## Dedication

*To my wife and best friend, Jinmei Xu, who helped brainstorm and develop the key themes, twists and turns of The Jade Necklace. Without her, there would be no novel.*

*Her patience and love have fueled these pages with life and emotion.*

*She is my love and inspiration.*

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## Table of Contents

[**Dedication 2**](#_vafanleal0bm)

[**Table of Contents 3**](#_rxwv9axy15he)

[**Prologue 4**](#_n7uaeuyu2zf1)

[**Chapter One: Lily and James Chen 5**](#_js9e3j3xyopc)

[**Chapter Two: Carlos Levy and Meijin Yu 32**](#_wteeqea6ggnr)

[**Chapter Three: Carlos’ Interest in Huangdi Neijing 59**](#_y1pfkhcahlfd)

[**Chapter Four: Huangdi, The Yellow Emperor 66**](#_2kjp1gcv5ib)

[**Chapter Five: Huangdi’s Early Life and Master Wong 70**](#_uhn0lytnghdh)

[**Chapter Six: Huangdi Neijing 86**](#_kyew4whnizst)

[**Chapter Seven: An Intriguing Proposal 89**](#_1q5ylepsgj7v)

[**Chapter Eight: Quest for the Golden Box 96**](#_ayfhqxuntumo)

[**Chapter Nine: Major Bao Zheng 118**](#_ypkaz96ey5gf)

[**Chapter Ten: The Way of Eternal Harmony 128**](#_kkalj56g4wir)

[**Chapter Eleven: Baduanjin (Eight Pieces of Brocade) 132**](#_3dazlxxwvhze)

[**Chapter Twelve: Qigong and the Way of Eternal Harmony 148**](#_9zyuaqsqvox7)

[**Chapter Thirteen: Stealing the Manuscript 159**](#_h5jmps9fig2x)

[**Chapter Fourteen: Fallout From The Theft 178**](#_2cdptyynywwo)

[**Chapter Fifteen: The Chinese Decide What To Do 184**](#_4ws1ckxry9fo)

[**Chapter Sixteen: Trip to China 190**](#_gvgk6jkb7ucs)

[**Chapter Seventeen: Rapture 216**](#_1pptln797dsa)

[**Chapter Eighteen: Revelation 220**](#_cuhzmbr0p7kh)

[**Epilogue 233**](#_oni903l589wu)

##

## Prologue

In the charming southern city of Raleigh, North Carolina, husband and wife team Lily and James Chen run a successful acupuncture clinic. Their peaceful existence takes a dramatic turn when friends Carlos Levy and his wife Meijin Yu invite them on a hunt for an ancient Chinese manuscript that promises eternal health. The couples embark on a mission to find the *Way of Eternal Harmony* and unleash its healing power. To their surprise and delight, they soon acquire it. But their plans are derailed when the document is stolen right from under their noses. Who is the thief, and why is he interested in this ancient manuscript? Is he working alone, or are other powerful forces involved? The answer to these questions will send the friends on a trip halfway across the globe and on an adventure none could have imagined. And what awaits them at the end is an event so remarkable that neither they nor the world will ever be the same.

##

## Chapter One: Lily and James Chen

It was three o’clock on Friday afternoon, and the acupuncture clinic was humming nicely. Lily and James Chen had full schedules, meaning they had two active treatment rooms simultaneously, with patients arriving every half-hour. They would take in a patient, conduct an intake or follow-up exam, and then give them a treatment. Patients would lie quietly on the treatment table with anywhere from ten to twenty needles strategically placed on their bodies to elicit the desired effect of the treatment plan.

By the end of a session, most patients felt a sense of calm and contentment, their qi energy having been activated and circulated throughout their bodies. As any of their patients would explain, acupuncture was more effective than a massage for relaxing. As a bonus, their health condition healed as they rested - two benefits for the price of one. With all of this good Qi flowing, the clinic exuded a palpable feeling of contentment, with patients being nourished by the needles as the afternoon sun slowly descended to the horizon.

James finished applying needles to a migraine patient and returned to the practitioner’s office. He found Lily recording notes in a medical chart from the patient she had just finished treating. She looked up as he entered the room.

“James, what time are we meeting Carlos and Meijin for dinner?”

“I think we settled on six-thirty, but I’m not sure.”

“I’ll text Meijin and double-check,” Lily said. She quickly sent a text to her friend. Meijin would be in her office at the university about this time, finishing up office hours. Meijin Yu was a math professor at NC State University. On Friday afternoons, she taught a graduate class on advanced game theory, after which she held office hours.

“Carlos seemed excited to share some news on his research,” James said.

“I know,” responded Lily. I asked Meijin about it, but Carlos swore her to secrecy!”

Carlos Levy, Meijin’s husband, was also a professor at NC State in the East Asian History department. Over the last several years, his research focused on the ancient Chinese text *Huangdi Neijing*, translated as the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*. James and Lily were intimately familiar with the book, as it was the oldest known text on Chinese medicine. Carlos had completed his dissertation on the work and had continued researching different aspects of the text since then. Based on Carlos’ message, he had stumbled on something new and exciting in his research.

Just then, they heard a bell. “That’s Room 5,” Lily said. “I’ll be right back.”

Every patient receiving acupuncture was given a bell in case they needed attention. In this case, Lily’s patient, Marjorie Smith, wanted her electroacupuncture settings stronger. She had neck pain, slowly improving under Lily’s care. After inserting needles, Lily had attached small clamps that enabled a gentle electric current to pass through the needle, down into the belly of the tight muscle. Electroacupuncture felt like a massage on the inside of the body, and in fact, that’s what was happening.

Lily strengthened the stimulation, then told Marjorie, “OK, I’ll let you lie here for another ten minutes. Then I’ll be back to take out your needles.”

“Thanks, Lily,” said Marjorie. Within moments, she was asleep, snoring contentedly.

Lily smiled. It always surprised Lily how many of her patients fell asleep during treatment with their bodies covered in needles, even when the needles had electricity running through them. But the fact of the matter was that acupuncture was incredibly sedating. And the body naturally fell into a happy, trance-like state during an acupuncture session.

Two hours later, Lily and James finished treatments for the week, completed their remaining paperwork, locked up the office, and climbed the staircase in the back of the office one flight up to their home. When Lily and James moved to Raleigh, they decided to find a house with an attached office. This convenience was critical for them, as they had a growing family with young children. The best commute to work was no commute!

The babysitter would arrive in half an hour, so they had time to check in with Lily’s parents, who watched the children during the day while Lily worked. Her parents brought them up to speed on the day’s events as Lily prepared the children’s supper. Soon, Lily and James would head over to Meijin and Carlos’ house for dinner. The workweek was over, and they were tired but content.

Going out to dinner was a treat these days. For parents of three young children, a night out with friends was a welcome respite. And they were curious about Carlos’ news. What, exactly, did Carlos want to tell them? They would soon find out.

\* \* \*

Lily Chen was born in Cleveland, OH. Her parents emigrated to the United States from China when she was two years old, so she had only the slightest accent remaining in her speech. English was essentially her first language. And while she spoke Mandarin fluently, having grown up with it at home, she preferred English.

Standing at 6’ 1”, Lily made a formidable impression when she walked into a room. She had a runner’s body, thin and toned, with long, athletic legs. She had run cross country and track in high school, excelling in the 1600 and 3200-meter races, and helped her team win two State championships. A knee injury sidelined her college running career, but she still enjoyed running 5 and 10k’s to stay in shape.

Lily kept her hair in a short bob, easy to manage, she liked to say. With dark brown eyes and a broad, friendly smile, Lily made an excellent first impression on the people she met. Confident, honest to a fault, with a good sense of humor, you would think she was an extrovert. But, while she loved people, she needed plenty of alone time to recharge. She felt best when interacting with people in groups of four or fewer, where she could connect without the distractions that inevitably came with a larger group gathering.

Lily’s quiet nature fit in well with her profession as an acupuncturist, as she spent most of her day working one-on-one with patients. Effective treatment required that she connect deeply with her patients in order to understand what was going on with them physically, emotionally, and even spiritually. Healing was three-dimensional in this way, and Lily enjoyed the challenge of getting into her patients’ heads and hearts as she guided them to recovery.

She was a skilled acupuncturist with a passion for Chinese medicine. Lily had been running Raleigh Acupuncture Associates with James for the last ten years. In this age of corporate medicine, their clinic was a refreshing change. The clinic, which was attached to their home with its own entrance, was small, having just five treatment rooms. Lily and James did not have a receptionist. When people called, they spoke directly with the practitioners. Who better to advise a potential patient wondering about how acupuncture worked? Or an existing patient concerned about their condition.

Some of their older patients were frustrated that they had to book appointments online.

“Why can’t you book my appointment for me, Lily?” asked an overwhelmed 72-year-old patient named Mildred.

“I’m sorry. Your daughter doesn’t mind booking your appointments. She told me herself, Mildred. If we hired a receptionist we would have to raise our fees. That wouldn’t help anyone.”

“Yes, I know you’re right. I just hate learning new things. You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.”

“First of all, you’re not old! And second of all, it’s really not that hard. I’ll be happy to show you.”

“I know, I know. Of course you’re right. I’m just being stubborn. I must admit, though, the reminder texts are helpful.”

Lily laughed, “These days it’s hard to claim you forgot your appointment when you get three text and email reminders!”

Lily and James had a robust website with over one thousand pages of content. That way, people could read and learn about all the conditions they treated in the clinic. The website highlighted each health condition with a detailed overview of how acupuncture approached treatment, along with a video where Lily or James shared details about treatment protocols. In addition, they provided numerous case studies, research studies, and patient testimonials for every condition. So, for example, someone could arrive at the website wondering if acupuncture treated plantar fasciitis. They would search for the page describing plantar pain, watch a video highlighting the foot pain treatment, and then review recent cases from satisfied patients. For a deeper dive, they could read a research study or two on how acupuncture treats plantar fasciitis and review patient testimonials.

Then, of course, some people just refused to use the internet. They would call on the phone and ask, “Do you treat back pain?”

“Yes, we do. Let me text you our video about the treatment.”

“No, I don’t want to watch a video. I want to hear you tell me in words, human to human, that the treatment works!”

“Yes, ma’am. The treatment works like a charm.”

“Will I feel better after one visit?”

“We suggest coming once a week for four weeks. If you don’t feel a difference after that, we won’t continue treatment. In most cases, patients start feeling better after just one or two sessions.”

“Well, that sounds fair to me. I’ll come in next Tuesday at 11:00am.”

“I’m sorry, Ma’am. We’re full at that time. Let me send you a link to our booking page. You can see all of our availability online.”

“Impossible! I refuse to use a computer, on moral grounds!”

And so it went, the ongoing challenge of automation versus tradition!

\* \* \*

In addition to acupuncture, Lily was an accomplished qigong practitioner. Qigong is an ancient exercise that optimizes energy within the body, mind, and spirit to improve and maintain health. Lily and James explained qigong to curious patients the following way:

*Qigong is a traditional Chinese practice that combines gentle movements, controlled breathing, and focused meditation to promote physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Often described as "energy work" or "vital life force cultivation," qigong aims to balance and harmonize the body's energy, or "qi," which flows through pathways called meridians. By cultivating this vital energy, practitioners enhance their health, reduce stress, improve flexibility, and achieve a sense of inner calm and balance. Qigong is a holistic and accessible practice suitable for people of all ages and fitness levels.*

Another interesting fact about Lily was that her great-grandfather was the famous Chinese evangelist Watchman Nee. Nee, who lived from 1903 to 1972, wrote dozens of books on Christianity and faith. In addition, he ran a successful house church movement called the Little Flock that flourished before the Communist takeover. There was no formal membership in the group since Nee opposed the idea of denominations. He believed that God determined membership in the body of Christ, not giving a title to a religious group. He often said the church had no good reason to require membership or pitch its tent in a particular camp. Despite his opposition to organized religion, historical records indicate that by 1949 the Little Flock had over 70,000 members in 500 assemblies.

The group may have even been larger. According to the Ecumenical Press Service, the Little Flock was much more prominent in scope, with 362 places of worship and 39,000 members in just the single province of Chekiang. Given that the group made up 20 percent of the Protestant church in China and was the largest single denomination, they likely had 150,000 to 300,000 members. James Mo-Oi Cheung, the author of *The Ecclesiology of the Little Flock of China, Founded by Watchman Nee*, affirms that there were thousands of assemblies by 1956 and that the Little Flock was China's most significant Christian group.

Lily's family often said that it was impossible to know how many of the millions of Christians meeting in house churches today were the outgrowth of Little Flock groups. Two things were clear to them. First, many house churches today were directly derived from Little Flock churches. And second, many other Christian groups owed a substantial debt to Little Flock doctrine and practice for their survival.

Christians came under severe persecution with the rise of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. The communists promoted a state atheism doctrine and feared that Western capitalist influences might permeate society through Christian churches. The authorities brought false charges and arrests against many foreign missionaries at this time, pressuring Christian believers to turn on each other through threats of imprisonment.

In April 1952, public security officers arrested Watchman Nee in Shanghai, conjuring up false bribery charges, and claiming he stole state property and failed to pay taxes. Then, in January of 1956, the government conducted a nationwide sweep targeting Nee's co-workers and elders from several churches he was involved in. Some died in labor camps, while others faced long prison terms.

Finally, in January 1956, the Religious Affairs Bureau began accusation meetings against Nee, resulting in his excommunication from the church in Shanghai. The authorities pressured the elders to turn against Nee and then sentenced him to fifteen years imprisonment and hard labor. The government had finally silenced Watchman Nee, who had refused to cooperate with them and would not stop preaching the word of God. Twenty years later, still in prison, he died at the age of 69, a faithful servant of Christ to the end.

Lily and her family believed that the Chinese government was not so much opposed to Christianity as it was worried that the church contained a Western threat to the communist regime. Their fear was not without cause. The Chinese were no strangers to Western influence and indoctrination. The British had poisoned the Chinese populace with opium in the nineteenth century, and the Japanese had mercilessly oppressed them during the first half of the twentieth century. Mao Zedong and the People's Party sought to silence all Western influences in China, so they targeted Nee and the Christian house church movement.

Lily's grandfather was no Western spy and had no malicious intent against the Communists. However, he was a purist regarding his faith, and some of his public statements may have fueled the proverbial fire. He once said that he did not care whether the Japanese or Chinese ruled the country since his ultimate concern was with God. The following excerpt is from "Watchman Nee and the House Church Movement in China" by Dennis McCallum:

*Another aspect of the same purism was his refusal to become a part of the popular nationalism that was dominating China at the time. During the war with Japan, he refused to pray for China’s victory over Japan. "It must be possible," he said in 1940, "for British and German, Chinese and Japanese Christians to kneel and pray together. . . in China, Christians and Missionaries have too much intimacy with the state. . . we ask for neither a Chinese nor a Japanese victory, but for whatever is of advantage. . . to Thee. . . "This remarkable excerpt from a war-time sermon was not what the average Chinese government official wanted to hear!*

His refusal to adopt nationalist rhetoric during and following the Second World War, made it easier for the authorities to accuse him of disloyalty. For Nee, his loyalty was only to God. He would not play politics to protect himself or the church.

Despite her family's personal experiences, Lily was not bitter toward the Chinese government. She often tried explaining China's unique position regarding Western religions to her American friends. At a recent bible study meeting, a friend asked whether she was upset about the recent crackdowns on the Protestant church in China.

Lily replied, "I'm not saying that I agree with the Communist regime, but I understand where they are coming from. The Protestant church wants more autonomy from government oversight. You see something similar happening with the communists and the Catholic church. Look at the relationship between China and the Vatican. They have had a longstanding dispute regarding the appointment of bishops. The Vatican wants the freedom to exercise its spiritual authority when appointing Chinese bishops. China, on the other hand, demands tight control over the Catholic Church in China because it believes that religion is intimately linked with social stability, national security, and even China's relationship with other countries. The Chinese government sees all internal religious affairs as a matter of sovereignty."

She continued, "In 2001, the Chinese government acknowledged that religion was a basic right to be enjoyed by all citizens. However, they made clear that religious activities, and those of the church, must fall within the scope of the Constitution and laws of China. China, for better or worse, is not a democracy. So the government demands greater oversight and control in religious organizations. And religious organizations must choose to either work within the system or face persecution."

Lily went on, "My grandfather was a purist and refused to participate in the government's method of overseeing religious organizations in the country. As a result, he took the brunt of government suspicion and paid for it with his life. But I'm not sure I agree with his choice. Jesus made clear that He would not oppose the Roman authorities in Jerusalem. Jesus told his disciples,

*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's. - Matthew 22:21*

Lily continued, “Jesus was teaching his followers that obedience to Roman authority was not mutually exclusive to obeying God's laws. I believe the churches in China should work with the communist authorities, being mindful of the government’s sensitivity to the threats of foreign intervention, regardless of whether those threats are real or imagined. The truth lies in the middle, as with most things in life.”

Lily’s family had maintained their Christian roots. As a result, Lily enjoyed a solid Christian upbringing and an equally strong faith in Christ. And living in America, she appreciated the freedom to worship. She knew it was easy to take such religious freedom for granted. So many Christians and believers of other faiths faced persecution for their devotion. America was unique in that the same street could be home to a Christian church, Jewish temple, Muslim mosque, and Hindu mandir. The American government and culture welcomed and supported diversity of beliefs. Lily believed that was one of the reasons the country had thrived over the past two hundred and fifty years.

While Lily was a strong Christian, she also appreciated her cultural ties to Daoism, one of the two foundational philosophies of China. Her Christian faith wove seamlessly with Daoism and qigong. A Christian friend named Jolie asked how Lily reconciled her faith in God with the naturalistic philosophy of Daoism. Lily explained that when she performed qigong exercises, her mind focused on Jesus. She told her skeptical friend that God created everything, including Daoism.

Lily explained, "Remember, Jolie, that Daoism is a path to the truth, not the truth itself. The word Dao means ‘way’, and refers to the way of nature as a whole. Following the Dao means learning lessons which nature has to offer about time and change, gain and loss, the useful and the useless."

Lily continued, "Think of it this way. The basic idea of Daoism is that since human life is just a small part of a larger process of nature, it only makes sense to act in accord with the flow of nature. Daoism rejects human standards that lead to an overly self-focused mode of behavior or the achievement of worldly possessions. Such motivations inevitably lead to violence and aggression."

Jolie responded, "That sounds just like Christianity, rejecting the self and following Christ."

Lily answered, "The only difference is that Daoists are forced to discern the right path from nature, while Christians can turn to the Bible and Jesus' own words."

Lily continued, "Daoism promotes wu-wei, which translates as "non-willful action." Daoists believe we need to step away from trying to control outcomes in the world. They seek happiness by separating themselves from worldly interests and passionate desires. Similarly, Christians strive to overcome self-focused desires. The more we put aside our urges, anxieties, and compulsions, the happier we become. The way forward for Christians is to surrender ourselves to God, put our faith in Jesus, let our sinful nature die on the cross, and be born again."

"That makes sense, Lily, but how do you personally blend the two paths, Christianity and Daoism, in your life?"

Lily answered, "I believe God created Daoism as a way to reach the Chinese with some important truths about nature and life. But while Daoism points to the truth, it doesn't explain the truth itself. Jesus is the truth. So I feel twice blessed, being raised with Chinese culture and Christian understanding."

Lily's Daoist-enriched Christianity carried over into her acupuncture practice. When she treated patients, she worked with their Qi knowing that all energy, both in the body and the world, derives from God. She prayed for her patients, mindful that every day was a battle. She knew that the prince of the air, the devil, ruled the earth conjuring human fears, troubles, and disease. But she also knew that the source of her strength was God. And part of that strength was being properly armed for battle. Her weapons included her knowledge of scripture and her experience with qigong and acupuncture.

\* \* \*

 From the time James Chen was a teen, he was motivated by a desire to connect with people. If he entered a room, be it a doctor's waiting room or the DMV, he would strike up a conversation with the person next to him in a matter of seconds. He was an extrovert with a quick wit, and he was constantly connecting with people by cracking jokes. It was no surprise that James was the hit at most parties.

 Like his wife Lily, James was tall, standing over 6' 2". But, unlike his wife, he was not a natural athlete. To the frustration of his coaches in school, who wanted to take advantage of his height, James could not muster up the talent or motivation to excel in sports. There was not a single fierce competitive fiber in his body. On the contrary, his appearance, marked by great height, puppy dog eyes, and sheepish grin, put people at ease.

 One time, when he was in middle school, the gym teacher organized a running contest. James, with his long legs, took a commanding lead. But then one of the students running behind James got a leg cramp and fell to the ground. James was instantly by his side, coaxing him back onto his feet.

 "James," the coach yelled in frustration, "why did you stop? You would have won the race!"

"What race? Come here quickly. JJ's leg is cramping!"

 The coach rolled his eyes. James would never make it as a competitive athlete. He was too distracted by helping other people and fixing their problems.

 James' teen years were difficult. Adolescence ushered in a season of doubt, when he questioned the meaning of life. It's as if his youthful innocence awakened to the harsh world around him, and he didn't like what he saw. People suffered needlessly from endless trials and tribulations. He found solace with the philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who famously said that life without the rule of law was 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.'

 James read Hobbes' *Leviathan* in a high school philosophy class. In the book, the author expressed his views about the nature of human beings and the necessity of governments and social contracts to keep them in check. Hobbes believed humans were all selfish, driven by fear of death and the hope of personal gain. In his opinion, only the rule of law and the threat of punishment could avoid catastrophe.

 The consequence of this, he argued, was that if society broke down and we had to live in what he called 'a state of nature', without laws, we would end up stealing and murdering. In a world of scarce resources, particularly if you were struggling to find food and water to survive, it would be rational to kill other people before they killed you.

 During James' teenage existential crisis, he stumbled upon an antidote to the absurdity and futility of life. One weekend, shortly after finishing Hobbes' tome, he visited a friend whose family had rented an American movie, Duck Soup, the famous Marx Brothers comedy from 1933. Here is how James described the film.

 *You've got this make-believe European country called Freedonia. At a certain point, the nation goes bankrupt. That's when a wealthy citizen named Mrs. Teasdale funds the government in return for making Rufus T. Firefly, played by Groucho Marx, the country's president. Sensing a weakness in leadership, the bordering nation of Sylvania sends in spies Pinky, played by Harpo Marx, and Chicolini, played by Chico Marx, to instigate a revolution. The movie is classic slapstick, filled with pranks, whimsical songs, physical gags, and a ton of goofy jokes.*

The Marx brothers inspired James, giving him the brilliant idea that it didn't matter if life was absurd. As long as we could laugh at the world and ourselves, we would be alright. Since then, James had been making people laugh everywhere he went. He had the perfect build for it. His tall, gangly body and sincere puppy dog eyes were already comic. Add to that a wit he had nurtured over the years, and life seemed more manageable. Here's how James recently described Groucho Marx to a friend and why the comic was such an important role model for him.

*Groucho was known for his quick wit, sharp comebacks, and irreverent humor, which set him apart as one of the funniest comedians of his time. There are six things you need to know about Groucho to understand what made him so funny.*

*First, he had great comedic timing, delivering his lines with perfect pacing. That's what I try to do, but trust me, it's not as easy as it looks. Second, Groucho was a master of the double entendre, delivering one-liners with precision and skill. Third, he had a distinctive delivery, with his trademark mustache, cigar, and raised eyebrows. These all added to his comedic persona. He used physical gestures and facial expressions to enhance his humor. That's what I try to do using my height and heavy-set eyes.*

 *Fourth, Groucho was a master of wordplay, puns, and other forms of humor. In addition, he used wordplay to make fun of authority figures and social norms. That would have gotten him locked up in China, but it worked fine in America!*

 *Fifth, he had an irreverent sense of humor, often poking fun at serious or taboo subjects. He was unafraid to take risks and push the boundaries of what was considered acceptable. That’s not as easy as it sounds. There have been many occasions when I pushed the limits too much and ended up with my foot in my mouth!*

*Finally, Groucho was a master at improvisation. His ability to improvise and ad-lib was second to none. He often incorporated audience members into his routines, making his bits even funnier. This added element made his performances unpredictable and exciting. Groucho Marx was the whole package - quick wit, clever wordplay, irreverence, and impeccable timing. Here are some of my favorite Groucho jokes:*

*You can leave in a taxi. If you can't get a taxi, you can leave in a huff. If that's too soon, you can leave in a minute and a huff.*

*Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana.*

*A black cat crossing your path signifies that the animal is going somewhere.*

*I have had a perfectly wonderful evening, but this wasn't it.*

*One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas I'll never know.*

*Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read.*

 James spent a good deal of his free time reading and watching the great comedians. Another one of his favorites was Steven Wright, known for his distinctly lethargic voice and slow, deadpan delivery. His jokes are ironic, philosophical, and sometimes nonsensical. He is famous for one-liners like these:

*The early bird gets the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese.*

*I almost had a psychic girlfriend, but she left me before we met.*

*OK, so what's the speed of dark?*

*How do you tell when you're out of invisible ink?*

*If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked*

*something.*

*Support bacteria - they're the only culture some people have.*

\* \* \*

James grew up in China. His parents, both members of the Chinese communist party, had come of age during Mao Zedong’s long reign of power. They had been enthusiastic supporters of Mao and the regime, only to be disillusioned during the Cultural Revolution, when so many of their friends and relatives suffered from overwork in reeducation camps or died from starvation during devastating famines. James was too young to feel the brunt of that difficult time, but he witnessed the fallout from his parents' disillusionment in their later years.

Frustrated with the double standards of the ruling regime and knowing that he could not take on the establishment, James opted to leave the country. He was a good student, and his parents' connections within the communist party smoothed the way for his student visa. He got accepted to the University of Wisconsin in Madison and was allowed to go, with the expectation that he would return to China afterward.

College was like arriving at an oasis. The freedom in America suited James' quirky personality better than the more culturally conservative Chinese. Americans laughed at his jokes more than his Chinese contemporaries, and he was free to explore taboo subjects without fearing trouble from the authorities. In his freshman year, James started writing a column in the Badger Herald school newspaper. In it, he poked fun at the oddities and eccentricities of the Chinese and American cultures. Here are excerpts from some of his essays:

*Americans eat sweets at the strangest times. I can't understand why Americans start the day eating desserts for breakfast - donuts, Belgian waffles, pancakes with syrup, sugary cereal. These things should be eaten after a meal as a treat, not for the meal itself! And certainly not for the first meal of the day. The Chinese breakfast is the exact opposite - tasteless, watery rice porridge. Imagine watery oatmeal for breakfast - every day!*

*Americans don't care about privacy! Upon my arrival in Madison, I was shocked by the number of people having phone conversations that everyone else could hear. Groups constantly seem to be telling their life stories over dinner in restaurants where everyone can eavesdrop. People in China are way more private, and much less trusting. I guess they never know if the person next to them is with the secret police!*

*Chinese people don't talk to strangers. But Americans will not only strike up a conversation with a total stranger, but will share intimate details about their lives. I think Americans actually trust each other. In China you trust your family, and that's as far as it goes!*

*Americans complain - about everything! If the waiter is not fast enough, they complain. When a store clerk doesn't show enough enthusiasm, they write a bad review online. Parents complain about their children's teachers if they give out a bad grade. And people at the gym are constantly complaining that the thermostat is set too high or too low. In China, we have not learned the concept of complaining. I think we're still so grateful to even have a restaurant or a gym. And we'd never criticize a teacher. Teachers are like gods in China, revered and respected.*

The column had a good following, and the editors kept him writing during all four college years. Following graduation, James navigated the path faced by all young, educated immigrants. He tried to adapt to and embrace the ways of his newly adopted country while not losing the values and traditions of his former home.

In addition, James had become a practicing Christian during college. In his first year, members of the campus student ministry had welcomed him with open arms. Faith in Christ filled a void that first arose in his teens. While Thomas Hobbes, the philosopher, had done a good job describing his disillusionment with the world, trust in God enabled him to overcome that disillusionment. James realized that fulfillment in life came neither from obedience to government nor indulgence to self. It could only come from surrendering to God.

He took Proverbs 3:5-6 to heart:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; Acknowledge Him in all you do, and He will direct your path.*

James observed the level of discontent among his secular friends. They sought happiness by indulging in premarital sex, video games, recreational drugs, and alcohol. They focused on their wants, desires, dreams, and longings. But they were looking for contentment in all the wrong places. Through his growing faith, James was learning that true happiness only came when you turned away from self and focused on God.

He tried sharing these new-found beliefs with his parents back in China, but they were too jaded to hear his words. They, in turn, worried that Western Christianity was brainwashing their son and admonished him not to donate money to the church. They thought all churches were cults seeking to exploit their members. Their fears frustrated James, something he would continue to feel as he watched his parents become increasingly discouraged with the passing years.

After graduating from Wisconsin, James decided to pursue a degree in Chinese medicine. This path enabled him to embrace the best qualities of his Chinese ancestry while positively affecting people's lives. He also began studying qigong, which blended well with his graduate studies. Qigong and acupuncture encompassed two of the five branches of Chinese medicine, along with Chinese herbs, massage (tui na), and nutrition. He would eventually train in all five branches. And best of all, it was at the New England School of Acupuncture (NESA), located outside of Boston, where he met Lily Chen.

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James and Lily met in the fall of their first semester of graduate school. NESA was founded in the early 1970s and was the first school of acupuncture and Chinese medicine to obtain accreditation in the United States. The two quickly became friends. They had a great deal in common. Both were Christian, of Chinese descent, over six feet tall, and enthusiastically pursuing a degree in acupuncture. Their friendship blossomed into a deep connection during the four-year program, eventually leading to marriage.

Studying Chinese medicine was challenging, stimulating, and thought-provoking. Lily explained it to a friend this way:

*Traditional Chinese medicine is like Western medicine turned on its head. We look at health and the human body differently than Western doctors. Where they strive to diagnose the patient and find a suitable medication, we ask the patient for symptoms to identify a pattern imbalance and then create a treatment plan to restore balance. In Western medicine, there is typically a pill to manage health conditions.*

*For example, a diagnosis of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, anxiety, or depression will lead to a prescription for pharmaceuticals. In Chinese medicine, on the other hand, one health condition might have six possible pattern imbalances, requiring six different treatment strategies. And instead of prescribing pills to ‘manage’ the condition, we use acupuncture and herbs to ‘heal’ the imbalance responsible for the condition.*

*For example, if a patient goes to their gastroenterologist with stomach pain and constipation they will most likely be diagnosed with IBS and given a prescription medicine to manage their discomfort. The same patient in an acupuncture clinic will be asked more questions about the nature of their pain and bowel function. The acupuncturist will examine their tongue and pulse, and inquire about their sleep patterns, emotional state, and body pain. All of this information will help differentiate the Western IBS diagnosis into a more specific Chinese medicine pattern imbalance, which can then be addressed with a specific treatment plan.*

*Training to be an acupuncturist reminds me of training to be a detective. From the moment the patient walks into the examination room we look at their facial tone, the brightness of their eyes, their gait, the sound of their voice, and mood. Then we feel their pulse, not to count how many beats per minute, but to assess one of a dozen pulse qualities. Is the pulse fast or slow, strong or weak, full or thin, slippery or wiry? Finally, we examine their tongue. Think of the tongue as a flag to the stomach. Is their tongue red, pink or pale? Does it have smooth, rough or scalloped edges? Is the tongue coating thin or thick, white or yellow, dry or greasy?*

*Based on all of the information, we determine a pattern diagnosis. This is not a general diagnosis like IBS, but a specific pattern diagnosis like ‘IBS due to Spleen Qi Deficiency and Liver Qi Stagnation.’ Or ‘IBS due to Kidney and Spleen Yang deficiency’. Or’ IBS due to Kidney and Heart Yin deficiency.’ Each pattern requires a different treatment protocol. And the best part is that by taking the time to understand the patient, acupuncture can actually heal their body so they can overcome the disease. We have good success healing IBS. We not only manage symptoms, but can often alleviate the condition itself.*

In the third year of their program, Lily and James started working in student clinics treating patients under supervision. There were clinics all over town, and students would sign up to work at different locations each semester. There was an acupuncture clinic in a housing project in Dorchester, another serving HIV patients in downtown Boston, and a third at the school. There were also clinics based in hospitals on the North and South shore. Faculty, experienced acupuncturists themselves, supervised the interns at each facility. Treatments at the student clinics were inexpensive, often just 25 dollars, making them affordable for the general public. The HIV clinic offered free treatment to anyone with a confirmed chronic condition diagnosis. This clinic existed before Nucleotide Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors were available to manage HIV. Back then, acupuncture was one of the few treatments that slowed the progression of the disease.

James and Lily loved working in the student clinics. There was something exciting about applying their book knowledge in real life. You could read all day about how a particular acupuncture point combination would alleviate menstrual pain. But to see it work on a real, live person was inspiring. And best of all was the plethora of patient reactions - relief, surprise, disbelief, and always gratitude. Years later, James and Lily still felt that sense of wonder when treating patients. They used to joke that Chinese medicine was a gift from God to the Chinese, but He forgot to sign the card, so they never knew who gave it to them.

The four years of their professional training flew by. During this time, James proposed marriage to Lily, which she happily accepted. They were married in a small ceremony at their church. A year later, they welcomed their first child, Julia. During the next four years, they had two more children, Isabelle and Jake. It was a busy time for the young couple. Life was full, juggling the clinic, kids, friends, church, and their relationship. They were so busy that it never dawned on them to be overwhelmed.

After completing their education, the Chens moved from Boston to North Carolina, opening their acupuncture clinic in Raleigh. Significant factors in this calculation included the fact that they could afford a house in Raleigh, there were fewer acupuncturists in the area compared to Boston, and there was a lot less snow! Raleigh, nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and the Blue Ridge Mountains, is the state's capital and home to North Carolina State University. They recognized the city's potential and the community's strong economy, and established Raleigh Acupuncture Associates.

Lily and James joked that one of their best ideas was to attach the acupuncture clinic to their house. They bought a large home close to downtown, which included an oversized in-law apartment with a separate entrance. A creative renovation by a talented contractor gave them an acupuncture clinic boasting five treatment rooms. Having the office next to the house was a game changer, enabling them to juggle raising three small children while running the clinic. Lily's parents offered to relocate to Raleigh when Julia and Isabelle were born, easing the burden of childcare significantly for the next few years. But their first big sigh of relief came with the enrollment of all three children in school. Lily could catch her breath for the first time in years and finally get a decent night’s sleep. She and James felt like they had survived a tsunami the first year that Jake joined his siblings at school.

Another benefit of having the children in school was that the Chens had time to return to their qigong practice. Qigong, rooted in Chinese medicine, Daoist philosophy, and martial arts, is traditionally viewed as a way to cultivate and balance Qi, translated as "life energy." Qigong typically involves meditation, coordinated slow-flowing movements, rhythmic breathing, and a peaceful, centered state of mind. This ancient technique calms thoughts, eases the spirit, and reduces stress.

Lily and James grew up surrounded by a culture influenced by Daoism, a philosophical and spiritual tradition that originated in ancient China. Daoism revolves around the concept of ‘Dao,’ which means the ‘Way’ or ‘Path.’ It emphasizes living in harmony with the natural flow of the universe and seeking balance and simplicity in life.

Laozi wrote the classic Daoist text *Daodejing* in 300 B.C. Daoists sought happiness by removing themselves from worldly interests and desires, striving to attain release from all activity. Important Daoist principles include inaction, simplicity, and living in harmony with nature. The foundation of Daoist philosophy rests on the unifying law of two opposite forces: yin and yang. If one tries too hard to attain a particular want, the law of reverted effort leads to the exact opposite of that desire.

There is a significant overlap between qigong and Daoism. James gave this explanation at a talk on the subject at the public library:

*There are four primary ways that Daoism and qigong overlap. First, they both share a common philosophical foundation. Daoism emphasizes the natural flow of life, spontaneity, and the interconnectedness of all things. Similarly, qigong is rooted in the belief that individuals can align themselves with the flow of universal energy (qi) to achieve harmony, health, and spiritual development.*

*Second, one of the primary goals of qigong is to cultivate and harmonize the flow of qi within the body. Daoism, too, emphasizes the cultivation and conservation of vital energy to achieve balance and longevity. Many qigong practices draw on Daoist principles of breathing techniques, movement, and meditation to enhance the flow of qi.*

*Third, Daoism includes a variety of spiritual practices, such as meditation, visualization, and inner alchemy. As a Daoist-influenced practice, qigong often incorporates similar spiritual elements to enhance the practitioner's awareness, inner tranquility, and connection to the Dao.*

*And fourth, both Daoism and qigong promote health and longevity. Qigong exercises improve physical and mental well-being, boost the immune system, and reduce stress, aligning with Daoist ideals of living a healthy and balanced life.*

James and Lily incorporated medical qigong into their acupuncture practice. Once a patient received acupuncture and was resting peacefully on the treatment table, the practitioners would take a few minutes to perform medical qigong, a purely energetic form of Chinese medicine. They started the process by focusing their own energy into the palms of their hands. Skilled qigong practitioners can generate warmth in their hands in moments. Then they would direct that collected energy toward their patient. This subtle process did not involve touching.

In medical qigong, like in acupuncture, healing occurs by balancing electromagnetic energy, which permeates all living beings. Disruptions in the body's energy occur throughout our lifetime due to poor diet, sedentary lifestyle, injuries, surgery, suppression of emotions, and aging. Medical qigong corrects these bio-energetic imbalances by strengthening the body and regulating internal organs, hormones, the nervous system, and the immune system. In addition, qigong relieves pain and helps release deep-seated emotions and stress.

In China, and more recently in the United States, doctors have applied qigong in hospitals and clinics to treat individuals suffering from various ailments. Practitioners utilize medical qigong therapy to treat people suffering from a wide range of conditions. For example, qigong treats autoimmune diseases by decreasing inflammation caused by the body’s immune system attacking itself. And it helps cancer patients by reducing the adverse effects of radiation and chemotherapy. While acupuncture and Chinese herbs were the primary treatment modalities at Raleigh Acupuncture, medical qigong was a popular adjunctive technique.

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Layered into Lily and James' psyche was a blend of Christian belief and Daoist culture. Their interest in Chinese medicine followed a natural progression from their Daoist past. Furthermore, they found that surrendering to God aligned with the Daoist principles of walking away from worldly interests and desires. Jesus asked his disciples to put aside the "self" to achieve true peace and freedom in the world. Daoism sought the same peace but failed to provide an example. Jesus was the living, breathing example of such peace, providing Lily and James with an acute clarity of purpose.

In John 14:6, Jesus declared:

*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

Similar to Jesus, the Dao (translated as "the way") is the universe's natural order. Daoists strive to live in harmony with this natural order, believing they can avoid violence, suffering, and struggle by cultivating a sense of naturalness. Likewise, followers of Christ believe that putting their faith in God fulfills the universe's natural order. And while Christians accept that they cannot avoid violence, suffering, and struggle in this world, they know they can overcome these hardships by cultivating a strong faith in Christ.

