically required. She patted his hip, smiled mischievously, and stuck a slip of paper in his right pocket with her name--wechat account, and Beijing cell number. Guess I didn't strike out, after all, Dan thought. The women in China are kind and friendly, he thought, but this flight attendant is special.

He settled back and prepared for landing, looking out the windows to his right. The lights below showed an expansive metropolis draped in heavy smog.

Bump.

The landing jolted Dan. As they taxied onto the runway, Dan gathered his belongings and tried to get adjusted.

"We will be delayed shortly; we apologize for the inconvenience."

Dan looked out and could see the massive Beijing air terminal in the distance. He yawned and began to daydream about finding a beautiful place to

take Teresa, among other things. He smirked as his eyes closed, still heavy with weariness after the nightmare.

Someone shook his shoulder. "Sir, please gather your bags," Teresa said with an urgent tone.

Out of the window to the right, Dan saw a van with stairs approach the airplane. Behind that was a distinguished car, all black, and heavy tint on the windows.

"Sir, please, you need to exit the plane now. We were instructed to let off our VIP guest first."

What the hell is going on? His pen clattered to the floor. Why are we stopped in the middle of a runway? His foggy mind tried to put something together. Planes don't just stop for passengers like a bus, especially for guys like me. He turned around in his seat. Maybe they got the wrong guy.

Teresa stared at him with expectation.

The captain opened the door and came out to see the trouble. He stood with a scowl on his face. He said a few words to Teresa, but Dan couldn't hear.

Teresa walked back down the aisle and said, "Sir, your hotel has arranged to deliver your bags." She was impatient, "Please, they are waiting for you." Teresa aided him in gathering his carry-on items and helped him stand up.

Behind her, the captain was visibly angry, red splotches appearing on his neck. "Sir, OFF the plane please," he said with exasperation. Dan leaned against Teresa steadily down the aluminum steps. The captain was ready to strangle him. It's not my fault my employer stopped a damn plane. He was just as annoyed about the situation as the man.

At the base of the steps was a large black Bentley with a man and woman standing behind it. The noise from the aircraft was deafening, but the two stood rock still like monuments on the runway. The Bentley was a new top of the line model - polished and dark, with a mirror - like surface reflecting the runway lights.

Why is the guy wearing sunglasses when it's dark outside? Dan thought.

The man was stocky, wearing an all-black suit, shirt, tie, and hat. Next to him stood a woman in an elegant blue uniform, taller than the man by a few inches, with flawless skin, shiny black hair, and striking eyes. The sight of her got Dan's heart pumping. She wore a silk suit coat and skirt that highlighted her broad shoulders, narrow waist, and feminine physique. Dan forgot all other women, and indeed all other thoughts, when he saw this stunning woman.

Dan's body buzzed with anxiety, feeling shaken from the entire flight experience. He took what seemed like minutes to get down the stairs. Feeling a glare boring into his back, he turned his head to see the captain projecting an intense look that screamed--GO!

As Dan left the stairs, the two came forward to help him.

The man said nothing. The woman said, "Hello, Dan, I am Xiao Hong. You can call me Red. Have you ever been to China?"

"Hello." Dan could only manage a single word. At this point, stepping off the plane onto the runway and the surrealness of the situation overcame him. Both the man and the woman acted as if they were simply picking him up from inside the airport, instead of on a runway. Their causal air was the exact opposite of the captain's glare that was about to sizzle a hole in his back.

These two are either aliens or richer than hell and don't care about other people's inconvenience. After taking another glance at the two of them, he smirked. Richer than hell for sure. The man helped him into the Bentley with a grim expression. Wonder if this guy has a personality? Once the door was shut, Dan took in the interior of the car. His hand brushed over the leather, and he made a soft groan of delight at the touch. It was like touching a woman's silky skin. God, I need it bad.

It had been too long since he'd felt a woman's embrace, and here he was fantasizing about it with a car. How pathetic. His eyes took in the advanced electronics, a 27-inch widescreen, and a fully stocked bar with Johnny Walker Blue Label Whiskey and Grey Goose vodka.

Dan drew in deep, calming breaths, trying to get his heart to stop hammering and to get the excessive sweating under control. Guess I was more rattled than I thought. He stared out the window, trying to clear his head.

"Mr. Eggers, we are thrilled to have you here. We will take you to the hotel, and you can settle. Your company has made arrangements, and a colleague will meet you at the hotel," Red said.

As they drove away from the airport, Dan looked out the window at the various new skyscrapers in the city, the eight-lane freeways, and the ubiquitous luxury cars. The ride to town was brief, with just a few standard pleasantries exchanged with Red. Though he tried, he could not get her to say anything about his assignment beyond what he already knew.

The hotel was an exclusive boutique near the city's old Embassy area, on the edge of the Central Business District.

"Hello, to you all. I am Raja." As the three of them exited the Bentley, they were greeted by the porter, who had Indian Tamil features and towered above the local Chinese with dark eyes and oddly tinted skin.

Raja picked up Dan's bag and led them directly to his room, bypassing reception altogether. Despite his polished appearance, Raja had a surprisingly putrid smell. He did not smile and condescendingly looked at Dan.

What's with this guy? And why does he smell like a dump?

Red handed Dan a leather-bound folder and said, "Dan, here is a list of contacts you will be meeting this week. This project is of the highest priority, so there is no limit to what we will do for you. Raja will help you with anything you need here at the hotel. You have my number. Your first meeting is tomorrow morning."

Dan gave ten dollars to Raja, then closed the door and settled into the room.

The room was extraordinary. It had a definite Eastern European feel about it and reminded Dan of some antiques at an exclusive club on the Upper East Side. The furnishings were solid and utilitarian, but almost over-sized in their dimensions. The walls featured gold trim and inlaid jewelry, and the bedding was immaculate silk. Porcelain cups, a teapot, and a table in the corner were ornate without being ostentatious. Wool blankets and silken throws covered the massive bed in the center of the room.

Dan jumped into the shower, letting the hot water wash away the stress of the flight and the strangeness of the entire counter with everything. His hand pressed up against the tile wall, as he

drew in a deep breath to get his body to calm itself. Just get the job done, Dan told himself. After a forty-minute shower, he toweled off, standing in his room for a moment in just a robe.

With a sigh, he pulled on his underwear and glanced around for a TV or computer to unwind for a while.

His brow scrunched into a frown as he soon noticed there was no sort of electronics in the room--not even an alarm clock.

On top of the antique desk, he found a note, featuring the same calligraphy as the letter he read on the airplane, and this time sealed with wax.

Mr. Eggers,

Welcome to Beijing. We look forward to your stay with us. If there is anything you need, we are at your service.

Always.

D

Dan had been briefed that Drago was old money, from Eastern Europe, with a family tree going back to a royal family and the banking aristocracy. Nobody knew how exactly much money he had, though.

It's late anyway, I'll just go to bed. Dan set the note back and climbed under the sheets. Though exhausted, his mind kept jumping around, jolting him awake anytime he started to drift off. He couldn't shake a cold, prickling feeling that seemed to be embedded into the walls of the hotel.

Whump...

Dan's heart leaped at the noise, stirring up old memories of the past. This hotel is as old as dirt, nothing to be jumpy about. Dan suddenly noticed that Raja's odd smell continued to linger in the room long after he had departed, making Dan's mind roll through thoughts of shadows and hidden enemies. How come I didn't notice that until now?

He had been dealing with occasional bouts of anxiety and paranoia since his Army accident but had been off medication for years.

After tossing and turning for another hour, Dan laid out his wallet, passport, his firm's American Express card, and money belt on the desk--there was no safe in the room. Brandel Notron, the firm's managing partner, had emphasized that no questions would be asked about expenses on this trip. He was told to spend a lot of money and put it all on the AmEx card.

Pulling on a pair of pants, Dan swiped his cell phone and sent a text to his friend Mike, who was now a U.S. Army Major working at the US Embassy, and they arranged to meet at the nearby Kempinski Hotel.

Dan asked the hotel porter to flag a taxi, and the car entered the stream of heavy traffic on the Third Ring Road. Mike and Dan had been in Iraq together and were in the same year group for Officer Basic and Ranger School. Mike moved up the ranks and got early promotions twice. He was one of the youngest Majors in the whole Army. It had been two years since the incident in Iraq, and somehow Mike got out of those tours of duty without a scratch. He did some dangerous missions but just seemed to have good instincts about things.

The taxi pulled up to the Kempinski, and Mike was there waiting with a big grin. He opened the door and paid the fare with a big fat tip for the driver.

"Dan, wow, you look great! So great to see you! How are you doing, buddy?" Mike's blonde hair was cropped short, his blue eyes shimmering with excitement at seeing his old friend.

"Hey, Mike, Great to see you." Dan pulled his friend into a man hug, slapping him on the back a few times.

"Damn, you recovered well. Last time I saw you, you were out of it, on drugs, and with a bloody stump. You were a mess!" Mike was not one for holding his tongue. "I read the article about you in the triathlon. You can outrun all of us now--shit!" He gave a hearty laugh.

"Yea, man, well, I had to burn off some anger. The new leg is good. I was thinking of doing the Paralympics, but there are some studs from the 82nd that are way past my running skills. Running was hard for a few months, but then one day, it all clicked and felt natural again."

They caught up on old Army news and then Dan told Mike about the strange arrival. "We stopped the airplane while it was still on the runway like I was getting off a bus stop."

"Think you're the king, eh?" Mike slapped him on the back good-natured.

"Then, the client's Bentley took me straight to the hotel from there, and they just put an entry stamp in my passport in the car." Dan paused for a moment. "Hell, maybe I am the king." He took a drink of his beer. "It has been quite an arrival. I should be sleeping now, but can't sleep worth a damn... Mike, how do you like Beijing?" The more Dan thought of his entire encounter so far in Beijing, the more strange it seemed.

"Good so far. The taxpayer is putting Molly and me up in a great villa out in Shunyi--driver, maid, the whole bit. After this assignment, we will be heading back to DC for a while." Mike leaned against the counter, fingering his sweating beer glass.

"You're still fit as always," Dan said, noticing his blond friend's muscular form.

"Gyms here are top rate. Gotta always stay fit and ready. We got a message you were coming, and Ambassador Wilson asked us to keep an eye on you. It looks like your firm has some pull. What brings you to Beijing? How is law firm life treating you?" Mike took a swig of his beer, his blue eyes holding Dan's gaze.

How does he know so much? Given the reception at the airport, nothing was too hard for Dan to believe anymore. "Good so far. I'm with Rhodes, Atley, and Goldman in Manhattan. It's an old money firm. They brought me on as a summer associate. Can't complain. We have a lot of banking clients, real estate investment work, and high net individuals with special needs."

"Heavy hitters for sure. I read up on a few of them," said Mike.

"Some are retired from the New York Federal Reserve. I was sent here by Brandel Notron, who hired me to cover private equity." They talked shop for just a while longer and Dan didn't want to divulge any confidential information.

"Dan, keep me in your thoughts. I retire from the Army in five years, and I don't think I want to go for Stars. I'll hang up my suit at 20 years and am keen to get into private equity."

"You bullshitting me? You always craved becoming a four-star general. Whatever happened to conquering foreign lands and winning a place in the history books?" Dan ran a hand down his chin.

"Getting too old," Mike laughed.

"Sure, I'll put in a good word with Brandel. He's always on the lookout for a hotshot like you. He likes veterans a lot. You'd like working there, it keeps you on your toes." Dan stretched his leg for a moment before saying, "By the way, I am here to meet a CEO of a bank. They set me up to be in an exclusive hotel, which doesn't even have a name, and I can't find on-line."

"Yeah? What is it?... a hole in the ground?" Mike took a long swig of his beer and wiped the foam from his lips.

"Something like that." Dan ran his fingers through his blond hair. "We meet tomorrow morning at the new China World Center. A few of my colleagues have done work for them. Do you know anything about Drago? Can you check the system and see what you come up with?"

"Yea, we'll check him out for you. Anything for you. What's the hotel address and number, in case I need to find you?" Mike's eyes narrowed.

Dan looked up his GPS history on his smartphone, and a map with location pins loaded on the screen. He handed it over to Mike, indicating the pin for his hotel.

"Right here, its old and the interior is exotic." Dan's hazel eyes shimmered with amusement.

After reviewing the information for a minute, Mike's face twisted with confusion. "Well, this must have been the old American Embassy from years ago. How did you pull that one off? We sold that back to the government recently. After the 2008 financial mess, it ended up being owned by the local

government and has been vacant since then as far as I know.

Between the various odd incidents up to this point, Dan felt a cold prickle travel up his spine. "Are you sure? It does seem like a very exclusive place, but it's a real deal. I saw at least four or five staff people in the lobby!"

This is weird, and it doesn't show up as being part of any chain. Do you have any brochures or business cards for this place?" Mike handed his phone back to him, his left eye slightly twitching.

"Sure, I will find," Dan quickly saw that Mike was uneasy.

"Buddy, here's my number, and here is an emergency number if you get into any trouble. Call here or push this combination. Better yet, Dan, here we will give you this locket. You put this somewhere out of sight, and if you ever need any help, if you are in any danger, just push the button. We will find you. We've got to take care of the Vets, especially my best buddy." The locket opened with a mechanical whirl, revealing a simple mirror and a small black button. "I will make sure the Ambassador and all the powers know you are here, and we will keep an eye on you." Mike patted his back, but Dan noticed the twitch hadn't left his eye. Mike folded his hands together, staring straight ahead for a minute as if lost in thought.

"Thanks, Mike, I should be fine. It's not a big deal. We just need to do one simple transaction, and then I'm off to the airport." Even as he said the words, Dan didn't believe himself.

"I'm sure it's nothing but better safe than sorry. By the way, Dan, if you have time while you are here, come to our Embassy Ball. The Ambassador's niece is visiting Beijing for a few weeks. She's single. Can you escort her to the ball, by chance?" Mike winked at him.

Dan wanted to speak his thought aloud but figured it'd be crass to ask. "Sure, I'll be happy to take her."

"Dan, don't worry, she's a hottie." They both laughed. "If you don't take her, I might exchange my wife for a younger model."

"You better not let her hear you say that, old man." Dan slammed the rest of his beer as Mike laughed again.

"She'd probably murder me in my sleep. The woman's tougher than I am."

"She has to be to handle an old bulldog-like you." Dan nodded to the bartender, who nodded back, taking the empty mug away.

"Take care, Dan. Watch your back. Something doesn't quite check out. We'll give you one of our guys to help keep an eye on you. Watch out for the girls here. They are beauties, but some are sent out to meet you for less than reputable reasons."

"Will do," Dan said.

They left the Kempinski bar, and Dan returned to his hotel. On the way back in the taxi, Dan felt relief flow about the job.

His mind spun about the upcoming date for the Embassy Ball. He'd have to get his hands on a tuxedo in the morning.

I'm going to enjoy my time here. Dan thought.

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The bat flew during a new moon.

It found the farm quarantined for the African swine flu and landed on a large hog. The pig feasted on the animals many nights and pulled in the virus.

The bat flew to nightclubs in Peking seeking younger adults enjoying romance. Some nights it transferred blood from the humans and others it gave the blood and the virus to the humans.

The virus DNA updated the cryptocurrency system.

The hotel was eerily silent when Dan entered through the main door, without a doorman this time. The receptionist was sleeping, and he could not see a single other person in the building. The thought of Raja still made his body crawl with unease. Weariness washed over him as he finally made his way into his room, threw his clothes on the floor, and climbed beneath the sheets. It didn't take more than five minutes to finally crash beneath the waves of slumber.

Dan opened one eye, his body telling him it was time to get up and going. Groaning, he looked toward the window where barely visible sunlight crept through. He slapped at his phone, turned it over, and cried again. Thank you, jet lag. It wasn't even five in the morning, but once he was awake, there was no way he was going to go back to sleep, so Dan figured he'd get some work done. Dan got dressed and went down to the lobby to relax for a few minutes before getting to work.

A young woman in a stunning gold traditional qipao walked in, bowed gently, and handed him a Wall Street Journal. The golden girl walked out without a word. After fifteen minutes, Dan could smell her coming back with fresh ground coffee. She poured a cup and gave him just the right amount of milk and brown sugar. Five minutes later, she came back with a local style breakfast. After he'd eaten, Dan reviewed his documents a final time, then decided to shake off his jet lag with some exercise. It was still only an hour since sunrise.

Dan's phone rang. It was from Mike. "Dan, keep your eyes open for this guy. We need to talk soon."

