



CHAPTER TEN: The India Garden

During the summer of 1997 an invisible monster began eating away at the wealth of Asian nations.

There was turmoil in the Thai financial markets as the baht dropped precipitously. Mona half heard this reported over the radio as she rolled out of bed. She reached over and turned the clock radio off. She walked into the hallway and could hear the shower. She went to the bathroom door and called to Meipo. "Are you going to be long?" No response. She repeated the question, louder this time. "What?" Meipo responded. Mona shook her head. Usually she was out of bed and showered long before Meipo awoke. She sighed. She decided to forgo a shower today and just get dressed and go to work.

The morning was punctuated by a meeting. Mona sat next to Shukri as D. J. Nathan outlined the rapidly deteriorating situation in Thailand. Ali Jamal did not attend the meeting. He was in a separate meeting with Prime Minister Abdullah. Fadil Hamzeh was also at that meeting. During her meeting, Mona found herself worrying about the other meeting: Ali Jamal and Fadil Hamzeh meeting together with the prime minister. She told herself there was nothing to worry about, but this was hardly any solace. Each time she had done Fadil Hamzeh's bidding, her worry and sense of having betrayed Ali Jamal grew stronger. She had copied files, provided Hamzeh with Jamal's speeches before they were given, and even planted a sealed envelope in Jamal's filing cabinet, even though she had no idea what the envelope contained. She had done all of this because Hamzeh had asked her to and she was afraid to refuse. Nevertheless, Mona understood that she had entered a dark tunnel and was unsure of the exit.

. . . I felt the warmth of the tea sliding down my throat and stared out the window at Dr. Wang. I was surprised to see her coming down the stone walk path. This was mother's doing. I made the mistake this

morning of telling mother about my latest vision. Mother never understood these things. She did not understand because she either did not see visions herself or she saw them and believed visions a sign of insanity. Either way, she did not understand. I saw the middle aged psychiatrist stumble on the one stone in the path that was much larger than the others, with a jagged spot that usually tripped up strangers. I was about to run to the door when I heard the door open and Mina, the house servant, greeting Dr. Wang. Then, to make matters worse, I heard mother's footsteps in the corridor. I sighed. I had very much wanted to see Dr. Wang, but not in the presence of mother. I took another sip of the tea and waited for my name to be called.



Jay spent three days visiting manufacturing facilities and speaking with Malaysian government officials in K.L. His work for Hong Kong Trade Development Council was fairly well known among officials of the Malaysian Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), which he had worked with in the past, and was currently on assignment to compose a short monograph for the U.S. based *Stroup Institute* on export-oriented manufacturing in Malaysia (a fact that he made sure was well known among Malaysian government officials). These visits were largely for show. He already knew more about the state of manufacturing in Malaysia than the liason assigned to him by MITI, although he was careful to flatter the young man for knowing so much and being so helpful. "Your name will figure prominently in my research report," he had told the young man, whose predictable response was to work even harder to arrange whatever visit Jay suggested might be of use. Jay understood that tramping around on official tours of semiconductor, automobile, or television manufacturing plants was not the most efficient way to gain insight into a country's industrial development or export potential, but it was what government officials expected and he did not want to disappoint. His final report would certainly name all the various officials, including the young liason from MITI, as important contributors to the project, thus guaranteeing their future cooperation. Given the connections (well-known) between the *Stroup Institute for Economics and Prosperity* and certain elements of the American corporate elite, including Grand United, to be spoken of positively in one of its publications produced a lot of good will.

Chinatown was crowded and noisy, as usual, when Jay arrived by taxi at the front of Golden Dragon Restaurant. He had a brief disagreement with the driver, who had refused to use his meter and tried overcharging, until Jay used a few carefully chosen words in Tamil (although he didn't speak Tamil, he knew just enough to fake it under the circumstances) and the driver's attitude changed dramatically. The man smiled at Jay as if they were close friends or brothers and told him, in Tamil, the equivalent of "take it easy." Jay paid the man an appropriate fare, including a tip, and went into the restaurant. The Golden Dragon was brightly lit with hanging lanterns and there were colorful wall hangings on the walls. It had a look of Disney China, Jay thought. Fortunately the music was not in synch with the decor. A very mellow jazz piece was playing, a tenor sax led the way. *Somebody has good taste.* He looked around and saw Fadil Hamzah sitting solemnly on a green bench in one corner table and made his way over and slid into the other bench. "You look tired," Fadil said.

"It's the heat," Jay responded.

"I've always considered you very disciplined. I would not expect K.L.'s weather to be a problem."

Jay smiled. "I wish," he said, as the waiter came to their table. They ordered their meals and after the waiter had departed continued their conversation.

"You were such a bright student at MIT," Fadil said. He seemed to reconsider what he was about to say. He stared at Jay without saying anything, but when Jay did not fill the void, he continued. "A few days ago Internal Security picked up a young man, a graduate student at the National University." Hamzah paused again. "He sort of reminded me of you . . . of how you were in graduate school. Very bright, very creative. He had a certain . . . charisma."

"Had?"

"Oh, don't worry. He's still alive. We're not barbarians."

Unlike Americans. That's what he did not say. "Why'd they pick him up?"

Fadil sighed, then shrugged. "It doesn't matter." He could have lied and said that he didn't know. "He's a leader in the so-called Democratic Student Movement. It's just another C.I.A. operation, trying to undermine our government."

"What happened to him?"

"He confessed to his crimes, of course."

Jay wondered why Fadil was saying this. He considered the possibility that there might be a warning in this otherwise irrelevant information. "You and I both know that the C.I.A. is a lot more interested in buying off top officials in the government and top officers in the military than in employing a bunch of idealistic students."

Fadil smiled slightly. "There is no reason they cannot do both," he said. "They have the money."

Jay nodded. "All the same," he said with a shrug. "I think Internal Security spends far too much time torturing innocent young people. That's what turns idealists into revolutionaries and terrorists."

The smile faded from Fadil's face. "You've been listening to anti-Malaysian propaganda."

Jay did not respond. It was his best poker face.

"It would be a lot easier for me if I knew who you were getting your information from, Jay." *Who is your master, Jay? Whose interests are you serving?* Fadil had been disappointed when Malaysian Intelligence was unable to supply him with this information. He had considered seeking the assistance of the Internal Security Agency, but thought better of it. The ISA did tend towards heavy-handedness. "You must know how surprised I was when you turned up in Asia. I expected you to become another American professor."

"Professor?" Jay shook his head. "I haven't got the patience. Besides, you once warned me about the perils of the paper chase, that you suspected I'd be unable to keep quiet long enough to get tenured."

Fadil mulled this over for a moment, then nodded. "Yes, I remember saying that." And he smiled.

"When you were my professor at M.I.T., I never imagined you in the Malaysian government. I mean, I knew about your political history, ruling party and all that, but I thought you'd stay at M.I.T."

"I was just visiting," Fadil said. "you knew that. Visitors never get permanent positions, not that I would

have wanted one if it had been offered. No, my future is here in Malaysia, with my people, fighting the good fight." Fadil smiled again. "So, tell me Jay, why the cryptic message? Why did you want to meet?"

"You need to advise the prime minister to impose capital controls."

Fadil frowned. "You came all this way to give me advise on our financial market policies? You could always write that in an e-mail message. What's this really about?"

"Simon Rekker," Jay said. "You must have noticed what's going on with the Thai baht."

Fadil nodded. "You're saying that Rekker is responsible for the problems in Thailand?" Fadil thought for a moment. "Rekker's going after the Thai baht? For what purpose?"

To make money. "It's not just the baht he's after. The rupiah, the won, the ringgit."

Fadil looked momentarily stunned. "How would you know this? This is not from HKTDC."

"No, it's not from HKTDC. But it's rock solid, Fadil, absolutely true. Trust me."

Fadil stared at Jay for a long moment. "Are you sure you didn't leave M.I.T. for the C.I.A.?" Jay shook his head, but smiled mischievously. "No, I don't suppose the C.I.A. would be passing this sort of information to me. Nevertheless, trust is a very precious asset, not to be shared foolishly."

The waiter brought them their food.

After the waiter was gone, Jay said, more solemnly, "If Rekker succeeds at his plan, a lot of people will suffer. And all the progress that has been made here and in other places in Asia will be derailed."

Fadil reached across the table to lay a hand on Jay's wrist. "I'm just the deputy finance minister. I doubt Jamal would agree to capital controls and I can't very well tell him that I'm asking on your advice. "

Jay shrugged. "Doesn't matter. Either he does it or he doesn't. If he does, you get hit by a magnitude 6 earthquake. If he doesn't, you get about an 8 on the Richter scale. If the latter happens, Ali Jamal will be looking for another job and you, my friend, might very well become the new finance minister. And I'm sure that you would make a better finance minister than someone too stubborn to do the right thing."

Fadil's eyes had widened as he began to realize the implications. He nodded. "I understand," he said. And, yes, he did indeed understand.



Samuel woke and peered into the semi-darkness of the room and then heard the sound of someone screaming. He nearly leapt from the bed and ran into the living room. The scream was more a yell. He listened at the door and was able to make out Helen's voice. He peered through the keyhole and could just make out a man flashing by, headed towards the next hallway and the safety of the elevators. Helen continued to yell in Cantonese, with a few English curse words thrown in for good measure. Then he heard her door slam. He could have sworn he felt the walls vibrate. He sighed. What was he doing still

in Hong Kong after all this time? It was clear that Michael was gone. But where? How could he be *gone*? And for some time now Faith had been gone, too. It was as if everyone was disappearing down a black hole. The Bermuda Triangle had shifted to Hong Kong. It made no sense and the senselessness of it kept him in Hong Kong. Isolated. Alone. He tugged at the growing tangle of hair on his face --- the beard that marked him as a *mad* ex-patriot, one more to be lost among the tangle of mad ex-patriots on these rocks.



Dr. Wang was a Freudian psychologist. She believed that everything relevant to behavior was locked up in the consciousness of each person. Everything was locked up in the consciousness: past and present. Behavior was overdetermined. That meant that everything in our past experience went into the deep well that was conscious and unconscious: unconscious just being that part of consciousness hidden from view and sometimes hard, if not virtually impossible, to find. It was like our brains contained an infinite series of infinitesimally small rooms. In our dreams, we enter some of those rooms and drag items from room to room, creating these images that give us information about both the visible and the hidden places. Most of the time I liked talking to Dr. Wang. She made me feel normal. She did not judge the visions. She treated them as if they were waking dreams. She said I had a gift for plumbing the depths of my deepest thoughts. Although one day I did scare her when I told her that I had had a vision of her death, that I had seen her in a black car that went careening across a crowded highway and then . . . she had interrupted and told me that we should focus on those things that were more relevant to the problem at hand. For the life of me I cannot remember what the problem at hand was, but all the same I understood that she did not want to talk about the car wreck any further. I wondered when the accident was going to happen. My visions almost always came true. They were not 100% accurate, but this was a particularly vivid dream and my experience told me that such dreams were as accurate as dark clouds portending rain. One would not want to bet against it and go out without an umbrella. I think I understand why Dr. Wang did not want to know more. It is not an easy thing to hear about one's death. At least I do not think that would be easy, although I cannot say for sure, not having had the experience. I do remember the look on her face, though. It had started out passive, as usual, but then her face just started to crack and her eyes got shiny and she started to blink. That's when she said we needed to focus on the things that were relevant to the problem at hand. When she was done with me, she met with mother. I could not hear what they were talking about, but mother always looked at me funny after talking to Dr. Wang, particularly after the time Dr. Wang gave me that intelligence test. I like taking tests. They're so much like doing puzzles. Fun. That's why I like Dr. Wang. Being around her can be so much fun.



"I don't know what the hell is wrong with him," Helen said, shaking her head, pacing in front of Samuel, who was sitting on the sofa in his jeans and a cowboy shirt he had bought on Granville Road in Kowloon.

If she were not so distracted, she might have commented on his taste in clothes. "How can he just think of himself with a sick child struggling to breathe in the next room. And he just complains that he can't sleep because of all the noise Malcolm is making. What is wrong with him? Tell me, how can anyone say something like that? He didn't offer to help. He didn't offer to go with us to the hospital. He just complains that he has to go to work the next day and that he can't sleep with all the coughing and choking. What the hell did he expect me to do, smother Malcolm so he could get his precious sleep?"

Samuel blinked. He did not know what to say.

"I was so damned scared," she seemed near tears when she said this. Samuel blinked. He wanted to reach out to her, but he was just too British. "He don't know me," she added. "He don't know a thing about me, if he can pull a stunt like that."

He found Helen's pacing in front of him distracting, particularly given her attire: a turquoise silk miniskirt and tight-fitting white cashmere sweater. He had a passing thought about asking if she had worn this attire to the hospital. The answer was, however, obvious. Of course she had. It wouldn't have made sense to come back from the hospital and change clothes. Besides, except for when she was going or coming to her job as a senior administrative assistant at the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, he could not remember seeing her dressed much more conservatively than she was now. He smiled. Maybe in Hong Kong, her current dress was conservative. In any event, he did find it very distracting.

"Sometimes I get so sick of this place," she said. "He just better not come back, not after that. I don't need that kinda shit."

Samuel's eyebrows went up.

"You know what I'm talking about, don't you?"

Samuel thought about this for a moment, then nodded. It was the first time he had seen Helen without make-up and he was a bit surprised at how attractive he found her in this condition. Or maybe he was just tired. Or maybe it had just been so long since . . . He moved uncomfortably on her sofa. Helen, sensitive to such changes of emotion, stopped talking and stared at Samuel. This made him all the more uncomfortable and his mind groped for something to say.

