

“Rules aren’t in the interest of the soul. Not the individual soul, not the universal soul, and not anything in between.”

-Mommy

Book One

The story of the Nian

The auditorium teemed with an electric spirit. You could feel it in your toes and in a prickling on your skin as you walked down the hall. Chi and energy and excited voices reverberated off of the waxed brick floor. It made it look like you were still outside even though you had already walked through the four glass doors into the building of Josiah Quincy Elementary/Community Youth Center Services. The voices of many immigrant populations, new immigrants, accented english and native tongues clashed and mingled, mixed and danced, laughing and bouncing off of each other. It was jarring in a comforting sort of way. A chaotic cacophony that sparred with harmony and created a raucous party atmosphere of sound. The clothes, smells and vitality of so many different groups from 99 different backgrounds swirling around in a room and slowly becoming one thing.

It was Sam Sing Trinity’s New Year Banquet, one of the biggest schools in Chinatown. A neighborhood that had been Syrian and Jewish before it was Chinese and had since become a mixture of everything. A station. A meeting place more than a neighborhood. Yes an ideal location for the rich, but also a community of those working in the service industries under those rich to gather and maintain a real neighborhood. A floating world of Finance, Massage Parlors, Hair salons, restaurants and real estate.

Creole and Fujianese accents joked together and Hispanics threw out phrases like “Joh Shang hao” in mandarin while Chinese from Venezuela and Columbia spoke fluently in Spanish. The accents of millenial and disposable income English spread throughout the room too. They were here because of a key component to this school’s curriculum.... Mandarin immersion and Chinese cultural immersion. It was income based, so for the poor it was cheap and for the rich, it was adaptable to the needs of the parents... and convenient. They even offered a boarding program. In essence, it was a training camp for entrepreneurs and the next generation of geniuses using outside the box methods to create wealth rather than toil for it... or at least that was the pitch.

The school did not even have a real building, it functioned on borrowed spaces and under other non-profits throughout Chinatown, funded by tuition, fundraising and cutting costs by paying the teachers hardly anything and teaching in a Triad Street Style. Triad 2.0 is what some began to call it as a joke.

Why would the hyper wealthy enroll their kids in this? Well in the beginning the school hadn’t been much. But they had challenged Harvard and MIT to realistic based problem solving and testing.... and they had won. This was a middle school. These kids were not even teens. And back then, they had been mostly from the ghetto. Of course the result turned heads and applications from wealthier families came pouring in. So within a generation they had wealthy alumni who had worked their way up from the gutter. They had name. They had face...But that didn’t mean that the school itself had money per se.

Of course, being a 5 year old, I didn't understand a whole lot of this. I just listened to what the adults said about the past.

The sound system kept cutting in and out and I carried my baby lionhead and tried to stay next to Baba. I looked down at the people with mics speaking on the auditorium stage. There was an old lady, and a young woman. I was pretty young, but I noticed that the young woman's blue dress, though very tasteful and professional looking, had a high cut to the skirt that made my heart beat faster. My father would later say that despite this reception not being as professional as the GAPA Chinese school reception that used to take place here, before GAPA constructed their own tower in Chinatown, that the MC with her pale Chinese thighs made up for it. It wasn't something you saw everyday. One organization had tradition and stability and money. But Sam Sing Trinity had spirit, ambition, intercultural mingling and beautiful free thinking youth.

A silence came over the room full of children and parents. I was pretty nervous. My father took a sip of something.

"Baba I'm thirsty, can I have some water too?"

"That's not water boy, you just hold on." He fumbled through the bags, "Put your sash on while you're waiting, you have to get ready yourself. You're going to be performing aren't you?"

I tied my red sash around my golden Kung Fu uniform.

"Baba how are they going to understand you, you don't speak English."

"They speak Chinese."

"But they speak Mandarin."

"They'll understand."

"How?"

Baba winked at me. "Magic."

I thought about that.

"What kind of magic?"

"Your magic. Just repeat everything I say. Make sure you breathe from your dan tian and project your voice. Don't shout just use your chi to project."

"But I don't....."

"Just roar it out like a lion. Trust me. Don't you trust your father?"

As a matter of fact I didn't. But I wasn't going to say that. I looked out at that huge audience. They were full of anticipation. I felt naked and exposed just standing there on stage without the protection of the head, or drums, or ceremony. I turned back to my father. He seemed to know what he was doing, so being next to him, I felt confident by proxy.

"Are we going to tell the story now?" I asked.

"No we'll drum first.

My father hit the side of the drum, "kalaK!" in a moment that seemed to freeze time as my little hands tightened nervously over the cymbals.

He said that "we'll" drum but he meant he'd drum while I played cymbals.

My mother plays the gong.

Our gong looks a lot like a shield. When you look at it from a certain angle a lion with a sword in its mouth appears. It isn't painted on clearly, in fact it feels a bit like a trick of the light, and so that faded image seems to watch you and even move, as if it is alive.

Kalak! He hits the sides again casting a spell over the minds of the audience, beginning without beginning, drawing out the space between them.

Baba stands over the drum in his horse stance, powerful and fierce.

kalack!he strikes the sides and plunges into the deep sounds of drumming like striking into the heartbeat of the universal being.

Boom

Boom

Boom Boom Boom

And the drum rolls from slow to fast. I feel and see a mighty horse, approaching from a distance, bearing down on me. But it isn't just a horse. It is the spirit of something greater, filling the room, filling the universe with its galloping essence.

Baba hits the sides once more and the roll begins again, this time I feel the ocean. Waves. A mighty roaring wave. A tsunami crashing on rocks from the before time when the elements spoke as we speak.

A final third time. My father rides the mighty horse to cross the ocean. It is the beginning of the before time. The beginning of the universe before our universe. He has let us glimpse it. He has stolen it away from the mighty Black Dragon of time, taken a peek up the Dragon mother's skirt and showed us through his beats where we were never able to see, where we feared to see, a place we may have pushed away from our psyche to the point that we questioned its existence... and then it is just music again.

We drum for a long time, carrying the children's minds to a far away land with our magic. We enter their minds and capture and kidnap their imaginations. My father can control time. My mother too. It's how we always get enough sleep. It's how we got here on time with our Eagle Car.

The car looks like crap, but it is magic.

My parents don't look powerful. But they are. They are gods that are just lying low.

My father is Cheung Bo Jai. The pirate from hundreds of years ago. The pirate that stole from British ships and gave to the poor surrounding Hong Kong. You can still see the narrow caves in the rocks where his crew would disappear in the night.

That was a life his soul lived. When he died his spirit continued travelling here and there, stealing souls and absorbing them into his own. The result was a powerful group of souls under one conscience... a god. (or I guess some would say a demon. But it is implied that demon's are evil. And we are not)

He came back to life in this world and married my mother, who was the soul of Grace O'Malley, another pirate from a hundred years ago who did much the same thing. She too stole from British ships, but in Ireland, another colony closer to England.