Dan said, "Sure Mike." Dan went back to his reading but closed the documents and decided to burn off some stress.

He stepped out onto Xiushui Road, soaking in the serene surroundings of swaying trees and only a handful of people scurrying around. He did a few

stretches before running down the road past the British and Indian Embassies. Tucked away inside streets, he noticed armored vans with wide-awake troops nearby--security for the embassy area.

One soldier noticed his prosthetic leg, with the high-tech blade, and it didn't take long for word to get around by radio to the other nearby crews. Dan took notice of the differences in military uniforms and decorum. He could distinguish the plain-clothes officers by their mannerisms, dress, and the looks on their faces. What most interested him was that some had running shoes instead of boots.

After ten minutes or so, he came to a walled area that surrounded a park. Just to the north, Dan saw many Russian shops and buildings, the Elephant restaurant, and a place called 'Treasure Island' active with a few Russian women in evening attire still flitting about.

He turned around and went back to the park, drinking in the quietness of nature. He entered and walked around it for a while, all on the outer road, and then came upon a stone historical marker. Ritan Park, meaning Sun Park, was set up by the Ming Emperor in 1530 as a park to worship the sun. It was aligned so that it was directly to the East of the Emperor's throne in the royal palace. He remembered that four such parks around Beijing represented the sun, moon, earth, and heaven, set up north, south, east, and west from the throne.

He loved the sight of people in the park doing TaiQi, tending pigeons, and unfurling homemade kites.

I think I found my running spot for the next few days Dan thought, after a while, Dan left the park and walked back through the Embassy district and to his hotel, having worked out a big sweat. He passed through the front door and made it to his room easily. Once inside, he quickly showered and crashed for a nap.

Today will be a great day. Easy. Show up, get the signatures, register, then enjoy the city. What could go wrong?

With that thought, Dan fell asleep.

The next day, Dan went to the China World Tower. The office was on the top floor of the newest and tallest building in Beijing.

The office was impressive, inside a penthouse in the New China Center, which was built the previous year and had become the premier business address in China's capital. The entrance was directly connected to the underground parking area, with a private elevator straight to the top. The company offices were on floors 86, 87, and 88, the top three floors of the building. Drago's office took advantage of that, and the ceilings were close to forty feet high.

Drago's walls were covered in hardwood inlaid with gold, like the furnishings in the hotel. The lighting system utilized some type of high-tech LEDs that avoided projecting any shadows. Dan noticed that there were no windows.

Maybe the guy hates the sky, he thought. Or hates the sight of the city. Some of the wealthiest people he'd met had some of the oddest quirks.

"My friend, Mr. Eggers, welcome to Beijing. I am so glad you could come. Can I get you a drink? We have some excellent whiskey."

"Thank you, Mr. Drago, it is lovely to meet you." Dan smiled at the man.

"I am so glad that your firm could send someone on short notice. How was your flight?"

Dan took in the man's tall frame, most likely six foot five, very clean-cut, and distinguished-looking face. Drago appeared to be fiftyish and was in great shape. His face featured a thin nose with a high bridge, gleaming blue eyes, and a prominent--almost bony, long chin.

Dan held out his left hand for Drago to shake. "Sorry, my right arm is not well," Dan said. Drago's grip was extraordinary for someone of his age.

Drago came back with a glass of whiskey on ice. "We have heard many great things about you and your

firm. If there is anything you need, please let me or any of my servants help you. We hope to make your stay a pleasure. Please, accept my apologies for the lack of a banquet tonight. We will have one soon. Tonight, we will celebrate your arrival with some fun and excitement." The man's eyes danced with dark hunger, which startled Dan for a moment.

Dan gave Drago a letter from the law firm. He read it and nodded. He then paused, however, and looked at Dan directly without saying anything for a long time. "You look familiar somehow." He said.

Dan shifted in his chair. What's this guy's deal? Typically, unfazed, Dan felt the same uneasiness he'd felt since he'd first gotten to the hotel.

Finally, Drago spoke again. "I need a law firm that is an expert in all these matters and am pleased you are here." He then went through the requirements in detail. "Also, we will need to arrange to move some items out of China in an expedited manner. We have been sitting on some materials, and now the diplomatic channels are closed, and we must find a way. Your firm will be richly rewarded, and I can assure you that all the necessary State Administration of Culture and Heritage chops have been obtained."

Shouldn't be a problem, he thought, even if he hadn't been expecting this. Why did he mention the S.A.C.H. approvals in the first place?

"Mr. Eggers, we have a new drug for stopping the spread of viruses that may come about from the recent swine flu outbreak."

"I am not familiar with that." Dan said.

"Your firm is welcome to invest in some new drugs we have in the works that can stop the spread of a major virus that can spread rapidly among the humans and has a very high death rate."

"Yes, that is fascinating. We know you are the premier drug maker in China"

They spent the next two hours going over the details of the transactions. All in all, things looked simple to handle.

"Dan, we will send a driver to you at seven and will meet you at the club tonight." Drago rose and went out of the room.

Dan got into a cab, heading back to the hotel, the same uneasiness creeping over him. There is nothing to be worried about. Just get this over with. He paid the taxi fare, headed inside the hotel, and hurried to his room to get things finished up.

Dan wrote an update for his firm, billed his time, and then went to work on a few drafts of the documents that they would need for the various transactions. Dan had a habit of writing out at least three versions of every contract or other writing to prepare for contingencies--plan A, B, C, and so on. This habit had saved him a few times in college and helped to save his life in Iraq. But there was only so much planning he could do, and there was no plan B that could prevent the future sometimes.

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In the same penthouse, Drago went to his boardroom. This room had soaring ceilings, artificial waterfalls, and huge interactive screens of news, markets, and interactive data. There was a 33-meter-long table made from one slab of wood made from a 3000-year-old cypress tree. Seated at the table were financial, security and political leaders of various large countries

Massive wood doors opened, and Drago entered. At once everyone at the table stood quietly.

"Gentlemen, ladies and others," and they laughed. "Here are the top powers from the large economies, of all colors, creeds and species." They chuckled and looked around. "We have one absolutely singular objective - to sort out the ways of the new world order."

We have concluded that certain standards are put in place starting this Chinese New Year.

"Finance, we will run everything through our network of asset management and social media companies." Applause. "The partnership will then control all finance, transportation, land holdings, set all wages, and control all transactions."

"We have a new venture we can all play across industry and very lucrative for you, the elite. The United States is allowing us to list our companies in their markets, but we simply list it as a document in the British Virgin Island. We have the benefit of collecting investor money but no obligation to pay dividends or give actual value to the investors."

The audience made a murmur and applauded.

A few administrative things in order:

"Our new measure is the average GDP per person.

We need to maximize the efficiency of every single person.

Every person has value even if the value is the organs in their body."

Laughter from the audience.

"Throughout crypt-blood accounts, all everyone will be monitored for their health and any problems we will bring them in for health care under our guidelines."

"Stakeholders are who? Society, people?" Anyone who complains could have worked hard to be in this room. You, the elite, know anything goes if we play within the rules. We make the rules. We count the votes. We are the legitimate." Rising applause. "Let's be honest, the world needs us in this room to reorder the world into a period of peace and stability with no annoyances such as freedom, democracy, and unapproved happiness."

The audience clapped and cheered loudly.

<>

A BMW arrived. Dan was expecting to see Red, but another woman named Pearl escorted him. As they drove, Pearl gave Dan a gentle introduction to the area, and said nothing about business.

"Dan, you are single?" Pearl asked.

"Now, I am. Yes," Dan said, eying Pearl with a light smile.

She blushed a bit. "Ah, yes, well, we will show you around to the hidden wonders of Beijing."

It was a short drive to the place, within walking distance, and Dan noticed the park from his morning run. The took gold embroidered elevators many levels below the ground. The elevator doors opened, and a tall blonde Russian woman greeted them.

The fittings inside were all European in design. It had the same kind of subdued lighting as Drago's office earlier. These people hate the light, Dan thought.

Dan had visited a few KTV parlors in his previous trips to China, but this one was far more elaborate. The room was huge and could hold well over a hundred people. It had a massive ten-foot high definition flat screen, two large rectangular tables, multiple couches, and its VIP bathroom. Strange was the new normal.

Dan's mind felt fogged with weariness, but the excitement of the day kept him going. We might as well have a bit of fun. He checked his smartphone, saw it was still a bit early, around 8 pm, and was thinking that the office back on the US east coast would be in action about now.

Pearl pulled her phone and showed Dan the new crypto money app.

"We have a series of cryptocurrencies and the government will force all bank accounts to be actively tied to a crypto account." She started to

download the app on Dan's phone. Dan was looking at Pearl's legs.

"Dan, pay attention," and Pearl tugged on his chin to look at the phone. "The most popular account is the blood and DNA account, and then we track the perfect blood, and this is how we can track the tastiest delicious blood donors."

Dan's said, "Tasty and delicious blood donors?"

"Oh, that is the game. It is very popular in China now!"

Dan admired Pearl again. "Sure, this is a big money maker?"

"Here give your fingerprint now to get started." And Pearl collected Dan's fingerprint.

"You can get more levels right away if you make a blood donation and give your DNA for research."

Dan set up the app and was sharing information with Pearl, and Drago entered the room with two young Mongolian twins. They sat down on one of the sofas without comment or expression as if sitting down to breakfast in his kitchen. The staff rushed in and placed a wide assortment of fruit, meat, and liquor on the tables. The two Mongolian women sitting with Drago were twins, about five foot seven, with long black hair and high cheekbones. The two women had athletic builds, pale skin, and sharp black daggers for eyes. They looked at Dan and smiled, giggling with each other. The slight plumper one came over to Dan and touched his face, speaking in Mongolian. Drago said something to them in Mongolian, and they came back like puppies to their master.

"Hi, Dan, my lovely friends like you." Drago nodded. "They will show you around a bit later, but first things first. The choice is yours."

In came ten Chinese women, beauties, late teens or early twenties, delicate in bone structure, clear of skin, various heights and features but all similar in proportions--slender. As they entered the room, music began to play in the background. None of

the girls smiled, and in fact, they looked forward with a blank stare, shifting around on their feet, clenching their hands. One, then another, took notice of his leg. He chose a girl, and she shied away from as if she was afraid of him.

Embarrassed, Dan then pointed to a taller one, but she would not come and sit with him either.

"Don't worry, Dan, there are more. This girl is nice, but she is a little simplistic. We'll try another round," Drago said as if talking about different types of wine.

Dan had some time to sit and take it all in until the next troupe of girls arrived. Why was my firm selected for this project? Many other white-shoe firms in New York could have handled these affairs, which had more developed relationships with the local Chinese officials. Why our firm, which doesn't even have a Beijing office? What is the catch here? Well, the partners mentioned secrecy and privacy, perhaps that's it.

At that point, Pearl left the room, and two minutes later came back in with ten more girls, similar in disposition to the first group.

"Dan, take your pick, take a few. The night is young." Dan could hear a tinge of amusement in the man's voice.

Dan was tempted, for sure. He figured he would not try to take his pick home but might as well practice his Chinese. Dan selected a young woman with glasses and an athletic build. She came to him with a frightened look and glanced towards Drago always. As she saw Dan's leg and pushed it away from her out of fright.

"Dan, let's trade." Drago winked his eye and talked his girl into joining Dan, taking the other girl for himself.

With the tension broken, the group conversed for a while over drinks, some singing, and casual flirting. Dan's new friend discussed what it was like growing up in the countryside, then coming to Beijing and working there. She explained in simple

Mandarin, which Dan understood well enough, that her family had arranged for her to marry a local farmer in her village to settle a family debt. This KTV hostess job was just something to endure. After one year, she would have enough money saved for her to return home and pay off her family's debt.

Dan saw a tattoo on her lower back. "Artistic tattoo."

"Ha-ha, yes my identity. I can make a lot of money with that," she smiled.

"What does it mean?" Dan asked Pearl.

"Best if used by date. And get your phone and check the QR code under it." Pearl replied and grabbed Dan's phone pointed at the code, "Here" and she pointed to the tattoo.

On the phone, came her detailed information, 19 years old, 45 kilograms, freshness, blood type, start date, end date, used-by-date, hometown, and entertainment skills.

Dan looked at her "Oh, my. What is used-by-date?" she smiled.

His social media accounts all updated the information and now he got messages from a company asking for his credit card.

Pearl and Dan's new friend were talking about life and peeling apples, giving Dan a slice at a time. He savored the taste of the juicy fruit, loving the way the girl's face lit up as she talked about her family. Her knife suddenly slipped and cut deep into her palm. She let out a yelp of pain, tears instantly springing to her eyes.

"Here, let me." Dan reached for a box of tissues.

A cold feeling swept the room as if they'd suddenly stepped into a freezer. The girl's eyes grew white with terror as a dark presence leaped over Dan. The girl screamed in terror. Before Dan could move, he felt cold fingers throw him against the wall.

THUD!

Darkness instantly consumed him.

Dan woke. "God, I feel like a train hit me." A headache pounded in the back of his skull, and as if imprinted in his mind, he could still feel the cold fingers throwing him into the wall.

He checked his phone and noticed that a few hours had passed by. The room's lights were turned off, and no one was around. Where the hell am I? Disoriented, he shone his phone flashlight around, wondering if he'd stumbled into a dream.

Dan said to himself, "The last thing I saw was some dark stuff flying over my head." He tried to recall the memory after the girl had sliced her hand. Did someone knock me out? What kind of mess did I get myself into? He saw double, and the music was still playing in the room. The TV was a blank blue screen. The heavy glass table was shoved up against the wall, and the area around his couch was scattered with items in all directions.

Managing to gather his senses, Dan sat up, his hand resting up against the back of his head. A bump was forming, but no blood came away when he looked at his fingers. Thank God.

He turned off the music, straining to see if he could pick up any sound but heard nothing from any direction. He was alone in the room; all the girls had disappeared. What happened to everyone? Where is Drago, and how can I get back to the hotel? He had the name card with the address on it but had to get out of the building first.

Annoyed at the entire encounter, Dan limped into the hallway. An unnerving silence was all that met him. Just get me out of here. He walked toward the elevator and saw the reception area. His hand brushed over the wall, where there was a strange-looking door--but it was not an elevator. Damn it. Did they slip something into my drink? He turned back around. He stood there, trying to figure out what the hell was happening. OK, evaluate the situation here. I simply need to get out and get to

the hotel, and then tomorrow, everything will get sorted out. How could Drago just leave me here? Dan leaned on the reception desk and then grabbed the chair behind it.

"My life is out of control, he thought. Why not be a simple accountant, why did I go down this ambitious path?"

Dan went to the door, remembering that the elevator had gone down when they entered. He searched and found some entries, but the first four all led to a room or dead-end. He walked down a hall for about a hundred yards and came to another opening to the left, this one with granite and some Chinese characters and Russian-like characters etched on it like graffiti. He passed through that one and walked for another thirty meters and came up to a dead end. The hallway simply stopped. This place is a maze, he thought, surrounded by three granite walls and a hallway leading back.

Dan's head, where he'd been slammed into the wall, throbbed, his leg ached, and he was about to fall asleep wherever he landed. He sat down to gather his thoughts. His fingers brushed the floor, cold dampness seeping into his skin.

He lit up his phone, put it on full light, and could see an old brick-walled tunnel, damp from the water seeping from underground, and covered in mold.

Dan leaned back against the wall. It was chilly this November evening, and the moisture seeping into his clothes made it even more so. Damn it to hell, He pulled his phone over closer to have a better look and noticed a line in the cracks of the wall that looked brighter than the rest.

There between two lines of bricks, there was an unusual light and then a hole. In the future, Dan would wonder what compelled him to put his pen in that hole and push it, but at that moment, he simply did it out of some odd impulse. It could be his obsessive nature by keeping things neat or his curiosity. Whatever it was, he pushed the pen inward, and a small brick popped out of the wall.

Click.

Dan scooted back in surprise as the wall started to shake and slide apart. He managed to get to his feet and entered, stepping slowly. It was deathly silent and pitch black. His fingers brushed the wall, and a moist substance stuck to them. He shined his phone light down the tunnel. My god, what is this? An unearthly fear struck him.

Thud. Thud. Thud. The sound of his own heart's loud, panicked beat startled him. I need to get the hell out of here. NOW!