"I guess I should have recognized how selfish Frederick was a long time ago," she said, rescuing him, unable to keep silent any longer. "He can't help it. It comes with growing up in Hong Kong." She smiled. "My friend, Jay, told me a long time ago not to expect too much from Hong Kong men."

"We are all products of our culture," Samuel said, somewhat relieved at having something he could comment on.

She shook her head. "I don't believe that. You can be the person *you* want to be."

"If teaching has taught me anything, it is that most people are programmed to believe what the crowd believes and to act in accordance with the norm, no matter how ridiculous that norm may seem in future. Add to that the way capitalism is eroding the ability that people have to empathize and you get very selfish behavior. The level of self-consciousness required to overcome these obstacles is greater than most people can muster. I'm sure your friend Frederick is not all that conscious of the consequences or even the meaning of his behavior."

Again, she shook her head. "That's a cop out. Look at my friend, Jay. He grew up poor in Arkansas and he doesn't sound or act like the people in the *Beverly Hillbillies*."

"Well," Samuel said, finding the analogy more than a bit obscure and not quite sure what to say to Helen.

"But then," she added, seeming to be talking to herself, "Jay is kind of strange."

He wondered when he would meet this elusive Jay that she often mentioned. "I didn't say that everyone conforms to the programming, just that most people do. When I teach a class of thirty students, I'm lucky if three of them are open to new ideas." Samuel wondered about the *depth* of her *friendship* with Jay, given the frequency of her comments about him.

"My mother always gives me a hard time for not being more like her," she said. "Now there's a conformist. She even had her eyes sliced up so she would look more European. And yet she's always going on and on about how Chinese culture is so superior to Western culture." She shook her head. "I don't listen to her, though. She's not exactly a role model. She lets my father treat her like garbage."

"Your parents don't have a good relationship?"

Helen looked at Samuel as if he was a complete idiot, then she smiled. "Yeah, you could say that. He's old fashioned, believes his wife is his slave. If he had his way, he'd probably bring back footbinding." Again, she shook her head, then let out a long, agonized sigh. "I'm tired," she said, and her shoulders slumped.

He moved to change the subject. "How is Malcolm?"

Helen walked over to the sofa and sat down next to Samuel, her knees turned towards his. "The doctor at Queen's Hospital said he has bronchitis. She gave us an inhaler and he's been able to breath since we used it. I gave him some medicine and he's sleeping okay now." Her smile widened as she looked into Samuel's eyes. "I don't have a lot of faith in doctors, but Malcolm is doing better."

"That's good," he said. Helen smelled differently than usual. He realized it was the absence of perfume and the presence of a lightly scented deodorant soap. "Although I'm sorry to hear that he has bronchitis."

She nodded. It felt good talking to Samuel. He was so different. She didn't know how. But not what she expected. "It's not surprising," she said. "The air is so bad and it just gets worse every year."

"It's the downside of *laissez faire*, I suppose."

She smiled. "Sometimes you talk like a textbook, Samuel."

"I'm sorry," he said, sighing.

She shook her head. "Don't apologize. I think it's sorta cute."

"Cute?"

She nodded. She fixed her eyes on Samuel's eyes. Brown diamonds. She wished she could read his thoughts. Hong Kong is not the right environment for learning to read other people's thoughts.

"I'm going to have to leave soon," he said, matter-of-factly.

Helen's brow crinkled. "Leave?"

"Yes. An aunt has been taking care of things for me. I think her patience is wearing a bit thin. She doesn't have the highest opinion of Michael and thinks he's just pulled some sort of disappearing act because of a woman or, as she put it, some other tomfoolery. I can't seem to shake her from this opinion. Actually, I'm not so sure of her opinion of me either." He seemed to drift off for a moment, into his own world --- fortress of solitude, as Superman would have it. But he was no superman and was completely oblivious to the change in mood that had swept over Helen. "I think if it were not for the fact of my being adopted, she would probably be a bit more honest with me and let me know that I'm not being very responsible staying in Hong Kong so long. After all, I'm supposed to be in Nanjing, living on the good graces and currency of a Foundation. I suppose I need to get back to my life."

Helen took a deep breath. "When?"

"When?"

"When are you leaving?"

"Before the hand-over," he said.

"Before the hand-over?"

He nodded. "I'd like to stay longer, but I need to go to Nanjing or I'll lose the position and I've already taken a leave from my university in Britain."

She got up from the sofa and walked toward the kitchen. "Can I get you something?"

"No," he said. "I'm fine."

She turned and looked at Samuel. "I'm going to get a glass of water. Are you sure . . . ?"

"I'm fine, thank you."

She frowned. "Not really," she said, turned and disappeared into the kitchen.

"Sorry?" Now he was frowning.

"Nothing," she said from her own fortress of solitude. She stood in front of the small refrigerator, her hand on the handle, gritting her teeth. She had thought maybe this would be . . . something. No such luck, she thought. She opened the door and felt the cold.



Mohamed could hear her singing. He stopped in the hallway and listened. She was not particularly musical, but there was something in this voice . . . , something he found attractive, something he was missing, although he could not put a name to it. It was like a scent in the air that brings back memories from long ago, memories that linger at the edges of consciousness, are so palpable they have a taste, but

which cannot be put into words. He could taste this voice. If only he could speak to her, not as master to servant, but as equals. If only angels could dance on the head of a pin. Perhaps they do. He wanted to enter her room, and for a moment he thought he was going to do this. He could see himself taking the doorknob and turning it. He could see himself step across the threshold separating two worlds. He had heard stories of the relationships (not always voluntary) between Malay or Chinese men of wealth and their Philippino servants. Was that all there was to this feeling he had? He sighed. He could no more enter that room than cross the chasm between the man he was today and the man he was before surgery. Some boundaries are permanent. He listened for a moment more, uncertain if he really believed in the permanence of boundaries. He knew that he could not speak to Crystal as an equal. How could he do so? How could he come to know the inner thoughts of someone in his employ, someone living in his country only because she serves? Her entire existence was shaped by servitude, by taking and then following the dictates of others. His eyes fell from the door to the floor. He could hear himself breathing and he could see himself reach for the doorknob, but instead he walked away down the hallway.



When Jay had returned to Hong Kong, one of the first things he did was attend the wedding of a friend. It was one of those bland affairs that was held at the registry office. Family and friends attended what looked to Jay like a ceremony inducting someone into the military. After the affair, everyone gathered in the courtyard for photographs. At least three other parties were doing the same thing at the same time and it had all the orderliness that Jay had come to expect of such events in the soon-to-be-former British crown colony.



Beng Lim read the fax that his secretary had just placed in his hands. The elder Kong Sam frowned as the secretary walked out. He did not like being interrupted. The fax was from Orbaw's Bangkok office.

"How can they just decide to cancel the bond offering?" Kong Sam returned to their prior conversation.

Beng looked across the desk at Kong Sam, a member of Orbaw's board of directors and chief operating officer in the company's Indonesian timber unit. "It's Goldman's prerogative," he said, curtly.

"We should issue the bonds ourselves, without their help," Kong Sam said firmly.

"It's not that simple, uncle," Beng tried smiling to ease the tension. "We need U.S. dollars. We don't have the connections to sell our paper in the U.S. without one of the big investment banks."

Kong Sam turned up his nose and made a face. "Fuck the investment banks."

Unfortunately, Beng thought, looking at the fax, the i-bankers were only one of Orbaw's problems.



Darcy Carrington and Celia Weatherstreet emerged from the Bank of China tower and nearly bumped into Samuel as he was walking by, looking up like a tourist at the gleaming green-glass.

"Samuel!," Darcy could hardly have said his name with more enthusiasm. "What a surprise."

Indeed. "Yes," Samuel said, momentarily not remembering where he had met this woman.

"This is Celia Weatherstreet," she said, introducing her friend and fellow employee and options-holder in Sunshine Systems. "I told you about her on the plane."

Now he remembered. "Yes," he said, "yes, indeed. Pleased to meet you." He extended his hand to Celia.

"Samuel is a college professor," Darcy said.

"Actually, I teach at the University of Birmingham."

"Yeah, philosophy, right?"

He nodded.

Celia smiled. "I took a philosophy class in college," she said. "I still remember having to read Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. It was deadly boring stuff."

Again, he nodded. "Aristotle is not for everybody."

"You never called me," Darcy chided, giving him a look. "You lose my number?"

He sort of smiled. "Yes, I think I did. I apologize."

She shrugged. "No problem," she said. She reached in her purse and fished out another business card and shoved it in his hand. "Look, Celia and I are going back to the states in two days. If you want to have dinner, tonight is your last chance, but you'll have to entertain both of us. Celia and I were planning to go to the India Garden. It's not far from here. You know it?"

He shook his head.

"Not hard to find. Anyway, we'll be there at nine. You want to join us, just call me first to make sure we didn't have a change of plans. If you don't want to, don't call. Fair enough?"

He nodded.

"Well, we gotta run. Another meeting. It's like this every time we're in Hong Kong."

And, again, he nodded.

"Nice meeting you, Samuel," Celia said, and gave him another smile. You would have sworn that she knew something about Samuel that even he didn't know.

"Nice meeting you, too," he said, and decided, against his nature, to have dinner with them after all.





Cantonese pop music poured out of the open door of a nightclub that Samuel walked past on his way to India Garden to meet Darcy and Celia. A sumo-sized Hawaiian walked out the door with a petite local woman clinging to one of his massive arms. He looked at Samuel and grinned. Samuel blinked, then walked hurriedly away. At night the streets of Hong Kong have a vibrancy second to none. Sometimes it appeared as if the population of Hong Kong had not even discovered the benefits of either sleep or slowing down. This was a city where serenity was banished to the outer islands or sold as little statues of Buddha in some sidestreet shop which also sold small figurines in various sex postures. Samuel glanced at one such display as he walked along, the images lingering after he quickly passed the shop. Once again, he wondered why he was going to dinner with these two strangers. What could he hope to accomplish? What did he have in mind? Samuel was simply weary of constant movement, weary of the failed search for Michael, and increasingly stressed about fulfilling his contract to teach philosophy in Nanjing, a city that he had yet to set foot in. He came to the entrance of India Garden, looking up at the stylized sign and smelling the aroma of spices and cigarette smoke wafting down the garish green stairs. For a moment he felt as if he was going to choke or vomit. He suppressed this sensation.

He walked up the stairs and was met at the top by the maitre'd, a tall well dressed man with blood shot eyes. He spoke to Samuel in a thick Bengali accent. Samuel explained that he was to meet two women and was trying to describe them when Darcy appeared. "You made it," she said gleefully. "Come on, Celia's starving. The maitre'd watched them dispassionately as they walked past a wall to another part of the restaurant. Celia was watching for them and smiled broadly when they appeared.

"You remember, Celia?" Darcy asked.

"Yes, of course," he replied and they took seats at the table, Samuel sitting with his back to room.

And so began one of those conversations where a lot is said but very little remembered, except stray bits and pieces that come just close enough to feeling meaningful to be placed in longer term memory.

"But are academics really very different?" Darcy asked, responding to something Samuel said.

"From what I've experienced, I would say there is a good deal of alpha male behavior among academics, both male and female," Samuel nodded. "So I would say that you are correct that academics are just as competitive, just as cut-throat as corporate executives, despite the fact that we pretend to be above the fray." He found that he enjoyed all this attention from two women.

He enjoyed it so much that he did not notice a third woman who passed by the table for a second time.

"Ricky, my husband, wants to be an academic," Darcy said. "He keeps planning to go back and get his Ph.D. in something or other. He's deluding himself, of course."

"It might be easier if he could decide on a subject matter *before* going back to school," Samuel suggested.

Darcy smiled. "Ricky'll never do it," she said. "He's not like you. His attention span is less than that of an eight year old. Maybe a little more than a two year old, but not much." Celia noticed the way Darcy looked at Samuel and, following some primitive sexual logic that remained extant within the species, she also began to feel an attraction. Samuel, sharing in the communal feast on the table, felt very well fed.

Later that evening, after Samuel had a bit too much alcohol with Darcy and Celia, he recalled with only the vaguest of memories that they had acquired a taxi for him and placed him gingerly inside it, although their efforts to be careful had been sabotaged by his drunken awkwardness as he had bumped his head climbing inside the taxi, uttered something unintelligible, at least he hoped it was unintelligible, and giggling they had said their goodbyes. He took some relief in that, since he had a faint memory of a day dream that had flashed in his mind as the two women had nearly carried him, upright, down the stairs of the India Garden -- a daydream of the three of them in a rather compromising . . . well, it was just a day dream, after all. He had climbed out of the taxi and was surprised to find himself at one of the entrances to South Horizons. Miracle of miracles.

What Samuel did not know was that neither Darcy Carrington or Celia Weatherstreet would make it safely back to their respective hotel rooms and that, unfortunately for him, the last person to be seen with either of them would be him.



Police inspector Davies unglued his eyes from the two female corpses just in time. A moment later, he would not have had the will to suppress the instinct the vomit. The brown haired inspector, one of the remaining Brits in a position of police authority, devoted to his work, young and oblivious to the implications of the rapidly approaching end of British rule in Hong Kong or simply too obsessive compulsive to care, realized that these two murders would quickly become a priority.

"Americans," police sargeant Lee said, with a hint of a smile. "This is going to be trouble."

Davies nodded. "Looks like a robbery." *What else could explain it?*

One of the crime scene investigators nudged past Lee, who cursed at the man. "Yeah, robbery."

Davies made some notes on his writing pad. "It's going to be a long night."