Heaven has rules. Or I should call heaven the spirit side of the Universe. Ghosts and spirits traveling that vastness which we know more about now, but only to the extent that we know that perhaps we know so little. Through thoughts, spirits, souls, lost among the emptiness of space time... a world is created. An illusion, or a hyperreality, outside of physics. Out there in the darkness of space, there is imaginary light, gods demons, dragons, and mystical creatures. They connect and go behind all that we can see through thought. And we can connect to them, in dreams, in music and in dances and drugs.

Our family has lions, dragons, and drums.

My father spoke and the audience listened, eyes glazed over like children in a daydream.

"Long ago.. there was a terrible Demon! A monster of mischief!. A great horned beast with a mean streak. A beautiful beast, that shimmered and changed form in the light. Some saw a female, some a male. Some saw a long body and some a short body. Some saw a giant monster and some saw a whole group of little monsters locking arms in a dance that turned into a riot. Most people saw evil.

But she couldn't help it. A lot like a terrible two year old, except with a fearsome head with teeth and claws, a long body and an incredible appetite. Some say she slept under water all year long and emerged once a year to feast at a local fishing village. She overturned the boats and came up out of

the water charging through the flimsy little huts they had for houses. She trampled and ate the crops and went door to door wreaking havoc and making a mess. Throwing things, screaming. It didn't mean harm but it was so big! People ran in fear and had to get out of the way so they didn't get crushed or injured."

"The monster came every Year! And it was called Nian. In some versions of the story the monster came every month. And instead of having a terrible face, the face was that of a woman, a very beautiful woman with the body of a lion. But once a month she came and tore everything to hell. And in that version of the story she was called Buraq and not a Nian. She was a terrible beast once a month. But for the rest of the month she was an incredibly fast steed. She could travel in one stride as far as she could see. Everyone wanted to ride her to travel the Universe and see beyond our realm. But few ever did and survived. Or maybe they did, but they did not return.

My father waved his hands and countless floating images of creatures in bubbles passed before the eyes of the audience. He waved to this one or that one to illustrate which version of the story he was talking about.

"But the story of the terrible creature was the one that stuck. Because everyone that saw the beauty went searching for her. They saw a beautiful woman on top and a creature like a horse on the bottom and a glowing horn coming out of her head. They called her the Unicorn and chased after her.

They were not the type to stay in a village. And they went West to find her. So those that stayed in the village and passed this story down, they say it was a terrible beast. With large head like a lions and the body as long as a snake but large. And then with the horn she became male again and only would go near virgin young girls. But you see it's all the same. All the creatures are versions of the same idea. But for you will choose this story of the Nian since we are in Chinatown and celebrating the New Nian... late.. Hahaha."

My father laughed and drank from his steel thermos again. I would find that later he had one of two drinks in there. It was either hot sake, or tea spiked with Vodka, depending on his mood. He paused and raised his hands dramatically.

“The people were afraid.

Every year they had to hide

They feared for their lives

They were at the mercy of the Nian’s whims...

Life was fear and pain and suffering..

Until!

One year.

The Nian came, and the people had been slow to run away into the mountains.

Some would say they had simply given up.

But another monster came from the skies.

A wild and beautiful woman riding it, dressed in her natural state.

Full of the power of thunder wind and rain.

It was a Nian too.

And a great goddess clothed in the elements of the universe and life.

The clouds, wind and rain.

The rivers, mountains and earth,

The fire and light or the sun and stars.

The Nian was a good and righteous Nian who listened to the woman.

The woman held a drum in her hands and her drum controlled a light. Back then, they called all light the sun. So they say she was able to speak to the sun.

This Nian was a noble beast walking on the clouds out of the heavens.”

“The two Nians, one good one bad saw each other and squared off.

They circled each other and growled.

They were not equal, for the bad nian was starving and hungry while the good Nian was full of goodness, happiness and enlightenment.

They came to blows, attacking with tooth and claw and ramming with horn.

The clash of clawed paws against scaled bodies was like metal on metal as loud as the cymbals crashing and gongs banging

The blows to the body were as deep and loud as the striking of a drum.

They locked in ritual contest while the mother goddess stood to the side.

Whispering to them and stroking them.

She leapt up, flying through the air onto the bad Nian's back and took hold of his horn. And thus he was weakened and defeated. She pulled horn from his head and the beast bowed its head in shame. She rode away on the good Nian and then put the horn to her lips, blowing into it. It sounded and the heavens opened up into massive light. She blew into the horn calling the mischievous Nian to follow her and he did.

The people were stunned and amazed.

"Well that was a good year" the people said.

"But what about next year? They thought played and planted and spent summer swimming and fishing and fall harvesting. They ate what was left in winter and they had preserved foods but some families ran out and still had to fast when there wasn't enough.. and they looked towards the new year, this time with a plan instead of fear.

Should we hide in the mountains?

Should we wait for the good Nian to come again?

A little girl eavesdropping on the men talking piped up. "Why don't we just make a good Nian?"

"Be quiet! Men are talking!"

"She's right." Said an old woman basket weaving.

"What do you know old woman?" said some of the young men.

The older men told the young man that they should at least hear her out and to respect his elders.

One girl saw through the old woman's disguise. She was the same woman who had ridden the good Nian, but clothed in this old body, the village did not recognize her eternal beauty or her terrifying power.

"Who are you? We haven't seen you in this village before." Said a man.

The boy tried to get the crowd to listen but they shouted at the old woman.

"If you could do this, Why didn't you do it before?"

People were unreasonably angry. They were thinking of all the property they had lost, the children who had died because of the beast. The elderly. All this anger came up and they took out these feeling son the old woman.

People said, "Maybe you are a witch. Maybe you created the Nian in the first place."

But others just scratched their heads. Wondering how to create life.

"I can't think of everything for you. Did I create the monster? No. I'll tell you what I created though. I created your lot. Gave birth to the first of you and every single one of you, your spirit is half from me. And the other half is from one of those two creatures. Both of them are inside you. I didn't bring them here. You did. One is angry and jealous and suspicious and greedy. The other is happy and caring and generous and loving. They are both necessary to create life and to be successful in this world. You can never fully defeat either of them, because to survive you need to have them in balance

and working together. My side of you can tame the one, and ignite the other. I am the spiritual side that can put everything into balance.”

“But since you shout at me, Go ahead and shout and curse. I’m not making anything for you. You figure it out yourselves! There is only ONE among you who has eyes that truly see!” With that she threw down her basket over by the girl. When everyone looked back at where the woman had been, she was gone.”

The little girl picked up the basket and moved it around.

“It doesn’t have to be a real monster. We can make a pretend one out of straw.”