With a deep rumble, the walls shut behind him with a thud. His chest tightened instantly, anxiety riddling his thoughts. How did I get into this mess? I'm going to die in this smelly hole. He recalled the moments after the Humvee attack and felt ghost pains in his missing left foot. God, not now. I need to get a hold of myself. He gathered his courage, reminding himself of all the advice he'd been given over the years in recovery. I must move, no matter what happens next. I can't stay here. He started to walk. He looked at his phone and saw no signal, and the battery was less than half-full, with just a few hours to go. He wished he had gotten a full chargeback in the hotel or had a portable charger. So little time to get out of this mess.

The floor beneath him was slick with moisture, the same substance that the walls were saturated with. I'd love to sit down for a minute. Dan's eyes scanned the dank muck and saw several things wiggling. Yeah, that's not happening. He lifted his phone to check if there was any form of an exit up ahead. Nothing but bugs ahead.

Dan continued to walk. It was now more than two hours past midnight. His eyes scanned his phone battery, feeling more panicked as it slowly drained. I'm going to die down here. He gave a dry laugh at the thought.

After the irony of the situation lifted, his mind started on a dark path. His chest tightened, and his heart began to race as if he were in a full

sprint. While his vision grew blurry, his senses of hearing and smell seemed to magnify. His chest felt like a taiko drum played at full speed. God, I haven't had a panic attack in years!

At this point, Dan sensed a turn ahead and stopped to place his hands on the filthy wall. Breathing laboriously, he walked forward and found himself at an intersection, he turned right, and after another hundred feet, saw a flight of stairs leading upward. He climbed the stairs and entered a room.

The moment Dan stepped inside, light glinted and danced, sparkling like diamonds on every surface. He stepped in further and felt something pushing up against his right foot. Reaching down, his fingers brushed up against a coin. He picked it up, and with the light of his phone, looked at the strange figures carved into what appeared to be at least a full ounce of gold. He shone his flashlight down around him and saw another, and then ten more, and suddenly a large pile. "Oh, my god." Dan shouted, and his voice echoed. He raised the phone, lighting up the entire room.

were all sorts of gold coins, carved figurines, jewels, crowns, and solid bars. Fingering several coins, Dan noticed that many of them had the same strange markings as the first one he'd touched.

To the right, he pulled off cloth and saw a stack of gold that was many times larger than he could see with his light. Almost everything was coated in a thick film of dust, making his footprints and fingerprints stick out.

Dan picked up a bar and weighed it in his hand. That's got to be ten pounds. On the back, he saw the character for Gold in Chinese, one of the few characters he recognized, and an imprint saying .999, meaning 99.9 percent pure gold. He saw fifty bars high, then about one hundred wide, and perhaps another hundred to the wall. My god, there must be over 1000 tons; maybe 5000 tons of gold here. Many

other items, jewelry, artifacts, ivory were stacked against the walls.

Now Dan's heart began to still its frantic beat because money was a language he understood in any situation. He was a corporate lawyer, after all. As if he had taken some sort of drug, the headaches and the pains in his legs and hip went away, along with his racing heartbeat. Here he sat on a treasure that was beyond anything imaginable. It was perhaps more significant than the gold bullion held under the New York Federal Reserve Bank.

And this one is right under downtown Beijing, with barely a guard. Then like a jolt, he remembered his predicament and sobered instantly. This is no accident. It's not like gold just appears out of thin air. This is someone's treasure. But whose is it? A wave of fear swept over him, overtaking his greed for the gold. I need to get out of here and find an exit.

Dan took a handful of coins and placed them into his pocket and exited the room. He returned to the intersection and walked down the other direction. After a few minutes of walking, he could see the outline of something lumpy up ahead.

His light suddenly illuminated pale white skin and a twisted body covered in grime and muck--his hostess from the KTV room. Oh my god. Dan noticed her neck had puncture marks and dried blood caked on it like a mini river down her pale skin. He quickly felt her wrist and sensed a very faint pulse. What do I do with her?

He couldn't carry her, and soon his phone would run out of battery. He took pictures of her and would get her help later.

Dan's feet slapped against the ground, echoing back to him. The longer he walked, the more he felt like he was in a giant underground tomb. Soon he came upon a large room without a door. His finger brushed up against what appeared to be shavings from what he assumed had once been a door. His phone

light outlined several caskets on stone pilings. What the hell is this place?

He noticed how clean and ordered the room appeared--not even a trace of dust. Someone has been here recently, or dust is scared as shit to appear in here.

There were three caskets, one of which was far more extensive and more substantial than the others. It sat on a marble platform and was open as if inviting him to look inside. Against his better judgment, Dan reached his phone over the edge and took a picture. A dark feeling crept over his skin, and he could have sworn he felt a hand brush against him. I've had enough of a freak show for today. He bolted from the room, not wanting to know where the bodies were that belonged to those coffins.

The once green bar on his phone was now red. It's nearly six. I've been in this tunnel the entire night. If I don't get out of here soon... His mind didn't want to finish the thought, as his chest tightened with the feeling of being alone in this tomb.

A rumble shook the tunnel beyond the room with the caskets--sounding like a train rattling over tracks. Dan jumped at the sound, exhausted, anxious, and not knowing what else to do but go forward. As he continued to go down the tunnel, every five minutes, he could hear rumbles and feel shaking. Each five minutes it appeared closer.

Dan moved toward the sound, and after five hundred yards or so, he came up against a door with no handle. He spotted another odd hole like the one he'd first seen. He pushed his pen into it, and then a door opened into a subway tunnel. Just as he was about to jump down, the whirl of a train passed him. With a gasp, he took a step back to let it give then slowly dropped into the tunnel.

An ache was spreading through his body, and fatigue was making it hard to want to move forward. He started to cramp up from dehydration and the cold. He walked along the tracks hugging the side

and stuck against the wall to endure the passing train. Finally, he came out into one of the subway stations, but he could not get up on the platform.

After a few more trains passed by, he decided to wait, then hopped on the rear of the last train and jump onto the platform. His feet just barely hit the ledge. Wobbling, he thrust his hands out to steady himself. There were a few people there waiting for the early trains, and they were startled to see him suddenly appear. However, once the next train came, they got on board and disappeared.

The subway guard didn't bother him but took notice of his roughed-up appearance. Dan went up the stairs to exit the subway. He went to the turnstiles but could not exit--he had no subway exit ticket. He went over to the clerk to ask for a way out, and she pointed at a paper saying that he needed to pay two renminbi to exit. The problem was that Dan had no Chinese money whatsoever. He had relied on his credit cards, and others had paid the bills. He had never bothered to get local cash.

Dan pulled out a US twenty-dollar bill, but the clerk had no interest in that. She pointed at the sign.

"Ma'am, I need to get out of here, please," Dan pleaded with her but to no effect. He then went around to some others, but his clothing was covered in the muck from the tunnels. He could see the disgust in people's eyes and figured everyone thought he was a beggar. Nobody would talk to him.

Come on, people! His fingers dug into his pocket, and he pulled out a gold coin. He tried to sell it to several people to get some renminbi, but everyone thought it was a fake coin, like the ones you could get at the flea market. Dan did this for half an hour. His exhaustion from the night before was catching up to him. Finally, he jumped the turnstiles and tried to get out of the subway, but then four police tracked him down and arrested him.

<>

"Where did you get this gold coin?"

Dan sat in the police station, now half asleep, truly worn out by the sleepless night, jet lag, and all the exertion.

"Hello, pengyou, wake up. Where did you get this coin? What happened to you?"

Dan woke up to see a man, about 25 years old, wearing a black coat, with a badge that said POLICE in English and Chinese.

"I don't know..." Dan rubbed a hand down his face, feeling like he was more grime than man at this point.

"Your passport, please."

Dan had forgotten to bring local money with him, but he did not forget his passport. Of course, if he had just a tiny bit of renminbi, he wouldn't need to be there and could be at his morning appointment.

"Ah, darn..." His mind was not cooperating with him.

"Sir, are you drunk? We have problems with foreigners sometimes, but they never show up walking down a subway tunnel." The police officer couldn't seem to get his eyes off Dan's suit that was covered with grime and grease, and Dan's general appearance of a homeless person.

Dan tried to get his mind to think straight and looked down at his phone to make a call to Mike.

"Darn, the battery's dead. Could you help me charge my phone?"

The policeman ignored the request and left. A half-hour later, he came back with the passport. "Mr. Eggers, you are new to this country. Already you are causing disturbances. Could you tell us what you are doing?"

Dan was now in a spot. Could he tell them the whole story of the day? They would think he was crazy and stick him in jail, perhaps. And what about the gold? What is it doing down there? If he told

them about that, then they would do one of two things. Not believe him and stick in his jail or believe him and then force him to show them the location. Then at that point, he would be underground, alone, unprotected, and then what? Would they just let him go or maybe kill him? There was no good outcome if he started to talk. He had to think of a story that made sense.

Dan said, "I was out late last night with some friends, and they were playing some silly games. They put a bag over my head, and then before I know it, I am sleeping underground in this tunnel. I didn't even know what has happened. Then I see a train coming." He was wondering at that point if the policeman was believing his story. "Then I woke up, and I tried to get out of the subway, and I had no money except for that gold coin you have."

"How did you get this gold coin? Do you know it is illegal to have gold and antiquities that are unregistered?" The man stared at him with a steely expression.

Now Dan was getting deeper and deeper into the lies. If only he could get out of there and get back to the hotel, shower, change clothes, and get back to work, then he could get on with things. "It's a birthday gift from my friend. I didn't know it is illegal."

Dan was thinking of pushing the man harder to power up his phone, but then he thought about the pictures. Let's see how this thing works out. If I power up my phone and call Mike, then they may search through the phone. These police are merely investigating a strange situation. Dan thought about it from their perspective. Here is a guy looking like shit, which jumps the turnstiles and has some gold coins. Quite strange.

The police officer rose and went back to the office. He returned a half-hour later. "Mr. Eggers, do you know you are supposed to register with your local police station. We have no record of where you are staying."

Dan showed the hotel address card.

The police officer checked it on the computer and left the room. They all left the room, and Dan was sitting there alone, exhausted, not knowing what to do, except to keep alert. His mind began to blur, and his fatigue got to him. Soon, he fell asleep.

"Dan, dear, let's go." Red was suddenly there pushing on his shoulder. Dan woke with a start, startled to see her next to him. Where did she come from?

She helped him up, giving him a rather expressionless look. He gathered his items, and as he walked out of the police station, he saw the officers at work on other issues. None of them even cared to look at him or consider that he was of any concern whatsoever.

In Red's Bentley, there was not much conversation, and after a bit, they pulled up to the hotel.

Red said, "Let me have that coin. I need to investigate it."

Dan couldn't say no at this point. "Sure, keep that." He felt shivers and an unusual attraction. His eyes lingered on Red, taking in her beauty buried beneath her stiff, formal attire and cold demeanor.

He left the Bentley, went to the hotel, settled in, checked his messages, and put the other coins in a safe place. What a weird night he thought. Dan fell onto the massive bed without even removing the bedspread and entered a deep sleep where he dreamed of lakes, bamboo, eagles and a beautiful young woman.

Tony stood looking at two heavy, magnificent wooden doors--hundreds of years old, dark red, and with polished brass. Tony had heard of Maggie's bar. It was legendary in Beijing, especially among the expatriate community. Now, he was staring at the entrance, right in the middle of the old Embassy District and at the south gate of Sun Park, the same park where Dan was running that morning.

The new job in Beijing was a pressure cooker. The first four months at the embassy left little time for relaxation--moving, protecting visitors, guard duty, and paperwork. Add to this his new ball-breaking boss Gunny Perez. It was nice to get off and explore the city.

He went out with four other Marines, including his close friend Rob, a young sergeant, one of the toughest fighters in the whole Marine Corps. Rob won the Marine boxing light heavyweight championship and was now training in some advanced Kung Fu and Mixed Martial Arts getting ready for a second career as a professional fighter. Rob could take on five people with no problem, and he would do that occasionally back in the USA. He was warned by Gunny to control his temper and had kept it in check--until tonight.

First, the Marines went shopping at the silk market, where some of them bought shirts and watches. Then they had a steak at the Weston Hotel and onto Sanlitun to flirt with local women. Tony had no luck with the ladies. He never developed the ability to banter with women, and though surrounded by charming and willing women, he would always say something inappropriate. One of the guys decided to follow a love interest, and the four remaining went to the Den, near the national worker's stadium. That night there was a big Rugby playoff between the English and Australians, and the Den was packed with expats. They chatted up with some friendly Australians. A few beers later, they jumped in a taxi to an area just north of the Forbidden City to

check out a bar district named Houhai, named after the small lake, that is behind the imperial palace. Then as midnight came, they went to the place that didn't get rocking until after midnight--Maggie's Bar.

Maggie's had another nickname--the Second Mongolian Embassy. Most of the workers were Mongolian women. They were from all walks of life in Mongolia, most from Ulan Batar, and most of those with respectable positions there--teachers, engineers, doctors. But, here in Maggie's Bar, they had a second profession and a profession that could double their income in just a few weeks of work.

Legend had it that Maggie was a front for a dominant owner, a powerful man from either the Army or the police. The bar was set up decades ago to make money while keeping foreigners away from Chinese women. Now, the big club money was in Beijing with local establishments serving whiskey with green tea and overpriced foreign beers. Still, Maggie's had its niche. In addition to the Mongolians, there were also blonde Russians, Kazakhs, and North Koreans.

Tony walked into the bar and heard Springsteen's Born to Run playing. Beautiful women swarmed the place, dancing and throwing flirting glances at several men as they teased them with their moves.

The weather outside that day was a few degrees above freezing, but the ladies dressed to display their beauty, some still in miniskirts or hip-hugging shorts. Bare skin and long legs ruled at Maggie's. The women were different shapes and sizes, but all eager for cash.

On the dance floor was a throng of hot non-Chinese women. A gorgeous blonde Russian, 5 foot 9, slender, fit, a bit light on the top, but a dancer's body--just what Tony wanted. His jaw dropped open slightly, and he was ready to marry the girl on the spot, but Rob pulled him back.

"Tony, come on, man. Let's get a few beers. Don't even bother with these girls. You are here to do a job. You need to protect your career and security status. It's not a problem if you take a girl home with you, but she can't sleepover. You must stay conscious. If you lose your mind, blackout, and fall asleep--you'll be sure to lose whatever you have on you. Phone numbers, or whatever is in your phone, you name it." Rob gave him a long speech, but Tony didn't mind.

Tony ordered a Qingdao beer and a drink for his new Russian friend. He still had the problem of his shyness, but in this place, it would not be an issue. At the bar, Chinese women were hustling drinks from old, overweight, white-haired men, who were trying to compete with young, tough guys. The Chinese women were employed to sit at the bar. Their job was to simply lighten foreigners' wallets early in the evening and then turn them over to the Russians and Mongolians. Their one taboo was a limit on going home with a foreigner. If the guy got up to leave, the drinks were dumped. Gin was water, Rum was Coca-Cola. Their job was to extract cash and not get drunk.

The girls talked Rob and Tony into ordering drinks. Tony pulled out five hundred renminbi notes. What a rip off. Ah...it's not worth the hassle.

Rob and Tony scoped out the place. It seemed every nationality was intermingled like a big giant bowl of skittles. One customer stood out among the rest--a distinguished gentleman with a gray beard, sharp blue eyes, and a pronounced chin. He wore expensive clothes, a dark black suit, dark shirt, and a hat. The girls hovered around him, stroking his suit and face.

"Who is that guy over there? Is he the owner of this place?" Tony asked the blonde beauty in perfect Russian.

"No, he doesn't own this place, but he owns a chunk of the city. One of the few foreigners to make it rich here. Mysterious guy, but we all want him."

Two Mongolian girls, healthy, fit, busty, and vibrant, were at his side. They stood together to his left, and to his right was a taller and slim Kazakh girl. They were laughing and giggling, and very at home at the bar. A tall American man in his forties walked up to one, to strike up a conversation, and they smiled at him but turned back to the dark-suited gentleman and giggled.

The gentleman enjoyed watching but never moved until he saw the Russian girl next to Rob.

He came over with a confident stride. "Ah, darling, you light up the place." He kissed her hand gently. "You are lovely, and may I ask why I have never seen you before?"

The girl did not speak English and merely shrugged her shoulders. So now, in Russian, Tony conversed with her fluently and made her blush.

The Chinese girl, next to Tony, said something in Chinese, and now the man spoke in Chinese. Tony could feel the aura of the wealthy man filling the room with something powerful yet intoxicating. Impressive.

"I'm Tony. And you?"

"My friend, it is a pleasure to meet you"--he gave a slight bow--"I am Drago. Here is my card. I can tell both of you are very distinguished Americans. I am always happy to meet Americans."