Lily and James had discussed what part, if any, their Christian faith should play in their acupuncture clinic. They knew Christian physicians who openly prayed with their patients. Other doctors strove to keep their religious beliefs separate from their work for fear of alienating patients who held different views. Lily and James struck a balance between the two. They believed their work in the clinic was divinely inspired and that any healing that occurred was due to the grace of God. Furthermore, they set the intention to be the conduit of healing, not the source, and that God would work through them. They were not the healers but the brokers of healing, connecting their patients to the ultimate healer, God Himself.

And while they did not solicit their patients to pray with them, they kept two monthly periodicals in their waiting room, one from David Jeremiah and another from Charles Stanley. The Chens supported both ministries, and each had a lovely booklet for distribution. Many patients read them in the waiting room and took them home afterward.

Something interesting happened regularly regarding these pamphlets. New patients would come to the office, see the booklets on the table in the waiting room, and start to cry. When asked if anything was wrong, they would share that they had been feeling desperate about their health and had prayed to God, only to be led to the Chens' clinic. Seeing that the Chens were Christian confirmed that God had answered their prayers. God had sent them to a foreign, strange therapy but placed them in the hands of fellow believers. They were reassured and comforted by this chain of events.

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## Chapter Two: Carlos Levy and Meijin Yu

Carlos Levy was a 35-year-old assistant professor at the Center for East Asian Studies at NC State University. His field of research involved ancient Chinese culture, focusing on health and medicine. As such, he was an expert in the history of Chinese medicine and its spread across East Asia through the centuries. Originally from Lima, Peru, Carlos came to NC State for college, stayed for his Ph.D., and ultimately accepted an assistant professorship in the Center for East Asian Studies.

From a young age, Carlos knew two things about himself. First, he was smart. He always got the highest grades in school and ran intellectual circles around his peers. His mind worked faster than everyone else, giving him clarity in the blink of an eye when it took others much longer. Second, Carlos was short-tempered, easily getting irritated with people for either not responding quickly enough to his needs or doing what he perceived as wrong.

The primary reason for his short temper was his frequent headaches. Migraines had plagued him for as long as he could remember, waking him in the middle of the night and lasting for days. Medications never helped much. He slogged through the fog and pain until they eventually left, only to return a few days later. Given the distraction of the pain, it was a wonder he did well in school. As a result of his short temper, people tread lightly around him.

Carlos was Jewish by birth but raised agnostic. His parents, like many of their Jewish contemporaries, were non-observant. While cherishing their Jewish roots and taking pride in their ancient culture, his parents rejected the existence of the Old Testament God. Carlos followed in his parent's footsteps, adopting their values. As secular humanists, they prided themselves on doing the right thing, treating people with respect, and trying to improve the world. Carlos' moral values fit well in the culture of higher education and university life. Most of his fellow graduate students and faculty were non-religious, opting for a secular moral code over traditional biblical teachings.

Carlos' father was proud of his Jewish heritage but was not a practicing Jew. He neither attended synagogue nor read the Bible. He thought of himself as a spiritual person but not religious. He admired the 17th-century Jewish philosopher Benedict de Spinoza, who recognized a universal force but rejected Judaism's biblical teachings characterized by an all-powerful God.

Spinoza believed that God was not the world's creator but instead that the world was a part of God. This view is often described as pantheism, the doctrine that God and the world are the same. Spinoza argued that the way to achieve freedom and happiness was to understand and align with the deterministic laws of nature. Determinism means that everything happens for a reason and in a manner we can know through cause-and-effect relationships.

Central to Spinoza's ethical system was the idea of ‘intellectual love of God.’ This idea does not refer to religious devotion but rather to an understanding and acceptance of the natural order, with the goal of leading to a sense of joy and contentment. Spinoza was critical of organized religion and saw it as a source of superstition and dogma that hindered proper understanding of the world. This belief brought him into conflict with the religious authorities of his time and led to his excommunication from the synagogue.

Spinoza's views align closely with Universal Unitarianism, a liberal religious tradition that emphasizes individual freedom of belief and encourages members to pursue a lifelong search for truth and meaning. Unitarians prioritize loving their neighbors as themselves, working for a better world, searching for truth with an open mind, using reason to explore religious ideas, and granting everyone the right to choose their beliefs. In many ways, they epitomize the modern secular humanist, who believes that humans are capable of ethical and moral behavior without religion or belief in a deity.

When Carlos was a freshman at NC State, he attended a Unitarian congregation near campus. There he found a community of welcoming, kind truth-seekers. Their Wednesday night dinners were a needed break from his intense academic schedule. However, over time, Carlos felt that something was missing. Unitarians prioritized nurturing each person's quest for understanding while embracing the notion that there were no universal truths. But how was he to make good moral choices without clear guidance?

"Look inside yourself," they would say. Or "turn to the great philosophers for direction." But wrestling with these moral issues always left him hanging, waiting for the proverbial shoe to drop. "Why do I constantly make bad choices?" he asked himself. "When I'm in a good mood, I treat people well, but when my head hurts, I'm rude and mean to others." Was he just a flawed person? The other Unitarian members seemed so together and advanced as human beings. They never seemed to lose their temper, drink too much, or yell at their girlfriends. Why couldn't he 'figure it out?'. Maybe his chronic headaches made it impossible for him to be a good person.

From an early age, Carlos was fascinated by Chinese history and culture. Peru was home to 1.2 million people of Chinese descent, accounting for five percent of the population. As a result, Chinese influence was found everywhere, from the architecture to the food. In high school, he started reading ancient Chinese literature, and over the next two years, he taught himself Mandarin. There was something about the way the Chinese identified with the world that suited his sensibilities.

When it was time for college, Carlos thought it would be fun to study abroad. He was offered a generous scholarship at NC State University in the United States, and happily accepted their invitation. The school had a robust program in Chinese history and culture, housed at the Center for East Asian Studies. The decision to attend NC State was one of the best he ever made. He loved the school, and they loved him. After graduating, they recruited him to stay on for his Ph.D.

Life as a graduate student in Raleigh had its ups and downs. Carlos enjoyed his academic work. However, serving as a teaching assistant proved challenging. His short temper upset the students, who complained about him to the school administration. The problem was mitigated when Carlos discovered, with the help of his primary care physician, that taking a Xanax before teaching class helped mellow him out. The anti-anxiety medication controlled his outbursts, reducing student complaints.

His social life also proved to be problematic. Carlos was reasonably good-looking, standing 5' 10" tall, with dark hair and complexion, and piercing black eyes. He was an excellent conversationalist who could speak on various topics with insight and charm. However, his mood was fickle. If he was feeling well physically, he did alright. But he seemed to lose his bandwidth when he was in pain, becoming irritable at the slightest trigger. For the first two years of graduate school, this tendency kept him from proceeding past the first few dates with the women.

That all changed when he met Meijin Yu, a 26-year-old, newly hired assistant professor in the math department. He first noticed her at a meet-and-greet for graduate students and faculty in the fall of his third year. He felt poorly that evening and almost did not go to the party. But a friend pestered him to attend, so he did. That evening changed his life forever.

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NC State had just hired Meijin Yu as the youngest member of an elite Math department faculty. She was a math prodigy, scooped up by the University after completing her Ph.D. at MIT in Cambridge, MA.

Meijin was born and raised in Dalian, China, a city of six million people located on a peninsula on the Korea Bay, two hundred eighty miles east of Beijing. From a young age, Meijin showed mathematical prowess. She advanced through all her high school math classes by the eighth grade, so she began bicycling to the University in the afternoons to attend college-level math courses.

Meijin looked like a mathematician, with thick black plastic-rimmed glasses. She had a penchant for zoning out during conversations when her mind was focused on something else. Her baggy, nondescript clothing hid a toned and athletic body, which she had developed from years of competitive swimming. She enjoyed the water, where she could happily spend hours solving complex mathematical equations in her head as her body went through the comforting motions of freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, and butterfly.

Her family described Meijin as friendly but aloof. She didn't have a typical reaction to other people's moods and emotions. If her mother was upset over a heated conversation with a relative, Meijin would calmly offer comfort without being pulled into the emotions flying through the room. And when her best friend had another breakup with a boy, Meijin would gently hold her hand, smile, and remind her that time would heal the pain, just like it always did. Meijin approached relationships from an analytical perspective, not an emotional one. So when she witnessed someone engaging in an emotional meltdown, she saw the facts of the situation, not the feelings. This perspective shielded her from emotional volatility.

Regarding relationships, Meijin had a few close girlfriends in high school but did not seem interested in dating boys. Some boys asked her out because she was cute, despite the thick glasses, but she typically turned them down. When her father asked why, she said they were too dull. She'd rather read a book or work on a math problem.

When Meijin was four, her Uncle was visiting from Shanghai. He brought some Chinese puzzle boxes that he thought Meijin would find interesting. The Yu family came from a long line of puzzle box masters who excelled at solving the intricate traditional devices. Chinese puzzle boxes are typically made from metal or wood and feature various compartments, hidden panels, and complex mechanisms. To open the box, one must discover the correct sequence of movements, such as sliding panels, twisting parts, or pressing hidden buttons. Each puzzle box has its unique design and unlocking mechanism, adding to the challenge and intrigue.

Meijin was enthralled with the puzzle boxes, immediately claiming them for herself, to the distress of her Uncle! He had only intended to show them to his niece, not give them away. However, his attitude softened when he saw how much she loved them. She instantly understood their complex internal mechanisms. It was clear that she would follow the family tradition.

When it was time for college, Meijin's parents encouraged her to apply to the best math programs, regardless of distance or expense. They were thrilled when she was awarded a full scholarship to MIT. The Chinese authorities were happy for her to study abroad. There were tens of thousands of Chinese students attending elite American universities. The Chinese government hoped the students would return home afterward to help grow the blossoming Chinese economy or become future academic stars in their country of birth.

From the moment she arrived, Meijin loved MIT. Interacting with students who equaled her intelligence and academic ability was exhilarating. As a bonus, being surrounded by super-smart peers and faculty enhanced her problem-solving performance. It's as if she and her new friends were engaged in intellectual wrestling matches, making them more skillful and nimble.

She soon discovered two groups of students in her class, those who thrived on the challenge and congenial competition and those who were overwhelmed by it. The latter group didn’t stick around, finding refuge in less demanding academic pursuits. But the former, of which Meijin very much counted herself, blossomed in the stimulating environment.

By the end of her first year of undergraduate study, Meijin had decided to pursue the field of game theory. Game theory is a branch of mathematics that deals with the study of strategic decision-making in situations where the outcome of one person or group depends on the actions of the other. It provides a framework to analyze and understand the behavior of individuals, organizations, or countries in competitive or cooperative situations.

Game theory was formally introduced by mathematician John von Neumann and economist Oskar Morgenstern in their 1944 book, *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*. Since then, it has found applications in various fields, including economics, political science, biology, psychology, and computer science.

Meijin explained her new field of interest to her parents in the following way:

*The essential components of game theory are as follows. Players include individuals, groups, or entities involved in the decision-making process. Each player has a set of strategies they can choose from. Strategies involve the possible actions or decisions that each player can take. A strategy determines how a player will behave in the game. Payoffs are the outcomes or results each player receives based on the combination of methods chosen by all players. Payoffs represent the players' preferences for different outcomes. Finally, information is the knowledge that each player has about the game, including the actions and choices of other players.*

*Games can be classified into different types based on their characteristics. Non-cooperative games are where players make decisions independently, without formal agreements or communication. They typically compete for their interests. Alternatively, cooperative games involve players who form groups and make binding agreements. The focus is on how to distribute the gains from cooperation among the participants. Zero-sum games are those where the total payoff to all players remains constant, meaning one player's gain balances out another player's loss. And finally, in non-zero-sum games, the total payoff to all players can change, and all players can gain or lose collectively.*

*To analyze games and predict the likely outcomes, mathematicians and economists use various solution concepts, such as Nash equilibrium, which is a set of strategies where no player has an incentive to change their plan unilaterally, given the other players' strategies.*

*Game theory has significant real-world applications, such as understanding economic behaviors, negotiating strategies, and pricing decisions. It helps in decision-making by providing insights into how people interact in complex situations and helps determine the best method for achieving goals.*

For Meijin, discovering game theory was like coming home. Calculating people's behavior based on known variables set her mind alive with excitement and anticipation. And while she had always been stellar at math, her work in this new area was simply off the charts. She and game theory were a match made in heaven!

After finishing her bachelor of science degree in three years, the math department invited her to stay on to earn her Ph.D., which she completed in five years. Her years of study at MIT were challenging and exhilarating, and flew by in an instant.

After graduation, many companies and universities sought Meijin for teaching and research positions. Ultimately, she and her MIT advisors thought the best fit and opportunity for her was an assistant professor position offered by NC State's Department of Engineering and Mathematics. NC State, located in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina, was one of the fastest-growing and most dynamic technology schools in the country. They were expanding their game theory department and wanted Meijin to head the endeavor.

It was a great opportunity, especially for a 26-year-old woman fresh out of graduate school. Meijin was shocked when she discovered they would be paying her $180,000 a year. The University knew she could command twice that salary in the private sector, and they were thrilled she accepted the position.

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Meijin met Carlos Levy at a party at NC State, just three weeks after arriving in town. Levy, also 26 at the time, was working on his Ph.D. at State. Meijin had not dated much at MIT, either as an undergraduate or graduate student. She was too busy, she told herself. And while the students around her were bright, she never met anyone who excited her. That changed when she met Carlos. He was standing across the room by a window when she arrived. She found his dark, brooding visage attractive. He looked almost comical, sneering at nothing in particular through the oversized window overlooking the commons below. She didn't know at the time that he was trying to manage an intense migraine, secretly wishing he were back home in bed.

Carlos' mood picked up quickly when he turned and saw a lovely Asian woman walking toward him with a shy smile. He had never seen her before and wondered who she was. She came right up to him and resolved that problem.

"Hi, I'm Meijin Yu. I saw you from across the room and decided to come up and introduce myself.

"I'm Carlos Levy. Nice to meet you."

"Do you teach here?" Meijin asked.

"No, I'm a graduate student at the Center for East Asian Studies. How about you? Are you new here? I haven't seen you around."

"Yes, very new. I only arrived three weeks ago."

"What are you studying?" Carlos asked.

Meijin hesitated, embarrassed. "I'm actually an assistant professor in the Mathematics department."

A look of surprise came over Carlos' face. "How old are you, if you don't mind me asking?"

"I'm 26," Meijin answered.

"Me too," said Carlos. "Let me guess. You got your PhD at Stanford. Either Stanford or MIT."

"The second one, yes," said Meijin with a smile.

"Well, it's nice to meet you, Meijin. I was feeling pretty bad five minutes ago, but all of a sudden my head doesn't hurt. You apparently have a healing effect on me! Now if you could only make me less cranky, my transformation would be complete," he joked.

Meijin laughed. "I'll see what I can do," she answered.

Carlos and Meijin spent the next hour talking. It felt like they had known each other their whole lives, the way they naturally jumped from topic to topic, interest to interest. She told him about her work with game theory while he shared his research on *Huangdi Neijing*. They laughed, joked, and teased each other. It came easily, as if they had always been friends. After the party ended, they continued their conversation at a coffee shop near campus. They closed down that place, too, eventually parting ways after midnight. Both of them left feeling dazed and happy. They had never met anyone like the other, and it felt good.

Carlos and Meijin got together the following weekend. However, to Carlos' dismay, he started developing a migraine during dinner. He was worried that his "Dr. Jeckle & Mr. Hyde" personality would show up, which was not a good look for him, especially on a first date. He tried to remain positive as the pain worked its way from his neck to the base of his skull and then started embedding itself into his right temple. But by the time dessert rolled around, he had been testy with the waitress and had sarcastically replied to something Meijin said. He was horrified by his behavior. He wanted to make a good impression with her, but just the opposite was happening.

Yet, much to his surprise, after each of his irritable outbursts, Meijin laughed instead of getting annoyed.

"What's so funny?" he asked, feeling both confused and relieved.

"You are," she answered.

"What do you mean? I was just rude to the waitress."

"Yes, but it's obvious you're getting no enjoyment out of it. If anything, you look horrified by your behavior, like you're all tied up in knots. Sorry for laughing, but you kind of look ridiculous!" She giggled again.

Carlos broke out in a fit of laughter. She was right. He *was* all tied up in knots.

"Yeah, you're right," he admitted. "Every time I get a headache I become an idiot. I can't control myself. And I was really trying to make a good first impression so I wouldn’t scare you off."

Meijin found his sincerity endearing. "You're not scaring me off. You're just being you. You feel bad, so you act bad. I don't mind. I can tell that you like me. It's as if you're shooting yourself in the foot over and over again but don't know how to stop."

"Exactly! Well put. I'm relieved that you're not phased by my personality."

"It's not your personality that's the problem. It's your headaches. Why don't you get them fixed?"

Now it was Carlos' turn to laugh. "I've had them my whole life and nothing ever helps. Not even pain medications."

"What about acupuncture?" Meijin asked. "My uncle said it made all the difference for him."

"I tried acupuncture back when I was a kid. It didn't help."

"Well, why don't you try again? I found a place in town for myself because I've been having trouble sleeping. A Chinese couple run the clinic and they have excellent reviews. We can go there together."

"Sure," Carlos answered with enthusiasm. He was game to do anything if it included doing it with her. He didn't have high hopes for acupuncture helping, but it couldn't hurt. It was ironic, Carlos thought to himself. He was an expert on ancient Chinese medical texts, but the medicine did not work for him. In all fairness, he had only tried it once, twenty years ago in Peru.

Come to think of it, if his memory served him correctly, he wasn’t even treated by an acupuncturist. His primary care physician gave him an acupuncture treatment, thinking it might help his migraines. Licensing boards, then and now, don’t require M.D.s to have formal training in Chinese medicine to perform acupuncture. Carlos thought that was crazy, but not surprising, given Western medicine’s outsized influence in the healthcare field. In any case, he was up for trying again, this time with a properly trained acupuncturist.

They had a great time that evening and agreed to get together the following week. The more time they spent together, the more apparent it became that they were a good fit. Meijin appreciated Carlos for his quirky kindness and thoughtfulness. He was curious, funny, and creative. He, in turn, appreciated her calmness, apparent indifference to his moodiness, and brilliant mind. She was, by far, the most intelligent person he had ever met.

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Being raised in China, Meijin had no experience with organized religion. While at MIT, most of her colleagues were atheists, and she felt right at home. However, upon moving to Raleigh, she noticed that people were noticeably more religious. North Carolina is in the heart of the Bible Belt, and despite the secular trends in urban areas, Raleigh was filled with lots of churches and many Christians. These were not reserved Christians either. Southern Baptists, Methodists, and Evangelicals were open to sharing the good news of Jesus with anyone available to listen. People were not pushy, but they enjoyed and celebrated their faith.

A few months into Meijin and Carlos' courtship, a mutual friend invited them to a Christmas Eve concert at their church. After listening to beautiful music performed by an orchestra composed of church members, the pastor gave a short sermon on the meaning of Christmas. Neither Meijin nor Carlos was familiar with Christianity. Nonetheless, the pastor's message gave them pause. Prompted more by curiosity than calling, they started attending church services on Sundays with their friend.

Over the next several months, their hearts simultaneously experienced radical change. With each passing week and encounter, they fell deeper in love. Theirs was an all-consuming love, encompassing powerful emotions and life-shifting perspectives. It was the first time they could imagine spending the rest of their lives with another person.

At the same time, another mysterious phenomenon was occurring in their hearts. The pastor’s Sunday sermons resonated in their souls, stirring them in unfamiliar but satisfying ways. As they dipped their toes into the proverbial pool of faith, a tantalizing feeling of hope descended over them. And although they were not wholly conscious of it yet, they were beginning to fall in love with Jesus.

Carlos and Meijin were constantly surprised by the development of their spiritual path during this season of their lives. Being raised by Jewish parents, Carlos was familiar with the Old Testament. But Bible stories always seemed impersonal and far away. However, the Old Testament came alive when he factored Jesus into the mix. The ancient biblical laws had always felt daunting and impossible to follow. To be a good Jew, you had to follow 613 rules, keep a Kosher household, pray twice a day, and attend services every weekend. Carlos had no interest in doing any of those things. So by default, he abandoned his Jewish faith.

On the other hand, Jesus' teachings made sense to Carlos. God never intended us to master the law. Its primary purpose was to point out the impossibility of achieving righteousness through the law. However, one could "get right with God" by believing in His Son. And ironically, having faith in Jesus made it easier to do the right thing.

Meijin, for her part, was surprised by the tremendous comfort she experienced studying the New Testament. As a mathematician deeply embedded in the world of logic, she prided herself on self-reliance. After all, she was more intelligent than most people and had capabilities that surpassed even the brightest of her contemporaries. Yet, despite these gifts, she often felt empty inside. She had always sensed that something was missing from her life. Her mind was full, but her heart was unfulfilled. To her surprise, she felt more content the more she studied the words of Jesus.

Carlos, in turn, experienced a deep satisfaction, bordering on relief, as he began trusting God. He had always pressured himself to act the right way, do the right thing, and be good. However, unlike the beliefs of secular humanists, the Bible made clear that he could not possibly know or achieve correct behavior on his own. Instead, he needed to surrender and follow God's will. The act of surrendering to God was freeing to Carlos. He was not relinquishing responsibility. Rather, he was acknowledging the true source of his goodness. Carlos' good acts reflected Jesus' will, not his self-discipline.

As their faith grew, Carlos and Meijin discovered that their previous notions of "freedom" were an illusion. Their pastor liked to say, "We are all slaves to something. Slaves to work, slaves to entertainment, slaves to food or alcohol, or slaves to pleasure. Given these options, why not be slaves to God?"

\* \* \*

Carlos and Meijin made appointments at Raleigh Acupuncture the following week. Carlos booked with the male practitioner, James, and Meijin with the female, Lily. During Carlos' intake exam, James asked him several questions about his headaches, as well as other things like sleep, mood, digestion, and bowel movements. Then James felt Carlos' pulse and examined his tongue. After taking a few notes, he instructed Carlos to remove his shirt and lay face down on the treatment table. It was like a massage table, with a cradle for his face and an armrest for his hands and arms.

James then administered an acupuncture migraine protocol, factoring in Carlos' pattern diagnosis of liver qi stagnation and spleen qi deficiency. Once the needles were in place, James added wires and clips to each needle and then turned on the electroacupuncture machine. Carlos felt like he was getting a massage on the inside of his body. He experienced deep tingling sensations in all the places where he typically felt pain. The treatment was so relaxing that he fell asleep, only to wake forty minutes later feeling exuberant. Afterward, he felt "unstuck" for the first time in years - not just his neck and head but also his spirit. He felt lighter and significantly less irritable.

"Will I always feel this way after an acupuncture session?" Carlos asked.

"I wish the answer was Yes, but in all likelihood this is a first-time phenomenon."

"Why is that?" asked Carlos.

James explained, "Your body has spent years building up stress, getting tighter and tighter, more and more stuck. It's what we call 'Qi stagnation'. Your first acupuncture treatment brings an unprecedented level of Qi movement into this zone of stuckness. The euphoria you’re feeling now is your body’s first sense of relief after all these years. That’s why it’s so intense. Follow-up treatments will feel good, just not as mind-blowing."

"Got it," said Carlos. "You’re saying that I’m currently experiencing a huge energy shift. In the future they will be less extreme, but still helpful.”

“Exactly,” said James.

“That works for me. Do you think acupuncture can help my headaches?”

“You’re young and healthy. My guess is that, at a minimum, acupuncture will ease the intensity and frequency of your migraines. It will also make your pain meds work better. In the best case scenario, acupuncture will resolve them for good.”

“I’ll take either one. I appreciate your candor, James. See you next week!”

\* \* \*

For Meijin's part, Lily conducted a similar intake exam, asking about Meijin's sleep history. Then she felt Meijin's pulse and examined her tongue. Lily treated Meijin face up on the treatment table, inserting the sterile, hair-thin needles in her arms, hands, legs, and feet. She added some points to her head and ears as well. Like Carlos, Meijin immediately felt relaxed and soon fell asleep. She awoke forty minutes later feeling rested and calm. Best of all, she slept like a baby that night.

Both of them were encouraged by the results of their first treatments and spoke highly of their practitioners. It took Meijin just six treatments to restore her normal sleep patterns. It felt so good to fall asleep more easily at night and to stay asleep. Lily explained that a big part of Meijin’s sleep problem was not being able to quiet her mind. When her brain grabbed onto a problem, it wouldn't let go. Bedtime would come, but her mind took no heed. After receiving acupuncture, her body was able to set limits with her mind. Nighttime was for sleep, and daytime was for thoughts. Her mind was going to have to deal with that schedule. And acupuncture was the tool to make that happen.

Carlos was overjoyed to experience an eighty percent decrease in headache frequency and intensity after nine sessions. Meijin was right - acupuncture could help his headaches. In the past, any stressor could set off a headache lasting for days. Now he had more bandwidth and tolerated stress without falling into the clutches of a migraine. As a result, he no longer had to walk on tiptoes trying to avoid taxing situations. In addition, acupuncture made his pain medications work better when he had a headache. James explained that medications work better in a balanced body, in the same way that cars get better gas mileage after a tune-up. A balanced body metabolizes drugs more efficiently.

Once acupuncture had met their health goals and treatments wrapped up, Meijin and Carlos invited the Chens to lunch. They wanted to get to know them better as friends. The four of them got along well and soon met regularly to socialize. Lily and James were intrigued by Carlos' academic work. As acupuncturists and qigong enthusiasts, they had read many ancient Chinese medical texts. Chinese medicine has evolved over thousands of years, incorporating hundreds of branches, schools, and theories. Unlike Western medicine, which typically required overturning a current practice before adopting a new one, Chinese medicine welcomed new ideas, allowing competing theories to exist side by side. As a result, practitioners had many more tools at their disposal for understanding and treating health conditions.

James and Lily were also fascinated by Meijin's work in game theory. One evening, over drinks, she told them one of her favorite game theory stories.

*One of the most famous uses of game theory happened during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. As you know, the event involved a dramatic confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, triggered by the Soviets placing nuclear missiles in Cuba, which threatened the security of the U.S.*

*At the time, President Kennedy and his advisors faced the difficult decision of responding to the threat without escalating into a full-scale nuclear war, which could have catastrophic consequences for both nations and the world. To resolve the crisis, Kennedy's administration turned to game theory and used it to analyze the situation from a strategic perspective. Mathematician and game theorist Thomas Schelling was crucial in advising Kennedy during the crisis.*

*Schelling introduced the concept of a 'credible commitment' in game theory. In the Cuban Missile Crisis context, this concept referred to finding a way for the U.S. to convey a credible message to the Soviet Union regarding the consequences of their actions. The Kennedy administration, through backchannel communications with the Soviet Union, demonstrated a willingness to pursue alternative solutions while also making it clear that they would respond with force if necessary. This credible commitment allowed both sides to negotiate and eventually reach a peaceful resolution.*

*Using game theory as a guiding framework, the U.S. and Soviet Union found a way to de-escalate the crisis and avoid war. The Soviets agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba, and in exchange, the U.S. publicly committed not to invade Cuba and privately agreed to remove their missiles from Turkey. The successful resolution of this crisis is considered a triumph of diplomacy and strategic thinking, and game theory played an essential role by providing a structured approach to analyzing the situation and finding a way out of the dangerous impasse.*

Meijin concluded, “I love this example because it shows how game theory can resolve complex and high-stakes situations, even in matters of international security and global peace. It inspires me in my work. I'd love to get a call from the President someday requesting my game theory services!”

Lily said, “I never realized how much mathematics and public policy overlap. It’s important for national leaders to be ‘out-of-the-box’ thinkers, especially in times of conflict.”

“It’s also important for leaders to have a good sense of humor,” James added. “ As a matter of fact, President Kennedy had a sharp wit. So did Abraham Lincoln.”

“I didn’t know that,” said Meijin.

James continued, “Lincoln was an inveterate storyteller. He loved entertaining people with stories he had picked up from his days as a circuit rider lawyer in backwoods Illinois. The burdens of the Civil War did not stop him from indulging in humor.”

James continued, “One time he was joking with a judge before trying a case. He said something to the effect of, “I met a woman riding horseback in the woods. As I stopped to let her pass, she also stopped, and, looking at me intently, said: ‘I do believe you are the ugliest man I ever saw.’ Said I, ‘Madam, you are probably right, but I can’t help it!’ ‘No,’ said she, ‘you can’t help it, but you might stay at home!’”

James added, “Another time, he was facing off with Senator Douglas in the great Lincoln-Douglas debates. Responding to his opponent, he said that the Senator’s argument was ‘as thin as homeopathic soup made by boiling the shadow of a pigeon that had starved to death!’”

“Chinese leaders could learn a thing or two from their American counterparts,” said Meijin. “They are always so stiff and formal.”

“It goes both ways,” added Carlos. “Chinese leaders may be stuffy, but they excel in the art of patience. And the key to successful negotiation often involves a big dose of slowing things down and pausing the action to de-escalate a tense situation.”

“I think President Kennedy did just that,” said Meijin, defending her adopted country.

“Yes, I suppose you’re right,” admitted Carlos. “And look where it got him.”

“You’re too cynical,” laughed Meijin.

After another round of drinks, Carlos asked the Chens about their qigong practice. He had read extensively about the ancient healing art, but had never done it himself.

“Tell us more about qigong,” said Carlos.

“James, tell them the story about Li Wei,” Lily said.

“OK,” said James. “It’s an oldie but goodie.”

*Once, in a small village nestled deep within the misty mountains of ancient China, there lived an old qigong master named Li Wei. He was known far and wide for his wisdom, kindness, and profound mastery of the ancient art of qigong. People from neighboring villages sought his guidance and healing whenever they faced hardships or health issues.*

*A terrible drought struck the region one winter, leaving the villagers desperate for water. The streams had dried up, and their crops were withering under the sun. The village council called on Li Wei, knowing of his reputation as a master healer, to find a solution to the water crisis. Li Wei listened intently to their plight and realized that the key to restoring water lay in harnessing the power of nature through qigong. He devised a plan and gathered the villagers near the dried-up well. With the villagers' trust and willingness to follow his lead, Li Wei began a series of qigong movements and meditations.*

*He taught them how to harmonize their breath with nature's rhythms, directing their qi toward the heavens and the earth. Through focused intention and unity, he guided them in visualizing the clouds gathering above and the raindrops falling gently from the sky. Days turned into weeks, and the villagers diligently practiced qigong under the watchful eye of their master. Some nights, they would gather beneath the vast canopy of stars, the moonlight reflecting in their eyes, and continue their qigong practice as if one with the cosmos.*

*Then, one fateful night, as the villagers practiced qigong, a distant rumble echoed through the mountains. Dark clouds gathered, and the wind whistled through the pines. A gentle drizzle began, gradually intensifying into a downpour. The rain danced upon the parched earth, quenching its thirst and reviving the village's hopes.*

*The drought ended, and the village flourished again, thanks to Li Wei's guidance and the unity and determination of the villagers. News of their miraculous restoration spread throughout the region, and Li Wei became revered not only as a qigong master but also as a spiritual leader.*

*But the challenges for Li Wei were far from over. Many years later, he faced a debilitating illness that threatened to kill him. The villagers gathered to repay his kindness. Through a collective effort, they performed qigong practices on his behalf, enveloping him in healing energy, eventually healing his body and renewing his strength.*

*With health restored, Li Wei continued teaching qigong to young and old, emphasizing the connection between humans and nature. His wisdom and teaching spread like a gentle breeze, touching hearts and minds. His legacy lives on to this day, forever etched in the lives of those who practice the timeless art of qigong.*

"That's a lovely story," said Meijin. "It reminds me of the tales my grandmother told me when I was a child."

“I agree,” added Carlos. “You can see the connection between qigong and Chinese medicine. It’s all about tuning in to the energy around us and patiently focusing on restoring balance.”

“Exactly,” said James.

 Another quality that drew Carlos and Meijin to their new friends was the Chens' strong Christian faith. As new believers, Carlos and Meijin were encouraged by the Chens' certainty about the truth of God and the scriptures. Secular culture constantly challenged the word of God, belittling Christians as weak and naive. This practice was especially true at the university, where rational thought and liberal ideology dominated. Carlos and Meijin struggled to keep their focus and quell the doubts circulating around them. Spending time with James and Lily encouraged them and gave them hope that one day they would walk in the confidence of the truth they felt inside their hearts. Lily reminded them not to worry when faced with criticism from the world, quoting Matthew 5:11-12:

*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

“Hey, I wanted to share a blog I recently wrote,” Lily said. “I was inspired by a devotion from my great-grandfather, Watchman Nee.”

“I get his daily devotions every morning in my email,” said Meijin.

“That’s awesome. So do I. I want to share the post with you and Carlos. There might be something in there that brings you encouragement. I titled it, *Discerning God’s Will*.

*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

*Each morning I receive an email devotional by Watchman Nee. A recent message struck me with particular force, addressing how we should approach decision-making in our daily lives. The key was discerning God’s will instead of relying on our own cleverness. He started with scripture from 2 Corinthians.*

*"For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you." - 2 Corinthians 1:12.*

*Watchman Nee then commented:*

*"The principle of Christian living is to rely on the will of God and not on one’s cleverness, to depend on the grace of God and not on our own wisdom. This is a lesson we need to learn. Suppose some action is put before you, but you do not know whether to do it this way or that, or not at all. You have no idea which is right. So you begin to deliberate on the effect of whichever action you may take. If you do it this way or that, what will people say? You therefore try to be clever. How? To say or to do that which will meet the least problem and avoid the most opposition. By following this policy it means you have forgotten that God’s children do not live on earth by human cleverness. To be a Christian is really quite simple. You merely ask one thing: 'God, what do You want me to do?'" - Watchman Nee, Christian Fellowship Publishers*

*GOD, WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?*

*Life would be so easy if we remembered to ask this simple question whenever faced with a decision. Asking this question highlights our recognition of God’s sovereignty, wisdom, and authority and acknowledges our need for His guidance and assistance in navigating life.*

*WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO RELY ON THE WILL OF GOD?*

*Christians believe that God has a perfect plan and purpose for each individual’s life. Instead of relying solely on our own understanding and cleverness, Christian living encourages seeking and discerning God’s will in every aspect of our lives. This involves surrendering our own desires and plans to align with what we believe God desires for us. It requires trust and faith in God’s wisdom, knowing that His plans are ultimately for our good.*

*"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." -Jeremiah 29:11*

*WHAT IS DEPENDENCE ON THE GRACE OF GOD?*

*Christianity teaches that salvation and reconciliation with God are made possible through His grace alone. We cannot earn or achieve it through our efforts or wisdom. Christian living emphasizes the recognition of our own limitations, weaknesses, and sinfulness and the need for God’s grace and forgiveness.*

*By depending on God’s grace, Christians acknowledge that our own wisdom and understanding are insufficient, and we rely on God’s wisdom and guidance to lead us in righteousness.*

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths." -Proverbs 3:5-6*

*Likewise, the apostle Paul emphasizes the contrast between human wisdom and the wisdom of God.*

*"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." -1 Corinthians 1:25*

*By living according to these principles, Christians seek to humble themselves before God, acknowledging their dependence on Him, and striving to align their lives with His will. They recognize that relying on their own cleverness and wisdom can lead to pride, self-reliance, and ultimately, separation from God. Instead, they seek to walk in humility, relying on the wisdom, guidance, and grace of God to navigate life’s challenges and make choices that honor Him.*

*DISCERNING GOD’S WILL*

*We’ve asked the question, “God, what do you want me to do?” But how can we hear His answer? And if we do hear an answer, how can we be sure that it’s God’s voice as opposed to our own, or someone else's? The devil’s whisper can often sound similar to the Lord’s.*

*Discerning God’s will is a deeply personal and spiritual process that involves seeking a relationship with God, understanding His character, and engaging in practices that help us align with His desires. While there is no one-size-fits-all formula for discerning God’s will, here are some principles and practices that can be helpful:*

*PRAYER*

*Prayer is a vital aspect of seeking God’s will. Through prayer, we communicate with God, express our desires, and listen for His guidance. By spending regular time in prayer, seeking His wisdom and direction, we open ourselves up to receiving insights and promptings from the Holy Spirit.*

*STUDY AND MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE*

*The Bible serves as a significant resource for understanding God’s character, principles, and teachings. By studying and meditating on Scripture, we gain insights into God’s desires, His ways, and the principles that guide His people. The Bible can provide clarity and guidance for decision-making and discerning God’s will.*

*SEEKING WISE COUNSEL*

*Proverbs 11:14 says, “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” Seeking advice and counsel from mature, godly individuals who have wisdom and experience can be valuable. They can offer perspectives, insights, and guidance to help us discern God’s will.*

*PAYING ATTENTION TO INNER PROMPTINGS AND CONVICTIONS*

*The Holy Spirit dwells within believers and can guide and direct them. As we grow in our relationship with God, we develop sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Inner promptings, convictions, and a sense of peace or unrest can be indications of God’s guidance. However, it is essential to weigh these against the principles of Scripture and seek confirmation.*

*CIRCUMSTANCES AND OPEN/CLOSED DOORS*

*Sometimes, God’s will can be discerned through circumstances. Open doors, closed doors, and opportunities that align with God’s principles and purposes can indicate His leading. However, it is important not to rely solely on circumstances, but to seek confirmation through prayer and biblical wisdom.*

*SURRENDER AND TRUST*

*Ultimately, discerning God’s will requires surrendering our desires and plans to Him. It means trusting that God’s ways are higher than ours and that He will guide us in the right direction. Trusting in His faithfulness and goodness allows us to navigate uncertainty and make decisions with confidence.*

*Discerning God’s will is a lifelong journey that may not always be clear or immediate. Patience, perseverance, and a deepening relationship with God are crucial. It’s important to remember that God is loving and desires to lead us. Even if we make mistakes or misinterpret His will, He is gracious and can work through our shortcomings.*

"That's a great message, Lily," said Meijin.

"Thanks. I mostly wrote it to encourage myself! Believe me, even after all these years I struggle with discerning God's will," Lily said.

"Do you ever question your faith?" Carlos asked.

"All the time," Lily answered. "It's easy for me to start doubting my faith when I'm surrounded by secular culture. So I start each day in prayer, to get myself revved up!"

"Why do we have to reboot our faith every day? Shouldn't I be able to sustain it from one day to the next?" asked Meijin.

"Not as long as we're living in the world," Lily said. "The Apostle Paul admonished us to put on the armor of God every morning. He knew that the world was ruled by the devil and that unprepared Christians were sitting ducks."

*"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." - Ephesians 6:13*

"I love that scripture," said Carlos."

"Me too," added Meijin.

"So don't feel bad if your faith is challenged in the world," Lily said. "That's to be expected. Just be prepared for the battle."

