NANJING MEMORIES
 by max keanu © 2012

      Flew up the stairs, rounded the corner, there he is, gun raised, smiling in crooked white teeth on coco brown skin. The twin barrels of his shotgun welcomed my demise.

     BAM! So loud, SO LOUD! SO LOUD!!! A piercing explosion fills the room. Sulfurous gunpowder aromas commandeer the air and surreal wisps of smoke float up from the barrel— He still smiles at me with those teeth! Trigger pulled again! BAM! He doesn’t miss! My left hand explodes.

     Signals to the brain are frizzling, frazzling flares of a billion neurons searching for answers to hold onto my life. Loud, is loud, is loud! The gun blast, in the confined space, leaves my ears humming in dulled deafness. The bucking contents of the shotgun impact me on my left side, way before the sound fades away. Backpedaling rearward, a thousand lead pellets throw me hard against a wall.

     An open window, a hot breeze, a color television of cartoon voices, jaunty music in frolicky happiness, all insulting my battle-hardened mind! So damned incongruous in a battle-ravaged kill zone. Through a half-open window the vicious currents of battle screams invade time and space.

     Tech Sargent Karl Wooster's real life adventure plays in stunning slow motion in the Technicolor of my mind. My mission in life is now lit up in the cosmic spotlight of being and suspended existence. It slowly dawns on me, something happened to me in the last two nanoseconds.

     My first thought—how had the Iraqi man knocked me down, caused my incredible pain and agony from across the room? Mystic power projected by his mind or did his shotgun really do this? What the fuck happened?

     I questioned my unique circumstances—Am I the fucking disaster? Time slows when you're the victim of your own calamity, when you're the main actor on the last staging of your ongoing drama. Terrible events are supposed to happen to someone else!

     Oh, fuck! No! Oh, fuck, not me! No, not me!

     Nerves obliterated, spinal currents on overload, a frenzy of insane images from frontal lobes— trying desperately to reach— The Self.  Awaiting evaluations in split nanoseconds, my brain announced its rational conclusion to the body politic—

          "OH FUCK! I'VE BEEN HIT!"

     I yell, lungs gasps for air, knowing somehow that there might not be a tomorrow, hoping my unit heard my screams between the gunfire and frag blasts. I cry loud for my life, but oddly, my muted voice emanates out of my mouth and a big hole in my chest at the same time.

     I drew in a breath, my breath escapes. Exhaling at two separate places at once! Gurgling, bubbling, wet spitting, moist sucking— I can't catch my breath— blood and breath and desperation enter and exit my lungs through a shot-open chest hole.

     This blood I taste is mine! This blood is mine! Something is so wrong. So wrong, everything has gone so wrong with my body!

     Crumpled on the floor, on my right side, the point of impact glowed raw, blood spreading over my uniform. Lie still! A ragged powder-burned perimeter surrounded the location of the entry wound. So unnatural! Shut up! So nasty! So incompatible to the natural order of things. Lie back! So not what my life was supposed to be! Ever! Lay your head on the floor! Stay down!—

     —It’s time to die!

     Fighting logic, split-second denials, protesting my impending death, telling myself— this is no fucking way to die. Looking closer now, viewing the deep hole in my side, as if on another person's body —blood-bloody red, liquid red, tiny veiny oddities red, sheered-off destroyed flesh, smoking flesh, pulsing  Karl-fluids, oozing bubbles of yellow fat circulating in the redness,  ripped-raw muscle blackened and white chips of my rib-bone fragments—

      I'm fucked!

     My left hand nearly blown off, but still hanging on, swinging pendulous by sinewy bloodied strands of my elastic wrist skin. Though irrational, my brain and hand try to clench my fist and wiggle my fingers to determine if they still function. My hand didn’t know Karl exists. Blood spurts in pulses from the stump of my once perfect arm.

      Wondering, am I alive? Wondering, why me? Wondering if my hand can be fixed, wondering if the torn apart tendons, bones, muscles and are fixable. Wondering, can Lieutenant Doctor Fix-It pop my hand back on and make it work like it use to?