"Shit," Lee shoke his head. "I knew I should have taken some vacation time."

Davies nodded. "We better start interviewing the locals." He sounded less than enthusiastic.

This made Lee smile. He knew that in Hong Kong everyone was myopic. Good bet, no one saw anything.



Outside the building where the options and futures trading floor was located there was a ferocious outburst of rain. It had come suddenly and in windblown waves. The building façade was soaked. The streets were soaked. The drivers in the cars and buses and lorries strained to see.

There is nothing simple about money. Money is history. Money is the accumulated acts of taking and giving and being robbed. Money is history. There is nothing simple about it. In the pits, everything is simple. You make money or you lose money. You lose enough and you die. You win enough and you get to play at a different level. Hand motions. Gestures communicating buys and sells. Quantities exchanged. Money made and lost. The den rose from the floor and the mad traders gesticulated in undulating flurries. It had always been like music to Go Mei as he stepped into the fray. He always traded at the center of his own universe, feeling as if he was the only person in the world. All else, everyone else was simply objects of his buying and selling. He felt the vibrations of the market in his bones. But there was something about the way the currencies were trading that made him uneasy. He knew that something was amiss. Something subtle but not simple. He did not know what it was and ignorance made him afraid. Ignorance was the road to poverty. He needed to know what was going on and yet he had no clear way to this knowledge, only the growing fear that something ugly was lurking in the markets and might at any moment leap out and swallow him. Go Mei sighed and kept trading.



"We may have just received confirmation," C.I.A. Deputy Director Donald Gilboy said, "that there really is a *Long March* operative in Hong Kong." He looked across the desk at Bernie Stifel. "If you hadn't discovered this goddamned blunder by Sunshine Systems, we might not have been so damned lucky. As it turns out, we may still be able to make a serious mistake into something of a victory. I don't know if we can get the cat back into the bag, but at least we can catch a damned rat."

Stifel tore the plastic from a twinkie and took a bite. "We find out what happened to those girls?"

Gilboy shook her head. "No, but we've confirmed the identity of the man who was with them."

"The Raven?" Stifel reached out and took the folder that Gilboy offered. "American?"

"Nope. The friggin' rat is British. He's a college professor. Black. Marxist. Speaks Mandarin."

Stifel put the partly eaten twinkie on the desk, then opened the folder. "He get the Sunshine algorithm?"

Gilboy frowned. "That's just the thing, Bernie. Looks like he got it but didn't turn it over to his handlers."

"He's gone freelance?" Now Bernie was frowning, as Gilboy nodded. "Jesus, friggin' Christ."



It was drizzling and rapidly getting dark when Crystal got back from visiting her sister. She ran from the bus stop down the street and up the walkway. She was about to go around to the back of the house when the door opened and Mohammed motioned for her.

"You are drenched," he said, as she tried to apologize for getting back late. He shook his head and told

her to stop apologizing. "I won't tell Izmeen. Don't worry. But you need to get dry or you'll get sick."

She thanked him and said that she had to get the children their dinner and get them ready for bed. He told her that he had already done both. "They were quite happy to have me read them a story. I haven't done that in a long time." He smiled, looking in her eyes. "It is foolish for me to spend so much time on government trivialities and so little with the children." He meant this, it was not sarcasm, although she was not sure. She started to rush away to her room to change, when he took her arm. "I'm sorry," he said, immediately letting her arm go. "I just wanted to tell you how much I appreciate the way you look after Hussein and Xarmina. You must know, they love you very much." She stopped and looked at him, her mouth fell open. She did not move immediately and he moved nearer. "You really do need to get out of these wet clothes." She blinked, thanked him again and hurried away. He watched her and smiled.



Samuel rode up the escalator in the Convention Plaza Office Tower. It looked like a mall. Many of the buildings in Hong Kong looked like malls. Some of them were malls.

"Maxwell."

Samuel turned toward the voice. It was Jay. Samuel frowned at the pony-tailed man. He experienced a sense of recognition, but he did not know who this man was. He nearly fell as his escalator stair disappeared under his feet. He righted himself at the top of the escalator and waited, uneasily, for the man to reach him.

When Jay reached the top of the stairs, he took hold of Samuel's arm and directed him away from the escalator.

"Who are you?" Samuel asked.

Jay offered his hand and Samuel instinctively shook it. "Sanjay Harris," he said and smiled.

"Sanjay Harris," Samuel said slowly and with a certain incredulity.

"My friends call me Jay."

Samuel's mouth fell open. His eyes narrowed. "Helen's Jay?"

"Well," Jay said, "I wouldn't go that far. You hungry?"

"What?"

"I know a good place to get a bite," Jay said, and again took hold of Samuel's arm. He led Samuel down a corridor of glass-fronted shops and around a corner. The restaurant entrance was open. A woman in a long, traditional Chinese dress, slit on the side, greeted Jay as "Mr. Harris."

Jay said something in Cantonese that Samuel did not begin to comprehend and the woman led them into the restaurant. She gave them a table by the large picture window.

"I eat here a lot," Jay said, after they were seated. Samuel looked flustered. Jay opened his menu and

said, "You should try the dim sum."

Samuel started to say that he was not hungry, but that would have been a lie. He was very hungry. "Have we met before?"

Jay smiled. "I don't think so," he said. "But I did see you once, as you were leaving South Horizons."

Samuel nodded, feeling a bit more relaxed. "I wondered how you knew . . ."

Jay shook his head. "Sorry about that," he said. "By the way, I work in this building, Hong Kong Trade and Development, on the thirty eighth floor. I've got a great view of Victoria Harbour."

Again, Samuel nodded. "What's Hong Kong Trade and Development?"

"Hong Kong Trade Development Council," he said. "It's a quasi-governmental organization that promotes trade between the territory and other nations. I'm an economist for HKTDC, specializing in Southeast Asia and the mainland."

"An economist? Do you know my brother, Michael?"

"Michael?" Jay nodded. "Not really. I did meet him once, but only briefly."

Samuel's face brightened. "You must have been as surprised to see me as I was to see you."

Jay shrugged. "We get a lot of foot traffic here, being so close to the ferry. We also sponsor a number number of trade fairs. Consequently, I run into a lot of people in this building."

"Trade fairs?"

"Yeah, for stuff like toys and textiles: the trinkets that made Hong Kong rich."

"I see."

A waiter appeared and Jay asked him to come back in a couple of minutes. Samuel looked down at the menu again. "Helen tells me you've had no luck finding your brother."

"I'm afraid that's true," said Samuel. "It's very frustrating. I'm not sure what to think or do."

"Your brother hadn't been in Hong Kong long. What was he doing here?"

Samuel shook his head. "I wish I knew. He works for the IMF, but that's not why he was here."

"The first thing you should do is find out why he was in Hong Kong, don't you think?" Jay reached for his menu. After perusing it for a few minutes, he looked up. "I'm a vegetarian, so you're on your own."

"Excuse me?"

Jay pointed at Samuel's menu. "I hear the seafood is good, but I have no first hand experience with it."

Samuel picked up his menu. "Faith doesn't even know what Michael was doing here," he said.

"That's not totally true," Jay said with a smirk. "She certainly knows some of what he was doing." It took a moment for Samuel to get the inference, then Jay added, "How long do you plan to search for him?"

"Until he turns up," Samuel said, emphatically. "But I do have a contract to teach in China in a couple of months. I suppose I need to go eventually. They were expecting me to have already arrived."

"Don't worry, Chinese administrators expect a certain flakiness from us foreign devils."

Samuel frowned. "I would rather not reinforce stereotypes."

Jay shrugged. "Don't knock stereotypes. Sometimes they can make life easier."

The waiter returned. Jay ordered spicy noodles and a Dutch beer. Samuel ordered an Italian dish.

After the waiter left, Samuel asked Jay what he would do, if he was in the same situation.

"I don't have any siblings," Jay said, with another shrug. "But I guess I'd just go to the police and let them handle it. You know, he might not even be in Hong Kong. The police could check on that."

Samuel sighed. "I've filed a missing person's report. According to the police, there's no record of Michael leaving the territory. Other than checking with immigration, I don't think they did anything. I went to see Helen's brother, as I think Helen may have told you, but he was no help at all."

Jay sat back. "You're a university professor, verdad?"

Samuel sighed. "Yes. I teach philosophy. Why?"

"Nothing," Jay said, turning his attention to the waiter, returning with their food. "Did you check his e-messages?" This last question was clearly addressed to Samuel, but Jay never turned from the approaching waiter.

"What?"

"His *e-mail* messages. You read them?" Again, Jay did not turn to face Samuel as he asked this.

Samuel frowned. "No," he said, "I . . . I didn't even think . . . E-mail? I mean, how would I go about doing that?"

"You might want to give it a shot," Jay said, finally turning to face Samuel and giving him a look that could only be described as mischievous. "It's surprising what people will put into an e-mail message."

"But how would I get into Michael's e-mail? Aren't there passwords and other forms of security?"

The waiter reached them and placed their dishes on the table. He also distributed Jay's beer and the large lemon aide that Samuel had requested. Jay thanked the man, who promptly departed again.

"Look, why don't we take a look at your brother's computer and see what we can come up with?"

Samuel was reluctant but agreed. He knew that Michael's computer was in the apartment and so it was logistically not a problem for them to gain access. He remained skeptical that simply turning on the computer would be enough to gain them access to the information locked inside, much less Michael's e-mails. Samuel was relatively clueless about computers and the technology that allowed for e-mailing, but he was quite sure it involved passwords and such and he had no passwords. Nevertheless, this Sanjay Harris was willing to give him a hand, so he was not about to turn him down without a try.

"The spies at the U.S. consulate have begun snooping around."

Inspector Davies looked up from his desk, with its neat little piles of paper, and immediately stood up, at attention. It was Deputy Police Commissioner Kwok. "I'm sorry, sir?"

"This case with the two dead American women. What have you got?" Kwok asked.

"I'm investigating a lead from the India Garden restaurant. The women had dinner with a black man that the waiter indicated was British. I'm trying to identify this fellow."

Kwok nodded. "You think this *black* fellow might be the perpetrator?" His eyes twinkled.

Davies was not completely naive. He realized that the fact that he was one of the few remaining British officers in the Royal Hong Kong Police (soon to be simply the Hong Kong Police) was the reason he had been placed in charge of this investigation. This was clearly a very sensitive case. "It's possible," he said.

"But your initial report indicated it was a robbery."

"I wrote that it was most likely a robbery, yes."

"I see," Kwok said, then told Davies to sit down. Davies complied. Kwok put his hands on his hips and said, "I don't care how you do it, I want this crime solved. No loose ends. Understood?"

"Yes, sir," Davies replied, looking up, remaining stiff in his chair.

"I've informed Forensics to provide you with all the help you need."

"Thank you, sir."

Before leaving the office, Deputy Commissioner Kwok said something somewhat cryptic: "You should remember, American spies are not interested in simple robberies and murder."



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DREAMING IN MALAYSIA

A Web Novel

by

Satya J. Gabriel



CHAPTER ELEVEN

It stormed during the afternoon when Jay met Samuel at the South Horizon's apartment. Jay brought a small device that he hooked up to the Compaq computer. He told Samuel that it would help them gain access to Michael's e-mail account. In reality it was an optical storage device. As Jay suspected, the e-mail account was quite easy to access. Michael had saved his password on the hard drive.

Jay sat at the keyboard. Samuel sat next to Jay. Since Samuel had already told Jay Michael's e-mail address, it wasn't difficult to gain access to the hotmail account. Jay turned and smiled at Samuel. The optical disk device whirred away in the background for a few seconds. "I think we're in luck," Jay said.

Samuel frowned. He knew that what they were doing was benign, but he still felt guilty. Privacy was something he felt was very close to sacred. "What do you see?" Samuel asked, leaning forward and trying to see what was on the screen.

Jay shrugged. "I can't believe you've been sitting in this apartment for months and didn't think to look at your brother's e-mail."

Samuel sighed. "I guess that's one way we're different."

Jay opened several messages in quick succession. The optical device was, meanwhile, installing a virus

that would backup the hard drive and give Jay permanent remote control of the computer.

“You think this will be of any use?” Samuel asked.

“Patience,” Jay replied. “Isn’t that what life is all about?” The installed software executed.

Samuel smiled. “Volumes have been written seeking the answer to that question.”

Jay turned for a moment and looked at Samuel. “You really are a philosopher, aren't you?" The virus was already creating a compressed replica of the hard drive, including deleted but not overwritten files.

“That's why I'm here,” Samuel said. "I'm supposed to teach *Western* philosophy at Nanjing University."

“No offense, but I don't think that's what the Chinese need.” Jay turned back to the screen.

“What do you mean?"

“China needs technology, not philosophy."

Samuel blinked. “Technology is the product of ideas and creativity, of epiphany."

“And you think Western philosophy will generate epiphanies?"

“I think that broadening intellectual dimensions creates the potential for creative leaps, yes.”

“Is that why so many Westerners run to Eastern philosophy to save their immortal souls?"

“Look here, I don't really buy into the division between Eastern and Western philosophy . . .”

Jay glanced at Samuel, but only for a moment. “And that's why you're teaching Western philosophy?"

"No," Samuel said with a frustrated sigh. "That's what the administrators at Nanjing University want me to teach. I did not think it worthwhile to try explaining to them that the divisions between Eastern philosophy and Western philosophy are arbitrary. I mean, what exactly is the West and the East? Most of the material taught in introductory philosophy has its origins in the region of the Mediterranean, with ideas flowing into the region from what we today call Asia and Africa, as well as parts of what we now call Europe. Philosophy is, almost by definition, a product of global influences.”