## Chapter Three: Carlos’ Interest in *Huangdi Neijing*

Carlos' area of expertise was East Asian history, particularly the development of ancient healthcare and medical systems. His doctoral dissertation focused on the classic Chinese medicine text *Huangdi Neijing*.

*Huangdi Neijing* (translated as the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*) is one of the most influential texts on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Authorship of the text is attributed to Huangdi, the famous Chinese emperor who ruled China in the 2600s B.C. The book, compiled during the Han Dynasty in the first century A.D, expounded on principles of medicine, health, alchemy, yin-yang theory, meditation, breath control, and longevity.

In both Chinese mythological and historical texts, Huangdi is considered a legendary figure and cultural icon. He is credited with various accomplishments and contributions to Chinese civilization, including the development of medicine and the establishment of a centralized state. The *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon* includes extensive discussion and explanations of the workings of yin and yang, nature's powerful elemental balancing forces. The interrelationship between yin and yang forms the basis of Chinese medicine.

*Huangdi Neijing* established the principles of traditional Chinese medicine and explained how to maintain and restore health through understanding yin, yang, qi (vital energy), and the balance of the body's organ systems. It emphasized the concept of harmony within the body and between the body and its environment. The book explained the process of achieving a state of dynamic equilibrium where yin and yang energies harmoniously interact. It emphasized recognizing and addressing imbalances or disruptions in the body's energy flow and restoring harmony through various TCM modalities such as acupuncture, herbal medicine, diet, lifestyle adjustments, and qi cultivation practices like qigong.

Carlos was always on the prowl for ancient texts addressing the fundamental concepts of yin and yang, qi, and harmonic balance. While his academic focus was on the past, he was mindful of the past's potential influence on the present. Western medicine offers miraculous remedies, from antibiotic treatment for infections to joint replacement surgery for restored motor function.

Yet there were vast areas of human health still wrapped in mystery. What, for example, were the underlying root causes of infection and pain? While antibiotics kept a person alive by killing the bacterial infection, they also destroyed the beneficial bacteria in the gut, which were essential for healthy digestion. And while pain medications brought temporary relief, what if we could offer patients long-term relief by identifying a way to resolve their pain at the source?

Levy believed that ancient civilizations held answers to many of these questions. He knew, for instance, that Chinese medicine could resolve pain and disease at the root level. Yet this ancient knowledge had been dismissed by modern Western medicine as backward and outdated. His study of the *Huangdi Neijing* convinced him that there were hidden treasures if only he could find them.

The term used to describe the attainment of the perfect balance between yin and yang energies is "harmony." In the philosophy of yin and yang, harmony represents a state where the opposing forces of yin (feminine, passive, dark, etc.) and yang (masculine, active, light, etc.) find equilibrium and mutual support. The ancients believed that achieving harmony led to optimal well-being and health.

Lily, James, Meijin, and Carlos often discussed Chinese medicine and its uncanny ability to heal otherwise intractable health conditions. As explained in *Huangdi Neijing*, Chinese medicine sought to manipulate and influence qi energy within a person's body through acupuncture, herbs, and qigong. The Chens’ website contained numerous case studies from their clinic which demonstrated this healing potential. Here is a summary of two recent cases.

\* \* \*

*A 34-year-old woman came to our clinic complaining of abdominal pain. She was married with a young son and worked for a large government agency. The pain started six months prior, with occasional sharp stabbing sensations and constant distention in her low abdomen. Doctors found no underlying issues and diagnosed her with IBS. They wrote her a prescription for antidepressants, which did nothing to alleviate her pain.*

*Her bowels were on the loose side with urgency when under stress. She had been gaining weight even though she was eating well and exercising. At the time, she had a high-stress job and a young child at home. She ate healthy foods, including fruit smoothies every morning for breakfast and salads for lunch. But she had difficulty falling asleep and was anxious at night. Her tongue was pale with scallop marks on the sides, and her pulse was thin.*

*We frequently see these symptoms associated with abdominal pain. After examining the patient, we were confident we could help and that acupuncture could restore her health. She was suffering from an imbalance called Liver/Spleen disharmony. This condition led to chronic abdominal pain, sleep problems, and weight gain. High stress from working, running the household, and raising a young child had led to an imbalance called Liver Qi stagnation. The energy (Qi) that flowed through her body was stuck. This nervous energy overacted on (attacked) her stomach and intestines, causing pain. Her weakened stomach function was called Spleen Qi deficiency.*

*In addition, her dietary choices were further damaging her stomach. She started each day with frozen smoothies. While the ingredients were healthy, the cold, raw food damaged her stomach. The stomach needs warm, cooked foods to function optimally. Salads for lunch further aggravated her stomach, as salad is cold and raw. These foods further damaged her Spleen Qi.*

*We used acupuncture points LV3 and LI4 to address her Liver Qi stagnation. For her Spleen Qi deficiency, we selected ST36 and CV12. We added ST25 for her loose stools and a combination of GV20 and Yintang as calming points. In addition, we suggested she start eating cooked, warm foods like oatmeal for breakfast and stews for lunch and dinner. She agreed to steam or stir-fry her vegetables instead of eating them raw. These dietary changes would enable her stomach and intestines to heal.*

*She received four acupuncture treatments over a month. We modified the acupuncture points each week to address her changing needs, but treatments always addressed her underlying Liver/Spleen disharmony.*

*After the initial four treatments, we had reduced her abdominal pain by 60%. After three more sessions, acupuncture had cleared up the remaining pain. Her bowel function was normal, stress relieved, and weight in the zone. A six-month follow-up found her happy and healthy. The treatments restored balance to her mind and body.*

*Our bodies are always giving us clues to help us address problems. If we ignore them, not only do they persist, they often turn into more serious issues. By addressing them early, we feel better and avoid trouble down the road.*

The second case study read as follows:

*A professional businesswoman and mother of three came to our clinic complaining of severe fatigue, concentration problems, foggy thinking, and depression over the past 12 months. She had been to several doctors and had checked hormone levels and blood work without getting a precise diagnosis. Her internet research pointed to a self-diagnosis of adrenal fatigue, as that condition mirrored her symptoms. A cortisol saliva test confirmed that her cortisol levels were below normal.*

*It seems like everyone has adrenal fatigue these days. The stress of daily life is taxing our adrenal function, resulting in a host of debilitating symptoms, including the ones experienced by our patient. Once your cortisol level drops, it isn't easy to recover. That's why this condition often lingers. It's not enough to “just relax”. Recovery involves returning your overtaxed organs to balance, making lifestyle changes, and, most importantly, understanding how your body works. Acupuncture plays a vital role in this recovery.*

*Our working mom was totally exhausted. A perfectionist by nature, she had always taken on a great deal of responsibility. Up until recently, she had been able to handle it. She managed a heavy workload, raised three children, and ran a busy household. While her husband helped out at home, she had primary responsibility for shopping, cooking and feeding the family, looking after the children, and being involved at church and school.*

*In her words, 'About twelve months ago, a switch flipped. I couldn't do it anymore.' She had difficulty falling and staying asleep, her mind couldn't process information like it had in the past, and she had no energy. These problems increased her stress because she could not function properly at work. The condition spiraled until she found herself depressed and sidelined.*

*Lab work indicated that her blood chemistry was normal and physical examination concluded that she wasn’t sick with any known disease. Her doctor told her she was working too hard and needed to slow down. While this was true, she didn't know how to pull it off. She had a full-time job and a house full of kids. She needed to get her health back! Since Western medicine could not figure out what was happening, she turned to alternative medicine. She found Dr. Lam's website and mailed in a saliva test, which found low cortisol levels. Additional research led her to our clinic.*

*At Raleigh Acupuncture, we have been treating adrenal fatigue for years. Chinese medicine recognizes the condition as a combination of imbalances triggered by overwork, too much stress, and the natural aging process. We focus treatment on strengthening organ function, restoring good sleeping patterns, and reducing stress.*

*In this case, we identified that our patient had Kidney and Spleen deficiency and Liver Qi stagnation. We used a pool of acupuncture points: ST36, SP3, BL20, BL23, KD3, LV3, BL18, LI4, and GV20. After four treatments, it was clear that she was responding to the acupuncture and beginning to feel better. More treatments were appropriate, so we continued once a week for the next eight weeks.*

*At this point, she had significantly less fatigue. Where exhaustion had been 10 out of 10, now it was 2 out of 10. She could get through her workday without problems and keep up with her life. Concentration levels were also significantly improved. She no longer had mental fog and her memory and focus were restored. In addition, her depression was gone. She no longer struggled with dark thoughts, lack of motivation, or constant irritability.*

*While acupuncture played a pivotal role in her recovery, she also made important lifestyle changes. These included reducing her hours at work, modifying her exercise regime to "less intense" workouts, and allowing for more "down time" with her family and for herself.*

Carlos was fascinated by these case studies and amazed that a five-thousand-year-old text was the source of their treatment strategies. And while the principles of Chinese medicine seemed to be based on alchemy at first glance, a closer look showed depth and substance. The bottom line was that it worked - their patients got better!

Carlos' friendship with Lily and James was one of the factors that motivated him to keep studying *Huangdi Neijing*. Deep within its pages, there were sure to be more clues to solving the world's health problems. He just needed to find them.

##

## Chapter Four: Huangdi, The Yellow Emperor

Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor, was a legendary Chinese king and cultural hero. In Chinese mythology, he was considered the ancestor of all Han Chinese. The Han people are an East Asian ethnic group native to China. They are the world's largest ethnic group, comprising nine out of every ten Chinese citizens, and 18% of the global population. Han Chinese includes various subgroups speaking distinctive varieties of the Chinese language.

 Huangdi was one of the Five Emperors mentioned in the historical text Shiji, dated around 100 BC. Tradition maintains that he reigned from 2697 B.C. to 2597 B.C. He was born Gongsun Xuanyuan and took the title Huangdi at his coronation as emperor of China. He later appeared as a chief deity of Daoism during the Han Dynasty (202 B.C. to 220 A.D.)

 Among his many achievements, chroniclers credit Huangdi with inventing Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and authoring the classic TCM text *Huangdi Neijing*. However, modern historians consider the book to have been compiled from ancient sources by a scholar living between the Zhou and Han dynasties more than two thousand years later. According to historical references, his interest in natural health and the prevention and treatment of diseases enabled him to live well beyond a century.

 In legend, his wife, Lei Zu, taught the Chinese how to weave silk from silkworms, and his historian Cong Jie created the first Chinese characters. A loud burst of thunder from the heavens heralded his birth on a clear day without clouds. Legend recounts that Huangdi became the leader of his tribe, which took the totem of a bear. His tribe attacked a neighboring tribe holding the totem of a bull, headed by Yandi. Huangdi's superior military and leadership skills brought victory, subduing Yandi's tribe. The two united and became one, forming the start of Chinese civilization.

 Sometime later, a tribe ruled by Chiyou threatened Huangdi's people. They were said to have magical powers and eighty-one brothers, each with four eyes and eight arms wielding sharp weapons in every hand. Huangdi reached out to eight neighboring tribes, joined forces, and sent the combined army to meet Chiyou and his brothers. The two great armies battled for days without a clear winner. Just as Huangdi's army began to turn the tide, Chiyou breathed a thick fog and obscured the sunlight. Huangdi's troops fell into disarray, unable to continue their offensive.

 At this critical moment, Huangdi created the South Pointing Chariot and ordered its construction on the battlefield. Armed with the innovative chariot, Huangdi led his army out of the fog. Next, Chiyou summoned a heavy storm. However, Huangdi contacted the gods, who dispersed the clouds, clearing the field once again. Huangdi then defeated Chiyou and his tribe for good. With this great victory, Huangdi defended not only his tribe but the tribes of his allies. The nine tribes joined together as one under his leadership.

 Huangdi ruled for one hundred years. He had twenty-five children, fourteen of whom were sons. Of these fourteen sons, twelve chose last names for themselves. All the noble families of the first three dynasties of China, Xia, Shang, and Zhou, are considered direct descendants of Huangdi. At the end of his life, Huangdi arranged his worldly affairs with his ministers and prepared for his journey to the afterlife. One interpretation claims that a dragon came from heaven and swooped Huangdi away. Another says Huangdi turned into a half-man and half-dragon and flew away.

 The South-Pointing Chariot, invented by Huangi on the battlefield, was a two-wheeled war chariot with a pole in the center of the carriage. A small figurine adorned the top of the pole. A set of gears connected the two wheels to the rod so that no matter which way the chariot turned, the figure on the pole always pointed in a preset direction, typically South. The South-Pointing Chariot is considered the earliest form of the differential gearing system used in modern automobile transmission systems.

 Huangdi also played a role in creating the Guqin, a seven-string Chinese musical instrument. Enjoyed since ancient times, the Guqin is considered an instrument of great refinement. In addition, he invented the earliest form of the Chinese calendar, employing the sexagenary cycle. This cycle, also known as the Stems-and-Branches, comprises sixty terms, each corresponding to one year. A total of sixty years constitutes one cycle. China and East Asia still utilize this method for recording time.

 Ancient lore holds that Huangdi captured the mythical figure Bai Ze atop Mount Dongwang. Bai Ze could speak, understand the feelings of all things, and know the affairs of ghosts and gods. It only appeared before a king with virtue and could ward off all evil spirits on earth. According to the History of Yuan, Bai Ze appeared as a white tiger with a horned head and a dragon's body. The beast taught Huangdi about thousands of monsters, shapeshifters, demons, and spirits. Huangdi recorded this information in pictures, which later became the book *Bai Ze Tu*.

 Ling Lun, the legendary founder of Chinese music, invented the notes of the ancient five-tone scale and the eight sounds made by eight musical instruments. He gave the emperor flutes tuned to the sounds of birds, including the mythical phoenix, which became the foundation of Chinese traditional music. Huangdi is said to have ordered the casting of bells in tune with those flutes.

 Huangdi came to power in a time of warfare, as the declining House of Shennong could not stop the feudal lords from fighting. He subdued them all and gained their allegiance, save for Chiyou. Eventually, he defeated Chiyou at the Battle of Zhuolu and executed him because he was unwilling to cooperate with the new alliance. The House of Shennong fell, and Huangdi became emperor.

 Historians debate whether Huangdi was a historical figure or merely the conjurings of accumulated legend. Some believe Huangdi was euhemerized from a mythical god into a legendary emperor by men of learning during the Zhou Dynasty. Euhemerization is when historians take a cosmic god and place him as an actual person at a definite point in history, later deifying him. They may have embellished his legendary deeds along the way.

However, the great historian Sima Qian believed in the historical accuracy of Huangdi's life. He began his detailed account of ancient China with the Yellow Emperor. Huangdi's reign provides a valuable reference point in a consistent historical narrative. Therefore, the Yellow Emperor is a figure centrally grounded in historical positions as well as religious, legendary, and popular culture.

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## Chapter Five: Huangdi’s Early Life and Master Wong

Huangdi was born Gongsun Xuanyuan in the late 28th century B.C. on the eastern outskirts of Qufu, in Shandong Province, China. Early on, he lived with his family near the Ji River. His father, the Lord of Shaodian, was a wealthy farmer, educated in business and philosophy. He raised his children accordingly and expected them to follow his path, governing the people and expanding the family business.

However, from an early age, Xuanyuan marched to the beat of a different drummer. He was exceptionally thoughtful, so that he could sit quietly in contemplation for hours, undisturbed by his surroundings. He had a sharp intellect and mastered all of his father's business and agricultural knowledge by the time he was nine. As an early teen, he worked diligently to improve the farm's business structure, doubling his family’s annual profits.

One day, when Xuanyuan was thirteen, he traveled to a neighboring village on an errand for his father. Along the way, bandits accosted him, threatening and taunting the boy, demanding his money and horse. The boy, with an attitude of calm determination, applied his martial arts skills to subdue the thieves, taking their weapons and horses as a trophy.

When he was fifteen, Xuanyuan's village faced a severe problem. Their rice crops were failing due to a mysterious pestilence. His father had tried all known solutions to deal with the pestilence without success. The village was facing the real possibility of famine.

Xuanyuan, spurred by his insatiable curiosity and inventive mind, decided to take matters into his own hands. He asked his father's permission to embark on an ambitious journey through the dense bamboo forests, seeking guidance from a hermit rumored to reside in the mountains. Xuanyuan's father had met the hermit decades ago while hunting in the far reaches of the province, but had heard nothing of him since.

His father knew firsthand of the hermit's knowledge and wisdom. Yet, he hesitated to let his son venture out in search of the old man. The sage was probably dead by now. And the trip was too dangerous for a boy. However, given the village’s desperate situation and no other solution at hand, he relented and allowed his son to go.

After days of arduous travel, Xuanyuan found the reclusive hermit. It took the boy a week to convince the old man to trust him. He had not seen a soul for the past twenty years and was slightly out of his mind with delusion by the time the teen found him. However, while the hermit was half-mad, his memory was intact. After the boy befriended him, the hermit gladly revealed the secret to saving the crops.

The hermit taught Xuanyuan about the delicate balance of nature and the importance of harmony in the ecosystem. He shared a method of introducing natural predators, ladybugs and spiders, to control the pests plaguing the village's rice fields. Eager to apply his newly acquired knowledge, Xuanyuan returned to the village. He then had the task of convincing his father and the skeptical villagers to adopt the hermit's approach. After much explaining and cajoling, they relented and allowed the boy to release ladybugs into the plagued fields. They also introduced spider nests to the land surrounding the rice paddies.

Over the next two months, these natural predators worked wonders, keeping the harmful pests at bay without harming the crops. The rice plantings flourished again, saving the village from impending famine. Xuanyuan's intelligence, resourcefulness, and willingness to learn from nature solved the village's problem and earned him the respect and admiration of his family and fellow villagers.

Years passed. By the age of seventeen, Xuanyuan was restless, hungering for more learning and knowledge.

"Father, I want to study with Master Wong." Master Wong was the most famous qigong teacher in China.

"But son, he lives on Wudang Mountain, a month's journey from home. Why not study with Zhen Zhu in Xian? It is only a three day ride, and his school is renown in the province."

"I want the best, father, and Master Wong's school in the Palace of Harmony is the best for qigong. My spirit is fitful and I have a deep hunger for the Dao. I will not be able to rest until I understand the ways of the world. May I go?"

His father paused to think. Decades ago he had asked his father for permission to leave home and seek his destiny. Now the tables had turned, and he realized that fears for his son's safety should not keep the boy from living his dreams. He took a deep breath and said, "I will not stop you, son. You are a force of nature! My worries appear real to me, but I know they are unfounded. I should be more concerned for anyone foolish enough to cross you! Go in peace. You have my blessing. Just remember to visit your family during the holidays. We will miss you."

"And I you, father. Thank you for your blessing."

\* \* \*

The snow fell heavily as Xuanyuan rode through the high mountain pass. It had been forty days since leaving home. He had been navigating his way to Wudang Mountain, and according to the map, he was close. Xuanyuan stopped for a brief lunch, more to provide rest to his horse than sustenance for himself. He was eager to arrive at his destination and to the warmth of a solid roof over his head after more than a month of hard travel through the mountains.

It was not more than an hour after he set off again that he saw in the far distance the great Wudang Mountain, home of the ancient Palace of Harmony. Three hours later, he was at the base, looking two thousand feet up at the palace nestled at the summit. He made camp at the bottom, knowing he would all need a good night's rest before tackling the challenging climb to the top the next day.

 At sunrise the following morning the snow had stopped, but not before leaving a foot of fresh powder. The climb took the young man three hours up narrow paths that dangerously skirted the mountain's edge. This ascent was not for the lighthearted, as generations of students had learned. Seeking out Master Wong took grit and determination, even before the first lesson began. Those who were unsure would often turn back along this dangerous mountain pass, overwhelmed with the sheer force of nature before them.

 He arrived at the third hour of the afternoon. As he approached the front steps of the palace, the sun broke through the dense clouds for the first time in days. Xuanyuan, the future emperor of China, had arrived at Master Wong's school of qigong.

\* \* \*

Master Wong was a tenth-generation qigong master and had spent a lifetime studying and teaching the ancient art. He required four hours of sleep a night and the smallest morsels of food to sustain himself. His academy was filled with the best and brightest students from all over China, hungry to learn the Daoist principles of balance, compassion, and peace. Most significantly, Master Wong was a light-bearer who carried the secret *Way of Eternal Harmony*, which was passed on from generation to generation of qigong masters.

Like all new arrivals at the school, the staff assigned Xuanyuan the most menial tasks. For the first year, his job was to wash the floors each morning, sweep the steps on the Palace's perimeter, and polish the railings. To accomplish this work, Xuanyuan had to rise two hours before the others, so he could finish and be ready to join the students for the first lesson at 5:00 am.

Study always began with an hour of meditation in "Tiger Stance." An advanced student explained the position to the young novice:

*Qigong Tiger Stance is a traditional Chinese exercise that imitates the characteristics and spirit of a tiger. In qigong, the practitioner assumes various postures, and the Tiger Stance is one of them. This posture builds strength, stability, and internal energy while promoting mental focus and concentration.*

*Here is the step-by-step breakdown for understanding how to perform the qigong Tiger Stance:*

*1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, your back straight, and your arms relaxed by your sides.*

*2. Take a step forward with your right foot, about one and a half to two times shoulder-width apart. Your toes should be pointing forward, and your feet should be parallel.*

*3. Slowly bend your knees, lowering your body into a semi-squat position. Evenly distribute the weight of your body between both legs. Keep your back straight during this movement.*

*4. As you bend your knees, visualize sinking your energy into the earth and centering it in your lower abdomen, the area below your navel.*

*5. Bring your hands up in front of your body as if holding a big ball. Your palms should face each other, with fingers gently spread apart. This arm position helps to open up the chest and promote better circulation of energy in the upper body.*

*6. While holding the Tiger Stance, focus your mind on embodying the spirit of a tiger. Imagine yourself as a strong, majestic, and focused tiger, fully present in the moment.*

*7. Maintain slow, deep, and relaxed breathing. Inhale through your nose and exhale gently through your mouth. Sync your breath with the movements, and let your breath support the flow of energy throughout your body.*

*8. After holding the stance for the desired duration, step back with your right foot to return to the starting position. Then, repeat the exercise on the other side by stepping forward with your left foot.*

*9. The key to qigong practice is to stay relaxed and avoid muscle tension. Regularly practicing the qigong Tiger Stance will improve your balance, strength, flexibility, and energy flow throughout the body. Listen to your body, start gradually, and observe the other students to refine your movements and breathing. And prepare to spend many hours practicing. The key to success is practice.*

 Xuanyuan performed Tiger Stance each morning for the next ten years. At first, the exercise was torture. Within minutes, his legs and back ached, and all he wanted to do was stand upright, shake out his legs, and walk around. But slowly, over many months, the position became second nature to him. At his six-month anniversary at the school, Xuanyuan could hold Tiger Stance for forty-five minutes with little pain or discomfort. By twelve months, he could last the entire hour with his classmates.

 Over the years, Xuanyuan learned more about the ancient art of qigong. Master Wong did not rush the process. Nor would he allow students to progress to the next level before mastering their current one. Time moved slowly at the school. But Xuanyuan was never bored. Qigong was the glue that held the world together, and learning its techniques enabled him to understand everything around him. He finally had overcome the restlessness he had felt since childhood. He still wanted to conquer the world, but from a place of peacefulness and calm, working with energy, not against it. To accomplish that, he needed to quiet his mind and 'feel' - feel the people, the natural environment, and the buildings around him. Everything radiated its own energy, and qigong enabled Xuanyuan to sense each element's unique vibration, like a fingerprint.

One day, six years into his qigong study, Xuanyuan made a startling discovery. He realized that he could influence the behavior of people around him by focusing his concentration. This awareness first occurred when he was sitting in a group meditation. As was his practice, he quieted his mind of all thoughts and distractions. After half an hour, he began projecting his thoughts out toward the people around him. He would think, "My head itches," or "I'm going to sneeze." Then he would wait. It was like fishing, casting out a baited hook. After a while, he would feel a gentle tug from another person's energy. He was luring someone else's mind to his thoughts. Now the game got fun as he tried to figure out who was nibbling his line. Within a few moments, someone would inevitably scratch their head or sneeze. No matter the message, someone would get caught up in his net.

Once he established a link, he would send additional influencing messages to the person. He thought in their direction, "Take a deep breath," or "Stretch your neck," or "Look up at the ceiling." A few moments later, they would inevitably respond to the command. Xuanyuan suspected that the other person was not even aware of his presence.

He talked privately with Master Wong about his discovery, to which his teacher gave him a surprised look.

"How long have you been doing this?" Master Wong asked.

"The past few weeks," Xuanyuan answered. "They don't know I'm there, do they?"

"No, they don't. But treat these interactions with care. You are a guest in their house, and must treat them with respect. You should only influence them in ways for their betterment. Never harm them or use them to benefit yourself. Don't treat this ability as a form of persuasion. You can always use your voice for that. What you have stumbled upon is more profound. It is a healer's gift, so make sure you approach these interactions as a healer, using them only for the other person's benefit."

"For example," Master Wong continued, “instead of using this gift to make someone scratch his head, try to sense an imbalance or disease in his body. Once you identify it, focus your energies on healing the problem. And better yet, ask them first if they want the healing instead of entering into their mind uninvited!"

"Good point," Xuanyuan said, laughing.

Master Wong understood that great power demanded great responsibility. Most people would never have the capabilities that this young man displayed, and his teacher felt obliged to develop in him an accompanying level of restraint. Xuanyuan understood his Master's concern and agreed to proceed cautiously. Nonetheless, he continued developing the technique, what we now call medical qigong or energy healing.

In addition to healing people, Xuanyuan found it possible to communicate with plants, albeit more subtly. He could stare at a plant and "feel" its energy. After enough time, he could integrate with it to get a leaf to shift position or a flower to bloom. If a plant had damage, he could focus his healing energy on that place. Sometimes it helped the plant heal. Other times not. Plants were more foreign to him than people.

Inanimate objects were the most difficult to influence. Xuanyuan would stare at a chair for a solid hour and barely feel the flow of energy within it. It was so subtle and "far away" that he could not imagine moving or altering it. That's why he was impressed with Master Wong's ability to move inanimate objects. His teacher could focus on a lightweight item, like a piece of paper, and with great effort, move it a few millimeters in one direction or another. His teacher said it was more of a parlor trick since it served no purpose but to impress his students. He was not 'healing' the paper.

"Don't waste your time with inanimate objects," he instructed his students.

\* \* \*

Xuanyuan spent ten years studying under Master Wong. He rose through the ranks, eventually becoming Master Wong's protege. In this capacity, he assisted his teacher in the school's day-to-day operations, developing curricula, and interacting with the other communities on Wudang Mountain. They needed to raise money, pay bills, defend their security, and maintain the Palace. The kitchen needed stocking, and cooks and servers required management. The school was like a small village, with over three hundred students and a dozen full-time staff.

During the spring of Xuanyuan's seventh year, Master Wong received an urgent message from a neighboring village. A large hoard of bandits was terrorizing the countryside, robbing and plundering everyone in their path. They were making their way toward Wudang Mountain, aware of its many temples and villages. In better days, when the country was under the rule of a strong king, the government would send troops to protect the palaces that adorned the sacred mountain. But in the current political environment of warring lords, places like the Palace of Harmony became a tempting target for plundering marauders. Master Wong met with his staff to plan their defenses. The thieves were estimated to be a three day journey from the Palace.

"Twelve years ago we were attacked by bandits here at the Palace," Master Wong began. "They killed a dozen of my students and staff, and stole our ancient relics, along with the majority of our food supplies. I don't want a repeat of that episode."

Xuanyuan said, "Master Wong, I have been studying the art of warfare from the texts in the Palace's library for several years. In addition, I have befriended several retired military officers who live in the neighboring villages."

"I was unaware of these activities, Xuanyuan," Master Wong said, smiling. It did not surprise the teacher that his prized student was interested in military strategy. The boy had a voracious appetite for learning and was interested in everything.

"The military arts have always intrigued me, sir. I've learned that defending the Palace from bandits will require strategic planning, physical fortifications, and security measures. May I share my thoughts?"

"Yes, of course."

"Our location is ideal. The Palace is situated on high ground with limited access points, making it difficult for bandits to approach. However, two heavily traveled paths lead from the base of the mountain to the summit. These routes are currently open, without barriers or defenses. We have neither the time nor resources to build sturdy walls and gates around the Palace. However, we can create natural watchtowers to track the enemy's progress. I have identified six peaks and overlooks that should be manned starting tomorrow. Knowing when the enemy approaches is essential to thwarting their attack."

"Please continue," said Master Wong.

"I suggest we create a defense brigade, recruiting fifty of our strongest men. We are all trained in martial arts, which will be good for hand-to-hand combat. However, I want to train them in archery as well. We have two days, so we need to start immediately. The entire school should begin making bows and arrows so we have a robust supply."

He paused, then continued, "Neighboring villages will communicate with each other using the bells found in most of our temples. I will send codes to them so they can practice ahead of time."

"What about keeping the bandits from reaching the temple mount?" asked a colleague.

"Excellent question. We need to prepare removable barricades that can be placed in choke points during the attack to slow their progress. We also need half a dozen traps consisting of boulders and tree limbs. These will significantly damage their forces. We've got gravity on our side, and they will be vulnerable to attack from above as they ascend the mountain."

"If they make it to the Palace, we need contingency plans. First, let's hide half of our food supply in the crypts. They'll never find them, and will assume the food they find is our entire stash. Second, let's carefully apply a thin coating of arsenic on the exterior of the precious items we know they will loot. The fast-acting poison will stop them dead in their tracks within an hour."

"You're sounding more like a warrior king than a monk, Xuanyuan!" teased Master Wong. He was pleased to see his young disciple taking action to protect the Palace.

"Master Wong, you and the other elders should stay in the crypts with the food in the event that the Palace is breached. You can remain there until the hoodlums depart."

Xuanyuan looked at everyone in the group, assessing their level of determination. He was pleased by what he saw. They were ready to fight to protect their home.

"There's one final strategy I want us to employ. Let's start spreading a rumor that the palaces on Wudang Mountain are protected by ghost guardians. Since we're in the rainy season right now I thought it appropriate to use the Daolaogui."

"Yes, marvelous," Master Wong exclaimed. "The Daolaogui will be perfect protectors. Tell us what you know of our new primordial benefactors."

"Legend holds that the Daolaogui haunt the deep mountains of Hubei Province. They are often accompanied by strong winds and heavy rain when they appear. The sound of the ghosts is like a blood-curdling scream. People call it 'ghost screaming' or 'ghost howling.' They lurk behind inclement weather to hide their presence until they can strike and destroy.

"The Daolaogui exhale a highly poisonous gas from their mouth, which shoots at people like an arrow. Victims swell up quickly and die in less than a day. Our arsenic ploy will fit in well with this story. The Daolaogui include male and female ghosts. The male ghost is dark green, and its toxicity is violent, while the female ghost is purple and slightly less toxic. These ghosts are incredibly fierce and are known to haunt the damp and cold places deep within the mountains."

Xuanyuan continued, "And our story will include the fact that Wudang Mountain has seven particularly violent Daolaogui ghosts. The monks of the Palace of Harmony cared for them when they were abandoned as baby goblins thousands of years ago, raising them as their own. Now, the ghosts protect the monks as they would their own family."

"Perfect," shouted Master Wong. The other monks agreed. "We shall certainly be victorious against the marauders with these plans in place. Alright everyone, let's get to work!"

And with that, the entire community and all those in neighboring temples began preparations for the looming attack. People worked around the clock building lookouts, setting booby traps, storing food, and coating precious items with deadly poison. Forty-eight hours later, they were ready. Xuanyuan reviewed the plans with Master Wong and the team of leaders. Everything was in order and ready to go. Now they just had to sit back and wait. Six hours later, the first alarm was triggered.

The lookouts saw the approaching hoard, a group of fifty heavily armed thugs crossing the plains surrounding Wudang Mountain. Word of the Daolaogui had reached the bandits, thanks to a speedy messenger who left the mountain two days prior and rode on horseback to a village in the valley on the bandits' route. Not surprisingly, when the marauders arrived at the trail leading up the mountain, they stopped.

What followed was a heated discussion about whether to continue to the temples above or cut their losses and move on, thereby avoiding the malevolent ghosts. The debate became heated, followed by shouts and fistfights among the robbers. This melee, in turn, led to heavy drinking and a decision to camp at the base of the mountain for the night. They would decide what to do in the morning.

This turn of events presented Xuanyuan with an opportunity, and he quickly made a plan to capitalize on it. In the dead of night, he and six of his best 'soldiers' hiked down the mountain and snuck into the robbers' camp. They were all sound asleep in a drunken stupor. The monks could have slit their throats, but that seemed unsportsmanlike. Instead, they took out paintbrushes and coated five of the men's sword handles with arsenic. Ten minutes later, they were heading up the mountain back to the Palace.

An hour after sunrise, the monks heard screams of panic and fear as five of the men in the group of thieves began foaming at the mouth and dying from poison. It took just thirty minutes for the poison to overtake them after grabbing the hilts of their swords upon waking and getting dressed. The others believed that the ghosts had attacked during the night, and they fled as quickly as they could. The bandits left the valley and the province to get as far away from the demon monsters as possible. No one ever heard from them again.

All villagers and palace staff celebrated the great victory, and all hailed the bold leadership of the young monk Xuanyuan. It took a week for life to return to normal. Once the commotion passed, Xuanyuan was surprised at how much he had enjoyed the crisis. Instead of being anxious about the impending attack, he had felt enthralled and empowered. He was not going to let anyone hurt his adopted family. And while he appreciated the skills he had developed mastering qigong, he found himself longing for more excitement in his life.

\* \* \*

Three years passed, in what seemed the blink of an eye. Day-to-day life generated a satisfying momentum of activity. Xuanyuan woke early, practiced qigong, and helped Master Wong manage the Palace. He was content. His yearnings for excitement following the marauders' attack had faded, overtaken by the comforting hum of routine. So it came as a shock to Xuanyuan when Master Wong became ill soon after celebrating his one-hundredth birthday. His decline was rapid and, according to the doctors, irreversible. What happened during the next few days, before the Master died, would change the course of Xuanyuan's life forever.

On his deathbed, Master Wong called his prized student to his side, telling Xuanyuan to bring paper and pen. He then dictated a speech from memory, having the young man write down every word. It took over three hours before Master Wong was satisfied. After finishing, he turned to Xuanyuan and said, "And now it's time for you to leave the Palace of Harmony."

"What do you mean, Master? I must stay and keep the school running."

"That's a job for another person. You're called to different tasks. I have foreseen your future, and it does not include staying at this school. I will be gone soon, and when I pass, you must leave. Go to the capital. Watch for signs and omens, and follow the opportunities that present themselves to you. Mark my words, young man - you will achieve great things for China and for the world."

Xuanyuan was not happy with his Master's instructions. But he answered, "Of course, I will do as you say. You speak of me accomplishing great things. I would like to know what you see in my future."

"I cannot reveal all, for that would disrupt the balance of the Dao. However, I can tell you this much. You will become a great leader. The skills of introspection and patience that you have developed on Wudang Mountain will serve you well when you rule. In middle age, you will write a book containing your accumulated knowledge of the Dao and Chinese medicine. This book will be a template for future generations. And as the last light-bearer, you will preserve what I have dictated to you today, the secret of the *Way of Eternal Harmony*. Tell no one, but safeguard the knowledge. This, my son, is your most important task."

"The future is a mystery to me, Master Wong. But I trust your insight. I won't let you down."

"I know. Now go and let me rest."

The next day, as the sun rose over Wudang Mountain, Master Wong, the most revered qigong master in the history of China, passed from this earth. The students and staff at the school mourned his death for a month. Then, just as students and staff were finding their feet again after the great loss, another shock came upon them. Xuanyuan announced that he would be leaving.

"You can't go. Who will take Master Wong's place if not you?" they asked.

"Master Ting has worked side-by-side with Master Wong for thirty years. He is wise and kind. Our teacher has chosen him to run the school. Master Ting, are you ready to take this position?"

"Yes, I am," he answered.

And so, Xuanyuan packed his possessions and left the Palace of Harmony and Wudang Mountain. He would return frequently in the years to come. His time at the school had been life-changing. Now he was ready to move on toward his destiny.

##

## Chapter Six: *Huangdi Neijing*

Years later, Xuanyuan, now the Yellow Emperor of China, sat down to write the book foretold by Master Wong. What follows are sections from the first chapter of Huangdi’s book, *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*, as translated by Maoshing Ni.

*In ancient times the Yellow Emperor, Huangdi, was known to have been a child prodigy. As he grew he showed himself to be sincere, wise, honest, and compassionate. He became very learned and developed keen powers for observing nature. His people recognized him as a natural leader and chose him as their emperor.*

*During his reign, Huangdi discoursed on medicine, health, lifestyle, nutrition, and Daoist cosmology with his ministers Qi Bo, Lei Gong, and others. Their first discussion began with Huangdi inquiring, ‘I’ve heard that in the days of old everyone lived one hundred years without showing the usual signs of aging. In our time, however, people age prematurely, living only fifty years. Is this due to a change in the environment, or is it because people have lost the correct way of life?’*

*Qi Bo replied, ‘In the past, people practiced the Dao, the Way of Life. They understood the principle of balance, of yin and yang, as represented by the transformation of the energies of the universe. Thus, they formulated practices such as Qigong, an exercise combining stretching, massaging, and breathing to promote energy flow, and meditation to help maintain and harmonize themselves with the universe. They ate a balanced diet at regular times, arose and retired at regular hours, avoided overstressing their bodies and minds, and refrained from overindulgence of all kinds. They maintained well-being of body and mind; thus it is not surprising that they lived over one hundred years.*

*‘These days, people have changed their way of life. They drink wine as though it were water, indulge excessively in destructive activities, drain their jing - the body’s essence that is stored in the kidneys - and deplete their qi. They do not know the way of conserving their energy and vitality. Seeking emotional excitement and momentary pleasures, people disregard the natural rhythm and order of the universe. They fail to regulate their lifestyle and diet, and sleep improperly. So it is not surprising that they look old at fifty and die soon after.*

*‘The accomplished ones of ancient times advised people to guard themselves against zei feng, disease-causing factors. On the mental level, one should remain calm and avoid excessive desires and fantasies, recognizing and maintaining the natural purity and clarity of the mind. When internal energies are able to circulate smoothly and freely, and the energy of the mind is not scattered, but is focused and concentrated, illness and disease can be avoided.*

*‘Previously, people led a calm and honest existence, detached from undue desire and ambition; they lived with an untainted conscience and without fear. They were active, but never depleted themselves. Because they lived simply, these individuals knew contentment, as reflected in their diet of basic but nourishing foods and attire that was appropriate to the season but never luxurious. Since they were happy with their position in life, they did not feel jealousy or greed. They had compassion for others and were helpful and honest, free from destructive habits. They remained unshakable and unswayed by temptations, and they were able to stay centered even when adversity arose. They treated others justly, regardless of their level of intelligence or social position.’*

*Huangdi concluded, ‘I’ve heard of people in ancient times, spoken of as the immortals, who knew the ways of the universe and held yin and yang and the world, in the palms of their hands. They extracted essence from nature and practiced various disciplines such as Dai-in and Qigong, and breathing and visualization exercises, to integrate the body, mind, and spirit. They remained undisturbed and thus attained extraordinary levels of accomplishment. They healed the sick, raised the dead, and held the key to everlasting life. Someday their secret may be revealed to the world.’ - Huangdi Neijing, Chapter 1*

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## Chapter Seven: An Intriguing Proposal

After Lily, James, Meijin, and Carlos finished dinner, Carlos refilled everyone’s wine glasses and began speaking.