“Or Bamboo! Or Rattan!” Said a young boy catching on excitedly.

The people got together and made this

They did this, and made war drums and brought gongs and cymbals. They gathered sticks and spears and axes and hatchets and farming tools. The boy and the girl were looked to as leaders of the village. Somehow, put in that position, they were able to come up with interesting solutions by listening to everyone and keeping an open mind. In any case they taught the village how to tap into their subconscious through holding painful poses and conquer their fear. They became leaders, and somehow, when put in this situation, they came up with something by listening to everyone’s advice and coming up with solutions.

The hunter’s brought out the Tiger fork, with the two swords and daggers and red flowers of cloth hanging from it because these were the tools to kill a tiger and maybe it would do for a bad Nian as well.

And they danced with the Nian monster they had created in every corner of every house of the village.

The bad Nian saw this and cowered back in fear. Nuwa appeared in her natural state of beauty. Some hearts beat faster, in admiration and love. Some hearts beat faster in jealousy and greed. The jealousy and greed strengthened the evil Nian. The admiration and and love strengthened to good nian. The old woman and the young girl stood by Nuwa, the beautiful young woman, and now the villagers could see that they were three in one. The boy stepped forward and Nuwa took her horn and placed it on him, and he was transformed into a man, and

then a Nian Beast, the product of Nuwa and both Nians, and he Danced around and roared and played in the village along with the pretend Nian.

At the end of the day he became a man again and the next morning the people only remembered the man as having always been a man. They forgot the boy and they forgot the beast. They only remembered him and the dance and they made him their leader. The young girl became a priestess, a spiritual leader. And the young man sought out her advice when he had trouble.

Years later, some children saw this dance. They were so young that they did not remember hiding in the mountains when the bad Nian came.

“What is that thing?” they said

“Long! It’s a Dragon.”

No it’s not a Dragon. Dragon’s are much longer and their heads are shaped much differently.

“Fu! It’s a Tiger!”

No it’s not a tiger. Tiger’s don’t have such long bodies or a horn. Their face is much different and they have stripes.

“Kei Lun! It’s a Unicorn.”

No it’s not a Kei Lun. Kei Lun’s are much smaller and even more graceful. Their mouth are smaller as well.

“Si! It’s a lion!”

What's a lion?

They are from India and they have them in Africa too.

People shrugged. They had never been to India or Africa themselves.

Maybe it was a lion.

And the name stuck.

The name stuck and the dance spread and the meaning of it changed. Nuwa was forgotten, and other deities put in her place. The horns were decorated by leaders in the community. The story of the woman, one in three, became suppressed. The reason for this was that later on, as the village became a city and later joined with other empires that were controlled by armies and societies where men ruled, this idea of powerful women, did not fit. And so the story was changed to fit with the society. But the dance still spread and became what it is today. The ideas about it have changed and in truth, even from the beginning it was nothing more than a show to act as a live scarecrow for the villagers.

But the essence of the dance is different. The essence to connect to Nuwa, the mother goddess and to harmonize the good nian and the bad nian. The essence is not what is going on outside in the dance but within you. From the very first dance, that was not the point of the villagers. The point was just to scare off a monster that was part of them by pretending to be a good beast, that was also part of them. But if you listen within yourself while beating the drum and doing the movements, you can connect with Nuwa, the goddess and balance the parts of yourself. And when you can do that, you can find that you have great power and can do amazing things.

Even if you know nothing about the lion dance, you can still feel its essence in the beating of the drum, and rushing of blood as you dance the Kung Fu stances with the beast."

Now! Do you want to see the Lion Dance?

Baba had dropped his hypnosis over the crowd. They had journeyed back into their seats in the auditorium as if waking from a great dream. They were disoriented at first but slowly it came back to them. Yes. New Year celebration. School, the real world.

“Yesssss!!!” the crowd sang. In fact before they had even known where they were they started saying this response back. It was the act of saying it that brought them back to who they were in this life, shoulds captive in bodies captive in jobs and roles the world had given them. Students teachers parents workers.

But now, after our story, our dance would free them again. Bring them to an animalistic part of themselves beyond words, just hearing and sight.

I put on my lion head. On this ship I can fly. I look like a real Nian, a real creature, called a lion, but horned and able to walk on the clouds. I amaze the older children and strike fear into them, as I truly become that creature, alive and breathing. I eat the chuang and bless them with good luck for the new year. When I stop my dance they are amazed. We release their imaginations, and I am back on stage with the head...my father drumming.

How Baba taught me Lion Dance

A drum sat in the corner of our little apartment. I had seen my mother buy it. It was not a special drum. She had bought it at pier one imports as an end table. My father said that usually that's not what you used a drum for.. They argued about it and then Baba said he was just saying, but that she could do what she wanted.

The point is, this drum was not the special drum. It was not a holy drum, not at first. The holy drum was a drum that hung on the wall that was so small you could hold it in one hand. I had seen versions of this drum for babies that you could hold like a lollipop. This was an ancient version of that type of drum. The drum on the wall that is. The drum on the wall had an energy and to tell you the truth... I feared it.

The drum in the corner was decoration. There was a glass cover over it and it was used like a coffee table. But my mother soon gave up on using it in this manner and in the future, when I learned the lion dance, my little baby head would sit on this drum. In fact that baby head, would become our go to performance head. It was made small enough that I could use it, but big enough that Baba and Mommy or any adult could use it like a Kei Lun. It was a mixed breed. It was a cross between a Dragon and a Lion and it began to absorb energy from this drum... this end table.

Again, this end table drum started off being nothing much. But then, my father anointed it and we painted on the side of the drum and on the skin. My mother too. We painted on it every day. Not just flowers and some characters like you see on some drums... done quickly and gotten over with to move on to the next drum they had to paint. We painted mountains and rivers and scenery that you could walk into. There was a woman painted on it too. A snake woman. In cartoons I had seen her.

"Is this a snake demon?" I asked my mother. She scoffed at that.

"Chinese people call her Nuwa, isn't that right Bo?" He grunted, "She's no demon, she is the mother goddess, your creator and protector, but all these men always like to call her a demon because they are threatened by her. She is like a snake because that is like the intertwining helix of DNA. And the Snake represents healing too, like the caduces you see on the side of an ambulance. And not only that the snake eating its tail is infinity, and in the Bible story the snake represents knowledge and truth, but the story got twisted up to make it out that the snake was bad. The snake isn't bad, and the woman isn't bad. She is the Eve and the mother of all humanity, the creator of all humanity. In the Nuwa story, she formed humans from clay. In Africa they have a mighty snake goddess too. The stories got twisted up but these are not representations of something evil, but something good."