Jay smiled. He turned to Samuel and said, "You'll be popular at Nan-da."

"Thank you," Samuel returned the smile. "So, what is it that brought you to Hong Kong?"

"You mean, what's a nice guy like me doing in a place like this?" Jay turned back to the computer, the optical disk drive worked silently and efficiently, searching, compressing, storing. "I like it here."

"That's not much of an explanation?"

"Why not? Look, I like Hong Kong for the same reason I like economics."

“And why is that?"

“Because economics is about who gets to eat and who doesn’t, about who gets a roof over their head and

who doesn't, about who gets shit on and who does the shitting. Hong Kong is a place where the only philosophy that carries any weight is the philosophy of economics."

"Sounds rather dismal," Samuel replied. "Clearly, there is more to life than the struggles over material possessions."

"Like what?"

"Aesthetics, the pursuit of knowledge, love."

"Bromeas," Jay said, making a sour face, then leaned forward and said quickly, "Pay dirt."

Samuel, who had been formulating a response, preparing to repeat an argument made many times before, now turned his attention to the spot on the computer screen indicated by Jay's finger.

"I think maybe you should read this," Jay pointed to a message from oregon_rosewater@yahoo.com. It read as follows:

You must be joking. You are actually working with that throwback? I thought you said you would ring his neck if you had the chance. What in heavens name got you and Frank Hyde together?

Samuel shook his head. "I don't understand."

Jay looked at him. He seemed to be pondering something, then said. "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. Look at the date."

Samuel looked at the message again. He thought for a moment, then said, "This was sent shortly after Michael came to Hong Kong."

"And who's this?" Jay touched the screen just under the name *Frank Hyde*.

Samuel shook his head.

"Just as a matter of deductive logic," Jay said, "don't you think that this person, this Frank Hyde, must have met with your brother here in Hong Kong? Otherwise, how could they have gotten together, as this message implies?"

Samuel nodded.

"Well, do you know who Frank Hyde is?"

Samuel shook his head again, thinking that he had already answered the question.

Jay scrolled down some more messages. "No more messages from our mysterious oregon rosewater," he mispronounced Oregon, as most people do. "Maybe you should try sending them a message."

Jay returned to the message from oregon_rosewater@yahoo.com and clicked reply. He moved his chair aside and invited Samuel to the keyboard.

Samuel moved his chair so that he could type. He thought for a moment, then quickly typed in a short message. He stopped and just stared at the message. Jay leaned over, moved the cursor and clicked on send. In that instant, a spybot/tracer, part of Jay's virus, followed the path of the message, sending back

codes, including IP addresses, to the computer and recording the output onto the optical disk.

“I wasn’t finished,” Samuel said, turning to Jay.

Jay disconnected his optical disk drive device and stored it in a satchel at his side. The backup was done and Jay could access the computer from home if he needed more. “You wrote enough. Don’t turn off the computer or log out of the e-mail account. Either you’ll get a response or you won’t.”

Samuel frowned, but complied.

“Look, chief, I did my undergraduate work at Amherst College.”

“I’ve heard of it,” Samuel responded, not seeing the relevance.

“I remember there being a professor of economics at UMass named Frank Hyde.”

“UMass?”

“The University of Massachusetts at Amherst. It’s just down the street from Amherst College.”

“You think this Frank Hyde is the same one at the University in Amherst?”

Jay shrugged. “He’s an economist. Your brother is an economist. The name fits. Other than that, it’s a shot in the dark.” He got up from the chair and touched Samuel’s shoulder. “Worth checking out,” he said. “I would guess that if you find this Frank Hyde, whether he is the same one I have in mind or not, then you’ll find what you’re looking for.” Samuel went to the door, satchel over his shoulder.

“You’re leaving?”

Jay stopped in the doorway. “I think you can take it from here, Sherlock.”

Samuel got up and followed Jay as he walked out of the room and down the hallway. “Thank you. You have been an immense help,” he said.

Jay turned on his heels. “Nobody helps nobody,” he said, with a smile, then added, “But you’re quite welcome all the same, Maxwell.”

“Samuel. You can call me Samuel.”

Jay started to say something, then changed his mind and said something entirely different. He nodded. “Just find your brother.”

Samuel nodded. “I hope so,” he said.



The sky was full of dark gray and the air smelled of wet smog. Mona waited for the train, along with restless others, deep in day dreams. In a matter of weeks, Meipo would pack up and move her things back to her parents' house and then leave for the United States. Berkeley, California. Mona would remain, alone, in the apartment. It wouldn't be that big a change, she thought. She felt alone enough already. Something she heard somewhere: you come in this world alone and go out the same way. A cliché? She sighed, glanced down the tracks to see if the train was approaching, half heard the babble of

impatient travelers behind her, and sighed again. Birds in the distance were like abstract art against the volatile sky.

We come into the world alone and go out the same way. Mona remembered riding the bus with Meipo to Hampshire College when they were students at Mount Holyoke. She could hear Meipo's laughter at some joke, now forgotten, as she, in the here and now, looked vacantly out the window of the train. Back then, as far as either of them knew, life would always be like that, laughter piled upon laughter, in between the petty challenges of exams and papers. Mona studying into the wee hours, at the last moment trying to finish a term paper or cram for an exam. Meipo chiding her for trying to achieve the impossible. Back then they walked in each others' shadows, blending so deftly that at times people could not think of one without thinking of the other.

Mona sighed. The chatter on the train brought her back to reality. She felt a jolt of anger at Meipo for leaving, then tried to dismiss it. The pressure from Fadil Hamzeh was getting worse and being alone in the apartment would not help her mood, her attempt to cope. She was sneaking files out of Ali Jamal's office several times a week, copying them and then returning them. The copies were passed along to Hamzeh. The more she cooperated, the more Hamzeh had her in his clutches. She could see no way out.

Imagine you are on that train, watching Mona watching her own image in the glass and the world beyond. There are several minutes when you are aware of nothing else. The sounds of the other passengers, the train, everything else fades into nothingness and all you are aware of is Mona. It is as if you can read her mind, as her thoughts drift from thinking of Meipo to thinking of Ali Jamal. In her imagination, she is kissing him.



Samuel stood in front of Helen's door for a long time before he finally knocked. Helen opened the door and looked at Samuel with surprise, then let him in. She watched him as he paced across the living room to the window. The sofa was cluttered with sections of the Saturday edition of the Hong Kong Standard, a writing pad and pencil, and a white sweater. On the floor in front of the sofa Malcolm lay on the beige carpet, head propped up in his hands, watching the television. Adults dressed in silly costumes pranced around speaking in high pitched voices. Malcolm glanced only briefly at Samuel.

"Did you talk to Jay?" He asked, finally turning from the window.

"Is that any way to say hello?" She put her fists on her hips and gave him the evil eye.

"Sorry," he said. "I'm beginning to forget my manners."

She folded her arms in front of her. "Okay, I can accept that."

"I may have a way to find out what happened to Michael." There was a hint of excitement in his voice when he said this.

She looked at him for what seemed a long time. He looked at her expectantly. She nodded. "Then Jay helped you," she said finally.

"Yes," he said. "I did not think his idea of going through Michael's e-mail would be of much use, but I've just received an e-mail message from someone who may know why Michael was here in Hong

Kong. I may have a way of locating him."

Helen smiled. *Good for Jay.* "What do you have to do?"

"I'll have to fly to the United States."

She blinked, "To the United States?"

"Yes," he said and walked over to the sofa and stood next to it, holding onto it as if for support. "It's a long shot, I know, but it might be of some help."

One of the adults on the television shrieked as a balloon filled with blue colored liquid exploded over his head.

"I thought you were going back to England?"

He nodded. "I think this is important enough for me to change my plans." It was an expensive change of plans, to be sure, but Samuel had concluded that he would be less than broke when he finally made it back to England, especially with Angie plundering all their meagre possessions, so what difference did it make? If this trip to the U.S. bore fruit, perhaps he could still go to Nanjing.

"You can't just use the telephone?"

"I'm afraid not," he said.

Again she was silent. This time it was Samuel who was forced to break the silence. He circled around the sofa, careful not step on Malcolm, glanced for a moment at the clutter on the seats, then looked at Helen and said, "I have no idea what is going on here, but I think I need to find out. The message I received over e-mail was quite explicit about meeting in person. I mean, I'm quite surprised to have received any reply at all. In any event, it appears that this person --- I have no idea whether it is a man or a woman --- will say only so much over e-mail and refuses to speak by telephone." Although the cloak and dagger aspects of this were somewhat exciting, he really would have rather spoken to this person by telephone. The United States was not exactly *in the neighborhood*.

"Then you'll have to go to the United States," she said.

Malcolm looked up for a moment, interested. He had seen the television and movie versions of the United States and, as far as he was concerned, those versions were the real United States, an exciting place of guns and shot-outs, car chases, and run-amock cyborgs that could morph into just about anything they wanted to be.

He nodded. "Yes, exactly."

"Where in the United States?"

"Portland, Oregon," he said. "I'm afraid this person has a certain sense of the dramatic. We're to meet in a specific restaurant at a specific time. Sort of like something in one of those American movies. As it is, I'm afraid I don't have a lot of time. I'll need to book a flight tomorrow."

Malcolm had never heard of *Port Lund*, *Are a gun* and he scrunched up his nose and returned his interest to the television, realizing that what ever the excitement of the United States, this really didn't involve him.

"Did you tell Jay about this?"

He shook his head. "I haven't been able to reach him."

She nodded. *Who can?* "I have a friend who can get you a ticket for a good price," she said. "He'll make sure you make your appointment."

Samuel smiled. "Thank you," he said emphatically.



Meipo left the apartment earlier than expected, deciding to spend part of the summer before going to graduate school traveling in Europe. She had surprised Mona with this news one evening. It resulted in a rare but violent argument between them. Mona ended up screaming and cursing at her friend, who remained unpleasantly (for Mona) calm throughout the entire disagreement. In the end there was really nothing to debate and the next day Meipo, with the help of her muscular uncle, moved out. When he heard about this, Mona's father encouraged her to move home, rather than occupy the apartment alone. Mona insisted that she would be fine. In truth, she was deeply depressed. Her mind went mushy and she spent several evenings just watching television, hardly aware of what was on. At work, she spent that first week trying to write a couple of speeches, both with approaching deadlines. She did not finish. She went to lunch with Shukri Chamrong and talked to him at length, thinking somehow he might be of some help in changing her mood, but it did not work. She ran into Fadil Hamzah in the hallways once. He had smiled and commented that she was doing excellent work in the Finance Ministry. She had felt humiliated.

At the end of that week, she found that she could write on her novel, even as she could not write on anything else. She didn't know if it made any sense, but it was therapeutic, or something like that. It made her forget that she was depressed.

Shukri, realizing that something was amiss with Mona, decided to take a chance and give her a ring (having obtained her telephone number during their visit to the National Malay Coalition's Youth Conference in Penang). The telephone conversation interrupted her watching of another television show. She had no idea what he had interrupted, however. She had been staring at the television without consciously seeing or hearing much of anything. She had been, as they say, just spacing out. She was actually pleased, though surprised, to hear from Shukri. She was beginning to think of him as a friend, someone she could confide in. She found Shukri particularly talkative tonight.

"I could not believe my eyes," he said. "I swear to you, I saw Hamzah march right into Ali's office and toss the papers on the desk. What insolence. I'm sure he would be dismissed immediately, if not for his ties to the Prime Minister. One of these days, I am sure that Ali is going to be so fed up with this behavior that even the Prime Minister will not save Hamzah from his wrath. I've seen Ali when he is angry and he's no one to mess with, I assure you. But then you know this as well as I, I'm sure. You work so closely with him, writing his speeches and his reports. I just can't believe that Hamzeh would have so much nerve. I even heard him raise his voice to Ali Jamal. His superior. He said something about going to Akil Abdullah and forcing Ali Jamal to have to answer for what he's done. I'm sure that is what I heard. Can you imagine? I wish I could have heard Ali Jamal's response, but his secretary closed the door and told me to come back later. It was quite embarrassing. Have you ever heard anything like that? No, of course not. I have to say, Fadil Hamzah can be sort of scary. I even hear he has friends in Internal

Security." Mona blinked and Shukri just kept talking. He seemed unable to stop himself. "I don't know if you know this but my mother is ill, something respiratory. She complains about being tired and has pains in her joints. My father always listens in silence. He is not much of a talker. How is your father?" Mona just shook her head. She didn't want to talk. "Do you think it's true what they say about Hamzah having friends in Internal Security? I even heard he once had someone tortured." And on and on and on he went. Mona listened, with the occasional "I see" or "Yes" or "Are you certain of that" but not much else. At some moment, as she listened to his voice, sitting on the floor, back against the sofa that she and Meipo had purchased, she found the fabric of time and space was going woozy and the words and the fabric had joined like cloth and ink to form something magical. In this moment, she found sleep. When she awoke, he was still talking, hardly aware that his companion on the other end of the line had not heard (consciously) a word said for . . . some time. " . . . the simultaneous existence of all historical time. I thought it was a most fascinating concept. I told Rajiv that he had made the right decision to study physics and that I probably should have done the same. He was quite flattered by this, but told me that he was quite sure that politics would serve my family better than physics ever could. It is a luxury of coming from a large family and being the fourth son, he told me." She finally interrupted Shukri and told him that she needed to go to sleep and he spent another long stretch of time apologizing for monopolizing the conversation. He asked her to lunch again and she agreed, mostly to get him to shut up and hang up the phone. But after saying goodbye and cradling the phone, she stood and thought that it was rather nice, indeed, that someone could have talked so long and with such . . . interest? to her and without any sense of restraint. The odd thing was that, despite how sleepy she had been on the phone with Shukri, she could not sleep once in her bed. She simply kept thinking about Fadil Hamzeh, Internal Security, and torture.