“I wanted to tell you about a fascinating development in my research on *Huangdi Neijing*. You already know about my work with the text. But there is something you probably don’t know. Ancient legends describe a missing section of *Huangdi Neijing* involving Master Wang, the famous qigong master who lived five thousand years ago at the Palace of Harmony, a magnificent center of learning on the top of Wudang Mountain.

Carlos continued, “The story passed down through the ages claimed that Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor, traveled to see Master Wong around 2660 B.C. when he was a young man and spent the next ten years studying under the Master’s tutelage. When Master Wong was one hundred years old, he became ill. He took his star pupil aside on his deathbed and told him a secret. Master Wong confided in the young man that he was not just a qigong master. He was a light-bearer who held a secret so important that the ancestors had passed it down for a thousand generations. Each light-bearer kept the knowledge and passed it to the next in line, keeping the secret alive. Master Wong then shared the secret with Huangdi, called the *Way of Eternal Harmony* . The next morning, Master Wong died. Soon after, Huangdi left Wudang Mountain to pursue his destiny.

“Decades later, after Huangdi was well into his reign as Emperor of China, he sat down to write the classic tome on Chinese medicine, *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*. Deep within this text, the Emperor prepared to include the secret knowledge he had acquired from Master Wong, the *Way of Eternal Harmony*.

“But before his book was published, the Emperor had a change of heart and removed the passage. He remembered his Master’s warning not to reveal the secret before it’s time, for the knowledge it contained was too profound to be casually revealed. Instead, Huangdi ordered his most skilled artisans to construct a golden puzzle box emblazoned with a ruby-encrusted dragon where he placed the manuscript, the *Way of Eternal Harmony*. He then stored the box in the palace crypts, which remained hidden for millennia.

Carlos continued, “Over the years, historians have speculated whether the story about Huangdi and Master Wong was apocryphal or true. No one has ever discovered the location of the Golden Box or the manuscript hidden within. That is, until I stumbled upon a fascinating reference in my research. I was examining an index of Chinese artifacts housed in the British Museum that the British had stolen from the magnificent imperial palace complex known as the Forbidden City outside of Beijing at the end of the First Opium War.

Carlos paused, took a sip of wine, and then continued.

“Let me give you a little background. The First Opium War, from 1839 to 1842, was fought between the Qing Dynasty of China and the British Empire. The conflict arose over trade disputes and Britain’s desire to continue its lucrative opium trade with China. The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842. Under the treaty, China ceded the island of Hong Kong to the British Empire, and several ports, including Shanghai, were opened for British trade and influence.

“As the British were leaving China, they stole much antiquity from the Chinese. The Chinese government has repeatedly requested the British return these priceless items, but the British refuse to acknowledge their existence.

“Deep within the archives of this material, I discovered a reference to a small golden puzzle box, elaborately embossed with a red dragon made from priceless rubies. Museum records indicate that the staff has never been able to unlock it. The box, along with the other stolen artifacts, are kept out of the public eye deep within the storage rooms of the British Museum due to the tension about their nefarious acquisition in the 1800s.

“I found the mention of this golden puzzle box intriguing, as it reminded me of the legend about Huangdi, Master Wong, and the Palace of Harmony. I’m wondering if there is any connection between them. The bottom line is that I want to see that box for myself and find a way to open it. Just imagine if it contained the ancient manuscript The *Way of Eternal Harmony*!

“Incredible,” exclaimed Lily.

“Amazing,” chimed James.

“I told Carlos that we had to tell you about this. I knew you’d be interested,” said Meijin, bursting with excitement.

“Do you want to come with us?” asked Carlos. “We’re planning a trip to London to examine that golden box.”

Lily and James looked at each other, then at Carlos. “We’ll have to check with Lily’s parents. But if they’re up for watching the kids, we’re all in!”

“That’s awesome,” said Meijin. “It will be a wonderful adventure!”

“There’s just one small problem,” Carlos continued with a smile. “We can’t just show up at the British Museum and ask to see their collection of Chinese artifacts. The items technically don’t even exist.”

Lily asked, “Carlos, how were you even able to see the index?”

“That’s a funny story. I was able to access the museum index through a circuitous back channel connection at N.C. State. It ends up that our department Chair is on good terms with the head of the British Museum. However, while that channel worked to give me access to the index, it's not strong enough to get us permission to see the materials themselves.”

“So what are you going to do?” asked James.

Carlos pointed to Meijin. “I have a friend,” Meijin said, smiling. “My roommate from college is Selina Fitzgerald.”

“You mean the wife of the British Prime Minister?” exclaimed Lily.

“That’s right,” said Meijin. “She met Sebastian Fitzgerald when he was a rising M.P. They fell in love and got married. Since then, Fitzgerald’s political career blossomed, leading to his ascension to Prime Minister last year.”

“You’ve stayed in touch with her?” asked James.

“Oh, yes. We talk all the time. She’s been pestering me to visit for a while.”

“But will she be able to get us the access we need?” asked James.

“That is the big question,” said Carlos with a smile.

“There's only one way to find out,” laughed Meijin. With that, she grabbed her phone and dialed a number, putting the call on speaker.

“Meijin, you sly mathematician, I’m so glad you called,” said a cheerful-sounding Selina Fitzgerald. “Were your ears burning? I was at a reception at Oxford this afternoon and had a nice chat with the head of their math department. Lovely man named Harold Bloom.”

“Yes, I’ve read some of his papers,” Meijin said.

“Well, he’s also read some of yours, my dear! Very impressed with your paper last year in the Journal of the American Mathematical Society.”

“I’m glad he enjoyed it,” she said modestly. “Hey, Selina, I’ve got you on speaker with Carlos and our friends Lily and James Chen.”

“Hi Carlos! And greetings to the Chens!” Selina said.

“Hi Selina,” they answered in unison.

Meijin continued, “You know how you’ve been bugging me to visit? Well, Carlos and I are ready. And we want to bring the Chens with us. There’s an adventure brewing as we speak, and we need you to be a part of it.”

“How mysterious,” exclaimed Selina. “I’m intrigued. What exactly are you planning, and what role will I play?”

“Your role, my dear friend, may require pulling a few strings.”

“Meijin, you know I love pulling strings, especially for my roommate! What do you need?”

Meijin explained the situation, including Carlos’ research and his discovery of the cache of Chinese artifacts at the British Museum.

Selina responded, “I’ll make some calls tomorrow. I can’t imagine that it will be a problem. The museum will probably just ask that you keep the visit on the Q.T., given the political sensitivity of the artifacts.”

“Yes, we have no problem with that,” Meijin replied. “Keep me posted. We’re ready to fly over any time. It will be great to see you again. It’s been too long!”

The following afternoon Selina called Meijin back, confirming that she could set up a viewing of the artifacts. Selina would join them as planned. They agreed to come the following week.

**\* \* \***

If Carlos had any chance of opening that puzzle box, it would only be possible because of his wife, Meijin. In addition to being a math whiz, Meijin was a Chinese puzzle box master. She was ranked as one of the five most accomplished puzzle box masters in all of China, thanks to an annual competition hosted by the Chinese government. Meijin started participating in the event when she was a graduate student at MIT. She got second prize that year, the youngest person ever to rank in the top ten. Since then, she'd placed anywhere from first (three times) to fifth (once).

She credited her success with puzzle boxes to the skills passed down from her uncle, grandmother, great-grandfather, and probably beyond, although they did not have records going back that far. These skills did not grow on trees. If your ancient relative had the talent, chances are they learned it from one of their relatives and back multiple generations.

In addition to Meijin's genetic predisposition to solving puzzle boxes, she benefited from being a certified math genius. The combination was one of the reasons she dominated the competition each year in Beijing.

 Meijin gave her friends an overview of these unique boxes.

"Chinese puzzle boxes incorporate intricate mechanisms and require a series of precise manipulations to unlock. They are often made of metal and have ornate designs.

"These magnificent boxes typically consist of multiple interlocking pieces or components that must be positioned or moved in a specific sequence to release. The mechanisms can involve rotations, slides, pushes, pulls, or other types of movements. Each move in the puzzle lock sequence is usually interconnected with the next, creating a complex and challenging puzzle-solving experience.

"The designs of Chinese puzzle locks can vary greatly, ranging from traditional and historical patterns to more contemporary and artistic creations. Some puzzle locks feature knobs, cylinders, engraved designs, and decorative gemstones, enhancing their functional and aesthetic appeal. They often contain riddles, which require specific knowledge or problem-solving to answer. You must solve one level of the puzzle entirely before being able to move on to the next. And if you pick the wrong option, you jeopardize destroying the box's contents. They are often crafted with fail safes to prevent unauthorized access.

Meijin continued, "These puzzle boxes provide a tactile and intellectual challenge, requiring problem-solving skills, dexterity, knowledge, and patience to solve. The fact that the staff of the British Museum has possessed this particular puzzle box for over a century without being able to open it speaks volumes to the intricacy and complexity of its mechanisms, along with the knowledge that it may require. It also is a reminder of the daunting task before us!"

##

## Chapter Eight: Quest for the Golden Box

Carlos, Meijin, Lily, and James flew to London the following week. That evening, they met up with Meijin's friend Selina and had a lovely dinner. The next morning, they gathered in front of the British Museum. Carlos wondered to himself if this regal building held the ancient treasure he sought. The museum stood majestically in the heart of London, an architectural masterpiece with its iconic neoclassical facade. The building's exterior was constructed with a blend of Portland stone and imposing columns, exuding a sense of solidity and timelessness. A grand staircase marked the entrance, and the steps led to an impressive set of bronze double doors.

Looking up, they noticed an intricately crafted pediment adorned with sculptures and friezes depicting scenes from different cultures and civilizations. As they drew nearer, the museum's facade became more imposing, with its sheer size giving an impression of a treasure trove brimming with antiquities and cultural artifacts from all corners of the globe.

Once inside, they were required to sign several non-disclosure agreements, promising to keep their findings secret. Security guards then escorted them below. As they descended to the lower floors of the museum, a sense of wonder and mystery overtook them. These lower levels were not accessible to the general public and served as secure repositories for the museum's vast and precious collections. The lower floors were spread out as a labyrinth of climate-controlled rooms and corridors, carefully designed to preserve the artifacts in optimal conditions. The air was regulated to maintain specific humidity and temperature levels, protecting the delicate materials from deterioration.

Shelving units and storage systems lined the walls, meticulously organized to house the vast artifacts. Each shelf held rows of ancient pottery, sculptures, textiles, coins, and other objects, carefully labeled and cataloged for easy retrieval. Dim lighting and motion-sensor-activated illumination helped conserve energy while providing adequate visibility when staff entered the storage areas.

As the friends walked through the corridors, they caught glimpses of intriguing and diverse pieces from different eras and civilizations peeking out from behind glass cases and fabric wraps. The atmosphere on the lower floors was one of quiet reverence, acknowledging the artifacts' historical significance and cultural importance. As they descended deeper into the well-organized catacombs, they heard the occasional hushed footsteps of museum staff retrieving artifacts or moving an item for research or exhibition purposes.

Security measures were stringent, with surveillance cameras discreetly placed to ensure the safety and protection of the museum's priceless treasures. The museum restricted access to authorized personnel only, and most visitors were prohibited from entering these sensitive areas to avoid any potential damage to the artifacts. In the depths of the British Museum, the lower floors held a hidden world of history and human ingenuity, carefully safeguarding countless ancient stories, awaiting the day they might be unveiled to the public or studied by researchers to enrich our understanding of the past.

The items Carlos sought, however, were not intended for public display. The museum kept these Chinese artifacts hidden away for political reasons. The British government was not proud of how they acquired these priceless Chinese relics, but they were unwilling to return them, especially to the current Communist government. As such, they had remained hidden and secret for over one hundred and fifty years. That is, until Carlos unearthed an inventory list, and Selina Fitsgerald called in a favor. And now, due to these unusual circumstances, they found themselves admitted into a shelf-lined room containing 132 boxes of Chinese antiquities.

After searching for over an hour through dozens of storage bins, they found a small golden box about sixteen inches wide, twelve inches deep, and eight inches tall. A magnificent ruby-encrusted red dragon embossed the box's cover. Carlos' heart pounded with excitement as he carefully lifted it out of the storage container. This box clearly fit the description of the ancient legend. Upon closer examination, Meijin confirmed it was a classic Chinese puzzle box. In addition, the box was ancient, well over one thousand years old, yet in pristine condition. She wondered if a puzzle box this old would still work.

The staff at the British Museum had spent decades trying to decipher its codes, unable to get beyond the first layer of the puzzle. And they knew better than to force the box open, as it might jeopardize the contents inside. Many Chinese puzzle boxes included mechanisms to destroy their contents if forcibly opened, to safeguard them from uninvited eyes. They could tell that the box had never been opened, even by the Chinese. Did the Chinese also lack the know-how to open the box, or were they honoring the Yellow Emperor's request to keep it locked and its contents secret?

As she assessed the ancient puzzle box, Meijin was awed by the elegant complexity of its design. She quickly determined that it had five major components. Each element had several corresponding actions. But how could they establish the correct order to proceed? The solution lay hidden in the engraving on the cover of the golden box.

The puzzle box had a sliding panel designed to release horizontally to the right. To make that happen, Meijin needed to solve a series of complex calculations. This initial movement was unique, but she had seen similar ones. It took her twenty minutes adjusting various mechanisms on the box to access a small lever. She then moved the lever downward approximately three millimeters, which triggered the slow, steady release of the first sliding panel.

The panel emerging from the right side of the box displayed an elaborate scene. A leopard was rising out of the sea, inset with dozens of gems. The craftsmanship was exquisite. The animal had a set of horns, and on each horn there was a crown. Its feet were not of a leopard, but of a bear. And its mouth was much larger, with huge incisors, like a lion. Next to the beast was inscribed the number 13. On the bottom of the panel were three cylinders, each numbered 5 through 15. The puzzle box artisan designed the dials to rotate and display a single number. The top of the first knob showed the image of the leopard’s head, the second of the horns, and the third of the crown.

Meijin explained that puzzle boxes opened in stages. Solving one step enabled another level to appear. To open the box, the process must continue until the final lock is released. This level required setting the three cylinders to the correct values. However, if they chose the wrong numbers, the container would lock permanently. This is why no one had ever attempted to open the box. It was too dangerous to proceed without knowing the correct digits. The puzzle box did not allow for guessing.

The challenge before them was monumental. Meijin explained, "Combination probability involves elements created under specific conditions and restrictions. The combination may consist entirely of unique features or include repeated elements, requiring them to be in a particular order or have them all present. In mathematics, understanding the parameters of a combination allows you to calculate the different number of possible combinations that meet those requirements and, as a result, the probability of a specific outcome occurring.

She continued, "Finding how many permutations exist for a combination that allows for repetitions is the simplest of the different combination calculations. Multiply the number of options for each element in the permutation by the power of the number of elements. For example, in our case, the puzzle box has three rotating cylinders with 10 numerals on each. To open this level, we need to turn each cylinder to the correct number. There are 10 options for each element and three elements, so you multiply 10 by itself three times. Thus, there are one thousand permutations in this first level of the puzzle box."

"A thousand possibilities?" exclaimed Carlos. "It's impossible. We'll never figure it out."

Meijin continued, "You're right, our chances don't look good. The only way to solve this puzzle is if we can identify the clues and solve the riddle. There is no way to guess our way to a solution."

Given this sobering assessment, they focused on the images before them. The picture of the leopard and corresponding numbers on the dials did not correlate. The first dial clearly referenced the leopard’s head, but they did not know which number to select. The second dial pointed to the leopard’s horns, but again the numbers 5 through 15 did not make sense. There were two horns, but the dial did not have 2 as an option. And the same held for the crown, requiring a number between 5 and 15.

Was there an ancient Chinese legend involving a leopard rising out of the sea, with bear claws, and a lion’s mouth? And what about the number 13 displayed below? On top of that, what was the connection between the numbers on the dial and the images of the head, horns, and crown? Carlos admitted that he had never encountered this grouping of images in a Chinese text. Fifteen minutes passed, as the friends stared at the panel in frustration. Their feelings of desperation increased with each passing moment.

Suddenly, Lily declared, "I can't believe it!"

"What?" Carlos asked.

"I think I know the solution, but it doesn't make any sense."

"What do you mean?"

Lily took a deep breath, trying to comprehend what she was seeing. "I mean, I recognize these clues, but they have nothing to do with Chinese civilization. Hold on."

Lily took out her phone, opened an app, scrolled to a section, and held it up for them to read. As they scanned the text in front of them, their jaws dropped. They were flabbergasted! The solution to the first layer of the puzzle box was displayed on the screen before them. But it didn’t seem possible.

"There's only one way to find out if this is correct," Carlos said. He carefully set the numbers on the box according to the document on Lily's phone. He moved the leopard head dial to 7. Next, he lined up the horn dial to 10. Finally, he set the crown dial to 10.

Within seconds they heard internal mechanisms moving deep within the golden box. A plate on the west side of the box slowly started to emerge. It was the second panel. They shouted for joy!

“I can’t believe that worked,” said Carlos.

“Me neither,” added James. “Lily, read it out loud so I can get my mind wrapped around what just happened.”

“OK,” said Lily. And she began reading:

*“Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having* ***seven heads*** *and* ***ten horns****, and on his horns* ***ten crowns****, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a* ***leopard****, his feet were like the* ***feet of a bear****, and his mouth like the* ***mouth of a lion****.” - Revelation 13:1-2*

“But how is this possible,” James asked. “A Chinese artisan designed this puzzle box five thousand years ago. He could not have known anything about the Bible or the *Book of Revelation* because neither of them had been written yet.”

“I know,” answered Lily, “but whether they knew about the Bible or not, the puzzle was based on these numbers and images. It’s too specific to be a coincidence.”

“How did you even know to look in the Bible?” asked Meijin.

“I’ve been reading the Bible since I was a kid. The Book of Revelation is one of my favorites, filled with vivid imagery and profound symbolism. As I was looking at the clues on the puzzle box, my brain clicked. And while it’s unfathomable to me how this book answered the riddle on the puzzle box, I’m thrilled that it did!”

“We’ve got a problem,” said Carlos, pointing to the box.

They noticed that the panel had only emerged two inches before stopping dead in its tracks. They could see that there were buttons and images on the plate, but without releasing further, they would not be able to proceed.

"What's happening?" asked Lily. "Why is it stopping?"

Meijin responded, "Don't worry. This action is typical for a multi-layered puzzle box. I need to perform additional calculations and adjust the dials below for the panel to fully display. This puzzle box contains two types of challenges. One requires puzzle box expertise, which I can perform. The second involves expertise that, miraculously, Lily is well suited to accomplish.

It took Meijin twenty minutes to manipulate the intricate mechanisms on the west side of the box before the second panel fully emerged. When it did, the friends saw that it contained 17 push buttons, each adorned with the image of an animal. Twelve animals were from the Chinese zodiac, including a rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig. Five additional buttons contained the images of a bear, elephant, leopard, rhinoceros, and lion. While the meticulously etched images were small, their simple designs were easily recognizable. The artisans responsible for this work were incredibly skilled.

Below the buttons were two dials. The first was numbered 1 through 100, and the second contained the values 111, 222, 333, 444, 555, 666, 777, 888, and 999. Below the dials was the number 13, just as it appeared on the previous panel.

Lily said, “This builds on the first panel. The number 13 probably means we’re still in the thirteenth chapter of Revelation. Let me read the relevant portions and see what pops.”

“*Now the beast which I saw was like a* ***leopard****, his feet were like the feet of a* ***bear****, and his mouth like the mouth of a* ***lion****. The* ***dragon*** *gave him his power, his throne, and great authority…* [*And*](http://biblehub.com/revelation/13-5.htm) *he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for* ***forty-two*** *months…* [*Here*](http://biblehub.com/revelation/13-18.htm) *is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is* ***666****.” - Revelation 13:1-2, 5, 18*

“OK,” said Carlos. “Let’s do this.” He carefully pushed down four buttons on the panel: the leopard, the bear, the lion, and the dragon. He then set the first dial to 42 and the second to 666. They all held their breath.

Within a few moments, they heard the sound of gears turning within the box. A new panel began sliding out of the east side! Meijin performed her puzzle box magic, enabling it to fully extend. This panel revealed an image of a lamb standing on the side of a mountain. Underneath the lamb was the number 14. And below it were six dials, each ordered 0 through 10. Below the dials was a single rotating knob. Each rotation displayed a different musical instrument: a lyre, flute, harp, drum, horn, and rattle.

“This third panel removes any remaining doubt,” Lily said. “Check out Revelation Chapter 14.”

*“Then I looked, and behold, a* ***Lamb*** *standing on Mount Zion, and with Him* ***one hundred and forty-four thousand****, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their* ***harps****.” -Revelation 14: 1-3*

Carlos set each of the six dials: 1 - 4 - 4 - 0 - 0 - 0. Then he turned the knob to display the harp. Once again, they heard the now familiar sounds of the internal workings of the golden box. After Meijin’s handiwork, a fourth panel opened from the south face of the box.

The fourth panel contained three images, each with a dial underneath. The first image was an angel, the second looked like a man with a bird mask and hat, and the third was a bowl. The dials numbered 1-10. At the bottom of the panel was embossed the number 15.

Lily said, “Let’s read Revelation Chapter 15.”

*“Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous:* ***seven angels*** *having the* ***seven last plagues****, for in them the wrath of God is complete…* [*Then*](http://biblehub.com/revelation/15-7.htm) *one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels* ***seven golden bowls*** *full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever.* [*The*](http://biblehub.com/revelation/15-8.htm) *temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.” -Revelation 15: 1, 7-8*

Carlos said, “The first one is clearly the angel and the third is the bowl. Do you think the man in a bird mask represents plagues?”

Lily answered, “Yes, that’s a plague mask all right, plain as day. It was commonly used during the Black Plague.”

“But the puzzle box was made millenia before the Black Plague!” Selina said, wonder in her voice. “How could the artisan who designed this image know what a plague mask even looked like?”

“Maybe they had plagues back then too,” suggested James.

“Or maybe, when it comes to this puzzle box, time becomes extremely fluid,” said Lily.

“In any case,” Carlos said, bringing their attention back to the matter at hand, “we’ve got more riddles to solve.”

“You’re right Carlos, first things first. Let’s get this box open. Then we can figure out how to explain these mysterious riddles,” said Lily.

Carlos turned the three dials to 7, 7, and 7. Five seconds later, a fifth panel slowly churned its way out of the north face of the box.

The fifth panel was adorned with a woman in a purple and red robe sitting on a ruby-encrusted red dragon, similar to the dragon emblazoned on the cover of the puzzle box. Below the woman and dragon were three dials. The first two dials were numbered 1-10, topped with a dragon’s head and a horn, respectively. A third dial rotated, displaying three images: a plate, a bowl, and a cup. At the bottom of the panel was the number 17.

Lily read aloud:

“[*So*](http://biblehub.com/revelation/17-3.htm) *he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a* ***scarlet beast*** *which was full of names of blasphemy, having* ***seven heads*** *and* ***ten horns****.* [*The*](http://biblehub.com/revelation/17-4.htm)***woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet****, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a* ***golden cup*** *full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.” -Revelation 17:3-4*

Carlos set the first two dials to 7 and 10, and selected the cup on the third dial. Then they waited.

Within moments, gears began turning, and a final panel emerged from the top of the golden box. This panel was different from the previous five. It was more elaborate, encrusted with magnificent gems and ornate designs. The image was that of a king sitting on a white, pearl-encrusted horse with a sword coming out of his mouth. Below the image were the words “万王之王万主之主,” which translates to “King of Kings, Lord of Lords.” Below was a dial numbered 1-22.

Lily scrolled through her phone for a minute and said, “It’s chapter 19.” Then she read aloud:

“[*Now*](http://biblehub.com/revelation/19-11.htm) *I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness, He judges and makes war.* [*His*](http://biblehub.com/revelation/19-12.htm) *eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.* [*And*](http://biblehub.com/revelation/19-14.htm) *the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written:*

*KING OF KINGS AND*

*LORD OF LORDS.”*

*Revelation 19:11-16*

“There are no numbers referenced in this passage,” said Carlos.

Lily thought for a moment, then said, “The dial stops at number 22. Why that number?”

“Maybe we should pick 19, since the passage is in the 19th chapter,” suggested James.

“Wait a minute,” Lily said. “There are 22 chapters in the Book of Revelation. I bet the number we’re looking for is 22.”

“That makes sense,” Carlos said. “Let’s do it.” He set the dial to 22.

A moment later, the golden box opened!

\* \* \*

Carlos carefully lifted the cover of the unlocked puzzle box. There, before them, was the ancient manuscript. It appeared perfectly preserved. The document, written on thick parchment, was entitled *Way of Eternal Harmony*. The last page displayed the date *2650 A.D*. and was signed, *Huangdi, Emperor of China*.

Upon further inspection, Meijin confirmed two intriguing facts. First, the box had never been opened. A mechanism inside tracked the number of times the cover had been lifted. It registered “1”. They were the first people to set eyes on the manuscript in five thousand years! Her second observation was that, as she suspected, the box contained a booby trap that would have shredded the document had it been opened by force.

Since the museum would not allow them to make a copy of the manuscript, or even take digital images on their phone, Carlos, James, Lily, and Meijin painstakingly copied the entire manuscript by hand. If word got out about their discovery, the British would have an international scandal on their hands. The Chinese government would be furious that one of their most precious historical documents was being held by Great Britain. The museum permitted Levy to study the manuscript but gave him strict instructions not to tell anyone about his discovery. When they had finished transcribing, Meijin restored the document to its original home and relocked the box, safely sealing the contents inside.

That night, the two couples enjoyed a festive dinner with Selina and her husband, Prime Minister Sebastian Fitzgerald, at 10 Downing Street, London. The Prime Minister was intrigued by the manuscript and made Carlos promise to let him know what he discovered after translating and studying it.

\* \* \*

The following day was Sunday and their flight was scheduled for 7:00 pm that evening. Over breakfast at the hotel, Lily said, “Hey guys, I have an idea. There’s an amazing pastor in town who I follow online. His name is Richard Belmar. He has a church in London. Why don’t we head over there for worship this morning? We have the time, and I think you’ll enjoy the experience.”

“That’s a great idea, Lily,” said Meijin. “What do you think, Carlos?”

“I could use a little grounding in the word,” he answered. “It’s been a whirlwind few days.”

“James, what do you think?” asked Lily.

“I’m in,” he answered with a smile. I’ve been wanting to hear Pastor Richard preach in person for years.”

After breakfast the group headed across town and arrived just in time for the 10:00 am service. After a lively praise service, Pastor Richard got up to give his sermon.

“Good morning, Church. Today I’d like to discuss the perplexing question of why God created us. By understanding this question, we might gain a clearer picture of our purpose as human beings. I will be quoting from the Book of Genesis throughout the homily. First, let us pray.

“Our Father, we ask Your Holy Spirit to be our teacher this morning as we bow to the authority of Your Word. In Jesus’ name, we pray, amen.

“From a biblical perspective, there are two primary reasons for our creation. First, to populate and rule over the Earth. And second, to be in a relationship with God. God created us to rule over the Earth, including plants, insects, birds, fish, reptiles, and animals. This is the high-altitude view of creation. God planted people in cities, towns, and the countryside to work the land, raise animals, and interact with each other.

*“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the Earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Genesis 1:27-28*

“The second reason why God created us was for relationship. This is the low-altitude view of creation, looking down at Adam and Eve as they found their voices and learned to speak directly to God in the Garden of Eden.

*“Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul.” Genesis 2:7*

“God breathed life into Adam, giving him a living soul (consciousness) in which to perceive his creator. God gave Adam and Eve the tools for intimate relationships – emotions to feel and free will to choose. Of all creation, they were the only creatures on Earth who could experience the presence of God.

“These two reasons for creation in Genesis answer a puzzling question. When Adam and Eve left Eden, cities were already populated. How is this possible if they were God’s first creation? The answer is explained above – there were two parallel creations – one to populate the Earth and the other to create a relationship with God. The people already dwelling in cities when Adam and Eve left Eden did not know God.

“Why God created us is a perplexing mystery. He fashioned vast galaxies spanning fourteen billion light years across. Then, deep within this extraordinary cosmos, He populated one tiny planet with life. Over a span of five billion years, He filled the Earth with trillions of living things, from microscopic bacteria to soaring sequoia trees, tiny insects to huge elephants. Finally, near the end of this creation cycle, God made Adam and Eve, endowing them with consciousness – the ability to perceive Him.

“Why did God give Adam and Eve ‘a living soul’, or consciousness? Animals and birds get along fine without a sense of self and knowledge of the divine. In many ways, they get along better than humans. Animals and plants are not the ones putting the earth in jeopardy of destruction. Human greed and extravagance are the culprits.

“But as harmonious as the birds and animals are, they lack the ability to communicate with God – as far as we can tell. They live by instinct, not choice, and lack a soul and free will. Similarly, when God created humans to populate the earth (Phase One – to rule over creation) they had free will but lacked connection with God. It’s as if they had half a soul, able to perceive and choose, but unable to make right decisions for the higher good.

*“The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” - Genesis 6:5*

“God was clearly not in relationship with these men and women. He quickly regretted creating them and planned for their destruction. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said,

*“I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” Genesis 6:6-7*

“However, Phase Two of God’s creation was a different story. God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and they *did* know God. They spoke to Him, and He spoke to them. God created them with the ability to communicate with Him. Therefore, God created two types of humans, those with incomplete consciousness (unable to recognize God) and those with complete consciousness (able to perceive God). It didn’t take long for God to remove the former. And after their destruction, it fell to Noah and his family to repopulate the Earth, this time with humans who had the ability to perceive God.

“So it seems clear that God created us for the purpose of relationship. But if that’s true, how are we supposed to communicate with Him? The Bible says that God spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden, spoke with Noah, and spoke again with Moses. But God doesn’t speak to us today the way He spoke to them. If we asked, “God, can you hear me?” chances are good that two things will happen. First, He will hear us. But second, we won’t hear Him the way our ancestors did. Certainly not in a deep baritone voice responding, ”Yes, my child, I can hear you.”

“Why is that? We’re dealing with a communication gap of universal proportions. God is an all-powerful, immortal, universe-creating supreme being. How is He supposed to hold a conversation with one of his lowly creations? It’s like a human (the creator) baking a cake (the creation) and then trying to hold a conversation with it. If the cake analogy feels like a stretch, imagine a human trying to talk with a grasshopper. Either way, the gap is too great. So what possible form of communication could God use to bridge the gap between His existence and ours?

“Remember when Moses first encountered God in the desert?

*“Moreover, he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.” Exodus 3:6*

“Moses could not look directly at God, for God’s holy righteousness was a blinding light that would kill any mortal. That’s the communication gap. Given this situation, how can a holy, pure, immortal being have a relationship with the equivalent of a grasshopper? That miraculous process is spelled out in the Bible and is essential for us to understand.

“After giving Adam and Eve the ability to perceive, God provided them with a rule to guide their behavior.

*“And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”” Genesis 2:16-17*

“God did not give this rule to any other creature. In contrast, He gave animals instincts to guide their behavior in the wild. But God established a rule for Adam and Eve, similar to the way parents teach their children how to live in the world – by recognizing right from wrong. God knew free will would inevitably lead humans to disobey – life has too many Earthly temptations, and we are curious and rebellious by nature. So He imposed a rule on Adam and Eve to establish boundaries and to help them understand their need for Him.

“This one rule laid the foundation for Adam and Eve’s ability to communicate with God. Doing right, despite the urge to the contrary, created a seed of righteousness in them. This seed opened a channel of communication with God. As long as Adam and Eve obeyed God, they shared in His righteousness, and that righteousness enabled them to communicate with Him.

“It’s like parents setting rules for their teenager. If the teen abides by the rules (be home by 11:00 pm, do your homework, clean your room), then there is a basis for a relationship with his or her parents. And the parents, in turn, will be patient with the teen, knowing their challenges.

“However, despite this direct communication link to God, it didn’t take long for Adam and Eve’s sinful urges to overtake their desire for good. The devil soon tempted them to disobey God by breaking the one rule that God established. And once they succumbed, their link to God’s righteousness was severed and communication ceased. Furthermore, since Adam and Eve now had the knowledge of good and evil, they lost the privilege of immortality. For only the righteous (God-like) can live forever. As a result, God could no longer give them access to the Tree of Life – they had to leave the garden.

“Humanity now found itself expelled from paradise on Earth (Eden), facing unending hardship, pain, and death (mortality). While this seems like a bleak development, hope was far from lost. The story of God’s creation is like a great novel, with twists and turns, defeats and victories. As humanity entered this difficult phase of development, God’s will still directed their path. Why God created us had not changed – He still wanted a lasting relationship with us. The Bible spells out God’s next steps in this process.

“God made a series of covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses. First, God promised Noah that He would never destroy His creation again, no matter how corrupt it became. Then God chose Abraham to become the father of a great nation that would know God and whom God would love and protect. Next, God selected Moses to lead the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt and bring them to the promised land where they could dwell in peace with God.

“God nurtured a relationship with these three men by calling on them to trust Him. For the only way to build a relationship with God is to obey, which requires trust. A good example is when Abraham obeyed God’s command to sacrifice his son Isaac.

*“The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” Genesis 22:15-18*

“I can imagine the devil whispering in Abraham’s ear, “Don’t listen to Him! This is crazy!” But Abraham trusted God and obeyed. And his obedience created a seed of righteousness that opened the channels of communication with God. This time God not only rewarded Abraham with a relationship, but He extended that offer to all of Abraham’s descendents. Obedience and trust led to a relationship with God.

“After establishing these covenants, God gave His people the Ten Commandments, declaring the following ground rules:

Rule 1: I am righteous (God always does the right thing).
Rule 2: Abide by these Commandments and you’ll be righteous too. Then we can be in a relationship.
Rule 3: If you love and honor me, I’ll forgive you when you fall short.

“This third rule is essential because humans are incapable of acting righteous all the time, no matter how hard we try. We may know the right thing to do, but our base instincts and selfishness cause us to make wrong choices. Without forgiveness, we would end up like the first city-dwellers, flooded into oblivion.

“But it didn’t take long for trouble to strike the Hebrews. First, there was the incident of the golden calf at Mount Sinai. Then there was the debacle at the Jordan River, when only two of the ten tribes of Israel agreed to enter the promised land. But no matter how bad they messed up, God always forgave His people.

“However, God’s righteousness required that He impose punishment for bad behavior. If you don’t discipline your teenager for missing curfew they will just do it again. Unfortunately, over the centuries, these penalties would be devastating (i.e., forty years wandering in the desert, exile in Babylon, destruction of the Temple – twice).

“There had to be a better way for humans to live in the world, a way that would end this cycle of sin, punishment, and forgiveness. And when the time was right, God provided that way.

Jesus answered,

*“I am the way and the truth and the life.” John 14:6*

“The new covenant ushered in by Jesus, the Son of God, would allow God’s people to once again attain righteousness despite their unrighteous nature. But this gift would come at a great cost to God. Just as Abraham showed his obedience to God by being willing to sacrifice his son Issac, so God now showed His love to us by offering His son to pay the penalty for our sins.

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16*

“God gave us Jesus to restore our relationship with Him, opening the lines of communication between a righteous God and an unrighteous people. He gave His son as a living sacrifice to pay for our failings. Once the debt of our sins was paid on the cross, God could welcome us back into the family, this time for good.

“When we put our faith in Jesus, and acknowledge Him as the Messiah, God bestows Jesus’ righteousness on us as a gift (justification through faith). Armed with Jesus’ purity, we can finally have a complete relationship with God, providing us full access to His kingdom on Earth and immortality in Heaven.

“In the past, we did our best to abide by the law, inevitably falling short. And God had no choice but to punish our transgressions as any parent must. To break this cycle of pain, God gave us Jesus, who took on our sin and paid the penalty of death in our stead. As a result, when we put our faith in Jesus, God overlooks our sin. In addition, He helps us rise above our selfish nature through the power of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to make better choices.

“Why God created us is the same reason why we choose to become parents – to be in relationship with our children, to love and care for them, and to feel their love in return. We are made in the image of God. As different as we are from the Almighty, we have similarities, and craving for relationships is one of them.

“Everyone can choose to be in a relationship with God. To claim that relationship, we must do two things. First, we must praise God, the Father and creator of the universe. And second, we must believe in Jesus, the son of God, who sacrificed Himself to restore our right relationship with the Father.

“God will never force you into a relationship with Him. Remember, God allowed Adam and Eve to eat the apple. You are free to live independently of Him, guided by your own moral compass and self-reliance. And that is a choice billions of people make every day.

“But understand that there are consequences to a life without God. First, you’re on your own – literally. In times of trouble, you’ve got no one to pray to. You can seek help from people, but folks are fickle at best. Ultimately, without God you’ve got to fend for yourself. Second, life without God means you forfeit eternal life in Heaven. You may not believe in Heaven. But since you don’t know for sure if Heaven is real or not, why not go with “it’s real”? We’re talking about eternity, which lasts for a long time.

“Our choice to believe in God is the most important decision we will ever make, one that determines our quality of life on Earth and the fate of our ongoing existence. Living under God’s guidance enables us to find joy in life independent of our circumstances. Furthermore, we can do good in the world (despite our selfishness) by surrendering our will to God’s, allowing Him to direct our thoughts, desires, and actions.

“Having a relationship with God has many perks. Talk about having friends in high places! In times of trouble it’s good to know that the Creator of the universe has got your back. Also, knowing God gives us a taste of Heaven on earth. Trusting God eases our anxieties and helps us make better choices, improving our quality of life. Finally, having God in our life gives us the greatest gift – immortality. We get to live with Him forever in Heaven.

*“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Psalm 23:6*

“In conclusion, our relationship with God began in the Garden, progressed through the wilderness, and resolved with Jesus, through whom we have regained right standing with the Creator. I’m grateful that God provided a way for us to know Him. Life is not always easy, and many times it's downright difficult. But knowing God makes the difficult times more manageable and the good times way more meaningful.

“Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we thank You that we are able to be here today, gathered together to worship You. We thank You for Your gift of the Holy Spirit. Please fill us with Your Spirit and may we be full of grace, joy, and peace, because of Your presence within us. May Your Spirit's power produce fruit within our lives. Amen.”