Most of that speech went over my head but I managed to remember what my mother said anyway. My mother used a magic brush and occasionally, if I or anyone else in the house accidentally cut myself, a bit, a tiny bit of that blood would go onto a plate or something and with the magic brush would be added into the pictures on the drum. The drum became like a medium with the gods, even though when it was made, it was created for nothing more than decoration.

There were animals and humans and shape shifters performing magic and Kung Fu. The Universe and galaxies were depicted. Patterns and poems. Forms of subconscious art. Layer upon layer producing optical illusions and three dimensional images if you stared into the drum. And that way, after painting on it every day and sacrificing blood and time and thought to it... a drum that was a nothing drum became very powerful.

And all the while we practiced on it.

One day Uncle Chucky came over. He was one of Baba's best friends it seemed like.

He looked at the drum. "Where'd you get this?"

“That’s the one you gave us.”

“From where?”

My mother later told me she had helped to set up a room with Uncle Chucky and later realized that it had been a Bordello of some sort. What tipped her off was the Korean girl who helped them move furniture around kept touching herself in a way that my mother thought was strange for public company. The apartment that was being used had an Asian theme and these drums were used as end tables. These sorts of businesses have to move around in order to avoid detection from police. And so at some point, everything was packed up and moved. Uncle C had asked my mother if she wanted one of the drums. She had.

“No the one I gave you was different.” he said.

“I know the boys painted it.”

“The boys? You have two sons now?”

“I have one son, and Bo Jai. He is the other boy. I painted it too. What do you think.”

He nodded his head looking at it, “I can’t even tell it’s the same drum. It catches the eye. I don’t know if it matches the room... but I can’t stop staring at it. Ho Chey Ngan. It seems to have power of some sort.” He laughed, “who is this woman? The goddess of prostitutes?”

My mother got mad but wasn’t sure in which direction she would get mad. “She is a goddess. And she is the goddess of humanity, but you Chinese seem to ignore her but I read about her in your mythology. And prostitutes are part of humanity.”

Uncle Chucky actually nodded, “Usually women and households bow to Guan Yin but I can tell this woman is Nuwa.”

“Their bothe the Goddess, it doesn’t matter.”

“No, their very different.”

“I know what you mean. But Mary, Nike, Victoria, Justice, Liberty...”

“Huh?”

“Yes the name of western Gods. All those gods are the Goddess and Nuwa and Guan Yin too.”

He stared into the drum a long time and then looked at my mother and nodded. “Maybe.” he said

“But I’ll keep owing to Gwan Gung I understand him better.

So you see, the drum was more than just decoration.

Baba would bring it into the middle of the room and rest it on an Ottoman.

“Follow me!” he would say. He raised a leg looking like he would take off in flight. His hands to one side like wings.

Ba DOOM

I followed. But not quite as he wanted. He yelled at me.

“Relax Stop yelling.” My mother interceded. My father took a breath and tried to explain.

“BE HERE! Understand? You follow but you lead. Back and forth. Call and response. You are not just copying. You are creating. You are yin to yang or yang to yin. Express your SELF in the drumming. But also... follow me. Match me! The drum is you heart beat. But together, this drum, a nothing drum, through our art, our playing, will be the beat of the Universe.”

We tried again. We were using a drum that you usually used with sticks... but we used our bare hands instead. Later we would drum on it in a lion dance fashion. But this first part... it was JUST the drum and just our hands. Getting to know the drum. Getting to understand and feel the beat that was all around us. We started with one roll. A slow roll that took the whole body, with motions like a dance, like a forceful Tai Chi which ended up giving iron palms as I struck the drum skin and the side.. My father on one side and I on the other.

Ba Doom! “Hai!”

Doom! “heeyah!

Doom! “Chaaaaa!!!” a high pitched scream.

Ba doom! “Hawww!” A low dan tian yell.

Doom! “Hok!” a hi pitched crane call.

Doom! “Haiiii!”

We struck and yelled and danced until tired and sweating. We spun and jumped with our simple beats and then got into the roll. Then the beat.

Doom doom doom. Papapapa! Doom Doom Doom Doom Doom! Papapapah!

It was a slow and steady beat. A warriors beat. A marching beat. And old and ancient beat. And with it I expressed my love to my father and laughed. I did not hold up my end of the playing at first. But slowly I am to understand.

“You see,” said my father, “Universes... let us think of a big drum skin. And a beat is struck... and that strike.. As the skin widens and widens and continues to widen.... Well that strike forms a bubble in this.. Well ocean and the ocean expands and expands. And so each strike of the drum forms a bubble which expands with this ocean and with this drum skin. And the reverberation of that beat plays through that bubble as it expands and expands, speeding up in it's expansion. That expansion is one universe. Each strike of the drum is one bubble one universe, in this cosmic drum beat dance.

The truth of that beat.. The feeling of it, reverberates through the universe. Through our universe. And the truth of the other beats and the other universes too. And so this dance, through focus and listening to the drum... we tap into that with our spirits and it increases our power.”

So this is how we played the drum. I can't remember the first time exactly, whether it was painting the drum or playing it or what have you. But this became a very important part of our lion dance practice... even though it was separate beats from the Lion dance. It was tapping into something greater. And that is what Baba was trying to show me. That he would show me moves and show me the dance and he would force me to do it his way... but in the end the goal was something else. Something besides performance... and at the same time, the performance was part of that inner search, to tap into that reverberating beat of the universe.

The practice ended with another drum roll. And then we would sit and laugh and talk about our moves.

Kung Fu Kek Jap

Baba was watching his stories on TV. Kek Jahp that he rented from the video store and binged watched all night long, foregoing sleep, and then going to work again as a chef. Sometimes Uncle

Chucky would bring videos over that his wife had copied from the video store version. That way we didn't even have to return them. Even still, my father would watch them all at once.

"Have you even moved?" My mother would ask sometimes watching Baba leak tears emotionally over some other family's problems from Hong Kong. She would laugh at that, but secretly it made her love him all the more.

I liked it better when he watched the Kung Fu dramas. They were more interesting. Though sometimes the ghost Kung Fu ones were too scary. I still have nightmares of a man being tied to a post and some Kung Fu bad guy sticking his hand on his torso and twisting, the sounds of his inside cracking as the victim, a main character cries out in agony.

As an adult I realize this is actually such an easy thing to film. After all the only special effect is the sound of something breaking... probably just sticks or celery or something. There isn't even any blood and the bad guy just has to pretend that he has resistance while he twists and the good guy just has to cry out in agony. Isn't strange how something so fake can be so real with the right set up?

Nobody has the power to torture someone like that. But to fake it is so easy, so little effort. And the sound effect and acting making so real, that I still have nightmares of it.

Kung Fu powers enable people to fly, have super strength, and even wear light silk outfits while jumping around in the snow. In fact this was one of the points my mother honed in on.