In Chinese, he ordered MacCallen 30 years. "Let's try some whiskey, shall we?"

The bartender poured double shots for everyone. The Russian girl gulped it down too fast until she started to cough, the liquor dripping down her nose.

This is the best whiskey I've ever had in my life. Tony stared at the glass for a moment, savoring the taste.

The women soon loosened up, laughing, flirting, and engaging with them effortlessly. Drago's eyes watched them all as if soaking in information through the exchanges around him. The Mongolian twins came up to Rob and Tony and started to touch their arms with light strokes of their fingertips,

sending sparks of fire through Tony's body. Teasing smiles tilted their lips, and they giggled, exchanging glances, cooing at the two Americans, and talking excitedly in Mongolian.

"Ah American friend, let me introduce Mei and Kunkun. They have taken a liking to you."

A thrill went through Tony, and he found his eyes roaming over the two women. "Damn. Girls back home are not this nice and simple. A girl like this in America would never talk to me," he told Rob.

The twins pulled Tony and Rob across the room to play pool. At the table, players finished their game early and let them take the table. Tony was feeling a little buzzed after a few more MacCallen shots.

"Tony, your girl is gone," Rob said with a raised eyebrow.

Tony's stomach clenched, so he wasn't paying attention to what Rob just said. Ugh, shouldn't have eaten that nasty street food. I need to take a dump and fast. He nearly ran over to the washroom.

"Damn, Rob, the door is locked. I got to go, I think that squid got me," he called over his shoulder.

"You can just go outside, man," Rob said, pulling Tony along. "I think your Russian girl is gone. Come on."

On the way in, they had noticed a park nearby with a lot of trees.

"Guess there is plenty of covers," Tony said, glancing around with nervous glances. They went along the fence, and Tony found a place to squat and do his thing while Rob looked out for police.

"Rob, some paper, man."

Rob dug around in his pockets, producing used tissues that he'd used to blow his nose on.

"Tony, you got to be prepared, ha." Rob started laughing, handing over the tissue.

"I hate you right now." Tony finished up quickly, and they decided to go for a walk. All paths led to the altar, which dominated the center

of the park. The moon cast silvery shadows around them, the air smelled crisp and clean, and silence enveloped them.

A woman's piercing scream shattered the stillness. They both exchanged a quick look and ran toward the sound. Tony already imagined a million horrible scenarios as his feet hit the ground with sharp thuds. With eyes wide, the two of them spotted two people standing before an altar, the moonlight turning their faces into something made of nightmares. One of the two was a girl, her face twisted with anguish.

Rob said, "Come on." He started to run towards the altar with determination.

Tony followed, yelling, "Rob, no, man, come back."

Rob leaped upon the altar and approached the man. Tony came up a few seconds later and took in the tall form standing beside the Russian beauty from Maggie's.

Tony and Rob stopped their approach; they could see the Russian girl go limp, trying to scream but unable to make a sound. Blood made rivulets down her neck, pooling into the front of her dress.

Rob screamed, "Tony, that's your girl!"

The man slowly turned and glared at the two of them.

Drago, Tony thought, his heart instantly picking up in the beat.

Blood crisscrossed down his chin, spilling over into dark pools on the alter. His eyes turned malicious, glaring, and a bestial hiss came from his mouth.

Without another thought, Tony bolted forward, grabbed the girl, and threw a meat-sized fist into Drago's face. Pain exploded throughout his hand. God, it's like hitting a brick wall!

"Tony, cool it, it's not our thing," Rob said, glancing between the two of them, sensing the immediate threat.

Drago's eyes lit up, a sick smile twisting his lips. He grabbed Tony by the ears and threw him thirty feet down the stone altar. The wind roared in Tony's ears, but he caught himself just in time, falling off the ledge to the soft ground. Laying on the ground, Tony tried to catch his breath, his mind spinning with the unrealistic reality that was happening around him. What the hell is he?

Tony spotted Rob punching Drago, his face a mask of rage. Drago simply took the shots without flinching and leaped forward, striking his friend in the chest. Tony crawled up the stairs, trying to get to his feet but couldn't breathe.

Punch after the punch was met with Drago's blocks as if easily avoiding the tantrum of a little child.

Tony finally got to his feet, running to help Rob. He leaped and elbowed Drago from behind with all his strength. Drago laughed and with one punch, struck Tony in the gut, dropping him on the ground. With a firm grip, Drago grabbed Rob by the arm and yanked, and Rob shrieked as his arm was pulled instantly out of the socket. Drago's foot came down on Rob's leg next.

SNAP!

Tony watched in horror as he saw Drago hold Rob's head between his ankles and throw punches at him over and over, finally stomping on his head with a sickening thump.

With a dark grin on his face, Drago walked to Tony with liquid-like movements. Tony struggled to get this foot, his eyes widening with horror. Drago's fingers curled around the front of Tony's shirt, and he hefted him up into the air with one arm, staring him in the face. He paused for a moment.

Tony gazed into the dark orbs trying to find a hint of humanity. Oh my god... All he saw was a limitless amount of evil.

Drago smiled. "Ah, Tony, my friend Mei likes you. I won't kill you now, but I shall let you

suffer your friend's loss. Let's put you to sleep next to your precious friend here."

Blinding lights flashed in Tony's eyes, and the sharp sound of whistles hit his ears.

A face peered above him. Gunny Perez.

"Tony. What exactly happened last night?"

Tony could not speak.

"Can you see me? We will get you back.

Corporal, take it easy."

Tony said, "Where is Rob?"

"Rob is dead."

Dan was lost in a deep sleep and was dreaming of traveling on the airplane again, but now the plane was twisting side to side...

"Dan, get up. Up, Up."

Dan awoke, feeling disoriented, and saw Red standing next to his bed, looking severe.

"We don't have much time. You have to tell us some things about these coins you found last night."

Dan shook his head, trying to get his groggy brain to kick into gear. "Wait a minute. You work for Drago."

Her eyebrow arched. "Why you think that?"

"You picked me up at the airport." He rubbed a hand down his face.

"So, what."

"Well, weren't you picking me up to bring me to meet Drago?"

"I work for who I work for. Now, you are going to help us. You have no choice." Her voice grew frigid.

"What do you mean, I have no choice?" He was starting to get annoyed now.

"Look, Dan, you have no choice in the matter. You must help us. Don't ask me to tell you the consequences."

A cold, prickly feeling went up to Dan's spine as he thought of Drago, the near-dead girl with the punctured neck, and had a feeling whoever Red's employer was didn't negotiate.

Maybe she's with the Army or an influential political leader. He mulled around in his head what to do next, but the stare from Red was convincing enough to not question.

"Dan, you have to know that you need to play with us. As far as you and your firm are concerned, we are now your client. Your firm can check us out. It will make sense. We need to know where you went last night. These coins are from a lost treasure from the Qing Dynasty. This is a fabled treasure

under the Forbidden City. You were underground last night, weren't you?"

"Yes." The muscles in Dan's neck tightened. He'd been around plenty of powerful women, but there was something about Red that made him feel as if he was an ant about to be stepped on.

"So, Dan, you tell us where you went last night." Red's dark eyes bore into him merely six inches away.

Dan told Red the entire story about the KTV place, waking up, and being lost in the tunnels. He said that Drago had given him the coin as a gift, but that was all. He left out the part about the gold bullion. His instincts told him to keep that hidden for now.

Red kept her face free of emotion. She kept asking questions and told Dan stories about tunnels under Beijing--how they were built as air raid nuclear fallout shelters during the 60s. Red told him about other older tunnels that people were afraid to open due to superstition. Archaeologists from Beijing University found more tunnels that went to and from the Forbidden City. Under the East side of the Forbidden City were caskets from around the end of the Qing Dynasty. They opened the coffins and found two perfectly preserved women there-- two women of Manchu or Mongolian origin, probably royalty. But when they went back with the proper equipment to remove them, the bodies were gone.

Red tried to get Dan to open and react to various parts of the story.

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"Corporal Ruiz, Sergeant Smith was killed last night. His body was crushed and mutilated. The police saw you there. What happened?"

Tony's head throbbed, and every muscle and bone in his body felt as if it'd been through a ringer. None of the images in his head were making sense. Two tough Marines were tossed around by some old guy in a suit, a guy who is a vicious blood-sucking psycho.

"It was an old man," he mumbled, rubbing in-between his eyes.

Tony physically recovered from the fight in the park, except for some nasty bruises from the fall. In hundreds of fights, he had never met anyone that could hit like that--and this from an old man.

The officers in the detachment treated him with less respect, especially the Army officers like Mike. He knew they thought he was delusional and weak, and whenever around them, he felt heat climbing up his face.

Rob's death was a big hit to the Unit, and the whole Corps and State department were up in arms. The worst was the reaction from Gunny and other soldiers. The next day a memo came out.

No more bars, no more leaves, no more anything until they figured out what was going on. All the other Marines were livid and blamed Tony.

Gunny stood before him. "Tell us what went wrong."

Tony said, "We did nothing wrong. We came to the aid of a stranger. The woman was being attacked, and the corporal stepped in to save her. The guy, who killed Rob, was abnormal, like some sort of supervillain. He tossed Rob around like he was a bag of air. Now he's dead, and everyone thinks I'm a nut case." Tony's hands shook, his head still throbbing.

"Besides the obvious problems, Ambassador Wilson is coming down hard on all of us." Gunny paced back and forth. "Are you sure that's what happened, Tony?"

"Yes, I swear to God." Tony ran his fingers through his hair.

Ambassador Wilson was extremely anxious about the situation and had been getting calls from all directions--China's Foreign Ministry, The US State Department, and the Vice President. The Ambassador was a good friend of the President. He had studied in China for a few years, was fluent in Chinese, and was a real scholar. He never spent a day in the military and looked on the Marines as a necessity to be tolerated, certainly not a group that needed to cause him trouble.

Tony's mind was a mess. He tried to recall every detail from that night in the park, but all he could feel was a sense of deep fear and shame. His eyes darted to and fro. I couldn't save Rob. The first night I go out, my mentor and best friend are killed, and I get my ass handed to me.

Now not only my boss but the whole establishment has branded me a psycho case. I meet a nice girl here, and she is killed by some horrible old man from Hell. Tony wanted this entire incident to go away. He rubbed his temples in slow circles, trying to get his head to ease up. I just want to get back to work. He waited outside the office for fifteen minutes, then Gunny came out.

Gunny walked with him and told Tony to get back to work, saying he would still do the drill at the Embassy Ball. Tony was an expert at drill and ceremony, and in the past few years, he had won awards and even performed at the 50-yard line before the Army-Navy football game. If he could do this in front of 80,000 people and a broad TV audience, then he could do it at the most significant social event of the year for the Embassy--The Embassy Ball.

"I got it. Easy as breathing air," Tony said.

"Get your head on straight. Don't mess up, or we will all pay."

This is the chance to redeem me a bit. Now, we can start to rehearse and prepare, and it's a great distraction from the nonsense, Tony thought.

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"Dan, what the hell is going on? You missed your meeting, and Drago is calling us hopping mad." Brandel was on the other end of the phone, shouting. It was not smart to piss off Brandel Notron. He was known to wreak havoc on people who crossed him.

"I am sorry, after the dinner, I got knocked out by someone in Drago's group. I..." Dan said.

"You can't carry out a simple task?"

Dan was dumbfounded. He had no idea what to say to the partners. Are they going to fire me? He tried to wrap his mind around the situation, filtering through his thoughts about what had happened. Drago took me out to dinner, and now this happens? Who knocked me out? Didn't Drago see it? Why the hell is he angry at me? Didn't he see me get injured? Is he that callous of a person? The questions in his head left him feeling disoriented.

"Get your act together. Get the papers signed, and come back, and we will handle things," Brandel said.

Letting out a sigh, Dan got off the phone and called Mike for a meeting.

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They met at the Weston near the Embassy and went for a walk outside in the chilly air.

"Mike, I had a miserable night two nights ago. My phone was off, and I ended up in the police station," Dan said.

"Damn, man, how did you get there?" Mike's brow bunched in thought.

"I went out with Drago. What am I dealing with here?"

"What do you mean?" Mike said.

"Something is off about this guy," Dan said.

"There is not much out there about this guy. He's tied into the old money and the World Bank. He is on the board of directors of some big non-governmental organizations. He checks out as a legitimate, big player, but we don't know much about him. His business dealings are hard to pick apart. He is manipulating the USA stock market with some shell companies in the Caribbean. We don't even know his birthplace," Mike said.

"How did he get to own the old Embassy?"

"He simply overbid on the place. Drago was able to work a deal with the local government as part of some land swaps and get his hands on the old US Embassy complex. All we know is that he comes from some family of old money going back hundreds of years, a group, called the Carpathians--mysterious for sure."

Dan pulled out some of the gold coins and started to go through the events of that evening.

"Mike, I've heard some interesting things about these coins. Maybe these can help answer some questions."

Mike observed the two that Dan showed him, took photos of them with his phone, and sent on wechat to his old professor. They had lunch, and twenty minutes later, he got a call.

Mike said, "I can set up a meeting with Professor Xu, my teacher when I studied here. He knows everything there is to know about Modern China history, going back to the Qing Dynasty. Maybe give you some more information. We'll set it up for tomorrow."

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Red was in her China Army uniform, with full colonel insignia was in her office. She had a series of cases on corruption related to drones dropping rotten pig meat with viruses on farms, financial fraud and a virus outbreak in Wuhan.

Her phone rang.

"We have a serious incident and need your expertise. There is a loss of a nuclear device and we need to find it"

The next day, Mike picked Dan up at his hotel, and in the car, they joked about the police station.

On the Northside of Beijing, there was a Tibetan Lamma Temple, one of the most popular tourist spots in Beijing. Down the road from there was an old Confucian Temple and Imperial school, which was a college during the past dynasties for young men to enter the civil service under the old imperial system.

They walked into the old Confucian courtyard. A warehouse stood before them, holding hundreds of six to ten-foot-tall stone tablets, with the names of the graduates of the Imperial College through the centuries.

"This Professor was my favorite when I came," Mike was looking at the 1200-year-old Cyprus tree.

"Well, I wonder how he will know about these coins," Dan walked around, admiring the old granite marble with the names of the graduates of the imperial exam.

"He is the foremost scholar of late Qing Dynasty," Mike came to Dan, "Brilliant mind, knows such details."

Professor Xu was an older man with a small beard and had a little dab of hair on his head. He was able to sit for years here, write fiction, and tell stories. Mike had developed a little friendly relationship and knew that he had expertise with old Chinese money.

"How are you? Long-time no see. Now you are back in an official capacity," he said.

"It's good to see you, Professor Xu. Let me introduce my old friend from the Army, Dan Eggers. Dan was here meeting some people and came across some historical items. I thought you might like to have a look at these."

Dan gave the coins to the professor who looked them over for about five minutes. "These are

fascinating." And he gazed at them for minutes silently.

"Say, where did you found these?" and he looked Dan in the eyes for a long time without blinking.

Dan looked back, and they locked in a gaze, "I was in a hotel, and these came about and ventured into a room," Dan was not giving details.

"Yes, of course, a room," the professor kept eye contact.

"This looks like something. I need to get a book." He went in the back to research, his feet shuffling along the floor.

"Fascinating man," Dan said to Mike.

"Oh yes, he taught me a lot," Mike pulled out his phone and received a wechat message.

"My wife said that your date is set. Ambassador's daughter"

After a few minutes, Xu came back out.

"This coin is from the Qing Dynasty. It is Imperial gold; this is very rare. Where did you get this?" The professor looked at Mike's eye to eye.

"This is extraordinary. Who gave you this?"

Rare? There is a pile of these. I am rich, Dan thought. "From a visit I had with a man Drago." Dan left out some details and was not very good at telling complete lies.

"Drago. Who is this?" the professor said with a tilt of his head.

They both briefed the professor about what they knew about Drago.

Mike said, "Drago is a big player, runs some of the largest companies in the world. He works behind the scenes in the new China World Tower downtown."

The professor went to the backroom.

Mike and Dan found the new information they'd uncovered fascinating but got to talking about the upcoming Embassy Ball the next day.

"It's all on you, buddy. We are trusting you with this pretty, little lady."

"I like how you worry about everything. You know I'm the perfect gentleman," Dan said.

The professor came back out with a confused look. "There is a legend but can't be true." His gnarled fingers clutched some ancient-looking books, covered in a film of dust. He spread them out before Dan and Mike, opening them up.

"That looks familiar," Dan said.

"What do you mean?" said the Professor.

