



BOOK 1

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by Richard Del Connor

Masonic Kung Fu BOOK 1

by
Richard Del Connor

First novel
of a 3-book series
about European Freemasonry
and Shaolin Kung Fu
in China
before World War II

ShaolinCommunications.com

Raves for Richard Del Connor's

Masonic Kung Fu BOOK 1

"I really like this book. But since I wrote the book--I'll replace this with someone else's rave--soon."
---*Richard Del Connor, Mason Lodge 513, San Fernando, California.*

ALSO BY RICHARD DEL CONNOR

AUTUMN FLAVOURS

THE ANTICHRIST

BUDDHA KUNG FU STUDENT MANUAL

COYOTE IN A GRAVEYARD

THE HOLOCAUST

HUMAN VALUES FOR SUCCESS
IN FAMILY & BUSINESS

KUNG FU COWBOY ORIGINAL DRAFT

LOVE, ALWAYS & FOREVER!

THE POTATO VALENTINE & OTHER LOVE POEMS

SEASON OF FOURS

SHAOLIN KUNG FU BEGINNER

SHAOLIN KUNG FU INTERMEDIATE

SID'S PLACE

TAI CHI BEGINNER

TAI CHI INTERMEDIATE

UTAH - PHASE 1

RICHARD DEL CONNOR

MASONIC KUNG FU BOOK I

Richard Del Connor is the author of **Buddha Kung Fu Student Manual**, used to launch in 2008 his Buddha Kung Fu schools which use this PDF book to interact with the thousands of webpages at *www.BuddhaKungFu.com* and *www.ShaolinChiMantis.com*

Richard is the author of many poetry books since 1974's release of **Autumn Flavours**. This poetry book launched the poetry book series, **Season Of Fours**.

Richard Del Connor became The Coyote in 1984 while performing his rock opera, *Coyote In A Graveyard*, in Los Angeles. The first American Zen album, LEVEL 1 = Peace Of Mind, was released under the producer name of Richard O'Connor.

Later albums and poetry books by American Zen were released under the pseudonym, The Hippy Coyote.

Richard has completed two decades of child raising and is looking forward to world travel and television appearances.

www.RichardDelConnor.com

Masonic Kung Fu BOOK 1

First novel
of a 3-book series
about European Freemasonry
and Shaolin Kung Fu
in China
before World War II

by Richard Del Connor, "Buddha Zhen"

(Zhen Shen-Lang, Spirit Wolf of Truth)

Founder of Shaolin Chi Mantis and Buddha Kung Fu schools.

Author of *Buddha Kung Fu Student Manual* and *Tai Chi Beginner*.

ShaolinCommunications.com

Masonic Kung Fu Book 1

by Richard Del Connor

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THIS book is the First Edition Release by Shaolin Communications.

Author: Richard Del Connor

Chinese name: Zhen, Shen-Lang "Buddha Zhen"

English translation: Spirit Wolf of Truth

Richard Del Connor is a master mason of Panamericana Lodge 513. No part of this book was intended to reveal any of the "secrets" of modern Freemasonry. The author hopes that by creating this dramatic interest in masonic rituals, ceremonies, and symbols that more men will realize the inspirations and rewards of masonry. Richard has created two versions of this "Masonic Kung Fu" Kung Fu form:

one for public viewing, that does not pause for the "secrets,"

and another performance version of the "Masonic Kung Fu" for master masons only.

Buddha Zhen has been teaching Shaolin Kung Fu since 1984. He learned this Kung Fu form, "***Ling Po***," ("***Lian Bu***" = mandarin Chinese) first from Dr. Kam Yuen in 1981, and later from Dr Yuen's shifu, Grandmaster Wong Jack Man, in 1997. The videotape produced by Shaolin Chi Mantis in 1994, "***12 Lessons of Ling Po***," teaches the Tai Mantis version of this Masonic Kung Fu. Currently, Buddha Zhen teaches only the official Chinese Jing Mo Association version of this form.

Freemason Lodges can book performances and seminars from Richard Del Connor at 818-723-2769.

Instructional videos to learn Lian Bu will be available at **www.shaolinINTERACTIVE.com**

BOOK 1 of a 3-book series.

FICTION

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This **BOOK 1** is completely fictional with no persons living or not living depicted or represented in the story.

For updates and information about "*Masonic Kung Fu*," visit **www.RichardDelConnor.com** "**Project 14**"

Dedicated

to all Kung Fu artists who seek to be better persons
and all Freemasons who seek a better healthy life.

Thank you

to Dr. Kam Yuen, Shifu Scott Stamps, and Grandmaster Wong Jack Man for teaching me this Kung Fu.

Masonic Kung Fu BOOK 1

by Richard Del Connor

About the Author:

Richard Del Connor has been teaching Shaolin Kung Fu since 1984.

In 1992 Richard founded the Shaolin Chi Mantis Traditional Buddhist Gongfu schools.

www.ShaolinChiMantis.com

In 1996 Master Zhen founded the Tai Chi Youth nonprofit education organization.

www.TaiChiYouth.org

In 1998 Zhen Shen-Lang founded the Shaolin Zen sect of Chan Buddhism.

www.ShaolinZen.org

In 2008 Buddha Zhen founded the Buddha Kung Fu schools.

www.BuddhaKungFu.com

In 2010 Coyote shaved his head--for the third time--to become the Hippie Buddha?

www.HippieBuddha.com

For more information about Buddha Zhen: (Kung Fu and Tai Chi Master, Buddhist Scientist)

www.BuddhaZhen.com

www.BuddhaZ.com

For more information about Richard Del Connor: (Author, poet, record producer)

www.RichardDelConnor.com

www.DickieDare.com

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I discovered the "**Masonic Kung Fu**," on June 9, 2009, while practicing for my 3rd Degree proficiency of Freemasonry.

Ironically, the masonic lodge I joined was closed down the month after they accepted me as an initiate. However, I still had not officially been initiated, before they were shut down. So I was a "candidate Mason," without a lodge, not officially initiated.

I studied the pamphlets and **Cipher** almost every day during the last months of 2006, but it wasn't until months later in 2007 that another Mason lodge performed a "courtesy degree," for me, so I could officially be a Mason, or "Freemason." At the end of the initiation, the new mason signs his name in the lodge's **Bylaws** and is duly registered as a mason of that lodge. However, even after my initiation, performed by the Magnolia Park Lodge 618, the lodge that had accepted my application, Cahuenga-LaBrea Lodge 513, did not exist--or was not allowed to exist, so my name was not entered into any lodge's register.

This made me a mason without a lodge.

The next two years were spent attending weekly dinners, and some First Degree meetings and initiations of the Burbank 406 Masonic Lodge. I was such a regular attendee that most of the members of Burbank 406 thought I was a member of their lodge.

The master of the lodge, knew I was a floating member, and prioritized me after all the official members of the lodge. Each year, a new master is elected to be King Solomon and run the lodge for that year. My regular attendance to dinners, functions, and stopping by on Thursdays before their meetings, which I could not attend--endeared me to some of the masons of the Burbank 406 lodge. I think that their support enabled me to receive my 1st Degree Proficiency on June 20th, 2008, more than a year after being initiated an Entered Apprentice Mason.

This "proficiency test" is required after each masonic degree to prove you are ready and capable of accepting your next degree up the ladder of Masonic development. Performing the degree ceremonies, and training the candidates for their proficiencies is a lot of work involving a half dozen to a dozen masons. Even during these years of low enrollment in masonry, it is a lot of work to perform three degrees per month, and have a "stated meeting" like any nonprofit board of trustees does.

I received my 2nd Degree in masonry, July 17, 2008, at Burbank 406 lodge. Although there is a lot of information about Freemasonry on the internet, including all the "secrets," I didn't want to interrupt the intended flow of dramatic events and spiritual enlightenment by reading or even seeing pictures of the rituals. I sought to immerse myself in masonry and grow accordingly, mentally and spiritually. So, I was surprised, and unaware of what happened to me, and what was about to happen to me during the rituals and ceremonies. This darkness and ignorance forced my mind to "accept" or "rebel" from my helplessness. I strove to trust my fellow masons. I knew they had endured whatever I had to endure, and I strove to believe in the masonic ideals--before I knew what all of them were. Faith requires effort.

When I and three other "fellowcraft masons," entered the lodge to take our 2nd Degree Proficiency, we were nervous. We had to perform for a couple dozen Master Masons, and would either pass or fail. There is no grading in these tests.

The mason next to me, Jorge, was from Mexico and didn't speak English as well as he wanted to. This made him more nervous than the rest of us. As a friendly gesture, I offered to go first, so he could benefit from my performance before delivering his own. He was appreciative, and we are still friends to this day, and despite his moving back to Mexico, we talk on the phone and email each other regularly.

Another fellowcraft mason taking his 2nd degree proficiency, was a professional actor. After hearing and watching his performance of the test, I realized the beauty and artistic complexity that masonry contained, like a Shakespeare stage play. He was a pleasure to behold. I did really good, with just a couple little flubs, that a couple masons pointed out later. But I passed with flying colors and earned a reputation as a future officer of the lodge with my radio announcer style voice.

The 3rd Degree ceremony of masonry is the biggest, longest, and requires more supporting actors than the other degrees. During the past few years, my original lodge of Cahuenga-LaBrea 513 was absorbed into another lodge, newly formed called, Panamericana 513. (They took the number, but not the name of my former lodge.) By default I was to be a member of Panamericana 513, but they were formed to be a Spanish speaking lodge, and were adamant about using as little English as possible in the ceremonies, and even their monthly board of trustees "stated meetings." were conducted in Espanol. I don't speak Spanish.

Burbank 406 had adopted me. 406 performed my 2nd degree and 3rd degree ceremonies. I went to one of the Panamericana meetings to meet my default fellow lodge members. I knew a couple from the Cahuenga-LaBrea meetings I had attended, before its charter was pulled, but wasn't received very enthusiastically by the Spanish speaking members. They were mostly immigrants from South America and Central America, so my chest length hair probably didn't help my being befriended. I am also known as, **"The Hippy Coyote,"** of **American Zen**. My albums are produced by me as Richard Del Connor, and released by **ShaolinRecords.com**

I spoke with the Secretary, Chaplain, and Master of Burbank Lodge and they offered to accept me formally into 406. This would involve another limbo move for me though. Before they could officially accept me into their lodge, I would have to formally resign or quit Panamericana 513, which I was now listed as a member of by the Grand Lodge of California Masons, who oversee all the mason lodges in California. There is no USA Grand Lodge. Each state of the USA has its own Grand Lodge, and can alter their ceremonies and rituals as they see fit. Of course, all American lodges work from the oldest established rituals that were officially declared during 1717 in England. This created the uniformity that exists today in "speculative masonry," worldwide, "with exceptions."

However, at that moment when I was removed from Panamericana 513, I would be a Master Mason without any lodge. A rogue. A ronin. I would then have to apply, like anyone, to be accepted into another masonic lodge. That shouldn't be a big deal, but it only takes one member of the lodge to "black ball" someone from membership and the lodge. Every member present at that meeting must vote, and they must vote unanimously to accept any new member.

Once you are denied membership in a lodge, you can try again, a month later. Masons believe that "harmony" is vital, and accordingly seek harmony in their lodge, by not combining people who don't like each other.

Although I thought I was a friend of every mason in Burbank 406, one mason was noticeably concerned about my poverty. Normally, the steak dinners cost \$10, before the meetings. A good deal, but at that time--more than I could afford. So I especially enjoyed a "free" steak dinner. But this caused some irritation among paying members, so I was told by the secretary of the lodge, "no more free dinners." He was nice enough and said I could even attend the dinners, "just don't eat."

Having been studying Masonry for several years now, I was impressed with the ideals of charity and helping masonic brothers in need or poverty. Slogans are memorized about helping those in need--but masons don't pressure or urge each other to help or give much. I came to understand why "charity" is the highest ideal of a master mason--it's the hardest thing to teach or expect from anyone.

I had to panhandle gas money to attend some of the meetings, but continued persistently and consistently, at great expense to me, to drive around the mountain to the Burbank lodge each week. An upcoming Master of Lodge 406, who had some artistic ambitions and qualities of his own, whispered to me that he would help me get my 3rd Degree Ceremony when he became master of the lodge. He kept his word and scheduled my 3rd Degree ceremony as one of the first of his year-long reign. "Thank you worshipful."

I received my 3rd degree ritual on February 12, 2009. I was still planning to resign my membership in Panamericana 513, and apply for membership in Burbank 406 at this time. I was slightly apprehensive though, because one of the members of 406 had warned me that I should wait to join their lodge when I was financially stable. He didn't want me to be, "a drain on the lodge's resources." This concerned me. His negative vote would completely prevent me from being able to join Burbank 406. If that happened, I would be a mason without any lodge at all. Worse yet, once you are black-balled, you have to let each lodge you apply for know that fact...

That night when I was waiting to receive my 3rd Degree ritual ceremony at Burbank 406, more than a dozen Spanish speaking masons arrived to observe my ceremony. I recognized a couple of them, and recognized a few from Cahuenga-LaBrea, and was told that the other members were my Panamericana lodge brothers. I was slightly shocked and overwhelmed to discover I had a masonic family. I had brethren who were concerned about me. I had a masonry family after all.

I was moved by their support, and after the degree, told the Chaplain and Master of Burbank 406 that I wasn't sure whether to quit my lodge now, after they'd come out to support me. Secretly, I was also relieved to not go through the limbo process of quitting one lodge and hoping to be accepted by another lodge.

Perhaps this worked out better, at least in the short run. Unlike Burbank 406, the Latin lodge was less structured and less formal. The master of the lodge, Louie Bizarro, was very appreciative of my artistic talents. He appointed me to be the **"Organist of Panamericana**

513." He knew the organ was broken, but had heard me play guitar, so I was the guitaristo of the lodge. So far, I haven't heard of any other California lodge with a guitarist-organist. I performed ceremonies, rituals, and meetings playing my Alvarez acoustic guitar in the background. Despite this being a Spanish lodge, there were some members reluctant to allow or encourage me to play my guitar. They didn't want me overwhelming the rituals, distracting the audience, or making it difficult to hear what people were saying.

So I worked hard to play in the background, like a soundtrack to a movie, that adds to the drama, but doesn't call attention to itself. Then, there were times when the room and rituals had to be reorganized, like changing the set on stage of a play. During these "intermissions" I would perform more boldly and entertain the brethren. I probably couldn't have expressed myself as much at Burbank 406. I also wrote the song, "**Flintridge Fire**," during those months. This is a Spanish classical style song, so the members accepted this music within many of their rituals. I later released a smaller "radio version" of this song called, "**Cinco de Mayo**," that is available at iTunes, amazon.com, and other internet music stores.

Masonry changed the shape and meaning of my rock'n'roll album being recorded in 2009 and 2010 under my band name of **American Zen**. This album took on the story of Hiram Abif, instead of being about me, and was released as, **LEVEL 4 = Kung Fu Cowboy Part 1: King Solomon's Temple**. The subsequent album was also recorded that year and almost finished. It will be **LEVEL 4 = Kung Fu Cowboy Part 2: 3rd Degree Master Mason**. The musical stories were inspired by this book being formulated in my mind and include the song, "**Masonic Kung Fu**." These may be the first rock'n'roll albums about Freemasonry ever recorded. 2009 was an amazing masonic year for me.

During 2009 my flute became the main attraction of lodge ceremonies. The simple melodies and long flowing notes added a Heavenly and serene mood to the lodge. I composed several musical phrases that represented different people or masonic positions of the lodge. As these functions were performed, I would use the same theme music for them. Several members could be seen smiling as they recognized their own unique song as they performed their ritual duties, like opening the **Bible**. Guests of our lodge would shake my hand after the meetings and congratulate me on adding a "spiritual dimension" to what can sometimes be demanding rituals--after you've seen and heard them year after year.

But the real inspiration for this book took place on June 9, 2009, as I was practicing my Kung Fu and also practicing daily for my "3rd Degree." The 3rd degree ceremony is an awesome event, but the "proficiency test" is where the expression, "Don't give me the 3rd degree," comes from. This is a 3/4 hour memorization test that requires months of study and practice.

Shaolin Kung Fu is primarily for practicing alone, whether it be a sword form, spear form, or open hand fighting form. Each form or martial arts dance, is encoded with many fighting techniques that are not noticeable to onlookers or the practitioner. A Shaolin Kung Fu master is required to unlock these fighting secrets and explain how a heel stance is a kick block, and by adding a grab the technique becomes a joint lock leg break...

I was practicing the Kung Fu Form, "**Lian Bu**," or "**Ling Po**," as it is referred to in the Cantonese dialect on that June day in 2009. While practicing my Kung Fu forms I speed them up, slow them down, do them hard style, do them soft style, sometimes practice them drunken style--looking, searching, and uncovering the "hidden lessons" of the Chinese Kung Fu dances.

While breaking down the "**Lian Bu**" form, I noticed it started with the dugard and sign of a 1st degree mason. Then I realized a few moves further, the dugard and sign of the 2nd degree mason. I got goosebumps. Like Indiana Jones in an ancient cave or temple, I looked ahead more for clues and symbols. Sure enough, the 3rd degree dugard and sign appeared in the Kung Fu movements. This was amazing! A coincidence? As I spent many hours studying the movements, I realized that all the movements appertained to the degree preceding it. After the 1st degree secret hand signs there was the hammer, chisel, and 24 inch ruler (my arm held out level with fingers pointing upward). Then the requirements of being prepared for the 2nd degree, a framing square pressed into the...

The 2nd degree secret hand signs came next, then, "The Master's Secret," held up out of reach, tightly gripped in the Master Mason's fist. The next moves represented the preparation for the 3rd degree and had a symbolic enactment before the Kung Fu performer takes the position of receiving the 3rd Degree of masonry. Then, the dugard and sign of the 3rd degree. Wow!

I called the Grand Secretary of California and told him about my discovery. I called the Worshipful Master of the Burbank 406 lodge about my discovery...I called everyone I thought would be interested. Now what? I took it to my Panamericana Lodge and received permission from the Worshipful Master to perform my "**Masonic Kung Fu**" for the brethren. I performed it regular at first. I asked if anyone noticed any of the secret hand signs of masonry. No one did. Then I performed the "**Lian Bu**," form slower, pausing where the hand signs and punishment gestures were. I could hear the gasps and muttering. When I was done, I asked the brethren to take a vote, "Was this a Kung Fu Form with masonry encoded within it, or was it possibly a coincidence?" The master masons voted unanimously, that the "**Lian Bu**" Kung Fu form was encoded purposely with the secret symbols and signs of modern masonry.

Over the next few months, I decoded the rest of the form and realized that an entire third of the form was dedicated to telling the story of Hiram Abif being murdered in King Solomon's temple. You can find updates, and perhaps performance dates of myself at **www.RichardDelConnor.com** You'll notice a link on the left sidebar, "**Masonic Kung Fu.**" I look forward to showing it to you.

As I researched the history of this Kung Fu form I discovered that it first appeared in 1938 and became a favorite of many martial artists of many martial art styles. This was very unusual. There is no sharing of dances between Kung Fu styles. Each style has it's own dances and unique manner of performing them. How did this Kung Fu form, "**Lian Bu**," cross over into so many Kung Fu styles? I even found it, with photos, in a Daoist martial arts book by a Chinese Hsing-I master published in the 1950s. Amazing!

Unfortunately, the Japanese did confiscate the Masonic lodge records in China during 1937 and 1938, making it more difficult to trace information. Also, Chinese were officially banned from masonic membership during those years. So this led me to consider that this Kung Fu form was created by an unofficial mason. It may be best to keep this fictional so that I don't get you into trouble. Since I am the first person to decode this Kung Fu form in the past 50 years, I'm not sure when it lost its' masonry coding, or if they ever intended for anyone to decode it after it was accepted into a Chinese government school in 1938.

I look forward to uncovering more facts, and perhaps offering the true story of this "**Masonic**

Kung Fu." For now, I offer you this fictional version, that avoids using some of the facts I've collected so far, and adds many details of my own imagination and life.

I hope this book inspires more people to become masons, and inspires more people to study Kung Fu. Perhaps by combining this Kung Fu version of the masonic principles into the public's awareness, masonry can be seen as something vital and beneficial, in a new and exciting way.

Don't worry you brother masons out there. I've been very careful not to "reveal" the coded secrets to nonmasons. I blur through the secrets during my public performances, sometimes talking about the concepts of masonry, then elaborating move by move when I reach the story of Hiram Abif being murdered, explaining each movement and the persons involved in the masonic story. I verified with many master masons, and the Grand Secretary that these parts could be openly revealed to the public. Since I can only fully reveal this ***Masonic Kung Fu*** to master masons, I encourage lodges to contact me for performances in your lodges.

p.s. I hope this book becomes a movie.

Sincerely,
Richard Del Connor, Zhen Shen-Lang, "Buddha Zhen," Spirit Wolf of Truth

Masonic Kung Fu BOOK 1
by Richard Del Connor

Chapters

- 1. Destiny Lodge**
- 2. New Father**
- 3. Master Yang**
- 4. Twin Dragons**
- 5. Backyard**
- 6. Time**
- 7. Work**
- 8. Listen**
- 9. Look**
- 10. Learn**
- 11. Lay Low**
- 12. Hole**
- 13. Home**
- 14. God**
- 15. The Way**

Freemason of Degrees

Of purpose and words that lack a rhyme--
we set the cornerstone.
The quarried soul is the rougher rock
chiseled by us alone.
With hammers that were forged, of the sublime,
the paper turns to etch--our glory with our mind.

The fellowcraft of burden, humbly does unfold--
his mortal destiny:
Standing in the stronger clock
whose hands and arms are free.
Devoted each day by degree, with trowel and secrets told,
cleaning the path of history--in lodges led to find.

Sectioned by the ruler of our success, of our demise--
builds faith in fellow men.
Measured by the smoothness of the final given block
God discovers a mortal friend.
Advancing up the winding staircase, where charity grows and flies,
following the light held by, the best of humankind.

"Father Sebastian says they worship the devil."

"It's not true. They use the **King James Bible** in all their meetings," responded Chong Lin.

"You must stop spying on them," warned Shao Mei with her dark brown Chinese eyes that seemed much darker as they widened with serious concern, and a hint of fear.

"Maybe," shrugged Chong Lin, "but I don't think so."

"You said so yourself! They threaten those who reveal their secrets with death."

"So I won't reveal their secrets."

"You're revealing them to me!"

"Not really. I can't understand the Finland masons, but they have the same death penalty signs."

"See! You should stay away from them. They will kill you if they ever find out!"

"Somehow, I don't think they would. They seem nice enough."

Shao Mei shook in rage--attempting to blurt out something scolding and threatening--but then, relaxed and with a sadness in her eyes, "They are foreigners. All of them. The Irish. The Dutch. And especially the English. They don't belong in our country."

"Father Sebastian says they are here to help our country prosper," taunted Chong Lin.

"You know that's not true."

"Are you calling Father a liar?"

"They worship the devil."

"I told you, they don't worship the devil. They use the same bible that Father Sebastian uses."

"How do you know that?"

"I've seen it."

Shao Mei wanted to say something, but couldn't find the words to argue with him. "I don't believe you," was all she could muster.

Chong Lin smiled. "I'll show you."

Now Shao Mei truly looked frightened. "I would never--"

"I know when they have their meetings. It's empty most of the time." Chong Lin was trying to reassure her but he might as well have been trying to get her to go into a haunted house. At only 13 years old, ghosts can seem very real. These gigantic foreigners though, were even more frightening and threatening than any Chinese spirits they'd ever imagined.

"Hey, look they're leaving now," spouted Chong Lin as they turned to watch the dozen Englishmen walk out of the building next to Chong Lin's house.

"I'm not going in there!" stated Shao Mei.

"Of course not. But they'll all be on their boat tomorrow. They only come for their meetings at night."

"That one. That one with the grey coat--I've seen him come during the day."

"Yes. He's the secretary of the lodge."

"How do you know that?"

"I've heard them call him that, many times," Chong Lin said proudly. "See the large book he's carrying?"

Shao Mei nodded.

"That's where he writes down what happens at the meeting."

"You are really scaring me Lin. You shouldn't watch them anymore."

Chong Lin ignored her warning. "See that one with no hair on the top of his head? He's The Master of the lodge."

"Their Shifu?"

"No, not that kind of master. He's like the King. He rules the meetings and all the other masons bow to him."

"They kneel and bow?"

"No. Not like a Chinese bow. They have weird bows." Chong Lin thought for a moment. "They seem to have different salutes for different levels."

"Levels of what?"

"I'm not quite sure how to explain it--"

"Shush. One of them is coming our way."

"That's my friend, John Campbell." Turning to the approaching sailor in his dark blue uniform with large brass buttons, "Hello Mr. Campbell!"

John smiled as he walked up to pair of young teenagers. "Well hello little friends. Isn't it late for you to be out on the street?"

Shao Mei stepped behind Chong Lin with her shoulders hunched.

"My mother hasn't called me yet," replied Chong Lin. "How was your meeting?"

John smiled again before answering. "It was--" he thought for a moment, "It was nice."

"What do you do in your meetings?" asked Chong Lin, pretending to be naive. Shao Mei kicked him in the back of his thigh. It really hurt and his leg buckled slightly.

John didn't smile. His mouth tensed and twisted slightly to the right side as he struggled for an answer. "Well, we just get together a couple times each week. It's nice to get off the ship."

Shao Mei tugged at Chong's sleeve from behind.

"It seems your friend wants you to walk her home," John stated, hoping to change the subject.

"Oh she just lives--Ow!" She kicked him even harder this time.

John smiled again. "Never keep a girl waiting. In England that's rule number one." John relaxed and

straightened up more. "It seems that's rule number one in China also."

"Okay, Mr Campbell. Bye."

"Bye," replied John as he watched them walk away with Shao Mei leading him by the sleeve.

When they were a few houses away, Shao Mei spoke, "What are you trying to do? You are going to get us both killed!"