The CIA computer expert, a thin man in his twenties, with short cropped hair, worked diligently at the terminal, glancing at the screen with all the intensity of a teenager playing video games. He smiled suddenly, then picked up the nearby telephone. "I got it," he said. After a pause, while listening to a question posed by the man on the other end of the line, he added, "It's definitely the file you wanted. Same coding style, completes the puzzle. This is the rest of the algorithm. The trace shows that it was sent from the computer you flagged in Hong Kong. It went to a Portland, Oregon IP address." Another pause, and the computer expert nodded, even though the man on the other end couldn't see this gesture. "Yeah," he said finally, "I'll get on it. I'll find out who took possession of the file and get back to you." The last thing he said to the man on the other end was "cool."



In the first white hot rays of sunlight Crystal had awakened, turned off her alarm clock (at least an hour before it would have wakened her), dressed, and walked out into the back garden. The elderly gardener, Ravi, was already working, unseen, balanced on a one-legged stool, spade in hand, on something in another distant corner of the garden. She stood near the house, breathing the early morning air, thinking about home in the Philippines.

"Beautiful isn't it?"

The voice startled her. She jumped. When she turned she saw Mohamed. He looked at her the way a schoolboy looks at a teacher with whom he has a crush. Her mouth fell open and she did not respond to

the question. He walked up to her and, without thinking, without pausing, kissed her.



When the black Cadillac limousines arrived in tiny Edgehole, Oklahoma they drove past the "downtown" and two elderly men watched from the window of Watson's store. The two men had been playing checkers and bantering with Bill Watson, owner of the store, when the first limo whizzed past. "I guess that son-of-a-bitch Senator Birch is back in town," the one with the International Harvester cap said.

"Him and that whole damn Washington, D.C. crowd looks like," said the one with a battered and dirty Saint Louis Cardinals cap, vintage 1964. Two more limos rolled past the window.

"Gonna play rancher some mo', I reckon," Watson interjected.

"Ain't no rancher," International Harvester said. "He bought that damn ranch just for show."

"He brought in some of them Hollywood horses," Watson said. "Damned things ain't much bigger'n ponies. Even so, I hear he's scared to get near 'em."

"Don't s'ppose he'll fall off then," International Harvester laughed.

"When he buy that ranch?" Saint Louis Cardinals asked.

"Oh, little less than a year ago, if I recall correctly," Watson replied. "Sent his lawyer down here from Washington."

"What's wrong with our Tulsa lawyers? They ain't dishonest enough?"

Watson shrugged. "I gotta get back to work," he said, having seen the last of the three limousines roll past the window. "I'll be in the storage room if anybody needs me."

"Gonna get the high priced stuff out for the press, huh?" International Harvester grinned.

"You bet," Watson said, opening a door and disappearing into the storage area.

"Say he gonna run for president," Saint Louis Cardinals said. "What you think?"

"Where you hear that?"

"It was the paper."

"Oklahoma Sentinel?" Saint Louis Cardinals nodded. "How would they know?"

Saint Louis Cardinals looked out the window as if expecting more limousines to come by. "I think it was *unofficial sources*."

International Harvester nodded. "You know what that mean, don't you?"

Saint Louis Cardinals shook his head.

"It mean they made it up." He grinned toothily.

"Come on."

"Most of that stuff you read is made up. They jest wanna sell papers is all."

"Well, I believe 'em this time. I think Birch wanna be president. His father tried and didn't make it. He wanna show he's better than his old man."

"You think so, huh?"

Saint Louis Cardinals nodded. "Yup."

International Harvester shrugged. "Well, he prob'bly make a good one."

"Why you say that?"

"He sure go to a lot of trouble to look like a president. I think that's about 9/10th of it."

"What about Clinton?"

"What about Clinton?"

"You think he look like a president?"

"I think he look like Elvis." They both laughed.

"I voted for Clinton," Saint Louis Cardinals said this as if it was confessing a crime.

International Harvester shook his head. "Man president of the U-nited States. Probably can have any damn woman he want and what he go and do? He go and fool with some teenager intern. That's down right piti-ful, you ask me. And you see how ugly that other one was? Man sleep with anything."

"Half the politicians round here would have done the same thing," Saint Louis Cardinals said. "And the other half would do it if they weren't such galdarned cowards."

"You don't believe that."

"Yeah, I do. They all got big heads, wanna be Hollywood. Men like that put morals in their back pocket and only bring it out for campaign speeches."

"You think all politicians like that?"

"Not jest politicians. Lawyers. Preachers. Sunday School teachers. Fact is all of 'em two faced. Don't much matter whether it be Jimmy Swaggert or Jim Baker or Bill Elvis Clinton. They cain't keep it in they pants. It's a ego thang, you know. It's not really 'bout sex. Heard that on Larry King."

"I don't believe that," International Harvester said indignantly. "You been voting for Democrats so long it done clouded your judgment. Besides, cain't believe nothing that Larry King says about sex."

Saint Louis Cardinals shrugged. "I voted for a few Republicans in my day," he said. "Voted for Nixon and Reagan."

International Harvester nodded. "Now Reagan, there was a real president."

Saint Louis Cardinals smiled. "Jest another crook."

International Harvester frowned. "You said you voted for him."

"Yeah, and I said I voted for Clinton, too. I vote for the lesser of two evils. They all evil, but one is always lesser. And Clinton jest a good ole boy from Arkansas. I don't blame 'em for acting the way he does with women. You look around at the so called upstanding citizens of this community and tell me they any better than Clinton when it comes to women. Don't matter if they Democrat or Republican. It's in they blood. They look at women like little kids look at toys. Nah, I'm not blamin' Clinton for being jest like every other politician, preacher, lawyer, entertainer, what have you. He think he Elvis, you know."

"I still don't see why you vote for him." While they were talking, Watson had returned with two boxes and was opening them on the counter.

"Nixon was a crook, I voted for him 'cause McGovern was a sissy. Reagan took money from the Ayatollah Ko-main-ee, but I voted for him 'cause Carter seemed weird. And I voted for Clinton 'cause I could jest tell he would enjoy being president, 'cause he a neighbor from Arkansas, and 'cause he try to do somethin' for the ordinary workin' man."

"What?" International Harvester reacted as if his friend was completely insane.

Watson looked up from his boxes. "What Clinton ever do for the ordinary workin' man?"

Saint Louis Cardinals smiled. "He got 'em jobs," he said emphatically.

International Harvester shrugged. "Clinton ain't give nobody no job. Businesses gave people jobs." Watson shook his head and turned his attention back to the boxes. "Who's move is it?"

"Mine."

"Well go ahead then."

Saint Louis Cardinals smiled. He reached down and took four of International Harvester's black pieces with one of his red and having reached the last row said, "Crown me." International Harvester took a captured red piece and put it on top of the victorious red.

"We can count on Bent Dombaugh and a whole army of talk radio hosts to get the word out," Chrissy Crock told Lance Cane, as they sat on the back porch of the great house on Senator Birch's 1,000 acre ranch. Crock had recently been added to Birch's staff. She had been senior vice president for marketing at a division of the huge conglomerate Grand United. She had a long resume in public relations and a law degree. Her father, Avery Crock, was a multimillionaire who had inherited his father's discount retail empire. Lance Cane was chief of staff for Senator Birch. "Dombaugh has a huge following and has all but pledged allegiance to the Senator."

"Can we trust Dombaugh?" Lance Cane was a tall man with thick eyebrows, squinty eyes, and a long face. He seemed most natural wearing a frown. "What's to keep him from changing his mind? We don't yet know who else might throw his hat in the ring."

"Dombaugh is a pragmatist about things like this," Crock replied. "If he is supporting the Senator, it's because he sees the handwriting on the wall. Senator Birch has the nomination to lose. And I don't intend to be part of a losing campaign."

Cane smiled. He knew that Dombaugh was under contract to Grand United and that the conglomerate was throwing its considerable weight behind Birch. Dombaugh knew who wrote his checks, no matter how much he played the angry maverick for his vast radio audience. "So what'd we need to do?"

"We still need to secure the Far Right," she said. "If we get the hard core conservatives solidly on our side then we get money and volunteers and a base of guaranteed votes."

"Who else are they gonna vote for?"

Crock shrugged. "You never know, Reverend Abraham could still run. He can't win the nomination, but he's still the darling of the evangelicals."

Cane nodded. "If Reverend Abraham runs, he could hurt us with the evangelicals and, if that happened, winning the nomination wouldn't be worth a damn. What'd we need to do to keep the good reverend out of the race?"

"Triangulation," she replied. Cane's smile widened. It was the favored strategy of the Clintonites. Steal your opponents issues. Leave them with nothing to say. "We come out foursquare against abortion, affirmative action, and gay rights. We demonstrate that we will support the hardliners in Israel . . ."

Cane frowned. "Why?"

"Reverend Abraham's people believe Israel has a role to play in bringing about Biblical prophecy. Israel is supposed to bring about the Apocalypse, the Second Coming, the Rapture, or something crazy like that. I don't know." She shrugged. "Anyway, they're very emotional about this. They're natural supporters of the hardline Zionists in Likud because they think those are the folks that will trigger World War III."

Cane frowned. He thought about this for a moment. "How do you know about this?"

"I do my research," she said in a cheery tone.

Cane sighed. "This explains how Reverend Abraham can be both anti-semitic and pro-Israel. He and his kindred think Likud will bring about the end of history and we're supposed to play up to this lunacy?"

She nodded. "Doesn't hurt anything."

"Doesn't hurt anything? We trigger World War III and it doesn't hurt anything?"

"No one is going to trigger World War III," she said waving her hands. "Israel has nuclear weapons. As long as no one else in the region has them, there's not going to be any war."

Cane shook his head. It all sounded completely nuts. "So Birch should meet with Netanyahu, then?"

"It would play even better if he met with Ariel Sharon."

"Sharon?" Cane frowned. "Won't that piss off Netanyahu?"

Crock smiled. "It shows how independent minded Senator Birch is. He meets with the most hardline of

the hardliners. It'll make Abraham very happy."

"Are you telling me that Netanyahu isn't crazy enough for Reverend Abraham? Come on, Crissy, we're talking about a man who wants to push all the Palestinians into the Red Sea."

"He *wants* to do it, but Sharon would actually do it."

"I don't know, I smell trouble."

Crock shook her head. "Don't worry. The idea originated with Einhorn and Grady, not me. We have Senator Birch meet with Sharon at some innocuous setting. We don't make a big deal about it, but the evangelicals and the hardline Zionists all take notice. They remember and no one else does. It works."

"Peter Einhorn is behind this?" It suddenly made sense to Cane. "Okay. I'll talk to Birch about it."

Crock nodded. "We take every issue that Reverend Abraham might grab hold of and we take it from him. Then we do the same with the Republican moderates. We can ignore the few liberals still wandering about in the Party. That's all it would take to sew up the nomination. As long as we can avoid any big mistakes, of course."

"That's your job," Cane said. "You make sure Birch doesn't make any big mistakes."

She agreed. "Don't worry," she said. "I'm going to be his shadow."

"You do that," Cane said, "and I'll buy you a drink every day we're in the White House."

Crock smiled. "That won't be necessary. If we win, I would much rather get a cabinet appointment."

Cane nodded. "I'll put in the word with the senator," he said with a mischievous look and a wink that indicated his interest in his colleague was not strictly professional.



Two men in a CIA office in McLean, Virginia. One sat behind a desk and was middle aged, with graying hair and glasses. The other was in his middle thirties, brown hair, who still had the muscles of a marine stood in front of the desk, almost at attention. The ex-marine was speaking. "Samuel Taylor Maxwell's file is on the way from MI-5," he said. "He's a philosophy professor at the University of Birmingham. We have preliminary info that he has had close contact in Britain with the daughter of Penko Yordanov, who is officially ex-Bulgarian intelligence and now a top exec with the national airlines. Yordanov had the rank of colonel and was in charge of counter-espionage. He had close contacts in the KGB, including elements in Section V. We suspect that Yordanov may actually still be active."

The man behind the desk reacted to the mention of the murderous Section V, then nodded thoughtfully. "You think both Yordanov and Maxwell may be in the employ of the Long March?"

The ex-marine nodded. "Maxwell has the Rekker program and probably has the Sunshine decryption program. The word is he didn't pass it to his handlers, but plans to sell it to the highest bidder."

"The Raven has gone free lance?" The marine nodded and the man behind the desk frowned, then sighed.

"Get the information to the deputy director and when that MI-5 file gets here, I want it on my desk."

The ex-marine nodded, then turned on his heels and left the room.

➡ NEXT CHAPTER

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Life on a Cloud

Mohamed could feel cold sweat curling down his forehead as he sat at his desk in the air conditioned office. He felt guilty when he glanced at the half eaten plum cookie on wax paper next to the telephone. Izmeen had made the cookies for him. She had gotten into the habit of making him plum cookies to eat every workday. Nevermind that her cooking always seemed to give him an upset stomach. He was impressed that she would take the effort. She did not have to cook. Along with her childcare duties, Crystal was responsible for cooking their meals, and before Crystal there was Rose and before Rose there was Lakshmi (but of these three, only Crystal had the gift of being truly visible to Mohamed --- Rose and Lakshmi having been wholly or partially invisible). Thinking about Crystal obliterated the feelings of guilt about the cookies. He drifted away. He had kissed her and she had not resisted. The moment of embarrassment had not happened. He had kissed her and then in a moment that had the illusion of permanence, of the clock having stopped, he had simply looked into her eyes and she into his. No words were spoken, but an eternity of meaning seemed to flow instantaneously, or so he believed. In that moment, every moment when he had felt "in love" coalesced into one and he felt like a river flowing in only one direction and that direction was towards her. Not since he had been a teenager had he felt so helplessly stupid.