Dan showed the photo of the casket underground, and on it were some Chinese characters.

The professor leaned forward and almost fell into the table. Mike caught him and steadied him.

"Mike, I am wishing you are not playing a joke with me. Is this American prank?"

Mike looked at Dan, and Dan felt his pulse quicken.

"This is unbelievable. If this is true, it is a legendary criminal that comes from the end of the Qing Dynasty. At that time, some bad elements came from Europe and helped to rot away the Manchu Government," the professor said to Mike.

"From Britain?"

"London, with some German origins. Perhaps Eastern Europe." The little professor's face was pale with shock. "Let me see this. Here are some copies of correspondence."

Dan looked at it and lost his breath for a moment. The handwriting in the photo matched the exotic writing Dan had seen in the letters written by Drago, which Dan had read on the airplane and in the hotel.

"Dan, are you OK?"

Dan's stomach lurched, and his face felt flushed instantly.

Professor Xu said, "There is some speculation that some of this legend could be based on truth. For years, we assumed this story was just propaganda to stir up xenophobia during the Boxer rebellion. If this photograph is real, then it is unbelievable. There was a legend of a demonic person from Europe who fed off children. He supposedly came to China about 130 years ago during the decline of the Qing

Dynasty and helped the Empress Dowager to build her power. He fed off the population, supported the power structure, and built a fortune. Legend says that he was a ruthless soldier who fought against the foreign invaders and assisted in the June 1900 massacre of the foreign diplomats and their families in Beijing. It is rumored that he feeds on the blood of the living and that if it was enemy flesh, then his allies did not care or notice. The police have hushed up many gruesome deaths around the Embassy district, and those of us who are aware of the legend wondered if it was not this same ancient evil."

Dan could tell the Professor was disturbed.

"Legend has it that he can change shape to any number of animals and see in the dark. But he can change way only at certain times of day, for example, at sunrise, sunset, the exact solar noon, and midnight. He makes neither shadow nor reflection. He likes to play games with his prey and loves to use the law and distort language to cover his evil. When the sun rises, he loses his power. I believe in the West, you have some similar legends, for the creature known as a vampire--the Dracula. We know this monster as DEGULA." Guang Xu shuddered.

"This monster from the West is pure evil. With all the desperate souls entering Beijing alone--whether unwanted children, itinerant workers, or young prostitutes--he has a selection of easy meals that no one cares about or protects."

"Dan, hard to believe such evil exists in physical form. Do you think this could be Drago?" Mike said, looking skeptical.

Dan's mind flashed to the shadow, launching over him and the girl with the twin puncture marks on her neck. "I don't know."

The professor looked at Dan, "Who are you?"

Dan sat silent and said, "well, I am Dan." His face was red, and he gave a nervous laugh.

"I know you from somewhere. I swear I do", the Professor leaned back.

"You found a lot more than these coins, didn't you."

Dan shifted in his seat. He looked at Mike with some shock.

"This woman you met, tell me about her."

Dan stuttered, "Well, she first saw me at the airport."

"At the airport? Why did she meet you there?"

Dan explained the reception on the runway, and he mentioned, "... and it is odd she had a bird on her shoulder."

"A bird?" The Professor spilled tea.

"Yes, and she she had the bird when she found me in the police station also."

"So, she is following you."

"More like stalking" Dan tried to make a joke, but even he could not laugh.

Professor Xu shifted in his set, and he sat back. "Dan, where are you from? Where were you born?"

Dan looked at Mike.

Mike put his hand on Dan's arm and said, "Dan, I never asked you and am curious."

Dan said, "I can't remember any time before the injury in Iraq and waking in the hospital."

"Wait, you remember Iraq, how about before that time?"

"Don't remember anything."

Professor Xu rubbed his chin and sat for a while. "Oh Dan, you have a chaotic life." And Professor Xu leaned forward to Dan, "This woman. Does she know you?"

"I don't know, I mean, we never met before. Maybe she has a file on me."

"No, Dan, do you ever have any dreams about old China?"

".... oh maybe. Just strange dreams."

"Dan, this woman. What does she look like?" the Professor stood, "Give me some time." He walked to the museum.

"Oh, wow, " Dan looked at Mike. "This guy is intense."

Mike put his leg up on the chair, "He likes to ask a lot of questions. He is not like this. He is very relaxed. But this is something I have never seen in him."

Dan looked out into the courtyard.

"Well, you got yourself into a bit of an adventure, Dan" Mike was smiling and looked at Dan.

The professor returned with a folder and sat, "Have a look at this photo," and he pulled an old black and white photo and put it on the table.

"That's her!" Dan said without thinking.

Professor Xu shook and grabbed the table to steady himself.

Mike stood and reached over to hold his arm. "Professor, are you fine?"

"Yes, Mike, yes."

"Is something wrong?"

"No, I need to rest." Professor Xu spoke slowly.

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Red met the General that morning.

"Red, urgent priority. Two weeks ago, we lost a significant bomb that can blow up part of a city. Looks like an inside job. An extensive countrywide search throughout the nation is seeking the weapon but there are many decoys. The Army thought they found the bomb in the Western Province, but it was a false alarm. We need you to find this bomb and we do not have much to go on. Here is the file."

Red was reading the summary as she made tea in her office. She moved to her desk and saw an envelope with a wax seal, a unique wax seal of Emperor Guang Xu. Red slowly picked up the envelope and examined the seal. She stumbled with dizziness and had flashbacks of old Beijing on the grounds of the Forbidden City and walking around the Opera House.

She sat stunned and stared at the seal. Her hand shook and she spilled the tea. She looked at the seal and reflected on her time with the Emperor in his private room, talking over tea.

She opened the letter, and a coin fell out and onto her desk - the same coin Dan gave to the Professor and the same engravings as Dan gave to her.

Zhenfei, My Dear,

Come to the old Imperial School, and I will see you there.

Yours always,

Professor Guang Xu

The next day, Red arrived at the old Imperial School and walked among the cypress trees and old classrooms.

"Ah, Zhenfei," and Professor Xu smiled broadly.

Red stopped, stood still and looked at him.

"You are not the only one to make it this far." And Professor Guang Xu smiled.

Red said, "I thought I felt your presence over the years."

"You remember the time when I went to Xi'an?" Guang Xu said.

"Yes, I tried to find you" and Red cried. "Your aunt rounded up the entire throng of eunuchs and concubines, and the vampires were there", Red sat, and tears came forth.

"We auntie was not that bad. She meant well. " The professor touched her cheek. "Sometimes the evil is so powerful, and most cannot resist"

"I failed", Red said.

"That was a long time ago and look at us now. Please, some tea, like old times," and Professor Xu smiled like a child.

"She was evil, and that monster and the eunuchs killed me."

"And you were thrown in the well, but you have that particular purpose."

"Oh, nonsense."

"Red, you are bitter about the past. You are better than that. Auntie was a woman of the time and place of who she was, and she did nothing strange given her situation. Forgive her. It is over. Here we are now."

Red moved to the table and sat and accepted the tea.

"Here, let me pour for you," Professor Xu said.

"Do you remember you rode through the chaos when the country was failing, and we had the Boxers, and the demons stirring trouble and you made peace with the foreigners?"

"Yes," Red was stunned.

"I know, when we returned to Peking, they told me you rode through them, and they loved you so much," the Professor chuckled.

"I didn't know this."

"Yes, Zhenfei, my dear, you taught the children, stirred the wives to love Chinese staff, and everyone loved you". He pulled a chair out for Red.

Red, said nothing, looked up.

"My aunt was so jealous of you. You made her blood boil." Guang Xu laughed.

Red blushed. She remembered the past, and it was more than a dream. It was real.

"Of course, I loved you then," and the Professor poured more tea for Red.

"Well, you were the Emperor. You could have anyone." Red blushed.

"No, No, it's real. I really adored you above all others," and he drank tea and put his hands out wide.

"Sure."

"Zhenfei, you were the one, the only one for me, that's old history. I mention it to let you know."

"Yes, that is history" and Red drank some tea and put it down.

"After that, we made peace with the foreigners, but still, we had intrinsic evil and bureaucrats who turned on their people and only cared for their selfish interests. All those evildoers are dead now. But some evil lives on and has grown."

"Yes", Red remembered the horror and she shook.

"You live. Goodness will win in the end."

"If you count all the family members. you know there are maybe 5000 to 8000 people that are ruining China, and that needs to be extinguished. Really, all of China is suffering under these vampires." The Professor walked to the window. "These demons make the others do their bidding."

"Yes, there is corruption in every government." Red said.

"Your man is here," the Professor said.

"What?" Red looked up.

"That young man from then. Your good friend. From then. The one that took you to Tianjin," he looked at Red.

"Impossible!" Red dropped her cup.

"Ha-ha, your true love!" and Guang Xu clapped.

"You play with me!" Red stood.

"Oh please. You know already. I can see it. It is the one you met at the police station. He told me."

Red stood still, Quiet. She looked away.

"He doesn't know. He is living a life of risk and chaos. His life is a mess. He knows you, but he cannot see through his own turmoil. Well, some men don't have that awareness of true love."

"Heavens!" Red looked back.

The US Embassy Ball in Beijing, called the Marine Corps Ball, occurred each November. The Marine Corps flew in replacements for the Embassy Marines so they could dress in their most impressive uniforms, do some ceremonies, and party.

This was a significant event for Mike also. Military officers from various embassies in Beijing attended, and it was an excellent time to show off uniforms, build relationships, and share gossip. Mike dressed in his formal Army uniform and brought his wife, Molly.

Dan looked like a distinguished gentleman dressed in a formal black tuxedo, which was measured and made in the silk market in less than 24 hours. Dan was having a hard time that day getting the business finished with Drago, and he was developing doubts. Drago would not sign the documents, and the partners in New York were calling twice a day, pushing for updates and success. It was a stressful situation, but this evening would be a day to focus on something else, relax, and enjoy the evening. What could possibly go wrong?

"Dan, you will sit with us." Mike and Molly walked Dan over to a side room where they saw a small group of people, a few Marines, the Marine Commandant, and then through a curtain.

They came to meet the Ambassador and his niece Patty, who was dressed in a lovely dress and was nervous about meeting her blind date, Dan.

Ambassador Wilson asked, "Can you be trusted with my daughter?" and acted as if he had a shotgun. They shook hands and the Ambassador hugged Patty.

Patty and Dan got along well and conversed about simple fundamental issues about China, the USA, the weather, the Embassy Ball, and topics essential to two people who meet the first time under compelling circumstances. They entered the auditorium, had some formal pictures taken, and started to mingle.

Red entered the room alone, dressed formally. Her hair was held high with a hairpin and flowers, such that is showing off her perfect skin. As she walked in, men and women turned to see her radiant eyes, porcelain skin, and a ten-thousand-dollar dress that allowed her to show off stunningly shapely legs. Red walked alone, elegant, poised, and confident. Dan caught her eye, and they nodded to each other, but Dan chose to not move from Patty's side.

A short time later, the premier of China walked in, followed by many other dignitaries.

Dan and Patty sat at the table with Mike, Molly, a Naval Attaché named Doug, and five others. At the head table sat Ambassador Wilson, the Commandant of the Marines, the Premier of China, a few others, and Drago.

"What is he doing here?" Dan felt a wave of shock go over him at the sight of the man.

Doug said, "He is a world leader in oil and international finance. He is tied in tight with the global political system."

"Doug is our expert in international finance", Mike smiled. "Just ask him, he will tell you."

"I met Drago a few days ago," Dan said.

"Tremendous honor. Some believe he is the richest man on Earth. A real global leader doing good for the world while he is rich." Doug said and he rose his arms. "He does great work for hospitals, orphanages, clinics, and he is the main world financial power behind organ transplant, drug research, and DNA technology. A real genius."

Dan said, "Nice to know." He turned to Patty for lighter conversation.

Outside the hall, the Marines were preparing. Five Marines were lined up with flags and rifles. Tony was on the right-side carrying a rifle. Tony had been ready for the night. This would be his redemption. He would show off his skills, then go and have some fun and forget about the horrible last

few days. The music played and Tony marched as he had done hundreds of times and in a very professional manner. He kept his eyes straight and made sure he lined up with the other Marines.

They stopped and started to do an elaborate marching turn, and it was at that moment that Tony saw the one thing that stopped his heart in his chest for a second. The person that killed Rob and almost killed him, Drago was sitting at the head table next to the Commandant of the Marine Corps and the Ambassador. Drago looked right at Tony and smirked. Tony's head started to swim with images, nausea, making his stomach lurch. He fell to his knee and dropped his rifle.

The crowd went "AHHHH," followed by murmurs of shock. The Commandant frowned, the Ambassador covered his eyes, and many people looked away. Drago looked and smiled.

This had never happened to Tony in his entire life. He felt like a child standing before his worst nightmare, unable to run away.

Tony looked up and saw Drago smirk and smile at him. Tony knelt, all eyes on him. Gunny came over, took the rifle, and another Marine carried Tony to the side out of sight.

Tony's night was ruined. He spent the rest of the evening alone outside in the hall. What is wrong with me? Tony wanted to crawl away into a hole somewhere. This was his job, the reason for being in China.

Things got back to normal for the rest of the audience. Dinner was served, Ambassador Wilson gave a dinner speech, and things started to loosen up. Patty was having a friendly conversation with Dan and warming up to him. Dan saw Red talking with various dignitaries and working the room with no man by her side.

The Philippine band started to play cover music from Madonna, Lady Gaga, and people began dancing and mingling. Drago was very social. He had been chatting with many people, and Dan saw he was joking

with the Ambassador. Drago went over to the band as they were completing a set. He picked up a violin and started to play, singing and charming the audience.

After a short time, Patty asked Dan to escort her to the entrance area. As they walked around the corner, they saw the Marine, off to the side. His squad leader was talking with him. Patty went to the ladies' room.

Dan headed into the men's room and was checking his tuxedo and tie. Dan pulled out the locket Mike gave him and opened it to see the small mirror. He was checking himself in the mirror, fixing his tie, and straightening it when he heard:

"I see you like to collect coins."

A ripple of shock went over him. It seemed Drago 's voice came out of thin air. He twirled around and fell against the sink when he saw the man right behind him. Good lord, where did he come from? He looked back to the small mirror and saw no reflection of the man standing behind him. A buzzing sound filled Dan's ears, and a wave of dizziness hit him. Spots swarmed his vision. Could Drago be a vampire, or even Dracula, as the Professor suggested?

"Dan, you mustn't look at places that are private." Drago's face morphed shape. The once black pupils filled with red, and sharp white fangs grew longer. As if shedding a costume, the man's skin turned a sickly white.

Dan's heart hammered in his throat, and he pressed himself up against the wall. Drago turned and left. Dan drew in some deep breaths to try and calm himself.

"Dan!" He heard a scream from Patty. He ran out of the washroom and saw the Mongolian twins, Mei and Kunkun, grabbing and forcing Patty into the stairwell. They giggled and caught Dan's eye, then scowled at him.

Drago was to the left. He turned to Dan and said, "My friend, won't it be fun watching you on

television having to suffer for the loss of the ambassador's lovely niece. Dan, the murderer." He slammed Dan against the wall.

Dan let out a groan, falling back a few steps, tripping and crashing to the floor in a heap. How is he that strong? Dan thought.

Drago followed the Mongolians and Patty into the stairs.

This is all starting to make sense now. The underground tunnel; the office with no windows; Drago refusing to go outside during daylight.

A crushing pain filled his chest as he thought of Patty. What can I do? Should I go get help?

"Dan, Dan, we have to go. We find them." Red grabbed him, forced him nose-to-nose, eyes to eyes. "Dan, you take me now, get up."

To Dan's left was standing Tony, watching. "I'm coming with you. I want a piece of that guy," Tony said.

Dan got to his feet, stumbled and stood there for a moment. "I must get her back." He pushed the button on the locket for Mike to come.

"I'm Tony."

"Dan." They shook hands quickly.

Red jumped down the stairs in one leap. Tony grabbed Dan, and they quickly followed. They came out into the kitchen area of the China World Hotel. Red had already asked where Drago and the women had passed. As they ran along, Red in front, she kept asking several of the staff about Drago, and they pointed. The kitchen was huge and was fully staffed that night.

They ran right through the main preparation area, past six people working on cakes and ice cream, and knocked over one tray of cupcakes. As she ran, Red held out her badge to show them, which put a sense of awe into a few.

Dan was having a hard time keeping up, slipping from the slick floor, and cursing under his breath.