"Aren't they cold?" She said when the man and woman were talking love at each other, which only Baba understood out of all three of us. I mean we got the gist but what specifically were they saying?

"They do Chi Gung, that keeps them warm." said my father.

"Not the characters I mean the actors? I mean that isn't real snow is it? There isn't snow in Hong Kong. And this wasn't filmed in China."

"Oh the actors.. Oh no, it's fake snow."

"Baba do you know how to do Kung Fu?" I asked.

“In another life maybe. In another life I was pretty tough and your mother too, but we came here not to be fighters so much.”

“Okay but do you know Kung Fu?”

“Of course.”

“Can you show me?”

“Why so you can beat up your friends? You know if you practice how to fight all day, when it comes time to fight or if you are put in a situation where fighting is an option. Than fighting will come naturally to you.”

“Awesome!”

“Why is that awesome? You will choose the option to fight first, when if you look at it objectively, there might be other options that are better.”

This was totally going over my head. I just wanted to throw some punches and kicks and stuff.

“You know,” My mother piped in, “Once people find out you are a fighter, then suddenly everyone will want to fight you. But if you are not a fighter, than actually you won’t get into many fights.”

I thought about this.

“There are only so many fights you can win. There is always someone better. Just based on statistics it is only a matter of time before you lose. And if you are talking about real fighting with guns and knives, then losing means you die. And me and your father didn’t come here from the land of the dead to see you die young.”

“You both were fighters?” I asked.

“Your mother is Grace O’Malley reborn.” She said, “and you’re father is Cheung Bo Jai reborn. Both of us were pirates on opposite sides of the world, some of the best fighters that ever lived were by ourselves. So imagine how great we would have been together! Well we met up in the spirit world and figured we would get together here and try and have a son and live a normal life, to see what it was all about. A second chance. We had to fight to get it, fight spirit world, fight heaven, as some people would say. And we didn’t do all that fighting just to have you become a fighter and get run through with a rapier.”

“Or more likely shot.” Piped in my father.

“In any case, if that’s why you want to learn Kung Fu, then you can learn it. It will just give you a false sense of security and make you think you can win when common sense would tell you that you can’t.”

“Let’s just show him Lion Dance first. Or you know what? I’ll show him lion dance, and Mommy can show you Kung Fu.”

“I don’t know Kung Fu.” Mommy laughed

“Swords and sticks and fists and guns.. same thing. But I’ll start with Lion Dance. My special Lion Dance. Lion Dance of the mind. You don’t even need a lion head. I’ll show you, and then we’ll make a lion head, how about that?”

My mother laughed and shook her head. But from that day I started doing all the stances. And the Kung Fu? I just picked up moves from the movies we watched. In truth, I practiced more Kung Fu than a lot of kids who study at a school. After all the stances are the most important, and doing one hand movement over and over again because you don’t know much else? Well that’s the real way to get good anyway.

Learning Lion Dance Gung

“Okay,” said Baba. “Put your Lion head on.” Baba held out his hands. I didn’t know what he was doing. They total were empty.

“Baba what head?” I asked.

“Mommy ah,” Baba complained, “Play the drum so he can see the head.”

Mommy laughed and pulled a flat drum off of the wall.

“Baba that’s not a lion dance drum. Not like those real Dai Gu that go dong Chang with eth cymbals and everything.” I knew what a “real” Lion dance drum looked like from seeing it in the parades in Chinatown. Our end table drum was not even quite right. I would later learn that the end table drum was more of a Dragon drum from the north. In addition to our version of two people playing with the hands.. This type of drum could be put on a stand on it’s side, and two people could face each other and strike it with sticks. It has two heads, this end table drum. But the Lion dance drum only had one end.

It was so cool how the teenagers hit the sides and the drum while wearing their leather jackets and smoking. They were real cool teenagers! I wanted to hit the sides like them and look upward at the sky with dark sunglasses on wearing a leather jacket and smoking a cigarette. I had started to envy these younger teenagers more than my father. They dressed nicer and just seemed cooler and more with it than my father, who seemed to not care what he wore and whose style was sort of that of a bum in many ways. He dressed for comfort and was always very casual. Ironically, I would later learn that these teenagers looked up to my father and Uncle Chucky. In fact it seemed that they took orders from them. But to me they still seemed cooler in their demeanor and their smooth motions and cool handshakes.

“Baba why can’t I do the drum and the head like THAT?” I had asked him once while watching the performance, “Why don’t you teach me what they are doing?”

“I told you,” said Baba, “This is MY lion dance. But once you learn this one you will know the other one too. Pretty easy.” Back to learning in the apartment.

Mommy started hitting the drum.

I still didn’t see any lion head, but Baba showed me how to hold my hands and how to get into a squat or sei ping ma, the four legged horse stance. I followed along but grudgingly. Quickly losing my patience and groaning, “Baba this is so boring! And stupid! I want to do lion dance not just moving around pretending like ehhhh! This is so dumb.”

“Don’t talk to your father that way, if you would pay attention to my drumming you would see the goddamn head you ungrateful spoiled brat!” said my mother. “I’ll beat you like this drum until you do see the head.”

“Look!” Said Baba, “You want to learn this or not? Me and your mother fought all of Heaven to push through to the physical world, just so that we would have you. And why did we have you? We don’t even know yet but part of it has to do with learning this Lion Dance. So are you going to learn it or not?” Baba said

“Well!!!! Maybe if you got me a head!!!!” I argued.

Well it was no good. I just would listen and I just couldn’t figure out what they were talking about. Baba looked so mad I thought he was going to stroke out and die right there. So he said, “Fine forget it.” He breathed and then said, fine we’ll just make a goddamn head then.

Actually this was pretty fun. I colored in a paper plate in a picasso looking head and danced around with it. Mommy hit the drum and then I hit the drum. My parents were sort of annoyed because this was not the way it was supposed to be done. But they just went with it for now. It was better than completely turning me off to the tradition right?

So the next day Baba got an even better box and painted a lion face on it with his Moh But, a chinese paintbrush. I then used some crayons and paints to color over it. This annoyed him and he struck me with the brush. I cried and he apologized but told me that if I had wanted to just scribble I should have got my own damn box and done that before he spent so much time drawing the lion’s face.

The next day he got another box and painted a face on it and I continued to draw on mine. It took a while just to get to the point where we were now learning Lion Dance, The stances and

the moves but we got there. This time he let me play on my own and he would do his thing and try to encourage me to do it his way sometimes. But a lot of times I was just doing it my own way.

Mostly he was showing me how to do it, but I wasn't necessarily doing it that way. It was more like I would dance around, get tired and then he would tell me a story about the right way to do it for entertainment while I rested. He hoped that somehow, this way, eventually, I would learn.

He showed me different poses and told me to flex my muscles, and to suck in everything beneath my waist.. or to imagine that I was sucking in instead of pushing out.