The ringing of the telephone jolted Mohamed from his day-dreaming. He lost the dreamy image of Crystal's face and reached for the telephone. He imagined lots of possibilities, but was ill prepared when the familiar voice was that of Izmeen. Izmeen never called him at his office unless it was an emergency, and even then she would often go to great lengths to avoid calling him. It was not his desire that this was the case, but neither did he do much to change Izmeen's seeming taboo. The feelings of guilt crept back. "Mohamed, I think you need to come home now," she said. "What is wrong, Izmeen?" "What do you

mean, what is wrong?" "I've still got work to do." "Mohamed, you are a complete fool if you think you can treat me like some weak, stupid wife." "What are you talking about, Izmeen?" "Are you coming home?" "I can't just leave . . ." And she hung up the phone. Confused, he wondered if somehow Izmeen had found out about this less-than-innocent kiss. He wanted to call Crystal, but she was at the house and there was no way for him to get past Izmeen.

Then came a knock on his door. His secretary looked in. "I'm sorry to disturb you," she said, "but your daughter is here."

Involuntarily his heart had started racing during the phone call with Izmeen. He would rather have had time to calm down, but he nodded and told the middle-aged woman to let Mona in.

Mona had been sitting in the waiting area, thinking about how nice it would be to get a good night's sleep and that maybe then she would be able to do her work the way she was supposed to, when Mohamed's secretary had reappeared and mumbled that she could go in. Mona entered the room without any hint that something might be amiss. Nevertheless, he motioned for her to close the door behind her. She sat down in the comfortable chair in front of her father's desk. After the pleasantries, she told him that she had done something that was very embarrassing. He asked her to elaborate. She told him what she had been doing for Fadil Hamzah, of the betrayal of Ali Jamal. And then she told him why and fell silent, barely able to breath, as her father sat, also in silence, staring at his daughter.

"I'll resign my position," Mona said, finally. "I'm very sorry."

Mohamed blinked. This was far worse than Izmeen's phone call. In fact, he had temporarily forgotten the phone call and much else. He walked over to his daughter. He looked down at her, tears rolling down her face, and he slapped her so hard she fell backwards onto the floor. She curled up into a fetal position and began sobbing. "Stop it!" He shouted. "Stop it, this minute!"

Mona forced herself to stop sobbing, although the tears would not abate. She tried looking up at her father, although fear made her turn away almost instantly. In a moment of lucidity, she considered telling him what her uncle had done to her. Perhaps . . . but no. She decided not to. "I'm sorry," she muttered.

Mohamed went back to his chair behind the desk. "Get up," he said.

Mona immediately pulled herself up from the floor, picked up the fallen chair and reseated herself in it. She looked nervously, expectantly at her father.

"I need to you to go home," he said. "Your mother just called me and she sounds . . . disturbed about something." The memory had come back, although Mona was nonplussed by this request.

She's not my mother. Mona wanted to say this but this was clearly not the time. She remained as still and as silent as her condition would allow. She blinked repeatedly as her father stared into her, as if trying to erase her with his eyes. Deep inside her brain, something was trying to stir, some memory, some logical explanation that would make everything right again, but this was some sort of illusion, for there was no such logic, and her brain was mostly cotton fluff. It was as if all the machinery had simply stopped moving.

"You let yourself be used, not once but twice," he said. "What sort of daughter are you?"

Mona looked at her father with a pleading face. "I'm sorry," she repeated a third time.

At the same time that Mohamed was "meeting" with his daughter, Fadil Hamzeh was meeting with Prime Minister Abdullah. He had brought along a 10x10x6 inch box of documents.

D. J. Nathan was surprised when he received the phone call from the Prime Minister's office. He was told to report immediately to the P.M.'s office and not to inform anyone, including the finance minister, where he was going or that he had received the phone call. He followed instructions without hesitation. He left a message that he would be out of the office on personal matters and left the ministry immediately.

"I can't."

He made a face, frustration wrinkles. "What is the alternative, Mona?"

"You could help me."

He shook his head. "You have brought shame to your family. I do not see how I can help you after what you have done."

"What am I supposed to do?"

Mohamed shook his head again. "I do not know," he said. He turned away from her, leaning back in his chair, deep in thought. His head felt as if in a vise, the anger simmering. "How could you . . .?"

She waited for him to finish, but the words trailed into silence.

The room grew hollow, the air, the sound pulled into some unseen black hole.

Mohamed frowned, suddenly realizing the next step. "You will, indeed, resign from the finance ministry. And you will move back home. And then we will find you a suitable husband." He waited to see if she would protest, ready to get up and slap her again.

She simply nodded in passive agreement. Her mind had fled the scene.

"Go home," he told her, now looking at her squarely. Mohamed watched her rise from the chair, the door close behind her and then recalled Izmeen's telephone call. While he was in no hurry to know what had angered her --- he suspected that such knowledge would not make him feel better --- he knew that putting it off would not help. He looked at the dust dancing aimlessly in the shaft of sunlight streaming through his window. The anger had disintegrated whatever fear he had about Izmeen. He knew what he had to do.



The ten gallon aquarium still sat on a side table in the living room of Jay's flat, empty, except for the filter, although it had been months since the death of the only other resident of this apartment, a tiger fish he had nicknamed Flipper.

He smiled as Helen's voice came on the answering machine. He listened to another of her messages about coming to a party. *That woman loves parties.* He had no intention of going. She knew that. Their

relationship was a private matter. She knew that, too. But she kept trying. Hoping. When the message finished he hit the delete button, then went into the bedroom of his fourth floor apartment. Fourth floor of a twenty story complex in the mid-levels. An older building. Most people would think that living on the fourth floor of an older building was a sign that Jay was not doing so well. Living in the mid-levels and on the fourth floor of an older building. For an ex-pat, that was truly slumming. The Hong Kong Chinese think the higher up you live, the better. *Hell, you would have to live on a cloud to really get anyone's attention in this town.* The only thing better than living in the highest floors of a high rise building was to live at the highest peak of Hong Kong island, *The Peak*, in a big house that you didn't share with anybody. That would be nirvana. But not for Jay. He was content with the fourth floor of an older building in the Mid-levels. *Good enough. Inconspicuous and good enough.* In the bedroom he changed clothes, shedding the cheap hand-made suit (he was happy to give the local tailors some work from time to time). He put on a white shirt and blue jeans. He checked his appearance in the bedroom mirror and then picked up a new black leather belt, which he slid through the loops of the jeans. Buying new clothes in Hong Kong was an easy ritual. Probably more than any other city in the world, it was easy and inexpensive to buy new *Western* clothes in Hong Kong. Sure in other cities you could buy the local rags on the cheap, but that usually meant looking like you were in costume. In Hong Kong you could be outfitted for a trip to the financial district in Manhattan or the City on less than Americans pay for casual attire at their local mall. He smoothed out his hair and replaced the blue band that held his ponytail in place. He had been wearing his hair in a ponytail for the past year. It added to the mystique. It also caused even more heads to turn and eyes to fix on his brown skin than was usual, and it was usual to be stared at if you were brown-skinned in Hong Kong, even for those who had lived in Hong Kong for most or even all of their lives. Jay didn't care. He knew that the more they stared at his skin and his hair, the less they saw him. He was invisible, like Ellison's alter ego, and he liked it that way.

Jay had recently started using one of those little zip bags that had become increasingly popular in the West and that had been standard fare for professional men in China and Hong Kong for some time. He took his wallet from the ceramic countertop, where he had set it before removing his suit jacket, and slipped it into the zip bag, then closed it. He looked in the mirror one last time before going out. In the moment of reflection in the mirror, he thought once again about the long journey he had made from his childhood in Arkansas to this place and time. He thanked his lucky stars that he had not been born one hundred or even twenty years before he was. He would like to have been born even further into the future (assuming as he did that things must get better, especially for *people of color* --- he bristled as that phrase crept into his thoughts), but decided that he should simply be thankful for being in the present, not the unquestionably less pleasant, more violent past. Not that there was any logic to the *progression* of human society. Mo ah. There were no guarantees against the reemergence of horror. The world was full of chaos and danger. Not the rationality of the economics he had learned in economics classes at Amherst College. He had felt, even as an undergraduate, that economists had become mired in a bizarre world of sociopathic robots, resembling real sociopaths in their selfishness but capable of robot-like calculations and decisions, no references whatsoever to violence or faith, much less zealous belief, and out of control mathematical masturbation that pleased only themselves. Funny that he had ended up in Hong Kong, the one place in the world that probably came closer to the fantasies of neoclassical economics than any other place in the world. Mo ah. Irony was one of the few constants in the Universe of human history.

Jay liked the streets of Hong Kong at night. He liked the lights, the smell, the bustle. It had a warm familiarity, like sitting outside in semi-darkness around a ragsmoke-fire in Arkansas, hearing the old folk telling stories, and listening to the frustrated whine of mosquitoes. He met with Shi Dao in a small,

family-run Buddhist restaurant in Wan Chai, not far from his office. The man was dark for a mainlander, probably from the South, probably Chiuchowese from his facial features. Westerners generally think all Chinese look alike, which is another of those fallacies, *day-dreams* about race. Jay slid into a seat across from Shi Dao and watched him eat a bowl of rice and a plate of mock something-or-other.

"Are you hungry, Jay?" Shi Dao's eyes seemed more intense than usual.

Jay shook his head.

"You should let me order something for you." The eyes were unblinking.

A small man wearing an apron watched them from the glass-beaded kitchen entrance, then a young woman, slightly taller, long black hair, squeezed by him, jangling beads, and came to the table carrying a pitcher of water. The man disappeared back into the kitchen. The woman made her way to the table.

"Maybe just rice," Jay said.

The woman walked softly up to the table, filled two glasses of water, and Shi Dao told her to bring rice for his friend and maybe some broccoli with garlic sauce. He remembered that Jay liked this dish. The woman asked Shi Dao if he wanted more mock duck and when he shook his head she padded away as quietly as she had come, only making a sound when she parted the hanging glass beads once again.

"Thanks," Jay said.

The man nodded. "I assume from your message that you provided Mr. Maxwell with the help he needed."

"His brother sent an incomplete file to the States," Jay said. "I provided the missing pieces."

"Excellent. Our sources in the CIA will take care of the rest." It was, Shi Dao knew, already taken care of.

Despite what he knew of the long reach of the Long March, Jay remained impressed.

Shi Dao picked up the small teapot and poured tea for Jay, then for himself.

"Let's drink to harmony," Jay said, lifting his teacup gingerly.

Shi Dao nodded.

They both drank from their teacups. Jay waited a moment before asking the question that he'd wanted to ask when he first sat down in the restaurant. "Do you really think this will work?"

Shi Dao smiled again, broader this time. "The CIA will begin to worry that their plot to sabotage China, by using Simon Rekker, will be exposed. This will make them very cautious."

"And you think they will stop what they're doing?" Jay sounded skeptical.

"No," Shi Dao said bluntly, "but it will cause them to do less, to take precautions, and this will lessen the impact of their actions. The People's Bank of China will be able to block this less brutal attack."

The sound of beads. The woman returned with the food, left it, then quickly turned on her heels and left.

Jay smiled. "Are you going to turn Rekker's program against the West?"

"I find it fascinating," Shi Dao said, not directly responding, "that the Americans would destabilize this region. I had thought the United States would want to avoid chaos in Asia."

"I think it is in the interest of the U.S. to slowdown Asian economic growth, reassert *Pax Americana*."

"We are entering a difficult period," Shi Dao sighed. "China is struggling with unprofitable state-owned enterprises and many years of accumulated debt in the banking system. The Party is still controlled by men who lust after power. The contradictions that governed Mao and the China that Mao created are still very much alive, like the shadow fighters of the *Long March*." He seemed to gaze into nothingness for a long moment. "Harsh winds are beginning to blow. One does not try and repair one's roof during a storm." *A storm that provides just the proper distraction, smoke in the darkness.*

Jay nodded. "I believe western institutions plan to force a drastic debt liquidation that will weaken this city and every country in Asia, including China. Yes, I think you could call that a storm. I certainly don't believe there is anything that can be done to stop it. You must remember, my friend, capitalism is all about *creative destruction*. Financial crises provide a means for shifting control by destroying the accumulated wealth of those who are weakest in the capitalist food chain."

"And you think Asian capitalists are weak?"

"Relatively speaking," Jay replied, "except, maybe, those in Japan."

Shi Dao smiled. "The Japanese have been scraping their knees on the ground for the past seven years."

Jay laughed. "Well, I'm not sure they've been kicked out of the club just yet."

"I am beginning to see the logic of this thing. So, you think we must kowtow or suffer?"

"You can try Mao's way --- autarchy --- or you could try and turn the financial crisis against the West."

"You think we could use the Rekker program to make a financial crisis in the United States?"

Again, Jay shrugged. "Not without the cooperation of the American government and bankers."

"Wo ming bai la," Shi Dao nodded his head and made a face like someone who has tasted moldy fruit.

"Well, it would be very complicated and very risky," Jay warned.

Shi Dao's face became more dispassionate. "Perhaps something good will come from this."