      Get up! Walk backwards in time! Go back down the stairs! Go back in time! Go back to recon base! Go back to safety!

      However, no magic transforms my tragedy. Time doesn’t reverse. My nanoseconds pass, a mash of lethargy crushes me, weariness grabs at my heartbeats....

     Little baby boy, little Karl, innocent child baby boy inside wants immediate release from this colossus of fear and pain!

          “Mommy! Mommy! MOMMY! **MOMMY!**”

     The buck-toothed, brown-skinned man runs towards me, sword high above his rag-wound head. Looking into his dark glistening and frenzied eyes, I see his objective so clearly He's trying to kill me! His words come out in a Munchkin-like voice, processed and translated in a talky place somewhere within my brain as,

      Off with your head, infidel! God is....

     His cutlass descends through the hot, thick air, my attacker slips in my blood, misses my tender neck, however the blade falls and slices deep into both of my legs above my knees.

     Immediately, the barbarian hefts the cutlass again, higher overhead —certainly even more Allah inspired. He smiles a deranged flash of worn white teeth and targets my neck. And yet for some odd reason, his god-awful teeth are the focus of my fear— broken, crooked, worn to nubs—this poor, angry, dental misfit of a man is trying to kill me! The sword descended.

     A shot rings out. His head explodes in a bloody splatter of flying white enamel, pink-gray flesh parts and a truncated declaration of Allah Ak!... He flies back as if this were all a weird cartoon –a rag-headed Wiley Coyote on an insane and deadly rampage, avenging the Roadrunner in some faraway dusty and evil Acme-Corporation-inspired killing spree.

          "God Damn, Karl! You're hit! Karl, stay still! Oh Christ, buddy. Karl buddy, your legs are — your hand! Oh shit! Medic! Medic! Medic! Medic! Medic! Medic! Medic! Medic............................

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     She doesn’t look away as I look up at her. I'd caught her staring at me over lowered sunglasses. Her appraisal went on a few seconds too long. Then she did something unusual. She stood, walked towards my table, a cute little smile on her beautiful face. For me.

    Let me tell you, it’s not often, in fact never, does a tall gorgeous oriental woman of a pleasing buoyant stride and luscious figure-eight curves focus in on me. She walks ramrod straight, confidant, like she'd seen the wide-world and the dark places in it, but her bold and beautiful smile obtained her first-class tickets out at first light.

     She appears a willow-wispy young woman, bending against the slight breeze of my imagination as she comes closer. Heels clicking urgent on the tile floor, her left arm remained snug to her side holding a large pink alligator-skin handbag. She closes in on me. She flips her large silver-framed sunglasses to the top of her oval shaped head, a suburban tiara, regal resting on shimmering midnight-black hair parted down the middle. She stops a few feet from me, flashes a smile of perfect teeth, luscious lips and approval. Female aromas flow over me, traveling forward on her past's propelled movement, perfumes of a woman filling me with dream-girl visions of what life is, might be or might become.

          "I've seen you here before. Karl. Yes?"

          "Yeah, “ I replied timorously, withdrawing into the cage of my wheelchair, “I've seen you before. You're?"

          "Hui Zhong. You always sit alone."

          "So? “ I reply, shifting my legless torso in my wheelchair. “So do you."

          "Mind if I join you?"

           "Join me? For lunch? Here? Now? Me? “

     Oh, damn! Do I sound like a fool, or what?

          “Yes. I hate to dine alone. Such joy in food taken with another human being,” she says, grinning a beam of tranquility at my foolishness. My hesitancy, my shyness, my fear of her exotic beauty evaporated instantly.

     So caught in her spell, hypnotized by her magic from that moment on. So caught.