"If you push out you'll get a hernia." I didn't know what that was but it sounded pretty gross. So I flexed and stretched and gripped the ground with my feet. I was really doing poses more than dancing so far. There were moves with my arms out straight and my muscles ached. I needed balance too to stand one leg and my things were burning and shaking I was sweating terrible and my mother was playing the drum but it didn't even sound like Lion dance beats. I wanted to stop but Baba wouldn't let me.

"Just keep going until you completely collapse... like really collapse and pass out and when you do you pass out right here."

"Noooooo... but I'm so tired I do need to collapse See! Ehhhh! THat's it I collapsed!" I whined and half laughed while I did it. I laughed at my own ridiculous and Baba laughed too. But I didn't like being laughed at. I tried really hard to scowl and be mad, because I was mad. But at the same time I knew it was so stupid to be mad at nothing and that was so funny.

We took a break.

For the rest of the day.

The next day I was doing the moves by myself and Baba made sure he just simply did not interfere.

Instead, he laid out a rug or a mat of some sort. And he lit a candle and incense. I kept going through the motions. The poses that is. I wasn't moving that much, just holding these poses. But I was sweating so much that my feet were slipping against the cold black tile floor.

I was really trying hard and sweating. It's weird. When Baba pushed me I simply tried hard to fight with him and argue. But while he was seemingly ignoring me, lighting candles and incense and whatever, I tried hard.

As I held my stances, with the smell of the incense and these other leaves he was burning in the house.. Not like a fire burning it was just like incense but it wasn't in stick form.. And with the candle lit and all the rest of the lights off, I started to feel different. At the time I thought it was my dance, But thinking back on it as an adult I know that the leaves or herbs my father was burning had something to do with it as well. The window was open, I assumed so that the smoke detector would not go off.

But thinking back, maybe there was a different purpose for that too. My mother was smoking something in the night and my father also. And she began to play the drum lightly. And then.. Baba began to play the flute. It gave me the creeps. It was eerie, but I was doing my dance.

Now here I will say something because my father is Chinese and I have heard later from many an old Chinese person not to whistle at night. That whistling at night calls ghosts and spirits near. And also from African American Church going women. They say the whistling raises the devil. Now the fact that two separate traditions say something similar, and that you have a natural creeped out feeling when you hear whistling at night... well I think there was something to this.

Chinese will also say that Taoists will occasionally play the flute at night on purpose.. To purposefully call forth spirits or demons or what have you.

I mention this now because perhaps that is what my father was doing. And I am saying that he did this as I played the Lion Dance moves with my cardboard mask and the narcotics and the candles and the incense burning in apartment 62 of the Castle Court high rises.

This lion dance is not the traditional lion dance that I later learned in Philadelphia's Chinese Community. I don't know if Baba made it up... or, as he would say, that he was just guiding me and that it was the spirits who taught me the dance, and it was they who had taught him, in the othertime. The time that is both past and future and if you play the music just right and open yourself to the night with your dance, in an ecstatic or focused moment it can be the present as well.

"Start thinking like an animal. The movement is on the inside. The pain will make you reach deep inside to a wilder side." This is what my father and mother were telling me. I heard it in words. But I believe the words came from the drum and the flute. This wasn't really like a meditation that is calm. It was like a torture. The incense smelled sweet. Mommy continued with the drum and Baba was illuminated only by the candle showed now. Occasionally he stood and brought me through poses that included Lion Tail movements and lion head movements. Sitting, rolling, contorting, crawling like an animal, strengthening my arms. I was sweating now and now I really wanted to pass out and then finally Baba let me lay down, and put a cloth over my eyes so that I saw a darkness deeper than when you just close your eyes but you can see some light through your eyelids.

"Sink down... go down the hole into the ground. Let yourself fall through." he whispered as mommy continued with the drum.

I dreamed and I saw Baba and next to him was the head of a fearsome beast. Did it look like the lion heads they use for Chinese New year? Well how many different ways have they made those heads? I will tell you this, the beast looked like all beasts that have ever been drawn and ever existed. It was every dinosaur and Mammoth and Mammal and whale and shark that lived on earth or even in other worlds and was every creature ever thought up. It was the angel of God and the demons of hell. But yes, because of my back ground, though from

many angles it had different forms, I could see that yes it was like the Chinese Lion they used for New Year.

“Now you see the lion head.” Said Baba and picked it up. The lion head moved, it talked, it was alive. It was Baba, they were the same and then I got under the head with him and I was part of the Lion too. I moved. I learned the dance because it was danced through me. I learned the rules because I was watching myself follow them. Eating real food, instead of just a representation of it. I travelled the forest, the universe, space time as the Time Lion, the Year Beast. It was incredible. I learned and danced the whole night.

I awoke in the morning. Slowly opening my eyes I didn't know where I was. I wondered which world was real. The world of the dance and the beast.. Or this one, a world with a room and a mattress on the floor, and a marking in crayon on the wall that I had made what seemed like long ago as a baby. I stared at the marking. Baba had wanted to clean it off by my mother had stopped him.

“Look... it's the world tree.” she had said. I had not intended it to be a tree. But looking at that scribble on the wall now... I did see what my mother had seen and I smiled.

“Now you know the lion dance.” Baba said plopping next to me disturbing me from my early morning trance. “But you still have to practice.” He smiled and kissed my cheek, the stubble of his rough face scratching me and making me scowl “Ehhkkk beard Baba! I don't like it!”

He laughed, “ Mommy made breakfast la. Let's go eat.”

Mommy was making eggs and toast. It was Monday. Later we walked to Boston Common and while Baba sat watching me play I did indeed practice, making sound effects of the lion clawing the air and roaring. I spun around lost in my own dervish of Kung Fu dance moves, reliving my dream. Baba did it too. So I would watch how he moved and do that too. And then at the end he would hold poses and I would do that too.

Sometimes in the early mornings I would wake up to practice, before anyone else woke up. Sometimes at 4:00 am before the sun had even risen. "Don't jump up and down like that, that's right on top of the people's heads underneath us and it's too early in the morning for that." screamed my mother. We lived on the 6th floor. Baba told me to just lift my legs up instead and to land with one two and then the other, lightly.

"Imagine you are walking on the clouds." And I remembered my dream. Indeed as the lion I had stepped over whole galaxies and over eons, over space and time. As that creature, I could travel in one step as far as I could see. And in my dream I could see way beyond what we see, and so I travelled incredible fast.

Breakfast.

Breakfast was an interesting thing. We did buy food from the supermarket but there was another part of our daily diet that was pretty strange. We had this brass bowl. It was like a bell actually, and my father and mother could ring it with a special wooden pistle. But they could also make it sing. They would circle the wood around the bowl and it would ring out slowly and clearly the way you can do with your finger around a glass of water.