 After the service, the friends went out to lunch. The sermon seemed perfectly timed for their situation. They were beginning to understand why the golden puzzle box contained so many references to the *Book of Revelation*. God, the creator of the universe, loved His people. So it made sense that He was involved with a manuscript explaining how to heal disease. The bottom line was that God had a hand in every aspect of their lives, whether they saw it or not. He watched over them, encouraged them, and sought a deeper relationship with them. They just had to open their eyes and look for His presence.

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” - Revelation 3:20*

\* \* \*

Later that day they caught the red-eye out of Heathrow, bound for Raleigh. The trip was more of an adventure than a vacation. With the mission accomplished, they were all anxious to return home, James and Lily to their children and clinic, and Meijin to her work at the university. Carlos felt like a kid in a candy store. He hardly slept, busy as he first translated and then studied the *Way of Eternal Harmony*.

The day after his return, Carlos bought a small safe and promptly installed it in the bottom drawer of his office desk. He would keep the manuscript secret, hidden, and locked up. No one would know about this fantastic document until the time was right.

##

## Chapter Nine: Major Bao Zheng

Agent Bao Zheng was an ambitious 26-year-old member of the Chinese Military Cyber Command, a team of cyberspace experts working to defend the military's networks and conduct electronic operations around the globe. Zheng was good-looking, five foot eleven inches tall, with dark hair and piercing dark brown eyes. He wore his hair short and cropped in the military style and sported a tan all year long due to his habit of running outside five miles a day.

Zheng grew up in Guangzhou, a large city of eleven million in southern China. His parents were both police officers and members of the communist party. He always knew he would enter law enforcement - his parents all but expected him to follow their path. Zheng taught himself computer programming over the summer when he was eight. His friends all asked their parents to buy them computer games. Zheng, on the other hand, taught himself Python programming and built his own game. It was a hit with his friends, and he began his love affair with coding.

During high school, Zheng became an IBM-certified Artificial Intelligence professional by self-teaching himself AI computing using free university resources. For his senior project, he used IBM Watson to design an image recognition system to detect fire and smoke. His design was so successful that the authorities implemented it at a local power plant to monitor high-risk fire areas with remote cameras. Two months later, one of the remote cameras identified flames ignited by a faulty wire. Zheng's software activated an alarm, and the authorities extinguished the fire before significant damage occurred. Zheng got his picture in the newspaper, and all of the power plants in the province soon implemented his program. At graduation, he was given the Youth Citizen Award for his work on the project.

By the time Zheng graduated from Guangzhou University of Technology at age 20, he was receiving offers of employment from over a dozen start-up computer companies. His professors thought he might be the next Zhang Yiming, the CEO of Toutiao, a $20 billion news aggregator app with 120 million daily users. But Zheng turned down every offer from the private sector. Instead, he accepted a position with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in their cyber warfare division.

The PLA was actively transitioning its focus to information-based warfare conditions, which included moving the military doctrine from weapon platform-centric to cyber-centric. As such, they were seeking to recruit individuals with the background and capabilities of people just like Zheng. The task of this division was information warfare involving information-based weapons and forces, including battlefield management systems, precision-strike capabilities, and technology-assisted command and control. In addition, their work encompassed the political and espionage effort of the Chinese state.

He spent the next four years working in the cyber technology command and control division, where he developed malware tools used for espionage. These software programs communicated with and controlled infected machines and networks. The goal was to profit from a malware attack for as long as possible by maintaining a covert channel or backdoor between the military's server and the compromised network or machine. Zheng excelled at the work, and his superiors promoted him to the rank of Major. Soon after, they put him in charge of a division tasked with reacquiring Chinese national treasures which foreign governments had stolen over the past two hundred years.

In his new role as head of the Chinese Government Ancient Artifact Reacquisition Unit, Major Bao Zheng managed a department of eight people housed in a wing of the cyber command and control division. His new boss, Colonel Li Ming, had recruited Zheng to his division, knowing quite well that Zheng would quickly outgrow his assignment. The PLA had bigger plans for this young, gifted officer. But in the short term, Colonel Li had the opportunity to tap Zheng's expertise to crack some stubborn cases.

For the past eighty years, since the communists had come to power, the government had tirelessly worked to track down stolen Chinese artifacts taken by foreign governments over the centuries in the hopes of reacquiring them. This office primarily targeted the Japanese, who had stolen thousands of Chinese historical pieces during their brutal occupation of China in the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, they focused on Great Britain, which had likewise stolen priceless Chinese relics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Zheng's cyber unit sought the location of stashes of Chinese artifacts and then reacquired them through diplomacy, purchase, or if all else failed, espionage.

Zheng's team designed spyware to infiltrate foreign government computer systems. However, unlike most cyber intelligence activities, his team was not targeting military installations. Instead, they identified and tracked the target country's national archives, historic preservation organizations, museums, and library databases, seeking any reference to Chinese cultural artifacts.

For his first assignment, his team planted spyware into the central computer system of the Japanese National Archives. Zheng went undercover, posing as a computer technician hired for an unrelated job at a National Archives satellite office in Kyoto, Japan. Once inside the facility, he accessed their network, hacked the system, and planted the bug. Since the facility was non-military, security was minimal. The Japanese never knew that Zheng planted the bug.

Once he returned to China, Zheng and his team could access every file within Japan's vast archives, totaling more than 67 million distinct documents. It did not take long for them to identify nearly 2,700 Chinese cultural artifacts in Japan's possession, all hidden away from the public eye. Incredibly, the Japanese kept more than 90 percent of the stolen items in a single warehouse thirty miles outside of Kyoto, a warehouse responsible for storing tens of thousands of cultural curiosities from around the globe.

This facility was not a museum - the public was never allowed to see these items. Instead, it was a repository for stolen booty from decades of Japanese colonial occupation. The sad truth was that the Japanese no longer wanted most of these items, but it was too politically awkward to return them. Doing so would highlight the atrocities Japan committed on the foreign country. So instead, they held onto the relics. Initially, they kept the warehouse heavily secured. But as the decades passed, safeguarding the facility became less of a priority.

When Zheng and two of his agents started scoping out the location, they were encouraged to learn that it was guarded by a lone civilian security officer. In addition, the facility was old, in disrepair, and lacked security cameras. Late on a Tuesday night, Zheng and his team quietly gained access to the facility from a locked door on the far side of the warehouse. Once inside, they spent the next sixteen hours sifting through hundreds of boxes housing thousands of artifacts. They identified nearly twenty-five hundred Chinese relics from their original list of twenty-seven hundred.

After carefully packing each item within specially designed, military-grade, plastic moving boxes, they smuggled them out of the warehouse. The Japanese never knew they were there and never suspected an infiltration because Zheng's team left the warehouse looking just as it did before they arrived. Two days later, they returned to China with their cache of repatriated antiquity. The mission was a complete success.

\* \* \*

Zheng was single, choosing not to complicate his life with personal entanglements, which often became cumbersome. That decision was most appreciated when he had to pack quickly and leave the country for a mission. He never knew how long he would be gone. His choice to remain single did not mean that he was devoid of emotions. The 32-year-old dated and kept up a decent social life. But his relationships tended to be superficial. In Zheng's life, work was his priority.

One of Zheng's favorite pastimes was snooker, a game similar to billiards. In recent years the game's popularity had soared in China thanks to Ding Junhui, a professional snooker player who had won several international championships. There were 1200 snooker clubs in Beijing, kept busy by over 120 million players in Beijing alone.

While Zheng's interest in the game was recreational, he was quite skilled, and many of his friends teased him that he should pursue the game professionally.

"You'll make more money with snookers than the PLA!" they teased.

"Yeah, I know," laughed Zheng. "But I couldn’t carry a gun! Then how would I deal with riff raff like you?"

In addition to playing the game, Zheng also wrote about it. He had always enjoyed writing, so last year, he submitted an article on the joys of playing snooker to the Beijing Snooker Society, which they printed. Of course, this brought on more teasing from his friends, who dubbed him a "snooker nerd," but he didn't care. He loved the game. Here's the article from the newsletter. It was entitled "The Complexity of Snooker."

*Playing snooker is a beautifully intricate dance between skill, strategy, precision, and intuition. It's a game that delights in complexity, offering players a dynamic and challenging experience that requires mental acumen and physical finesse. The moment you step into the snooker hall, the distinct aroma of chalk and the soothing clatter of balls envelops you. As you survey the perfectly leveled green baize table adorned with multicolored balls and meticulously placed pockets, you begin to sense the potential for triumph and challenge ahead.*

*The first break-off shot sets the tone for the entire game. As you line up your cue, the smooth wooden surface glides through your fingers, instantly connecting you to the history and tradition of the game. The initial crack of the cue ball against the tightly racked reds sends them scattering across the table. The meticulous placement of the cue ball, the angle of impact, and the power of the shot all combine in a delicate equation that could lead to a rewarding position or an unexpected setback.*

*The essence of snooker lies in its intricate strategy. With 21 colored balls on the table, each with its own point value, the player must not only pot balls but also think several moves ahead. Snooker is like a complex puzzle where you're constantly weighing risk and reward. Do you go for a difficult long pot or play safe and leave your opponent in a tricky position? The mental acuity required to plan a sequence of shots, accounting for angles, spins, and ball placements, adds an intellectual layer that elevates the game beyond mere physical skill.*

*As you line up a shot, the combination of muscle memory and focus becomes apparent. The way you hold the cue, your stance, your breathing – they all come together in a delicate choreography that could result in a graceful pot or a disappointing miss. When you sink a challenging shot, the sense of accomplishment is unparalleled – the crisp click of the ball finding its pocket, followed by a swell of satisfaction that resonates within you.*

*Snooker also has a rhythm of its own. The game's ebb and flow, the steady progression from one ball to the next, creates a sense of anticipation. Each shot is a step closer to achieving a big break, a century, or even a maximum 147-point clearance – a rare feat that showcases the player's mastery of the table.*

*Ultimately, the joyful complexity of playing snooker lies in the harmonious blend of concentration, technique, and strategy. It's a game that demands respect for tradition and an appreciation for the beauty that emerges from its intricacies. The satisfaction of executing a challenging shot, the mental engagement of outwitting your opponent, and the sheer pleasure of being immersed in a timeless pursuit of excellence all contribute to the unparalleled joy of playing snooker.*

Bao Zheng’s other extracurricular passion was quantum mechanics. He had been reading and studying about this strange and mystifying branch of science since he was a teen. This is how he explained it to his friends:

“Imagine you're in a world that's very different from our everyday experiences, a world at the tiniest scales of existence – the quantum world. Here, the rules are vastly different from what we're used to in our everyday lives. Quantum mechanics deals with the behavior of microscopic particles, like atoms, electrons, protons, and neutrons. These particles are the building blocks of everything around us. One of the weirdest things about quantum mechanics is that particles, like electrons, can also behave like waves. It's as if they're dancing to their unique music. This dual nature is called wave-particle duality.

“In the quantum world, you can't know everything about a particle's properties at one time. Furthermore, there's a limit to how precisely you can simultaneously measure things like a particle's position and momentum. This idea is known as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. Certain properties, like energy levels in an atom, are quantized, meaning they come in discrete, specific values. It's like having stairs where you can only be on one step at a time, no in-between.

“Another cool thing about quantum mechanics is that particles can become entangled with each other. The properties of one particle are directly connected to the properties of another, no matter how far apart they are. This spooky action at a distance is so strange that it even puzzled Albert Einstein. In addition, quantum particles can exist in multiple states at once, a concept called superposition. For example, an electron can be in multiple places simultaneously until you measure it and "collapse" its superposition into a single state.

“Sometimes, particles magically pass through barriers - a feat considered impossible by classical physics. This ability is called quantum tunneling and is responsible for some strange phenomena. Finally, quantum mechanics deals with probabilities. Instead of saying something will definitely happen, it tells us the likelihood of something happening. It's like rolling a dice with many sides.

“In a nutshell, quantum mechanics is a branch of physics that deals with the behavior of particles at the smallest scales of existence. It's a realm where particles can be in multiple places simultaneously, properties are uncertain, and observing can change the outcome. While it's incredibly weird compared to our everyday experiences, it's also a fundamental and highly successful theory that helps explain the universe's behavior on the tiniest scales.”

Zheng's boss, Colonel Li, recognized his interest in quantum mechanics and included him in an interdepartmental task force on cyber technology. The previous month, Zheng attended a top-secret meeting where military scientists discussed their ongoing projects in computer encryption. The lead technology officer began with an overview:

“Thank you for coming this morning. We have officers here today representing all branches of the People’s Liberation Army. For the past few years, we have been working in quantum cryptography, which can enhance our computer encryption methods. Today, I want to give you an overview of how we utilize quantum entanglement to improve computer encryption.

“First, as you know, quantum entanglement is a fundamental concept in Quantum Key Distribution (QKD), a subfield of quantum cryptography. QKD enables two parties to create a shared secret key for secure communication. We utilize entangled particles to establish this key.

“Second, we use entangled photon pairs for QKD. When two photons are entangled, measuring the state of one instantaneously determines the state of the other, regardless of the distance between them. This property forms the basis of secure key distribution. One of the primary advantages of using entangled particles is that any attempt to intercept the quantum communication will disturb the entangled photons. This disturbance can be detected, as it violates the principles of quantum mechanics. If interference is detected, it alerts the parties that an outsider may have compromised their communication.

“While we don't use quantum entanglement itself for encryption, we do use the shared secret keys generated through QKD with traditional encryption algorithms to enhance their security. These keys are incredibly secure because they are immune to interception, thanks to the principles of quantum mechanics.

“We are aggressively researching and developing quantum communication networks that can provide ultra-secure data transfer across vast distances. This technology is vital for securing sensitive military and defense information. It's important to note that while the principles of quantum entanglement are promising for security, practical implementation is still in the experimental stage. Quantum cryptography systems are not yet widely deployed, and there are technical challenges to overcome.

“The bottom line is that the military is exploring the use of quantum entanglement as a foundational concept in quantum key distribution (QKD) to enhance computer encryption. QKD enables the creation of ultra-secure encryption keys using entangled particles, and these keys can be used in conjunction with traditional encryption methods to create highly secure communication channels. However, widespread adoption of quantum cryptography is still a work in progress due to technical and practical challenges. But we are confident these challenges can be overcome with focus, commitment of resources, and the hard work of our team members.”

Bao Zheng was thrilled to see this type of work being pursued by the military. His goal was to eventually segue his career in this direction, where he could combine his computer programming talents with his deep-seated interest in quantum mechanics.

##

## Chapter Ten: The Way of Eternal Harmony

Upon his return from England, Carlos devoted his time first to translating and then to studying the manuscript. The deeper he got into the work, the more excited he became. It was clear from the writing style that the author of *Way of Eternal Harmony* was the same as *Huangdi Neijing*. The phrasing and syntax were identical. In addition, the manuscript fit perfectly at the end of Chapter One of *Huangdi Neijing*. Carlos wrote down the final verse of Chapter One and then began his translation of the *Way of Eternal Harmony*:

The final paragraph of *Huangdi Neijing*, Chapter One, read:

*Huangdi concluded, “I’ve heard of people in ancient times, spoken of as the immortals, who knew the ways of the universe and held yin, yang, and the world in the palms of their hands. They extracted essence from nature and practiced various disciplines such as Dai-in and Qigong, and breathing and visualization exercises, to integrate the body, mind, and spirit. They remained undisturbed and thus attained extraordinary levels of accomplishment. They healed the sick, raised the dead, and held the key to everlasting life. Someday their secret may be revealed to the world.”*

And the *Way of Eternal Harmony* began:

*Huangdi said to Qi Bo, “I have something to share with you, a secret held for a thousand generations. A wise man gave this wisdom to me to preserve and protect until the world was ready to receive it. Hear it now and receive its wisdom.*

*Huangdi continued, “As you know, Qi Bo, when I was young, I studied qigong, learning the way of the Dao. My teacher was Master Wong, an exemplary man with whom I studied for ten years. During our final days together, sitting in the Great Hall of the Palace of Harmony on the top of Wudang Mountain, he shared with me the Way of Eternal Harmony and instructed me to safeguard its wisdom.*

*“Master Wong told me,* ‘*The knowledge of this great truth was passed on to me by my teacher, just as it was passed on to him, down through a thousand generations. Now I pass it on to you for safekeeping. Keep these words hidden until their time of revealing has come.*’

*Huangdi continued,* “*What I tell you now is the Way of Eternal Harmony as revealed by Master Wong on his deathbed.”*

*Master Wong: “When I was a young man, I sought out to learn qigong from the greatest masters alive in China. My search took me to Wudang Mountain and the Palace of Harmony, where the wise and skillful Master Jiang ran a school. There I studied for fourteen years, rising before dawn, washing the floors in the school, milking the goats in the barns, and studying my forms. I studied with Master Jiang for 10 hours a day, six days a week, absorbing all his knowledge. My hard work paid off, and I was soon allowed to sit at my Master’s right hand during our exercises and meditations.*

*“Around the time of my fourteenth anniversary at the school, Master Jiang suddenly became ill. A week into his sickness, he called me to his bedside and said, ‘My son, I am not long for this world. My life will be cut short in a few days. So I must take action now while I still have the energy. What I am about to say to you must always be kept secret, just as I have kept these words secret since they were spoken to me long ago by my Master. He chose me to be the light-bearer of the Way of Eternal Harmony, an ancient prophecy carried down for thousands of years, from one Master to the next, generation to generation.*

*“Master Jiang continued, ‘This secret holds the key to salvation for the world, and it must be safeguarded until the proper time has arrived. I have chosen you, my son, to bear the secret now that I am passing from this world. Listen to my words, memorize them, and keep them close to your heart. And when the time is right, pass them on to one whom you trust, one who shall continue the vigil of safeguarding this unblemished truth until the day it will see the light.’*

*“Master Jiang then told me to fetch paper and pen, and he spent the next three hours dictating from memory the entire Way of Eternal Harmony, which I diligently wrote down until I committed it to memory. I have kept the secret in my heart and mind ever since.*

*“Within a day, Master Jiang died. Heartbroken by my Master’s passing, I decided to travel the country in search of qigong masters who could teach me more. I spent twenty years roaming from province to province, traveling from master to master, learning all I could. But I did not join any of their schools. My heart belonged to the Palace of Harmony. And so, after two decades, I returned to Wudang Mountain. My colleagues welcomed me back and asked me to lead their school, an honor which I accepted. And for the last fifty years, I have devoted all my energies to practicing and teaching qigong in the spirit of Master Jiang.*

*“As the years passed, I often wondered to whom I would pass on the great secret. Who would be worthy of its burden and responsibility? Then you, my son, arrived seeking wisdom and understanding, and I knew it was your destiny to become the next light-bearer.”*

*Huangdi continued, “Master Wong proceeded to tell me the Way of Eternal Harmony, which I conscientiously wrote down, word for word. And here it is, exactly what I wrote, so many years ago.”*

*The Way of Eternal Harmony*

*“At a predestined time in the future, the Way of Eternal Harmony will reveal itself to the world. Heaven will dictate the proper time for light-bearers to bring forth its decrees. Perfect yin yang balance shall rain down from heaven. And when it does, no disease shall survive, no anguish will linger, and no doubt will remain. When the time is right, the chosen ones will return to the Palace of Harmony, atop Wudang Mountain, to perform the Baduanjin. They must carry out these qigong exercises just as I describe them, within the Great Hall, in the Year of the Dragon, in the eighth month, on the eighth day, at the eighth hour. The Thousand Year Harmony Necklace must be displayed in the center of the Great Hall. Then all will be fulfilled.”*

*Huangdi continued, “Then Master Wong described to me the famous qigong exercise called Baduanjin, also known as Eight Pieces of Brocade.”*

##

## Chapter Eleven: Baduanjin (Eight Pieces of Brocade)

*Master Wong: Perform the movements in the Great Hall of the Palace of Harmony following these instructions. Waver from them at all, and you will not attain the Way. But follow them to the letter and the Way will open before you and bless the world.*

*Baduanjin shall be performed eight times by:*

* *A man and woman, together;*
* *United in holy matrimony;*
* *Pure in heart, poor in spirit;*
* *Seeking righteousness with forbearance;*
* *Claiming power while acknowledging weakness.*
* *Do not search for them. They must find you.*

*Any deviation from these instructions will forfeit activation of the Way of Eternal Harmony. Follow the Baduanjin in the Great Hall in the Year of the Dragon, in the Eighth Month, on the Eighth Day, at the Eighth Hour.*

*The Eight Movements include:*

 *1. Two Hands Hold up the Heavens*

 *2. Drawing the Bow to Shoot the Hawk*

 *3. Separate Heaven and Earth*

 *4. Wise Owl Gazes Backwards*

 *5. Sway the Head and Shake the Tail*

 *6. Two Hands Hold the Feet*

 *7. Clench the Fists and Glare Fiercely*

 *8. Bouncing on the Toes​*

*Huangdi continued, "Then Master Wong gave explicit instructions on how to perform the qigong forms."*

***1. Two Hands Hold up the Heavens***

*​Performing the Exercise*

*Starting in horse stance with hands together in front of your lower dantian [below the belly button], begin to inhale as you lift your hands, bending at the elbows with palms up through your centerline, gradually contracting your lower abdomen and simultaneously expanding your chest and directing the qi from the lower dantian up to your chest. As your hands pass your face, flip the palms upward and extend, fully stretching your legs, body, and arms.*

*Firmly plant your feet on the ground. Your legs, waist, and back should be straight, and your body should fully extend at the end of the inhale. As you exhale, spread your arms out to the side and down, returning your hands to their original position in front of the lower dantian. Simultaneously, gradually relax the chest and lower back muscles, drop the qi into the lower dantian, and return to the horse stance position with knees bent and pelvis tilted slightly to the back. It is imperative to feel the Qi radiating outward toward your skin as you exhale.*

*​The purpose of this form:*

*This movement of reaching up with the arms and the full extension of the body will promote deep and steady breathing. It will also eliminate fatigue. Proper breathing is essential for conditioning the triple burner and adjusting the muscles, meridians, tendons, bones, and internal organs in preparation for exercise.​*

*The primary function of this movement is to regulate the "Triple Burner." The term "triple burner" refers to one of the six human body's fu organs, a unique concept in Chinese Medicine. The five zang (yin) organs are the heart, lungs, liver, kidney, and spleen, and their corresponding fu (yang) organs are the small intestine, large intestine, gallbladder, bladder, and stomach, respectively. The sixth fu organ is the "triple burner." It does not have a corresponding anatomical organ in the human body. Instead, it is more like a complex of cavities between the internal organs.*

*The triple burner in the human body is a collective term for the upper, middle, and lower burners. The upper burner is above the diaphragm and includes the heart, lungs, and pericardium. The middle burner is located above the belly button and below the diaphragm and consists of the liver, spleen, stomach, and gallbladder. The lower burner is below the belly button, including the kidneys, bladder, and large and small intestines.*

*The triple burner mobilizes the Original Qi (Yuan Qi), allowing the Yuan Qi to perform various functions in each organ. The triple burner also controls the distribution of Qi throughout the body - the ascending/descending and entering/exiting of Qi in various organs and structures. It also regulates the transformation, transportation, and excretion of fluids.*

*The upper burner acts like a mist. The middle burner works like a foam. The lower burner acts like a swamp. The upper burner is responsible for harmonizing the functions of the heart and lungs and governs respiration. With the Original (Yuan) Qi as a catalyst, some of the Gu Qi from the middle burner is transformed into Zong (Gathering) Qi and then further refined into True (Zhen) Qi. True (Zhen) Qi is called Wei Qi (Protective Qi) and is the qi that flows primarily in the superficial layers of the body, especially in the muscle and tendon meridians.*

*Qi takes the form of "Mist" and is dispersed from the upper burner by the lungs as sweat into the spaces between skin and muscles, the membranes, the joint capsules, and all other cavities in the body. Part of the Gu Qi from the middle burner is also sent to the heart via the lungs and transformed into qi and blood with the help of Yuan Qi and kidney qi. Qi in the blood is called Ying Qi (Nutritive Qi) and is circulated in the blood vessels to nourish the internal organs and the whole body.*

*The middle burner extracts qi from food and water intake into the stomach. "Foam" is the byproduct of digestion in the middle burner when the spleen and stomach transform, ripen, and decompose food. Food first transforms into Gu Qi in the spleen. Next, The Gu (Food) Qi is distributed via the meridian system to the lungs, transforming into Ying (Nutritive) qi and blood.*

*The lower burner separates food essences into pure and impure components. The pure is absorbed into the body via the small intestine, while the impure is like the "swamp." The body excretes liquid waste and excess water through the urinary bladder and eliminates solid waste via the large intestine. The lower burner is also the source of Original Qi, the basis of Kidney Qi at the Gate of Vitality (Ming Men) that fuels all the activities in the other organs and ascends into the upper burner through the upward action of the liver and kidney yang.*

*If the triple burner is healthy, all other systems will be well.*

***2. Drawing the Bow to Shoot the Hawk***

*​Performing the Exercise*

*This movement starts in the horse stance position. Inhale. Contract your lower abdomen and draw the qi up to your chest while you shift into an empty stance, resting weight on your left leg with the right leg extended in front of your body (along the nose line). Simultaneously, draw the left hand into a fist to rest on the left hip while you bring the right arm up and extend out in front of your body. Draw your left shoulder as far back as possible while the right shoulder is as far in front of the body as possible. On the exhale, the lower part of the body returns to the horse stance with the shoulders following your hips while you gradually relax the muscles in your chest and bring your qi downward.*

*As you return to the horse stance position, draw the right elbow toward your center line (palm up) as you extend your left arm (palm up) over the right arm through your nose line. At the end of the exhale, your right hand is in a fist in front of your chest with the right elbow pointing to the right at shoulder level, your left hand fully extended to the left with the thumb and index finger making an "L" and the rest of the fingers curled in. Your head faces your raised left hand, and your qi rests in your lower dantian.*

*On the second inhale, the lower part of your body moves from the horse stance to an empty stance with the weight on the right foot and the left foot in front of the body. As you begin the inhale, swing the right hand out to the right in a circular motion pulling it back into a fist to rest on your right hip while you drop your left hand by your side and extend it out and in front of your body (along the nose line). Pull your right shoulder back and left shoulder forward to their limits.*

*On the exhale, the lower part of your body returns to the horse stance. Gradually relax the muscles in your chest downward, with shoulders following the hips. As you return to the horse stance position, draw the left elbow toward your center line (palm up) as you extend your right arm (palm up) over the left arm through your nose line. At the end of the exhale, your left hand is in a fist in front of your chest, with the left elbow pointing to the left at shoulder level. Fully extend your right hand to the right with the thumb and index finger making a backward "L" and the rest of the fingers curled in. Your head is facing your extended right hand, and your qi rests in your lower dantian.*

*​The purpose of this form:*

*This movement benefits the body by expanding your rib cage, expanding elasticity in the shoulders and neck, and increasing blood circulation. It stimulates the meridians in your arms, bringing more vitality to the heart, pericardium, lungs, triple burner, large intestine, and small intestine. With repetition, blood circulation and qi in the body will dramatically increase.​*

***​3. Separate Heaven and Earth***

*​Performing the Exercise*

*This movement transitions from the previous action by maintaining the stable horse stance and extending the bent left arm (rotating from the elbow) to the left. The extended arms continue in a counter-clockwise motion until the bent left elbow ends up extended downward, pointing toward the right side of the body. In contrast, the right arm moves towards the head, and the right elbow is lowered in front of the head until the right hand is at the left side of the face as if to protect it. As the arms rotate counter-clockwise, the shoulders turn from the waist to the limit (the left shoulder in front of the body).*

*With weight on the left foot, step together in a standing position. On inhale, draw the right hand downward and the left hand upward as if the right hand is a sword sheath and the left arm is the sword. As you inhale, keeping your hips stable, turn your body from the waist up to the right, simultaneously creating an "S" with the right hand forming the lower part of the "S" (fingers pointing forward) and the left hand forming the upper part of the "S" (fingers pointing downward toward the other hand) and your head turning to the right to focus on a spot on the wall behind you.*

*On exhale, draw the left elbow down along your centerline to the right side of your face as you step out into a horse stance, twisting your shoulders to the limit toward the left while the right arm points downward toward the left side of the body and your head faces forward.*

*With your weight on your right foot, step the feet together.*

*On inhale, draw the left hand downward and the right hand upward as if the left hand is a sword sheath and the right arm is the sword. As you inhale, keeping your hips stable, turn your body from the waist up to the left, simultaneously creating an "S" with the left hand forming the lower part of the "S" (fingers pointing forward) and the right hand forming the upper part of the "S" (fingers pointing downward toward the other hand) and your head turning to the left to focus on a spot on the wall behind you.*

*On exhale, draw the right elbow down along your centerline to the left side of your face as you step out into a horse stance, twisting your shoulders to the limit toward the right while the left arm points downward toward the right side of the body and your head faces forward.*

*To complete this series, keep the lower part of your body in horse stance, inhale, bringing your arms together above your head, and exhale, spreading your arms out and down to the sides of the body.*

*​The purpose of this form:*

*The primary purpose of this form is to strengthen the spleen and stomach. The alternating and opposing arm movements create a "massaging effect" in the abdominal cavity, benefiting their function. The spleen and stomach are vital in digestion and absorption processes and are the body's main energy source. Enhancing their function improves the operation and efficiency of body tissues and other organs. The result is that the body is less prone to host disease.*

*This movement also adjusts and regulates the liver and gallbladder, whose meridians pass through both sides of the rib cage.*

***4. Wise Owl Gazes Backwards***

*​Performing the Exercise*

*This movement begins in a standing position with the feet together or slightly apart with the hands closed in fists resting on the hips. On inhale, fully extend the arms away from the body at a 45-degree angle (palms facing forward with fingers spread apart) while turning the head to the left and looking as far back as possible. Simultaneously, direct the qi up to the chest area, gradually contracting the lower abdomen upwards while expanding the lungs and chest and relaxing the shoulders and upper back. The legs and back are fully extended.*

*On the exhale, the palms are rotated toward the center line and down the sides of the body. Simultaneously, the legs sink as you direct the qi downward from the chest area toward the lower dantian. Meanwhile, return the head to the center facing forward by the end of the exhale.*

*​The purpose of this form:*

*This movement focuses primarily on the care and treatment of the human body. "Wu Lao Qi Shang" is a Chinese medicine concept that translates as "the five damages and seven injuries." "Wu Lao" refers to liver, heart, spleen, lung, and kidney damage.*

*"Look for too long, and it will hurt your blood; sit for too long, and it will hurt your muscles; stand for too long, and it will hurt your bones; walk for too long, and it will hurt your tendons and lay down for too long, and it will hurt your qi."*

*This passage means that looking, sitting, standing, walking, and lying for too long will hurt and negatively impact the body. "Qi shang" refers to damage to our body caused by external elements and our incorrect way of life. Wind, rain, cold, and heat will hurt the body. Sitting on wet surfaces for too long will damage the kidney, and drinking too many cold beverages will hurt the lungs. Overeating taxes the spleen, while anger causes damage to the liver. Being sad or worrying too much will injure the heart. Being constantly fearful will wound the spirit.*

*This movement treats the imbalances caused by these five damages and seven injuries. To properly execute the form, practitioners must remember to look back as the head turns, with eyes focused behind. The purpose of this movement is to train the spinal cord. The spinal cord is essential because the body's yang energy flows through this area. These damages will injure the yang in our bodies.*

*By looking back and focusing the eyes backward, we twist our spinal cord to enhance the role of the yang, which will help prevent diseases and external damage. Through the extension and rotation of the arms, the three yin and three yang meridians in the arms activate, enhancing the corresponding organ systems (heart, pericardium, lungs, large intestine, triple burner, and small intestine).*

***​5. Sway the Head and Shake the Tail***

*​Performing the Exercise*

*​This movement of the Baduanjin starts in a standing position with the feet wider than the shoulders. On the inhale, the hands are drawn up through the center line (palms up) as the legs extend, and the qi is directed upward toward the chest. The palms turn upward as the hands pass the face. At the end of the inhale, the body is fully extended with arms extended above the head (palms up, fingers touching), the feet pushing against the floor, the abdomen contracting, and the qi up in the fully expanded chest area.*

*On the exhale, direct the qi toward the lower dantian, spreading the arms out and down (as the hands drop below the hip level, turn the palms such that the thumbs are pointing to the body and the fingers are pointing toward the opposite hand) ending with the hands on the thighs and the legs in a horse stance.*

*On the second inhale, empty the abdomen, tuck the chin to the chest, and turn the shoulders from the waist as far to the left as they'll go. While keeping the lower part of the body stable, drop the head toward the left knee, stretching the right side of the body. Slowly draw the head toward the floor and across to the right knee. As the head passes the body's center line, press the left arm against the left thigh to turn the shoulders to the right as far as they'll go while stretching the left side of the body, opening the chest to the limit (and contracting the abdomen). On the exhale, bring the body upright to a centered horse stance.*

*On the next inhale, empty the abdomen, tuck the chin to the chest, turn the shoulders from the waist as far to the right as they'll go, and keeping the lower part of the body stable, drop the head toward the right knee stretching the left side of the body as much as possible by pressing the left arm against the left thigh and draw the head toward the floor and then across to the left knee. As the head passes the body's center line, press the right arm against the right thigh to turn the shoulders to the left while stretching the right side, opening the chest, and contracting the abdomen. On the exhale, bring the body back upright to a centered horse stance.*

*​The purpose of this form:*

*This movement rids the body of xin huo (Heart Fire). What exactly is xin huo? To answer this question, we must first understand the relationship between the internal organs. Chinese medicine studies the five internal organs and how they relate to the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water), emphasizing the importance of these relationships for the human body to function well.*

*For instance, between water and fire, fire is considered to be the heart. This idea has two meanings: one is heat, and the second is that heat can rise. If the heat rises in the heart, this leads to xin huo symptoms (insomnia, palpitation, mania, delirium). To control this, we must use the element water (kidney organ system) to balance. Through this exercise, the bladder complements the kidney qi and increases kidney water.*

*Water must always go down, but if too much goes down, it will cause the legs to become swollen and heavy. So in the body, we must balance the kidney and heart to be healthy. If heart heat descends, it can warm up the kidney. The main goal is to balance the kidney and the heart to prevent the xin huo symptoms. This movement stimulates the "du mai," heart, and kidney meridians. ​*

***6. Two Hands Hold the Feet***

*​Performing the Exercise*

*On the inhale, bring the hands (palms up and fingers touching) up through the center line, flipping the palms up as the hands pass the face. Simultaneously, contract the lower abdomen and direct the qi upward. At the end of the inhale, fully extend the body with the abdomen and lower back muscles tightly contracted, the qi up in the fully expanded chest, the feet firmly pressing against the floor, and the spirit lifted.*

*On the exhale, bring the arms down through the center line with palms down and elbows out to the sides. Allow the fingers to trace the center line stopping at the belly button. Resting the palms on the abdomen, sweep the hands around the waist to the lower back. While bending forward at the waist, direct the qi down, pressing the back of both legs firmly with the palms until the palms reach the ankles. Without breaking contact with the feet, swivel the palms from the back of the feet around the outside of the ankles, and rest the palms on top of the feet about a third of the way from the tip of the toes. Press the feet to the ground as you press the hands on the feet.*

*While in that position, look up. On the inhale, stretch both hands out in front of the body and come up with a flat back, again directing the qi upward as you rise. After the inhale, fully extend the body with the abdomen and lower back muscles fully contracted, the qi up in the fully expanded chest, the feet firmly pressing against the floor, and the spirit lifted.*

*To complete this movement, exhale, bring the arms down through the center line with palms down and elbows out to the sides. Allow the fingers to trace the center line until both hands cannot go further down. Then, allow the arms to fall to the body's sides naturally.*

*​The purpose of this form:*

*The "heart and kidney intersect method" involves meeting the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. According to TCM, the yang Heart belongs to the Fire element in the Upper Burner, while the yin Kidneys belong to the Water element in the Lower Burner on either side of the spinal cord. In the middle of the palm, there is a pressure point called Lao Gong, an essential point in the Xin Bao (pericardium) meridian.*

*In the soles of the feet, there is a pressure point called Yong Quan (Bubbling Spring), which is the starting point of the kidney meridian. This movement promotes the "mutual support of Fire and Water," where the Heart Yang descends to warm Kidney Yin, and the Kidney Yin ascends to nourish the Heart Yang. ​*

*In addition, inhaling and exhaling will stimulate the abdominal cavity, waist, back muscles, and the meridians. The low back between the kidneys is the "Gate of Life" (Ming Men), which sources the energy necessary for the production of Marrow (including the bones, bone marrow, brain, and spinal cord) as well as all other functions related to the transformation and transportation of qi in the body.*

*The kidneys also govern the absorption, transport, and elimination of water in the body and the reception of Qi from the Lungs. The kidneys are also responsible for reproductive development. The movement regulates qi and blood, improves bodily functions, and protects the body from disease and sickness. It also balances yin and yang.*

***​7. Clench the Fists and Glare Fiercely***

*​Performing the Exercise*

*This movement begins in the horse stance, with the head facing left. Place the left hand to the side with palm out, and rest the right arm across the abdomen toward the left arm with thumb down and palm out.*

*On inhale, extend both hands out and up to shoulder level while contracting the abdomen and directing the qi into the chest while expanding the ribs. Simultaneously, fully extend the body by pressing the feet down to straighten the legs. On the exhale, rotate the palms to face down while clenching them into fists, sink the qi, and sink lower in the horse stance.*

*Turn the shoulders to the right while moving the head to the right, allowing the arms to follow naturally. The right hand is at the side with the palm out, and the left arm is resting across the abdomen toward the right arm with the thumb down and palm out. On the second inhale, extend both hands until level with the right shoulder while contracting the abdomen. Direct the qi up into the chest while expanding the ribs. Simultaneously, fully extend the body by pressing the feet down to straighten the legs. On the exhale, rotate the palms downward, clench them into fists, sink the qi, and drop lower in the horse stance.*

*​The purpose of this form:*

*The primary goal of this movement is to improve overall strength and qi. The liver stores the blood, and its primary function is to preserve and maintain accessibility for the qi and blood. A healthy liver results in healthy tendons, better hearing, and better body performance. The function of the liver includes promoting and distributing blood in the body, spleen, and stomach operation, bile excretion, men's ejaculation and women's ovulation, and regulation of emotions. A healthy liver is essential for sufficient blood support for the tendons. If there is adequate liver blood, the tendons will be strong, reflected in the health of the nails. ​​*

***8. Bouncing on the Toes***

*​Performing the Exercise*

*Place the feet together and hands in a fist on the hips. Inhale, pull the fists back while contracting the lower abdomen, and direct the breath toward the chest. Open the chest by pulling the shoulders back and down and drawing the elbows as far back as possible. On exhale, direct the hands downward in front of the body, palms up, and descend the qi downward into the lower dantian.*

*Keeping the qi in the lower dantian, inhale and bring the arms out and up in front of the body (palms up) until they are at shoulder level. Hold for three seconds and drop suddenly onto the heels. Repeat four times.*

*​The purpose of this form:*

*The main result of this movement is to treat and prevent hundreds of diseases in the human body. This culminating exercise in the Baduanjin opens the possibility of healing the body from all diseases. The body is primed for deep healing when correctly performing this movement following the previous seven forms of Baduanjin.​*

*In Chinese medicine, the toe is the contact point of the "leg san yang" and "leg san yin" meridians. Gripping the ten toes to the floor stimulates the six yin and six yang meridians. This movement regulates the qi and blood and improves the function of the corresponding internal organs. In addition, bouncing on the feet stimulates the "Du Mai" (governing channel), adjusts the balance of the body's yin and yang, and promotes health and rejuvenation.*

*The Du Mai flows through the Bao Zhong (uterus in women and testes in men) and continues to the Hui Yin pressure point (perineum). It then travels up the spinal cord, to the neck, over the head, and down to the upper lip. Branches of the Du Mai supply qi to the kidney and other essential organs. The Du Mai connects to the brain, spinal cord, and kidney. "Du" means commander. The Du Mai passes through the back, making contact with the six yang meridians of the hands and feet. It governs and balances qi within the yang meridians of the entire body.*

*Bouncing the feet helps power ascend, from the heels, through the legs, and up the spine to the brain. The bouncing motion also stimulates the kidneys. These two systems improve the qi and blood of internal organs, regulate yin and yang balance, and strengthen the body.*

***The Jade Necklace & Qigong Exercises***

*Huangdi continued, “Then Master Wong spoke of the jade necklace.”*

*Master Wong: Now that we have reviewed Baduanjin, let us turn our attention to another essential component of the Way of Eternal Harmony. At the time the Baduanjin is performed, a specific jade necklace must be present. It will be extraordinary in craftsmanship, quality, and design. The priceless necklace shall be composed of 27 large beads, each etched with a single Chinese character.*

*The characters must be in this order: 马, 马, 路, 约, 使, 罗, 哥, 哥, 加, 以, 腓, 歌, 帖, 帖, 提, 提, 提, 腓, 雅, 彼, 彼, 约,约,约,犹, 启.*

*Do not fabricate this necklace yourself. It will come to the light-bearers at the right moment. Remember, nothing is forced in the Way of Eternal Harmony. All is revealed at the assigned time.*

*Once the jade necklace is acquired, place it on a pedestal in the center of the Great Hall. Then begin the qigong forms, and repeat them eight times. After the eighth iteration, the heavens will open, and Eternal Harmony will descend upon the earth and imbue the jade necklace with regeneration and healing. Then peace will reign forever and ever.*

*Then Huangdi said to Qi Bo, “And so it was that I received the Way of Eternal Harmony. Within days after recounting these words, Master Wong passed from this earth. Shortly thereafter, I left the Palace of Harmony to pursue my destiny. Now, years later, I sit in the Palace of the Forbidden City and write down these truths.*

*“I will not include the Way of Eternal Harmony in my book Huangdi Neijing, for Master Wong instructed me to keep it secret. Instead, I will craft a golden puzzle box and place the manuscript therein for safekeeping. I will encode the box with clues that can only be deciphered by those whom the Great Master deems chosen, the future light-bearers who are meant to reveal the Way of Eternal Harmony to the world.”*

##

## Chapter Twelve: Qigong and the *Way of Eternal Harmony*

Carlos and Meijin invited Lily and James to their house the following weekend. Carlos then proceeded to read the manuscript to them. After finishing, he looked at his friends and asked, "Well, what do you think?"