"I told you, he's my friend."

"My father says none of these foreigners are our friend. You should stay away from them!"

Ignoring her comments, Chong Lin reminded, "I could show you their bible tomorrow, after school."

"I'm going to tell Father Sebastian."

"No you won't. And hey, he's a foreigner too!"

Shao Mei tightened her lips into a leathery knot--then huffed and walked ahead of Chong Lin.

"I'm sorry. Don't be mad at me."

"I'm not mad--I'm--" Once again, she couldn't find the words to express her frustration, fear, and concern.

Chong Lin realized he'd better change the subject now. "I'll see you in the morning."

Shao Mei slowed so Chong Lin could catch up to her side. When he was beside her, she looked up at him, a few inches taller than her five foot height, and nodded. Then she ran across the street to her house. She didn't look back as she entered her home and closed the door.

* * * *

Father Sebastian closed his book and sighed. The half dozen Chinese kids could now hear the fountain behind him, as the Father's reading of **GREAT EXPECTATIONS** by Charles Dickens was completed for today.

"Children? Do you have any questions about today's lessons?"

Chong Lin raised his hand. Shao Mei looked at him with that same concern she shared last night. "Father?"

"Yes Lin?"

"It sounds like the children in England are similar to the children of China."

"Yes Lin. Children are children everywhere in the world."

"But, in England, adults seem more lonely."

"What do you mean Lin?"

"Here in China, we look after our elders and parents. It seems that English families are less concerned about their parents."

"You must be referring to your Ancestral Worship. Before we brought Christianity to you, many Chinese prayed to the spirits of their ancestors."

That wasn't what Lin was referring to, but he let Father keep talking.

"Christians pray to Jesus Christ and his father, The Lord."

"They are a family too," quipped Lin, realizing he'd probably said something wrong--but realizing it after he'd spoken.

Father Sebastian almost reacted, thought, and commented, "Yes, we are all part of God's family. The Lord is a father to all of us."

"Then Jesus is my brother?" Lin flinched his face, realizing once again his mouth was betraying his better judgment.

"Well, in a way--"

Glad to see another hand raised, "Yes Shao Mei," Father said abruptly to interrupt himself.

"Father? are the English going to always be here in China?"

"I can't really answer that. I hope so."

"Don't you miss your homeland Father?" asked Shao Mei?

"Yes child, but God's work sent me here to you. As long as God sees fit for me to be here, I shall remain with you." Seeing Sister Evelyn approaching, Father Sebastian seized the opportunity to end the class. "Okay children. Sister Evelyn will take you for your afternoon prayers. Be good and go straight home from school."

"Yes Father," chanted all the kids.

Sister Evelyn sought some praise for the overworked priest. "Well Father," she congratulated, "thank you for your lesson today." Turning to the half-dozen kids, "Children, say 'thank you' to Father Sebastian."

"Thank you Father," they chanted, almost in unison.

"Come along children to the chapel."

Father Sebastian watched the small herd of kids walk away with Sister Evelyn. He was still trying to think of an answer to the question about how long the English would be in China.

* * * *

As Shao Mei and Chong Lin walked home, she spoke up, "I thought you were going to ask Father Sebastian a question about the masons."

"No. Last time I asked him he got upset."

"Good. I wish you'd stop talking about them too."

Chong Lin tightened his lips not knowing what to say.

They continued walking in silence.

* * * *

As Chong Lin sat in his room reading the Chinese comic book with Kung Fu fighters, he heard rustling in the mason lodge next door. Alone in his house, he didn't worry about being caught by his mother. First he walked to the wall and flipped the switch to turn out the light in his bedroom. He quietly walked in the darkness to the corner book case and moved the wooden box from the second shelf to the floor. He laid a cushion down and

kneeled on it to peer through the book shelf where a crack in the boards gave him a view of the lodge's interior. The secretary of the lodge was seated at a desk near where the king of the lodge sat during meetings. The secretary was sorting some letters and writing in his book.

Lin could hear a knocking on the lodge front door and watched as the secretary got up and walked to answer it. A moment later he returned to his desk followed by a sailor in a very different uniform. This strange foreign sailor from another European country spoke in a language that Lin could not recognize or understand. The secretary seemed to understand it though and spoke in the same language with the sailor.

The foreign sailor handed a scroll to the secretary and a letter, both of which the secretary studied very thoroughly. They spoke some more and eventually shook hands. The sailor then handed the secretary an envelope before he walked out alone.

Lin watched the secretary open the envelope and count the money which he placed in a small metal box. After writing some more in his book, the secretary took out a key from his pocket, locked the metal box, and carried it to a closet, out of Lin's view, in a room behind the desk. Lin could hear a key unlock the cabinet, then relock it with the snap of a padlock after the metal box was slid onto a shelf.

Before the secretary returned to his desk, Lin picked up his own box and put it back onto the shelf, blocking the crack in the wall.

Lin's heart was pounding. Seeing them hide this money made him more nervous than watching their secret meetings at night.

* * * *

The next day as Lin and Shao Mei walked to their Christian school, Lin decided not to say what he'd seen. He knew that if this made him nervous, it would certainly upset Shao Mei. She noticed Lin's quietness and asked him, "Are you alright Brother Lin?"

She only called him Brother Lin when she was being very Christian.

"I'm--" Now, oddly, Lin couldn't figure out what to say.

Shao Mei looked at Lin's troubled expression and allowed silence to dominate the remainder of their walk to school.

* * * *

It was Tuesday night. The French masons held their meeting. Lin didn't bother to watch their meeting. He couldn't understand what they were saying. He could tell they were conducting a similar meeting, but their meetings were longer and had more marching around than the English. He read his comic book, again, for the fourth time this month.

* * * *

On Wednesday night, there was usually no one in the lodge room next to Chong Lin's home. It used to be a book store, but the Yueh family moved back to the Henen province when their parents died. The masons rented the room from the Hong Association that owned many properties in the neighborhood. Lin's mother told him that the Hong Association was similar to the masons, and held their meetings in the big hall down the street where the old people played mahjong all day.

Tonight, there was a lot of noise next door. Lin decided he had to take a look. Moving his box off the shelf, he peered into the lodge to see about eight foreign sailors, dressed like the one he'd seen the other day, setting up

their flag and putting the same bible out onto the platform in the middle of the room. It looked like the same bible the English used. The French brought their own book, that looked like a bible, so Lin didn't know for sure what it actually was.

Lin would later learn that these were Dutch sailors from a country called Holland. He realized they were masons also, but since he couldn't understand what they were saying, he decided to read his comic book instead of watching them.

* * * *

On Thursday night, the English masons were back. Lin was anxious to watch their meeting. Last week they had been practicing for a "third degree." He'd seen them pretend to kill someone with a hammer. Then the mason pretending to be killed was dragged off in a blanket.

Lin watched the meeting begin, but was interrupted by a knock on his front door. He put the box back on the shelf and went to answer his front door.

Lin opened his front door to find Shao Mei looking up at him from the steps. "Hello Chong Lin Shan," she said sheepishly.

His mother called him "Chong Lin Shan" when he was in trouble. Lin didn't usually use his middle name of Shan.

"Please come inside," Lin told her, surprised to have her visiting tonight.

"Do you want some help with your English lesson?" Lin offered.

She shook her head side to side.

Puzzled, he asked, "Is everything alright?"

She blurted out, "I want to see the masons."

"Shssh." Lin hissed. "Are you serious?"

Shao Mei just looked at him.

"They're having a meeting tonight," he commented.

"I know. I saw them go into the bookstore."

"Are you sure you want to see them?" he asked with concern in his voice now.

"My father said that the only way we can defeat the foreigners is to know what they know."

Lin was surprised. "I don't think this will--" Then he stopped and realized she was probably right.

"I'm not sure if this is really going to be of any use to you. I've heard them say that women are not allowed in their meetings."

"Good. Then now I really want to know."

Lin was very surprised. Last week she was mortally afraid of the masons. Now she was stalking them like a tiger.

They both heard the wooden hammer pound three times to announce the beginning of their meeting.

"You have to be very quiet."

She nodded.

* * * *

The next day, they walked to Christian school in silence. Not a normal silence, like two people who had argued. It was a silence more like at a funeral. Neither of them knew what to say about the mason meeting they watched last night. They both had questions. They both had answers. Too many answers. More answers than they'd planned to ever ask. They were both thinking about what they'd seen and were somehow in respectful awe. There was something inspirational they had learned, but they couldn't seem to make use of it or understand how to use the information. Like a child lighting a wooden match for the first time, they were mystified by the magic of what they saw, but did not comprehend how it came to be.

* * * *

During the next week, they did not talk about the mason meeting, but Shao Mei made it known she would return to see another meeting.

When the Thursday meeting began the following week, Lin's mother was home sick. She couldn't work at the silk factory, and since she was home that night, Lin and Shao Mei went for a walk instead of watching the mason meeting.

There was a nightclub at the end of the block, so it was normal to have some European sailors walking up and down the street at night. Tonight there were some Dutch sailors standing on the street near Lin's house. They made some comments about the kids as they walked by. Lin and Shao Mei could not understand what they were saying, but they knew it was disrespectful.

After having a tea at Lin's uncle's house across the street from Shao Mei's home, they crossed the street together towards her front doorstep. The Dutch sailors who had been down by Lin's house were now in front of Shao Mei's house. They decided to walk back towards Lin's house, hoping the sailors would move down the street further, so Shao Mei wouldn't have to get too close to them.

As they walked away they heard some loud yelling and horrible laughter. They turned to see the sailors kicking the poor beggar Chin, as he tried to roll away from them in the street. They both stood with their mouths gaping as the sailors laughed and kicked the beggar. Several neighbors ran out and were yelling. Lin and Shao Mei decided to hurry back to Lin's house.

They were still panting and fearful when they closed Lin's front door. Mrs. Chong sensed their panic when she heard the front door slam and got out of bed.

"Are you alright Lin? Are you alright Shao Mei?"

The two teens both told what they saw in panicked voices at the same time--so Mrs. Chong was unable to understand either one. "Lin? Who was hurt?"

"The sailors were kicking beggar Chin."

"Stay inside children. Lin, you walk Shao Mei home when we are certain there is no trouble on the street."

"Yes mother."

Mrs. Chong went back to bed and the kids went to the kitchen to make tea.

* * * *

About an hour later, as Lin was walking back to his home after seeing Shao Mei to her home, he stopped across the street from his house, and realized the mason meeting was over. He stood still, watching the English masons descend the concrete steps of the former bookstore. Like most of the houses on this block, they were smashed together or shared a common wall. It would look like the street of houses was one huge jagged roofed hotel, but every home was different in design and construction--as if they didn't want to look like their neighbor's house.

Not wanting to walk through the foreigners, Lin stood back in the shadows and patiently waited for the masons to return to their ship in the harbor.

One of the last to leave was John Campbell. Lin stepped forward from the building's shadow and waved at John. John waved back, looked around to see that his friends were all heading back without him, then walked across the street towards Lin. Lin was more nervous than last week. He didn't know whether to trust John after seeing the beggar beaten up.

"Hello son. Your name's Lin right?"

"Yes, Mr. Campbell. Chong Lin Shan."

"You're out late again I see."

"I walked Shao Mei home."

John smiled his regular smile. "That's good. You're quite the young gentleman."

"Thank you sir."

John sensed the boy's apprehension. "Is everything alright Lin?"

Uncommonly, Lin was able to keep his mouth shut, but after a moment of reflection, decided to tell John what he'd seen earlier.

"That's truly horrible!" gasped John. "That must have been very frightening for you. That must have really frightened Shao Mei."

"Yes sir. We were scared and ran away. We didn't try to help beggar Chin."

"Now that's a noble thought young man, but you are still too young to deal with a situation like that."

"I was a coward."

John straightened up and stated calmly, "You took care of Shao Mei. I think you were a hero. You did your best."

Lin thought about that.

"These meetings we have on Thursdays here--they are what we call mason meetings. We do more than just spend time together. We try to help each other to be better men."

This was the first time Lin had an opportunity to talk about masonry with a mason. "What do you mean, better?"

"We share stories and learn from the ancient past, how we can be better men, and help people."

"Would you have helped beggar Chin?"

John smiled with a small huff. "Probably."

"You live across the street there don't you?"

"Yes sir."

"Well, I'll watch and make sure you get home safely, just like you did for Shao Mei."

Lin smiled. "Thank you sir."

Lin bowed slightly and quickly, then ran home without fear.

* * * *

As Lin laid in bed that night, he remembered John's words, "I think you were a hero. You did your best."

"Lin, Master Yang has agreed to accept you as his disciple this year."

Chong Lin looked up at his mother with wide eyes, processing this incredible opportunity. "Really?" was all he could say.

"He was a friend of your father, and he is going to accept you as a tribute to your father's memory." She bowed her head as she turned from the kitchen table where Chong Lin sat alone. With her back turned, she continued speaking, "He said there is a short period of novice training--before you are formally accepted as his disciple."

His mother paused. "Your father would be very proud of you. I know you will do well."

Lin looked at the back of his mother's loose fitting, thin silk floral dress. The waist band of blue material, the same as the rest of the gown, gave his mother a young shape, from behind. With her voice quivering slightly, Lin realized his mother was also--a girl. Well, a woman, but still, a girl. She seemed defenseless and in need of protection. Lin felt a surge of power as he realized, he would protect his mother. He didn't want her to be weak and vulnerable.

"I will be a good Kung Fu student," Lin stated proudly. "I have always wanted to learn Shaolin Kung Fu."

His mother straightened up where she stood in front of the sink. She started the faucet water onto the dirty dinner dishes. He sensed her regather her calm. He wanted to say something else reassuring. "When can I start my Kung Fu lessons?"

It was Sunday. His mother did not work in the factory today. It was nice having her home for dinner. She cooked excellently. During the week, she would cook his dinner at lunch time, and Lin would merely have to reheat it or eat it cold with his rice or dumplings.

"Master Yang said to come to his next Kung Fu class on Thursday night."

His mother could not see the small jolt of conflict and confusion that shot through Chong Lin's body. It had been two weeks since he'd been able to see a Mason meeting. Last week his mother was sick. Now this week--

"Okay Mother. What time is his class?"

"He said to come to the school at 5:30, before the classes started, so he could talk to you."

Lin thought for a moment. "Yes Mother, I will go to Yang Shifu's school at 5:30 this Thursday."

Lin was surprised to hear himself speak so formally, but he wanted to reassure his Mother.

"Good son. I know you will be a great hero some day."

This really shocked Lin. With her back turned, she couldn't see the second wave of reaction that probably was visible, as his body and mind reacted to this unusual information he was being bombarded with.

* * * *

"Really!" gasped Shao Mei later that evening, as they sat on her front porch landing.

"I start classes this Thursday night," Lin stated proudly.

"Wow. That's incredible. You are very fortunate."

"I know. I've always wanted to learn Shaolin Kung Fu."

"No, really incredible. Master Yang hasn't accepted any new students for three years," Shao Mei said with great astonishment.

Lin shrugged. "He's taking me because he knew my father."

Shao Mei processed this information. "I see." Now she seemed disappointed.

"How did you know he hasn't taken on any new students?"

"I've been trying to be accepted as his disciple for the past two years," Shao Mei stated flatly, with a slight coldness.

Lin didn't know this. "You wanted to learn Kung Fu?"

Shao Mei stood up. "Yes. Girls can learn Kung Fu also."

"I know that." Lin stood up. He tried to figure out something to say to reduce the negativity that somehow exploded like a firecracker. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I thought you might laugh," she said kicking a pebble off her porch.

Lin wasn't sure how he'd somehow become the bad guy in this conversation. "I'll ask Master Yang to accept you also as his disciple."

Shao Mei turned with excitement towards Lin, then like a deflated balloon, relaxed and sighed, "No, don't you dare do that."

"Why not?"

"He'd just say, 'No,' and--I don't want to get you in any trouble," she said timidly, reminding Lin of his earlier conversation with his mother. Once again, he wanted to protect her, and make her feel confident. "It won't hurt to ask. I'll explain you're my close friend, and, and, we can practice our Kung Fu together!" he said more reassuring.

Shao Mei pondered. "Maybe. Maybe you're right." Shao Mei looked up at Lin's face, "Would you really do this for me?"

Shao Mei's eyes had a doe-like quality. Her huge dark brown eyes made her look young, innocent, soft and gentle--and very feminine.

"I would be honored to speak in your behalf," stated Lin like a soldier. Once again, Lin was surprised to hear his own voice sounding more mature, than he expected.

Shao Mei smiled. She grabbed his hand. "Let's go get a dumpling."

Lin smiled back. They jumped the three porch steps like Kung Fu warriors then ran up the street, racing each other, bumping into a few people on the sidewalk as they hurried to the restaurant.

* * * *

Shao Mei's uncle owned the restaurant, so the tea and dumplings were always free to the kids. As Uncle served the tea, Shao Mei informed him of Lin's new opportunity. "Chong Lin is starting Shaolin Kung Fu this week."

Uncle stood up and pulled his shoulders back before responding. "That would be Master Yang I presume?"

Lin wiggled his fingers after pulling the ribbed ceramic hand painted tea mug close to him. The heat of the mug was more than he expected. "Yes," he replied, looking up at Uncle with his eyes, but not raising his head.

Uncle looked down. "This is a great honor for you Chong Lin. Master Yang has not taken on any new disciples for several years now."

Lin realized he must know of Shao Mei's attempts to join the school. "He told my mother he's chosen me because he was friends with my father."

Uncle shook his head slightly and started to turn from the table.

"I just found out that Shao Mei has wanted to be his disciple also. I will speak on her behalf this Thursday."

Uncle froze and turned his head towards Lin, his body still aimed at the kitchen.

Lin elaborated, "I will ask Master Yang to accept Shao Mei also as his disciple."

Uncle turned back towards Lin but did not speak. His lips seemed tightly clasped.

"I will explain to Master Yang that Shao Mei and I are very good friends, and that--" he stammered slightly to finish his sentence with the best possible words, "and that if we were both his disciples, we would practice his Kung Fu together and both bring him great honor."

Uncle relaxed and smiled. "That would be very wonderful young Chong Lin. I hope he chooses to accept both of you as his new disciples." Then, to Lin's surprise, Uncle held up his left palm and with a loud smacking sound, pounded his right fist into his left palm to create a Kung Fu salute. He gestured out slightly with a piercing look like an eagle; threatening, yet also friendly.

After Uncle walked away, "Wow, your uncle knows Kung Fu!?"

Shao Mei looked at her tea. "Yeah."

"Aren't you proud of him?"

"Oh yes." She sipped her hot tea.

"Why don't you learn Kung Fu from him?"

Shao Mei gave Lin a piercing look that froze him with her bitterness. "Uncle is not a Shifu."

"Still, he could teach you some Kung--"

Shao Mei cut him off as she leaned forward and spoke softly with a frightening intensity. "You only learn Kung Fu from your master. If he were to teach me, without his master's permission, he could--" She paused. "No one teaches Kung Fu without permission Chong Lin. Don't you know anything?!"

Chong Lin was shocked, a little confused-- He didn't know much about the Kung Fu world.

"Listen Chong Lin," she continued in her loud whisper. "There are many styles of Kung Fu. There are many Kung Fu masters. But once you start with a Kung Fu master, he is your master for life." She burned a piercing stare into Chong Lin's eyes. He wanted to back up, but realized, this was important to understand.

Shao Mei looked around to see if anyone was listening. Reassured, she looked back to Lin, who was still frozen, awaiting more information. "Uncle is of the Choy Lay Fut school. His master is--" She looked around again. "His master does not take girls into their school. He suggested I try Master Yang."

Now Lin didn't feel so reassured and brave. If Master Yang turned down his request to accept Shao Mei, Uncle might be very disappointed also. This whole Kung Fu thing was suddenly becoming very serious and complicated.

Lin realized, he didn't know as much as he thought he knew about Kung Fu. "What do you know about Master Yang's Kung Fu school?" he humbly asked Shao Mei.

She brightened like a candle and flickered as she spoke quickly. "Shifu Yang is a great hero! He fought in the Boxer Revolution."

"That was twenty years ago." Lin thought for a moment. "How old is he now?"

Shao Mei smiled. "Good Kung Fu takes many years to learn. Then it keeps getting better."

"How do you know so much about Kung Fu?" questioned Lin.

Shao Mei sat up proudly, took a sip of her tea--"Uncle."

* * * *

As Chong Lin laid in his bed that night, sleep did not seem anywhere close to him as his thoughts churned from today's Kung Fu world of introductions. He thought of Master Yang. He'd seen him several times, but did not know him. Would he be mean to him? Would he get all beat up in his Kung Fu training?

Now, Lin was not so interested in learning Kung Fu. He started to think about being kicked and punched, and kicked and punched, and kicked...then he thought about Shao Mei. What if Master Yang didn't accept her as he expected. She would never be his friend again? And Uncle. Uncle seemed scarier than ever before. After seeing that brief Kung Fu salute from Uncle, Lin realized that Uncle was not someone he wanted for an enemy.

Then Lin remembered his mother. His mother was expecting him to do well. Lin was only 13 years old, but he was the man of the family. It was his job to look out for his mother. Sheesh. Lin realized, he'd never even been in a real fight. He couldn't protect his mother. Lin thought of the beggar being beat up. He certainly couldn't fight even one of those Danish sailors, let alone all four of them. And he thought of how he ran away with Shao Mei after seeing the beggar being beat up by those Danish sailors. He was a coward. He remembered the Mason John calling him a, "hero." Lin knew he wasn't a hero. Even now, just laying in bed, he felt more fear than bravery.

Knock, knock. There was only one room in their little apartment, but his mother was knocking before she entered.

"Are you awake Shao Lin?" She hadn't called him "Shao Lin" in several years. It was an affectionate term all parents used for their children. Sometimes it would stick into the teenage years, like with Shao Mei. But boys were insulted and embarrassed to be called "shao" which means little or young.

"Are you awake?" she asked again.

"Yes mother. I have much on my mind."

Even in the darkness, he could sense his mother's reassuring smile. "I thought so," she said slipping into her bed on the other side of the room. "Was Shao Mei happy for you?"

"Yes, but--"

The pause hung for a moment. "What happened?" she asked.

"I found out that Shao Mei had already asked Master Yang if she could be his student, and he said no."

"Some Shifu do not take women to be their disciples," she commented from the darkness across the room.

"I learned that tonight. Did you know that Shao Mei's uncle is a Kung Fu master?"

"Yes."

"But he isn't allowed to teach Shao Mei any of his Kung Fu."

"Kung Fu is a very serious art. It is a lifelong commitment."

"What do you mean lifelong?"

His mother thought for a moment. I wish your father was here to explain this to you. There are many different types of Kung Fu."

"Yes mother, I've seen them in the tournaments and lion dances."

"Yes son. But there are some Kung Fu schools that are not for public performances or tournaments. Some Kung Fu styles are very secretive, and they do not allow their students to perform in public or work for the government."

A dark silence made the dark room even darker, and the air seemed as black as the darkness.

Lin attempted to pierce a hole in this black vapor, "Yes, mother--Shao Mei explained a few things about Kung Fu to me."

The dark silence was still there.

"A thousand years ago," began his mother, "there was a temple in the Honan Province--"

"The Shaolin Temple!" interrupted Lin.

"Yes. And other Shaolin Temples also."

"Really?"

"Yes. A thousand years ago, there were many Shaolin Temples in Northern China."

"Wow. I didn't know that."

"During the last thousand years, our government was corrupted many times and run by the Qing."

"Yes, Mother. They told us--"

"In school, son--they don't always tell you the whole story."

The dark silence was apparent again.

It remained a little longer as Lin's mother chose her words. "There are many types of people in the world Lin."

The darkness seemed like a wall between him and his mother.

"Sometimes people can use a knife to cut their vegetables."

Lin listened.

"Sometimes people can use a knife to kill someone."

His mother seemed closer, yet far away in the darkness.

"What are you saying Mother?"

"Kung Fu is a knife Lin. Sometimes people use it to protect people. Sometimes people use it to hurt and kill people."

"I know that."

"What I am trying to say Lin, is that Kung Fu is a person."

Lin thought, but didn't understand.

"Your Shifu, Yang Shifu, is a hero."

"Yes!" Lin interrupted enthusiastically. "Shao Mei said he was a great warrior of the Boxer Rebellion!"

The air seemed to lighten into a grayness. "Yes, he was a hero of the revolution. But that's not what a real hero is."

"What do you mean?"

"A Kung Fu hero is a certain type of person. A hero doesn't have to know Kung Fu to be a hero."

Lin remembered Mason John referring to him as a hero.

"A hero is noble man, of great virtue."

"Yes mother, I learned about that in school. Confucius said that virtue defines a man and determines his place in the world."

He heard his mother make a couple faint huffs in the darkness. "Yes," she said, with what seemed some difficulty. "--a place in this world."

The darkness returned, but it was different. A sad darkness, not as heavy as before.

"I wish you'd known your father Lin. He was a true hero."

"Really Mom? Did father know Kung Fu?"

"No son."

"Would he still be with us--if he knew Kung Fu?"

"Perhaps."

"When he died on the boat, did--"

"Let's not talk about that now."

The darkness sparkled. Odd. It was as if tiny glowing sparks danced throughout the room.

"Shifu Yang is a great man. Do you know what the meaning of the word, Shifu, is?"

"Yes Mother. Man of great skill."

"Yes son. But there is another meaning, Master Father."

"If Master Yang accepts you as his disciple, he is accepting you as his son."

Lin thought for a moment. "Even though I don't have a father--does that--"

His mother cut him off abruptly, "YOU DO HAVE A FATHER!"

The room was dark. The sparkles seemed to freeze in the air--waiting.

"Your father will always be your father."

"I'm sorry Mother. What I meant was--"

"I understand Lin. But you need to understand that to be Master Yang's disciple, you will be bound to him for life, as you are to your father."

The darkness was now like a void. A nothing. Lin laid on his back, but felt as though he were floating in mid air, above his bed.