     Of course, I couldn't stand, couldn't be the perfect gentleman and pull her chair out. She stood across from my wheelchair, her eyes never leaving mine. She lowered her long and sensuous hour-glass figure into the high-back wicker chair, totally astounding my personal space. Our eyes engaged, pupils to pupils, as if friends forever. Her stare unnerved me, yet at the same time drew me deeper into her.

          "Lost an arm, incident near a bridge in Nanjing. I pin my stump to my side, so it doesn't flop around. Paralyzed to the shoulder—snow frozen flesh dies fast."

          "Oh yeah, well I'm lucky to even have an arm!” Karl shot back.

     My habitual nastiness bubbles up, my loathing for life flaming all over my undeserved disabilities again. Nevertheless, she'd brought the subject up. I could tell we were both on uneven turf. We both hurt inside, outside—kindred spirits within broken bodies.

          Her arm extends to my mine, clasps my hand tenderly and she says with brazen manner, "So hard to do things with one arm. But, what is, well, is. You went up those stairs. The solider brandished a shotgun and a sword. My attacker, a Samurai sword. One never forgets."

     Looking into eyes of softness, into eyes of guileless candor not felt since— Had I told her about my encounter with the Iraqi? How the hell did she know? Had I met her somewhere? Had we met somewhere after my physical undoing in the Marines?

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     Of course, the entire episode was a mercy fuck. What else can five hours of heaven be? No woman would ever want me. Ever! Missing three limbs, scarred-up, mental-maggot mind and ugly as hell to boot. Was her eager-beaver attitude the novelty of stump-to-stump intercourse? A public service servicing or her annual art project involving the medium of corrupted flesh—the monumental lifting of the spirits of a basket case like me?

      What the fuck did she want from me anyway? But man! Oh man! I tell you, I gave my fiery love to her! Whatever she desired from me, I wanted to give it to her forever and every night from then on!

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     Pulling back the thin sheet, I study her near perfect body in the dawn light. Her body liberates my soul, allows in the memories of women who'd touched my heart in long ago pasts. Her emotions are for me are tenderness, affection, the enlivening of a downed spirit, the liberating of a destroyed body in rewards of flesh for a deserving man whose love ambitions already had two feet in the grave. Love so freely given! Yet I can’t help thinking, Miss Fortune or misfortune?

     Ivory sculpted skin; so young, so soft, spellbinding in morning light, smoothness celestial in tints of yellow inside white. So fine. Fragile body lines. The epitome of womanly design, mine to caress. Words of poetry float above her as I realize I've left the ugliness and destruction of my war world outside her front door.

      Have I fucking died and gone to her heaven?

      I run my fingers over what looks like a knife wound, a slicing of flesh starting above her solar plexus, traveling up her chest and then delicately circling her neck. The wound healed long ago, but the scar near her heart seemed recently sutured, although, I’m no doctor or surgeon.

     Her left arm, the stump up close and personal, a missing portion of her everyday life seeming to display, in its absence, a lifetime of ungodly horror, a relentless torment that encapsulates and entraps her delicate soul in some uncompromising way.

      The unsaid hardships of her past life exist like a waving phantom limb, always the invisible determinant of her being and essence. Her left arm stump, withered, the end scarred, blackened; holding an invisible appendage that beats a slow and sad cadence to funeral marches far beyond my comprehension. Her stump, like the small wound over her heart, oozes minuscule amounts of pinkish blood, causing her some pain and wounds tear at my soul in pity.

      She turns over, the morning sun filters in to embrace her sleep. She breathes in a slow, steady rate. I followed the inflation-deflation of her thin chest for what seems like hours. Oh, this has to be love! I consider her breasts beautiful beyond words, ivory-sculptured miracles, two burgundy rose buds. Nipples of nourishment for a child that could be mine in the future, but nipples that had suckled a life or two in another life.

     She’d experienced childbirth, yet, not a single word to me concerning a family. Do they live with a relative? Divorce? Separated?

     She'd tell me all the stories of her life in time.