"It seems pretty clear that Huangdi wrote this himself, and that he originally planned on including it in the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*."

"I agree," said Lily. She continued, "Unfortunately, the more we learn about the manuscript, the more questions it creates."

Meijin said, "First and foremost, why was the puzzle box riddled with references to the *Book of Revelation*?"

Carlos answered, "The contents of the manuscript had been passed down for generations, from Master to Master. Finally, Master Wong shared it with Huangdi, who dutifully wrote it down and preserved it in the Golden Box."

"But, is the *Way of Eternal Harmony* connected to Christian Bible?" Meijin asked.

James said, "It sure seems like it."

"The riddles pointed in that direction," said Lily. "But if that's the case, how is it possible? The *Way of Eternal Harmony* predated the Bible by thousands of years."

Meijin asked, "And if the two are connected, which they seem to be, what does that mean for us? The manuscript stated that its secret was destined to be revealed at a particular time in the future, to individuals specifically chosen to receive it."

"Does that make us light-bearers?" asked James. "Because if it does, I have to admit, I don't really feel very light, and we certainly don’t look like bears!"

They laughed nervously. Carlos flipped through his notes and said, "Here's what Master Wong said:

*"At the appointed time in the distant future, the Way of Eternal Harmony will be revealed to the world. No one knows when this shall be, but it is predestined, just as the stars align according to the ages. Heaven will dictate the proper time, and the right individuals will likewise be chosen as light-bearers to bring forth its decrees."*

"Well, I don't know about you, but it sure sounds like he's calling us light-bearers," said Lily.

"I agree," said Meijin. She paused, then said, "But if that's the case, shouldn't we try to follow his instructions?"

James laughed, "The Blues Brothers were on a mission from God. We'd be on a mission from Wong!"

"But seriously, James," started Lily, "we can do this. I mean, I think you and I can pull this off."

"What are you saying, Lily?"

"We know how to perform the Baduanjin."

"The description is pretty detailed, Lily. Are you sure you and James could do it the way the manuscript describes?" asked Carlos.

"Believe it or not, from what I can see in the text, the Baduanjin we know has not changed that much from how it was done in the past. And the nature of qigong is forgiving. You're not supposed to do the forms perfectly. As you proceed in a series of exercises, the forms begin to take shape around and through you. It's not so much that you are performing the exercises as that they are manifesting through you."

"I agree with Lily," James said. After a moment, he continued, "We've been practicing qigong for over ten years on a daily basis. We should be able to perform Master Wong's version without a problem." Then he added, "To be honest, I'm more concerned with the other requirements of the 'couple' who are supposed to carry them out. Master Wong had a list of pretty specific characteristics. Carlos, can you find that part?"

Carlos looked through his notebook for a minute and then read aloud:

*"Baduanjin shall be performed eight times by:*

* *A man and woman, together;*
* *United in holy matrimony;*
* *Pure in heart, poor in spirit;*
* *Seeking righteousness with forbearance;*
* *Claiming power while acknowledging weakness.*
* *Do not search for them. They must find you."*

Lily said, "Believe it or not, most of this is straight out of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes."

"So, once again," Meijin said, "the manuscript is displaying strong biblical references. Amazing!"

"Here, check this out," Lily said. She took out her phone and pulled up the Bible app, then continued to Matthew 5:3-10.

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

"The Beatitudes are an amazing puzzle," said Lily. "Jesus demanded these qualities from his disciples. Yet, they were impossible to achieve. Moreover, who would want to act this way?"

"What do you mean, Lily," asked Meijin.

Lily answered, "Who would choose to be poor in spirit or meek? People want to be strong in spirit and courageous. And who can truly say that they are merciful and pure in heart? We may try to be merciful and pure-hearted, but a day does not pass that we fail to live up to these standards." She paused, then continued, "But that's the point. Jesus laid out the impossible for a reason. I know it's confusing. This may help. My great-grandfather, Watchman Nee, wrote a book on Matthew. I carry it with me on my phone because it's so helpful when I come up against a challenge. Listen to what he said about this passage."

*"When we believers go ahead to follow the teaching on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7, we unconsciously fulfill it. The impossibles become possibles. And precisely this is what it is to be a Christian, the daily showing forth of what is impossible in oneself. For this reason, Romans 6.14 says that this which we have in Matthew 5-7 is what is truly under grace: it is God who enables me to do what He commands, for I am no longer under the domination of sin nor under the law." -Watchman Nee, from Interpreting Matthew, p.77*

"I never thought about it that way," said Carlos.

"Most people think they are failing Jesus when they read Matthew 5," Lily said. "But, they are misreading His message." She continued, "Let's take a look at the details from the *Way of Eternal Harmony*. First, the writer’s reference to "pure in heart and poor in spirit" comes directly from Matthew 5:8 and 5:3. To be pure in heart is to desire nothing more than to be with God. Furthermore, purity is possible only by admitting our rebellion against God's will, seeking His forgiveness, and putting our faith in Jesus. Jesus promises that those who embody a pure heart will see God. How can He make that promise? Because He knows that when all you desire is God, you have become one with Him. Jesus sees the Father, therefore you see the Father. When we believe in Jesus, we take on His righteousness, His heart, and His vision.”

“So we’re not doing it ourselves,” said Carlos.

“And we’re not supposed to,” responded Lily. “The Beatitudes are a call to surrender, not a command to perform.”

"How about being poor in spirit?" asked Carlos. “I never understood that one either.”

Lily said, "I know, that's confusing too. You'd think God wanted our spirit to be strong. Here's how I understand it. Being poor in spirit is simply acknowledging that we don't have the answers in this world, so we need to rely on God for clarity and direction.

“Billy Graham taught this passage by encouraging us to think of 'poor in spirit' as 'humble in spirit.' When we come to God, we must realize our sin and spiritual emptiness. If we are self-satisfied or proud in our hearts, thinking we don't need God, He cannot bless us. James 4:6 says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble," and Proverb 3:34 says, 'Surely He scorns the scornful but gives grace to the humble.'"

“OK, I see a theme here,” said Carlos. “Jesus is saying the way forward is to put our pride aside, let go of “self”, and grab onto Him. That shouldn’t be so hard.”

“It’s harder than it seems,” added James. “Everything in this world encourages us to develop a strong sense of self, be independent, and nurture self-reliance. That’s how we feel safe in the world. Jesus is asking us to throw that all away and face the challenges of life by relying on Him.”

"What about seeking righteousness with forbearance?" asked Meijin.

Lily said, "Those come from Matthew 5:6 and 5:5. Jesus wants us to always seek righteousness, which is doing the right thing in alignment with God's values, not the world's values. And at the same time, He wants us to approach our life's work with forbearance. Jesus used the work "meek" in the passage, which no one seems to get. Meek is not weak. Think of a war horse trained for battle. The horse is strong and capable. However, it also follows its rider's commands without hesitation. That's what Jesus meant by meek, and that's probably what Master Wong meant by forbearance, having patience, self-control, and restraint."

"The next one is claiming power while acknowledging weakness. That's a riddle as well," said James.

"Yes, Jesus was known for speaking in riddles," Lily said. "Claiming power while acknowledging one's weakness is a Christian principle. Jesus wanted us to be soldiers of God's truth and power, not our own. The danger with developing our strength is that we might forget the source of our power and think that it comes from us. We do this all the time. That's why powerful men and women constantly screw up. You can almost predict that a successful or famous person will crash and burn if their motivation doesn't come from God.”

Carlos asked, "So given the connections between Matthew and the manuscript, what is the take-away? How are we supposed to interpret it?"

Lily said, "I think Master Wong is saying that the qigong practitioners need to have the mindset of Jesus. The Beatitudes capture Jesus' vision of heaven on earth, the way He wanted His disciples to behave and think. I feel this scripture captures the essence of being a Christian."

"So are you saying that Master Wong wanted a married, Christian, qigong couple to perform Baduanjin?" asked James.

"Yes, as crazy as it seems," answered Lily. "What do you think, Meijin?"

"I agree with you, Lily. The manuscript is pointing to you guys. Your qigong experience and your Christian faith are exactly what this manuscript is describing."

"OK, so we've got the qigong portion of the puzzle solved, for the moment at least," said Carlos. He continued, "James, tell us more about Baduanjin. I want to get my head wrapped around why the light-bearers put so much focus on this particular qigong exercise."

James said, "I've been doing a little research on this subject. My understanding is that the name itself, Baduanjin, translates to Eight Brocades, referring to how the eight unique movements impart a silken quality to the body and its energy. Brocade is a patterned, woven fabric. Baduanjin is primarily designated as a medical qigong exercise to improve health."

He continued, "These exercises have a long history, and communities commonly practiced this qigong exercise throughout China, dating back thousands of years. The forms focus on healing the body. Each of the eight movements builds on the other. The first form, "Two Hands Hold Up The Heavens," describes strengthening the Triple Burner. Here's how Master Wong described it:

*“The triple burner mobilizes the Original Qi (Yuan Qi), allowing the Yuan Qi to perform its various functions in each organ. The triple burner also controls the distribution of Qi throughout the body - the ascending/descending and entering/exiting of Qi in various organs and structures. It also regulates the transformation, transportation, and excretion of fluids.”*

James continued, "Master Wong is talking about the most fundamental energy source in the body, the Yuan Qi. Think of this Original Qi as the foundational building block for our health. The Triple Burner distributes Qi throughout the body, nourishing the "organs and structures." This qigong exercise starts at the source, building health from the inside out.

"With each of the eight forms, the practitioner continues to cultivate health until the final form, ‘Bouncing on the Toes,’ culminates in perfecting health. Here's what Master Wong says:

*“The main result of this movement is to treat and prevent hundreds of diseases in the human body. This culminating exercise in the Baduanjin opens the possibility of healing the body from disease. The body is primed for deep healing when correctly performing this movement following the previous seven forms of Baduanjin.”*

James concluded, "I believe this particular qigong form was selected because it aligns with the goal of the *Way of Eternal Harmony*, which is to heal the body of all disease. Qigong is not a magic pill. You can't heal all diseases by performing the Baduanjin. However, that was always the goal. Master Wong is declaring that at the right time in the future, this exercise will, in fact, cure all diseases." James paused, then asked, "But, is this the right time?"

 "That," declared Carlos, "is exactly what we are going to find out!"

"What about the jade necklace?" asked Meijin.

Carlos answered, "Well, the manuscript referred to a specific necklace. Its description matched the priceless Thousand Year Harmony Necklace housed at the Palace Museum in the Forbidden City."

He continued, "My research indicates that artisans crafted it in the early 15th century for the emperor's wife, Zhu Di. The necklace is green jadeite, known as ‘imperial jade,’ which is significantly harder than regular jade, and most highly valued. It consists of 27 gigantic jadeite beads of magnificent green color, excellent clarity, fine texture, and majestic proportions, with diameters ranging from 19.20 mm to 15.40 mm.

"The proportions of precious stones make the Thousand Year Harmony necklace highly unusual and impressive, as top-quality jadeite boulders typically yield beads of no more than 5 to 10 mm in diameter due to their extreme scarcity. I read that to fashion a strand of matching jadeite beads, they all must come from the same boulder, and as many as three times the desired number of beads would have been required to select the most suitable ones. With the immense wastage involved, jadeite bead necklaces rank among the most valuable and sought-after forms of jadeite jewelry.

Carlos elaborated, "The Chinese have always prized jade for its hardness, durability, and beauty. In particular, its subtle, translucent colors and protective qualities caused it to become associated with Chinese conceptions of the soul and immortality. They considered jade to be a symbol of heaven. By the Han dynasty, 206 BC to 220 AD, the royal family and prominent lords were buried entirely covered in jade burial suits sewn with gold thread, the idea being that it would preserve the body and the souls attached to it. They also believed jade would combat fatigue in the living.

Carlos concluded, "But the most unusual feature of the Thousand Year Harmony Necklace is that each of its 27 beads has been meticulously engraved with a Chinese character. Since its creation, no one had ever been able to explain why this seemingly random string of characters were etched. And now we've uncovered a manuscript written 4,000 years before the creation of the necklace that describes the same list of characters in the correct order."

"The only thing about this that makes," chimed Meijin, "is that it fits perfectly into the other 'impossible' occurrences regarding the manuscript - references to the *Book of Revelation*, links to Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*, and now the jade necklace. But what do the characters represent?"

Lily smiled, then said, "You're not going to believe this. Well, actually, you'll probably believe it. We're all getting used to witnessing the impossible. I was just looking at the Chinese characters and it dawned on me to check something out. The clue that tipped me off was the 27 beads and characters. Do you know what else totals 27?"

Meijin said, "27 is the only positive integer that is three times the sum of its digits. In a prime reciprocal magic square of the multiples of 17, the magic constant is 27."

Lily laughed. "That's not what I was thinking, but I'm impressed you had that fact tucked away in your head. No, what I realized was that there are twenty-seven books in the New Testament. Then, it was just a matter of finding the Chinese names of each book. Each character on the Thousand Year Harmony necklace corresponds to these books, in the correct order."

"Of course they do!" laughed Carlos. "The necklace is the final confirmation tying the *Way of Eternal Harmony* to Biblical prophecy. Absolutely incredible!”

"So what do we do with all of this prophecy?" asked Meijin.

“I feel like Frodo in the movie Fellowship of the Ring,” said James. “Wait a minute while I find the quote.” A moment later, he continued, “Here it is. Remember when Galadrial said to Frodo, “You are a ring-bearer, Frodo. To bear a ring of power is to be alone. This task was appointed to you. And if you do not find a way, no one will’”.

“OK,” said Carlos. “Here’s what we have so far.” He pulled out his notebook. “First, we know the manuscript is legitimate. Second, it was written five thousand years ago by Huangdi, the emperor of China. Third, it’s filled with a ton of biblical prophecy, which we know is accurate, even though we can’t explain it.”

“Fourth,” chimed in Meijin, “Lily and James fit the bill for the perfect qigong practitioners to perform Baduanjin.”

“Fifth, we know that the jade necklace exists and also perfectly matches the description in the manuscript,” said Carlos. “And we know this all needs to take place in three weeks, on August 8th, in the Palace of Harmony.”

“Got it,” said James. “Piece of cake!” he joked. They all laughed.

“I hate to be negative, but even if we could get ourselves over to China in time, how are we going to get the Thousand Year Harmony Necklace? It’s a priceless national treasure kept at the Museum of the Forbidden City.”

“Good point,” said Carlos. “That is a pretty big sticking point.” He paused and looked at his watch. “It’s late, you guys. Why don’t we give this a rest for now. We’ve digested a whole lot of information tonight. Maybe we’ll have fresh insight in the morning.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said James.

Lily and Meijin nodded in agreement. “Good night, guys.”

“Take care. We’ll touch base tomorrow,” said Carlos.

##

## Chapter Thirteen: Stealing the Manuscript

Major Bao Zheng had led the Ancient Artifact Reacquisition Unit for the past two years. During that time, he gained much expertise in Chinese antiquities. The government maintained a comprehensive list of items stolen from various palaces, museums, and governmental offices over the centuries. During his tenure, he and his team had located dozens of caches of Chinese treasure and had successfully reacquired many of them.

One of his ongoing cases involved the stash of materials taken by the British from the Chinese at the end of the First Opium War and currently housed at the British Museum. The Chinese were confident that the British had stolen many items from the Imperial Palace in the Forbidden City.

This group of antiquities held particular interest for Chinese scholars. Legends told of an ancient manuscript secured in a golden puzzle box, hidden deep within the crypts of the Forbidden City. Most intriguing was the belief that the Yellow Emperor wrote the manuscript around 2650 BC.

When the communists came to power under Mao Zedong, officials searched for the mysterious golden box at the palace in the Forbidden City. However, their efforts came up empty - the chest was nowhere to be found.

Then, an archivist who had served under the last emperor, Puyi, confided in some of the young communist officials. The Xuantong Emperor, commonly known as Puyi, was the last emperor of China, the eleventh and final monarch of the Qing dynasty. He ruled the puppet state of Manchukuo under the Empire of Japan. The archivist relayed a story of a travesty that had occurred a century earlier, when the British government had stolen hundreds of priceless Chinese artifacts from the Forbidden City. The theft occurred in the closing months of the British occupation of China during the First Opium War.

The emperor's archivists had documentation confirming that a golden puzzle box had been stored in the Forbidden City. They also recorded additional items stolen by the British. Since that discovery, the Communist government had made multiple requests to the British, demanding that they return these historical artifacts, but without success. The British even had the audacity to deny the Chinese access to view the materials, supposedly stored deep within heavily secured crypts at the British Museum.

Since the British had refused to cooperate with the Chinese government, Zheng's superiors assigned him to track them down and wait for an opportunity to reacquire them. Zheng and his team had developed a complex software program to hack into the British Museum database, where they could monitor activities within the museum, particularly regarding the Chinese stash of artifacts.

One morning, two days after Carlos' return from England, Bao Zheng noticed a ping on his cyber-alert system. Upon examination, he discovered that the British Museum had authorized access for someone to view the Chinese artifacts. He was an American academic named Levy based at NC State University in North Carolina, USA.

Probing deeper into this new development, he uncovered a confidential memo in the British Museum's database noting that the museum director had received a backdoor channel request from the Prime Minister's office. This American professor had gained access to the Chinese artifacts through a personal connection between his wife and the British Prime Minister's wife.

A follow-up memo written the following week left Zheng speechless. The American and his small team had not only found the golden box, but they had opened it and retrieved its contents. If this was the box that Zheng believed it was, it should have been impossible for them to open. No one in China had ever been able to solve the mysterious codes required to gain access. Nor could they have forced the box open without jeopardizing the contents inside.

What if they had managed to open the golden box? Countless specialists of ancient Chinese artifacts had speculated for centuries that it contained the coveted manuscript *Way of Eternal Harmony,* written by Huang Qi nearly 5,000 years ago. At a minimum, such a discovery would be historically important. But, in the unlikely event that the legends were true, that manuscript would be one of the greatest finds of all times.

Zheng was a data-driven scientist but had a healthy respect for the ancient ways. You couldn't grow up in China without being influenced by Daoist principles, no matter how hard the government tried to suppress them. If the American accessed the manuscript, Zheng wanted to know what he found. He requested permission to plan an operation to intercept the information acquired by the American named Levy. He needed to find out what was in that box. And if it was the manuscript, he wanted to acquire it for Chinese scholars to examine.

The operation would entail placing him in the field, posing as a postdoctoral student at the same university where Levy taught. He would befriend the professor and then discover what he had seen in the crypts of the British Museum. An hour after he submitted the request, he got a phone call. It was his superior office, Colonel Li Ming.

"Major Zheng, this is an interesting development."

"Yes, sir. I don't know how the American accessed the golden puzzle box, but the information I've obtained from internal memos at the British Museum indicate that he has come into the possession of an ancient manuscript. The director of the museum swore the American to secrecy, given the delicate nature of the artifact."

"The fools," declared Colonel Li. "The British think they’re keeping these Chinese artifacts hidden from us. Not only do we know they have them, but we can read their emails and internal memos as well. What I'd give to have access to their Pentagon the way you've wired up that museum!"

"I agree, sir," said Zheng. "Probably a bit more security to navigate at the Pentagon, but I'd be happy to give it a shot."

"I know you would. That's why I'm grateful to have you on my team before someone else grabs you for more important matters. But, getting back to the issue at hand, I'll approve your mission. There's little risk, and it will give you a good overseas experience. The professor should not be too difficult to manipulate."

"Thank you, sir. I won't let you down."

"I know you won't. And I have to admit, I'm curious about what the professor found in that puzzle box. How in the world did he manage to open it? I talked with the director of the Forbidden City Museum an hour ago and he doesn't believe it. 'Can't be done,' he told me. Apparently, the palace staff spent centuries playing with that box, trying to find a way to open it. As you know, Zheng, most of our puzzle boxes have riddles tied to ancient Chinese culture and history. But according to the director, the riddles encrypting this golden box were unfathomable, even to the most gifted Chinese scholars."

"And," added Zheng, "the British similarly struck out. Their memos revealed embarrassment when this small group of Americans showed up last week and had the box open in a matter of hours. They asked the professor how he’d done it, but he wouldn't say. He just agreed to keep the manuscript secret."

"What's he going to do with it?" Li asked.

"That's one of the things I'll try and find out."

"Be safe and keep me informed on your progress."

"I will, sir. Thank you."

\* \* \*

Zheng did research on Professor Carlos Levy and his friends. It didn’t take much digging to discover Levy’s interest in the golden box. He was a scholar of East Asian history and had written his Ph.D. on *Huangdi Neijing*. His recent work focused on the Yellow Emperor’s early life. It made sense that he would be curious about the golden box. Finding the *Way of Eternal Harmony* would be like finding the Holy Grail.

He then turned his attention to the other people who accompanied Levy. A few clicks later he got his answer. The woman named Meijin Yu was Carlos’ wife. She was also an academic, and not coincidentally, an expert on Chinese puzzle boxes. How convenient, Zheng thought. Then, there was Selina Fitzgerald, the British Prime Minister’s wife. She was an old college friend of Meijin’s. What about the couple, Lily and James Chen? How did they fit into this mystery?

A little more searching on the internet revealed that the Chens were acupuncturists in the same town where Carlos Levy lived. Maybe Carlos had met them seeking acupuncture for himself, or because of his interest in *Huangdi Neijing*. Bao Zheng next turned to the Chen’s business website, https://raleighacupunctureinc.com/. It contained extensive information about their clinic, the conditions they treated, and a blog. As Zheng was perusing recent posts, something caught his eye. James Chen had recently written an article entitled, ‘God, Quantum Physics, and Acupuncture.’ Intrigued, he clicked the title and began reading the article.

*“God, quantum physics, and acupuncture overlap like never before in today's culture. As believers in God, we have faith in the truth of the Bible. We cannot scientifically prove our belief, yet we know it is true. As acupuncturists, we experience the powerful healing taking place with this ancient medicine. Again, we cannot prove how it works, only that it does.*

*At the same time, quantum physics tells us that the world we see, feel, and touch is not what it appears to be. Science is finally catching up with religion and ancient medicine, acknowledging realities that the tools of this three-dimensional world cannot measure.*

*God is the creator of the universe. With His word came light and the creation of all things. He gave us the Bible, our instruction manual, to help us navigate this life. The Bible describes life on earth and life in the heavens. It recognizes the physical world and the spiritual world. It tells us that we are subject to spiritual forces that we cannot see. Believers know this. Most importantly, the Bible commands us to "Fear the Lord." This instruction is the key to a happy, healthy life, symbolizing our relationship with the Creator.*

*Believers and non-believers populate the world, those who devote their lives to an unseen God, and those who choose to put their faith in the physical, rational world of science. It can be challenging to make the leap from non-believer to believer. Ultimately faith is a choice. God does not force us into a relationship with Him.*

*Good health and happiness derive from a right relationship with God. Modern medicine, science, and rationality provide temporary comforts, but fall short of the ultimate answer to why we exist, where we come from, and where we are going. Interestingly, quantum physics and ancient Chinese medicine align with this wisdom.*

*About 100 years ago, scientists made a startling discovery. Subatomic particles follow different physical rules than large objects. In our world of big things, we are familiar with the laws of gravity, speed, force, and order. But on the quantum level of small things, like waves and particles of light, our rules don't apply.*

*For example, experiments have confirmed three unusual properties at the quantum level:*

1. *Objects at the subatomic level can pass through solid walls.*
2. *Two objects participating in a race can reach the finish line before leaving the starting gate.*
3. *One can alter the outcome of a test just by observing or not observing it.*

*All three of these outcomes make no sense in our world of big things, yet they are the standard way of being in the world of small things.*

*Our understanding of quantum physics is beginning to touch the surface of understanding the ways of God and how He functions in the universe. God created the universe from nothingness and empowered people to perform miracles (events that the rules of our world of big things could not explain). We now have scientific evidence that the world is not what it appears to be, that miracles are indeed possible, and that universal forces are at work well beyond our comprehension.*

*This awareness leads us to the interconnection of God, quantum physics, and acupuncture. Acupuncture straddles the world of small things with the world of big things. It creates a small world environment within our big world bodies that results in healing from pain and disease. Acupuncture uses energy (small world) to alter our physical body (big world). While a successful acupuncture outcome is not dependent on faith, understanding is essential in this healing process.*

*Acupuncture resolves migraine headaches, cures insomnia, and overcomes unexplained infertility through a 2000-year-old medical diagnosis and treatment system. Practitioners feel the patient's pulse and look at their tongue to determine the internal imbalances responsible for their health condition. Then they use tiny, sterile needles to activate "Qi" energy, which restores balance to organs in the body. This restoration resolves pain and overcomes illness.*

*For years, the Western medical establishment dismissed acupuncture as "voodoo." Now they regularly send their "difficult" patients to us, those that do not respond well to modern medical treatment. They don't understand what we do, but see our results and "want in" on the action. The general population also sees it. They come for treatment, desperate for relief from pain and disease. And most of the time, acupuncture helps them get better.*

*You cannot see Qi (energy) with your eyes or even an electron microscope - tiny acupuncture needles open blocked channels, resulting in pain relief. Circulating qi through the body lifts stress and depression. Nourishing organs with Chinese herbs resolves anxiety, improves sleep, and restores fertility. There is no modern explanation for this.*

*Someday, quantum physics may explain how it works, how acupuncture shifts the energy of a physical body to allow healing that could not otherwise take place. In the meantime, people come for acupuncture treatment based on faith, desperation, or a combination of the two.*

*The bottom line is that there is more to this world than we can see. We can choose to embrace this reality or not. No one is going to force us to believe. But if we do, entire worlds of possibility can open up for us. The choice is ours.” -James Chen, Lic. Ac.*

 Bao Zheng was surprisingly moved by the article. Chen was merging two ideas Zheng was familiar with, quantum mechanics and acupuncture, with a third that he knew nothing about, God. But instead of Zheng dismissing the argument for God, which he would have done in the past, he somehow felt more open to the possibility that an all-powerful deity might be actively involved in the world. This thought opposed everything he had ever been taught in Chinese schools. The communist party, of which he was a proud member, did not accept the notions of divinity. Nonetheless, he was intrigued and appreciated Chen’s sensibilities. He then pushed these thoughts aside and continued his preparation for the mission.

Zheng next researched Carlos Levy's employer, NC State University. The school was home to one of the best engineering programs in the United States and was a pearl in the North Carolina public university system. NC State was located in Raleigh, a small capital city in the southern state of North Carolina. Zheng was unfamiliar with the state but knew it was about five hours south of Washington, DC, a city he was quite familiar with, being America's national capital.

He predicted that his assumed identity would blend in at NC State, posing as a Chinese graduate student. The campus had 34,000 students, many of whom were Asian. His government had good relationships with many American universities, as there were over 220,000 Chinese nationals studying in college and graduate programs nationwide. NC State was no exception.

All it took to arrange the post-doc for Zheng was a telephone call from the chairman of the computer science department at Tsinghua University, a prestigious Chinese technical university, to a colleague at NC State. Tsinghua is a national public research university in Beijing. Like NC State, it is publicly funded, in this case, by China’s Ministry of Education. Reciprocal arrangements frequently occurred between top-tiered universities. Within the hour, NC State granted Bao Zheng a six-month position in their computer science department. The chairman at Tsinghua never suspected that Zheng was anything other than a doctoral student.

Bao Zheng always looked forward to overseas assignments. They were challenging, required planning for all possible contingencies, and included a tantalizing element of danger. This assignment, however, was not particularly risky. His target was a university professor, not a foreign agent. Nonetheless, he was entering the United States with false papers, was lying to customs officials, and would, in all likelihood, be stealing an American professor’s academic research. Such actions carried significant risk, which added to the fun.

Zheng called his mother before leaving. She lived thirty minutes from downtown Beijing. He and his mom were close. Zheng's father had passed away five years earlier from a stroke. Every Sunday, he drove to his mother's house and joined her for lunch. They had been doing this for years, and both looked forward to their weekly visits.

"Hi, Mom."

"Bao, I'm so glad you called! Did you go out last night with your friends to play snooker?"

"No, I was busy at work. That's what I'm calling about."

"What's going on? A new case?" Zheng's mom loved hearing about her son's assignments, or at least the general overviews he was allowed to share. She was glad he had turned down those high-paying job offers from private industry. Her family had all served in the military and police, and she was glad her son was following in their footsteps. She always said, “There's no greater joy than service to your country. You can make a million dollars at a private company, but what does it give you? Temporary wealth, which can easily be lost. But when you serve in government, you earn honor, which no one can ever take away from you.”

"I'm starting an assignment overseas, Mom, so I won't be seeing you for a while."

"How long will you be gone?" his mother asked.

"Hard to say. At least a week, possibly longer."

"I know you can't tell me where you're going. Just be careful! I'm proud of you, son."

"Thanks, Mom. Give Jippers a big hug for me!" Jippers was his mother's 15-year-old cat.

"I will," she responded. "He'll miss you!"

"I'll miss him too," he said, laughing. "But I'll miss you more, Mom."

Ever since his father's passing, Zheng had worried about his mom. She told him that she was fine, and in reality, she was. She had many friends, still worked part-time at the sheriff's office, and had good health. But Zheng was an only child and felt protective of his mother. Since he didn't have a serious girlfriend and was not interested in starting a family, he focused on his mom, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, and cousins. 'There are many ways to have a family,' he would tell himself. 'Not everyone is cut out to get married and raise children.'

The following day Zheng flew out of Beijing Capital International Airport to JFK International Airport in New York City, where he transferred planes for the short flight to Raleigh. Upon arrival, he secured a Lyft to his hotel a block from campus, in the heart of downtown. He would not need a car, as the campus was walkable, and there were numerous restaurants in the area. He was supposed to check in with the department head of graduate studies in the computer science department the following day. For now, he unpacked and went to bed. He had to be fresh tomorrow morning - there was work to be done.

The next morning Zheng reached out to a Chinese government contact in the Raleigh area. He needed a particular drug, and he was assured by Colonel Li that this man would be able to supply it to him. Sodium thiopental, a truth serum, is a barbiturate with sedative, hypnotic, and anesthetic properties, traditionally used to elicit information from unwilling parties. As a barbiturate, it decreased both higher cortical brain function and inhibition.

Suppression of the higher cortical functions often leads to revealing truths someone might otherwise wish to hide. The drug tends to make subjects verbose and cooperative with interrogators. Since the Chinese government did not want to injure Carlos Levy, they decided to use sodium thiopental to extract information from the professor about the content and location of the manuscript.

Thiopental is commonly used in China as a truth serum to weaken the resolve of a subject and make the individual more compliant to pressure. Bao Zheng's assignment included befriending Professor Levy, taking him out for drinks, and then sedating him. Later that afternoon, he met with his contact and received the necessary dosages. Now he just needed to befriend Professor Levy.

\* \* \*

Carlos’ office phone rang. He picked up the receiver. “Hello. This is Carlos Levy.”

“Hello, Professor Levy.” The man on the phone had a Chinese accent.

“Yes, may I help you?” inquired Levy.

“Professor, sorry to bother you. My name is Bao Zheng. I am a visiting postdoctoral student in the Computer Science department. I am from Beijing, China, here for six months, and would like to meet with you regarding your work with *Huangdi Neijing*.”

“Welcome, Dr. Zheng. Yes, of course, I’d be happy to talk with you. I take it your interest is personal, and not related to your computer science work?”

“Yes, you are correct. I’ll be completing a post-doc here, but wanted to take the opportunity to seek you out because I have a personal interest in your work. I’ve read your dissertation and follow-up papers on *Huangdi Neijing* and was very impressed. In fact, one of the benefits of coming to NC State was that it gave me an opportunity to meet you.”

Carlos was flattered. “It will be my pleasure to talk with you about my work. When would you like to come by?”

“Are you free tomorrow?” asked Zheng.

“Yes, absolutely. How about 3:00pm? You can come by my office. I’ll send you directions.”

“I am looking forward to meeting you, Professor.”

“Likewise, Dr. Zheng. See you tomorrow.”

Bao Zheng arrived at Carlos’ office the following afternoon. Zheng had read Carlos’ research on *Huangdi Neijing* and was prepared to engage in a lively discussion. Carlos offered Zheng a cup of tea, and they settled in for conversation.

Zheng began, “One of the things that intrigued me about your research on *Huangdi Neijing* was the abundance of information you discovered on the Yellow Emperor’s early life. How did you accomplish this?”

The question was a setup. Bao Zheng knew exactly how Carlos had done it. In preparation for the mission, Zheng had read the research of famed Chinese scholar Weidou Xu, a professor of Chinese history at Shanghai University. But Carlos didn’t know that. Zheng figured that once he got Carlos talking about Xu’s work and how it inspired his own, he could dive deeper. Had Carlos found any “new” information about the Yellow Emperor’s early life that Xu had not yet discovered? This topic might lead to Carlos sharing about his discoveries at the British Museum.

As Zheng anticipated, Carlos referenced Xu’s extensive work on *Huangdi Neijing*. Zheng could feel Carlos’excitement build as he shared his views about the classic Chinese text. Zheng listened intently, showing enthusiasm and encouraging Carlos to keep talking.

After half an hour, Carlos said, “I hate to cut our time short, but I have a class to teach.”

“Might we continue this discussion another time?” asked Zheng.

“Of course,” said Carlos.

“Are you free tomorrow, possibly later in the day?”

Carlos looked at his schedule. “Well, I will finish a class at 5:00 pm tomorrow afternoon. I could meet with you for half an hour here in my office if you like.”

“That would be excellent,” said Zheng. “I’ll see you tomorrow. And I’ll bring the tea this time. I found a wonderful tea shop in the neighborhood that has my favorite brand. You’ll enjoy it, Professor.”

“Sounds good. Until then.”

\* \* \*

Bao Zheng was pleased with the mission’s progress. He had made contact with Levy, established a rapport, and now had created the perfect opportunity to slip the professor a dosage of Thiopental - in the tea he would bring the following day. He suggested meeting Levy in the late afternoon so they would be undisturbed during the “interrogation”.

The next afternoon Zheng arrived at Levy’s office, drinks in hand. They picked up their conversation where they had left off the previous day. Today, however, the conversation went in a distinctly different direction. As the drug took effect, Carlos Levy became relaxed, uninhibited, and forthcoming. When Zheng knew the drug had taken its full effect, he asked Levy a question.

“Professor, the papers you’ve published on *Huangdi Neijing* are marvelous. Are you still actively researching the text?”

“It’s funny you should ask that question,” the relaxed Levy answered. “As a matter of fact, I am currently involved in a related project that is nothing short of astounding.”

“Really?” asked Zheng, feigning surprise. “You must tell me all about it.”

“Oh, I wish I could. But, unfortunately I am not at liberty to discuss the matter. The British are strict about protocol.” Carlos laughed and continued, “Well, I should not have said that, should I? About the British, I mean.”

“Do not worry, professor. My lips are sealed. Like you, I have a passion for ancient Chinese texts. Tell me about this astounding project.”

“Yes, of course. I mean, what would be the harm? We’re all professionals here, aren’t we?”

“Yes, professor, we are. Please, continue.”

“Well, I was perusing an archive of ancient Chinese artifacts held by the British Museum when I stumbled upon a reference to a golden puzzle box adorned with a dragon. I immediately remembered an obscure reference to one of the legends surrounding the Yellow Emperor and *Huangdi Neijing*.”

“You mean the legend of Master Wong?” asked Zheng.