"I do not know as much about the Kung Fu world as your father did, but I know that each Kung Fu school is like a family. Sometimes families run a business. Sometimes families run a kingdom. Sometimes families help each other. Sometimes families compete with each other."

Lin was atop his bed. He turned toward his mother and thought he could see her, laying beneath her sheets, on her back also, on her bed.

His mother summarized, "Since Kung Fu schools are like families, they also compete or help each other."

"I've seen the tournaments--"

"Kung Fu is not in the tournaments Lin. Kung Fu masters exist, unknown to you, here in the city."

"I've seen them Mother--"

"Lin, there are Kung Fu masters and there are Kung Fu performers. A true master is a man of virtue. A man of virtue does not allow his students to use their skills for evil purposes or tournaments."

Lin struggled for a way to ask politely, "Mother, I've seen some incredible Kung Fu masters in the tournaments--"

"Lin. You have seen the banished students. You have seen the disciples who turned their back on their masters. The Kung Fu you have seen has been men without righteousness. True Kung Fu is not for glory or financial gain."

Lin thought about some of the incredible Kung Fu fighters he'd seen in the New Year's events and tournaments.

"I wish your father could explain it to you."

"I think I understand Mother." Lin wanted to reassure his mother. "I apologize for not understanding completely, but if Master Yang is a virtuous hero, as you have said, I'm certain he will teach me to follow the true path of Kung Fu, and be a true hero." Wow! Lin thought to himself. Did I just say that?

Lin could feel his mother relax and smile from across the room. The room seemed to be lit from within. He could clearly see his mother in the darkness, despite their being no candle lit. "You are a good son Lin."

Masonic Kung Fu BOOK 1
by Richard Del Connor

Master Yang
Chapter 3

Some kids went to the public schools of China, but Shao Mei and Lin went to the Christian school. Lin's mother said it was one of his father's last wishes.

There were a couple of "guai lo" students, "round eyes," as the Chinese referred to them, here at the Christian School. Lin's mother said it was good for him to learn to speak English. She said that the future of China depended upon people like him who could communicate with the foreigners.

"Today's Thursday," reminded Shao Mei.

Lin hesitated to respond. He wasn't sure whether to be excited, scared, nervous, or what. "I've thought about it alot this week," he responded. "If Master Yang won't accept you also as his disciple, I won't be his disciple either."

Shao Mei opened her mouth in a silent gasp. "Don't you dare. This is your opportunity. This will only be offered to you once. If you refuse--he won't ask you again."

"I know."

Shao Mei looked down and shook her head from side to side. "I'm sorry Lin. I didn't mean to get you into this. Don't ruin it just because of me."

"It's not just because of you," commented Lin, also looking down at the bricks as they sat at the church fountain. "It's a matter of honor--I think. We are friends. I won't leave you behind."

Lin noticed a drop of water hit the bricks beneath Shao Mei's face. Then another. She sniffled and tried to cover up her tears with the back of her right hand. "Lin you are a hero."

They sat together in silence until the bell rang for their next class.

* * * *

After school, Shao Mei and Lin walked side by side to the home of Master Yang. It wasn't really a Kung Fu school, like the Choy Lay Fut school. The back courtyard had only a wooden fence at the back alley. Kids often peered through the boards to watch the students working out in Master Yang's backyard. The bamboo on the inside of the fence made it difficult to see well, but every kid in the neighborhood had been there at some time or another.

Like most apartments on the street, the homes were like one long building of windows and doors. Sometimes there were spaces between them, and often hardly enough room to walk between the buildings.

Lin stepped up the usual three steps to the very small porch. He gestured for Shao Mei to come up also. She shook her head, "I'll wait here."

Lin knocked three times with his knuckles. It hurt more than usual. His hand felt small, weak, and tiny. The dark red paint was thick and felt different than any other door he'd ever knocked on. He waited. It was silent. The noises of the street seemed to disappear as he listened for a noise within Master Yang's home.

Then he heard footsteps approaching the front door. His heart began to beat. Never before had he been so nervous about knocking on a door--it opened smoothly and quickly like an unexpected gust of wind. He felt the hair on his head move.

There wasn't much room to move on the porch. Lin didn't know which way to go and realized he was like a tree--stuck in the ground, straight up in the air.

An older teenager stood at the door. It wasn't Master Yang. Lin was surprised. He didn't know what to say. They looked at each other.

"I'm Chong Lin. I have come to see Master Yang."

The teenager smiled. "I am Chuk Su. Master Yang is expecting you." He stood back in the direction the door had opened and gestured with his arm for Lin to enter. Without turning his head, his eyes took note of Shao Mei standing on the street. There were no sidewalks in this neighborhood.

After closing the door, "He's in the garden. Follow me."

They walked into the backyard where Master Yang was watering some plants with a large watering can, not made in China.

"Yang Shifu, Chong Lin has arrived to see you." Then the teenager went back into the house.

Bowing briefly, with watering can at his side, "Just a moment please, I have a couple more plants to tend to." He smiled at Lin and resumed his task. "There," he said, setting the watering can down behind some potted geraniums. He walked up to Chong Lin, bowed again, then very unexpectedly reached out his right hand to shake hands with Lin.

Lin returned the courtesy by trying to bow quickly with a slight bend forward of his neck while reaching out his right hand at the same time. They shook.

"I heard you go to the Christian school, so I presumed you were used to shaking hands."

"A little bit. But most people I know do not shake hands like the foreigners."

Master Yang smiled. "Have a seat over here," he said gesturing in a similar manner as Chuk Su had done at the door.

"Your father and I were friends," began Master Yang. "He was a great man, and it would be my honor to have you as my disciple."

Wow, now this was really not going as Lin had expected. "Thank you sir."

"You are 13 now?" asked Master Yang.

"Yes sir, Master Yang, Shifu," he stammered in slight confusion.

Master Yang smiled. "Just call me Shifu."

"Yes master--Shifu."

"Kung Fu is like a career. Some men become bankers. Some men are fishermen. Some men are shop keepers. Others may be a doctor, or a lawyer." He paused to see Chong Lin soaking up every word with his complete attention. "Kung Fu is like a career, but it is not a job. There are some who make a living off their martial arts skills, but that is not the true Kung Fu. You can still be a banker, a lawyer, or a fisherman, while being a Kung Fu master."

Chong Lin listened.

"I teach my students, that Kung Fu is 'work and time.' Everything is work and time. Your sitting there is a certain amount of work or effort. And we are sharing time. So everything we do, even sleeping, is work and time."

Chong Lin still listened.

"What do you want to do with your life?"

Chong Lin sat up a little. "I don't really know."

"Do you want to be a doctor, or a banker?"

"Not really."

"Do you like to play music?"

"I like music, but I don't know how to play an instrument."

"Would you like to learn to play an instrument?"

"I think so."

"What instrument would you like to play?"

"I like the pipa a lot. I also like the zither, but it seems very difficult to play."

Master Yang nodded his head. "Yes the zither may be a bit more difficult. It certainly is more difficult to carry around!"

They both chuckled.

"Perhaps that is a good example Chong Lin. If you HAD to choose the easier instrument or the more difficult instrument, which would you choose."

Lin thought for a moment. He realized that Master Yang was testing him, but he wasn't sure what the right answer was. "I don't know for sure. Perhaps there are other things to consider, such as price, or--" he paused, "having to carry it around."

Master Yang smiled again. "Sometimes it's wisest to realize there are more things to consider, before making a final decision. You seem to be a smart boy."

"Thank you sir--Shifu!"

"That is why it is important for us to get to know each other, and for you to know more about what Kung Fu is, what MY Kung Fu is--before you decide to become my disciple."

"Thank you Shifu. I am honored to have this opportunity to be your disciple. But there is something very important that I must ask you."

Master Yang had an amused expression. "Yes, Chong Lin. What must you ask."

Lin wanted to sit up tall and ask proudly, but he felt slightly awkward, and did not want to be disrespectful. "I must ask an important question Master Yang--Shifu."

"I may not know the answer, but ask Chong Lin."

"I have a friend, Shao Mei, Cheng Mei. I think she has spoken to you before."

Chong Lin looked into Master Yang's face for recognition, but he was patiently listening.

"Cheng Mei, I call her Shao Mei, she wants to be your disciple also. We are very good friends. We go to school together at the Christian school. I would like to ask you to accept her as your disciple also."

"Cheng Mei has asked me to teach her Kung Fu. She is the same age as you?"

"Yes Shifu. And she is very smart, and a very good person. Her Uncle knows Kung Fu also. He's the owner of--"

"I know her Uncle." Master Yang stood up and walked towards the bamboo.

"I am sorry if I have offended you Shifu. But if she was also your disciple, we could practice our Kung Fu together, and--"

"I haven't decided whether you will be my disciple, and you have yet to decide whether I will be your Shifu. This is not like your normal school," Master Yang explained, looking away from Lin. "In Chinese school, what do you refer to your teacher as?"

"Laoshr."

"Your Laoshr is obligated to take as many students as she is told to accept. She does not pick and choose her students. Most students will only be in her classroom for a year or two. Kung Fu is much different."

Chong Lin stood up and slowly walked closer to Master Yang as he stared at his bamboo. "My mother started to explain to me that Kung Fu is like a family and that you would be like my father, for the rest of my life."

"Yes. For the rest of your life. And if I accept Cheng Mei as my disciple, she also would be a daughter--my daughter, for the rest of her life."

Chong Lin realized he'd really jumped in a big hole, but there didn't seem any way out of it. Only moving forward. "That would make her my sister for the rest of my life also--I guess."

Master Yang gave a small chuckle to himself. "Yes, that's right. And if she was your sister, you could never marry her." He turned to look at Chong Lin's reaction.

Lin was only 13. He had never had romantic feelings for Shao Mei. They had the love of a sister and brother already. "Yes, Shifu. I already think of her as my sister."

Master Yang became relaxed and walked back to the round stone table in his back yard. "Please sit down. I am sorry. You surprised me with your request."

They sat down as they had been sitting before. "Tell me Chong Lin, what would you say to me if I did not honor your request?"

Chong Lin felt his head become sucked into his body like a turtle retreating. He looked at the table and tried to see it, but his mind was full of words. "I told her I wouldn't be your disciple if you didn't accept her also."

A loud roar of laughter escaped Master Yang. He slapped the table and frightened Chong Lin--but he was laughing. "Now you really are a chosen one!" He laughed a little more, then regained his composure. "Young Chong Lin, I am impressed. It is not entirely up to you or me whether she will be my disciple. But we shall consider this." He rubbed his chin as if he had a beard. "Bring her with you next Thursday, at this same time. We shall discuss this further then."

Master Yang stood up bowed in a similar Kung Fu manner that Uncle had the other evening. Realizing Chong Lin could not return this salute, he reached out his right hand after Chong Lin bowed a longer bow than before. They shook as Master Yang beamed a proud smile at Lin.

* * * *

"What did he say?" Shao Mei asked.

When Lin's feet hit the street in front of Master Yang's house, he couldn't walk, he had to run. "Catch me and I'll tell you."

She huffed and chased him back up the street where they had come from.

As Shao Mei and Chong Lin stepped up to knock on Master Yang's door, they were nervous, yet anxious in a happy way. Even though this could be the end of Lin's opportunity, it also could be the beginning of a new life of possibilities.

Somehow, Lin didn't feel bad about hinging his Kung Fu future on Shao Mei's acceptance. In some way it also seemed like a safety valve, a way to escape this Kung Fu world of responsibilities. Lin was anxious--just to get this meeting over with.

Shao Mei was the most excited and nervous of the two. She wanted to be Master Yang's disciple more than he did. She seemed to be more aware of this entire opportunity better than Lin. Her Uncle had given her a view of the martial arts world, so she knew more about it than Lin. The society of martial artists. Kung Fu masters are like any group of professionals. Doctors have their own world of social contacts. Lawyers have their world of people. Shao Mei wanted to be part of that martial world of Kung Fu heroes. Lin hardly knew what that world was.

The door opened. The same student opened it as before. He was smiling and seemed somewhat festive.

"It's me again, Chong Lin, and my friend, Shao Mei, I mean Cheng Mei."

Chuk Su eagerly ushered them both in. "Yang Shifu is in the backyard." He closed the door, then with a hop to his step, led the way through the hallway and living room of Master Yang's home. Lin hadn't noticed all the flags, awards, banners, and photos on the walls last time. There were swords in the corners of the room, and other weapons he'd never seen before. He glanced at them, and wanted to look more as Chuk Su walked briskly ahead of them. In the backyard were four other students of Master Yang. It seemed there was a class about to start, or, a party, or, were they here to see him? Here to see her? They all seemed to be eagerly chatting and everyone seemed to be in a very good mood.

Master Yang rose from the stone table and walked up to them. "Hello again Chong Lin," he said with a bending forward bow. His arms were at his sides. He looked to Shao Mei.

"Hello again Cheng Mei."

"Hello Yang Shifu. Thank you for allowing me to come here today."

Lin noticed that everyone stopped talking when Master Yang had risen. All eyes and ears were focused upon them.

"Please, have a seat here," Master Yang gestured.

"Su."

"Yes Shifu."

"Please get us some tea."

"Yes Shifu." Briskly he pivoted and popped into the home.

They sat with their backs to the other students. Master Yang faced them all. "Chong Lin told me that he wants you to join our Kung Fu school together."

"Yes Shifu. I will be a very good student. The best student I can possibly be," Shao Mei emphatically stated.

Master Yang smiled. "You are both very young. You both have long lives ahead of you. It is hard for people to plan the future, or plan their lives. Many things can happen. And there are many things yet, that neither of you are aware of. Becoming parents, having families." He looked at Shao Mei, "having babies."

Shao Mei didn't even blink.

"It takes many years to learn Kung Fu. Neither of you has chosen your careers yet. Neither of you is married yet. Neither of you know where your schooling will take you."

The kids sat still, intently looking Master Yang face to face.

"However, at age 13, this can be a good time to make some decisions. Decisions that will affect the rest of your life." Master Yang paused, sat back a little. "I'd like you to meet some of my students."

As Chuck Su put the drinks on the table, Master Yang stood up.

Shao Mei and Chong Lin stood also.

Master Yang walked across the back yard to where the five students lined up side by side, without being asked to.

"This is Law Lo. He is 18 and will be a doctor in a few years. Law Lo bowed and held his hands in a Kung Fu manner like Uncle did in the restaurant.

"This is Danny Lee. He is a cook in the Westin restaurant." Danny bowed the same way that Law Lo did.

Stepping backward, Master Yang exposed the next student in line. "This is Jun Tung. He works in his father's hardware store." Jun smiled at both of them before he stomped his foot and saluted much more aggressively than the others.

Master Yang stepped back again. "This is Chow Ree. He works as a laborer at the docks." Chow Ree bowed, without the stomp.

Stepping back once more, "And you've met Chuk Su. He lives here with me and manages the school affairs." Chuk Su bowed without the stomp, but lowered his eyes, unlike the others.

"I have several other disciples, who visit occasionally, and several others who have moved away to other cities. We are a Kung Fu family. If you join my school, these will be your Kung Fu brothers."

Shao Mei gave Lin a slight nudge with her elbow and bowed to the students. Lin followed suit.

"Harmony is important in life," stated Master Yang as he walked back to the table. Harmony in a family is important in life. Master Yang sat down, and noticed the students relax more. "Be seated, let's talk a little and drink some tea together. Su! "

"Yes Shifu."

"Tea for everyone."

"Yes Shifu." The students all followed him inside.

"As you can see, we don't have a large school, here, in my backyard."

Master Yang realized that Shao Mei and Lin were waiting for him to drink first. He picked up and sipped his tea. They did the same.

"I spoke with your Uncle," he said to Shao Mei.

She almost choked on her tea.

"In the Kung Fu world, we are families. I wanted to be certain that if you did join our school, that he would not be resentful."

Shao Mei didn't know what to say. Her Uncle did not tell her he had spoken to Master Yang this week. She wanted to ask, but kept quiet, waiting to find out what was said.

"Your Uncle was supportive of you joining our school. He thinks very highly of you."

Shao Mei was frozen, processing this information. "Thank you Shifu."

"I spoke with your mother again also," he said looking at Chong Lin.

Lin wanted to say something also, but no words came.

"She thinks your father would be content for you to join our school."

My father? He thought. Why would his deceased father be 'content?' He sensed this meant something else.

"Since your families have approved you joining my school, it is still up to the both of you to decide if this is truly right for you."

"I think that--"

Master Yang cut them both off. "You will both have 30 days to make your final decision. During that time, we will train you here. There is no point in making any decision until then, so, do your best, and we will all get to know each other." He smiled.

"Thank you Shifu."

"Thank you Shifu!"

"Classes will be Tuesdays and Thursdays at 6:00. Will that work with your school schedules?"

"Yes Shifu," replied Shao Mei. "We get out of school at 4:00."

"Have dinner before class, but don't eat after 5:00."

"Yes Shifu," they said in unison.

They hurriedly drank their teas, which were too hot to drink fast.

"Wear clothes like the other students."

Chong Lin, noticed that he and Shao Mei were wearing western clothing. The Kung Fu students were wearing normal Chinese clothing, but loose fitting, in several colors, brown, black, and gray. Master Yang was wearing a light tan cotton Chinese jacket with white frog buttons.

"Thank you very much Shifu," Lin stated as he stood up and bowed.

Shao Mei stood and bowed, longer than Lin did. She didn't need to say thank-you, her bow was very appreciative.

As they walked through the house the other students patted them on the back and Chow Ree, the dock worker, shook both their hands. He had a very strong grip.

* * * *

The next day, they both seemed to be floating on a cloud in their Christian school. Sister Ann noticed their exceptional contentment. "You seem very happy today Shao Mei."

Shao Mei didn't know whether to talk about her Kung Fu schooling with the foreigners. She didn't know what to

expect or what they would think of that. So she just smiled.

Chong Lin wanted to tell Father Sebastian, but was nervous also about how he might react or what he'd think.

* * * *

After school they walked home.

"I can't wait for next Tuesday," panted Shao Mei as they walked more quickly than usual.

"Me too. What do you think it will be like?"

"Oh, it's usually horrible in the beginning," Shao Mei reassured, with unreassuring information.

"Horrible?"

"I've heard my Uncle talk about how they put the initiates through Hell."

"What?" Lin said, now rather concerned. "Hell?"

"I heard about making them stand in the rain for hours, being made to work all night long--"

"Why?" Lin gasped.

"To prove that they were serious disciples. To prove that they wouldn't quit."

"Did they quit?"

"I don't know. That kind of stuff is supposed to be a secret. I just heard him talking about it."

"Secret like the Masons?" Lin asked.

"No, well, kind of. Yeah, I guess that Kung Fu schools have their secrets too."

"Hmm," Lin hummed.

"And there are initiation ceremonies," Shao Mei added.

"I've heard of those too. What are they?"

"I don't really know. But I do know that they have to make kowtows, and promises, and oaths."

"Really?"

"Of course Lin," she scolded. "Kung Fu schools are a little like the Masons. The disciples have to protect their school, just like a person protects their family. I think there's a society called the Chinese Freemasons."

"Chinese Masons?"

"I don't think so. I think they were here before the Masons got here."

"I don't understand."

"I don't either, but, some things are not supposed to be known, until it's time, or you are allowed to know."

"That does sound like the masons."

"Is your Uncle one of those Chinese Freemasons?"

"I think so, but I think I'm telling you too much."

"We're family now," chided Lin. "Brother and sister."

She smiled sideways at him. "Yeah, I guess we are."

Master Yang wasn't home, or at his home school for their first class. Chuck Su answered the door, as expected, then led them back to the living room, not the backyard.

None of the other students were there yet. Chuck Su told them they would come later, and also on different days and times than them. "But they'll probably be here for a few of your workouts this month," he informed them.

Chuck Su pointed at a few of the photos on the wall and explained why Master Yang had received some of the flags on the wall. Evidently, Master Yang was a real hero, and had been presented some of these awards from the local community, and the Mayor. He'd caught a few criminals and there was one from the Chinese Freemasons.

They do exist, he thought to himself. He'd ask more about them later.

Some scrolls on the wall were poems of chivalry, perhaps to inspire the students. Some of the calligraphy artworks included the words, loyalty, and honor.

Finally, after a quick tour of the room and the hallway, Chuk Su announced, "Now I will show you how to begin each Kung Fu class. Although this is a house, the home of Shifu, it is also our Guan. Our Kung Fu school. We come from a Northern Kung Fu heritage that was only taught to Buddhist Monks for many centuries. So our school is also to be considered as a Buddhist Temple."

"Normally, all Kung Fu schools use the North wall as their altar. Since the hallway is part of the North wall, this is not practical for our school. So this West wall is our altar wall for our school here. This works for us also, because when we are in the backyard, we can face this West, or East facing wall from outside, and still pay our respects."

Although Shao Mei and Lin were both being raised as Protestant Christians, they were familiar with Buddhist practices, that most all their neighbors subscribed to. There were also a few Daoists, but Shao Mei and Lin knew less about them.

"Each time you come to class you should bring an offering for the altar. A fruit or something." Although there was no one else in the house to hear him, he lowered his voice, "Or a candy bar."

The kids smiled at each other.

"Do we burn incense also," asked Shao Mei.

"No, that isn't necessary, unless you have a sincere question or prayer for Buddha."

"I've seen an altar with General Guan," spoke Shao Mei.

Su realized she was probably talking about her Uncle's home or school. "The Southern style Kung Fu schools usually have a statue of General Guan on them. He was--"

"He united the seven kingdoms," interrupted Chong Lin anxiously.

"Yes, very good. But he is neither a God, an immortal, or a Buddha--so Buddhist Kung Fu schools, or Northern schools, as we call them, do not include him on our altars."

"I recognize Buddha, but who is that statue?" Shao Mei asked pointing at an unusual monk statue with hair only on the sides of his head, and a knotted beard.

"That is Da Mo," replied Su. "He is the--"

"He is the founder of Chan Buddhism," interrupted Chong Lin.

"Very good, but did you know he is the founder of Shaolin Kung Fu?"

They both shook their heads side to side.

"Da Mo came from India. He was the 28th Patriarch of Mahayana Buddhism. Perhaps I should let Shifu tell you that story."

"Didn't he stare at a wall for 18 years?" asked Chong Lin.

Su chuckled. "Perhaps 8 years. Da Mo walked all the way from India, alone, with only a shovel."

"A shovel?"

"A thousand years ago, Buddhist monks were responsible for burying the dead, and offering them prayers. Buddhist Monks did not have homes, and most only lived in temples during the winter months, when the roads were impassable with snow. Da Mo walked all the way from India, to meet the Emperor of China."

Shao Mei and Lin seemed to be enjoying his storytelling, so Su continued, "He was more than the 28th Patriarch of Buddhism, he was also a Kung Fu warrior."

"From India?" asked Lin.

"Yes. He learned his Kung Fu in India and brought it to China. He must have been very good, because travelling alone a thousand years ago was more dangerous than now. There were bandits, and also tigers!"

Both kids got wide eyed imagining confronting a tiger on an ancient dirt road in the mountains.

"Da Mo stopped to rest at the Shaolin Temple--"

"Where Kung Fu comes from," piped in Lin for extra credit.

"Not yet, it didn't."

Lin was deflated.

"When Da Mo arrived at the Shaolin Temple, the monks were fat and lazy. Da Mo liked the temple though and would later return after his visit with the Emperor."

Su moved closer to the altar and pointed to the statue's feet. "You'll notice his feet are bare."

The kids looked closer. "There's his sandals, on the end of his shovel!" noticed Shao Mei.

"Yes. Now look closer. Notice he is standing on a leaf."

They looked.

"This is water," Su added, pointing at the base of the statue. "This is the Yellow River in Northern China. But this is later in the story. After leaving the Shaolin Temple, Da Mo crossed the yellow river, to visit the Emperor in the northern capital, before it was moved South. I believe that this statue represents his return to the Shaolin Temple, after visiting with the Emperor."

"But Da Mo's visit with the Emperor did not go well." Su paused to see if they were really interested in hearing more.

"This guy's from India?"

"Yes," Su excited blurted. He realized he blurted. Calmly he spoke, "Bodhidharma was accepted into the Emperor's court. He was given an audience with the Emperor. Bodhidharma probably didn't bow, but

hopefully, he did. Da Mo was the 28th Patriarch of Mahayana Buddhism, or Large Wheel Method--the more popular Buddhism."

Su continued, "The Emperor was a Buddhist and had erected many temples and stupas throughout China. He asked the Pope of Buddhism, 'Haven't I earned a place at the right hand of Buddha in Heaven, for all that I have done?' But Da Mo wasn't a political monk. He was a Kung Fu warrior of the Kalaripayatu school of India. He answered the Emperor with complete honesty, 'Your actions in this world will not affect your place in Heaven.'"

"This was not what the Emperor wanted to hear," Su said excitedly. "Any one else--OFF WITH HIS HEAD! But this was the Pope of Buddhism...So the tales of Bodhidharma continue, with him crossing the Yellow River, to get to the Shaolin Temple on the other side of the river. Take a look at the statue again," Su ushered with his waving arm gesturing inward.

"I believe he made a raft and paddled across--but that's not how history has decided to tell this story." Su's storytelling was building in steam and climbing in pitch--"But history, here in China, says that Bodhidharma sailed across the Yellow River on a single leaf or batch of leaves, to arrive back at the Shaolin Temple."

Su seemed winded, then continued, "but he wasn't well received here at the temple either."

Su's eyes widened, "There's a part of this story, that few people tell." Su looked wildly for other wild eyes...but he was more excited than anyone. "One hundred years before this time--the Shaolin Temple was built--based upon a prophecy by another Indian Monk. This first Indian monk built the Temple, with some support from the government based upon a partnership with a Chinese monk...but this Indian monk foretold, 'One hundred years from now, another Patriarch will come from India and renovate Buddhism into something new. He will come here to live and begin this new sect of Buddhism. The temple was completed in 495AD. Bodhidharma arrived about 75 years later.'"