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      It was decided, Rudy's Restaurant for breakfast. I drive my handicapped van and as usual she’s patient and helpful, without being cripple-conscious or fawning or phony or overly obliging in stupid ways. She hums Chinese melodies I'd never heard; old oriental songs with a bit of syncopated ragtime spiced and sprinkled into them. She dances a foxtrot around the parking lot to amuse me, laughing all the while, making on-lookers giggly-happy. Who the hell knows how to foxtrot these days? For once in my stumped life, I relaxed and feel happiness. Although, I’m still skeptical of unknowns, cynical and sneering at the rig-a-ma-roll and the social policies the world pressed on me and my nothings.

     A few weeks together and we’re a team, a duo; a mirror of each other’s emotional wants and needs. However, she'd tells me little about herself. Would this change with time? How much time would we have together? Every minute counts. No woman desires a damaged man, but possibly I’m wrong. My marred neurotic mind—the never-ending noisy carnival shooting gallery, a hell never letting up, my hell, my war of torment!

    Guns firing in my head, uncontrollable flashbacks, firefights, gunshot moments and the ever-present smell of gunpowder surreptitiously hijack my life. Go slowly, slowly, take everything slow and easy and let her tell you about her life. She can rescue you. She’ll divulge her past when the time is right.

      Over refills of coffee, she tells me she wants to enroll at the local community college to become a physiologist. Oh, man! I nearly blow a fuse thinking her little Karl Wooster is to be become her living Lego-Braino construction kit, her experimental mental dummy to investigate and probe at will and explore on her couch —on her bed. Oh! That bed!

     Made love to her twelve times so far, the first sex since my accident years ago. Moments of sexual love I never thought I’d experience again. Let her explore! I’ll be her lust and love test dummy for life! Let her learn, such a pleasurable toy I could be for her— My cuddly, naked and stubby teddy bear body needs exploring too!

          "I know what you’re thinking, Karl. Believe me, I do feel sorry for you. My arm is a stump like yours, paralyzed and pathetic. Life is much harder with three limbs made useless." She sips her coffee slowly, runs a moist tongue over full lips and says, enigmatically, “I want to help you Karl Wooten, as do my long-gone ancestors. You must love life to the fullest, before you can relinquish a past. My ancestors will breathe new meanings into our lives.”

      Under the table, her foot roams over my two stumps and settles on my crotch. Bare-footed erotic one-sided footsies, while she carried on a one-sided conversation. She jabbers on and on about going to the higher planes, understanding the spiritual dimensions of life and going back to China where she belonged in another life and journey. Nanjing Number 5 something, something was home. She says this repeatedly in pidgin Chinglish, this number 5 business and something about children always needing help. Her eyes mists up in painful remembrances, her face became a melancholic shadow self in sighs floating on a million of her fallen tears.

     The number 5, Confucius, God’s will, emperors, tyrants, Nanjing, one hundred heads, old wars, revenge, all words in rants and raves lost to my erection dreamland and hard-on happiness. Whatever she said went in one ear and out the other. Yet, her past meant a lot to me. Her ramblings unlocked part of her timeless and mysterious past.  I love the mysteries of the orient!

           "Karl, I want to touch your soul, your root, be your lover for eternity and beyond and forever," she says, as if she'd read my thoughts. Her smile encompasses my whole world again, but sometimes she embellishes her declarations with words and ideas of another era, another time, and another place.

          "Okay, Miss Ah Fook, my beautiful Hui Zhong, what would you like to do today?"`

          "We must visit my great-grandfather in Kula."

           "Well, I don’t know. Long drive up the volcano.”

          “I drive. We have good time. He’s a venerated man. He knows magic.”

          "Can he grow me two new legs and an arm?"

           "That's why we're going to see him, silly. We're going dancing tonight. You a good man, Karl, but, ho, woe-ee, your memories! Oh boy, they destroy you, my witty-wittle-Wooster. He get rid of them. We give each other our bad memories of life, must relocate them to each other," she says, delicate fluttering eyelashes fanning desires and promises. At this point in love, I couldn't refuse her or disbelieve anything she told me.