“Yes, exactly. I’m not surprised you know about it. Anyone who lives and breathes this work like we do is familiar with the legend. But here’s something you probably don’t know. The British stole a large number of ancient artifacts from the Forbidden Palace at the end of the first Opium War. It has long been suspected that one of the items they took was the golden box associated with Huangdi.”

“That would be too incredible,” Zheng declared.

“So I would have thought,” said Levy. “But I can assure you that the item housed in the British Museum is the actual golden box.”

“Professor, that is miraculous!” Zheng paused, then continued, “But how do you know it’s the box referenced in the legend?”

“Because we opened it!” said Carlos, clearly pleased with himself.

“But that’s impossible, Professor. No one has ever been able to open the golden box. Its riddles are legendary, and forcing the box open would destroy the contents inside.”

“Yes, you are correct, Dr. Zheng. No one has ever been able to open the box - until now. We succeeded. It was incredible - the greatest moment of my life.”

“How did you do it?” Zheng asked. “Tell me how you achieved this incredible feat.”

“Unfortunately, I am not at liberty to discuss how we got the box open. Suffice it to say that we did it.”

“And what was inside?”

“An ancient manuscript.”

“Was it the *Way of Eternal Harmony*?” asked Zheng.

“The very same,” Carlos answered. “Dated and signed by Huangdi himself.”

Zheng said, “With all due respect, professor, I find that hard to believe. You may have found a forgery, but surely not the original manuscript.”

“I understand your skepticism, Dr. Zheng. But, I can assure you, it was the original.”

“I would not possibly be able to accept such a claim without seeing it for myself. If only you had a copy for me to see with my own eyes!”

Carlos knew he should not show the manuscript to this young man. But, despite his better judgment, he was leaning toward doing so. Little did he know that the drugs enveloping his nervous system were compelling him to acquiesce to the subliminal demands of his interrogator.

“As a matter of fact, I do have a copy,” Levy said. He felt a strange sense of relief sharing his secret. He continued, “Not only that, I will show it to you. But you must promise to keep this between us. Otherwise, I will get in big trouble with the British government.”

“My lips are sealed,” said Zheng as sincerely as he could muster.

Carlos walked over to his desk, took out a key, and unlocked the bottom right drawer. Next, he removed a metal box from the bottom of the drawer and unlocked it with another key. A moment later, he was holding a small notebook.

“Here, take a look at this,” he said, handing the notebook to Zheng.

Bao Zheng looked at the first section of the notebook, which contained handwritten Chinese characters. They were clearly copied from ancient text. He saw the authorship claimed by Huangdi, the date of the document, and the title. He recognized the unmistakable style of *Huangdi Neijing*. But this was not the Yellow Emperor’s Classic Canon. It was an addendum, the section withdrawn by the emperor that never got published with the rest of the classic text.

After examining the notebook for a few minutes, Zheng said, “I am beyond words, professor. You have, indeed, found the *Way of Eternal Harmony*. Congratulations!”

“Thank you.” Levy looked at his watch. “Oh, no! I’m late for an appointment. I’ve got to go.”

“No problem. Thank you for your time. It’s been most enlightening.”

He returned the notebook, shook hands with the professor, and departed.

Bao Zheng left the building and returned to his hotel. He immediately documented their encounter, including details about the location of the manuscript. Next, he began planning the break-in, which would occur later that night. He needed to gain entry to the professor’s office, open the safe, copy the manuscript, and leave, without being seen.

\* \* \*

Bao Zheng knew exactly where Carlos Levy had hidden the manuscript - in the bottom locked drawer of his office desk at the university. He had to get into the building after hours undetected. During his visit to Levy’s office that afternoon, Zheng had checked out the locks and video surveillance. Thankfully, there were only two cameras to deal with - one outside the front of the building and a second in the main entryway. He could avoid both by entering through the service door in the rear of the building.

Zheng returned to the faculty building just past 11:00 pm. He calculated that it was late enough to avoid a crowd but not too late to elicit suspicion if seen by police patrolling campus. The lock on the service entrance was a piece of cake to pick, taking less than a minute to unlock. He then used a back staircase to access the third floor. The hallway on the third floor was dark, indicating that all the staff had left for the night. He used his flashlight to find Professor Levy’s office and began working the lock. Again, like the first one, this lock posed no problem to Zheng, who had the door open within ninety seconds.

Once inside the office, he quickly reached Levy’s desk and opened the remaining two locks. Before him was the notebook he had held that afternoon. Within minutes he took digital pictures of each page. He then put the document back in the metal box, relocked the box and the desk drawer, and reversed his steps out of the building. Twenty minutes later, he was back in his hotel room.

After reading through the entire manuscript, Zheng felt confident that he was holding a genuine copy of *Way of Eternal Harmony*, stolen by the British 150 years ago. While the original was still inaccessible deep within the catacombs of the British Museum, this copy, now digitally secured, was nearly as valuable. Zheng contacted Colonel Li in Beijing, reporting the good news. Within minutes he had uploaded a scanned copy of the document to Chinese government servers.

Colonel Li then instructed Zheng to pack his belongings and depart immediately. A flight was leaving for Beijing in five hours, and Li wanted Zheng out of the country before any suspicions arose. He arrived at RDU airport ninety minutes later, went through security without incident, and caught a two-hour nap at the gate before boarding his flight to Beijing.

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## Chapter Fourteen: Fallout From The Theft

Carlos realized something was amiss. He did not feel well the next morning. He had a headache and was more tired than usual. He also remembered little about the previous evening, which was unusual, since he typically had perfect recall. One moment he and Dr. Zheng, the visiting postdoc, were having a lively discussion about *Huangdi Neijing*, and the next, he was waking up in his bed the following morning. His wife said he had acted unusually happy the night before, cracking jokes and telling stories. But he became exhausted after dinner, complained of a headache, and went to bed.

Upon arrival at work, Carlos' feelings of foreboding significantly increased. He suspected that someone had been in his office during the night. His first clue was that his office chair was out of place. Carlos had great attention to detail, which made him seem absentminded when focused on a task, but also gave him keen awareness of his surroundings.

Memories of the previous afternoon began permeating through Carlos' mind. The foreign postdoc had been asking him questions about the manuscript. He had even asked to see it. Did Carlos show it to him? That would have been stupid. He shouldn't have even mentioned the manuscript, let alone show it to him. What was he thinking? And why was his memory so clouded? He did not feel well at all.

He picked up the phone and called the campus health clinic. Then he headed over, where a nurse examined him and took a blood sample at his request. Carlos had a bad feeling and needed to know the answer. Two hours later, his apprehensions were confirmed. He had, indeed, shown Dr. Zheng the manuscript - because Carlos had been drugged!

A call to the police and several interviews later with investigators resulted in the authorities confirming that Bao Zheng had taken a flight out of the country earlier that morning. Upon further examination, the police confirmed that someone had picked the locks of the rear entrance to the faculty building and Carlos' office. The perpetrator had been careful - there were no fingerprints or video on the surveillance cameras.

Back in his office, Carlos sat at his desk, trying to make sense of the events of the previous few days. Dr. Zheng, the supposed postdoc in computer science, had contacted him requesting information about Carlos' work on *Huangdi Neijing*. At their second meeting, Zheng arrived with tea, which Carlos drank as they talked. That's when his memory began failing him. Now it was apparent that Zheng drugged him, getting Carlos to show him a copy of the manuscript. But why go through all that trouble? And why break into his office later that night?

Then it dawned on him. Carlos unlocked the bottom drawer of his desk and looked at the metal box. Did Zheng come back to look at the manuscript again? Had he stolen it? Carlos unlocked the box. The manuscript was still there. Zheng must have made a copy of the document. But wait, he thought. How would he even know that the manuscript existed, or that Carlos had it?

Carlos felt certain that Bao Zheng was not working alone. Someone with powerful connections had secured a university position for Zheng on short notice, flown him into the country, and got him out again quickly and inconspicuously. If the Chinese government was involved, the next question was how did they even know Levy had a copy of the manuscript? As far as he knew, few people knew about his trip to England.

Carlos called his contact at the British Museum, Ronald Godfried, and explained what had happened. Godfried listened intently and then replied,

"We were afraid something like this might happen."

"What do you mean?" Carlos asked.

Godfried continued, "Our computers were recently hacked. And, to be perfectly honest with you, they might have been compromised earlier without us knowing. We just discovered the breach last week. A computer bug was monitoring our online activity, including calendars, emails, and archives. Someone was keeping close tabs on the comings and goings of the Museum. We had no idea what they were tracking - until I received your phone call. It seems they were interested in the China collection, and in particular the golden box."

"But who?" asked Carlos.

"We suspect it's the Chinese government, given the sophistication of the spyware."

Carlos said, "Then I would not be surprised if Bao Zheng was a Chinese spy. He certainly knew how to extract information from me - getting a postdoc assignment, befriending me, drugging me, breaking into my office, copying the manuscript, and leaving the country so quickly."

"Our government is trying to figure out how to proceed," said Godfried. "We had folks from the cyber crime unit over here this morning examining the spyware. They see this as a good opportunity to learn about China's technology. I'm glad they're happy. We're certainly not!"

"Neither am I," said Carlos. "Hey, thanks for the information, and good luck."

"You too, professor. Sorry for all the trouble. Take care of yourself."

Carlos hung up the phone. At least he knew who he was dealing with - the Chinese government. Apparently, they had been interested in the golden box long before Carlos stumbled upon it. And now they had a copy of the manuscript, thanks to him and his friends.

An agent from the CIA contacted Carlos later that day. The British government had reached out to them regarding the case. The call was a formality - the CIA was neither concerned nor interested in the document's contents. To them, it seemed like the Chinese were indulging in fantasies regarding ancient mythology. Furthermore, the United States government did not care if the Chinese wanted to steal back something that the British shouldn't have taken in the first place. Plus, the CIA did not believe there was any merit to the prophecies contained in the manuscript. And they saw no national security issues. All they asked was for Carlos to inform them of any developments in the case.

\* \* \*

Carlos updated his wife and friends over dinner that evening.

"So the Chinese government now has a copy of the *Way of Eternal Harmony*," he concluded.

"But so do we," Meijin said, smiling. "That makes us even!"

"When we met last week, we were going to think about what, if anything, we wanted to do," said Carlos. "All indications pointed to the fact that we were somehow meant to find the manuscript."

“But last week there was a big stumbling block,” added Lily. “We had the qigong angle covered, and the trip to China was doable, even on short notice. But we had no way of getting the jade necklace.”

“That’s right,” said Carlos, “One thing seems clear from this spying episode. The Chinese government was motivated to get their hands on the manuscript. Do you think they want to activate the *Way of Eternal Harmony* next month?”

“It sure seems like it,” answered James.

Carlos continued, “Well, if that’s the case, we no longer have to worry about how to access the Thousand Year Harmony Necklace.”

“They’ll do it for us!” declared Meijin with a grin.

“So, does this mean we’re going to China?” asked James. “Because if we are, I need to start packing!” Everyone laughed.

“I’m in,” said Lily.

“So am I,” Meijin agreed.

Lily added, “James and I just need to make sure my folks are up for staying with the kids while we’re gone. They had so much fun together when we were in England, I’m sure they’ll be thrilled to do it again.”

“Well, then it’s settled. We’re heading to China!” declared Carlos. “And if that’s the case, we have a lot to do. We have to secure visas, make flight arrangements, and plot a course to Wudang Mountain.”

James added, “And most importantly, we’ve got to figure out how we’re going to get into the Palace of Harmony on the morning of August 8th and participate in the event. At this moment, all I can envision is how we’ll be arrested as soon as we land on Chinese soil!”

“Good point,” Carlos said. “How in the world are we going to make this work? Even if we can land undetected, how are we going to get to the palace, gain entry, and integrate ourselves in the process? We’ll be detained for sure.”

Lily responded, “Don’t worry, Carlos. God wouldn’t have laid this at our feet without an elegant solution. This is where we need to trust. Let’s take the actions we can see right now, which includes getting ourselves over to China and Wudang Mountain. The rest will come. God works like car manufacturers - with “just-in-time” delivery.”

“What’s that?” asked Meijin.

Lily answered, “If operating perfectly, a car part will arrive at the assembly plant right as it’s needed on the line. This method drives down costs, as storage is not necessary. In God’s case, He delivers solutions to problems just at the right time, and not a moment before. This method forces believers to develop strong faith and not rely on themselves.”

“And God always operates perfectly!” added James with a smile.

“Amen to that,” laughed Lily.

##

## Chapter Fifteen: The Chinese Decide What To Do

The Chinese government's reaction to finding the *Way of Eternal Harmony* was complicated. On the one hand, Chinese scholars were overjoyed at the discovery that the ancient prophecies were right and that the text actually existed. But balancing that joy was deep frustration with the British government, which had consistently denied China's requests for the repatriation of these artifacts. It took subterfuge for the Chinese to acquire a copy of the manuscript.

And in stark contrast to the scholars’ enthusiasm, Chinese officials were skeptical of the manuscript’s authenticity. They believed it was unlikely that a five-thousand-year-old document would have survived intact within a Chinese puzzle box. Furthermore, even if the document was legitimate, the government considered its promise of eternal health to be a myth and not worth pursuing. Such legends were pipedreams. It was mythical thinking like this that prompted the communist regime to limit Daoist teachings to its citizens. The government didn’t want the Chinese people putting their faith in mythical fantasies - like jade necklaces being able to heal disease. Modern medicine would provide for the people’s health, not fairy tales.

There were other inconsistencies about the manuscript that fed the government’s doubts about its legitimacy. For example, the document referred to a necklace that did not even exist at the time of its writing. It seemed obvious to them that the text must have been written after the necklace was made for the Emperor’s wife. How else could it have predicted the existence of a necklace etched with twenty-seven distinct Chinese characters. Most likely, the Emperor drafted the manuscript after the necklace was made in order to increase the necklace’s value. That would make the document five hundred years old, not five thousand.

Then there was the confusion about how the Americans had been able to open the puzzle box in the first place. Historians at the Forbidden City Museum reported that no one had ever been able to unlock the box. Its riddles were impossible to solve, and choosing the wrong answers, or forcing the box open, would have destroyed the contents inside. Every few decades, another mathematician, puzzle box expert, or historian would attempt to open the golden box, but without success. It seemed highway suspicious to the Chinese that a group of young Americans, albeit Chinese Americans, could solve the multiple puzzle levels and open the box.

At the end of the day, however, the Chinese officials still had to decide what to do with the manuscript. The scholars pleaded with them to put aside their skepticism and act as if the document was legitimate. “We’ve got nothing to lose,” they argued. “Let’s carry out the Baduanjin next month at the Palace of Harmony and see what happens. If it doesn’t work, we’ve lost nothing but a little time and money. However, imagine if the prophecy of Huangdi is true. The results would be a game-changer, providing the government with a jade necklace that could heal all diseases. Our party leaders would no longer get sick, enabling the Communist regime to reach even greater heights of power and success.” But despite the enthusiasm of the Chinese academics, government officials remained unconvinced and argued that a mission to the Palace of Harmony would be a waste of government resources.

The decision came three days later, passed down directly from the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. This high-level division was empowered by the Politburo to make routine day-to-day decisions on issues of concern to the country. Clearly, the manuscript had caught the attention of some highly influential members of the Central Committee.

"Agent Zheng, the Secretariat has authorized the mission,” said Colonel Li, Zheng’s commanding officer. “You are to lead a team to oversee the enactment of the *Way of Eternal Harmony*.”

"Yes, Sir. I'll start planning immediately!"

“You leave in three days for Wudang Mountain. As of this moment, your complete focus will be to prepare for the August 8th event. A number of Politburo members are particularly interested in this ancient manuscript and its potential.”

“That doesn’t surprise me, sir.”

“Nor I,” responded Li. “The government may have suppressed the outward appearances of Daoism, but it apparently has not snuffed out its deep-rooted influence on Chinese culture.”

Zheng was pleased that the mission was approved. While skeptical of the manuscript's promises, a small part of him wanted to believe that there was some truth to the prophecy. Now he would be able to find out.”

"I'm sending you two qigong masters, a married couple, as the manuscript requires. I'm also sending a talented, young videographer to document the event."

"Excellent, sir. What about the necklace? How will you secure its release from the museum?"

"Good question, Zheng. The darn thing is priceless - a national treasure. I’m afraid the director at the Forbidden City Palace Museum will not be keen on the idea of lending it out and sending it across the country to an ancient qigong palace on top of a remote mountain."

Zheng asked, “Don’t you think the director will be motivated to cooperate with the Central Committee?”

“Typically, I’d agree with you. But you don’t know Wang Xudong.”

“He’s the director of the museum?” asked Zheng.

“Yes. I happen to know him personally. He’s incredibly stubborn when it comes to safeguarding his museum pieces. Central Committee or not, he won’t make this easy.”

Zheng responded, “I’ve been doing some research on the matter, in the event that the mission got approved.”

“What kind of research?” asked Li.

"If I am not mistaken, sir, the museum's director’s wife, Wei Zhang, is a historian at the Beijing Capital Museum with a specialization in ancient Chinese texts. I'm sure Mrs. Zhang is familiar with *Huangdi Neijing* and the legend of the *Way of Eternal Harmony.* She might be helpful in encouraging her husband to loan us the necklace."

"Excellent idea, Zheng! I'll make a few calls and see if I can shake that necklace loose from the grips of Wang Xudong and his precious Forbidden City Museum. We need that piece of jewelry - otherwise this will be a big waste of our time."

Thanks to Bao Zheng's suggestion, and the assistance of Wang’s wife, the museum approved the release of the Thousand Year Harmony Necklace. The jewels would receive a special military escort from the Forbidden City Museum to the Palace of Harmony on Wudang Mountain, where they would arrive on the afternoon of August 7th, just in time for the qigong event the following morning. Soldiers would guard the necklace around the clock until its safe return to the museum on August 10th. The director was horrified by the idea of releasing the necklace from the safety of its museum home, but he was even more fearful of his wife's wrath if he didn't agree to its release!

Two days later, Zheng got a telephone call.

"Major Zheng, this is Chang Liping. I was instructed to call you and set up a meeting. My wife, Jing Xu, and I are qigong masters here in Beijing. We've been recruited for your project."

The name sounded familiar to Zheng. He asked, "Are you related to Wang Liping?"

"Yes, he is my father."

"The famous qigong master? I've heard great things about your father."

"Thank you, Major Zheng."

"He is probably China's most famous qigong master. How old is he now?"

“He just turned 73.”

“And how is his health?” asked Zheng.

“Excellent,” answered Chang. “Colonel Li wanted to recruit him for this project, but unfortunately my mother is not a qigong master. It sounds like the requirements are strict.”

“Yes, they are. Tell me, is it true that your father is the 18th generation in lineage? Wasn’t he chosen in the 1950s to head the Dragon Gate school?

“Right again,” said Chang. “You certainly know a lot about qigong.”

“I’ve become a bit of an expert while preparing for this assignment,” Zheng said. He paused, then continued, “So that makes you 19th generation. That’s quite auspicious!”

“I try not to think about it,” laughed Chang.

“Well, why don’t you and Jing Xu come by tomorrow so I can bring you up to speed on the project. There’s a great deal to be done in a short amount of time.” They agreed to meet the following morning in Zheng’s office.

Finally, Bao Zheng sent an advance team to the Palace of Harmony to arrange access to the main hall on August 8th. They also needed to create a secure perimeter around the palace to protect the Thousand Year Harmony Necklace. The Palace of Harmony would be closed to the public from August 7th through the 9th, to the dismay of the Wudang Mountain business association, which managed the labyrinth of temples all over the mountain. The Palace of Harmony was a tourist favorite, being a famous qigong historic site.

Zheng and the rest of his team would leave in two days. In addition, Colonel Li assigned another half dozen staff to coordinate food and lodging. The Palace of Harmony was located in a remote location, five thousand feet above sea level, at the top of Wudang Mountain. Facilities were minimal, so they had to treat this operation like a field exercise, bringing all the necessary supplies. They had to plan for every contingency before they set out. And there was no room for error. They would all pay dearly if they failed to pull off this exercise. The next opportunity to perform the *Way of Eternal Harmony* would not come for 12 years.

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## Chapter Sixteen: Trip to China

Wudang Mountain, located in Hubei Province, China, is renowned for its cultural and historical significance, particularly concerning Daoism. The Palace of Harmony, also known as the Golden Palace, is one of the primary Daoist temples on Wudang Mountain. It is a significant religious and cultural site, attracting visitors and pilgrims from all over the world. The palace complex has halls, pavilions, and courtyards, showcasing intricate architectural design and Daoist symbolism.

In addition, Wudang Mountain is known for its association with martial arts, meditation, and the pursuit of spiritual cultivation. It has been a center for Daoist practices and the training of Daoist priests and martial artists for centuries. Many Daoist principles, including the balance of yin and yang, harmony with nature, and the pursuit of enlightenment, are deeply embedded in the teachings and practices associated with Wudang Mountain.

James, Lily, Meijin, and Carlos had to find a way to get into China and then to the Palace of Harmony quickly and quietly. They knew the authorities might have flagged their names, anticipating they would try to enter the country in hopes of reaching Wudang Mountain. James had a talented travel agent who was up for the task of getting the group into China with as little fanfare as possible.

“The key is to fly into the country as part of a large tourist group,” explained Sean Culver, travel agent extraordinaire. “In addition, make your destination city one that gets a lot of foreign visitors.” He thought for a moment, then continued, “I suggest you book a tour with China Travel Service (Canada) Inc out of Toronto. They are the largest foreign travel company in China and have been doing business there since 1928. The authorities know this company and have a comfort level with them.”

“But which city in China should we fly to?” asked Carlos.

“Book a tour that starts in Xi'an,” Sean answered. “It’s a popular tourist destination, being home to the famed TerraCotta Army.”

“I’ve been there,” said James. “It’s amazing. Thousands of life-size figures are buried with China’s first emperor, Qin Shi Huang.”

“That’s right,” said Sean.

“I’m also familiar with Xi'an,” said Carlos. “It’s not too far from Wudang Mountain.”

“Which makes it perfect for your point of entry,” said Sean. “You can take a train from Xi'an to Wudang Mountain in about seven hours.”

“Why not rent a car? Wouldn’t that be less conspicuous?” asked Carlos.

Sean responded, “The problem with renting a car is the paperwork involved. Car rental companies in China are all government-based. Your names would likely be flagged. Better to travel by train, especially if we can get the tour company to purchase the tickets for you.”

He continued, “Once you arrive in Danjiangkou, which is the closest town near the mountain, I will arrange for you to stay at a small hotel off the grid. Typically, you would take a cable car to the top of Wudang Mountain. But given the activities going on there, you’ll most likely have to trek up the mountain yourselves. It’s a popular tourist destination with multiple hiking trails leading to the summit.”

“We should hike up early in the morning on August 8th, say around 5:00 am, so we can arrive at the Palace just before eight o’clock,” said Carlos.

Sean found a tour with the Canadian China Travel Service, leaving for Xi'an on August 4th. The group only had three spots remaining, but Sean called in a favor, and got them to add a fourth. In addition, he arranged to have the tour company purchase train tickets for them to Danjiangkou, claiming his clients wanted a quick excursion to the mountain town to visit relatives.

Finally, he booked hotel accommodations for the group at the base of Wudang Mountain at Top Zero Hotel, just half a mile from a trail leading up to the Palace of Harmony. He booked the reservation using only Lily’s name and intentionally misspelled it.

He explained, “When you arrive at the hotel, just say that your travel agent accidentally misspelled your name. They won’t think twice about it. And that way if your names are on any watchlists, they won’t be flagged.”

“Did you ever work for the CIA?” joked James. “You seem like you’ve done this type of thing before.”

“As a matter of fact, I did. Not the CIA, but I worked in the travel office for a branch of the NSA for five years after college.”

“Well, that makes sense,” said James. “We certainly appreciate your skills right now!”

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Two days later, Carlos, Meijin, Lily, and James flew to Toronto, Canada, where they met with their travel group. There were twenty people, most from Canada, but some from the United States and Mexico. Together they boarded the flight to China.

As they settled into their cramped seats in coach, the anticipation of the long journey weighed heavily on their minds. The flight attendants moved about the cabin, making final preparations. At the same time, fellow passengers rustled with their bags, settling into their seats and finding room in the overhead compartments for their belongings. The overhead lights dimmed, signaling the start of the flight, and the captain's voice crackled over the intercom to announce their departure.

With a distant rumble, the plane's engines roared to life, and the aircraft slowly taxied to the runway. As they accelerated down the tarmac, they could feel the subtle vibration beneath their feet, a gentle reminder that they were about to embark on a journey spanning thousands of miles. With a surge of power, they lifted off the ground and felt the unmistakable sensation of being pressed back into the seat as they ascended into the sky.

Once they reached cruising altitude, the flight attendants began their routine service, pushing their carts down the narrow aisle. The aroma of reheated meals filled the air as they distributed trays of food and beverages. The friends unwrapped the foil from their meal trays, revealing a somewhat uninspiring assortment of pre-packaged items. The taste was nothing to write home about, but it was sustenance for the long hours ahead.

The hours stretched on, and the monotony of the journey began to settle in. The in-flight entertainment system offered a variety of movies, TV shows, and music, providing a welcome distraction from the confinement of the cabin. The passengers constantly shifted in their seats, attempting to find a more comfortable position. Still, the limited legroom and the constant drone of the engines made it challenging to relax.

The captain's voice would periodically come over the intercom with updates on their progress—mileage covered, time remaining, and notable landmarks below. It reminded them that they were crossing vast expanses of ocean and land, far removed from the world below. The cabin lights dimmed further as the local time-shifted, mimicking the rhythm of day and night outside the windows.

Despite the discomfort and the passage of time, there was a sense of camaraderie among the travel group members. They exchanged glances and small smiles as they navigated the shared experience of a long-haul flight. The friends talked with others in their travel group, learning why they chose to visit China. Some had been there before, while for others, it would be a new experience. All were excited about the journey. They had devised elaborate stories explaining their visit and had many hours to practice telling them.

As the flight neared its end, relief and exhaustion settled in. The anticipation of arriving in China and stepping again onto solid ground after hours in the air grew more palpable. The descent began, marked by the gradual reduction in altitude and the change in cabin pressure. The plane's engines throttled down, and the landing gear extended with a series of metallic clunks.

With a gentle bump, they touched down on Chinese soil. Applause rippled through the cabin, a collective expression of gratitude for a safe arrival after the marathon of a flight. The captain made final announcements as the plane taxied to the gate, and the fasten seatbelt sign switched off. Carlos, Meijin, Lily, and James gathered their belongings, stretched their stiff limbs, and stepped off the plane, ready to begin their extraordinary adventure to Wudang Mountain.

Going through customs at the Xi'an Xianyang International Airport, the four were nervous about whether they would be flagged or detained. They approached customs with their group and took their place in the long, snake-like queue. After slowly moving forward in the line for thirty minutes, they were relieved when their tour guide instructed them to proceed through the door marked ‘Exit’. Their guide later explained that the Chinese officials had processed all of their visas as a group in order to save time. It was one of the perks of traveling with a company well known to the authorities. Carlos reminded himself to thank Sean, their travel agent, when the trip was over. His suggestion about traveling with the tour group had already paid dividends.

Xi'an, located in central China, is a large city of nearly nine million people, and is the capital of Shaanxi Province. Once known as the city of Eternal Peace, it is located at the eastern limit of the Great Silk Road. It was the capital of many dynasties, including the Zhou, Qin, Han, and Tang.

Nestled within the heart of China, Xi'an bridges the gap between ancient history and modern living. The city is composed of contrasts, with old architecture poised alongside contemporary towers. The renowned Xi'an City Wall, a monumental fortification that encircles the historic district, is a testament to the city's past. Its ancient gray brick walls contrast with the bustling urban environment. The pulse of modern life reverberates through streets where contemporary skyscrapers intersect with traditional markets that beckon to the past.

The aroma of street food vendors fills the air, serving local dishes like yangrou paomo (a hearty lamb soup). The famous Bell Tower and Drum Tower rise with dignity against the skyline, offering a glimpse into Xi'an's past. In the evening, neon lights illuminate the streets and reflect off the waters of the moat that surrounds the city walls. Xi'an blends ancient grandeur and modern dynamism, capturing the essence of China's evolution through time.

They spent the next two days sightseeing around the city with the tour group. It was vital that they not stand out. They needed to appear as if they were in China for vacation and not to infiltrate a government operation. On the first day, they visited the famous Zhengmayong (TerraCotta Army), composed of thousands of life-size ceramic figures buried with China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang. All of them had visited the site before, but it never ceased to impress. Meijin was keeping a journal of their travels. This is what she wrote that evening to document their visit:

*The feeling of awe when viewing Zhengmayong is an experience that transcends words. It's a mix of overwhelming astonishment, reverence, and wonder that profoundly impacts anyone who witnesses it. As you approach the site, there's a growing sense of anticipation and excitement, knowing that you are about to encounter one of the most significant archaeological discoveries in human history.*

*The sheer scale of the terracotta army is breathtaking. As you stand before the life-sized soldiers, chariots, and horses, arranged in precise military formation, you cannot help but be awestruck by the artistry and craftsmanship achieved over two thousand years ago. The attention to detail in each figure is mesmerizing, as every soldier seems to have unique facial expressions, hairstyles, and clothing.*

*The historical context adds another layer to the feeling of awe. Realizing that artisans constructed these terracotta warriors to guard the tomb of China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, in the afterlife makes the experience even more poignant and humbling. The thought of the emperor's vision and ambition and the scale of the project undertaken by thousands of artisans brings a sense of amazement at the human capacity to create.*

*As we wandered through the trenches housing the terracotta army, I felt a sense of timelessness and connection to the past. It felt like I was walking through history, witnessing a moment frozen in time, transported back to an ancient era. The sheer scale of the army and the fact that it remained hidden underground for hundreds of years until its discovery in the 20th century adds to the feeling.*

*As we venture out on this strange trip deep into China, I am comforted by the existence of this ancient site. God is working in this place, and He is working in us. He will keep us safe, no matter the outcome. I'm grateful to be here with my friends. And although I am nervous about the days to come, I am also hopeful. Miracles have happened before, and they are sure to happen again.*

Two days later, the four got their traveling papers in order and split off from the tour group, ostensibly to take an overnight detour to Danjiangkou to visit relatives. They planned to reunite with the group in two days. They took a taxi from their hotel to the Xi'an Railway Station, and were soon on their way.

Traveling from Xi'an to Danjiangkou was a journey through changing landscapes and cultural transitions. As the train departed from Xi'an's bustling station, the urban vista gradually gave way to pastoral countryside. The train traveled through the Shaanxi region, passing emerald-green fields quilted with rice paddies and golden wheat, where they could see farmers toiling under the sun-drenched sky.

As their train progressed, the scenery changed, leading them into ancient mountains and winding rivers. Small villages and towns interspersed the route, offering glimpses of daily life from the past. Vendors sold local snacks on the platforms, and Meijin jumped out a few times so the friends could experience the provincial delicacies. As the train approached their destination, the landscape transitioned again. They saw the massive Danjiangkou Reservoir that served as a water supply for the region, providing irrigation, electricity generation, and flood control. Finally, seven and a half hours later, they arrived in Danjiangkou, the home of Wudang Mountain.

\* \* \*

Bao Zheng and his team had arrived in Danjiangkou five days earlier. Their path to Wudang Mountain had been more direct, with the full support of the People’s Liberation Army. Zheng was immediately struck by the ancient grandeur of the area. He picked up a brochure at the entrance and read the description.

*The Golden Palace on Wudang Mountain, also named Palace of Harmony, is located at the apex of Wudang Mountain, Tianzhu Peak, which is five thousand feet high. This sacred palace is the heart and soul of Wudang Mountain, the go-to place for visitors and pilgrims.*

*The palace was built 600 years ago under the direction of Ming Emperor Zhu Di. He stressed the importance of harmoniously incorporating the site within the mountain so as to respect the natural surroundings. The Palace of Harmony was to display royal magnificence without changing the natural beauty of the mountain itself.*

*The palace is truly like heaven on earth, surrounded by a natural sea of clouds, breathtaking sunrise and sunsets, lush forests and dramatic rock precipices. With so many attributes, it’s no wonder that Wudang Mountain attracts visitors from all over the world.*

Upon his arrival, Zheng met with the director of facilities, Chang Leung. Mr. Leung had been overseeing the temples, offices, and palaces of the Wudang Mountain complex for twenty years. And while he was familiar with the history of the Palace of Harmony, he was still surprised by the information the young major from Beijing was telling him.

“I can close off the Palace on Thursday morning, no problem. But I’d rather not shut down the tram. There are dozens of buildings on the mountain. People have planned their holidays to come and visit.”

“Can you set up a barricade around the Palace so we can be assured no one will enter?”

“How long do you need the Palace shut down on Thursday?”

“For the entire morning, and possibly the whole day. It really depends on what happens.”

“And what exactly are you expecting to happen, Major Zheng?” asked Mr. Leung.

“That’s a good question. We don’t really know. You have already taken an oath of secrecy regarding this operation, and your security clearance has been upgraded. Just be aware that the details of this operation are highly sensitive and extremely unusual. You cannot talk with anyone about what you see or hear, not even your family members.”

“I understand,” said Leung.

Zheng continued, “We have retrieved a five-thousand year old manuscript, quite possibly written by Huangdi himself. In that document, the Yellow Emperor describes an ancient ritual dating back thousands of years, passed down by the masters who resided at the Palace of Harmony.”

“But sir, the Palace of Harmony is only six hundred years old.”

“Yes, this building is, but historical records indicate that the original palace predates this one by thousands of years.”

“I always knew that Wudong Mountain was sacred,” said Leung, “but never would have dreamed of this.”

“You and I both,” laughed Zheng. “In any case, Huangdi was the last ‘light-bearer’, in the sense that he did not pass on the secret to another individual. Instead, he wrote it down. Initially, he was going to include the message in his classic text, *Huangdi Neijing*. But, in the end, he hid the manuscript in a specially designed puzzle box. That box remained, unopened, for thousands of years in the Forbidden City.”

“Amazing,” exclaimed Leung.

“Yes, and it would have remained hidden if not for the fact that the British stole the chest one hundred fifty years ago and carted it back to England, where it continued to sit, this time in the crypts of the British Museum.”

“Yet,” Leung said, “if that were the case, how did you end up getting a hold of it?”

“That’s a story for another day. Suffice it to say, we have the manuscript. It instructs us to perform a qigong ritual in the Great Hall of the palace on Thursday morning. If we don’t, we’ll have to wait twelve years for the next opportunity.”

“And what’s supposed to happen when you perform the qigong?”

“This is where the story gets even more bizarre.” Zheng took a deep breath before continuing. “Upon the completion of the exercise, which has to be repeated eight times, the heavens will supposedly open up and a divine power will descend from above and imbue a jade necklace with the power to heal every disease known to man.”

“OK then,” laughed Leung. “And the government is paying for this operation knowing what the end result is supposed to be? Have they lost their mind? I honor my ancestors as much as the next guy, but this story seems a bit far-fetched, don’t you think?”

“I’m a computer guy,” Zheng said. “None of it makes sense. But I’ll tell you one thing. I believe this manuscript is legitimate, and I also believe Huangdi wrote it. He was no fool. And if he believed it, then I’m open as well. I think that’s what the government officials think too. They are hedging their bets, treating it as a long shot, but one they still feel compelled to investigate.”

“Well, you have my full cooperation. Can I tell my family about it after the operation is over, assuming nothing happens? It will make a great story.”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to keep this one secret. If it works, the world will know about it. But if it ends up being a dud, the government won’t want to look foolish.”

“I understand. My lips are sealed. It’s still a wild story. I’m looking forward to Thursday morning!”

Bao Zheng walked over to the Grand Hall at the Palace. Chang Liping & Jing Xu, the qigong masters, were stretching.

“How are preparations going,” asked Zheng.

“Excellent,” answered Chang. “We are familiar with Baduanjin. It won’t be a problem to make the needed modifications for this event.”

“Is there anything unusual about the way Master Wong described this version of Baduanjin?” asked Zheng.

“No, that’s what’s so incredible. This qigong exercise has barely changed in thousands of years. Talk about getting it right in the first place!”

“I have a feeling Baduanjin had been perfected long before Master Wong dictated it to Huangdi,” Zheng said. After a moment, he continued, “How long will it take for you to complete the forms eight times?”

“Jing and I were discussing that. We figure it shouldn’t be more than thirty or thirty-five minutes.”

“That will be fine,” said Zheng. “Do you need anything else from us? Equipment, costumes? The manuscript did not specify your outfits.”

“That’s because qigong typically does not require a uniform. We plan to wear our typical dress for qigong. We do have one question.”

“Yes, of course,” said Zheng.

“If this ritual is successful and activates the jade necklace, like the manuscript claims, can we use it on Jing’s mother? She has stage four cancer.”

Zheng looked surprised. “I’m sorry to hear that, Jing.”

“Thanks,” she responded. “My mom has been in hospice for the past two weeks. They’re managing her pain, but doctors say there is nothing more they can do.”

Zheng paused, then said, “I think it would be appropriate for us to use the jade necklace on your mother. I’ll have to check with my superiors, but I can’t imagine that it will be a problem.”

“That would be wonderful. Of course, we don’t really expect this to work. But on the off chance that it does, we would appreciate the opportunity.”

“I’m skeptical too,” said Zheng. “We’ll know soon enough.”

Next, Zheng met with his staff. The jade necklace had still not arrived. There was an incident at the Forbidden City Museum which delayed its release. Mr. Xudong, the director, apparently got cold feet at the last moment and refused to release the priceless piece of jewelry. Zheng's boss, Colonel Li, had to intervene and call in some big guns from the Central Committee. Half a dozen phone calls and three emergency meetings later, the museum finally released the necklace to the army unit in charge of getting it to the Palace.

By that time, they were two days behind schedule. And since the heavily armed caravan was traveling by truck through the center of the country, progress was slow. Zheng's latest update indicated that the piece would arrive by Wednesday afternoon, troublingly close to the Thursday morning event.

Then there was the issue of who would be in the Great Hall during the qigong event. Chang Liping & Jing Xu would be there, as would Zheng and his team. In addition, there would be two dozen armed guards, some stationed inside the Palace and the rest positioned outside. Their presence was mainly to protect the jade necklace and ensure no uninvited civilians ventured into the area. The problem was that the Great Hall, despite its name, was not large. Luckily, qigong did not require much space, and Chang and Jing assured him they would have no problem working in the slightly cramped quarters.

The only other issue on Major Zheng's mind was a university professor from the United States, Carlos Levy. Though highly unlikely, there was a remote possibility that Professor Levy might show up trying to gain access to the proceeding on Thursday morning. He was the only other person with an interest in the event. But that would involve a massive undertaking on his part. First, he would have to get into China unnoticed, which would be challenging since the authorities had been given his name on a watch-list.

Second, Levy would have to get to the top of Wudang Mountain and pass two dozen armed guards. And while he spoke Mandarin, he would not easily blend into a crowd of Chinese. If he showed up, he would be found and arrested.