A knock at the front door startled everyone, including a noticeable jolt for storyteller Su. "I'll get it."

As Su answered the door they spoke to each other. "Su is funny," she giggled.

"Yeah, he's intense. But I really like him."

"Me too."

Su returned. "Anyway, Da Mo didn't live at the temple."

They looked at each other. Su had just jumped back into story mode.

"Da Mo spent the next seven or eight years in a cave, on the mountainside near the Shaolin Temple."

This seemed strange, thought Lin. The Pope of Buddhism living in a dirt cave.

"Some people say he stared at the wall for eight years--but that's ridiculous." Su became emphatic, indignant, and looked like Lin's mother. Su must have given a similar impression to Shao Mei because they both looked into each other's faces and helplessly blurt out some laughter.

Su wasn't sure whether to be insulted or continue--

"I'm so sorry," offered Lin. "we both apologize. But please, explain, why did Da Mo lived in a cave, instead of the Temple."

No one had ever questioned one of Su's stories before. He thought for a moment. Well, at least he was being taken seriously. So he decided to answer--in a serious tone. "Very well. Anyway--Da Mo wrote two or three books while he was in this cave, supposedly staring at the wall. And! HE CREATED KUNG FU!"

Su got super excited now. "Oh this is great! I'll teach you the Disciple Bow."

Su ushered them like big sheep into the living room then he kept pushing them until they were in the backyard.

"Okay," Su began.

Shao Mei and Lin wanted to be little soldiers--but they didn't know where to stand...which way to face...

Su laughed. "Turn towards the altar. Yes. There. Just Attention. Straighten your fingers. Relax your hand a little. Straighten up as much as you can. Now relax. STAY AT ATTENTION. There. Okay. Good."

Su circled them like an eagle above a nervous rabbit. "Good. I've seen Shifu give a long, long, long, and then long some more--lessons on Attention. Take this seriously," he warned them.

"YES SHIFU." They proclaimed, almost in unison.

"I am not your Shifu."

"Yes--"

"I am your big brother. I am your Kung Fu big brother. I am your Sihing, as the Cantonese say, and I am your Shixiong as the Mandarin says."

"Yes Shixiong."

"How did Bodhidharma--"

"Oh yes," Su realized, restarting his story from wherever it was he left off--Oh yeah! "Oh yeah. Anyway, Bodhidharma was probably not happy about being ostracized to a hole in the ground. Since he was a warrior monk, and probably practiced his staff, and sword routines--he wasn't liked by the lazy monks. Anyway, you've seen our one handed bow like this? Right?" He bowed with his right Buddha palm at his chest, and left arm hanging down to his side.

They nodded to Su.

"Different people tell this story differently. But my favorite version of the story is the one where the disciple, Hui Ke, keeps approaching the cave of Da Mo, but Da Mo refuses to accept him as his Disciple. Eventually, one day, Da Mo got irritated by Hui Ke and proclaimed to him, "I'll take you as my disciple when pigs can fly--no no that's not it," Su laughed.

The kids laughed nervously, not wanting to be sacriligious--about flying pigs...

"No, that's not what he said," Su chuckled a little more. "Da Mo said, "I'll take you as my Disciple when the skies rain red."

The kids looked at each other.

Su shrugged. "He just wanted to say something that was impossible. But Hui Ke used this against Da Mo. In this battle to become Da Mo's disciple, Hui Ke was persistent, maybe he was inspired by some yellow snow," he said with a chuckle.

Su looked for a reaction. He got a little one from both of them. He smiled. "Anyway, Hui Ke approached the entrance to Da Mo's cave. It had been snowing and Hui Ke stood in it, and summoned the Buddhist Master. "I am here to be your disciple." Da Mo must have come to the entrance, because he clearly watched as Hui Ke cut his left arm and bled into the snow. "See! He shouted. It rains red!"

The kids were a little shaken by this story.

Su knelt forward and spoke a little quieter, "Some people say he cut his entire arm off."

The kids leaned back a little.

Su straightened up. I don't believe that--but I do believe he cut his arm, because ever since then, all Buddhist monks of the Shaolin Temple on Mt. Song, bow like this." Su demonstrated again.

Su attempted to be more teacher-like now. "It's important to know all this. It's important to know WHAT your Kung Fu school really is."

Su was thinking of saying something, then stopped himself.

"Hey. That may be your Kung Fu lesson today. The guy at the door a while ago said that they had to work late."

The kids looked at each other.

"We'll wait a few more minutes. You guys practice it. Go on."

Su walked around them, then up to the front door, as if expecting someone to come to it--but no one did.

Su returned to the backyard. "NO!" he puffed. He walked over to in front of the kids. "Like this." He raised both hands up to the normal monk or priest or kid praying prayer hands. "Then you drop your left hand." Su looked back at them over his left shoulder. "Remember, in honor of Hui Ke."

Su wanted some recognition, but the kids were stiff with obedience, and could barely jiggle their chins up and down as Su leaned backwards with wider eyes--"Then just," he leaned forward, "bow like this."

They copied, but had to crane their necks up to see what he was doing in front of them.

Su resumed his Attention. The kids followed suit.

"Alright. Let's do it for real. Class is over." Su turned towards the altar in the living room.

"Attention," he reminded. "Prayer hands." They all raised their prayer hands up, with fingers pointed skyward.

"Bow to the past masters." Su leaned forward after lowering his left arm. He raised back up.

Su turned towards them with a fire in his eyes--like a tiger--a friendly playful tiger. "And salute your big brother."

"Thank you shixiong," they chanted.

Su smiled to himself. "Alright you two. See you Thursday."

"See you," they chanted stepping down the front steps into the street.

"That was a Kung Fu lesson?" questioned Shao Mei.

Lin shrugged as they walked side by side. "I guess so."

"I was expecting some punching," she punched. "Some kicking," she kicked. Lin walked calmly beside her hoping no one was noticing them.

"When are we going to--"

"Shhh," said Lin. "Your uncle." He pointed across the street. Uncle hadn't noticed them yet.

"Oh hi kids," Uncle chuckled.

"We were just at Kung Fu class!" boasted Shao Mei.

"Oh," cooed Uncle, being polite.

Then Shao Mei's face dropped and drooped as if her dog just got run over--

""What's wrong?" Uncle asked.

Lin wanted to kick her, and hoped she wouldn't say--

"We didn't really learn anything," she complained.

Lin looked at the ground, in another direction.

Uncle surveyed them.

"What didn't you learn?" he asked with a smile.

"He just told us--" She stopped. Lin glared at her, with his head lowered a little.

She continued, "He just told us about Da Mo crossing the Yellow River, and he lived in a cave." She looked at Lin, but Lin looked like he'd seen a ghost.

"And we learned about the first disciple of Chan Buddhism, Hui Ke." Shao Mei seemed indignant, for some reason.

"Well," responded Uncle, "It looks like you learned a lot today."

Shao Mei huffed at Uncle. He was obviously avoiding what she was saying.

"We didn't learn any Kung Fu."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," sing-songed Uncle.

"I want to learn to kick and--"

Uncle knelt down and pulled their heads all together so he could speak softly. "Kids. Everything you learn is Kung Fu. What you learn at your Christian school, is Kung Fu. Information is a weapon," he nodded at the kids, getting them to respond accordingly with bobbing heads...

"Yes, information is Kung Fu. A kick. A punch. A word. A secret. A weapon." They were in their own little world as people walked past on the street. Only Uncle's voice was heard. "Appreciate everything you learn, wherever you learn it, from anyone you can learn from." Uncle stood up and ended their huddle. "Kids." He smiled, realizing they were just kids. "Kids. I'm proud of you. Hang in there."

They hustled off in a fast jog towards their homes. "Uncle's, right." Lin panted.

"Uncle's always right," Shao Mei smiled.

Master Yang greeted them at the door. This was a first. It was Thursday. Lin convinced Shao Mei not to complain anymore about not getting a "real Kung Fu lesson."

There was noise in the backyard. Master Yang just raised his arm towards the backyard and the two 13 year old students cautiously approached the backyard's hooting and hollering sounds.

The students straightened up and stopped wrestling when the new students arrived.

Master Yang spoke from behind them towards the back yard. "Show them our Yoga today."

Su stepped up a couple steps and bowed, not the Shaolin Disciple one-hand bow, he taught them--"Yes Shifu."

The other two students went into the house without saying anything but each nodded at the kids as they left.

"Alright you two. Remember what I showed you the other day?"

"Yes, Shixiong," they said, not in unison.

"Alright," he led, stepping between them and the altar in the house living room. "Attention." He raised his arms up, but didn't give any commands. The two kids tried to catch up with him, but were obviously panicked and sloppy.

Su turned towards them. "Now salute your shixiong."

They did.

"Touch your toes." Su bent forward and grabbed his shoes. The kids bent forward, but couldn't even touch their feet. Lin bent his knees. "Keep your legs straight," scolded Su.

Sheesh, thought Lin. How'd he see me--"LIN! Touch your right heel."

Yikes. Lin tried to copy...

"Alright, now jumping jacks! Ready, and one, two, three..." The kids matched up with him. They did this exercise at the Christian School. Wow! thought Lin. I am Chan Buddhist now too. Will this be a sin? Would Jesus approve?

Lin was surprised to even be asking himself these questions. Buddhism was the natural religion of all his neighbors and friends. There were a few Daoists here and there, but most everyone was a Buddhist. But Lin was a Christian. This year he would receive the body and blood of Christ. Confirmation. Lin was going to be Confirmed in just a couple months now. Shao Mei too.

"No, turn on your heels like this," demonstrated Su.

"Shifu calls this, 'The Granny.' So don't do this when he's around. But watch me. Put your hands on your hips. Now turn 180 degrees ON YOUR HEELS by using your waist." Su glided back and forth from side to side, almost effortlessly. "Alright--now you do it," he urged them.

They spun side to side but their feet kept widening apart, they were falling forward...

"Stop," ordered Su. He walked behind them to a larger space of backyard. "From the square horse," Su looked like he was sitting on an invisible chair, "you keep your hips pushed forward, and lean back a little." Su demonstrated slowly but it didn't work very well slowly. Su resumed his square horse. "From the square horse," he swung his hips to the left and snapped into a new position, "you turn from the waist." Su smiled to himself with pride. "You turn from the hips and just raise your toes up."

The next half hour was spent on turning and pivoted and standing and turning and turning on the heels and...

"There," said Lin, as they walked up the street after class.

"There what?" huffed back Shao Mei.

"There's your real Kung Fu class!"

"Did better than you," she taunted.

Lin was shocked to hear her say that. She smiled when she noticed his reaction. She punched him and ran ahead...

* * * *

With classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, Lin hadn't seen his Mason neighbors come and go from their Thursday meetings. Until tonight. It had been a few weeks. Another week and they would be initiated into the Kung Fu school.

"Hello Mr. James!" said Lin loudly crossing the street towards his home, and towards Mason James exiting the Mason Lodge.

"I haven't seen you in a long time," stated James.

"I'm learning Kung Fu," boasted Lin.

Mason John exited behind James, "Kung Fu?" he asked.

"You bet," said Lin proudly. "Shaolin Kung Fu!"

The masons looked at each other. Mason John spoke as he stepped down towards Lin, "I've heard," he looked back at James, then back to Lin, "We've heard about Shaolin Kung Fu."

Lin was surprised. He didn't think anyone, not Chinese, would know anything about Kung Fu...

John noticed that Lin's outfit was a little sweaty--"Just finish class?"

"Yeah." Lin noticed them smile, and realized they might want him to show off some of his Kung Fu. Lin panicked, "Hey I'm just a beginner. ONLY A COUPLE WEEKS" he emphasized loudly. They smiled at him.

"I mean, I don't get initiated for at least another week."

The masons got really interested now. "Initiation?" they both asked, almost in unison. Which made them both wince at each other.

"Yeah. All Kung Fu schools do it," Lin said, matter-of-factly.

"What is this Initiation?" asked James impatiently.

Lin realized, this may be a little secretive. "I don't know really." He didn't really know.

"What is--" John nudged James into silence.

"That sounds interesting," offered Mason John. "Tell us more about it later." Mason John seemed to usher his friend away, almost rudely.

When they were twenty paces away, Mason John began, "Don't ask him so many questions."

"Why not?" Mason James complained.

"These Chinese secret societies are really strict."

"So."

"I guess I--I don't want to get the kid into trouble."

"Ah. Johnny wants a China boy?"

Mason John gave Mason James a very stern and unsettling look--that set things straight.

"He's allowed to have secrets."

"Like us," toned James.

John was still a little upset and trying to calm down.

"We have secrets," continued James.

"We aren't allowed to discuss our initiations," scolded John.

James got a little more serious now, and decided to change the subject. "You hear about the Japanese security force?"

John looked at him questioningly.

"North of here. Macao, I think. Just something I heard."

"What? What'd you hear?"

"The Japs. They attacked some city North of here."

"Really? No!"

Mason James just nodded.

Masonic Kung Fu BOOK 1
by Richard Del Connor

Work
Chapter 7

Master Yang approached the kids as they practiced some punching exercises, in strenuous looking square horses, legs bent, feet pointed straight ahead, backs straight, hips forward...legs trembling--"Kids."

They both anxiously stopped in obedient attention to their master's words--"Kids, it has been a month since we invited you to our school."

Shao Mei and Lin both looked at each other, then back to Shifu, "I like it here," stated Shao Mei.

"I want to join," said Lin.

Master Yang smiled. "Well good. But does our school want to have you?"

The kids were a little surprised to hear that.

The Shifu shouted, "Students! To the backyard!"

In only a few seconds, the other three students inside the house were there, at attention, beside and behind the kids.

Shifu did not seem to be surprised by their attentiveness. "Students," began Master Yang, "My students. My disciples." He walked around the backyard with his head hung a little, looking at the paving stones as he walked. "We are a school. We are a family." Master Yang looked up more as he walked slowly. "We are a Kung Fu family." Lin could feel the older students straighten up a little more.

"I am your Father. You are my sons." Master Yang realized he'd omitted Shao Mei, "and daughters," he stammered awkwardly.

Shao Mei smiled to herself. Lin noticed.

"Lin and Shao Mei have requested to join our Shaolin Kung Fu school." All the students squirmed a little.

Master Yang continued, "But it is also up to you to decide." Master Yang looked at his older students. "Unlike a family of children, when and where you must accept whatever Heaven gives you--" Master Yang walked. The students listened. "Unlike a normal family, we can decide who our brothers--and sisters will be."

Master Yang seemed almost emotionless. Matter-of-fact about it. "So, each of you, gets to offer your decision also."

The older students all looked to each with smiles. They didn't say anything. They didn't nod--but they seemed in agreement. They all looked to Shifu with content smiles.

Shifu noticed their decision accordingly. He was expecting more of a response, a word, a sentence. So Shifu started nodding his head as he walked around his backyard a little more...then he stopped.

"Alright Kids." Shifu stood before them, tall, serene, balanced, dignified, important--"Let me explain our initiation."

The kids looked at each other with very large eyes.

"Don't worry kids," chuckled Shifu.

"But Shifu?" interrupted Su, the head shaving!"

"Oh yeah." Shifu rubbed the top of his bald head with his right hand. "The Buddhist naming." He rubbed his head some more. He turned to Shao Mei. "You know, when boys become monks, they shave their heads."

Shao Mei nodded to Shifu's attentive stare into her eyes. "You know, when girls become nuns, they shave their heads too."

Shao Mei swallowed with difficulty. Everyone noticed. She swallowed again, consciously. "Yes Shifu."

"I've never had a girl shave her head for my school before," then Shifu turned and looked at Lin--with a thought that Lin could not discern--but he knew that Shifu was thinking something as he continued to look at him.

"Perhaps I should discuss this with your mo--"

"That won't be necessary, " Shao Mei huffed. "I will do whatever is required."

Shifu backed up. He was satisfied with that response and asked no other questions. Taking another step back towards the South wall, Shifu shouted, "Students line up." They all formed into lines.

As if nothing had been said, or agreed to, Shifu led the students, "Salute the past masters." They bowed towards the house altar. "Salute your Shifu." The students snapped down their bows, kept them there for several seconds.

Shifu smiled to himself, realizing that his students were trying to be extra respectful by bowing longer than usual. "Class dismissed!" The students shook hands anxiously with the new recruits. Shifu disappeared into the house.

* * * *

That night, Lin ran into James and John again. Several other Masons were exiting in very fancy black outfits with shiny sides, and white shirts and--

"Hey Lin," shouted Mason John pushing through the slower masons on the stairs. "How's it going?"

Lin realized John was being much friendlier than usual. "Hey Lin. Have you heard of any attacks by Japanese?"

Lin looked as if he'd been asked about aliens from another planet.

"Oh. Sorry." John didn't know what to say. "Hey. What about your initiation?"

"We got accepted tonight."

"You were initiated tonight?"

"No," laughed Lin. "They just decided to accept us tonight."

John looked at him like a puppy.

Lin elaborated, "We had a month to decide whether we liked the school." Lin looked to see Mason John listening intently. "And we had to see if the school liked us."

John smiled. "Did they like you?"

Lin smiled back, "Of course."

They both smiled.

"Congratulations."

"BROTHER JOHN. BROTHER JOHN." John was being summoned back to lodge by the small fat man with the tubular black hat. It looked like a big stove pipe--"Brother John!"

"I've got to go. Good luck Lin," said Mason John as he turned and walked back up the lodge steps to where the doggish man waited for him. They walked back inside.

"What are you doing?!" scolded the Master.

"I was just talking--"

"You were just talking to a Chinaman!"

"I know."

"Be careful Brother John. I'm hearing bad news, and it's not our business to pass it on to every Tom, Dick, and Harry Chinaman that comes along!"

"I know--"

The master's stare silenced Mason John. "Don't get too friendly. They may not be on our side."

John started to say something, but the master raised up slightly and silently squelched any arguing. John bowed slightly to the Master of the lodge, turned and walked in a dignified, almost military manner, back to the front door.

Lin saw Mason John exit the lodge, as he was entering his home. He could tell that Mason John tried not to look at him now.

Master Yang had spoken to Shao Mei's uncle. Uncle was so proud of Shao Mei he offered his restaurant for the Kung Fu initiation ceremony. This made Shao Mei proud at first, then more nervous second, since she was really performing now--for everyone! Performing? Taking vows? Giving bows. Kowtowing. Offering gifts. And getting a Buddhist name, and a bald head. A bald head. Shaving her head. Shave her head. She was going to shave her head...thinking about it didn't seem to make it seem any easier. Shave my head, she thought. So what! I'm shaving my head.

It didn't matter. She didn't like it.

Shao Mei got to Lin's house before he was outside. Usually, he walked to her house, then to school. Today she was at his house. She didn't sleep well that night. She kept thinking about shaving her hair. Her long hair. Well, not too long--only to her shoulders--but her hair--it was kind of long--longer than Lin's hair.

She thought of Lin's head. Hmmmph! He doesn't have as much to cut off. He doesn't have--

Shao Mei's eyes opened wide to focus better on Lin's head as he exited his home, surprised to see her outside waiting for him. "Oh--hi Shao Mei!"

"Lin!"

"Yes Shao Mei," as he walked past her and kept walking towards the Christian school.

"Lin!"

"Yes Shao Mei," as he kept walking ahead of her.

"Lin, your hair!?"

Lin didn't say anything, appearing to ignore her.

"Lin you shaved your head!"

Lin smiled, but knew that Shao Mei couldn't see his smile from behind him, "Mother did it last night."

"Why!"

Lin shrugged as he walked. "Just thought I'd get it over with."

This really floored Shao Mei. How could she complain and whine about losing sleep last night over shaving her head, when Lin had so unemotionally just gone--and done it!

"You look like a monk," said Shao Mei, not too nicely.

"Thanks," was all Lin said.

Shao Mei sizzled like a firecracker fuse--but didn't blow up.

* * * *

"What'd Father Sebastian say," asked Shao Mei, hoping for some bad news.

"Nothing."

Shao Mei was not getting the response she desired. "Really? What did you say to him?"

"I told him I was becoming a Buddhist too."

Shao Mei's mouth opened.

"I told him that we get a new name also."

Shao Mei's mouth was still open.

"He asked if he could attend the initiation."

Shao Mei's jaw seemed to detach and fall further.

Lin looked at her--wow, she was really in shock! "I told him okay," he said matter-of-factly.

Shao Mei shook her head sideways, as if shaking water out of her hair. "I can't believe you--"

"Lin. Brother Lin!" shouted Father Sebastian as he ran towards them. They waited silently for him. "Lin, I was thinking," he panted, "about your Buddhist naming."

Shao Mei glared at Lin.

Father panted further, "I think," pant pant, "I think you should consider a name from the Bible for your Buddhist naming."

Shao Mei's head seemed to retreat like a turtle into its shell.

Panting, "There are many names to choose from. In the Old Testament there are some fine Hebrew warriors to choose from."

The kids looked at each other. Father realized they may not believe him. "Here look." He thumbed through the pages of his Bible, "Here, Gideon, uh, Saul, and, well, look them over. Do you want to borrow my Bible?"

"Oh, it's alright Father," responded Lin. "I've got a Bible at home."

Father looked deeply into Lin's eyes.

"Really Father."

"Will you at least take a look for me?"

"Yes Father."

"Okay." Father wasn't as excited, but a little satisfied. Maybe doubtful.

"I will look for--" Lin stopped, "I'll look at the names Father."

Father Sebastian smiled slightly to the right side. He turned and walked back towards the rectory.

* * * *

That night, Lin did look through the Bible. He realized how much violence there was in the Old Testament. He bounced around. Read some here. Read some there. Bounced around. Then he heard noise next door. The Danish masons were coming into the lodge tonight. Hmmm. Friday night.

There were a lot of masons tonight. They were mostly all dressed in black suits with little ribbons on their necks. Then as Lin peered through his crack in the wall, he noticed some of the English masons come into the

lodge. Some sailors from several different countries seemed to be here tonight. The lodge was really filling up.

Finally they started. They spoke in Danish, so Lin couldn't understand what they were saying, or wow--yes he could. He realized they were saying the same things the English said during their 3rd Degree Initiation Ceremony, and he could kind of remember the words in English--so he knew what they were saying.

The movements and acting and roles and characters were very similar. They borrowed some of the same costumes the English used for their initiation role playing and acting--so Lin knew who was who and what was going on. He occasionally would back up into the center of his bedroom and perform the secret hand signs and penalty gestures of the masonry degrees. He had them down now. First degree hand sign. First degree punishment. Second degree hand sign. Second degree punishment. Third degree hand sign. Third degree punishment.

Lin heard the shouting. He knew what this was about--even though they were speaking Danish. He watched them act out the story of Hiram Abif being attacked in King Solomon's temple. He watched them attack the ancient Hebrew architect with a square, and a ruler, and a hammer! The hammer!

They killed him.

Like watching a stage play, it was a stage play, it was a story--he watched, knowing the ending of the story, but trying to remember the English words, as they spoke to each other in Danish--then the king! King Solomon! King Solomon--speaking Danish. Oh well. Still, he knew that it was King Solomon. He watched. He listened. Lin heard the words in his head. Lin understood what was happening, who was being chased...and executed.

Lin stayed in his house. He thought of going out to say hi to Mason John, but remembered how he'd gotten in trouble for talking to him the other day.

Lin pushed the wooden case in front of the crack in the wall behind the shelf. Now, he lit a candle. He realized a long time ago that sometimes their ceremonies go very dark--and he thought to himself--what if they see light from my room in the crack?...So he was careful.

He got out his newest Kung Fu comic book and heard Mason John talking in the lodge. "...it's wrong!"

Lin decided to listen. Mason John continued. "We shouldn't just ignore this."

The other mason laughed. "It's not our business. It's not our fight. It's not our war."

Mason John was indignant, "How can you say that?"

"If the Japs want to poke out their eyes--it's none of our business."

Mason John had an opportunity to speak now, but said nothing.

"It's probably nothing," the other mason tried to reassure. "Probably nothing."

Master Yang had made arrangements with several shopkeepers and store owners. Uncle's restaurant was awash inside with ribbons and sheets, and flags and colored cloths, and paper cranes, and...

"Is Uncle's school going to do a Lion dance?"

"No silly," scolded Shao Mei. "We don't have lion dances in Shaolin Kung Fu."

"Really? No lion dance?"

"Sshhssh. Here comes Shifu."

"Hello kids."

They smiled up to Shifu.

People were packed into the little restaurant that normally had only 6 tables and a dozen customers. Tonight there were 50 people, or more! Some were out on the street.

Lin had already shaved his head a week ago, but it had grown back, quite a bit.

Shao Mei hadn't cut hers at all. Her mother stood behind an empty stool in the far corner of the room. Shao Mei would go back to this table and get her haircut by her mother, then Shifu would deliver the final bit of shaving.

Shifu said he would shave Lin's entire head, but Uncle had brought in a barber, at his expense, who stood beside Shao Mei's mom, in the back of the restaurant. That same chair would also be where Lin got most of his head shaved, with Shifu delivering the final shaving also.

People were excited. Uncle pushed around with mugs of tea and plates of dumpling and wine and...

"Did you choose your name yet?"

"No," Shao Mei replied.

"What are you going to do?" Lin asked with concern.

"I'll let Shifu decide."

"Does Shifu know?"

"Yes," she replied, not looking at Lin, "I told him."

Lin didn't know how to reassure her. He'd picked his name. Surprisingly, Lin discovered a name in the Bible he really liked. Actually, he couldn't find it in the bible, but he figured it must be in there somewhere. He told Father Sebastian that Hiram Abif had sacrificed himself for King Solomon. That made Father Sebastian proud. To be named after a martyr, was very Christian.

Shifu approached the kids, "Go ahead and get shaved, we'll get started in just a minute."

Shao Mei wanted a little bit more attention for the loss of her hair. She wanted to say something.

Shifu disappeared back into the crowd.

Shao Mei looked at Lin.