      At times a woman's eyes—

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      The venerable great-grandfather, Kim Ah Fook looks older than the volcano he lives on. He moves about with spring-like agility; a stooped, stick-figured being, nearly consumed by his silk robes, talismans and charms. He wears a small black silk cap on a tired baldhead, but allows a black ponytail, emblazoned with bright red ribbons, to escape and descend past his waist. He is nearly toothless and lacks any semblance of a physical form under his garb. His left arm is missing, sleeve pinned into a side pocket.

      Does armlessness run in this family?

          "Where’d Hui Zhong go?” I ask Kim Ah Fook. She’d mysteriously wandered off, soon after we arrived and left me alone knocking on the thick old door of his ancient lava rock house.

          "Oh, great-granddaughter, she visit family graveyard under the volcano. Hui Zhong, she my favorite. Take good care of me, cleans up, so motherly. She be good wife. She angel. Angel’s destiny, find peace, happiness someday. Her, I, we alike."

      I suddenly realize I loved Hui Zhong, if she accepted my limitations— and she does. We’re a team. Did he say, under the volcano?

            “Mr. Sargent Karl Wooster, I give you chance to get back what you lose, get peace of mind, a release from your loss and gain back time lost—" The man pauses, hesitates for a long time, stands next to me, calm, concentrating intensely, eye to eye, a gold pocket-watch dangling before me, swinging back and forth.

          "Well, I didn't lose a pocket-watch, don't even own a watch."

           "This? No, no silly man. This not watch, this a memory machine, calls forth ancient magic. I obtain from healer man, long ago in Nanjing. Karl, all memories, they be so magical if cherished. However, bad pasts like Hui’s are wicked. Hui Zhong's real life was a wonderful memory before— Karl, we fix memories today."

      Was a memory? Language barrier is a bitch! Yes, language barriers between us. Pidgin speak. Old people.

           "Hui Zhong, she tell me you have memories, horrible war–"

           "I've told her little about my past. She witnesses my nightmares, hears me rave and scream in my sleep. But, I don't want to burden her with my history if I can help it."

           "Your past, your memories are why you're here today, Mr. Karl. Hui Zhong wants to trade memories with you," he says with a playful smile, and then adds, “But remember, some memories are much darker than yours. You may want to keep your memories, yes?’

          “I’d move heaven and earth to end the torment, the nightmares, the memories of one day.”

     All the while, the old man is lulling me into a relaxed and peaceful state of mind. He'd somehow pulled the drapes in the old stone house and turned off all the lights, except a small hanging lamp swinging back and forth in the serene room. I jabber on and on about Hui Zhong, about my plans for the future and returning to school when Hui Zhong did.

          "It's love, Karl. Right thing is to love great-granddaughter. I give permission to love great-granddaughter in this life, in her death. Think this in your mind. She loves you, believe me, she love you dead, alive."

       How does one love someone in death? Language barrier. Old people! Pidgin speak?

            “Would like for me to remove all memories, no more nightmares of day you shot, day legs chopped off? Mr. Karl, I can do, but only if you love great-granddaughter.”

     Not where I want to go with this kind old man. My mind avoided that horrifying day’s events— even I shied away from any remembrances of that day.

          “Well, Karl, you must tell me now. Do you love Hui Zhong or not?"

     Ah Fook's little pocket-watch swung back and forth in front of my eyes in a mesmerizing consistency. Hypnotized by her guardian to get at the truth, but it seems so natural and of the moment. Old people! Is he kidding?

     I recall Hui Zhong’s words earlier today,

     Great-grandfather, a venerated man, a man who knows magic.

     Hypnotized, ha-ha! An old man's foolish game! A test? That’s what all this hocus-pocus is all about! This is his way to assess my values, principles, and morals to determine my qualifications to marry his great-granddaughter. The wily ways of inscrutable wisdom, hypnotized—Hahaha!