"Got you, man." Tony grabbed his arm, and they hobbled along at times as if they were doing a

three-legged race. They somehow managed to keep up with Red, who was running and stopping to ask people where Drago and the others went. She was reaching the rear of the kitchen, and people there were quite fearful. She grabbed a man and shoved the badge in his face and smacked his right cheek three times. She twisted his ear and shouted in his face. The guy looked stunned to see such a beautiful woman screaming at him. His terror was evident as he told them to follow him.

The man went through a thin opening to the side behind the kitchen. One of the shelves was turned over, and there was a heap of flour on the ground. He pointed below a sign that said, 'Bomb Shelter' in Chinese and said, "There!"

The door was still ajar--another entrance to the underground tunnels. In they went.

The tunnel was fit for rats only, and they all had the creeps within seconds.

"I'm going to die," Tony said.

First in went Red, then Tony helping Dan.

Patty's scream echoed off the walls, followed by the sound of maniacal laughing from the twins.

Dan's gag reflexes kicked in at the smell of mixed sewer, rot, and stench. They had to rely on their phone lights and a miniature flashlight that Tony was able to wear. The dampness of the tunnel reflected enough light to gather their sense of direction.

Red moved forward. They could hear Drago and the twins yelling at each other, with some screams from Patty that left every one of them feeling a bit squeamish.

Dan's body trembled at the thought of the consequences of losing Patty. He was sure that Drago could kill her.

They ran down the tunnels another 500 yards, spotting markers. Red saw one, and she knew where they were located--under the old US Embassy. They turned right, listening for the twins' excited chatter as they went.

Occasionally, they could hear the echo of Drago's voice. Red saw a marker on the wall. "We are below the Vietnam Embassy."

This can't be the same tunnel I was in three nights ago, Dan thought.

"Patty!" Dan's voice bounced off the walls, fearing the worst.

The three stood and listened. They heard the twins in the tunnel to the left and ran that way for 100 yards. Ahead of them was a door with two Mongolian soldiers guarding the entrance.

The twin girls screamed at the soldiers who had their rifles pointed at them. Patty was gone--the twins no longer had her.

"What did they do with her?" Dan's hands curled into fists.

The twins were stuck between Red, Tony, and Dan on one side and the Mongolian soldiers on another. The soldiers pulled out silver crosses and garlic and started to advance on the girls who ran back into the direction of the three.

"What the hell?" Dan saw fear cross over the two girls' faces at the sight of the garlic and crosses. Are they like Drago too?

Tony and Red slipped into the side tunnel looking for Patty.

The twin girls ran toward Dan, their eyes dark and malicious. A long, slender leg launched into the air as Kunkun kicked Dan. Next, Mei slammed him against the wall, a giggle escaping her lips as she did.

The flash of a dagger caught Dan's eye as Mei stabbed at him. A sharp crack slammed against Mei, knocking the knife out of her hand. It clattered to the ground, and Red kicked it away from her.

The two twins exchanged a look and ran around them, racing down the side tunnel.

"Come on, Dan." Red picked him up, brushing off the front of him with her slender fingers. Tony came back, grabbed Dan's shoulder and helped him move.

The Mongolian soldiers came up to them, gave them two small pouches and motioned for them to go back down the tunnel.

Red was in the front, followed by Dan and Tony and they ran down the tunnel about fifty yards and could see an opening ahead. No more than thirty feet were the twins. A hand twisted in Dan's gut as he watched Red and Tony enter the room first. As soon as he stepped inside, he was knocked over by something standing to the side.

An explosion of pain went through Dan's back. He turned to see Raja, holding a club in his hand, a wicked grin on his face.

"Hey!" Tony turned around, but one of the twins reached out and grabbed him.

The club swung through the air, smashing Tony in his upper back, knocking the wind from his lungs.

A figure flew, leaping over Dan. Slender legs kicked Raja straight in the head. The large man reared up and screamed. Blood dripped from the edges of his mouth, and his teeth flashed fangs as he hissed at the three of them. His hands squeezed the club as he turned to Red.

Red stepped with ease as the club struck behind her. Red moved like a dance as she dodged and jumped to the left. Dan and Tony did their best to fight off the twins, doing more dodging than actual fighting. Red faced Raja, her porcelain face, a mask of calm.

Raja leaped at Red, who skipped to the side as if avoiding a slow-moving animal. From her hair, she pulled out a silver hairpin, six inches, and went right for Raja. As he came at her with the club, she ducked down. The man's meaty arms wrapped around her, hugging her in a death-grip.

Dan saw Red stab Raja in the chest, pushing her hairpin in deep. Raja let out a loud gasp, falling back, trying to pull out the pin--which was disguised as a dagger.

Red kicked him in the chest hard, pushing it into his heart further. He fell back with a rumbling

crash, trying to get up. At that time, the twins split--one ran down the tunnel yelling, "Drago! Drago!" The other one came at Tony while Dan was pulling himself up.

Red stomped on Raja and pulled her belt off, putting the end through a buckle and making a large loop. Inside the belt, a strand of unbreakable carbon fiber cut Raja. Red continued to push the silver pin into Raja.

Raja screamed louder than a jet engine, and much more horrid. As Raja pushed up again, Red wrapped the loop around his head and neck, pushing him down on the ground, stomping on his back with her right foot, then pulled on the belt with both hands, jerking it again and again.

Dan watched as she pulled and pulled.

SNAP!

Red flew backward against the wall, the head of Raja soaring up into the air and landing near Dan's feet. The last remaining twin bolted at sight, screaming.

Dark blood spewed from Raja's neck, and the body went limp and started to shrivel up.

Tony and Dan looked at each other and at the same time, said, "Holy shit!" They looked at Red with a new sense of fear and awe. She stood to her feet, wiping off the belt on Raja's shirt. She looked at them with narrowed eyes and said, "Let's go."

My god, what is this woman? Dan's eyes were wide with amazement at what he'd just seen.

Tony said, "Come on." He grabbed him by the arm.

They ran in the direction of the twins but could no longer hear any screams from Patty.

Dan thought, I don't know what's worse--the vampires--or facing my life knowing that Patty's death is on my hands. I'm going to rot in a jail cell for life.

They came up fast on the twins in the tunnel, who were trying to open a door and screaming, "Drago, Drago!" Along with other words in Mongolian.

The twins were trapped. Their eyes flared with madness, a bestial appearance overtaking their faces. They launched at them with distorted screams.

Red fended them off with low kicks and strikes but couldn't keep up with their ferocious speed.

Tony ran after Mei and grabbed her around the neck, but Mei threw him off like he was a small child trying to play piggyback.

Kunkun jumped at Red with her mouth open, screaming, and hissing. Red blocked her left leg, then parried her fist, then leaned back as the head and fangs struck at her.

Dan watched as Red stabbed at her with the hairpin and left a deep cut on her arm. The Mongolian let out a high-pitched wail. Mei yelled ferociously in Mongolian, slammed Tony against the wall, and hit Dan in the face.

Mei fled down the tunnel to the left, cursing and screaming, "Drago!!"

Kunkun hit Dan, knocking him back again with a huff. She avoided Red's kicks, jumping at her, and knocking Red off her feet.

Forcing himself to ignore the pain, Dan ripped open the bag and found a silver cross, rosaries, and some garlic.

"Mei!" Kunkun's scream bounced down the tunnel toward her sister.

Red's kicks came at the twin, stabbing her in the leg with the dagger as she forced her back. More screaming came from the woman, as loud as any beast on the butcher's block.

Mei suddenly jumped into the room, kicking Tony in his lower back. She got up and leaped headfirst at Red, who pushed her to the side like a child. Then in came Drago, furiously seeking vengeance, his eyes red and nearly glowing with power. He pushed Dan aside, his fist flying into Tony's shoulder.

Red stood right in front of him. Drago was furious at this woman who killed Raja and hurt his twins. He lunged at her, a blur of flesh. Red barely dodged his blows. His fists flew as he launched himself at her. Red's body moved like liquid as she jumped, skipped, and hopped backward--a dancer who knew every movement. She was suddenly behind Drago.

Red's hands were empty, and for the first time, Dan saw a fearful look cross her eyes. Drago grabbed a pole and threw it at her with such force that it smashed into the wall, shattering fragments around the room and sticking out of the wall. Red's chest rose and fell quickly as she tried to catch her breath. She threw a helpless glance toward Dan. Her feet were suddenly off the ground, and she used the pole to vault over to the other side of the room.

For a moment, Dan could see she was overcome with disbelief and fear of how to handle the situation. Drago's body flew as he grabbed her arm. He was about to throw her in the air.

"Help me!" Red screamed.

Dan lunged, stabbing Drago in the back with a metal construction rod. Drago's back twisted in pain as he let out a scream. He turned toward Dan and dropped Red to the ground.

"Damn you, lawyers. You all should die."

"You first, you Drago, blood-sucking leech!"

Dan's words shocked him for a moment. He walked over to Dan and Tony, changing form as he did. The room was suddenly lit up with a dark red glow, as Drago's eyes transformed. His arms began to crack and morph, growing out into large bat-like wings. His clothes shredded into rags.

"Oh my god!" Dan trembled, wondering if he was in the middle of a horror film. He pulled out some garlic cloves, stuffed them all in his mouth, and then spit them out at the monster.

Red yelled: DEGULA!!

Degula's face paled in shock but soon was followed by a twisted look of anger. Its right arm smacked Dan across the floor.

Now the creature went after Dan, his red eyes glowing with glee. From behind, Tony kicked Drago's knee.

With a cat-like scream, Mei ran at Tony, striking him in the ribs. Degula leaped to the ceiling, clinging there like a bat, then jumped down on Tony with a screech of anger. Tony crashed onto the floor, as the creature stomped on his chest.

Red leaped to help him, but Kunkun slapped her back, and Mei struck at Dan. Degula's heavy foot stomped again and crushed Tony's skull, killing him instantly.

"No!" Dan screamed, and Mei smacked him across the face, knocking him down again. He thought: Oh my god, we are all going to die!

Red pulled out a silver cross and jumped in front of the monster, her eyes narrowing with determination. Dan held out his rosary, praying under his breath.

A low hiss came out of Degula's mouth as he moved back with jerky movements. The twins hovered to its left, their eyes darting to the cross and rosary with skittish movements.

"Dan, you are a traitor. I will come after you and your kindred. You are my enemy forever."

Dan held the cross and garlic, his eyes boring into the three monsters before him. Degula was hissing, looking furious.

Red suddenly had her silver hairpin dagger and made a noose with the belt. She looked at Degula and said, "I will kill you and feed you to the rats."

Degula let out a scream of pure hatred, lunging himself at her. Red moved faster than anyone Dan had ever seen, cutting the monster's arm muscle and tendons. She faced Drago down with a glare that would scare any man. "Demon, come and die!"

They heard a large group of people behind them, lights getting brighter and brighter. Police, Army?

Now Degula was trapped here and doomed to his fate. 'Drago' exposed as Degula.

Degula reached into its belt and pulled out a device and as the monster squeezed, an earth-rattling boom filled the room. The wall on the far side crumbled, spewing dust into the air. Degula leaped forward, but before it could go far, Red stabbed its side with the silver dagger. Its deafening scream nearly shattered Dan's ears.

Degula ran down the tunnel while Dan and Red chased after it, chests heaving. The tunnels started to tremor, a low rumble shaking the walls.

Dan's fingers grabbed Red and pulled her backward. Rubble crashed to the ground where she had stood before.

"Damn it!" Rocks far too heavy to lift now blocked the pathway. Drago had escaped.

Coughs racked both of their bodies as dust got in their lungs.

They made their way back into the room, Dan's mind a twisted mess of anguish, fear, and anger at the monster vampire's escape. His eyes rested on Tony lying dead before him.

At that point, soldiers from the People's Liberation Army burst into the room with flashlights. Red ordered some of them to go here, go there.

Three minutes later, five Marines entered with Mike.

They went to Dan and found Tony's body, crushed.

One of the Chinese soldiers called out, "Here."

Mike came over to Dan. "What the hell. What is all this, and where is Patty?"

"If you only knew." Dan looked around, "Red, where are you?" The Chinese soldiers put in place three guards, and the rest left.

In came two more Americans in suits. Mike was in the corner, and four Marines were taking care of Tony, and three Chinese soldiers stood guard.

"Dan, let's go back and sort this out," Mike said.

Red was gone. "Red, Red, Red!" Dan continued to search for her, but Red was gone.

BOOK FOUR

死

Degula, with all its power, wealth in trillions, network of millions, control over thousands of companies around the globe, was exposed for the first time in many years.

"Get Central television, banks, oil, Army, Government, Party, Finance, everyone!"

"Yes sir."

"We need to find these people and remove them!"

"Find that woman, Red, and kill her."

"She is a threat. Do everything."

Instructions went to the military, media, and police to track them down. CCTV will destroy their reputation. Degula placed calls personally to the highest leaders he knew.

"How much money will it take for you to expose powerful corruption?"

"We don't take money for that request." The Minister said.

"Ten billion Swiss francs, today!"

"We will take that money for that National Security requirement." The Minister replied. "Swiss account it is."

The monster's rage continued.

<>

Red meditated and focused on her body and the energy around her. She cured herself with herbs, self-acupuncture and massage.

Red looked down at the letters and thought of the night and the evil Degula. Her hands were shaking, and the teapot spilled. Why was the world so cruel? How could this king of vampires be so powerful, and wicked and control so much in society and government?

The commander of her division, an Army General entered the room, "Red, we cannot find the criminals, and the Ambassador's daughter is gone. We are looking."

On CCTV:

"Criminals are on the run. Bring them to justice!"

CCTV showed photos of Red and Dan: "Tricked the country!"

"Member of a secret cult!"

"Find them, bring them to the authorities!"

"We will find her."

"But she is heavily protected. This is not easy."

Red said, "You know the cases I am dealing with. It looks like we hit an extremely powerful group."

"Yes, and you kicked something extremely powerful that can control the media," the General said. "You got in a lot of trouble; Stay here and we will hope they do not come."

Red said and gave the General hot tea. "There is some data that says the bomb may be in Shanghai."

"That hidden power is going to start a civil war." The General said.

Red knew the trouble came from Degula. "Maybe worse."

<>

Mike arrived at his office at the US Embassy. Marines were quiet, and no talk at all about the previous night's ceremonies. Mike said hello to his secretary, and she looked down, with no answer. The coffee was wicked bad. Everything was bad. Dan would not answer his calls. What is going to happen? Where is Patty? Damn this Dan. Who is Dan anyway?

The Navy attaché came to Mike, "Half-hour, Ambassador's office."

Before he finished his coffee, Doug pulled on Mike's shoulder.

Ambassador Wilson stood and stomped toward Mike, "This is your friend!! Find my daughter!! He pulled a knife from his drawer and raised it to strike Mike.

"Sir, please," one Marine pulled Mike back and Doug stood between Mike and Ambassador Wilson.

"Find him now!"

Doug brought Mike out. "He is under a lot of stress. The Vice President is coming, and now his daughter is missing or dead."

Mike shook, "My God, he has lost his mind. "What is going on? Call off the visit."

Doug poured coffee, "No, we warned the White House, and the Vice President insists on coming. It will lose face for both sides."

"We can reschedule."

"No, now is the time. The trade war and security issues."

Mike was quiet.

Doug said, "We must track this Dan down. And find out what is going on here with this message to his phone. What does that message mean? It haunts me."

Mike said, "We have elevated traffic that something is going to happen, financial markets are all over the place, and our artificial intelligence systems point to something big."

Mike made communications and tracking arrangements and left with a team of three Marines.

<>

Dan was drinking coffee at the International Club in the Jianguomen area. He touched his ribs still hurting from the fights and the chaos.

Dan's phone rang. It was from Mike.

"Dan, we need to meet," Mike spoke softly.

"Sure Mike, I am trying to find Patty."

"Dan, check in at the Grand Hyatt Hotel and we meet there in one hour." Mike ended the call.

Dan put his face into his hands.

As chance would have it, Teresa was in the coffee shop next to Dan. She gave him a sweet smile and extra attention. "Did you have a nice stay in Beijing?"

"It was interesting," Dan said, grimacing.

"Interesting doesn't even begin to describe it!"

"Did you visit the Great Wall and Forbidden City?"

"No." He said softly. The exhaustion with the whole ordeal was catching up to him.

"You spent a week in Beijing and didn't have time to see the Great Wall? Ah, you have not experienced Beijing if you have not seen the Great Wall and Forbidden City."

"Yes, too busy with work."

"Oh, you had a boring week," Teresa laughed.