"Contrary to popular wisdom, periods of crisis are just as likely to produce negative institutional changes as positive ones. Often a crisis will cause paralysis or reversals in reform in just those institutions where restructuring is most needed. In other words, I wouldn't count on this storm bringing about any positive effects for China or any other country in this region. It's possible, but . . ." Jay shrugged again.

Shi Dao thought about this for a moment, then asked, "Do you think the storm will be short or long?"

"This is going to take a long period of adjustment," Jay replied. "Long enough anyway. Longer than people think right now, but probably not as long as people *will* think as things get worse. People always overestimate things, whether they are good or bad."

Shi Dao nodded agreement. He remembered the English word --- hubris.

"I don't think the governments in the region or the people are ready for this," Jay continued. He opened the zip bag and removed a package. It had the softness of bubble paper. The package contained an optical disk. He slid it across the table to Shi Dao, who took it without taking his eyes from Jay. He put the package in his zip bag. "This package contains the complete set of algorithms your programmers need to reproduce the Rekker program. It should provide you with some insight into how to fight the effects of the destabilization. And, I suppose, it may provide you with the tools to eventually turn the table on those who would create chaos in Asia and, more specifically, in China."

"Chaos," Shi Dao nodded. "It is the spark that triggers revolutions."

"Sometimes revolutions, sometimes counter-revolutions. Either way, it has a terrible effect on economic growth. I guess you can't detach economic well-being from political stability, can you?"

"I would not think so," Shi Dao agreed. "In any event, it would seem that we have a lot of work to do."

Jay wanted to say 'Fucking A' but restrained himself, instead he nodded, smiling, his eyes bright in the reflected light of the overhead lamps of the restaurant. "Yes, my friend," he said, "that is absolutely right." He glanced in the direction of the open doorway where the old man had been watching. The doorway was now vacant. "I think the outline of Rekker's strategy will be useful. And if the CIA has to reduce its involvement, then China does not have to suffer the fate of its neighbors."

Shi Dao smiled and nodded. "The food smells good," he said.

"Nothing like a good garlic sauce," Jay agreed.



The distant roar of the four 747-400 engines, the low pitched, hollow drone of the air conditioning system (a misnomer, for certain), combined with changing pressure in the inner ear, made the world seem farther away, sent the consciousness into an illusion of detachment. It was the sound of wind in a vacuum.

"It's very difficult to defeat a guerrilla army by conventional tactics. The guerrillas are constantly moving. They infiltrate every town and village. They disappear into the general population. And they are relentless. Conventional forces tend to concentrate in easily identifiable groupings and they lack the will power to fight a relentless opponent. They are hired guns. Therefore, while the guerrillas are always at war, always engaged in warfare, the regular army's soldiers become exhausted and want to give up. This is why the only way to defeat a guerrilla force is to be ruthless and to violate every human right on the books. There is no time for R&R in a real war. R&R, rules and rights."

Samuel swallowed hard and loosened the blue silk necktie around his neck.. He did not want to have this conversation. He had a copy of *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie sitting on the tray table in front of him --- there were not a lot of bookstores in Hong Kong, but Samuel had found a rather nice one (it was even musty like the one he liked back home) while wandering around not far from South Horizons. If only he had been reading it before Colonel Conrad Roman had started this conversation, if you wanted to call it that. Colonel Roman did not seem a likely participant in an open-minded debate on human rights and revolution, so what exactly was the point in trying? Samuel contemplated his fortune, having been able to procure a business class seat on a coach fare, thanks to the assistance of Helen Fung. It was

the best she could do. He hadn't saved money, but had the good fortune of more leg-room and the company of Colonel Roman, who had quite openly said that he was with U.S. Army Intelligence. "I've just spent the last two years in Thailand. I can tell you, I'm glad to be going home." Between listening to the hollow and distant sound of his own breathing, Samuel wondered: *Why tell this to me?* Perhaps Colonel Roman had been bitten by that American form of racism within which all people of the diaspora (as well as all those of the African continent) were considered brothers, no matter what their differences or how little they had in common. Samuel also wondered if somehow Northwest Airlines had some sort of code for race that had seated the two of them together.

"It must be rather difficult," Samuel said. Samuel's ears adjusted poorly to changing air pressure. His own voice seemed distant. *Wind in a vacuum.*

Colonel Roman nodded. "I'm looking forward to a change of scenery. I'm about to take command of the Military Assistance Program, thanks to my old friend General Grady. Our mission is to prepare foreign military officers to meet any domestic or foreign threat to the interests of the United States."

Samuel looked surprised. "Shouldn't military officers defend their *own* country's interests?"

Colonel Roman frowned, as if Samuel was speaking gibberish. "There are only two interests: those of the United States and those of our enemies. We must create a fifth column of military leaders in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the former communist countries who will root out our enemies and destroy them." He paused for a moment, then added, "It's not always pleasant work. It's not always appreciated. We military men work in the sewers of humanity. But somebody's got to do it." The colonel seemed to stiffen in his seat, as if hearing some inner military command. Samuel considered taking this pause to divert his attention to the window (*there must be something out there worth seeing --- clouds, ocean, angels tampering with the wings*), but was transfixed on this other man. Roman smiled again, but only half-heartedly. "You know, I've done some things that I'm not really proud of." And then he stopped, as if catching himself in the moment before confessing.

"I'm sure that's true of a lot of people," Samuel said, not sure why he would want to console this man. *He is, no doubt, a murderer, a rapist, an abomination. Black like me? I think not.*

"Power corrupts," he said. "And what gives more power than the barrel of a gun?"

Samuel shook his head. "I'm sure I don't know," he said.

"Ideas," Roman said, "that is far more powerful than a gun. The right ideas can make a man think he is invulnerable. He will risk his life and the lives of others. He will do whatever it takes to achieve his mission. If he has to take the life of others, guilty or innocent, then he'll do it. And he won't blink an eye." Roman nodded. "Ideas are far more powerful than the barrel of a gun. That's why the first step in any conquest is to take control of the minds of the conquered." He smiled.

"How exactly do you do that?"

"That's not so hard, really. You just kill or exile the select few who are zealously committed to the wrong ideas and the rest will come along voluntarily. Most people are cowards."

Samuel did not respond. He looked into the brown eyes of Colonel Roman. In an instance, in this transfixation, they seemed as intimate as lovers.

"You ever find it hard to sleep?" Roman seemed to be changing the subject.

"Sometimes," Samuel said, not wanting to elaborate, not even sure why he answered at all.

"I find it hell getting any sleep. When the sun goes down and everyone goes to sleep, I start thinking about death, the inevitability of it, the lack of any way to escape it. I probably sleep, at most, three or four hours a night. Sometimes I don't sleep at all."

"I don't think you're alone in that, Colonel. From time immemorial, the fear of oblivion has kept human beings awake at night. I think that's what religion was supposed to cure." This time it was Samuel who smiled.

"We are the hollow men." Roman returned the smile. "What do you do for a living, Samuel?"

Exchanged pleasantries, exchanged names: Samuel contemplated the act of giving his name, of sharing even the peripheral intimacies of life, to a man such as this. *Was it like giving your name to the Devil? Did it curse you somehow?* He frowned, thinking that his thoughts were a bit too religious. "I'm a professor of philosophy," he said.

"Excellent," Colonel Roman said. "Then you probably understand the meaning of contradiction. You know, in my youth that word had no meaning. I would probably have thought that anyone who used the word was a pompous ass. Now I think about it all the time."

"What do you mean?"

"There are so many contradictions. Life is full of it. For example, we kill civilians in order to set them free. Now maybe for a religious person, that's not a contradiction. Religious people can always find a way to rationalize every damn thing. But I find it like squaring a circle, if you know what I mean."

"That's simple enough to resolve," Samuel said. "Don't participate in the killing."

Roman smiled his widest smile yet. "But that creates another contradiction. If you're in the military, you're a participant in the killing. If you try not to participate, you violate military law and are subject to prosecution. If you're prosecuted and convicted, then your example stimulates others to do as they are ordered. You become a participant in the process, whether you like it or not."

"Yes," Samuel agreed, "that is a problem."

"I suppose you've read Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*?"

Samuel shook his head. "No, but I'm familiar with it." *Catch 22*, like *Catcher in the Rye*, was one of those novels that, for Samuel, epitomized a certain strand of American intellectual achievement ("*white contempt and rebellion?*") during the contemporary era. Perhaps in the racialized social consciousness these novels might be seen as "white" corollaries to *Native Son*. Samuel had made no effort to read any of them.

"I read it in high school back in Pittsburgh," Roman said. "Damn fine piece of writing. Heller recognized that life is contradiction. Contradictions that are so all-over-the-damn-place that it creates absurdity. But the contradictions in *Catch 22* are all small contradictions, just like the one I mentioned."

"Small? Killing people in order to, as you say, set them free, doesn't seem like such a small

contradiction." Samuel thought about Thomas Aquinas and the medieval doctrine of a just war. *That was the beginnings of rationalization*, he thought. *Jesus the pacifist was displaced, once and for all, by church doctrine. That was when the final nail was hammered into the coffin of Christian pacifism, which was now only a ghost lingering in the shadows of the foreign policy establishment and military men like Conrad Roman.*

"Killing people isn't that big a deal," he said. "Life itself is the biggest contradiction of all. We live these lives, struggling to play our role, pretending to be important, and in the end we all die. We're no better than ants, really. Look, even the planet will die eventually. And maybe even the Universe. It's all just a big fireworks display that comes to a sudden end one day. So what the hell difference does anything make?"

This made Samuel smile. "So who is the philosopher here, Colonel?"

Roman laughed. "Certainly not me," he said.

Another long drink of silence. Roman did not blink. Samuel did. "Since we do not know the meaning of life," Samuel said, "then shouldn't we try to do good, to try to make the lives of those we share this planet with better?"

"But how do we know what is *good*? That's a moral term. Morality is relative."

He had a point. "You're right, of course. There is no universal standard of good. But we do know what pain is. Only the rare masochist enjoys pain. So why should we add to the suffering of others, cause them pain? We don't want it for ourselves or those we care about. So, if we live by that standard, we can at least do no harm."

"I'm not a doctor, Samuel," Colonel Roman said. "I'm a soldier. My role in life is to cause occasional pain, and sometimes to do a good deal of harm."

"You don't have to play that role, Colonel."

"Please, call me Conrad."

"If enough people refuse to play the role . . ."

"It doesn't work that way. Look, we're no better than ants. We play our roles or we are useless. The baker who doesn't bake; the painter who doesn't paint; the writer who doesn't write; or the soldier who refuses to do his duty --- They are nothing but zombies, the walking dead. They don't serve the colony and they don't deserve a place in the colony. For all I know, the real meaning of life, as you say, is to play your role without questioning it. Do what you're supposed to do. For you that's philosophizing. For me, well, it's different." He looked expectantly at Samuel, as if hoping for a better argument, although Samuel was hardly in the mood for deep philosophical debate with a colonel in U.S. Army Intelligence. Nevertheless, Samuel was always the teacher . . .

"Human beings are more than ants, Colonel. We are sentient beings. We are self-aware. We can dream of a better world than the one we inherit and we can fight to bring it about. It is the actions of those who refuse to play their roles that creates change and change is the foundation of human evolution. Without our ability to keep changing, we would not have survived as a species."

"Persuasive," he said. "But you sound like a damned revolutionary." He leaned back in his seat. "I suppose that's your role in society, as an intellectual, as a philosopher. You think outside the box, you agitate and create change. That's not my role. I'm a soldier. I defend the damned box." Again, the smile.

"Even soldiers can refuse to fight. And most intellectuals are quite conservative, using their wits to do just what you say is the role of a soldier --- defending the status quo. I haven't known many intellectuals who are willing to challenge their programming."

"Programming? I like that."

"Isn't it hard for the military to program men to kill?" Samuel asked a question that he really wanted the answer to.

The colonel thought about it for a moment, then shook his head. "I don't think that's what's hard. It's hard to get the young recruits to follow orders without thinking, and that's not the same thing."

"How many soldiers refuse to fight once the battle starts? One in ten? One in a hundred? One in a thousand?"

"A soldier who refuses to fight is no longer a soldier." Colonel Roman pursed his lips, then added, "Probably one in a thousand actually refuses to follow orders. A lot more find more subtle ways to subvert command."

"Well, I don't imagine the ratio is much better among intellectuals," Samuel said, hoping he was wrong, believing he was not. "The one soldier who refuses to fight, even if it means disobeying orders, is the real soldier. He is the soldier for peace."

Roman frowned and in an instance the thoughtfulness left Roman's face and his eyes turned cold. "That's the kind of b.s. that cost us Viet Nam. All the peace talk, the panzy-ass protesting. Back then there were lots of people who disobeyed orders. Not because they were sympathetic to the Vietnamese, but because they were spoiled middle-class brats who were afraid of death."

"Or maybe the Vietnamese were just more determined. Maybe they had more to fight for."

"That's my point." The smile returned. "That's exactly what I was getting at. The Vietnamese were more committed to their ideas than we were. We went into that conflict half-hearted. We were too damned philosophical. If we had been willing to kill every man, woman, and child in that country, we could have won the victory. Damn it, we'd already won the war."

"Won the victory?" Samuel was sure he had heard it right, but it made no sense.

Roman leaned back, relaxed a bit, and smiled again. "Most people think we lost the Vietnam war. We didn't lose the war. We lost the victory. We kicked the Vietnamese butt in that war. We'd won the war by the end of the Goddamned Tet Offensive. We beat the NVA and we had the V.C. running for cover. We let it all go because of the panzy ass peaceniks and the snotty nosed middle class brats we'd drafted to fight a man's war and their mothers and sisters and long-haired hippie brothers back in the States. That's why we had to change tactics. Instead of fighting ground wars, we turned the fight over to the pilots. We don't really fight any more, we bomb. Nixon started it after Tet, because of the weak political will back home. We just started bombing the hell out of the enemy, killing every damn thing under the sun."