Lin looked at Shao Mei.

She wanted something.

They walked back to Shao Mei's mom and the barber.

Father Sebastian showed up outside. Uncle pushed through to him. "Father. Father. Glad you could make it. I'll have a place for you to sit in just a few minutes."

Father bowed in a semi-Chinese manner. Uncle disappeared back into the restaurant, leaving Father Sebastian squeezed in between several women and a few children near the door. The women looked at the priest and moved their heads up and down as they scanned his long black robe that nearly touched the floor like a thick black dress.

Master Yang spoke loudly from inside. "Everyone. Neighbors. Friends. Family." Looking over to Uncle, "and wushu friends." Uncle nodded and bowed slightly to Master Yang. "I am accepting two new students into my Shaolin Kung Fu school today. They will be giving their vows of devotion and taking their new Buddhist names also."

Master Yang looked around at the guests. "Thank you for being here. I am Yang Shifu, master of the Shaolin Kung Fu school here." He looked around and smiled. "Taking on disciples is a special event for us. Our Chan Buddhism was started with the first disciple, Hui Ke. As many of you already know, we bow with one hand to honor that first disciple of Chan. Without that first disciple, there would be no Chan for us today--or Kung Fu!" he emphasized to the crowd. "Our Shaolin Kung Fu was created by Da Mo, who founded our Chan sect 1,400 years ago."

Many in the crowd murmured to each other something they knew about this Chan Buddhism.

"This ceremony will be relatively brief." The crowd was silent. "First, the initiates will bring their handwritten oaths to me. Then their basket of fruit and a gift." The crowd murmured some more. "Then they will offer their bows to myself as their Shifu and to our school, as their family."

"When do we shave her head?" someone blurted from the crowd. Some giggling and murmuring.

"The initiates are being shaved as we speak."

The crowd struggled to see the kids in the back. Lin's head was shaved completely except for a stripe, front to back on the top of his head. It kind of looked cool.

Shao Mei was still having her hair cut with scissors. Her mother worked frantically to get her daughter's hair close shaven so she could then shave her head. The crowd watched silently. NOW, she had their attention. Clumps of hair fell into Shao Mei's lap. It was almost like being undressed by someone. Shao Mei's head was lowered. She didn't want to move her head and upset her mother, but she tried to look up with her eyes. She knew that everyone was watching her.

Shifu used this opportunity to sit down and move the chairs and tables back, creating a pathway between the kids and him. He pulled two more chairs over and motioned to his senior students, Su and Law Lo. They grabbed the two chairs and slid them beside their master's chair. Shifu sat in the middle chair, then tugged at the pants of both his students who were watching Shao Mei's horrible haircut. They sat down, still watching Shao Mei's hair being removed in big chunks.

The restaurant was still silent. It was very rare, to see a woman get her head shaved. Very rare. The restaurant was quiet. You could hear her hair falling to the floor.

When Shao Mei's mother had cropped all her hair off, poor Shao Mei looked like a mangled rat. The barber talked quickly and quietly to Shao Mei's mother. She agreed to let the barber finish shaving her daughter. He used his European style barber whisk brush to spread soap on her head from the chrome bowl on the table. The crowd was murmuring but went silent when the barber pulled out his straight razor. He had a special leather belt hanging from his waist. It was some sort of barber sharpening strap. The barber swished the blade up and down the strap. Let the strap fall to his side, leaned over Shao Mei, grasped her chin in his hands and began shaving in long smooth strokes. He wiped his razor on a towel on the table and repeated this procedure

strip by strip until her entire head was shaved except for a stripe on the top of her head, a little wider and longer than Lin's leftover head hair.

He had another small towel that he wrung out as he pulled it from a small bowl of soapy water. He wiped her head off and the crowd murmured again.

Shao Mei couldn't tell whether they murmured because she was ugly and bald, or did they murmur because it was funny--she couldn't tell. But they murmured.

Shifu Yang stood up. His disciples at his sides stood up quickly also, then stood at attention beside him.

Slowly, the kids stood up, facing Shifu, across the room.

"Alright Disciples. Are you ready?"

They nodded.

Shifu sat down. His students sat down beside him. "Bring me your oaths."

Shao Mei's mother handed them to both the kids. They'd written them a few days ago and shown them to Shifu. He said that it was better not to have to read them in front of everybody there. But Shifu still looked at them both as they handed them to him and stepped backward to where they'd been. Shifu scanned the entire oath of each disciple from top to bottom before setting them under his chair.

"Disciple Lin, bring me your gift."

The crowd murmured. Lin's mother couldn't get the night off, so she was working now. Lin wanted her to be there. Lin's mother had given him an ornate Christian cross, with some red coral and Chinese turquoise stones embedded within it. It was really pretty. Lin felt very awkward, giving a Christian relic to his Shifu during a Buddhist ceremony. The crowd murmured a little louder than during Shao Mei's head shaving. Not all the audience approved of this gift when they saw Shao Mei's mother hand it to Lin.

Lin bowed towards his Shifu, then approached with his head hanging down. He got down on his knees in front of Shifu, "I hope you like this gift from me," he looked up to Shifu's knees, then looked back down, "and my mother." The crowd murmured as Shifu reached out and accepted the silver cross from Lin's outstretched hands.

"I admit," said Shifu Yang, to reassure the crowd, "that this is an unusual gift during a Buddhist naming ceremony." The crowd murmured in loud agreement. "But a gift is not the gift itself." The room was silent. "The object is just an object. If I stole it, it would not be a gift. If I told him to give it to me--it would not be a gift." There was a slight quiet murmur. Looking down at the shy, kneeling boy, Shifu spoke directly to him. "I accept this gift from you and your mother, and appreciate your desire to add the wealth of spirituality to our school." The murmurs were sporadic.

"You can go back now," Shifu whispered to kneeling Lin.

Lin stood up and still looking down, stepped backward to the shaving table.

Uncle was watching with intense interest, and remembered about the priest at the door. He turned and saw the priest, still wedged in between the women near the front door, but able to see and hear. Uncle gestured to the priest. The priest nodded he was okay.

Shao Mei was now kneeling before the Shifu and with her hands outstretched, she held a silk scarf, still folded up around something in her hands.

Shifu leaned forward, reached out and took the red silk scarf gently from her hands. He unfolded it in his lap to discover a gold ingot. The crowd gasped--then murmured.

Shifu smiled with a slight surprise and spoke down to Shao Mei. "I accept your gift of good luck and prosperity for our school. You make our school stronger with your presence, and your gift makes our school stronger in

wealth."

Shao Mei looked up. Uncle looked proudly from across the room. He had given her the gold ingot. Shifu smiled at her. She stood up and hurriedly walked backwards with her prayer hands held up.

"Now," announced Shifu, "they will bring their baskets of fruit."

Lin accepted the handoff from Shao Mei's mom who had kept all their presents under the table, and now distributed them to the kids. Lin walked to Shifu with his basket of eight fruit. Every number has a meaning. Some numbers are luckier than others. Lin decided that since eight was a popular Buddhist number, he would use that number. His fruits could barely be kept in the basket without falling out though. Several grapefruit, a few oranges, a star fruit and--oh no, he was about to lose a tangerine on top. Shifu even shifted as if to jump forward and rescue the fruit.

Lin kept the fruits in the basket, as he knelt in front of Shifu and the two senior students. "Shifu, I present this basket of fruit to our Shaolin Kung Fu school to bring health, life, and nourishment to our school. May our school always be overflowing with life."

Shifu laughed as he reached out and plucked the basket from Lin. "Overflowing is a good word for your basket." The crowd laughed softly. "Thank you Disciple."

As Lin walked backwards, Shao Mei started walking forward with her basket of only 5 large citrus. She said she chose the number five because it seemed spiritual too. Lin accepted that explanation.

"Shifu, please accept my basket as a token of the health, and, and, and nourishment that I can offer the school." The crowd murmured. They knew she hadn't said it very well. "I hope that our Shaolin school will be a source of life and protection for all who should need us."

This surprised Shifu a little bit. They had rehearsed this ceremony, but sometimes, even rehearsals can give way to improvisation, or something unexpected.

"Thank you Disciple Mei. You are my first girl student--disciple--" Shifu looked over at Lin again, like the other day. Lin couldn't tell what Shifu was thinking when he looked at him like that. "I am honored to have you as my Disciple and know that you will make me proud and bring pride to your family." As Shifu looked around at the crowd he saw Uncle. "And pride to your relatives." Uncle smiled at Master Yang.

Some of the crowd clapped, then stopped abruptly, realizing they may have been out of place to clap now.

Shifu stood up. His senior students stood up abruptly beside him. "Now for the last part of our Kung Fu initiation ceremony, the bows and Buddhist naming."

The barber walked up to the Shifu with his straight razor. The crowd murmured.

Shifu thanked the barber and sat back down, with senior students mirroring his being seated. "Lin, you may approach."

Lin walked up and knelt before the master. Then he placed his hands on the ground and bowed until his forehead touched the floor. Lin raised up to where he could almost see Shifu's knees, then bowed again, touching his forehead a second time. The crowd was completely silent.

Lin bowed a third time, touching his forehead to the floor again, then raising up enough to look Shifu in the face.

"Scoot forward disciple."

Lin shuffled forward a little further on his knees. Shifu's senior student on his right handed him the razor. Today Disciple Lin you take a new name for your new path in life. Shifu held Lin's head, cradling his chin in his palm. As Shifu shaved off the last stripe by pulling the razor forward towards him, he continued, "You've chosen the name Hiram for your Buddhist Kung Fu name." Finishing his last shave stroke, "So from today forward you will be known as Chong, Lin Hiram."

Lin looked up. He thought he'd be losing his name. Shifu smiled at him. Welcome to our Shaolin school, Lin-Hiram."

A few people started to clap again, but it didn't seem like the right time yet.

"Thank you Shifu," Lin said quietly before walking backward, bent forward.

"And now, Shao Mei, approach."

Shao Mei walked forward and knelt before Shifu. More rapidly than Lin, she knelt three times, each time pressing her forehead to the floor. When she looked up after her third bow, there was a red mark on her forehead from pressing into the wood parquet floor too hard. Shifu scooted his chair towards her instead of asking her to scoot forward. Holding her chin in the palm of his hand, he began to shave the last of her hair, the stubbly stripe on the top of her head. "As Buddhists we take various vows, and offer various sacrifices to Buddha. This sacrifice of our hair, is our way of saying to the Buddha, I am serious about being a good person, and I realize that being a good person doesn't require any hair." Shifu Yang smiled at Shao Mei. "But our identity, our ego, our pride, these are natural to all men--and women. When we shave our head, we are valuing spirituality and knowledge, more than our personal pride, or personal desires. We appreciate your sacrifices and gifts today disciples. You have impressed us all with your sincerity and devotion."

Shifu stood up. The senior students stood up. Shao Mei stood up.

Shifu signaled Lin to join them. Lin approached and stood beside Shao Mei, facing their Shifu. "Shao Mei, I have chosen a name for you that I hope will inspire you always to reach further and do well."

Shao Mei looked up like a puppy dog into Shifu's face looking down. "I name you Cheng Mei Bo." Lin was surprised. He should have gotten that name. Shifu gave her the name, "Hero."

Shifu completed the ceremony by announcing loudly, "Welcome to our Shaolin Kung Fu school, disciples."

Now the crowd clapped, and clapped, and shouted, and a few whistles...

Master Yang walked back into the house as Shao Mei Bo, and Lin Hiram worked out in the backyard. It had been a few months and they were starting to look like Kung Fu students.

As they walked home they recognized a lot of the masons on the street. "They must have had a meeting tonight," said Mei.

"Yeah, every Thursday night. I don't get to see them anymore because of our Kung Fu."

Shao Mei imitated one of the Mason secret hand signs.

"Shao Mei STOP! Don't ever do that in public! We'll really get in trouble."

"I'm not a mason."

"That's not the point. Those are secret symbols of the masons."

"I like Kung Fu better."

"Me too, but don't get us in trouble."

Shao Mei huffed as if she wasn't in complete agreement.

"See you later," he said to her.

"See you in the morning," she replied.

* * * *

As Lin approached his door he noticed Mason John talking to another mason he didn't recognize. They stood at the base of the lodge steps and seemed concerned about something. When Mason John saw Lin, he pretended to have to go back in the lodge for something and told his friend goodbye.

As his friend walked away down the street, John pretended to be unlocking the front door, then turned around and walked away from the lodge, in the other direction his friend had walked. "Lin."

Lin heard his name being called, but John wasn't looking at him.

"Lin, follow me."

Lin followed John, who seemed to be acting very suspicious.

"Lin, I wanted to talk to you."

"Yes, Mr. Campbell. What can I do for you?"

"Thanks Lin, but I've got some bad news to share with you."

Lin waited for more information as he walked faster to catch up with Mason John.

"Lin I'm leaving soon."

"Going home?"

"No. I wish I was. No. My boat is going to Australia."

"Wow. That sounds exciting."

"Listen Lin, we're leaving because the Japanese have been attacking China."

Lin thought this was very bizarre to hear.

"I don't know what's going on, but evidently, we're not going to get involved."

Lin was quiet walking beside Mason John, looking up at John's face, that never looked into his eyes.

"If you have somewhere to go inland, I recommend it," said John quietly.

"I don't understand."

"I'm not supposed to say anything, but evidently the Japanese are attacking China.

Lin laughed. "That's impossible. We're much bigger than them."

"That's all I can tell you for now. Sorry Lin. I've got to go."

John turned to the right and without pausing or slowing down walked away from Lin down the side street.

Lin stopped in the middle of the street and almost got hit by a horse.

* * * *

When Lin's mother came home, after midnight, Lin was still up. His mother scolded him for being up.

"Mom. I was talking to one of the masons,"

"That's nice son."

"Mason John."

"That's nice."

"He said that the Japanese are attacking us."

His mother stopped putting the dishes away. She turned towards Lin.

"He said that the Japanese have attacked us up North and he said we should move inland."

His mother wiped off a plate with her apron. She said nothing.

"Go to bed Lin. You have school in the morning."

* * * *

The Christian school kids were used to watching Shao Mei and Lin practice their Kung Fu. Shao Mei's hair was growing back. She had as much fur now as a teddy bear.

Father Sebastian approached the kids as they were playing a bouncing ball game. "Children, over here," whispered Father towards them like a drug dealer. "Children."

"Yes Father," said Shao Mei.

"Children, I've some frightening news."

They looked up at Father as he bent forwards towards them.

"Children, the Japanese are attacking China."

Shao Mei gasped.

"See! I told you."

"How did you know Brother Lin?"

"A mason told me."

"Probably a sailor," commented Father.

"What does this mean Father?" Shao Mei asked with great concern in her voice.

"I don't know. Maybe it's over now. Maybe it will get worse."

"Will they come here?" she asked.

"I don't know child. I've been told that we are to pack up and leave with the English boat going to Australia."

Lin realized that might be his mason friend's ship.

"Can we come with you father?" Lin asked.

"No, I'm certain that won't be possible."

"But if you and the navy are leaving, who will protect us?"

"You will have to protect yourselves," replied Father.

Lin was a bit peeved by all this cowardice. "I thought you said that the Europeans were here to improve our lives and protect us."

"I'm sorry Lin. I just know we've been told to leave."

The kids thought, but they had nothing to say.

"Sister Jean!" he shouted at a nun across the courtyard. "I've got to go kids."

"Is there school tomorrow?" asked Mei towards the back of Father Sebastian.

"I don't think so. We're leaving soon I think," he puffed as he ran away.

"Father!" exclaimed Lin.

"I'm sorry Lin. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Father did a slight bow to the kids from across the courtyard, turned and hurried at a jog to the nun.

"I'm scared," she said to Lin.

"I'll protect you," Lin said, then realized he wasn't capable of really fighting anyone yet. "I wish my Kung Fu was better."

"Me too," she agreed.

* * * *

It was the Tuesday class. Shifu was late. He arrived out of breath from running. "Students," he shouted. "Line up."

The students came from all directions and lined up in the back yard.

"I've just found out that the Japanese have invaded China and are moving south towards us."

The students all looked at each other, but no one said anything.

"Go home to your families. Hide your valuables. Keep your women inside, or hidden in the closets when they arrive."

The students all looked at each other again, as if hoping someone would say, "You're only dreaming"...or, "I'm just joking with you." But Shifu didn't say anything else. He went back into his house.

"Students," announced Su. "Get ready to salute out. Salute the past masters. Salute your Shixiong."

The students wandered in little circles talking to each other.

"Students," announced Su. "Do as Shifu said. Go protect your families."

The students dispersed into the home to leave.

* * * *

How long does it take to learn how to fight?

How long does it take to learn how to kick real good?

How long does it take to be able to punch really good?

How long does it take to be faster and stronger than anyone else?

When will our Kung Fu be good enough to protect ourselves?

When will our Kung Fu be good enough to protect our families?

How long does it take to be a Kung Fu Master?

A wushu hero?

A hero?

The senior students were remarkable. They banged their forearms together in rehearsed two-man forms. It sounded like two blocks of wood hitting. Lumber hitting lumber. They were tough.

It was Thursday. They hadn't gone to Christian school yesterday or today, but they did come to Kung Fu class. They were learning the 12 Step Tantui. A beginner program for Shaolin Kung Fu. All the students were practicing with more ferocity than ever before--imagining the approaching Japanese army.

* * * *

As the young teens walked home, they both noticed the beggarman Chin. They both wondered what would happen to him if the Japanese came. Neither of them spoke.

* * * *

After dropping off Shao Mei, Lin walked home, popped up his steps, took out his key--

"Lin," his name was hissed.

It was Mason John again, trying to whisper and yell his name at the same time. "LIN!"

Lin put his key back into his pocket and popped down the steps to walk to the Mason Lodge.

"Come inside."

Lin froze. He never thought he'd ever be invited into a Mason lodge. "Come on. No one's here."

Lin looked around nervously, then quickly walked inside. Mason John locked the front door behind them. "We're not having a meeting tonight," announced John as he walked by and headed towards the back rooms. Lin followed him.

"We're leaving tomorrow." Mason John disappeared into a room.

Lin walked slowly down the hallway.

John quickly reappeared holding the Lodge book of records. "Because of the Japanese." Then he disappeared into the other room. Lin heard that sound of the cash drawer on a wooden shelf. Slam. "Sorry," he said from inside the room, around the corner. "I didn't mean to slam that." He emerged with the cash box.

John walked past Lin and placed the two items on the Secretary's desk. He sat down, opened a side drawer, opened the top middle drawer, took out something, then took out a key. Lin figured the key was under the big flat green thing he pulled out.

John unlocked the cash box. He pulled out the stack of dollar bills, then wrapped them in a rubber band that scrunched them in the middle. He put the wad of bills into his coat inside pocket. Turning over the cash box he dumped out its' contents: a bunch of coins, some pins, some pens, and some buttons.

"These are for you," John said flatly.

Lin wasn't sure what he meant.

"Here," he gestured. "Put these coins in your pocket. They're yours."

Lin still wasn't sure if he should. Were they stealing the lodge's money?

"It's my job to collect the register and money." John looked Lin in the eyes. "It's collected. This is leftovers."

"Thank you," Lin said meekly. He began putting the coins in his pocket.

Both of them shivered and became pale as they heard a loud siren coming down their street. It was a Chinese police car, but both of them knew it was something else.

The car stopped out in front of the lodge. They heard several people get out. Another car pulled up. Another.

Lots of people were at the front door of the lodge. Lin and Mason John were inside. The voices outside were Chinese AND JAPANESE.

The Chinese police pounded on the door and demanded entrance.

Mason John looked around frantically for a place to hide. Nowhere.

"Lin. Lin," he whispered loudly. "Come with me. I'm going to lock you into the closet." He began walking into the back rooms, "Just come with me."

In the room, with the closet where he kept the cash box, they'd screwed a padlock on the closet door. It was still open from removing the cash box.

"Get inside," he hissed loudly.

Lin stepped into the closet with shelves. There was enough room between the shelves and the closet door for Lin to stand. John closed the doors and then he heard the snap of the padlock.

Then they both heard the sound of crunching wood. Probably an axe in the front door.

John's steps left the room. People yelled. People argued. Chinese. Japanese, and only John speaking English.

Lin heard the rattle of the cash box. They were checking it out. They found the money on John. Lin could hear the Chinese police talk slowly to the Japanese interpreter that they had confiscated the Mason Lodge records and money.

Evidently, that was good enough. It got quiet. Lin was still locked in the cabinet, and apparently they took John with them. The crack between the closet doors let in a little light. Lin could see that there was a lot of stuff on the drawers. Perhaps their costumes also. He felt around and found a small short stick. He forced it through the crack in the closet doors and then pulled back on it to pry the doors open.

After several tries, without any way to lean back, he finally snapped the lock open by pulling half the padlock out of the door with its screws tinkling on the ground. Lin emerged, cautious. Was he alone?

Everyone was gone. He walked to the front door. There was a big hole in it. He could hear talking outside. JAPANESE TALKING.

Oh no! How was he to get out? They were on the front porch.

Luckily they didn't hear him pop open the door. Should he hide inside. Well, it won't work now, he broke the door lock off the door.

Lin walked back into the lodge. He looked over where the crack in the wall was. He walked over to it. So close to home--on the other side of the wall--but impossible to reach...

Lin thought of pounding a hole or something to get through the wall. But not with those Japs outside. He wondered if they were Japanese police. Japanese soldiers?

Lin decided to go back into the back room again. He was a sitting duck in the lodge room.

He picked up the stick he'd used earlier. It was carved with big round wrinkles on it. It was varnished and stained a dark brown. Now he recognized it. The Marshal of the lodge used it. This was a--a--a something. He couldn't remember the name of it. He thought to himself that maybe he could use this to pry apart the boards in the wall and escape to his house. Still, it was pitch dark in the lodge tonight. Perhaps he could dig a little. No. He needed some distracting sound.

Then he heard it. Gunshots. Gun shots! He knew it was gun shots. It was quiet on the front porch. Lin hoped they had run to the guns. He pounded at the wall where the crack was. The plaster flew in all directions. It was pitch dark, but his eyes were open and he got some of the grit in his eyes. It hurt. It hurt bad. He kept pounding.

Finally Lin was able to wedge the stick into the wall and pry out a board. Not big enough though. He felt in the darkness and pryed another board loose, but he still couldn't get out. He needed something longer. He thought. Then he remembered. the flag poles. He walked slowly in the dark lodge, feeling ahead as he negotiated through the folding metal chairs and up to the stage where they kept the flag. He felt around, then stubbed his toe on the base. He felt the air in front of him. No flag pole.

Back in the closet he thought. He felt his way back on the sides of the hallway wall. The hole in the front door let in flashes of light as cars drove by. He opened the closet. He felt around. Nothing.

He checked everywhere. Then he found a box of wooden matches. He lit one. There they are! The flag poles were in the corners of the closet. Lin grabbed one and made it back to his hole as fast as he could.

Lin pryed and bounced to make his hole bigger. He heard a car pull up out front. He panicked. He pryed faster. The flag pole broke. What should he do?

Lin picked up the pieces of wood and scampered back into the back room. He put the pieces of wood on a shelf in the closet. He grabbed the other flag pole.

As he pryed at the hole in the wall, he heard talking outside the front door. Chinese cops he thought. He couldn't hear what they were saying though. Then he got an idea. The metal chair. He got one of the chairs and stuck a pair of legs in the hole. No. He stuck the flat back into the hole. Hey. This is doing something. He twisted the chair and got a couple slats of wood to bend into the room, like a huge mousetrap. Lin squeezed through the hole into his bedroom. Now what?

If he pushed the chair out, it would probably make a lot of noise. He knew they'd see the hole tomorrow. Their apartment wasn't safe to stay in anymore. His mother was at work. He'd have to hurry to her work and tell her not to come home.

But how? He had to get by the cops outside. Still, they weren't looking for him. He hoped they would just let him pass.

The Chinese cops watched Lin exit his apartment and walk away from them down the street. Lin tried not to look at them, but they got a glimpse of his face.

Lin needed to go the other direction, so he continued away from the cops, then turned right and went towards his mother's work on the next street up.

Lin's mother was sent home early. The silk factory closed down early tonight and sent the workers home. Because Lin was walking up the next street, he didn't cross paths with his mother as she walked home.

Lin's mother had to walk past the Mason lodge to her house, and was eyed very sternly by the Chinese police. She pulled out her key and entered her apartment. She used the bathroom, straightened up and got something to eat. She hadn't noticed the hole in their bedroom wall yet.

Lin hurried back home from the empty factory. He jogged but started walking when he neared his home and saw the pair of policemen still on the Mason doorstep. He walked past them, trying not to look up at them. They watched him intently as he passed them and entered his home.

"Mom!"

"Yes Lin. I saw them outside."

"Mom, that's not it! They took the Mason John."

"That's not our concern Lin."

"Yes it is mom." Lin grabbed her arm and pulled her into the bedroom. She turned on the lamp.

"TURN IT OFF MOM!" he hissed real loudly, frightening his mom. "They'll see the light!"

She turned the light off. But while it was on she got a good look at the hole with the wedged in metal chair.

"I had to dig a hole through the wall to get back home."

His mother was still in a shock, a little shock.

"What do we do Lin?"

"I don't know."

His mother thought. "Gather up your clothes. We're leaving. Actually, if you pack a bunch, it'll be obvious. Just grab some dumplings in your pockets. And a coat."

His mother put some jewelry in her pockets. "Let's go," she said, opening the front door.

They walked out. It was kind of late at night, but normally there were more people on the street. Tonight there was no one. It was scarier and quiet. They walked briskly up the street. They went to Shao Mei's house and entered, after they were sure no one followed them.

* * * *

Lin and his mother slept on the floor in Shao Mei's living room.

They awoke in the morning to more of the sirens they had heard last night.

All of them were scared. Shao Mei's mother was scared. Shao Mei was scared. Lin was scared. Lin's mother was scared. They drank their morning tea. No one talked.