"All work and no play. I will be your tour guide next time."

Dan smiled at her back. "Next time, I will not work so hard, and we can visit together."

"Let's take a selfie," and Teresa sat to Dan's left and snapped a photo.

"Sent to your wechat," Teresa kissed Dan on the cheek and left.

Dan checked the photo and started flipping through other photos from the past week. As he scrolled in his album, he came across the pictures from the night tunnel, faint images of the gold. Then he swiped to the photo when he had reached up

and pointed the phone down into the open casket.
Dan's heart skipped a beat, and he screamed, "OH MY
GOD!"

<>

Dan walked slowly to the reception of the Grand Hyatt Hotel near Wangfujing. "Sir, your card is rejected," the hotel clerk said.

Dan said, "that is odd, try this" He tried all his other cards, and all were rejected. Dan walked out of the front and was looking at ctrip.com for another hotel.

"Sir, come this way," a security person grabbed Dan.

Three men threw a net over Dan. Dan kicked one man while another tasered Dan in his lower back. Two large men followed, they threw a cloth bag over his head, pushed him into a van, and sped away.

Dan woke up in a cold room with no windows. His hands were bound by wire cutting into his wrists. Two men came into the room, pulled Dan and unbound his wrists.

Brandel Notron spoke on the video screen. "You look like you have been through a war. We have a report from the embassy, very troubling."

"I saw it with my own eyes. I saw Degula sucking blood." Dan's head throbbed.

"Dan, you are clearly in need of mental help and legal counsel. We heard you have strange dreams from your war injuries."

Dan tried to stand but the two thugs held him sitting.

Dan felt a major headache getting stronger.

"Dan, we see on CCTV you are in a lot of trouble. What did you do?"

"Nothing."

"Look, you have a job to do, and we will get you out of there. You need to go to the China World Tower penthouse. Our driver will send you now. Degula has a private jet and will get you out of the country."

The door burst open and four men entered. They grabbed Dan, threw a cloth around his mouth and

eyes, rushed him down some stairs and into a large SUV.

<>

The Weston Hotel at the third ring road would hold the ceremony of the Prime Minister of China and the President of the USA in a few days. There, an economic treaty would be signed as well as lowering the tension that had grown recently between the two countries. The stock markets of China and the USA rose fifty percent with the prospects of better cooperation. Security was very tight, and only a military unit could enter the area.

That day, the air conditioning unit was damaged. At 2 am, a van arrived with equipment. Around the corner, the guards were away, counting their new millions renminbi in cash. Two levels down the van stopped and four men stepped out.

"Here," the leader opened the truck door and as the lift pulled down the device. As they moved the bomb off the truck with a portable lift, one man on the right side slipped

"This thing will destroy five buildings and vaporize us." The leader said pulling the technician back. "You are shaking." The leader moved the bomb next to the elevator shafts and central support of the Weston Hotel.

The leader set the trigger for the exact time when the leaders of the USA and China would hold their reception ceremony. He called Degula, "The air conditioner is fixed."

"And the other issue?" Degula asked

"We cut the girl and took one of her kidneys."

"Did you sedate her?"

"Yes, but she is still in pain."

"Ok, send a photo of the girl and bring the kidney on ice to the penthouse. I have dinner with her father tomorrow." Degula leaned back and was pleased.

<>

Ambassador Wilson arrived at Degula's private penthouse restaurant at the China World Tower. Giant jade statues, exquisite paintings, and treasures from the Qing Dynasty greeted his arrival.

The guards frisked Ambassador Wilson.

"Impressive restaurant here," Wilson said.

"Thank you, it is a work in progress. We hope it can be better," Degula was wearing his Ottoman garments and charmed, "Thank you for your hospitality at the Ball."

"Yes, of course," and Wilson was in a daze. He said in a nervous voice, "Can you really help us to find my daughter Patty?"

"Oh yes, wonderful news. We found your daughter, and she is very near. I think you will be with her very soon."

"Oh, thank you so much, I am relieved." He relaxed.

"I am sorry we cannot be at the upcoming reception for the Vice President. We have some pressing and urgent troubles to monitor," Degula sat.

"Of course, we expect a time of great peace between the USA and China," Ambassador Wilson smiled for the first time.

"Yes, relations will certainly move to a new level of understanding. Here is a great dish, we have kidney, sautéed from one of our most exquisite animals. We slaughter only one per year and take all resources and time imaginable to make sure the animals are well fed and slaughtered in the most careful way." Degula lit a cigar.

"Do you know where she is?" Wilson tugged his collar and put his hands together in a tight fist, shaking.

Degula showed a photo of Patty. "Our security found a photo of your daughter. You can see she is not happy, but she is still alive, and we think we

can find the location. Let me ask for some proof. Excuse me, Ambassador." Degula walked over to the concierge and said. "Bring a new cigar"

"You can see here, the timestamp on the photo is yesterday."

"Oh wonderful. Anything you need, let me know!" Wilson said.

"Yes, very near and soon you will be with her." Degula smiled. "Indeed. Let's have some kidney." Degula cut Patty's kidney in a thin slice and gave it to Ambassador Wilson.

"Tastes odd," Wilson said.

"Oh, I think it is delicious," Degula licked its lips, "Here try this sauce, has eye mixed with the brain of that wonderful animal, praise to God."

<>

"Sorry for the rough treatment, buddy," Mike said. His team of Marines was nearby and out of sight. They sat in a hidden corner in the back patio overlooking the canal.

"I was just kidnapped by my own boss." Dan put his face into his hands.

"Ha, so we saved you," Mike laughed.

Dan said, "Mike, I don't know where Patty is."

"Yes Dan, we have people looking for her." Mike leaned forward. "Ok, well, you have bigger things to worry about."

Dan said, "How is that possible?"

"Your firm is causing massive fraud. Listen this is a trillion dollars meltdown possibility and massive transfer of wealth from Americans to China, because of your firm doing some bad things with the financial markets."

"They tazed me, threw a bag over my head" Dan looked around. "I need a beer."

"Me too," Mike ordered. "Your firm took what Enron did and put it backwards. Enron hid their debt. These large Chinese companies listed in the USA hide their assets."

Dan said, "That can't be, that sounds illegal."

Mike looked at him, "It is a flaw in the system. So, the USA listed company has nothing of an actual company and only has a simple paper contract registered in the British Virgin Islands."

Dan looked at Mike, "Hard to believe my company would do that. That is the legal department, I am not a lawyer."

"Buddy, you are in big trouble with this. You have finance credentials."

The beer arrived and Dan drank it in ten seconds.

"Slow down. Tycoon you are working with, the guy sitting with the Ambassador."

"Degula,"

"No."

"Oh Drago, his real name is Degula." Dan ordered a double whiskey.

"Yes, that one. Drago has control over all these companies through anonymous fronts. Last week, they bet against their own USA listed firms but not against their companies as listed in China. We see thousands of front companies in the USA and this is traced back to your company and Degula, rather Drago's companies here."

"That's legal," Dan said.

"They cornered the entire worldwide stock markets through our thousands of accounts and companies, and gamble there will be a big disaster, or shock."

The whiskey came for Dan. "You are exaggerating." Dan downed the whiskey in one second. "How can it be legal if nobody can make claims on the assets in China?"

"Yes, it is, and the system in the USA makes this it simple to grab money from the trusting investors, and it is now illegal in China, so you are putting your money into a money pit, and there is nothing you can do about it."

"I don't believe it," Dan said.

"Let's get out of here," Mike walked inside to pay the bill.

A massive wind came suddenly, and all chairs and canopies were knocked about. A large eagle grabbed Dan by the shoulders and flew away.

<>

In the Penthouse office, Degula and his advisors along with senior vampires gathered for the trades.

The vampire said, "China's Supreme Court and Ministry have outlawed these Chinese Variable Interest Entities on the US stock exchange, and simply marked the companies to the real value based on the paper contract, and these one hundred plus companies are now worthless. Over one trillion dollars in assets are gone."

Notron said, "China has outlawed many of their stocks listed in the USA and the stock market will crash. Our bets against the market are brilliant. Congratulations Degula."

"Thank you." Degula smiled.

<>

The eagle carried Dan to the roof of Red's building. "We meet again." Red helped Dan land and adjusted his jacket.

Dan was shaking, "What just happened?" He could see the walls of the Forbidden City and now it was lit up Red from the setting sun.

Red shook Dan, "I need your help. Your company in the USA are working with that monster Degula. There is a massive financial crime we have discovered."

Dan looked at Red. "Why do I keep seeing you?"

Red stood still and her eyes watered. She had a photo of the city during the Boxer Rebellion. "Do you know this person; can you remember anything?"

Dan looked at Red. "It is my dreams!"

"What do you remember from your childhood?"

"No memories, I don't know because of a terrible accident in Iraq."

"But how did you get to Iraq? Who sent you there?"

"I don't remember anything before that." Dan put his arms around his body

"Can you remember the Forbidden City? Have you ever had any memories or dreams of a palace and a young girl, or anything of that sort?"

Armored cars drove up to the building outside. Red looked down and could see Army and security stepping out and walking into the building below. Red went below to find the General.

Dan panicked, and thought he could fix the situation. He will go to see Degula and set up a call with Brandel Notron and fix everything.

Dan found a fire escape and raced down the stairs and slipped through a walkway to the street

behind the building. Fireworks were exploding as night started of the Lantern Festival.

Dan stopped a taxi and they arrived at the China Global Tower. Dan entered the building and it was dead quiet in the Lobby. Dan went to the elevator, and as he waited, two tall men, broad cheekbones, stone-cold eyes came from behind and joined. As the doors open, two more men, dressed in black and step out and grab Dan, the two men behind push him forward.

The two men held Dan's arm, and the elevator has no buttons or floors. It had one stop and that was Degula's penthouse.

The door opened, Dan saw two tall men in suits, and behind them on the screen was Dan's boss, Brandel Notron. "Welcome back."

"Welcome Mr. Dan", said Degula.

Red felt Dan's distress and she shuttered. She looked out the window of her office and saw Army vehicles surround the building. Soldiers were moving into the building.

The noise below stopped. Red saw the Army no longer moving outside.

The door opened and Professor Guang Xu was there, as a young Emperor Guang Xu in his yellow robe. "Zhenfei."

Red fell to her knees, lost her balance. "I can't do it." She looked down. "It is too much. I will fail."

"No, this is only you that can do it. You have the power. We need you. Come here and let me..." The Professor, Guang Xu put his hand to her face. "Win this battle for China and drive the evil away. Release me from this world. My time is done."

She moved to a seat, sat there, stunned. "How could I take on the world"? I failed before."

"Back then, you were young. Trust your power." Guang Xu sat next to her. She looked down.

Soldiers were moving again and coming up the stairs.

"Red, I cannot hold off the soldiers." Guang Xu said.

"Yes," Red laughed, "I remember. But it is not the soldiers that made the trouble, it was the eunuch bureaucrats."

"These Party bureaucrats have simple minds, simple pleasures, and very predictable - only care of money and pleasure. Working with the bureaucrats was easier 120 years ago than it is today." Xu laughed. "Back then we took care of the pleasure part before they served near the palace."

Red blushed, "They killed me." She looked at Guang Xu

"Of course," and Guang Xu laughed. "Come," they walked up the stairs to the roof.

The air was cool and crisp, the moon was full and bright, no clouds in the sky. They could see over Tiananmen, the Forbidden City walls and palaces to their side.

Guang Xu said. "Today is the Lantern Festival. Forgiveness, peace, reconciliation. Red, you are the one, and this is it. You and only you now. You will succeed. You go get your man. He is in the grasp of evil and dying now."

"I thought so. I feel his pain," Red looked at Guang Xu, and tears fell down her cheeks.

"Zhenfei, my Dear, you need to kill the one who has allowed this to continue."

"You represent all of China, all the ancestors of every person in China, all Chinese no matter where they live. Ancestors all call out to you, and you can save China." Guang Xu touched her neck.

"There is one above him, a spirit that is driving all this. The professor said.

"Yes, I know." Red looked up and stepped back. "Not him!"

"Ha, Zhenfei, you are more powerful than that one!"

"It is impossible." Red looked down.

"It will come to you, and you will know when!" Guang Xu walked to the window to check the soldiers outside.

"You know nothing can progress until that one above the demon is taken out."

She looked down.

"Red, you must get to the scourge, you must confront, no matter the Earth shakes with brutal violence, you must take out the demon!"

Red said, "You called me Red." And she touched Guang Xu. "I will do this, then I am finished with this place. I want to go home."

"I am also done with this world for now and will go to the other side." Guang Xu grabbed both of

Red's hands. "I cannot help. Red, save China from the evil forces."

Red stood still and said, "I will do this."

Guang Xu places palms against hers and said, "Push back."

They push against each other, and the energy was balanced. The negative fields flew to the sides, pushed and created a disturbance. Then Guang Xu placed his palms down and pushed the air around and a great blue glow developed around both. "The time has come."

Guang Xu whirled the force around Red and transfer energy.

Red stood and face fixed closed eyes and sang.

The wind whipped around her, and she lifted off the ground and outstretched arms, and the glow, and hair, and gleam in the eyes, and flashes grew.

The Emperor raised hands more and she lifted from the ground in the whirlwind, and he pushed more energy to her and then she came down and stomped on the earth and shook the earth and building.

Red raised her head and eyes, fixed and total confidence.

The Emperor fell to his hands and knees. He looked up, barren, and looking his true age. "My time is done."

Red lifted him and lay him on cushions and caressed his hair.

He looked up, "My only one."

She kissed his forehead, and he said, "Little Red, China needs you. End the evil."

Guang Xu disappeared.

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"Welcome, my friend, we have been expecting you. Our friends in New York have said you need some help to leave." Degula smiled.

Dan pulled away from the guards.

"Dan, come and talk to Mr. Notron at your firm. They are quite interested in what you have been doing, and I do have the papers where to sign, and we will get on our way."

"Yes, give me Patty." Dan said.

"Of course, " The vampire brought out Patty, who lay half dead, blood from her sides. Her neck had bite marks, bruises, and her face was white as a ghost, blood on her clothes.

"Delicious," one vampire stood in Dan's face and laughed.

Dan saw Notron and a trader talking with Degula. "Time to transfer the funds. Markets are opening in 30 minutes."

Degula talked inches from Dan's face. "Dan, I am disappointed in you a bit, and it seems you have been trying to trick me." Three vampires entered the room, hissed, and locked the door.

Dan said, "I will take Patty, now."

"Oh, Dan, you know too much. Frisk him," Degula ordered the vampires.

The scanner found the homing chip embedded by Mike. One vampire pulled a dagger to cut out the chip.

"Dan, you and Patty are going nowhere." Degula grabbed Dan's jaw. "She is delicious, and you are dangerous."

Dan panicked and resisted, but too many vampires held him. Two grabbed his arm, cut it open and pulled out the chip.

Dan screamed and looked at Notron on the screen, hoping for help. Notron looked away.

The vampires had a sword raised to cut off his entire hand.

Degula said, "Not yet."

On the screen Notron said, "Dan. You had a job to do. And you did not get it done."

Dan fell to his knees.

Notron said, "Yes, Degula, we agree." They turn to Dan. "You should have played in your league. You think you can play at this level and do business at this level?" They laughed.

A Vampire Minister came to Degula,

Also, there is a new law that will link all bank accounts in the world to new cryptocurrency and blockchain. All cryptocurrency accounts are transferred from all people in China to our holding company.

"Thank you Minister," Degula hugged the vampire.

Notron said, "Thank you, Mr. Degula, we have the wires and authorizations, and we are putting the trades in line for you."

Degula said to Notron, "In about one hour, the bombs will wipe out the Vice President and start the war."

Everyone smiled.

Everyone except Dan who yelled, "What war?"

"Degula, we expect the stock markets to collapse early tomorrow, and bond markets will collapse later in the day. The USA and Euro Currencies, China will drop and break the banks."

"Our bets against the markets will be worth trillions, and enough to break all rules of the financial system. No less than half the wealth of the world will be transferred with everything collapsing into our accounts." Degula stood and shook the hands of the ministers.

On the screen, Notron said, "Dan, you finished your mission, but you know too much now. What are we going to do with you?"

A vampire yelled, "Kill him" and another vampire swung a large knife, but Degula grabbed the Vampire's arm.

Degula said, "No killing like this."

The vampires hissed and bared their teeth.
Degula laughed, "Eat him alive."

The vampires screamed with delight. Other
vampires celebrated and climbed the walls like a
lizard.

Dan was stabbed in the side and collapsed.