Well, twice a day they would do this with the bowl and fill it with water and salt.

What would appear after waving the hand over it were three rice balls or sometimes sushi balls or triangles. I asked what type of filling were in there and my mother said I had to just eat it and not talk about it. The filling always tasted different but I never quite knew what it was. One little rice ball twice a day was not enough to fill me up. It was more of something that we ate before we actually ate. But my father said that if necessary I could definitely survive on these rice balls that magically appeared from the bowl. But that even when you didn't want to eat these rice balls, you had to eat them twice a day, every day, otherwise the bowl would stop providing them.

Mommy said this bowl was one of the four Treasures, a holy treasure in fact, a bowl that the Holy Grail was based on. I didn't understand what she was talking about. But she said that as long as we had that treasure, that I could never starve.

I asked if we had any other treasures. She said that we did but that I couldn't tell anyone about it and she would explain when I was older. She knew that if I talked about the magic bowl, nobody would believe me anyway. But gold and jewels, that was a different matter. People might try to steal that, especially in this neighborhood. Why attract sounds in the night that might be people breaking through the walls holding guns and knives, instead of just rats and mice? Of course most people who did break into steal, did not carry weapons. But if they really knew something was there and they knew that you had guns and knives... then they would come prepared.

Baba took me to school and I danced and jumped the whole way.

School was boring. I complained. I didn't want to go. It was stupid. My mother shrugged.

"What are you going to do all day?" My mother asked,

"Can't Baba just teach me or you?"

"Don't we have to work?" She said.

"What work?"

"I sing for money at a club." Mommy said.

"I thought that was for fun." I said.

"It is. But It's also to make money."

"But that's not during the school day that's late at night."

"Okay, but I have to sleep at some point. And Baba has to teach his Kung Fu classes at the school."

"I thought that was for fun too?"

"Yes... but again it is also a way to make money." My mother said.

I motioned to whisper something in my mother's ear and she bent her head down so that I could, "What is the point of having treasure if you still have to work anyway?"

My mother whispered back, "People who have money and do nothing to get it are very suspicious. People will talk. They will assume that you are selling drugs or committing some kind of crime. So the first thing you need to do if you want to be a criminal in this sort of society, is get some sort of boring job as a cover."

"That's stupid." I said loudly.

"No. It's the opposite of stupid." Said my mother.

In any case, what happened was my mother kept her job and Baba quit his and pulled me out. After all, it really was just for cover. I don't know what my parents did exactly to make money yet, but I knew that the job was cover. Hadn't my mother just told me that? And as for school...was it that important at that age? Baba would teach me at home for now. There would always be time for school when I got older.

He took me to the library and to the museums every day instead, and we learned lion dance and I got better and better. Crazy better. Like I could join the circus better. Most kids would have preferred school. But I sensed that I was different. That I was born for something different. And so I recognized that my life should be different. I made easy friends on the playground but I suppose I did not have any real friends that I continued to play with every day. I began to look at imaginary things, like the lion as real. And I began to see real people, the children I played with on the playground, as ideas and notions, like sunny days and happiness. They weren't real to me. And so I wasn't sad when they left and I did not see them again, because I would always see new people at the playground (and yes, sometimes the same old ones.) We often went to school playgrounds and played with children that did go to school. I was an outsider, but at the same time they envied me because I came and went as I pleased. Attached to my father yes, but there were no rules that he imposed. He was simply there.

Baba and I practiced every morning before breakfast for about a month, and then we practiced outside on the way to the library. We bought baos from Chinatown and practiced at Boston Common.

One day we were having a picnic at Boston Common. It was summer and a group of birds gathered near to us. Sparrows and blackbirds with long beaks.

“Baba, what are those black birds called?”

“Grackles.”

“I thought they were blue jays because part of their feathers look blue.”

“They’re not. You know what Blue jays look like. They’re a light blue color.”

I watch them. It looked like they were picking at the grass. For some reason a whole group of them were right in front of us but not in front of everyone else.

There were many people walking to work, women dressed nicely in skirts, or sunbathing wearing only a bikini top. They seemed beautiful to me, more beautiful than other women near our house, even if they also seemed more stern. But there were younger women too, student types, that laughed and giggled with each other. I wanted to be near them, and they would let me right into their group.

I told them about how I could jump and do lion dance and they laughed and played hand games with me that I did not understand and they laughed at that too. My father watched from a distance.

Not everyone was safe to go near though.

A bum came over yelling at me, “Get away from that Chinaman! why are you with him.”

It was weird. When Baba spoke to me, I understood him perfectly, even when he didn’t say anything. It was when we were around other people that I suddenly realized that Baba sort of didn’t speak English, unless we did our tricks with the drums. The bum got more belligerent. But I wasn’t afraid of him. I was too young to be afraid.

“Just ignore him.” Baba said.

“Come over here. Why are you with that man? Come away from him!”

I ran over to him, “He’s my Baba!” I said cheerfully.

The bum looked at me strangely. Simultaneously my father had admonished. “ehhh!!! don’t go over there.” to me.

“He’s your father?” said the bum, “No he’s not.” But then he looked at me and sort of saw it and doubted. He saw that even though I had blond hair and white skin, that maybe I was part Chinese after all. He stumbled away mumbling to himself.

He talked to the other bums.

The younger girls that had played with me earlier came over and sat next to Baba. They talked soothingly to me and told me to translate for him. He just smiled and laughed and shook his head, "No worry... allo good." He said in broken English. It was weird to me when he spoke in broken English because I was used to hearing fluent words come from his mouth and understanding them. I did not quite understand the difference in language yet.

The girls sat with us for a while.

"You see." My father told me, "We are protected because these girls are here. Sometimes fighting is not everything. These girls.. I'm not saying they can't fight . I mean they are physically fit, but they are thin. And your mother can fight, though she is a woman. And maybe these girls do sports. But they are not warriors. But they are protecting us just by being here, because they can explain that you are my son better than I can, if police come. Being big and strong.. People think that is protection. But sometimes beautiful women laughing and smiling and being beautiful... sometimes that is a far greater protection. Your mother is a fighter and a beautiful woman... and she understands this."

We finished our picnic of Baos and soy milk.

"Okay." said Baba, "See this guy walking over to us?"

I looked. "No don't look. Use your peripheral vision." I did. He didn't look like a bum. He looked tough though and was carrying a backpack. His face was hard and scary like it was roughly hewn from stone. We were sitting some distance away from him, cross legged and meditating.

"Send your lion out to him and make him collapse."

"What? How?"

"Close your eyes. You do the same moves, but not in the dance, just inside, and then in spirit and send your lion spirit out to eat him. Close your eyes. "

I did. And I saw my lion self, but I couldn't do it. But I saw Baba's lion. It jumped the man and knocked him to the ground. In real life the man collapsed in a fit.