"What do we do Mother," Shao Mei asked in a childlike voice.

Her mother sipped her tea. The police will probably track them to here if they try to find them. We all need to leave."

Lin's mother just nodded her head.

* * * *

The phone lines were dead. They decided to try to get to Uncle's house.

It was morning. There were a few people on the streets. They thought they heard soldiers marching last night, but no one got up to look out the window. They stayed in their beds, hiding from the outside world.

In broad daylight, they felt very nervous. Hopefully they hadn't found Lin's escape route and decided to track them down. Uncle's house had a front gate. They knocked with the hanging metal hammer.

A small wooden window appeared as someone on the other side slid the wooden square sideways in its track. "What do you want?" the woman asked gruffly.

"It's me Shao Mei, and my mother. We've come to see Uncle."

A face appeared in the small door window. "Shao Mei!" she exclaimed.

The huge wooden gate door swung open. They hugged.

* * * *

Uncle couldn't let them stay. As a member of the Chinese Freemasons, he said they would be coming for him too. He was packing up his family and sending them in a pair of cars, inland to the north.

They dropped off the four of them on the other side of town then drove back to pick up Uncles' family and relatives for their longer trek northward.

Lin realized they were near Master Yang's house and suggested they try there. Lin's mother didn't like the idea. "Master Yang will take us in," reassured Lin.

The house was empty and the front door locked. Lin said for them to wait a minute. He tugged on Shao Mei's arm and ran up the street. She didn't understand, but followed.

"Where are you going Lin?"

"The back way."

"Back way?"

"Yeah. The alley. We can climb over the fence." Then he also imagined prying a couple boards loose and crawling through the rear fence.

A few minutes later the front door of Master Yang's house opened. Lin stood in the doorway smiling proudly.

* * * *

With his mom, Shao Mei, and her mom, safely in the house, Lin felt very relaxed and slightly comical. Perhaps overcompensating for his real fears.

They slept at Master Yang's. No one came home that night or the next morning. Lin wasn't sure what to do.

Shao Mei looked out the second floor window, down the street.

"What're we going to do?" she asked.

"Just lay low, I guess." Lin wanted to say something more profound. "Perhaps Master Yang will return."

* * * *

After several days, their food was exhausted. They'd eaten all of Master Yang's fresh vegetables. Shifu had vegetables growing in several small areas of his backyard. Lin had tended them but felt bad to think of leaving them to no one's care.

"Let's go back and see if they were really looking for us," suggested Shao Mei.

Lin started to give her a scolding look, but then realized, she might be right. "We can go back tonight."

"NO!" his mother stated harshly.

"Your mother's right. If we're going to do it, let's go during daylight."

The radio stations disappeared several days ago. Even the radio stations of the foreigners had been shut off. The radios were eerily silent with that noisy windy sound everywhere across the dial.

"We're the Kung Fu heroes," boasted Shao Mei to stir up Lin's enthusiasm.

It didn't work. They'd been seeing jeeps of soldiers driving up and down the streets. It seemed that most of their Chinese civilian passengers had been leaving town, but very few, if any, civilians ever returned in the jeeps.

"Alright," said Lin, trying to be brave. Wanting to be brave. Not feeling at all brave. "Let's go now."

"NOW?" His mother was alarmed.

"Let's get it over with. Things seem to be getting a little worse--" Lin lowered his head, "worse every day."

"We're all going," stated Lin's mother.

Shao Mei's mother nodded in agreement--reluctantly.

Lin wanted to tell his mother not to come, but she was his mother. He wasn't sure how he'd let her know they made it. They'd have to come back for her...

"Alright," sighed Lin.

Shao Mei became the military leader. She was the most energetic of everyone today. "Bring some food, and water, and tea, and sugar..."

* * * *

It was a very long walk from Master Yang's house to Lin's house. It never seemed very long before, after Kung Fu classes, but today it seemed like another country away, with foreign border crossings. There were no cars in the street. Only an occasional jeep, or group of jeeps. Not a bicycle. This made the four pedestrians very

nervous.

They walked frantically most of the time. When they tried to walk normal it probably looked like they were jogging. They were only a couple blocks from their home when a group of four jeeps came from behind them. They had nowhere to hide. No small alleys or even a space between the buildings. They walked single file so that the jeeps had to pass them on their left sides from behind.

They could tell by the sound of the jeep motors that they slowed slightly as they passed. The last jeep slowed the most. The driver and two Japanese soldiers took intent interest in the two mothers, dressed in silk dresses. Shao Mei's mom wore a grey dress with black design and some red borders. It wasn't flashy and didn't stand out. Walking on the street her mom seemed to blend in with the buildings.

Lin's mother wore a bright royal blue dress. A little too flashy for now. An electric blue, that made you feel good when you looked at it. The design was a midnight blue, so mostly, the electric shiny silkworm material sparkled and flashed.

The jeep slowed steadily until it stopped about twenty paces in front of them. They slowed slightly, but kept walking forward. The driver remained in the jeep, but the two Japanese soldiers hopped out of the jeep, jabbering and laughing to each other. They carried their rifles. Lin's mom was in the lead and stopped. They all stopped in a row.

The soldiers approached them. The jeep began to back up behind the soldiers, toward them.

Lin's mom didn't know what to do. They couldn't outrun the jeep, or these men. The two soldiers approached Lin's mom and got very close to her, talking in smooth Japanese sentences, with big smiles, completely uncaring that they couldn't understand what they were saying.

Shao Mei's mom pushed up and wedged into the huddle beside Lin's mom. Lin wanted to step up, but everyone was taller than him.

Shao Mei's mom started talking in a scolding tone, Lin's mom seemed to be pleading. The soldiers kept joking to each other, unconcerned about what the two ladies were saying.

Several more jeeps could be heard approaching. This made the soldiers more nervous than the kids. They talked abruptly to each other, kept looking towards the sound of the approaching jeeps and chattering to each other--ran back to their jeep. Without a look at the ladies, they drove off to catch up with their own comrades.

The two ladies were pretty shaken up, but realized they had to soothe the kids also. They knelt before their kids and gave them hugs.

The next batch of Japanese jeeps drove by without slowing down at all as they passed the women and children on the side of the road.

The mothers gathered their steam and led the kids ahead towards Lin's home.

When they were across the street, they realized that the soldiers, and policemen were no longer here.

"I'll go see," said Lin bravely. He looked up to his mom. She nodded. He looked up and down the street one more time. He felt in his shirt pocket for the door key. It was there. He looked up and down the street again. He took a deep breath--and ran across the street. Quickly he slipped the key in and popped inside closing the door quickly behind him.

The house was dark inside. Lin turned on the light. 'Good,' he thought. The power is on again. Someone had been here though. Someone had been inside the house. But the door was locked.

Lin was scared. What happened? How? Who?

Like a panther stalking a rabbit, Lin tip toed through his house. He flipped on the wall switch in the bedroom. No light. He jiggled it up and down. Nothing. Strange. It worked last time he was here. The light was on in the kitchen.

He heard something to his right and jumped back out of the room like a flea.

He ran to the kitchen and found a rectangular chopping knife. Like a weapon, he held it beside his head.

He listened.

He heard something again in the bedroom.

"Who's there?" he shouted not too loudly.

Silence.

"Who's there?"

Silence, but he knew someone was in there.

"Is that you Lin?"

Lin recognized the voice of Mason John. He felt some of his tension release. "Yes. Is that you Mr. Campbell?"

"Wo jia pyun yo," Mason John said painfully. His terrible Chinese translated to, "I am friend."

Lin almost smiled and hurriedly stepped back towards the bedroom. "Are you alright Mr. Campbell?"

John had stood up from where he'd been hiding in the closet of the bedroom. He clutched his ribs and bent forward as he tried to walk towards Lin.

Lin stepped forward to assist him. "What happened to you?"

"They worked me over, and took our records," John explained with little gasps of air every few words.

"Are your ribs broken?"

"Maybe. I think so."

As John sat down in the kitchen Lin could see that his lip had been broken open a few days ago and now had a black ugly clot on it. Then he remembered his mother. "Stay here!"

Lin hurried to the front door, opened it, looked up and down the street, then waved for them to come in. He returned to the kitchen leaving the front door open.

"My mother and Shao Mei are coming inside."

They entered Lin's home briskly with Lin's mother entering first but holding it open until they were all inside.

"Hi Mr. Campbell," said Shao Mei, realizing he was injured after she started talking so her words faded in volume.

"Hello Shao Mei," John groaned.

The two women just eyed Master John, as if probing him with their minds, seeing him from inside his body.

"Lay down in the bedroom," instructed Lin's mom.

"The light's out in the bedroom," blurted Lin.

"Not really," groaned John. They all looked at him. "I just unscrewed the bulb a little so it wouldn't turn on."

Lin understood. Good idea. He wasn't able to see in the room when he came in.

Lin's mom started to help Mr. Campbell up.

Lin popped into the room and screwed the light bulb of the blue porcelain lantern with white lamp shade, back into its socket, without overtightening it.

He reached the wall switch just as his mom was helping Mr. Campbell into the room.

* * * *

They'd been home a couple days, and were almost out of food here. Shao Mei and Lin had piled up a bunch of chairs inside the mason lodge to block the hole in the wall. It seemed they were safe here.

The city was quiet. The radio was quiet. The streets were quiet. People kept leaving at night. They didn't come back. Lin wasn't sure whether it was better to stay, or to go.

No phones, no radio, and now no food. There was a grocer a block and a half away from Lin's house. They decided that Lin and Shao Mei would go check it out. They both wore brown and grey clothing. They wanted to be able to hide if necessary. Like warriors going off to war, perhaps never to return, they hugged their parents. Lin and Shao Mei both carried some money and each carried a back pack, hoping they would be full on their return.

With a last loving look from parent to child, and from child to parent, they took off. Shao Mei's mom wanted to watch them jog up the street, but Lin's mom pulled the door shut. They kept the window blinds drawn, and didn't turn on their lights at night. At least not in the kitchen.

Mason John was healing slowly. His cracked ribs would take a month or two to heal. The mothers weren't sure whether he was a detriment or an asset to them. Currently, he used up their food and water, so, he wasn't leaning towards the asset end of the value scale.

Lin's mom and Shao Mei's mom couldn't speak English, so they had nothing to say or talk about either. He seemed rather worthless to them, but they cared for him anyway.

As the mothers sat in the kitchen, nervously awaiting the return of their children, Mason John entered the kitchen. They moved apart so he could sit at the table with them in a wood chair. Lin's mom started to make some tea.

"The kids gone shopping?" asked John.

Neither parent could understand him, but they kind of understood him. Lin's mom used her hand to mime eating something with chopsticks, then made her hand run away through the air on finger legs, representing the kids.

Mason John understood. He pointed in the direction the kids went, "I hope," then he covered his heart with the same right hand, then made a thumbs up hand, "they are okay."

The moms understood. But with talking this difficult, they didn't try to keep the conversation going.

* * * *

As the kids neared the grocer, the street seemed vacant. They nodded to each other and briskly walked to the store. The blinds were drawn. The front door was locked. They knocked. Nothing. "Hey, it's us!" shouted Shao Ming. "It's-" Shhsssh, said the grocer as he opened the door halfway. "Hurry. Come inside."

Lin noticed the store sign with the picture of pig was on the floor in the corner. 'Oh,' he thought. The grocer doesn't want the Japanese to know there's food in here.

"Hello kids. What can I get you?"

Shao Mei handed him a list from the parents. He 'hmmmd' a few times as he read it. I have most of these things. Some food I've taken from here--before the Japs take it."

The kids nodded slightly in understanding.

The grocer hurried around and got them their food. When he was done, he pulled out his abacus and began adding it all up. "\$17.40," he said.

Shao Mei had enough without using any of Lin's money, so she paid the bill. Then the kids packed it into their backpacks.

"Be careful kids," said the grocer.

"Thanks," said Lin, with his thoughts already concerned with their return.

Just as they were about to leave, they heard jeeps coming and closed the door, staying quietly inside. No one said a word. The jeeps passed. They nodded to the grocer again. This time he only nodded back, without saying anything. They slipped out.

On the way to the grocer they had noticed a few hiding places. On the return journey they heard jeeps coming again and ran to one of the hiding spots they'd chosen. Crouched behind some wooden barrels, they waited for the jeeps to pass. Lin had always thought of Shao Mei as a friend. Not really a girl. Just a friend. As he looked at her now, scared like him, but also controlled and unemotional like him, he realized she was a very good friend, and to his surprise, he noticed she was a girl. A tough girl--

"Let's go," she said and led the way.

* * * *

They arrived back home and it was as if they'd been gone an entire year.

The kids really felt like heroes now.

That night's supper seemed like some of the best food they had ever eaten.

Shao Mei got cabin fever first. The mom's got over it a decade ago. Lin, just hadn't reached it yet.

Mason John was also becoming more irritable and clunking into things more than ever--as if he was trying to bump them out of the way.

"You need to practice your Kung Fu."

"So do you," Mei snapped back at Lin.

"No, I mean you need to practice it so you'll feel better."

She thought for a minute.

Mason John broke the silence, "I don't think they're coming back to the lodge again."

The room was quiet--with thinking.

"That would be awesome!" Lin almost yelled.

Mei smiled sheepishly.

"We could move chairs out of the way, and you kids can exercise in the middle of the lodge."

The kids now looked up at Mason John like little puppy dogs greeting their master--home from work.

Realizing he couldn't procrastinate this, "Well alright kids. Let's go make a Kung Fu school!"

Everyone seemed happy, even the moms.

First thing was to seal the hole in the front door. Realizing they'd have to replace at least half the door to do it, they called on Uncle. Uncle got them a new door, with a sliding window cover, just like at his house.

The moms decided this was an opportunity for them to do something also. They cleaned the floors, they cleaned the walls, they cleaned the ceiling! Then they started hanging stuff. This, and that. Some of the neighbors were gone. They left their belongings behind. The moms figured they were expecting to return to their stuff, so they protected those few homes, that they could see from the kitchen window--but they saw other homes being cleared out. Won't say by who...

So they came up with a new plan. They would bring some of the things that they liked, from the homes they were protecting, and keep them--or store them here in the lodge--where they were easier to protect and guard anyway. So without any intention of ever keeping some of the curtains, and end tables, and the plush devan, or the mirrored armoire-- That armoire was the worst of the items, or the more painful of the lodge decorations. It weighed a ton! They needed Mason John's help, but even after two months, he was hurting to use any muscles in the left side of his body.

* * * *

Lin looked around at the lodge. He'd insisted upon keeping some of the Freemason decorations, like the pedestals with one holding a globe of the earth, and the other holding a globe of the heavens.

Mason John fought hard to remove the "G" logo that hung on chains behind the "King's Throne," as Lin called it.

But Lin said that his Buddhist name was Hiram, and that he took the name based upon Hiram, an architect,

being a masonic hero--well, his final argument was, "The letter G is for Geometry, not God."

Mason John's mouth dropped, when Lin said he knew what the letter G stood for, and was correct, a few weeks earlier. Shao Mei was stirring up trouble at that time. She just HAD to tell Mason John something to get Lin in trouble.

Lin didn't dare say anything about how he'd watched all their secret rituals and meetings. He was Chinese, but he spoke English, so he learned everything that the masons knew. Lin was a Master Mason, in secret.

* * * *

The next few months became a routine. By the end of the summer, they'd spoken to a few neighbors. The Japanese drove through the streets on regular intervals. People timed their life by them.

If you wanted to meet someone, it'd be at a certain time, in between the patrols. Then hurry home. FAST!

Everyone concurred. Once people left town, they never came back. No one.

No one except Mason John. He'd escaped because he was English. They had orders NOT to harm any other nationalities--at all--except for the Chinese. They were raping, and killing and...

Mason John, remembered seeing some men, and a woman, a woman in a red dress he said, who he thought were all executed in a field North of town. He said he was trying not to look at them, and they were pounding his body with kicks and punches as if he was a rubber target.

When they brought in the translator, and John explained who he was, and they had to write it down--they let him go. Or at least that's what he thought. They left him standing at the end of a bungalow, and after a minute of no one watching him, he said he ran like a rabbit, a wounded rabbit, and didn't stop until he got back to the Masonry Lodge.

Poor Mason John. His ship left without him. Even though they'd sent him to collect the Lodge records, and box of lodge funds, the ship couldn't wait for one man. They were scheduled in Australia, some "middle way" place.

Since Lin had become a Buddhist, he took his Buddhism more seriously. He read some books on Buddhism. Even in the Christian Library, there were a bunch of books on Buddhism. But now he wanted to understand Buddhism. Confucius taught that you could read something, or you could study something. Lin was studying now.

The middle way is a very fundamental concept in all Buddhism, realized Lin. He read several different versions of Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in India. The tales of the armies of the gods, or devils, or "demons" as Father Sebastian referred to them--these tales were exciting, but Lin found himself hungering for the truth. "What really happened?" he found himself asking himself, usually within his mind--without speaking it out loud.

He discovered--

"Lin. Come on!" urged Shao Mei impatiently.

Lin put down his book.

In the Lodge, well, maybe it was wrong to call it a Lodge now. But it wasn't really a Kung Fu school either. A Kung Fu school is focused around its founder or current patriarch, and this school had neither. Shao Mei's mom was a Buddhist. She offered and even tried to set up an altar, but Lin's mom, didn't back her up. Mason John kind of tried to exact some authority or reclaim ownership of the lodge when he said, "A lodge is not allowed to support any one religion, but we do accept all religious faiths in our members."

Lin seized his political moment and stated, "Then no crosses, no buddhas, no statues--"

"The letter G," interrupted Shao Mei.

Lin slumped his head impatiently at Mei. "The letter G stands for Geometry, not God."

Shao Mei flatly stated, "God."

"No it doesn't."

"He said they are all religions--and all religions believe in God--so God."

"Mei it doesn't."

Mason John was surprised to not be a part of this argument. Theoretically, he was the only person in the room who should know anything about Masonry--but somehow--these kids knew things--

"Tell him Mr. Campbell," ordered Shao Mei.

Now Mason John was surprised to finally be IN the conversation. "Well Shao Mei--I was taught--" he was trying to be diplomatic--and gentle--"I was taught it meant Geometry."

Mei's slumping pout was expected by everyone.

"But I was also taught that many people do believe it stands for God, and they should not be discouraged from believing that."

Mei raised her head up, now victorious. From loser to leader in less than 10 seconds. The mothers made fun of her, but they didn't expect her to change--they were the same way--to some extent. But parents have to control their emotions, maybe more than kids have to.

Buddhism says that having emotions is the basis of all suffering. It took a few books before Lin figured out *"what they were really saying."* Everyone has emotions. Buddhism just expects you to identify them. Only after identifying them can you conquer or control them. Lin felt comfortable with the "middle way" concept. Not too happy, not too sad. Just content. That peaceful contentment made Shao Mei itch and get pissed off. She couldn't do it--so she despised it. Other than that, they got along great.

It was almost Christmas. They didn't know whether they should even try to celebrate Christmas. Afterall, China was at war, or being conquered by the Japanese--and they had a base north of town--and anyone who left, never came back. Their city was being held hostage. That's what they figured. The weird part though--who is going to pay the ransom? Who is going to rescue China? Father Sebastian said there were 11 european nations that owned pieces of China and it's government.

'But none of these 11 leeches have any interest in saving China,' thought Lin.

Lin pictured them like wolves that would return when the Tiger was gone--to fight over the bones. Sometimes Lin wasn't sure what to think of Father Sebastian. Sometimes when he had looked at him from across the courtyard, wearing his full length black gown--he seemed to glide along as if he had no legs at all. But the worst part of Lin's cartoonish image of Father was that he was black. All black. A black ghost. Only the Christian ghosts were like black ghosts.

Lin imagined what a person dressed in black clothes, black Kung Fu clothes would look like as a ghost. He closed his eyes. Lin didn't really believe in ghosts so he opened his eyes without being able to imagine a black Kung Fu ghost.

But Lin's mom, and Shao Mei's mom weren't interested in practicing the kicks and punches with their kids. They didn't get as much exercise. They wanted to go to the store. Both Lin and Mason John said this was a bad idea. But after six months indoors...seven months really...

"But we have our routines and know their schedules--"

"No mom." Lin stated like the man of the house. "Do not go to the store. Mei and I will go."

"We'll go at the same time as you two usually go. It'll be fine." said Lin's mom.

"We'll go with you," Lin stated, not accepting any argument.

"No. We'll be fine kids. We're adults."

"That may be the problem ladies," said John with Shao Mei translating to the parents. "The kids are of little interest to them. But you are both very attractive women"

Shao Mei flushed and blushed, then hurriedly translated, close enough.

The ladies were flattered, insulted, blushed, insulted, hurt, angry, contemplative, pissed off, yes pissed off, but maybe not at Mason John.

When it came time for the kids to go, Lin's mom stepped up to the front door. She wasn't wearing anything flashy, but whatever his mom wore revealed her slender, but feminine figure.

"I'll take that," she said grabbing the backpack from Shao Mei.

"No mom--"

His mother held her finger to her lips and Lin obeyed, with silence.

His mom knew the routine. She kind of imitated Mei by looking left and right somehow like her--then they were off.

No problem. They got to the store. The shopkeeper was surprised to see her. VERY surprised to see her.

"You shouldn't come to the store. It is very dangerous right now with the Japanese here. You should stay indoors."

Lin's mom gave the storekeeper all her expected arguments and he hemmed and hawed in courteous conversation with her.

Lin packed his mom's backpack for her. He made it as light as possible, carrying most everything himself.

Lin pointed out they had been here a little longer than usual, because they don't "stand around and chat with the owner."

Lin's mother was enraged at Lin being so disrespectful. Uh-oh. He had been disrespectful. But it was true. By talking to the shop keeper about her excuses for coming today, he'd been unable to complete their order as quickly as usual.

Lin was very nervous. Only the routine made him comfortable.

"Perhaps you should stay until the next 'cloudbreak.'" offered the storekeeper.

People in town referred to the small opportunities to move through the city, "cloudbreaks."

But now Lin's mother didn't want to seem as though she'd messed up the plan. "We'll be fine," she said to the shopkeeper and waved at him as if shooing away a fly.

"He's right mom. Let's just wait until the next cloudbreak. It'll give you a chance to--"

She did it. She did it again. She held up her finger to her lips. She'd been doing that to him as long as he could remember--and probably even longer than that. But somehow, she was still, "mother," and he was still, "son," so she had seniority or even if she wasn't older, she was mother, and he was son. A son obeys his mother. It's not the other way around.

Lin thought for a moment as his mom prepared to run outside to return home. WHO DID his mom obey?

"Let's go," she said and agilely slipped around the door with it only a quarter of the way open. Even the shopkeeper was surprised.

"Bye" was all Lin said as hurried after his mother.

* * * *

They were at the final leg, but the worst leg. There weren't any good hiding places on that last half block home. Lin and Shao Mei had talked about making or creating some, but hadn't yet.

"I don't think you should have come mom," Lin stated as nicely as he could.

"I told you everything would be okay."

"But if something did go wrong?"

His mother gave him that look. The same look as she had when she held her finger to her lips. But now, even without the finger, he understood and obeyed her. Lin was silent.

* * * *

"I was nervous for you," said Shao Mei's mom in the kitchen.

"You should have come. It was exciting," Lin's mom panted with obvious enthusiasm.

"No mom. Don't encourage Mrs--" that look. Lin stopped in mid sentence. This was a major problem he realized. If this was a family, two widows, two kids, and the English Freemason--then the mason man should be the father figure. But the women would never listen to him--they couldn't understand him. And, as they came to appreciate, he couldn't understand them either. Shao Mei was teaching him some Chinese words, but she was impatient with him.

Lin had always liked Mason John to some extent. During these seasons together, Mason John had to be inactive, with his ribs wrapped tightly, so he just read lots of books. The lodge had quite a few books to read. Mostly of masonry stories, or rules...Lin had to pretend not to be interested.

This winter, John was ready to start exercising. But Shao Mei and Lin were hardly able to teach him anything. They were just beginners. They hardly knew any Kung Fu at all. But what they knew they practiced.

Eventually, month by month, then week by week, then day by day John Campbell learned Kung Fu. Or as much Kung Fu as the kids knew. They were very picky with him. Shao Mei was expecting PERFECTION from her first student. John's feet had to be perfect, that back knee locked, the heel on the floor, the back straight, the chin up, eyes on the horizon, balanced as if suspended by a string from your head...

After a few months, he'd caught up with them. He hadn't been initiated or accepted into Master Yang's school, but he had become a member of the school. He was a part of their Kung Fu family. Actually, Lin felt really bad about that sometimes. He talked to the moms about it, but they were unconcerned. Still, Lin realized he was violating his oath to Master Yang by teaching John Campbell, without their Shifu's permission. Shao Mei argued, that if Master Yang were here, they'd ask him. "If he said NO don't teach him then SO BE IT. I wouldn't teach him."

Sometimes Shao Mei got too flamboyant. He tried to not remember what she said next--but trying not to remember something--seemed to be the same as trying to remember something. The more you tried to forget something--the more you'd remember it.

He saw Shao Mei put a hand on her hip and turning away with a feminine thrust of her hip ended the conversation, with, "I wouldn't even teach him my middle name."

That middle name. His middle name, Hiram. Lin wanted to know more about Hiram Abif. One day he got braver and asked if there were books on Hiram Abif that he could read. Mason John still had reservations and a gnawing suspicion about Lin--but he didn't know what he was supposed to be suspicious of. So he discounted it to just fearing him because he was Chinese.

* * * *

Many Chinese celebrated the European "Christmas." The concept of Santa Clause never took off in Chinese books and comics...so most Chinese didn't really know who Saint Nick was.

But presents? The Chinese know presents. The Chinese probably invented gift wrapping. They definitely have the best bow and ribbon makers in the world.

The Chinese believe in giving. They give to the dead. They give to their relatives. They provide for their parents. They give everything to their children and their children are expected to accept these gifts and improve them. When the parents retire, they expect one or some of their children to take over the business and take it to another level.