\* \* \*

As Bao Zheng was ruminating on these concerns, Carlos, Meijin, Lily, and James were arriving at their hotel, just half a mile from the trailhead to the temple mount. Their train ride had been pleasant, quiet, and, most importantly, uneventful. Carlos had worn sunglasses and a hat to blend in, while the others did the opposite, openly displaying their Chinese visage. To any observer, they appeared to be tourists from Beijing or Shanghai exploring the countryside.

Once secure in their adjoining rooms on the hotel's top floor, they strategized next steps. Their plan for Wednesday was to lay low, stay in the hotel, order food to their rooms, and avoid bumping into the authorities. They assumed Bao Zheng was already onsite, making preparations for Thursday morning. But how were they to gain access to the Palace of Harmony on Thursday? They couldn't just prance in and announce, "We're here to observe the *Way of Eternal Harmony*!"

After hours of discussion back and forth, the group came to a decision.

"Our best plan of action is to get to the top of the mountain without being noticed, and then converge on the Great Hall just before 8:00 am," said Carlos.

"Yes, that makes the most sense," answered Lily. "They won't have time to deal with us because they'll be on the clock, needing to start the qigong promptly at eight."

"So hopefully they'll just push us aside, figuring they'll deal with us afterward," added Meijin.

James added, "And with any luck, they'll let us stay to observe the event. We're not there to cause problems. Heck, we want them to succeed. We just want to witness it. I can't imagine that they'll give us much trouble. I mean, we've made it this far. That should impress them a little, don't you think?" James smiled.

"I'm impressed with us," laughed Carlos. "Impressed with how crazy we are. You know, we might end up in jail for this. Although I don't know what they would charge us with."

"You can start with trespassing," James said, laughing.

"I suppose that's true," admitted Carlos. "It's worth the risk. We're going to witness history in the making. That opportunity doesn't come around every day."

"I agree," added Meijin. "I'm ready for whatever happens Thursday morning."

"Me too," said Lily.

The hotel room alarm went off at 4:00 am. They ordered room service for coffee and a quick breakfast and then prepared to leave. After eating, they loaded their gear: flashlights, binoculars, passports, sweaters, and rainwear. Carlos still donned sunglasses and hat.

If stopped, the group planned to say that they were birdwatching. Birders had recently spotted the Eurasian Sparrowhawk on Wudang Mountain. Everyone, including military police, knew how determined birders could be. Amateur ornithologists will hike into a war zone to see a rare warbler or finch missing from their birding life list!

The trailhead to the top of Wudang Mountain was half a mile from the hotel. They picked the hotel specifically for that reason. Few cars were out as they walked. Ten minutes later, they turned right down a small road, which ascended a steep hill. The road winded upward for half a mile before ending abruptly. It appeared to stop at a forest. However, when they walked up to the edge of the trees, they saw an old gate with a small, rusted sign that read, “Trailhead - Wudang Mountain.” Twenty feet beyond the gate was a small, worn dirt path.

“Here we go,” said James. “By my calculations, we should be able to climb to the top in two hours. It’s about two-thousand vertical feet.”

They set out feeling a combination of nervousness and excitement. The air was clear and crisp as the dawn light started filtering through the canopy of trees above their heads. Trees lined both sides of the trail, predominantly consisting of Chinese pine and cedar, filling the air with their refreshing scents.

As Carlos ascended the path, he thought how strange life was. He could easily be hiking in Umstead State Park in Raleigh, a place which he frequented. The trees and scents were similar, as were the sky and clouds. Squirrels scurried, busy collecting nuts, while birds chirped noisily overhead. Yet, he wasn’t in Raleigh. He was eight thousand miles away, on an ancient mountain, in the heart of China, participating in an extraordinary adventure.

Five years ago, he never would have imagined diving down such a wild rabbit hole. But, then again, five years ago, he had not met Meijin, or become Christian, or befriended James and Lily. All of those occurrences changed him and the course of his life. No matter what happened today, he was glad to be here with his wife and friends. This adventure was guaranteed to be life-changing.

As they hiked up the narrow trail, their footsteps were cushioned by a carpet of fallen leaves and needles. The ground beneath their feet was slightly damp, evidence of the night's dew settling on the forest floor. The early morning silence was broken only by the occasional rustle of leaves, hinting at the hidden movements of small creatures starting their day.

The trees above created a natural canopy that filtered the growing light, casting intricate patterns on the ground. The shadows of leaves danced around them, creating a peaceful interplay of light and darkness. As the sun slowly rose, beams of light pierced through gaps in the canopy, illuminating patches of the forest floor in warm, golden hues.

Meijin thought about others who had ascended this path over the centuries, seeking refuge and enlightenment in the temples above. Wudang Mountain was sacred ground. So it was no surprise that the *Way of Eternal Harmony* directed them to this place. How many thousands of men and women had walked this path? She felt a twinge of excitement imagining that today’s event was the culmination of all their efforts, hopes, and dreams.

As they climbed higher and deeper into the forest, the symphony of morning sounds gradually crescendoed. Birds swarmed around them, including the golden pheasant, collared crow, brown-breasted bulbul, and buff-throated warbler. Each species added its unique voice to the chorus that provided a harmonious backdrop accompanying their journey.

About forty-five minutes into their trek, they came across a small clearing where beams of sunlight painted the ground in radiant splendor. Dewdrops glistened like diamonds on spiderwebs delicately strung between branches. The leaves above caught the light, revealing their intricate textures and shades of green that ranged from the vibrant to subdued. The forest unfolded like a story, revealing its secrets one step at a time.

As the sun's light grew stronger, the forest took on a livelier demeanor. Animals began venturing out of their hideaways, embarking on their daily quests for sustenance. Squirrels chased each other through the trees, birds flit from branch to branch in search of insects, and they even caught a glimpse of a deer cautiously observing their presence from a distance.

Hiking through this wooded forest on Wudang Mountain at dawn was a serene and magical experience. Yet, they knew this peacefulness would not last. For this moment, at least, time stood still, and they felt at one with the mountain.

Two hours and forty minutes later, after several wrong turns, the group got within one hundred yards of the summit. They knew they were close because of the noise and activity ahead. It was 7:24 am. They quietly left the trail, turning right into the underbrush. They would have barged into a group of soldiers stationed just ahead if they had continued on the path.

The sun was still low on the horizon, but it was light, and navigation was easy through the trees. They walked slowly, trying not to step on twigs that might reveal their presence. After a few minutes of climbing, they cautiously approached a large clearing at the edge of the forest. There, before them, stood the Palace of Harmony, not more than fifty yards away. It looked magical in the morning mist, its ancient walls covered with moss and dew. They had approached the side of the building and it was quiet, with just a few soldiers patrolling. Most of the activity was at the front of the Palace, near the main entrance. They kept hidden, crouching low to the ground, under cover of trees on the edge of the woods.

“Let’s walk a little farther to the West,” whispered Carlos, “to get to the back of the palace. There’s supposed to be a rear entrance.”

Five minutes later, they were kneeling beneath a dwarf pine tree, looking across the courtyard at the rear entrance to the palace, one hundred and fifty feet in front of them. They could see two soldiers standing outside the door.

“Well, there’s our welcome party,” whispered James.

They squatted silently and waited, wondering how to proceed. It was now 7:42 am, eighteen minutes before show time.

“Let’s wait a few minutes,” suggested Lily. “They may walk away. We have time.”

“I agree,” said Carlos. “We don’t want to arrive before eight anyway.”

The next ten minutes passed slowly. The soldiers talked, smoked cigarettes, but did not leave their post. Time was running out as the clock ticked closer to eight o’clock. The group decided they would have to come out of the woods and approach the building. The soldiers would apprehend them, but at least they might end up in the building where they could watch the event.

Just as they were about to stand up, they heard walkie-talkies. They froze, staying hidden. One of the soldiers had a brief conversation on the device. A moment later, both soldiers entered the palace, leaving the rear door unguarded.

“Now’s our chance,” said Meijin.

“Are you guys ready?” asked Carlos.

“Ready or not, this looks like our moment,” said James.

“OK, let’s do it,” said Carlos.

The group stood up with stiff knees and hurried across the open space to the palace. It was three minutes to eight. They ran up twelve stone steps to the landing. The soldiers had conveniently left the door propped open. It was dark inside. After catching their breath, they hurried in.

\* \* \*

As the clock struck eight o’clock, Chang and Jing, standing in the center of the Great Hall, began the first of eight repetitions of Baduanjin. They gracefully lifted their arms like synchronized swimmers dancing in a pool. When performing qigong, one experiences a deep sense of peace and relaxation. Qigong combines gentle movements, focused breathing, and mindfulness to cultivate and balance the flow of qi (life force energy) within the body.

As Chang and Jing moved through the first form, their five senses tuned with the energy around them. A heightened awareness quieted their minds and gradually released mental clutter, allowing them to enter a state of stillness.

As their movements continued, the couple became aligned with the Great Hall. The people standing around watching them were no longer a distraction. Instead, they were part of the moment. The deliberate motions of the qigong forms created a feeling of fluidity between themselves and their surroundings. Their minds became focused and external distractions faded away.

Many qigong practitioners report feeling a heightened sense of groundedness while performing the exercises. Stress and tension slowly release from the body, leaving one feeling refreshed and rejuvenated. And despite the formulaic appearance of these ancient forms, Chang and Jing experienced a sense of freedom, similar to a runner's high, as they lost themselves in the moment. About five minutes into the process, the couple began to experience warmth and tingling in their extremities as their qi began to flow more powerfully. With each round of movements, their gently waving arms and rhythmically moving legs transformed the Great Hall into a zone of tranquility.

Carlos, Meijin, Lily, and James were also caught up in the moment, observing the couple from a darkened corner of the Hall. Hidden behind storage cabinets, their vantage point offered them a clear view of the proceedings as they knelt near the floor, watching the scene before them. Time passed slowly. And despite the crowd, including armed soldiers, all was peaceful, without a trace of urgency.

Thirty-five minutes later, the couple finished the qigong routine. As they stood in the center of the room, a quietness descended as people held their breath in anticipation of what might come next. The heavens were supposed to open.

But instead, all they heard were birds softly chirping in the distance. People started murmuring to one another. Three minutes passed, and still nothing happened. Major Zheng looked at his watch and then took out his phone. He dialed a number.

"Colonel, it's Major Zheng."

"What's happening?" Colonel Li asked in excitement.

"Nothing so far, sir."

"How long since they finished?"

"About five minutes."

"Does the manuscript say how long before the fireworks are supposed to begin?"

"No, sir. But I think something should have happened by now.”

"For crying out loud," declared Li. "What a waste! No matter. It's not like we thought it would work. But we had to try. Wrap things up and report back to me this evening."

"Yes, sir." Zheng hung up.

Across the room, Carlos and the others were whispering amongst themselves.

Carlos said, "They did the qigong perfectly. Why is nothing happening?"

Lily knew why. Without consulting her friends, she stood and walked toward Major Zheng. As Lily approached, Zheng turned. Surprisedly, he pointed to her and said, "How did you get in here?"

A moment later, the others stood up and followed Lily toward Zheng. Then surprise changed to understanding, and he yelled to the guards, "Arrest them!"

"Wait!" yelled Lily. "You need our help. The qigong didn't work and I know why!"

Bao Zheng held up his hands, stopping the guards from grabbing the group of interlopers. "What do you mean?" he asked suspiciously.

"The manuscript calls for a couple to perform Baduanjin. But it also specifies that they must be Christian. Without that, the exercise is meaningless."

"What do you mean, Christian? That's crazy! The manuscript was written thousands of years before Christianity existed."

Lily continued, "Yes, I know. But let me ask you a question. How do you think we opened the golden box in the first place?

“I have no idea!” Zheng said, with frustration.

“The riddles on the puzzle box made repeated references to the Christian Bible,” she said.

“That’s impossible,” Zheng exclaimed.

“Yes, you’re right. It is impossible, but it’s also what happened. We can’t explain it, but that puzzle box was designed to open only for someone intimately familiar with the Bible.”

Zheng thought about this. He and his team had no rational explanation for how the Americans could have opened the puzzle box. "Go on," he said to her. “Tell me more.”

Lily continued, "Each panel on the golden box referenced a chapter in a particular book of the Bible called *Revelation*. The only way we were able to solve those intricately coded puzzles was by looking up the corresponding numbers and images in the *Book of Revelation*. I can show you if you like. I don't know how the ancient qigong light-bearers knew this information, but they did. Somehow, Christianity and ancient Chinese Daoism are connected."

She continued, "Even the Thousand Year Harmony Necklace points to scriptural references. Did you know that the characters on each of the beads of that jade necklace perfectly match the twenty-seven chapters of the Christian Bible?”

Lily paused, then continued, “And that brings us to Master Wong's specific requirements for the couple performing Baduanjin. They also come directly from the Bible."

"What requirements are you talking about," Zheng asked.

Lily explained Master Wong's explicit instructions regarding the couple performing the qigong. Bao Zheng listened, shaking his head in disbelief.

"I never could understand that section of the manuscript. It made no sense to me," Zheng admitted.

"It wouldn't make sense unless you were Christian," said Lily. She continued, "I'm telling you, if you want this to work, you need to let James and I perform the qigong exercises."

It all sounded unbelievable to Bao Zheng. Yet, he knew one thing for certain. The Americans had figured out a way to open the puzzle box when no one else could. And the characters on the jade necklace had also been a mystery for millennia. As hard as it was to believe this woman, action spoke louder than words. They had gotten the box open. Not only that, they somehow got themselves to the Palace of Harmony undetected. It all seemed so improbable to Zhang.

"Give me a moment to make a phone call," he said. Then he turned and walked away. Lily and her friends stood in the middle of the Hall, surrounded by a dozen armed guards and staff. No one said a word.

Zheng called the Colonel. “Sir, you’re not going to believe this.” He quickly explained the strange turn of events. He expected his boss to shut the operation down and arrest the Americans. But that’s not what happened.

Colonel Li was speaking to Major Zheng on the phone in his office. He had not been surprised by Zheng’s earlier call letting him know that the mission had failed. Li never put much faith into the promises recorded in the ancient manuscript. However, something clicked in his mind as he listened to Zheng’s update about the American woman Lily Chen and her explanation of how the Americans had solved the puzzle box riddles. Li was a military man who always made decisions based on facts and evidence. At first glance, the prophecies hidden in the golden box for thousands of years were the farthest thing from hard evidence. However, the Americans’ success opening the box was an undisputed fact. They had done what millennia of Chinese scholars had never been able to pull off. So while his head wanted to dismiss Ms. Chen’s proposal, his gut said do it.

“Major Zheng, proceed as the American woman suggests.”

Zheng couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “Are you sure, sir?”

“No, I’m not sure, Major,” he answered testily. “But I’m between a rock and a hard place right now, trying to salvage a failed operation that’s cost the government tens of thousands of dollars.”

“Sorry, sir. I wasn’t thinking.” Zheng felt bad for the Colonel. This mission had been fun for Zheng because he wasn't being held accountable for the outcome. The same was clearly not true for his superior officer.

Li continued, “Let the Americans perform the qigong exercises and see what happens. At this point, we have nothing to lose. If they fail, which I expect they will, arrest them and shut down the operation as we discussed. And make sure to get that necklace safely back to the museum.”

“Yes, sir,” answered Zheng. The call ended.

He returned to the Great Hall and approached the Americans.

“Alright, go ahead. You can perform the Baduanjin. And make it quick!” he said, frustration in his voice. “We’re way past the starting time at this point.”

“Thank you, sir,” Lily said appreciatively. She looked at James and then at Carlos and Meijin. They all nodded their approval.

Lily and James walked to the center of the Hall. Then, closing their eyes, they began to center themselves, preparing to dive into the same routine they had just watched Chang and Jing perform. They started a minute later. Once again, the room became still.

Despite the frenzy of activity that had just occurred moments before, a quietness fell on the Palace of Harmony. All of the people watching Lily and James perform the qigong would later testify that something mysterious happened in the moments that followed. Everyone, including Bao Zheng, his eight team members, Chang and Jing, the facilities director Mr. Leung, along with the armed guards and other palace staff, were overcome with an unexplainable feeling of calm. One moment, the group was watching a heated conversation between Major Zheng and Lily Chen, and the next they were transformed, almost instantly, into a strange zone of tranquility.

They all watched, transfixed, as Lily and James proceeded through the slow, intentional movements of the Baduanjin. Time seemed to stand still. At one point, Bao Zheng looked down at his watch, struck by the notion that the second hand was barely moving. “That’s strange,” he thought to himself. Others in the room experienced similar oddities during the performance. Meijin had the bizarre sensation that she no longer needed to breathe, while Carlos felt like his body was becoming buoyant. He actually looked down thinking he was levitating. Everyone watching was simultaneously experiencing physiological changes, due to the fact that Master Wong’s instructions were being followed correctly. They were all in the midst of change.

Forty-five minutes passed in what could have been the blink of the eye. Lily and James stood silently in the center of the Great Hall, transformed by the experience. Their breathing was deep and slow. Their audience breathed in lockstep with them, together as one. A minute passed, then another. No one moved - all appeared to be in a trance.

##

## Chapter Seventeen: Rapture

Then, in unison, every man and woman in the Hall turned their eyes to the center of the room. The Thousand Year Harmony Necklace, which rested on a three-foot high pedestal, had begun to glow. It was a deep green glimmer, subtle at first, but becoming more radiant every moment. People slowly started walking toward the necklace, transfixed. As time passed, the undulations increased intensity, glowing deeper, seeming to linger in the air. The whole room started pulsating green light. It was as if the color of the jade was absorbing the white light around it, swallowing it whole. Then, just as the intensity of color seemed to go beyond the visual spectrum, there was a burst of bright light like a flash grenade!

It took a few minutes for people's sight to return from the extreme light discharge. When it did, there were exclamations of surprise.

"It's gone!"

"Where is the necklace?"

"It was here a minute ago!"

Carlos walked shakily up to the pedestal and examined the surrounding area. The necklace was nowhere to be seen. "That's incredible," he said.

A moment later, they heard a low rumbling from outside. It sounded like thunder, but deeper and more ominous. As the rumbling continued, their bodies started to vibrate, as if they were standing in front of a massive wall of subwoofers at a rock concert.

Someone called out in panic, "It’s an earthquake!"

Zheng shook his head, trying to focus. He quickly looked around the room, then called out, "No, it's not an earthquake. The walls are not shaking."

Carlos said, "He's right, it's not an earthquake."

"Then what's happening?" asked one of Zheng's team members.

Before anyone could respond, they heard a massive burst of thunder. Everyone jumped, startled by the noise. The sound reverberated for over a minute.

Lily and James turned to each other at the same instant and looked into each other’s eyes. They were feeling something very strange. In that moment, standing in the middle of the Palace of Harmony, surrounded by noise and confusion, the two of them had become conscious of each other's thoughts.

"I know what you're thinking," Lily thought to James.

"Amazing! I'm in your head right now, Lily!" James thought back.

"We're not alone," thought Lily.

"I know," James responded. "He's here, with us."

"I feel Him too," Lily said. "He's coming!"

"Yes, He's coming."

Lily and James took each other's hands and closed their eyes. All around them, people were panicking. But Lily and James stood in the midst of the pandemonium with a look of complete composure.

Carlos and Meijin had been watching their friends, puzzled about how calm they appeared. Carlos approached them and said, "Hey, are you guys alright?"

James opened his eyes. "Don't worry Carlos, it's all good. We've triggered something way bigger than just the jade necklace."

“What do you mean,” asked Carlos?

Before James could answer him, someone yelled from outside the palace, "Hey, everyone, come here, quickly!"

The thunder was still rumbling, and now they could see lightning in the sky. It took a minute for everyone to navigate through the front entrance of the Palace. When they were outside, they looked up into the sky. Then everyone froze. The sight before them was unworldly. Lily and James smiled. In their unified minds, they heard the voice of an old man. Instantly, they knew it was the Apostle John. He said to them,

*“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” -Revelation 19: 11-16*

The next moment, people could see what appeared to be a magnificent king dressed in long, white robes, descending through the sky on a flying white horse, followed by legions of angels, also on horseback. The scene before them was supernatural. They were witnessing a miracle.

Lily, James, Carlos, and Meijin recognized the man on the horse. Jesus, Son of God, approached, galloping through the clouds, gracefully descending through the air, and eventually landing in the pavilion in front of the Palace of Harmony. He rode right up to Lily, James, Carlos, and Meijin. They could see the Thousand Year Harmony Necklace adorning His neck as He got closer.

Jesus looked at them, smiled, and said, "*Truly, I say to you, it has been a long time coming, but the day of reckoning is here. My friends, you have done well. Now it is time for you to leave this place. There is much work to be done on earth, but not for you. Your work here is done. A place awaits you in My Father’s house. Rise up, brothers and sisters, and join your fellow saints!*"

And with these words, the four friends, along with one billion other believers scattered across the globe, instantly vanished, swept up in the Rapture.

##

## Chapter Eighteen: Revelation

Bao Zheng had a lot going on in his mind as he stood outside the Palace of Harmony. He had just witnessed a man dressed in white robes fly down from the sky on a white horse, followed by thousands of angels. Then, after the man spoke, the four Americans vanished before his eyes. Now he and the remaining group stood facing the imposing figure.

“Are you a god?” asked Zheng.

*“Yes, Bao Zheng, I am God. You may have heard of me. My name is Jesus.”*

“So the Americans were right. What just happened in the Palace? Did we call you down from heaven?”

*“That’s correct, Bao. The Way of Eternal Harmony was given to your ancestors to preserve and protect until such time as My Father chose. Huangdi, the great Yellow Emperor, committed the secret to writing, where it was stored for thousands of years in the Forbidden City. At the chosen time, the manuscript was found by Carlos Levy and his friends. But you, also, played an essential part in the process. Your participation, like theirs, was ordained before you were born. And you have fulfilled the first part of your destiny beautifully.”*

“It’s all a bit much to take in, sir,” Bao said.

*“Yes, it is Bao Zheng, son of Mingze Zheng. You will have plenty of time to process all of this, for we shall soon be working closely together. I must depart for a short while, and when I return, I will come to you, and you will follow Me.”*

Then Jesus turned to the other eleven people standing around Zheng. They included his eight team members, the facilities director Mr. Leung, and the original qigong couple, Chang Liping and Jing Xu. He asked them, *“Who of you believe that I am the Messiah, the Son of God?”*

All twelve of them nodded in agreement. And they were not lying. Somehow, their experience over the past hour had changed them from the inside out. And although they had spent their entire lives as atheists, in this moment they became believers.”

*“I am pleased, as is My Father, who is in heaven. Therefore, I say to you twelve, you are My new apostles. I give you authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. You shall not heal them on your own, but in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”*

Jesus paused, then said, *“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”*

Then everything went dark.

*\* \* \**

The next thing he knew, Bao Zheng was standing in his favorite snooker hall in Beijing. He was at a table in the corner of the main room. Next to him was Jesus.

“How did we get here?” he asked, disoriented.

*“It doesn’t matter,”* answered Jesus. After a few moments he continued, *“What do you see as you look around this room?”*

Zheng saw young men and women playing snooker at about a dozen tables. They were laughing and drinking. None of them seemed to notice Zheng and Jesus.

“I see people playing snooker,” he answered.

*“There is a time coming,”* began Jesus, *“when these people, and others like them, will turn to you for guidance. They are your sheep, and you are their shepherd.”*

“I’m sorry, sir. I don’t understand.”

*“You will, my son. I need you to read the book that was written about Me and about My return. Pick up a Bible when you get home. I will make sure you understand what you read.”* Jesus paused, then continued, *“The Bible is strange and powerful. It is written in code, making it inaccessible to some, and enlightening to others. You must understand the past in order to lead the future.”*

“What do you want me to lead?” Zheng asked, hesitantly.

*“You are going to be My right hand during My thousand-year reign on earth. All the details are in the book, near the end!”* Jesus laughed.

“Why me, Lord?” Zheng asked.

*“Why not you, Bao Zheng? You were destined for this role since the beginning of time, when heaven and earth were first created. You and the four Americans.”*

“But why did they disappear? Why can’t they stay here to help me?”

*“They are on a different path,”* Jesus answered. *“Do not worry, everything will be fine.”* He paused, then continued, “*I have to leave now, but I’ll be back soon. Until then, carry on.”*

“Carry on, how?” asked Zheng. “I don’t know what to do.”

*“Be anxious for nothing. The Holy Spirit will guide you while I’m gone.”*

“What is a Holy Spirit?”

*“He is the soft voice in the back of your mind, helping you make decisions in your life. Listen intently and you will hear Him.”*

“You mean, like intuition?” Zheng asked.

*“Yes, that’s right. Like intuition,”* Jesus answered.

“When will you return?”

*“This time, it won’t be long. I know the timetable now. I’ll be back in about nine months. Then the heavy lifting will start. Until then, you will help prepare the way.”*

\* \* \*

The next thing he knew, Zheng was lying on the ground in the courtyard of the Palace of Harmony, groggily opening his eyes. He was surrounded by the eleven other disciples, all looking like they just woke up from a nap. The soldiers and Palace staff were also on the ground. They slowly propped themselves up to sitting positions, and then, one by one, began getting to their feet. The man on the horse, Jesus, was gone, along with his army of angels. The courtyard was eerily quiet.

“What happened?” asked Zheng.

“We don’t know, sir. One minute we were talking with Jesus, and the next we were lying on the ground.”

“Did we dream the whole thing?” Zheng asked.

Everyone looked confused and disoriented.

Then they heard a voice calling from the vestibule of the Palace, “No, you weren’t dreaming!”

Zheng tried to see who was talking. His mind was still not clear. “Who said that?” he asked.

“I’m Donghai Xu, the videographer,” the young man answered. Donghai walked up to Zheng with an unsteady gait.

“Tell me, Donghai,” Zheng began, “how do you know we weren’t dreaming?”

“I know, sir, because I recorded everything that happened over the past two hours. Trust me, I would not believe it either if I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes!”

“You recorded everything?” Zheng asked, surprised.

“Yes, and I just scanned through the files. I lost consciousness too, and I wanted to make sure I wasn’t hallucinating. From what I’ve seen so far, it’s all there on the video.”

“Come over here and show me,” demanded Zheng.

Donghai flipped his video camera around and cued the recording. Then he hit ‘play.’ Zheng and the others spent the next fifteen minutes reviewing critical moments of the one hundred and twenty minute recording. It was all there, plain as day, including the instantaneous disappearance of the four Americans.

Everything, that is, except Zheng’s meeting with Jesus at the snooker hall. “Maybe that was a dream,” he thought to himself.

A moment later he heard a soft voice in the back of his mind that said, “*No, Bao, that was not a dream*.”

Zheng smiled and thought, “So that’s how the Holy Spirit works.”

He turned to the others and said, “Thank goodness this was all captured on video. Otherwise, I guarantee that no one would believe us!”

“Yeah,” said Donghai, “and they’d lock us up in the looney bin for our troubles!”

A moment later, something clicked in Bao Zheng’s mind, clarifying what he needed to do next. He snapped into action.

“First things first,” he began. “Is anyone hurt?”

The group looked around, checking in with each other. “We’re all good,” Mr. Leung reported.

“Excellent,” Zheng said. “I need to upload this video to Colonel Li. And I think we all need a little time to decompress. Why don’t you head home. We will regroup in the morning.”

Everyone was relieved to get some rest. They packed up their gear and headed down the mountain.

Once Zheng returned tohis hotel room, he called Colonel Li.

“Sir, I’ve just uploaded a video to our secure servers that I need you to watch.”

“What happened when the Americans did the qigong?” he asked.

“You need to see it for yourself, sir.”

“Was there trouble?”

“You could say that. It’s hard to put into words. That’s why I want you to watch the video. Then we can discuss it.”

“Alright, I’ll get a hold of it and call you back after I’ve watched the darn thing.”

“I’ll be waiting for your call.”

Zheng took a deep breath. He felt like he was losing his mind. But simultaneously, he knew what he had witnessed earlier that morning was the truth. His life, and the life of everyone on earth, was changed forever. And somehow, he was caught right in the middle of the action. As he was ruminating in his mind, he became sleepy. A minute later, he was sound asleep, dreaming peacefully.

Colonel Li did not call Zheng back until the following day, as if sensing that his young officer needed rest. He was right. Bao Zheng slept for thirteen hours, not even waking to use the restroom. When he finally awoke, he felt better. Sleep had helped him digest the overload of stimulation from the day before. He took a shower, put on a fresh set of clothes, and ordered breakfast. Five minutes later, the phone rang.

"Major Zheng, we've got work to do." It was Colonel Li.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I watched the video, and when I saw what happened I requested an emergency meeting with the Central Military Commission." The CMC was the highest national defense organization in the People's Republic of China, which headed the People's Liberation Army, the People's Armed Police, and the Militia of China.

Colonel Li continued, "Turn on your television."

"Right now?"

"Yes, the broadcast is starting any minute."

"What broadcast?"

"You'll see," said Li.

Zheng turned on the television in his hotel room. All five national stations were displaying the same emergency broadcast. The announcer was saying,

"...in a few moments, we will play the entire video. To repeat, the Chinese government has confirmed the reporting of a global event involving the instantaneous disappearance of what is now estimated to be over one billion people. President Xi will address the nation following the presentation of the video. The government believes the event on Wudang Mountain last night was not a terrorist attack and that there is no threat to China or its citizens.

"Early reports from around the globe indicate that the most significant number of disappearances occurred in the United States, Brazil, and Mexico, which reflects the highest number of Christians. America is reporting 200 million missing. Brazil indicates that 150 million of its citizens have disappeared, and Mexico reports the disappearance of 100 million people. We have confirmed that almost every nation on the planet has experienced some of its citizens vanishing, all at the exact moment, and all members of the Christian faith.

"Here, now, is the video taken by the Chinese government yesterday morning at the Palace of Harmony on Wudang Mountain. The CMC has confirmed its authenticity."

Zheng stood staring at the television in a half-daze. He then watched as the previous day's events rolled before his eyes. It started with a peaceful scene of Chang Liping and Jing Xu performing their qigong exercises in the Great Hall of the Palace of Harmony. The video played just a short section, then cut to the end where nothing happened. Then it showed the American woman, Lily Chen, approaching Zheng, their conversation, Zheng's call to his boss Colonel Li, and then the American couple performing the same Baduanjin.

Again, the video cut to the end, only showing about a minute of the qigong. The camera focused on the jade necklace as it started to glow, culminating in the bright light and the necklace's disappearance. Then, followed the rumbling thunder, the group exiting the palace, and the white horsemen descending out of the sky. The video captured all of it as clear as day.

Then the man called Jesus addressed the group, after which the four Americans disappeared, right on the screen. Zheng was grateful that the videographer had captured every detail of what happened, sparing him the need to report the incredible story to his superiors. After the Americans' disappearance, the video documented Jesus briefly speaking with Zheng and his team. The video camera then appeared to fall to the ground.

The announcer said, "At this point in the video, everyone lost consciousness for approximately five minutes." The video skipped ahead to the camera righting itself again and focusing on Zheng and his team as they got off the ground. Jesus and the angels were gone. Zheng advised his team to go home, rest, and report back the next day. Then the video ended.

Next, President Xi appeared on the television and began addressing the nation.

"Greetings to you all. What you have just seen has been confirmed by our experts as accurate. This video is legitimate. In addition, I have spoken directly with dozens of state leaders around the globe and can confirm that the disappearances we reported earlier have indeed happened.

“We mourn the loss of over thirty million Chinese citizens who were swept away in this incident, an occurrence that we are still trying to comprehend. We do not, I repeat, do not believe there is any threat to China from terrorists or any other country. This event appears supernatural in origin, as difficult as that may seem, and is affecting countries worldwide.

"I have spoken with several experts on Christianity, and they have confirmed to me that what occurred yesterday is called the Rapture, an event predicted for millennia in the Christian church, whereby upon the return to earth of their messiah, Jesus, faithful Christians are instantly swept up into heaven.

“While we cannot confirm or deny the validity of this belief, we acknowledge that the disappearances have occurred and seem to have been triggered by the event that transpired on Wudang Mountain yesterday morning.

“The event in question, orchestrated by agents of our government, was connected to an ancient Chinese prophecy recorded on a manuscript that our scholars confirm was written over five thousand years ago by Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor of China. We believe the disappearances are related to the event which you just witnessed.

"The Chinese government will continue to allocate all necessary resources to understand what occurred and will continue to keep you informed. In addition, we have offered aid to the countries most affected by the disappearances and are ready and available to help them in any way we can. Our hearts go out to the families who have lost their loved ones, especially the families of our Chinese brothers and sisters swept up in this unprecedented event.

"Citizens of China, be strong and be comforted knowing that your government will always be here to protect you, no matter the challenge and no matter the obstacle. We have been completely transparent with you about these strange events and will continue to update you as we get more information. Good night."

Zheng turned off the television and sat down. This incident was too astounding to comprehend, and the government was acknowledging it all. They made no effort to hide, obfuscate or spin any aspect of the astounding series of events that had occurred. Zheng struggled to take it all in, trying to wrap his mind around the fact that a billion people had disappeared at the exact same moment.

President Xi said they were all Christians. Does that mean they were swept up into heaven, as the Bible claimed? And what about Jesus? Zheng remembered that Jesus told him He would return in nine months and that he, Zheng, would be working closely with Him. Zheng needed more information. And he didn't know where to begin.

The phone rang a moment later. It was Chang Liping, who had performed qigong yesterday morning.

"Major Zheng, I'm glad I was able to reach you."

"How are you and Jing doing?" Zheng asked.

"We’re fine. I’m calling to tell you that we flew out yesterday afternoon to see Jing's mom. We got a call that she took a turn for the worse. We're here with her right now."

"I'm sorry to hear that. How is she doing?"

"That's what I'm calling about. You’re not going to believe this, but she's cured. The cancer is gone!"

"What do you mean?" Zheng asked, confused.

"You know how Jesus said we could heal people?" Chang asked.

Zheng thought for a minute and then recalled what Jesus had said - something about giving the group of twelve the power to heal every sickness.

"Yes, I remember," he said.

"Well, when we arrived, she was in a coma. The doctors said she wouldn’t last the day. We decided to lay our hands on her and prayed for her healing. Nothing happened. Then we repeated the prayer, this time adding 'in the name of Jesus we heal you.' A moment later, she opened her eyes. We were shocked. She looked right at us and said she wanted to get up. We stared at her in disbelief. We told her she couldn’t get up, but she ignored us. A minute later, she was standing on her own next to the hospital bed, telling us she felt completely normal."

"Incredible," said Zheng.

"Yes, that's what her doctors said when they examined her. They did a scan and said the cancer was completely gone. One minute she was on her deathbed, and the next she was cancer-free. They’ve never seen anything like it before."

"You think the prayer healed her?"

"I know it did, sir. That's why I'm calling. Try for yourself. Find somebody to heal and see if it works. Can you tell the others?"

"Yes, I can do that." He hung up the phone.

An hour later, Zheng was addressing the nine remaining people from the group. They had met in a conference room in the hotel on the ground floor. He reported his conversation with Chang and the suggestion that they try to heal people.

"Where are we supposed to find someone to heal?" one of Zheng's staff asked.

"I don't know," he answered. "Why don't you head back to Beijing. Start with family members or friends. Let's meet via conference call tomorrow afternoon to check in."

As they were leaving the room, they heard noise coming from the hotel lobby. Turning the corner, they saw over one hundred people milling around. The hotel manager approached Zheng with a worried expression on his face.

"Are you Major Zheng?" he asked.

"Yes, I am. What's going on?"

"People started showing up fifteen minutes ago. They are asking for you to heal them!"

"Heal them?" Zheng asked, surprised.

"Yes, sir. And they refuse to leave until you speak with them."

Zheng looked at his staff and said, "You wanted to know where to find sick people? Well, no need to find them. They just found us!"

Over the next two hours, Zheng's team worked one-on-one with the people who had come to the hotel. Their health conditions ranged from aches and pains to chronic diseases. A middle-aged woman approached Zheng, limping.

“Can you help me?” she asked.

“What’s wrong with you?” he inquired cautiously.

“I have a terrible pain in my hip. It’s been going on for two years. The doctors say I need a hip replacement, but I don’t have the money for the operation. I’m unable to work and every day is torture for me. Please help me.”

“Why do you think I can help you?” he asked.

“Because I saw you on the television. Jesus gave you the power to heal.”’

“Do you believe in this Jesus?” he asked, surprised.

“I want to believe. Heal me so I can believe,” she said with conviction.

“OK, I’ll try. Is this the hip that hurts?” he asked, pointing to her left side.

“Yes, that’s it. Please heal me,” she said, tears welling up in her eyes.

Zheng did not know what to do. But he saw the pain in the woman’s eyes and knew he had to try. He took a deep breath, then extended his hands toward the woman’s left hip. He closed his eyes. A moment later he heard himself speaking out loud, “In the name of Jesus, I heal your hip and relieve your pain. As you believe, so you will be healed.”

A moment later, the woman screamed, “My hip doesn’t hurt! Thank you, Jesus. I believe!” She proceeded to run around the crowded room, hugging strangers, continuing to yell, “Thank you Jesus, my hip pain is gone!”

The videographer, Donghai Xu, was chasing her around the room, documenting her healing. He had filmed the entire episode, and would continue recording the events happening in the hotel lobby as they unfolded.

Each of Zheng’s associates found themselves healing people. And though none of them knew what they were doing, all of them found the right words, and the right actions, to accomplish the work. Pain ceased, symptoms stopped, fatigue lifted, and people reported feeling better - completely better. It was as remarkable for the healers as it was for the healed. Every prayer was the same. "In the name of Jesus, you are healed." The room was filled with incredible testimonies of relief, astonishment, and praise for Jesus.

Donghai’s video was viewed by a billion Chinese on television that night. A few hours later, the broadcast was witnessed by billions more, as network after network, country after country, ran the incredible story. The great awakening was unfolding before the eyes of the world.

## Epilogue

Six months later, the Chinese Communist Party made an unprecedented announcement. They were adopting Christianity as the official state religion. The government based this momentous policy change on their determination that the events at Wudang Mountain reflected the second coming of Jesus. They concluded that the event was intimately connected to the prophecy of Huangdi in the ancient manuscript *Way of Eternal Harmony*. Proof of the validity of these events had been demonstrated by the ability of “The Twelve”, as they were now called, to perform verifiable miracles of healing to countless thousands of people over the past half year.

Most Chinese citizens welcomed the government’s decision, having witnessed the events on August 8th and the work of the healing apostles. Dozens of other nations followed China’s lead. A cascade of new believers was sweeping the globe at an unprecedented rate. The world had witnessed Jesus’ return, just as prophesied long ago in the *Book of Revelation*.

***“****Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.” -Revelation 1:7*

Nine months after his initial appearance on Wudang Mountain, Jesus returned to a world that now knew His name as Lord.

*“Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and called Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on the earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” -Philippians 2:9-11*

And so began the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ on earth.

-The End-