"Yes, my dear friend, you lose everything,"
Degula laughed. "Exterminate him!"

Dan was on his knees, and the vampire came and
bit into his neck and back. One other vampire threw
Dan on the table. They tied him down with ropes.
The vampires cut into his face and started to devour
him as he screamed.

Degula gloated, "You remember, don't you?"

Degula sent over the funds and Dan watched as
the traders on the screen jumped for joy. In a few
minutes the world's finances will be destroyed.

<>

Red stood and sang. She arranged her swords, silver, flash, and laid the wrapped ropes and wires around her silk clothes. Red opened the window and lets the air in along with two eagles.

Red packed powders, packets and pyrotechnics. Red stroked the eagles back. "No more time, this is it."

Red twirled her hair into a knot and put silver daggers through the hair and turned to the eagles, "Are you ready?"

The eagles stood straight, with no movement except to look at Red.

Red walked outside and threw the ropes into the air and twisted it into the air. The Eagles flew, grabbed the lines and pulled Red upward and flew away.

Degula came to Dan and looked very close into his eyes. "Yes, I remember you now. You were the man, friend of the Emperor's Consort Zhenfei, that foolishly tried to keep China in the Dark Ages," Degula laughed.

In his great pain, Dan remembered the time as if he was there in the Palace with Red fighting twenty eunuchs and Degula himself.

The guard threw water on Dan to open his eyes. Dan screamed.

"My best friend Dan," Degula laughed, "everyone knows you started this, and your government is behind all this, and here in China, there will be a firestorm, and the only rely upon will be full war and mayhem and chaos."

Degula turned on the News and spoke to the anchorman. "Here is the enemy of China, who has sought to commit acts of terror." Dan's photo was shown, and the broadcaster repeated it live.

"See Dan, you are the enemy of the people," Degula laughed.

"Dan, you are destroying the world. Because of you, we have planted a bomb in the Weston Hotel and will blow up your President. Here is the camera in the basement of the Weston showing the bomb. Your Vice President is walking into a trap. We will keep you alive to watch the fireworks, ha-ha" Degula, the Vampires and Notron all laughed.

Red arrived at the roof of the Tower. Around her fireworks exploded to celebrate the Lantern Festival. She sensed many vampires nearby and Dan below in distress. Red tied the ropes to hooks. One eagle lifted Red out from the building. Red swung out to tighten the ropes and released herself - the ropes tightened, and Red swung down to the windows and threw explosives. The windows pulverized and fireworks exploded nearby.

Red landed on both feet. She threw energy and light into the room scattering vampires. The two vampires eating Dan were blasted against the wall.

Red pulled two swords and instantly stabbed one vampire in the heart and cut another vampire's head off in one swing. Red threw silver at two vampires on the wall and they threw themselves to the ground screaming. Red threw her hands out, stomped and thrust energy in the penthouse. All windows blew out. The 33-meter Cypress table cracked in half. The building shook, wind swept in and fireworks outside blasted. All the other vampires ran out the room or jumped out the edges of the building.

Red felt Dan's presence and saw him near death, bound to a table and half his face ripped off.

"Dan, Dan," Red cried. She pushed her arms tight against his wounds. She pulled out medicine and pushed acupuncture needles into Dan's face and neck. She cut her left and right arms and pressed her blood onto Dan's gash on his face. Red pressed on his head, to stop the bleeding. Dan's skin started to return, and his worst wounds closed immediately.

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"All Virus controlled DNA and blood cryptocurrencies are transferred, and all are under our control." The New York trader said.

"You fool! What is 'Our'! These are under MY control!" Degula roared.

"Of course, now the options to destroy the markets," the traders said.

At that moment, Degula heard explosions from the other room, when Red burst through the windows. The traders in New York said. "What is that noise over there?"

Degula screamed, "Get this through already!"

"Just a few minutes, it is processing."

The explosions continued, and the penthouse shook.

The vampire ministers in the room circled around Degula.

The trades kicked in and they announced, "Congratulations Degula, when you get that 'device' to blow, WE will own the entire world." They laughed.

"We?!", Degula screamed. "I, and only I will own the world!! "Take care of this, I have work to do."

Degula threw the set down and stepped over Patty and ran to the other room where it saw Red and screamed.

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Wind swept strong.

"Dan, come alive," Red pleaded. She gave Dan medicine and cut her arm to put her blood on his wounds. Red sang softly to Dan.

Dan awoke and thought it was the Forbidden City from 120 years earlier. He saw a vision of their time fighting in courtyard.

More Vampires returned. They circled and Degula rushed into the room with the financial ministers vampires behind him. "Kill her that evil!!" Degula rushed and threw itself at Red. She stood and threw the monster back with her energy. Degula screamed and expanded into his ugliest form with huge bat wings outward.

One of the pillars started to crumble and the structure of the building was weakening. A fire broke out in the reception area.

The two eagles swept into Degula and ripped flesh from the monster. Red pulled a dagger from her hair and hit Degula in the eye. She jumped at Degula and cut it in the shoulder with her silver dagger. Degula screamed. The eagles continued to rip Degula. Red drew both swords, and slashed Degula in the leg.

Degula threw its bat wings out and flew out the opening and fled. The two eagles followed.

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Red sang to Dan and cut her arm again. Red grabbed Dan and gave him an excellent healthy kiss. "Wake up dear."

Dan started to shake.

Red cut her arm again and put the blood on his wounds until he woke. Dan saw the bright glow of an angel. Red helped Dan to sit.

Dan could barely make a sound but said, "Oh Red! It is you."

"Yes, my love"

"They have a massive bomb at the Weston to kill the President and start a war," Dan fell back from exhaustion.

Red was putting acupuncture on his forehead and chest. "I must finish Degula or it will return in another form and ever more powerful."

Dan grabbed Red with all his strength, "No, this will destroy everything!"

Red placed her hands on his head and kissed his face. Dan's wounds closed and only scars remained.

"Dear, I must go." She massaged his face to heal. "Sorry, I have to kill the beast."

"We must call to stop the bomb." Dan tried to stand but was too weak. "Give me your phone."

"I must go to Tiananmen" Red said. Red sang for both eagles to return.

Dan grabbed her. "No, Red you must stop the bomb!"

"No phone dear."

"Come on and get up", and she pulled Dan up, but his legs were still weak.

The two eagles arrived and perched next to Red. Red moved Dan and said, "Pull on the legs left and right and our friend will take you there.",

"What?! We need a phone!"

"Kneel and put your hands up," and Red turned to the two eagles and sang in an unusual frequency. She grabbed his arms and raised them.

"What are you doing?" Dan looked at her. Then the eagle grabbed Dan's arms at the elbows and lifted him high. Dan screamed. Red laughed and the other eagle grabbed her.

Dan and Red flew together, each under an eagle. Red led the way and they flew north along 3rd ring road, and people below thought it was a hologram or a part of the Lantern Festival fireworks. It created quite a spectacle.

Red and Dan flew over the city, and Red slowed her eagle to ride next to Dan. They looked at each other and smiled.

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The Vice President of the United States arrived at the Weston.

The Vice President met Ambassador Wilson.

"Thank you for the arrangements."

Ambassador Wilson said, "I need to find my daughter."

Vice President turned to Doug and asked, "What is up with that?"

Doug said, "Sir, we will explain later. We made arrangements here."

The Prime Minister of China arrived in Red's Bentley.

Thirty feet below them was a powerful bomb ready to vaporize a whole district of Beijing in a few minutes.

Red and Dan approached. Red changed shape, and put a glow about her, and lit up the sky. The eagle slowed and swung around in the skies, and the radiance and energy made all soldiers shield their eyes and lower their weapons.

Red landed on the Bentley near the entrance of the Weston. The US Secret Service had weapons drawn to fire at them. The Chinese Army pulled the armored vehicle and machine guns drawn.

Dan came behind Red and landed on the US Vice President's car hood.

Dan jumped, "There is a bomb inside!"

The soldiers rushed to Dan.

Red, pushed her hands together and threw light at the building. "Listen!"

Red grabbed the Chinese soldiers. Dan ran to Mike. "There is a bomb inside. Evacuate now!"

"Nonsense!" "Unbelievable!"

"Unbelievable?" Dan said, "We just flew in on eagles and Red did what she did."

Mike said, "Yea, strange event!"

Dan said, "The bomb is on the basement two-level next to the heating plant."

The secret service raced off. Chinese soldiers joined them.

The Prime Minister of China walked to Red, "The legend has returned."

Red said, "I must go."

Degula rose and flew along Chang'An boulevard. The monster perched on the Great Hall of the people, watching fireworks light up the sky. It was pleased. Now will be the collapse of the world and the start of the vast chaos and war between the powers.

While the monster was enjoying its work, Red was carried by the eagle from the Weston Hotel to Tiananmen Square.

Red landed at the Southside of the Square, and thought, "I am getting rid of this curse now and forever." Red stood in Tiananmen Square, looked up at Degula, and ignored the monster.

Degula laughed as Red walked to Mao's mausoleum.

Fireworks increased and there was just one minute until the Weston would explode. Degula thought, "Zhenfei, you will see the towering hotel explode from here and the new world war will start."

Red turned and walked to the mausoleum of Chairman Mao Zedong.

Degula, watched, and moved back and forth. Time passed for the Weston explosion, and Degula walked back and forth on the top of the Great Hall of the People, checking the time and agitated because there was no explosion yet.

Red reached the guards. She pulled energy around her, was bright, lifted and changed appearance. Red glowed, with red and yellow, and she pulled out her sword. The guards cowered in fear.

Degula stood and walked along the roof, watched, and shouted. "Where dare you go!"

Red grabbed the two guards, one hand each, and seduced them. "You are dutiful. You are Chinese, you will allow me in the mausoleum"

Degula flew to the Mausoleum and raised its enormous wings. It raised a colossal wind that startled the guards and they fell.

Red glanced at Degula and then grabbed the guards tighter, "Yes, my friends, you step aside, and I will fix this."

The guards looked at the beast and stood straight. They pulled their rifles and removed the bolts and ready to fire. They looked at Red. The guards shot their rifles at Degula, and it laughed. It walked past, with no effect from the bullets.

Red stood still, "Leave forever, or die!!"

Degula rushed at her, and Red stood still. She placed her hands down and blasted energy. Pillars shook, and the ground trembled. Degula flew back and hard against the crypt, and the top broke into many pieces. Degula stayed on one knee and looked at Red. No motion.

"Step aside." Red pushed her hands together and directed at the door. The structure shook, and the guards stumbled. Red pushed hard, and the doors at the entrance shattered.

Red stepped into the tomb and stood at Mao's mausoleum. It was blocked by a wall and covered with a cloth over the class where Mao lay. Degula rushed into the shrine and ran directly at Red. She jumped, pulled a dart and hit Degula in the cheek, and then Red ran forward and kicked Degula in the chest. Degula jumped to the side and yelled, "Die. How dare you challenge me!!"

Inside, there was nothing but emptiness. At the podium of Chairman Mao was shattered, and no body of Mao.

"Heavens!!" One guard saw no body of Mao in the tomb and fainted. The other guard fired his rifle, but the bullet stopped in the air and fell. He screamed and ran back against the wall and fainted.

Red walked forward and saw a wide opening to the darkness below. With instinct, she jumped to the side.

"You evil!" and Degula jumped at her and missed. It fell into the hole and he was gone into the tunnels below.

Red looked up, shocked at the breaking of the crypt. Loud police sirens from outside were rising.

Then the earth shook, and there was an earthquake from the tunnels and the building cracked, part of the ceiling fell.

Red jumped into the opening and landed in the tunnel below. She lit the ground with light from her hand and found that Degula broke a wall.

Red knelt and prayed to her father and all the people before her for strength, and then she rose and stood tall. She heard Degula racing to the North under Tiananmen toward the Forbidden City.

Red ran and pulled her sword. She threw light before her and raced to the underground and reached a room of gold and gems.

She heard sounds and ran to a cavern. There was Degula perched against a wall. "My dear, you disturbed our friend here."

"This is it, demon!" Red said to Degula. Walking forward was Mao Zedong, animated, alive and moving about the treasure.

"Oh Zhenfei, you are so dramatic," Degula laughed.

Red stood, with sword drawn.

Degula walked to Mao and pulled him to a few feet from Red. "My good friend, I will put this Emperor's consort away for good this time."

Mao looked at Red and said nothing.

Red kept her eyes on Degula. She put her hands down and pushed the energy. The light lit up the tunnels and there was a massive shaking of the earth. The tunnels collapsed around them. Red started to move.

Mao was behind in the collapse. Gone with the vault of gold and treasure-filled in.

Red moved, raised her sword and swiped. Degula swung, and Red leaped to the rear and pulled its arm forward to put the monster off balance. She jumped toward Degula and struck its neck.

Degula roared, the tunnel shook, and it swung its wings with ferocious power scattering the treasure behind them - gold and silver flying about.

Degula rushed Red again, "Die forever!!"

Mao moved forward, grabbed a silver tipped pole and thrust it through Degula's back.

Degula shook and stopped, and looked up, the wings swung.

Red stepped over to help Mao and she thrust the sword through and with energy, ripping Degula's body. She cut Degula's heart out.

Red raised the sword and swung it down and chopped Degula's head off its body.

<>

Stones fell and dust rose, and the earth shook but Red and Mao both stood their ground.

Mao looked at Red.

Red looked back. "Sorry to destroy your mausoleum."

Mao smiled. "I hate that damn thing."

Red smiled, "Yea, I prefer quiet and privacy."

"Can you help me leave this place? Mao said.

Red looked at him. "Yes, Me too."

Mao paused, "Yes, yes, home. Bring me peace."

Red held her arms out. Beijing shook.

Red escaped through the tunnel, and the stones all collapsed. On the way out, Red thrusts her hands down and shook the mausoleum into a wreck.

The woman news presenter on CCTV 2 sat with shock on her face. "Two major stories today. Major disasters in the world financial system as three significant firms and several brokerages that had placed massive bets on the world markets have collapsed. Here is our reporter in Shanghai."

"The stock market dropped half, bonds are exploding," Behind the reporter, people were running, and one person bumped into her. "Over one hundred major firms here are wiped out, and the Government stepped in with some financial guarantees to stabilize the markets."

The camera was knocked off balance. "The value of the cryptocurrencies has gone to zero, and anyone with a crypto account is wiped out."

Gunshots rang out and the new connection cut off...

The CCTV2 presenter looked at the camera and said nothing. A man came to her with a paper and shook her shoulder, "Keep talking." The presenter said, "We have had a significant earthquake in Beijing last night and aftershocks today. Beijing had not had this size in North China since 1976, just before Chairman Mao passed away."

At that moment, in the Beijing studio, another earthquake hit hard. The news people looked at each other in shock and held the tables. The cameras cut off.

The earthquakes rocked all Northern China and caused many explosions. In Tiananmen, there has been a general collapse of many structures, including the mausoleum that previously held Chairman Mao.

To the amazement of all, Mao's body was gone.

<>

Dan returned North to his hometown. He stopped at the tree they enjoyed as teenagers. The tree was much larger now. He thought of the many years and experiences. Most of all, he thought of Red. He walked to the lake and heard the birds rustling and the wind whipping, and he looked and saw the fish jump in the lake.

Dan knew.

He saw Red riding down the road on a mighty horse, and eagles swooping. Dan smiled.

They sat against the tree, Red and Dan enjoyed the weather and said nothing.

"Nice to have you back." Red put her head on Dan's shoulder.

"Yea, it's been a journey, hasn't it?"

"All for the better."

"Hey, thanks for fixing my leg." Dan reached and touched his foot.

"Oh yea, well, I was pretty charged up at that moment. Your face looked like garbage."

"Oh, I was out of it."

"Yea, I didn't want to have you looking like that," and Red touched Dan's face. "There are some scars, let me fix it."

Dan hugged Red, "Leave it, good memories." They looked across the lake and felt the breeze that fluttered Red's silk robe.

"Oh yea, did you see Chairman Mao?" Dan smiled.

"Yea, we met in the Tiananmen Square tunnels and he put a spear through Degula. He went home for good." Red sat up and threw a rock into the lake.

"Yea, I saw him in the crypt, that time I was lost. Meant to tell you." Dan rubbed Red's back.

"Ah, yea, you always forgot to tell me things," said Red.

"Guess it slipped my mind." Dan pulled her to his shoulder and touched her hair.

"Oh, I knew about that all along.", Red tucked her head into Dan's chest.

"Good to be back."

"Yea,"

They found peace and finally fell into a deep sleep.