In 1937 China, some children accepted their fate. Accepted their destiny. Accepted their responsibility. Accepted their duty. Of course, some rebelled and some were uncooperative...but most believed in their elders.

Hiram Abif became the white haired elder with a beard. Chong Lin researched the life and legends of Hiram Abif, and discovered a unique tragedy of love, greed, and honor.

Lin couldn't fully grasp the romantic triangle between the maiden, Hiram, and a fellowcraft named Jubilum. At age 13 this deathly romance was uninteresting and upsetting.

So Lin focused on the actual Temple of King Solomon and discovered a wealth of symbols and concepts he only partially understood. The winding staircase and the history of architecture were interesting and somehow inspiring.

As winter approached, November seemed unnaturally warm. The night sky seemed unnaturally grey, instead of black. The thousands of lights, fires, and headlights that illuminated the roads and tents--lit the universe of that coastal county. At night, the presence of the Japanese had an eerie frightening quality. Like hands choking your neck from behind...the Japanese had seized their city.

Lin's hero Hiram, was the spirit of the holidays. Researching Hiram and King Solomon's Temple, kept Chong Lin's mind off of the eerie presence that overshadowed them like a crouching tiger. Hiram became a role model of courage for Lin. If Hiram could fear dishonor more than death--he could too. Lin realized that being a hero required a calm resignation. A quitting. No, not a quitting--a submitting. An acceptance.

The Christians had taught him about faith. Lin needed to have faith in something. Masonry gave him faith in goodness. Somehow this ancient art of being a good person had paid off over the centuries. This art of being fair. This logic of being just. This devotion to a large family of adult men, protecting, inspiring, supporting, and being brothers. All children of God. All believing in Heaven.

Lin enjoyed being absorbed into this fraternal brotherhood. He felt less alone. He felt more supported. He felt more empowered. Somehow, knowing what was right, made it easier to accept what was wrong. Chong Lin learned to have faith in his own judgment. He learned to have faith in himself. Chong Lin enjoyed thinking of himself as a Freemason.

* * * *

It was getting near Christmas. The nights came sooner. Although it might seem smarter to go out at night-- people feared the dark. People told weird tales, as if haunted beasts would suck up girls at night...

"I'm going again."

"Please mom. Don't go any more."

"I've been to the store three times. Stop worrying." Then turning towards Shao Mei's mom she changed her facial muscles and Lin noticed her voice somehow changed also. "You should come with me. You really should."

Shao Mei's mom wanted to, but she was really afraid to go out.

"We could go out at night if you'd rather," proposed Lin's mom.

This resulted in a more panicked expression and quicker head shaking side to side.

"Alright. Alright. But it is getting close to Christmas. Maybe you could get something for Shao Mei."

They had exhausted their money, but the few houses they were "protecting" had some cash hidden, and some jewelry which the store owner accepted. Lin's mom explained that when all this was over, and if the people came back, she would reimburse them for their jewelry. The shopkeeper was content with that.

Shao Mei's mom thought of all the jewelry they could give their kids, but that jewelry wasn't capable of being a gift. You have to own something before you can give it away. So they'd have to--it just didn't seem right. She wanted to buy her daughter a nice dress. That would be a great Christmas present. She had credit at the store, but if she told Lin to do it, then he'd eventually be forced or tricked by Shao Mei into revealing the secret gift--before Christmas. This seemed like the one good reason to go to the store. Her face relaxed. "Okay, I'll go."

Lin's mouth hung open. It really did. He was shocked. But once again he couldn't TELL her what to do. He was a kid, and she was the parent. He was supposed to obey her...But he COULDN'T. He knew this was wrong. He felt like he was the parent, and these were the children. But he couldn't tell the adults NOT TO DO SOMETHING. He didn't have the authority. He told them not to go anyway. But nothing happened. Lin realized that power only exists when people are obeying you.

* * * *

They'd been gone an hour. Lin had been more nervous about the mothers going to the store, more nervous than they were about the kids going to the store. Lin was incredibly nervous...from the moment they left.

Mason John, realized that Lin needed to think about something else, so he suggested, "Hey guys, let's do some Kung Fu."

"Shaolin Kung Fu," Lin replied flatly.

"Alright then! Let's do some Shaolin KUNG FU!" he sang with the last syllable being the highest note of them all.

"I don't feel like it," replied Lin.

Seeking to be tactful, and perhaps comical, "You taught me that sometimes the best time to practice Kung Fu is when you don't FEEL like practicing Kung Fu." Also delivered in a slightly sing-song presentation.

Lin looked up, as if he were looking over some reading glasses, which he wasn't wearing. Shao Mei decided to add something positive. "MASONIC KUNG FU." she chanted.

This got a reaction and stare from Lin.

"Hey, it's Kung Fu in a mason lodge--it's Masonic Kung Fu!"

Mason John decided to play along with Mei. He laughed. "Yeah. Masonic Shaolin Kung Fu."

Lin shook his head side to side.

Mason John reconsidered, "Okay, Masonic Kung Fu. I think I like that one best."

Lin didn't shake his head but sighed as if exasperated.

Perhaps they would have started their "Masonic Kung Fu" now but, a frantic knock on the front door startled all of them.

The man had run all the way here. Evidently, both moms had been kidnapped, abducted, stolen, taken away by a jeep full of three men. Lin pictured the three men who had accosted them many months ago. The neighbor said that they were parked, smoking cigarettes and drinking, when the moms tried to walk by them. That's also why they didn't hear the jeep. The motor had been turned off. He'd seen them do this before, during the cloudbreaks. Evidently, the Japanese also took breaks during the cloudbreaks.

Mason John was breathing like a bear, or a tiger, or a mean elephant! "I know where they took me. Maybe that's where they took them."

The neighbor looked at his watch then put it back in his pocket. "I've gotta go."

They thanked the neighbor then let him go immediately.

Mason John paced the kitchen like a wild tiger--in a cage.

"You can't go," explained Lin. They'll spot you and arrest you for being English."

"If they find out I'm English, it's too late anyway. We've got to not get caught."

Mason John was the only one who was strong enough and tall enough to win his fights with the Japanese. They had been practicing their Shaolin Kung Fu almost every day. For what little Kung Fu they knew, they could kick and punch. At least, a lot better than a year ago, before they started their Shaolin Kung Fu training. They had started a new Shaolin Form, "Small Circular Luohan Fist." But Master Yang had disappeared now. So the only Kung Fu they knew completely were the 12 Step Tantui, or 12 Rows of Springy Leg Boxing. Lin told Mason John to refer to them as 12 Step Tantui. (He didn't like calling them Springy Leg Boxing.)

They decided to wait until nightfall, then run as fast as they could to where they thought she was. They didn't even want the neighbors to see this. Mason John tried to talk Shao Mei out of this. She wouldn't consider staying behind. John warned her several times, "You may have to kill someone."

Mei did not seem to even give it a second thought.

"We may get separated." Mason John looked them in the eyes. "We can't wait for anyone. Once we have your mothers, we run into the forest and hide. Somehow, make your way back home, but take your time. We've each got enough cereal and rice to last a couple days." Mason John was a soldier.

The kids seemed to understand. Mostly they were just determined. Someone had their moms and they were going out to get them. Plain and simple.

"Don't hesitate to kill anyone, Japanese, or Chinese, that slows you down. Grab your mothers, then pull them to safety." John almost felt as though he was talking to a wall. "Your mothers may be injured." He was looking for some reaction now.

The kids looked at each other. They seemed to be telepathic. They'd known each other for so many years, they tended to sometimes think the same--or at least they could tell when they were thinking the same.

They watched the clock. They watched the sun. They watched the sun slowly sink, sink, sink, down, down, it

seemed to take forever for the sun to set. Never before had the sun set so slowly. The sky changed from blue to turquoise, with pink, and magenta, then dark blue, some yellow, dark blue, blue.

The kids looked to Mason John for the okay to leave. He was anxious too. But it wasn't completely dark yet. "I don't want the neighbors to see us leave," he warned. They turned back to the sky through the kitchen window. All the lights were off. The shade wasn't pulled down so they could watch the sky. Bad plan. They were going nuts waiting for it to get dark. When it did get dark, or as dark as the kids could wait for, Mason John warned, the next cloudbreak is in 20 minutes."

That meant that a patrol was due sometime in the next 20 minutes.

Lin felt courageous, "We could make it to some streets where we could hide during the next patrol. Then we'd be a little farther than if we waited to start from here."

Mason John found it hard to argue with that. He shook his head up and down and with a little exasperation in his voice said, "Okay Lin. What's your plan?"

Lin jumped over to the center of the kitchen and drew out the streets in the air as he talked. Mason John didn't know his way around as well as Lin and Mei, but nodded with confidence. "Alright Lin. Lead the way."

Evidently another part of being a good soldier, Lin thought to himself as they scurried up the street, trying to run quietly-- Evidently, picking the best leader is as important as being a good follower. Lin felt proud to accept the responsibility for being the leader, at least for this mission.

As they zig-zagged up a couple streets they hid in one of Lin's prepicked spots. Some of the run had been uphill. John had got his stamina back up after months of sitting around waiting for his ribs to heal. But the uphill part tired all of them. Still, they were evenly matched, and keeping up with each other.

Lin realized the 12 Step Tantui had really gotten all three of them into shape. They all had powerful legs, and knew how to use their body, waist, and leg muscles to increase their power--if they ever did have to punch someone.

They all looked at their watches. Lin was wearing the one on his wrist, that John Campbell gave him. John had a pocket watch also, which he snapped shut and pushed back into his pants pocket.

"It's the cloudbreak," announced Mei.

Lin shook his head. "But I didn't hear the patrol."

"Maybe they were on the other side of town. They change their routes you know."

"I didn't hear them," Lin said again.

Mason John prodded, "Where's the next hiding spot, and how long will it take us to get there?"

Lin drew the streets on the pavement between the buildings with his index finger. It was so dark, they could barely see his finger, but the movements made it easier to understand as he explained the streets and gave several possible alternatives. "We'll head for this one on Tailun St. and Chasong Ave."

"Remember kids, if we get separated before we find your moms, head back home as quick as you can."

Lin signaled them to get ready with a nod of his head. Like athlete runners they took their marks, (twisted up and crouched in the dark). Lin went first, then Shao Mei, then John.

They made it to the next hiding spot, together, uneventful. They'd only seen a couple people. Purposely they ran in the shadows and avoided looking into anyone's faces so they could not be identified. Brother John stood out the most, being so tall, but they put a cone shaped woven hat on him. He strapped it to his chin. But inside the hat, were rags soaked in kerosene. They put them in a round cookie tin and taped it shut. This made the hat sit higher on John's head so now he looked even more like a giant. He was already 6" taller than most adult Chinamen, but with his conehead...

All of them carried matches, and flashlights, thanks to the Masonic Lodge supplies. Lin wanted to bring the sword, but John argued, "When you have learned the sword, decide then. Tonight, get a gun if you can."

They all had several knives, and each carried a dozen pieces of rope for tying and gagging people. None of them had a gun.

When they got to the outskirts of the city, they could see the glowing sky on the other side of the mountain. They knew that was where the soldiers were. There were only two roads in that direction. They chose the inland road, so if they got chased, they wouldn't be caught in between the two roads.

Because the western road was higher up from the eastern road, down on the coast, it was heavily wooded. The trees and brush made it hard to travel on the side of the road, where cars could not see you.

So they ran in short 100 yard bursts and then crouched in the bushes, panting as quiet as possible, listening for anyone else. This was making better time than trying to run through the brush and trees.

Oddly, in the several hours they'd been out tonight, they had not seen a single patrol. None. No Japanese at all tonight.

"The Japanese are very orderly and punctual," commented John.

"Not tonight," commented Lin.

"Maybe they're having a party," chimed Shao Mei thoughtlessly.

The men fumed at her. She realized instantly, if there was a party, their mothers were the main attraction. Her breath stopped. She found it hard to breathe for a few seconds--it felt much longer.

"I didn't realize how far it was," panted John as they landed in the brush for the thousandth time.

"Perhaps if we can get there before dawn, they'll be sleeping, and it will be easier to get in and out with our mothers," stated Lin, as if he'd thought it out.

"You are becoming a true soldier Lin." John smiled proudly at him. "I'm ready to go."

"Let's go," urged Lin as he sprung from the brush and ran down the gravel sides of the road. This had been a really bad road to travel. Lin remembered how the road had really deep gulleys and now--now it was smooth, and had gravel on the sides.

"They're planning an invasion," said John, scaring them, and also himself as they ran.

John may be right, thought Lin. They've made this road really nice. Suddenly he didn't feel so good about living at the city they were paving this road to. Were they going to enter the town? Take them from their homes? Where would they put them? Us? Where could they keep us. Lin reassured himself that it was most sensible to just let us civilians hide until the war was over. Lin wondered what would happen if they won. If the Japanese won--

"Lin!" Mei slightly shouted. He looked back and saw them disappear into the trees. Quickly he turned to the left and hid also. He'd been thinking and had been out in front, not counting his steps...Each of them had had plenty of opportunities to decide how many steps it would be. The 100 yard dashes were each measured in their own running paces. John ran 152 steps. Shao Mei ran 212, and Lin ran 184, but they all ended at the same time. This was how they perfected their silent night dashes.

It took another two hours to get to the top of the hill and finally see where the Japanese were. THEY WERE EVERYWHERE!. As far as he could see in every direction were tents, trucks, fires, tents, trucks, jeeps, tents...forever. How would they find their mothers down there? That city was as big as their own city, maybe bigger. It definitely had more people in it than their city did now.

"Look down there!" pointed Mason John. They could see a few bungalows set up end to end with lots of lights

on them. They were even flying their Japanese flags at night! With spotlights on them. There was a lot of room in front of the bungalows, and jeeps kept arriving and leaving. "If they brought them in as prisoners," they probably took them there."

Lin looked at Mason John for the "but if." Mason John thought for a second. "But if they didn't want to get caught with these prisoners, they may take them straight to where I saw them execute that woman in the red dress--with the two men."

Shao Mei and Lin did that telepathic look into each other's eyes. They both seemed to nod at Mason John in agreement, at the same time, in stereo--before stereo was invented.

It was the end of 1937, and surviving until 1938 was very unsure now. But Lin and Shao Mei weren't going home without their mothers. That was the plan.

John climbed a rock off the side of the road to get a better view over the trees. "I think it's down there," he pointed ahead slightly but down the hill to the right.

Lin hoped if their mothers were there, they weren't dead yet.

* * * *

The Japanese soldiers were really drunk now. They might have been the same soldiers that accosted the ladies 7 months ago, but it didn't matter. They acted the same. They thought the same. They lived by the same rules, especially the one, "Do unto others before they can do unto you."

Right and wrong were as immature as the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus. These soldiers, had not been in college and drafted into the war. These soldiers had not enlisted, signed up, or wanted to be soldiers. No, they were criminals, even the driver. They all got a choice, go to jail or go to China. Obviously, China appeared to be the best option. They figured out how to break away, enjoy the "cloudbreaks." They'd enter homes, steal and plunder, rape and feast--just like soldiers always have since the Hebrews left Egypt, 4,000 years ago. The spoils of war. Most of these pussy college kids were looking for honor. They wanted to be a legendary part of their family's name and legacy. Japan needed a war to make some new heroes.

But these convict soldiers respected their fellow "scholar warriors," only a little bit more than they respected the Chinese. The Chinese had looked down upon Japan for 3,000 years. Japan was always the orphan island that China didn't even want. Well, Japan may just be a big rock in the ocean--but there are some beautiful lakes, and mountains, and a volcano! Oh yeah. Maybe volcanoes aren't such a good thing to have.

Master Yang shared a story with Mei and Lin about the Japanese pirates 1,000 years ago, who were pillaging the coast of China, then returning back to Japan. The Emperor was dismayed and his coastal civilian subjects expected protection and retaliation.

The Shaolin monks were legendary by now, perhaps 400 years since Bodhidharma founded Zen Buddhism and Shaolin Kung Fu. The Emperor sent a messenger to the Shaolin Temple. The abbot came up with a plan to help the Emperor. He didn't reply to the Emperor, but immediately sent 13 monks to the Chinese coast to lie in wait and ambush the bandits when they appeared.

When the Emperor received a reply from the abbot it said, "Pirates are with Buddha now."

Lin wondered if he was going to be sending any pirates to Buddha tonight. At age 13, he'd imagined killing someone, many times. He read books, and comic books. No big deal. You stab them--they die.

* * * *

The Japanese soldier leaned over his jeep from the back. It looked like he was going to vomit in the back seat. A shadow approached from the trees behind him. John stabbed him under the ribs from behind, pulled his

knife out quickly and as the man's pain was building into a yell John sliced his neck in the front while holding his head. He'd tried to grab his hair but it was too short and his head was sweaty and slippery and his head seemed to almost fall off backwards.

Shao Mei and Lin both watched the blood spray out over the entire jeep. John guided the body down then pushed him a little farther under the truck, so he was less visible.

The kids were already looking in the direction of a girl's muffled screams.

"Let's go," urged John. They headed upward into the trees, following the laughing, panting, crying, crying.

Shao Mei saw first. John grabbed Shao Mei, expecting her to run immediately to her mother's aid.

"Let me go first," said John. Realizing he had to offer her something, "then you can kill him when your mother's safe."

"If I don't kill him first," said Lin as if he was confident he'd win.

"Kids, let me go first. Hey! Where's the third guy?"

They all looked around in all directions. "Okay. Let's get your mom Shao Mei." Turning to face Lin, "then we'll go find Mrs. Chong."

John couldn't continue talking, dealing or anything, any longer. He fidgeted noticeably. He wanted to get over there and stop what was happening to Shao Mei's mother. He was like an animal in a cage. They couldn't really see, but they could tell what was happening, even in this dark, dark, darkness, on the side of the mountain. Her voice never sounded so horribly--horrible before.

John quickly stepped through the trees around the clearing to Shao Mei's mom being raped. This time they couldn't see what John did. But they could tell when the raping stopped. They ran forward, not worried about being seen. A shot rang out. Then another, and another. Lin kept running. When he reached Shao Mei's mom he realized that Shao Mei had fallen in the open patch 15 yards back.

John was holding Shao Mei's mom, but now Shao Mei layed on the ground, not moving. Lin kept looking to John and back to Shao Mei. He wanted some instructions.

"The shots will bring more soldiers," said John reluctantly.

"I can't leave without Shao Mei!"

"If you go out to her he will shoot you too."

"SHAO MEI!" Lin yelled.

John decided not to tell him to be quiet. The gunshots killed the silent Ninja plan.

But Shao Mei did not respond despite Lin's screaming to her.

"SHAO MEI ANSWER ME. IF YOU'RE ALIVE I WILL COME GET YOU."

But Shao Mei did not respond. Her body lay contorted on the ground as if she was trying to swim. Her head faced uphill towards the gunman as if she was gasping for air before her next arm stroke...

Lin turned with a really panicked expression to John, "We've got to save my mom!"

John was already helping Shao Mei's mom up and explaining to her how they would hide tonight, hide tomorrow, and try to make it home tomorrow night.

Shao Mei's mom wouldn't tell Lin what she'd already told John about his Lin's mom. She avoided eye contact with Lin--so John spoke up, "She's dead. I'm sorry Lin, But--" wanting to be more sensitive, "She's gone."

Lin's face went from panicked concern to the stone of Medusa.

He couldn't wait for Lin to process all this. "Help me with her mom. We can still save her mom. C'mon Lin. We've gotta go!" he tried to say quietly.

John held her hand and arm as he ushered her along through the hillside forest. "Lead us a path into those trees on that hill over there," he said pointing with his right hand as he pulled and pushed Shao Mei's mom with his left arm behind her.

Shao Mei's mom didn't get better. It took them three days to get back home, but they made it.

Shao Mei's mother was sad. They accepted that.

Shao Mei's mother had been raped.

Shao Mei's mother had seen her friend, raped, murdered, and...

Shao Mei's mother had watched her daughter die.

A knock on the door startled everyone, except Shao Mei's mother.

Lin peered out the kitchen window and recognized a man who worked for Uncle, in the restaurant.

"I know him," he said to John.

Lin opened the door and invited the man in.

John felt awkward. He didn't speak Chinese, but he didn't like ANYONE knowing he was there. Well, Uncle knew he was there all along. But Uncle protected him, or kept him a secret, because he was Shao Mei's friend. Actually, Lin's friend. Uncle knew that too.

Lin wondered, with his mother gone, Shao Mei gone--he wondered if Uncle still thought of him as "part of the family."

Mason John listened to Lin rant and rave and tell the story of their rescue mission--in Chinese. But he could sense and understand how Lin was putting too much blame on himself, for what happened to his family.

John could kind of read Lin's thoughts as he spoke in Chinese, or imagine what he was saying--or even more accurately, he understood what Lin was thinking. He could hear Lin's thoughts. 'Yeah, some family. A dead family. Dead because of me. They died because I couldn't keep them inside the house. What kind of a hero am I?'

Mason John could hear these destructive thoughts circling inside Lin's mind.

Well, he was a 13 year-old hero. He did rescue Shao Mei's mom.

(But he lost Shao Mei in the bargain.)

Was her death also his fault? Should he have made her stay behind?

Did he kill her too?

And Shao Mei's mom--is she really alive? In an emotional coma?

Lin could not find solace in Buddhism. Middle way! What middle way?

Was that what killed them? He tried to be in the middle? Instead of ruling from above?

Even though he was only 13, "being 13" wasn't an excuse for Lin to use.

Mason John realized he was hearing the thoughts of Lin. He'd started to wonder if he was at fault, he understood how Lin felt, he understood how Lin was thinking.

Lin tried to imagine how he could have kept them inside--how he could have made them not go shopping--

nothing came to his mind--but he believed the answer was there--somewhere--he should have kept them from going--they should have listened to him--maybe that is the problem--he lacked honor--he lacked power--they didn't respect him enough--so how could he make them respect him more? How? How? How could he have prevented all this?

No answers came, because there were no answers to these questions. But this pursuit of impossible answers warped Lin's mind. By consciously forcing his logical mind to look for illogical answers, something had to be shut off--some part of his logic--that part that didn't believe--

Mason John saw how Lin was becoming--psychotic? Something. It was bad. Maybe not as bad as Shao Mei's mom but bad. Real bad.

Mason John could tell that Lin was babbling and being self-deprecating, even though he didn't understand the words.

The messenger took it all in like a newspaper reporter. He looked at his watch, then lastly looked at Shao Mei's mom, and said goodbye very casually. That concerned Mason John. Sometimes when you don't understand the words, you notice other things, like sincerity, honesty, and honor.

Lin wondered where he stood with Uncle now. He had just started to realize that Uncle was a powerful man, with connections, and he was a Chinese Freemason.

"Uncle is a Chinese Freemason," Lin accidentally thought out loud.

"Yes. And as I told you before, they aren't really masons. They are the conglomerations of your revolutionary governments and business associations."

"So, he doesn't owe you any masonic loyalty--or brotherhood?"

John processed this information. "I guess not."

"If he was protecting you because of my mom and Shao Mei--why would he protect you now?"

John thought uncomfortably and answered, without much confidence, "Honor."

"Honor is what makes a man a gentleman."

"That was profound," John congratulated.

"Confucious said that."

"Oh. Well, it was still profound."

"So Uncle's honor is what protects us now?" asked Lin.

John wanted to reassure or state, "Of course," but his heart led him to say something more cynical, perhaps more honest--or realistic, "There is no honor in war."

Neither of them said more.

The next day the messenger reappeared. He informed them that Uncle was sending a van over to pick her up the next day, at this same time. Lin pictured a van, like the police used, but there were no autos in the city anymore. They were confiscated, gone. If anyone still had a car, it was hidden, where the Japanese couldn't find it--yet.

* * * *

The next day the van arrived. It was like the royalty used to use. A tent on two poles manned by four strong

men. They slowly helped Shao Mei's mom down the stairs into the van. No one hurried her or tried to alarm her or cause her fear.

They pulled the curtains down and whoosh. Then they were gone, and they hurried at a gallop. Lin thought to himself, those guys must have learned the Tantuis. He smiled to himself. Then he remembered, Uncle was a Kung Fu master. He hadn't had the opportunity to find out much about Uncle's Kung Fu...probably never would now.

He wondered if Master Yang was alive. Did he have a master? Did he have a Kung Fu school? Did he have any Kung Fu brothers? He imagined them fighting the Japanese soldiers.

He saw them beating them up by the dozens...but eventually, they got shot with bullets, in every one of his fantasies.

This didn't leave much hope for Lin.

Mason John finally thought he found the recipe or prescription for Lin's mental illness. "Masonic Kung Fu."

"Not funny," Lin insulted.

"I'm serious. Shao Mei came up with the name. Let's create Masonic Kung Fu."

"Shao Mei didn't really want to be a Mason."

"I know, but she wanted you to be a Mason."

Lin sat up. "Huh?"

"Shao Mei knew how much you were fascinated by Freemasonry."

"How'd you know that?"

"She told me."

"What else did she tell you?" Lin asked rudely.

"That you spied on all our rituals and ceremonies."

Lin spit out his tea. He coughed and gasped.

Master John laughed.

"When did she tell you that?"

"A few months ago."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

John smiled mischeviously, "I think she felt bad for telling me, so then she told me not to tell you she told me."

"You still could have told me."

John smiled again. "Honor."

"Honor my ass."

John laughed. "To tell you the truth, I've been trying to figure out what to think of this--and I don't know what to think. I never imagined that someone could spy on all the rituals, without becoming a mason. But you are Chinese!"

"Thank you," Tom replied indignantly.

"I mean--"

"Yes, you mean I'm Chinese. A Chinaman. Slant eye. Yellow skin--"

"Lin stop. I never meant any of those things."

Lin wanted to argue more, but he realized than any arguing would only hurt--the last friend he had.

Still, he was a little pissed off, but not sure why now...