     "I do love Hui Zhong. I love Hui Zhong. Yes, I truly love, Hui Zhong," I say a loud, repeatedly, as if these words were placed in my mind and spoken by my vocal cords, but commandeered by him.

      "Oh, yes, yes my darling! You said you loved me three times— the repetition of those words invoke ancient magic! Oh, darling, my darling Karl—and I love you too, my wonderful wittle-Wooster," The old man says, but in Hui Zhong's melodious voice. She then materialized in undulating, kaleidoscopic waves of air and space and colors, instantly taking his place and then she kisses me deep me on the mouth.

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     All the Gods of heaven descend to earth, shake the land, sea and air in vibrating auras of unfathomable cosmic energy. The world as I know it ends. Currents of the unknown swirl around my wheelchair, flow over me, through me, in me and out of me for what seems like time's infinities.

     I awake alone in the darkened room, remembering her great-grandfather swinging the gold pocket-watch in front of my eyes and that ghost–like kiss from Hui Zhong. The hanging card-table lamp still sways, tips the light from side to side. No human sound or sight or smell exists.

     I look down at my stumps, my prosthetic hand, realize my reality is inexorably altered, but I know I’m cleansed mentally and spirituality. All the regrets, all the anger, all the disgust of my terrorized life—Gone!

     Reborn, nevertheless, still a handicapped man missing limbs, bound to a wheel chair until death, but I can't remember the years of agony, anxieties or the constant ache of the loneliness I'd suffered from that horrible war.  Nonetheless, a dark past exists for me, although now only figments of recalled events obscured, moments of someone else’s long distance memories.

     The gold pocket-watch, the long chain secured to my wheelchair, ticks perceptibly— my memento of moments real. I wait hours for Hui Zhong’s return. Kula nights at the four thousand foot elevation are cold after the breeze shifts and the wind descends from the summit of Haleakala. I shiver in loneliness, experience a ravenous hunger for nourishment and Hui Zhong's caress. Depressed, abandoned, vacant, I descend the volcano's winding road towards home in reluctant retreat and distress.

       Where is she? No answer on the cell phone I bought her. She'll come home tonight. Our love is everything she ever wished for in life! The eternal happiness of two people, yes, a love bound together forever!

       How did the old man do it? Chinese herb and hypnosis, power of suggestion, inspiration of love? I didn't care how he did it. Relieved of those horrible memories, I felt so alive. In time, she'll tell me or he would. She’ll come back to me tonight. She had too! Hers is a love that frees me from my past. Now it is time to live life my life, our lives together to the limit.

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     I filed a police report at one minute after ten that evening over the phone. I told the duty officer, Hui Zhong Ah Fook is missing. Please send out people to search for her! Please!

     My information was perfunctorily entered into a database, but no action was possible for 24 hours. In such a fucking quandary! So torn! What should I do? Should I return to Kula? Wait at great-grandfather's? Search into the dark cold night for her?

     Ah Fook, old local family, on Maui since great-grandparents came over in 1938, I told the police officer. He told me the family named, Ah Fook, was not listed on Maui birth records going back to the first census in 1910.

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     Three nights later I awake from a fitful sleep, from a vivid dream, nightmarish, but not one of my old horrorfests. My desert war nightmares are gone, along with associated memories—flung somewhere through time into the clouds of the unknown.

     This nightmare, in Disneyesque living color is a movie panorama in the life of young woman, a Chinese woman working in a diplomatic compound in a walled city. She ‘s employed as secretary to the German ambassador in Nanjing, China. She lives at No. 5 something, something, something, something... I know it’s her childhood home, where she lives with her beautiful twin daughters.

      It becomes a dream of black and white and red newsreel horrors when the Japanese Army thunder in. The Japanese Army of the Second World War parades into the city of Nanjing in a show of arrogant swagger, in the audacity of brutal conquest.  I dream-witness a detached savagery, the conqueror’s rage as the heads began to roll; all seen in surreal Movie-Tone sepia-tinted news clips, within the analytical dreamscape of someone else's yesteryear.