Samuel blinked again.

Roman flagged down the stewardess and requested a gin and tonic. He asked Samuel if he wanted anything and Samuel shook his head.

It was in this instance that Samuel realized the horror of his situation. He was trapped inside the bulkhead of a jumbo jet over the Pacific Ocean above the clouds with this man for another twelve (plus) hours. He slumped in his seat and felt a wave of pain flow through his body. This man and airline food. The horror.



Memories weigh less than nothing. Or perhaps, memories are so substantial that we are unable to bear the full weight of them and so almost always remember only what we want to remember, giving memories less weight than they deserve. Mohamed looked out the window of the car from his vantage point in the rear. He remembered coming home from the hospital after his surgery. The shock of survival still weighed on him then, perhaps it still did. The moment of realization of survival was an epiphany. But what was it that he had realized in that moment? What made the moment an epiphany? In the mundane every day life he was leading, it had faded into something less than nothing. Negative weight that draws the darkness to the consciousness. The driver wheeled the Mercedes onto the circular driveway of Mohamed's home. He looked at the structure with a mixture of forboding and anger. This house was the primary symbol of the life he had created, of his status and power. It was meaningless. He had a wife he did not love, a daughter who had betrayed him, a life without meaning.

Inside the house he did not immediately see Izmeen. She was not waiting for him, as he had imagined she might be. He had thought perhaps she had wanted to start the screaming early. But she was not there. The room felt empty without her anger.

In the kitchen Izmeen was storing away the container of white powder that had served as a special ingredient in her cooking for Mohamed. She pushed the container back in the darkest corner of a cabinet where she kept her teas and which she had told Crystal, in very certain tones, was private, taboo. Izmeen remembered the contortions on Mohamed's face two nights ago. He complained of stomach pains again. He couldn't sleep. He was so afraid of the cancer recurring. She had consoled him. Now she heard him come in the front door. *He can wait*, she thought. *Let him wait*. Izmeen had a gift for patience. She had proved this with her father, who had lingered for five years before succumbing to kidney failure. Her mother had inherited freedom, yet she had cried almost endlessly. Izmeen could not, even today, understand her mother's wailing. She had also proved her patience with her cousin, Mohamed's former wife and her "best friend," who had been ill for nearly three years before her insides had rotted sufficiently to end her suffering: cancer that had spread throughout her body and was inoperable. Even now Izmeen refused to think the woman's name. She closed the cabinet door and went into the front room where Mohamed waited.

"I came home, like you asked," he said when she finally appeared. He moved closer to her, wanting to share the sickening information Mona had delivered earlier in the day.

She folded her arms and he stopped. She wished that she could cry on command. The coldness that she felt and that was frozen in her face seemed inappropriate, but she could not do any better. She was not a good actor, nor a good liar, although Mohamed was so naive about certain things that this hardly ever

dreaming in Malaysia
mattered. She wanted to smile, thinking about this man of the law, this politician, unable to make sense of his own family life, unable to fathom the hatred of his wife. "Sit down," she commanded. "We need to talk."

He stared at her for a long moment, then did as he was told. His anger turned into a sickness of the heart he felt neither strong nor aggressive any more and decided not to stand up to Izmeen.

She stood over him. It felt good to do this, so she did not sit when he motioned for her to join him on the sofa. "How much of a fool do you think I am?"

Her question floated in the air unanswered. "What is the matter, Izmeen?" He asked, not really wanting an answer, but knowing that this confrontation had to play itself out. *She doesn't know about Mona.*

She stood there for a while. The air seemed humid, despite the air conditioning (another of those little "class distinctions"). "You *know* what the matter is." She waited for him to acknowledge his crime.

He shook his head. It doesn't matter. *You have no power, Izmeen. Sound and fury, signifying nothing.* He let her rail about Crystal. She knew about the kiss, suspected more. *How did she know? It did not matter.* He calculated what he was going to do about Mona, about Izmeen, about Fadil Hamzeh, about Crystal. He was beginning to feel the threads of anger weaving back into his fabric.

"I fired her," she said.

"What? Fired who?" He had stopped listening.

"I fired her and if I need to, I'll do more than that."

He sat up straight. "You're a fool, Izmeen," he said and saw her anger boil over. *It is time for me to take decisive action. I've lost control of things and it is high time I set things right again.*

The power of righteous indignation and instinct, allowed her to restrain the urge to strike him. She saw something change in his bearing that made her cautious. "Crystal is gone, Mohamed. Do you understand what I am saying to you? Your little whore is gone. You are going to have to deal with this."

"Crystal?" He realized in this moment how absolutely unimportant Crystal was.

She smiled, if you can call it a smile. It was the look of someone who tasted something sweet and sour. "She's going back to the Philippines tomorrow."

"Why?" *It's totally irrelevant,* he thought. *Crystal is totally irrelevant and so are you.*

"I don't think I need to spell out every sordid detail of your little affair," she said. "How can you do something so low, so disgusting? I don't know what to do with you. You're an embarrassment. You must understand that I could ruin your career."

No, you can't. He looked at her. He saw the silhouette of the epiphany. No, she could not destroy his *career.* And even if she could, she wouldn't do it. She cared too much about power and money. It was not Izmeen who posed the threat. *And what affair? It was a kiss.* No matter. This present had already become past and insubstantial. He looked past her. He saw Mona's face. *Tomorrow?* The threads of the ethereal future seemed just beyond reach. He stood up. There was a sense of urgency in this action.

He shook his head and walked toward the door. He walked right past her.

"Mohamed, what are you doing?"

His mind made up. Thoughts swirled and disappeared into a void of emotion, interest, and disinterest. He never looked back.



As the taxi turned from the busy four lane street onto the driveway of an innocuous looking, red brick office complex in Tysons Corner, Mica Brant thought about how extraordinarily paranoid was the environment in the Central Intelligence Agency, yet how absolutely careless people could be with their secrets or with their oversight of the secrets of others. She paid the driver and exited the car. She watched him turn and drive away, then walked up the concrete walkway to the windowless metal door. There were no signs anywhere, nothing to indicate what this building housed. Most people thought the C.I.A. operated primarily out of McLean. For the most part that was true, but there were field operatives who never crossed the threshold of the Langley complex. Because Mica operated relatively openly, she had an office in Langley, but she knew agents who had never been inside the complex, including several agents working for Bernie Stifel. Indeed, some believed that Stifel did not even tell HQ the names of all his agents. She noticed the small camera above the door and had the sudden urge to pose (which she suppressed). She was now wearing her black hair at her shoulders and had on designer sunglasses. She removed the sunglasses and slipped them into the pocket of her gray jacket, then took from her purse an identification card and swiped it in the access control box. Finally, she punched in a six digit code on the control box keypad. The electromagnetic locks released and she pulled the door open and entered the claustrophobic reception area where a single guard, sitting behind a massive semi-circular desk, watched like a figure out of a B movie. She walked up to the guard and informed him that she was there to see Bernie Stifel. The guard, who spent his days in this fishbowl, under the watchful eyes of other but unseen guards, did not seem at all interested in who she wanted to see or who she was, but he picked up a black telephone receiver that seemed antiquated, said that Mica Brant was in the lobby, and repeated her request to see Bernie Stifel. In a matter of moments he gave her a visitor's i.d. badge to hang around her neck and directed her to the gleaming metallic elevator doors. If the entrance area was claustrophobic, the elevator gave one the impression of solitary confinement. There were no controls inside the elevator, only more of the ubiquitous cameras, and the walls were dark green. There was nothing to tell the passenger where she was or the floor where the elevator finally, mercifully, stopped. The doors opened and Bernie Stifel's plump cheeks, pug nose, and otherwise sad sack face was waiting for her on the other side. She shook his hand and exchanged pleasantries as they walked down the corridor to his corner office. Stifel was perhaps fifty, maybe a bit less, it was hard to tell. All the doors were metal and had keypad entry systems. At the end of the corridor was Bernie's door, larger than the others. Stifel punched in the code to open the door and led Mica into the office.

Mica's briefing was lengthy and memorized. She was sure he already knew much of what she had to say, but it was part of the ritual to repeat even the most innane facts, to avoid leaving out something that someone else (those above one in the food chain) might consider vital. Stifel was particularly alert as she told him about the machinations of Simon Rekker and his crew. Stifel even interrupted at one point to ask her if she or Kirk Fuller had met Jack Degenhardt. When she said that neither of them had met Degenhardt, he sat back and waved for her to continue. "Do we have the computer program?" Stifel

asked, after hearing about the sophisticated piece of software providing the road map for Rekker's current operation. Mica shook her head. Of course, Bernie already had the program, but Mica did not need to know. "Good enough for now," he said. "But eventually we must get that program." He was also particularly interested in Mica's contacts in Malaysia and Singapore, contacts that had been put to use during her efforts to secretly support Rekker. "We need someone higher up in Kuala Lumpur." He said. "We have extensive dossiers, including psych evaluations, on several top officials. Most of the information was gathered by your people. It's time you put it to better use, don't you think?" She nodded. "Ali Jamal is in trouble with Abdullah, although he doesn't know it yet. We have a chance to influence Abdullah's successor. We need to make sure it is someone who is amenable to our policy objectives." She knew that Ali Jamal was considered an obstacle to American foreign policy objectives in Southeast Asia, although she remained fuzzy as to why. Indeed, she had the impression that Ali Jamal was pro-Western and, therefore, a useful person to have at the top of Malaysian politics. There was nothing in the information she had obtained and forwarded to Virginia that provided an easy explanation for this aversion to Jamal, at least nothing obvious. She wondered if the Company might have other sources of information on the Malaysian government, if there might be other field operatives working there without her knowledge. This was a distinct possibility. An agency with a secret budget can do a great many things, including duplicating its operations as many times as deemed necessary. For all she knew there was another person equal to her in rank running a completely different set of operatives and, like her, without any knowledge that a parallel operation was in place. She also realized that her suspicions were quite consistent with having spent a good portion of her adulthood in the espionage trade. It was potentially another example of paranoia. In the end, she saw little usefulness in trying to figure out the machinations of the desk jockeys. She had enough to think about just gathering information to feed their computers. She finished her briefing with the associate deputy director of operations, knowing that he would then repeat the process with the deputy director of operations, who would likely already know everything that had been said in this supposedly secure location. One of these days, she thought, I'm going to put all this behind me and spend my time looking for seashells on the Oregon coast.



The branches of the tree were twisted as if drawn by a drunken artist. The texture of the tree was rough, yet from a distance it appeared smooth. The leaves hung delicately, as if a strong breeze could unhinge them. A man with spiked hair, gold chain around his neck, in a dark tunic and jeans walked past the tree to a concrete dormitory, one of many attached to a nearby factory complex. He stopped momentarily in front of the whitewashed dormitory, then moved across the street to a tin-roofed shack with a line of bicycles in front. Outside the shack a sign hung: in English the sign read simply *Store*. Moments later, Mohamed bin Haji Bilal walked past the artist's tree and stopped in front of the dormitory.

The man in the tunic lit a cigarette and crossed the street. The heavy chain glistened in the streetlight. He walked up to Mohamed and offered him a cigarette. Mohamed declined. "I'm Taiko," the man said.

"I appreciate your agreeing to this meeting," he said.

Taiko shrugged. "How can I help you, Mr. Chairman?"

"I have a problem with Fadil Hamzah," he said. "It involves my daughter."

Taiko's eyebrows went up. "I see."

"He needs to be neutralized." He watched Taiko think this over for a moment, then continued, "I don't really care if this is accomplished by a scandal or by an accident, if you understand my meaning."

Taiko nodded again. He realized that a favor of great magnitude was being asked of him and smiled.

Near the entrance to the store across the street, another man inside the closed store watched them surreptitiously. Lucas "Taiko" Hing, boss of one of the Triads, a man with ties to prostitution, murder, smuggling, meeting with the ruling party chairman. They spoke briefly, then parted company. The man watching this realized he would have to report what he had witnessed to his C.I.A. handler.



After Samuel was gone, the Royal Hong Kong Police, encouraged by MI-6, who were themselves encouraged by the C.I.A., became interested in finding Michael Maxwell and Faith Yiu. Inspectors were dispatched to follow any leads --- there weren't any --- and to talk to anyone who might know reasonable, possible whereabouts --- there were precious few and their ideas of even less usefulness than a few of those who didn't know Michael or Faith at all, but who, in their paranoia or warped sense of humor, had some good ideas where the police might search. It was, nevertheless, interesting the amount of energy that could be expended by police inspectors who knew virtually nothing of any particular use to solving the puzzle put to them. They worked like men paid by the hour, wasting a good deal of time driving here and there, eating in as many places in as many parts of the colony as could be reasonably justified, and talking to people who barely knew Maxwell --- often they said they didn't know him at all and some of them were telling the truth. At least the number of people who knew Faith Yiu was substantial enough to make up quite a bit of work for a subset of the inspectors, although knowing her and knowing anything relevant to where she was were quite different things. At the end of the day the one thing for which they were all quite certain was that they were sorry not to have Samuel Maxwell to interrogate and had concluded that should they be so lucky --- they did not expect to be --- and Samuel Maxwell set foot again in Hong Kong they would not allow him to leave without first talking with him at length and under the most unpleasant conditions they could muster within Hong Kong law.



•→NEXT CHAPTER

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