"But I'm not mad at you," John reassured.

"I'm mad at myself for breaking Shifu's vow and teaching you without permission."

"Shifu may not be alive--"

"Honor."

John thought for a moment.

"Well, somehow, in honor of Shao Mei, I'd like to make a Masonic Kung Fu form--and when we practice it we could think of her."

A light went on in Lin's mind. John saw it.

"Masonic Kung Fu."

"Yeah," John half-heartedly supported, hoping he hadn't pushed Lin over that emotional cliff--like Shao Mei's mom.

"Masonic Kung Fu, for Shaolin Mei. Masonic Kung Fu for Shao Mei..." he chanted softly to himself.

"Yeah," John interrupted, hoping to break any psychotic monotony--

"Okay. I'll do it."

That was it? John looked at Lin. Was he better? Worse? He couldn't tell. Lin had no emotion.

"But I need your help John."

"Of course."

"I mean, I need your help with the symbols and signs. I've seen them, even practiced them a little, but I don't have all the tools memorized."

"Sure, I'll help you."

Lin looked sternly at John. "You'll tell me anything?"

"Well, some stuff is secretive."

"Not to me. I've seen it all. I've heard it all. The first degree, the second degree, the third degree, AND THE PROFICIENCIES. I love the proficiencies--when they do them well." John smiled then snapped out of his acceptance.

"But you aren't supposed to know these things!"

"But I do!"

"But I can't break my oath."

"I broke my oath," Lin reminded again. "But you aren't even breaking your oath. You're not revealing any secrets that I don't already know. That's not as bad as what I did."

John wanted to argue, but somehow he knew Lin was right--again--but--"I can't do it."

"For Shao Mei," Lin cynically reminded.

That was cold, but--"I guess I could--"

Another light went off in Lin's mind now, "Okay. Then I've got a plan."

John just listened.

"I will--we will," he smiled at John. "We will make this Masonic Kung Fu form in honor of Shao Mei." He looked to John for some sort of acknowledgement. He was also fishing, and John could smell the bait.

Lin had lost his best friend, Shao Mei. Lin had lost his mother. Lin had even lost Shao Mei's mom, despite his supposedly being a hero and rescuing her. Actually, John did the rescuing.

So he didn't have anything to lose, nothing of value compared to what he'd already lost. He decided, as if he didn't care what happened, to just go for it. Do what he wanted, and not worry about the rules. The rules didn't exist anymore. The police didn't exist anymore. The government didn't exist anymore. The radio didn't exist anymore. Nothing existed. Nothing existed but his Kung Fu, the masonry, and the painful memory of Shao Mei--lying on the ground--

"I will--we will make a Kung Fu Form that will teach Shao Mei about Masonry." Lin looked at John, "European Freemasonry."

John kind of nodded.

"This Kung Fu form will teach her the first degree salute and the penalty."

"Dugard and sign."

Lin looked sideways.

"We call them dugards and signs. Each degree has its own dugard and sign."

Lin popped up from his chair and demonstrated the First Degree dugard and sign.

Brother John swallowed, with difficulty.

Lin demonstrated the second degree dugard and sign.

Brother John felt awkward seeing someone who wasn't a mason, doing the secret gestures. And yes, a Chinaman to boot!

Lin demonstrated the third degree dugard and sign.

Mason John was noticeably confused. What should he do?

"But I need help with all the tools of each degree."

"Okay. I'll help with that."

That wasn't asking much. Masons probably didn't regard their symbolic tools as secrets. How could they. Lin knew he needed more. "I need the story of Hiram Abif."

"I - I"

"I've seen the third degree, several times. I know the story, but you've got to help me make it into a shorter story for Shao Mei. She'll lose interest."

They both smiled. They both chuckled a little. Then they relaxed and both laughed freely, with genuine happiness.

* * * *

It had been almost a month since "the incident," as John referred to it. And it had been about three weeks since Uncle took away Shao Mei's mom. Lin had inquired with the grocer on his weekly trips and been told she was doing a little better.

Lin wanted to go apologize to Uncle some more--but he didn't know what to really say.

Lin's mind had healed up pretty good in just a few weeks. The Masonic Kung Fu had given his mind something worthwhile to think about, instead of those perpetual guilt questions.

"I am really impressed with the Hiram Abif section," John proudly awarded.

"That's because we're related. You know--my Buddhist name."

"The crosses were a unique idea," John added.

"It's not that I imagine Christ on the cross," explained Lin, "But since this masonry comes from you, and you are an English Christian--"

"So are you--" added John.

"I'm not sure John."

Uh-oh thought John. What did I say wrong? he thought to himself.

"They closed the Christian school before I got Confirmed."

"Really?"

"Another couple months and I would've been a real Christian. Accepted Christ's body and blood into my life. Eaten the holy eucharist and--"

"Well, maybe you don't need all that to be a Christian."

"According to Father--"

"And I like the way you blended the the dugards and signs with the tools of each degree," John stated hoping to get the conversation on a positive path.

"We can't name this Kung Fu form, Masonic Kung Fu."

"Why not?" John was surprised to hear himself be so flexible.

"Since we had to blend the moves together as you said, and you can't stop, or you'll reveal the secret hand signs--it should have a name that misleads people and doesn't attract that kind of interest."

"Misleads?"

"Well, you don't want anybody and everybody seeing and understanding this do you?"

John shook his head sideways.

"And this Kung Fu form was really made for Shao Mei--right?"

John nodded.

"Then maybe it's best we make the name a secretive name, like Boaz."

John thought, and realized Lin was right somehow, but--"Well, it has to keep continually moving."

"Yes, continually moving."

"Well maybe that's it!" John stated as if the winning ticket had been found. But Lin didn't understand who won.

"Let's call it The Continual Motion Form." He looked for recognition. None came. "The Water Form." Nothing.

"The Waterfall Form!" Nothing.

"I think you were right at first. The Continual Motion Form."

They both hummed and nodded to themselves for a few seconds, a few more seconds...then smiled at each other, "The Continual Motion Form," they said in unison--which surprised both of them.

They knew that Christmas, had passed, a couple weeks ago. Now it was Chinese New Year. This was what Chinese people looked forward to, much more than Christmas. The Chinese New Year always had parades, and fire crackers, and people packing the streets.

They knew that Chinese New Year this year would be much different than Chinese New Year, last year.

A knock on the door seemed familiar. They recognized it as Uncle's messenger. Lin still had not seen Uncle, face to face. Not just because it was so dangerous to travel a few more blocks past the grocer, but because, he felt guilty. Somehow he mostly knew he wasn't guilty--but he still felt guilty.

Lin let the man in. The messenger smiled politely to both of them then hurriedly told Lin a few sentences, bowed, and tried to leave as quickly as possible. Lin opened the door for him.

"He looked very nervous."

"He said that they were going to investigate the lodge."

"Investigate the lodge?"

Lin shrugged. "I guess--"

"Why would they be investigating the lodge?"

"Japanese don't like Masons?"

"That actually turned out to be very true." John rubbed his chin. "There's something else...HEY! how did Uncle know they were coming?"

"Uncle's connected."

"That's my point."

Lin thought. "Let's make sure they don't connect us and this house with the lodge."

John nodded. "Let's put a lot of the decorations away."

Lin nodded, but then realized that the decorations were by his mom and Shao Mei's mom.

Mason John could read Lin's thoughts better now, and somehow he knew that the decorations might have emotional connections. "Let's at least block the hole better."

They went back into the bedroom and both jumped out of their skins when they heard a huge, "BANG" and a thud. The soldiers had just knocked down the front door. They didn't smash it open, they smashed it to the ground.

John and Lin stood motionless. Even though they were in the next house, they were afraid their breathing might be heard.

They heard a dozen people enter the room and talk in feverish paces, in higher than usual voices, they were excited, in a mad sort of way. They were very unhappy. You didn't need to hear the words to understand their anger. Then they started hearing words that they did understand: "Gee," "God," "Masons," "Freemasons," "Gee," "God..." then "God" again. Evidently the Japanese really believed that the G letter stood for God, and that seemed to really be pissing them off. When they said, "God," in Japanese, with disdain and hatred, it became another word entirely. Not a pretty word.

They could hear them discussing some of the ornaments and then the "Gee" and "God" some more.

Finally they left. The soldiers didn't notice the hole into Lin's house. If they'd been in the lodge, when the Japanese got there--they may have been caught. But Uncle's warning didn't even give them enough time to cover their tracks.

Lin decided to be grateful. He wanted to believe that Uncle still regarded him as part of the family. But he didn't want to push it. He just wanted to believe it. He also remembered what John had said, "there's no honor in war."

This confused Lin. Honor was honor.

They decided not to use the Lodge anymore, at least not for a while. But they didn't feel comfortable in their home any more either. They seemed to both believe that eventually the Japanese would be in Lin's house. It seemed so bizarre, so unthinkable, so incredible! But they both seemed to see it coming.

So each week they purchased some camping supplies and water cans. Not enough to let anyone know they were leaving. They just looked like they were getting ready, in case the water got shut off, or food ran low.

They bought a lot of dried fruits.

Each week they made a nightly run out of town, towards the West, but Southerly, even though they knew there were Japanese troops EVERYWHERE.

They buried some of the food. They hid the water. They built a couple sheds out of twigs, so they didn't look like sheds. The trees were just starting to grow their spring leaves, but the trees were bare. Each week more and more.

* * * *

They were gearing up for war. They were at war! They were soldiers. They were warriors. They were locked away hiding in a concrete box with cannons pointed at them. They lived in fear.

So they exercised. They got good at their workout. Both Lin and James could easily do 10 one-arm push-ups. They did 100 sit-ups a day. Sometimes 300 sit-ups.

But they needed a big space for their 12 Step Tantui practice. The 12 rows of Tantui exercises required 12 paces in a straight line. Lin's apartment next to the Mason lodge, didn't have any large areas. They tried taking turns: starting the Tantui in the kitchen, through the hallway, through the bedroom doorway into the bedroom. It wasn't working.

Lin and John discovered a flat patio of large paving stones, just outside of town, in an abandoned backyard. It was large enough for both of them to practice at the same time. The hedges created walls that provided security and safety from being discovered. Many nights, after dropping their food in the forest, they would come to here and spend a couple hours practicing their Kung Fu.

Under the glaring full moon, or the darkness of the new moon, the night was a magical Heaven as Chong Lin and Mason James practiced their 12 Step Tantui.

Each night they also practiced their "Masonic Kung Fu" form. It was disturbing at first, for Master Mason John to listen to Chong Lin vocalizing the Kung Fu moves as he practiced them. "...and took my vows of a fellowcraft mason, whereby I also learned the dugard and sign of that degree..." After a couple weeks he was less upset seeing Lin pausing in the various dugards and signs of the form.

"John."

"Yes Lin."

"Why aren't women allowed to be masons?"

John thought for a moment. "There are several reasons. Some may still be practical, and others were based on a world of 1,000 years ago."

"What do you mean?"

"Women can be forced to become pregnant and have children by men they would then have to honor as the parents of their children. Men aren't faced with such unfair demands of loyalty."

Lin had a twisted, contorted look on his face that almost made Mason John start laughing.

"Women aren't expected to be masons, because they get pregnant and have to stay home and nurse their babies. A man can keep working, no matter how many babies he has."

Lin's face relaxed. "I feel a little differently about this "Masonic Kung Fu" form now."

"How? How different?"

"I've performed it many times for Shao Mei," he paused and turned away for a moment. "But now I realize that the power of masonry is not in knowing what the symbols are--the power of masonry is becoming those symbols."

Mason John didn't reply, but he smiled a little.

"I think that Shao Mei would want me to be a good mason, even if she didn't really like the masons."

John nodded slightly.

"I think that maybe I am a Master Mason." Lin looked for some response from John. "I mean, really--being a master mason is most importantly, being a good man and living by the symbols of masonry--right?"

"I agree with that."

"So? Am I a master mason?"

John smiled even more. "Yes Lin. In fact, you are one of the finest master masons I have ever known. You are a Kung Fu hero and a masonic hero."

Lin chuckled. "Masonic hero?"

"Yes. Masonry has many heroes to inspire us."

"Well, anyway, since I've explained all these moves to Shao Mei so many times, I want to focus on doing it as fast as I can."

"As fast as you can?"

"I know I have no business creating a Kung Fu form. I am only a beginner level martial artist. But I think that I am figuring out some interesting ways to fight with these moves we created for the Hiram Abif story."

Mason John stared into Lin's eyes like an anxious kid, patiently waiting for--

"Like the poke stance. When we lower down to bury Hiram in the temple rubbish, we could advance instead of retreat. This would create an aggressive pull-down--straight down. Here, I'll show you."

In the glimmering navy blue sky of that winter night, the martial artists glowed from the moonlight, kicking, punching, and battling their invisible enemies--always winning.

* * * *

It was April. They heard it coming. It was like a fire, burning up the city, laughing wickedly as the people screamed and died. They heard gun shots. They heard jeeps. They heard trucks. They hadn't heard trucks in the city for a year now. But there were trucks. Big trucks. Chinese New Year had passed, without a parade. Now there were fireworks, but Lin didn't like fireworks anymore. He realized what real fireworks were, and that real fireworks killed people.

"I think we should leave town tonight."

Lin nodded in agreement.

They had eaten their last dinner in the house, and were packing up some things when they heard that knock on the door. Lin rushed to the door and let Uncle's employee in the house.

The man talked quickly again, as he had before the Lodge visit. This made John nervous. 'Now what?!' he thought.

The man left in a hurry.

Lin turned to John. "Uncle is going to help us get out of town."

"Us?"

Lin nodded. "Uncle has made arrangements to hook you back up with the English army or navy, whatever you are."

"English navy."

"Yeah. So you'll be back with your people."

Lin didn't sound genuinely happy.

Even John felt the loss, and realized he was considering how he could stay...but--"I will miss you Lin."

Lin looked at John. John knew that Lin would miss him also.

"Uncle's going to get me enrolled in a Kung Fu school in Guanxiou province. Hopefully the Japanese aren't there."

"Good luck," John offered with outstretched hand. They shook, like men, like brothers, like masons, like Kung Fu brothers.

"Uncle is going to be expecting us at his house by 10 tonight. If there's trouble, we are to meet him at the road to Guanxiou before 3AM."

John seemed to be waiting for more information. "That's all he told me."

"Uncle's house is to the North, and it sounds like they are entering the town from the north."

"On that road we walked on."

"Yes. Where is the southern road?"

Lin began drawing his invisible maps again. They made their plans.

That night, with the screaming, and shooting coming from the North, they decided to just head for the South road, and hope to meet Uncle there.

There weren't any patrols that night. Just smoke and crackling from the north. The sky had a weird orange tint to it. The cloud of smoke from the northern part of the city could be seen at night, lit by the flames at its base, like a huge coiling dragon growing upwards towards the Heavens.

Too tired from running, they walked side by side, panting a little.

"Do you think the G stands for God?"

John enjoyed the change of mental venue. He realized how scared he'd been. "Sometimes."

"Me too."

They seemed to walk lighter now, through the city. Other people were fleeing. As the night grew later, more and more people seemed to be on the streets, and no one was waiting for cloud breaks. They wanted to leave town, but they didn't know which way to go.

Sometimes wild-eyed mothers, or panicked teens pawed at them, wanting something, something that John and Lin couldn't offer--safety.

"Do you think God watches over us?"

"Yes Lin. I think he's always watching each of us, everywhere, at the same time--somehow."

"Then I wonder what God is thinking right now?"

John slowed a little and dropped a little behind Lin as he saddened with that concept--imagining God, seeing all those people being killed, at the same time.

But Lin was unphased. He slowed up for John to catch up. "I just hope God doesn't enjoy what he's seeing now."

This floored John again. Talking about God at all was some sort of sin. Using the Lord's name in vain, or just saying, "God," was a sin of selfishness and disrespect. Somehow Lin was criticizing God, without being disrespectful.

"You can't be a Mason, unless you believe in God."

"I know," responded Lin.

"It sounds like you've lost some respect for God."

"Which God?"

John started to answer, but Lin knew what he'd say.

"Your God? My God? Their God? Whatever God the Japanese believe in?" He chuckled slightly. "Maybe you're right. I think I've lost respect for all the Gods."

"Lin you've--"

"I'm sorry John. I don't mean to be disrespectful--but God doesn't seem to have any influence on people."

"Not unless they allow him to."

Lin thought about that. "Allow him to," he repeated.

"So what God are they allowing into their hearts to do whatever it is they are doing?"

"People have free will."

"Perhaps God should not have given us free will."

"Then we'd just be mindless puppets."

"Puppets that didn't kill ourselves."

John was learning to enjoy arguing with Lin. Oddly, he'd reach a point where he felt he'd said what he had to say--but then he really wanted to know what Lin had to say. Lin's perspectives had inspired him many times over the past year.

The streets really got packed near the old bridge. Lin didn't think they'd be able to get across on the bridge. There were so many people packed onto the bridge trying to cross, that no one could move. They were all stuck on the bridge like flies in a spider web.

Lin told John, holding up a hand to block other people from hearing, "Let's go down the river a mile. There used to be some logs that fell across the valley."

John looked unsure at Lin.

Shao Mei and I crossed their a couple times.

John was reassured. He nodded.

Lin led the way down the river bank and to the South.

"I'm going to talk to God when this is all over," said Lin, as if he thought that God would listen to him.

"I'll be happy just to see another G again," concluded John.

They both laughed and continued walking in the sand next to the river.

They knew that Uncle might benefit from turning in the English mason. But he didn't--so far.

Lin wasn't entirely sure of Uncle's love for him. Did Uncle blame Lin for the deaths of his niece, and the rape of his sister?

Lin and John were hunted animals. Neither of them trusted anyone--except each other.

"There, we're on the road Uncle said to be on." They walked the dirt and gravel road, spinning in circles as they walked--trying to see the mountains silhouetted against the night sky.

They were about 3 miles south of the town now and there were a few other people on the road, carrying stuff. Lin wondered how far they would carry their stuff before they put it down, and kept walking--without it.

Car headlights were approaching from behind them. Had to be jeeps. They hadn't seen a Chinese person or any person, drive a car in almost a year.

They hid in the brush, waiting for the jeeps to arrive, then pass them.

But as they got closer, they knew they weren't jeeps. They were cars. Maybe they were Chinese!

Then, he wondered, maybe it's Uncle!

But how could he know. He couldn't see the cars at night. They were only a hundred yards away.

Lin tugged on John's sleeve. "It might be Uncle."

"It might be Japanese."

"I'm going to stand where they can see me."

This sounded like suicide to John. Then he realized how brave this was. Do or die. He would face the dragon and accept the consequences.

Somehow, John didn't feel bad about sharing his masonry with Lin. Lin was a fine man, an excellent man. A thirteen year old boy! He snickered to himself. 'A 13 year old hero,' he almost said out loud.

He let Lin be in the spotlight and stood a few paces to his side and behind him. The first car didn't bother to slow in the slightest, until it almost passed them. They slammed on the brakes, and the skidding noise frightened everyone, including a few other panicked fugitives... and then the car behind them almost ran into them!

Uncle got out of the front car. "THERE YOU ARE!"

Uncle waved his arm for them to come up and get inside the lead car. A big black car. Real big.

When the door closed with Uncle getting inside with them, Lin realized he was sitting next to Shao Mei's mom. She smiled at him and then gave Lin a big hug, which made him feel real awkward.

She then reached over and shook John's hand with a sad loving look.

John didn't know what to say. He just shook her head as nicely as he could.

"My heroes are on board," announced Uncle.

"Shao Mei was the hero."

"Maybe," said Uncle rubbing his chin. He'd heard from his messenger about Lin's guilt. "But a hero never gives up."

Silence.

"You never gave up Lin."

Lin didn't respond.

"Lin, you are on a path now. I wish the world wasn't so ugly now. But your path will lead you to a better place."

Lin wasn't responding to encouragement or credit--"I am very proud of all that you have done."

"BUT I COULDN'T STOP THEM--"

"Lin, calm down. Everyone is on a path. Each of us has our own path. Sometimes our paths go side by side, sometimes in opposite directions."

Lin was listening.

"Your path now includes Shaolin Kung Fu."

"And Masonic Kung Fu," blurted John, then realizing he maybe shouldn't have said anything.

"He's right Uncle. I didn't learn very much Kung Fu from Master Yang. But we practiced and practiced and practiced what he taught us."

Uncle nodded approvingly.

"I spied on the masons."

Uncle listened.

"You know their lodge was next door to me--well I watched their secret rituals and initiations through a crack in the wall."

Uncle listened intently. He glanced over at John to see his reaction. John didn't have a reaction any more.

"After Shao Mei was--was--was gone, we decided to create a Kung Fu Form for Shao Mei."

Uncle seemed to be getting glisteny, his eyes sparkled like reflections of the moon on water with little waves from a breeze.

"We put all the secrets," he looked over at John, who was listening unemotionally, "we put all the secret dugards and signs in."

Uncle cocked his head trying to understand.

"Their secret bows and punishments of each degree."

Uncle's eyes opened. He understood now. He looked over to John again.

"I don't know many Kung Fu moves so it is probably horrible."

Uncle reassured, "It's probably wonderful."

"I had to make up some moves."

Uncle smiled, "All Kung Fu masters make a new move."

"I put in the cross for the English masons," but when Lin tried to stretch his arms out there wasn't any room.

Uncle laughed. I want to see your Masonic Kung Fu tomorrow.

"I can't reveal the hidden signs to you, but if I do them quickly, I hope that people won't be able to see or recognize them."

"Clever," thought Uncle, rubbing his chin again.

"So we decided to name it, "Continuous Motion Form."

"Continuous Motion," mused Uncle. "I LIKE IT!"

His loud exclamation caused Lin to sit back a little.

"Tomorrow morning Lin will demonstrate his "Continuous Motion Form!" He laughed and passed a bottle of soda water to Lin and another bottle to John.

He smiled at them both.

* * * *

The next morning, after driving for hours, they pulled over for a pit stop. The driver pulled gas cans out of the trunk and refueled. The driver of the second car did the same. The kitchen staff and the messenger from the store were in the second car. The messenger waved to Lin as he disappeared into the trees.

When the messenger reemerged from the trees and people seemed to have stretched their legs a little, Uncle announced so that all within 25 yards could hear him. There were only the people in the two cars. "Lin will perform for us his brand new Kung Fu form he created, called "The Continuous Motion Form."

Lin felt extremely nervous. Maybe he should be proud, but he didn't feel proud. This Kung Fu form was very complicated. Sometimes he thought of Shao Mei. Sometimes he thought of his mother. Sometimes he only thought of the signs, and symbols, and threats, and sometimes he imagined fighting Japanese soldiers.

As Uncle stepped back so the entire street was Lin's, he realized that everyone was watching him. "John and I made this form to honor Shao Mei," began Lin. "She came up with the name "Masonic Kung Fu," because we used to practice our Kung Fu in the Masonic lodge, next to my house. After--after she was gone, I created this Kung Fu form to teach her all about masonry. Shao Mei will hopefully enjoy my teaching her about freemasonry, every time I practice this Form."

Uncle had a tear in his eye.

The crowd clapped loudly.

Lin stood at Attention. He twisted the invisible ball, stomped his right foot, turned quickly to the left with a backfist and a neck chop. He turned the other way and stood poised in a crane stance with his right knee lifted high.

Here and there Lin explained about Masonry, by pointing out the tools of Masonry, and how he'd created some of these stances to depict them...then he got to the story of Hiram Abif, and his voice wavered with enthusiasm.

By the time he finished, the audience felt as though they'd just watched an entire stageplay. They clapped very vigorously. John smiled very fatherly-like at Lin.

Uncle beamed at Lin. "That was much better than I expected. That was great!"

Lin was humble as he walked slowly back towards the car.

My friend will enjoy your form I'm sure.

"Who's your friend Uncle?"

"Gu Ru Zhang,"

Lin choked, "My master's master?"

"Your Kung Fu grandfather is about to become your Father."

"Do you know if Master Yang is okay?"

"He is from the Kwongshi province. I think he took his students there. Don't worry about him now. You are on a good path Lin. Your Kung Fu is good. That means you are a good man."

John beamed like a proud parent some more.

"You know about The Dao?"

Lin nodded to Uncle.

"The Dao is The Way. The Way is The Dao."

John and Lin shared a telepathic glance. John held out his hand as they drove in the car. "The way."

Lin grasped and shook John's hand, "Masonic Kung Fu."



For decades, Buddha Zhen has been saying to his students and friends, "I want to make a movie about Kung Fu that will inspire Americans to understand Chinese martial arts... and to pursue those heroic values in their own lives." This may be the story he was waiting for -- written after accidentally stumbling onto the secrets of Freemasonry, cleverly encoded in a popular Kung Fu form, "Lian Bu," or "Ling Po," taught to him by two famous Chinese Kung Fu masters, Dr. Kam Yuen of the Tai Mantis Federation and Grandmaster Wong Jack Man of the Jing Mo Association.

Richard researched the history of this Kung Fu Form and discovered it was created by a Chinese martial artist who added it to the Chinese government Jing Mo school in 1938, as the Japanese were invading China. Richard will continue to research this Kung Fu and has been assured the assistance of the Chinese Free & Accepted Masons.

Impatient for enough research to write the true story of this Masonic Kung Fu, Richard Del Connor decided to write this novel during his research of the British Freemasons, probably responsible for transmitting these "Masonic Secrets" to a Chinese Kung Fu master. In 1938, Chinese were not allowed to submit applications to become Freemasons.

So here it is: Chinese teenage heroes, a British Freemason, and an invading army of Japanese infantry. Based upon true incidents and the Masonic Kung Fu dance discovered by Richard Del Connor on June 9, 2009 after he became a 3rd Degree Master Mason.

All 3 **Masonic Kung Fu** books take place in China:

BOOK 1: 1937-1938 The Japanese Invasion

BOOK 2: 1938-1940 The Jing Mo school

BOOK 3: 1941-1942 The Shaolin Master

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