     In my dream movie, the German Ambassador gives the shy and reserved woman, Hui Zhong, away to the Japanese High Commander's adjutant as a gift. She becomes a human bribe in exchange for transit papers for his half-German, half-Chinese bed-girl out of occupied China.

     Later that night, in a different dream, the beautiful and dutiful Hui Zhong fights off the advances of the brutish Japanese man in his shoji-screened boudoir. As a last resort, she unsheathes his razor-sharp Samurai sword, elevates it over her head and threatens him. He laughs and snatches the weapon from her. The dream fades....

      Then in another dream, Hui Zhong is dead; a dagger plunged into her heart, her dress soaked with blood, her body in a muddy ditch next to her severed head and arm. Her two headless daughters lay nearby. Hui Zhong's head rests upright, against a tree stump, as if deliberately placed for the world to view and mock her beauty and defiance.

      A slow dreamy sunrise appears through battle-smoke, in cheapened pastel awakenings. It’s as if I float above the entire blood-soaked scene, become the omnipresent cameraman of God. I witness Kim Ah Fook, her great-grandfather; frantic, at wit's end, arrive in his muddy horse drawn cart. He cries out to all the gods of love, pity and revenge. He places Hui Zhong’s body in the back of the wagon and then places her head on her neck, as if somehow trying to reconnect her to a new life. He places her two decapitated daughter’s bodies and heads in the back next to her on each side. He screams out an avenging proclamation to the all-consuming maggots and evil men, and then whispers an insane, ranting curse upon the souls who did this to his family

     Still dreaming, I witness the cart make its way over a rickety bridge towards the remote countryside.  Hui Zhong reanimates into a wailing, raving, all-seeing siren, her wild screams those of the insane mind, cursing her eternity in death’s limbo and all things evil under the Imperial Sun.

     My dream is devoid of any emotions, seemingly only a movie newsreel of edited events in cinematic perfection and surround sound. I awake in a slight panic from the dream, but shrug the dream off, knowing the mind constructs mazes of complexities to confuse and control the unanswered longings for a loved one.

      Hope.

     She’ll come home to me.

     Someday.

     Love. Love!

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     Her letter appears on my night table. The postman didn’t deliver it. It consists of a single handwritten letter on Nanjing Hotel Stationary with a date, 28 December 1937 in the right hand corner. The fragile, yellowing paper smells of lilacs. It’s blotted and smudged from fallen tears.

28 December 1937

        Karl, my darling,

       Do not try to understand what happened. I’ve given you a special gift. Do not seek answers. We’ve obtained an eternity of peace. I have your memories; you have mine, yet they’re only emotionless newsreels of someone else’s memoirs of a vicious and violent life viewed from a dreamed distance. The dream you have of the girl in Nanjing is I. You have the memories of my family, my suffering fate—of my ordeal. The Nanjing Massacre was my reality and my living-spirit nightmare. You will keep it safe from me forever.

       I have unchained you from your past horrible memories. I possess them. I’ll keep them safe from you until my end and yours. We exchanged the memories of our hell on earth. You're free to live a happier life again. Keep the pocket-watch in a safe place. Defend it with your life if you value a continued happiness.

       Your love freed me Karl, freed me from a life lived in a limbo of death and horror, which is all painful scarring and haunting memories can ever be. I am eternally grateful to you, as I am reunited with my daughters through your love for me.

       Address your letters to: Hui Zhong Ah Fook at No. 5 Xinlukou and always with the date, December 27, 1937. Do not send it by post! I‘ll receive your thoughts, your love through your written words. I will send my words to you in letters like this one.

       Ours was true love Karl. You confided your true love for me when I took my great-grandfather’s form. Perhaps, in another life we will meet again. A day may come when I return from my world to give you legs, your arm. Someday we may run and dance and swim and love again on the Paradise called Earth.

       Ours was a true love—

        —Forever yours in dreams and memories,

                                                                    Hui Zhong Ah Fook

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