Baba's lion looked at me with meaning as he pushed the man's head back and exposed his jugular. He nodded to me. My lion ran over and sunk my teeth in. The man gasped in real life. Baba pulled me off though before I did too much. And he took something from inside the backpack and swallowed it into his mouth.

I opened my eyes. The world seemed to be greyish and black and white as my eyes adjusted to the contrast of bright light and us sitting in the shade of the trees. I saw that there was an ambulance and a crowd near where the man stood.. and squad cars. The A police officer came over to my father and asked if we saw what had happened. He shrugged and I tried to translate. But they found someone else, from among the bums who explained what happened. The man had just suddenly collapsed. Baba picked up out box full of Bao pastries and took me home. At home he opened the box, and in it was cash. A lot of cash.

"Where is that from?"

"From your good work."

"How did you know he had money?"

"From wandering the city at night in my lion form. He is a drug dealer."

"Baba isn't it wrong to steal?"

Baba shrugged. "When you eat meat, you take life. We eat from the bowl, the Holy pot, So we don't need to take life to eat. But we do. Technically we could survive on those rice balls from the bowl everyday. But you would be skinny and tired and undernourished. We eat meat which means that we support people raising and killing animals. Even if he don't have to.

It's true that we don't have to steal like this or attack the man with our lion spirits like this. I didn't take this man's life. I did affect his health though. And he will have a hard time explaining to his partners what happened to him. Maybe people will die as a result. Maybe not. After all this is a lot of cash to us. But to them? They will make it back. The money disappears, It is unfortunate. They assume the police took it. And we don't have to work hard Is it wrong? Sure it's wrong. Selling drugs is wrong too. So is eating meat. So is polluting the earth. Throwing out garbage without a care or flushing your poop down the toilet to be mixed with waste from factories. That destroys the environment, the seas. But don't forget your mother and I are

pirates. This is our nature. I'm not saying you have to do this when you grow up. I don't know what you will do. But I will teach you how to do this. Maybe you can use the spirit lion for something else. But you have to test it, to see if you can really use it. And in the meanwhile, we have \$5,000.00 for nothing."

"Baba, how come you teach the Kung Fu classes at your school and why does mommy play guitar and sing for money if you can get money so easily?"

Baba laughed. "Because if I just had money, that would be suspicious. So I teach Kung Fu to explain why I have money. Plus mommy likes playing guitar."

After Baba taught me the secrets to the spirit lions he started teaching me the dance that you perform at his school. He started teaching the Lion dance that was for performance. And we would learn how to make money this way too.

Baba and Mommy Make the Lion Head

Mommy was tying rattan together and coat hangers and the like. I didn't know what she was doing but it sure looked interesting.

"Can I help?"

"Give me a second."

"Let me help."

"Alright just let me focus."

"What's this what are you doing here?"

"Don't touch honey I need some space."

"Why won't you let me help? I want to do it too!"

My mother took a deep breath and looked around. "Okay, You can hand me things, as I tell you too... or you want to make your own."

"Make my own what?"

"You mean you want to help but you don't even know what we're making?"

"Rghhhhh Just tell me then I can help!" I yelled.

“Don’t talk to me like that. Okay we’re making Lion heads take some wires and start to shape the head.

I did end up making my own, but it wasn’t as nice looking. In fact, it was just some taped up calls on a flat box and a piece of tape for the mouth. I thought it was great.

“Done!” I said.

My mother looked at my handy work. “Oh you’re done? Well leave mommy alone then because I actually have to finish this.”

I took the box and started dancing around with it. After what seemed like ages I stopped and went back to see what my mother was doing.

“Is this how you made the big lion heads too?”

My mother nodded. “It’s not that hard if you know how.” After she was finished with the frame, we made a paste and put strips of cloth like paper over the frame.

“Now can we color it?” I asked.

“We have to let it dry first.” She said.

What a pain. I didn’t want to wait for it to dry I wanted to color it now. “Why can’t we color it now?” I asked sticking my finger into some wet paper mache cloth. My mother slapped my hand away. She had made quite a few lion heads. They didn’t sell well back then. But as long as we looked like we sold them, that would be an explanation of why we survived. You can’t just have money or people would be suspicious. And it wasn’t like we looked rich. We were living in the projects. Our clothes were normal clothes. The most flashy things were the lion heads, and the uniforms we she was sewing for us too. They had had a little Kung Fu school/ Antique shop... which when you think of it, don’t really go together. Anyway, they had it for a while now. But they had ignored it. It was a front really. But now that I seemed to have interest they were moving around and doing more things for it. They sold off all the antiques as quick as possible at a loss even. They still shipped in Chinese instruments, and Irish ones too. Kung Fu weapons, and shilleleghs. It was a mix of a store. But there was just less junk around because now we were focusing on the Kung Fu and lion dance side of things and Irish Stick fighting and playing music and getting people in there regularly. It looked like a booming business. We might have even been able to make a living without the stealing. But like my father said, my parents were

pirates. It was in their nature. They had stolen these lives of theirs. They had gone outside of rules in heaven, which were fake rules set up by spirits that had once been people anyway. The point is... they would never follow the rules of this world because they had broken the rules for centuries. It was part of the essence of who they were. To follow rules would be true death. Even death was just part of a cycle for them before being reborn by stealing back life.

“Mommy you always say you and Baba were pirates in a past life.. How do you know?”

“We still communicate with the spirit world even now, your father and I. Now we didn’t always know who we were in our pasts lives and we don’t like to talk about it, mainly because people will think we’re crazy, so that’s the sort of thing you only say at home okay?”

But yes, what we found out, from going into that world, riding the drum, and using the lion masks, well we pieced the story together...

I had my own crew. I was a big deal. In life and in the spirit world. Everytime men and women sang that song about me in this world I grew stronger in the spirit world. I had ships and ships and ships. And I could steal the treasures of the old Irish gods and the new ones too, but why? I stole from and with the English and the Vikings and all sorts of gods because I was fair and I recruited anyone that would work hard. Think of all those criminals dying gunned down in battle or in the street, or stabbed or starving that didn’t have a place to go in the spirit world. No purpose, and being taken advantage of by the strong. Not me. I banded all them together to rob the powerful because that is my way. Why should there even be hierarchies in the Spirit world? We don’t need food or shelter, it’s just for show at that point. And even in this world.

Jesus Christ said it, or the spirit of him said it through man’s writing... think of those flowers you see at Boston Common. He said, ‘consider the lilies of the field.’ But a lily is just a flower and he was talking about flowers that grew wildly. That is part of the field and not a garden. Weeds, like dandelions. Don’t they look beautiful? Dressed to the nines? Decorated nicely? King Solomon in all his glory couldn’t compare could he....

You see King Solomon was a famous king in Israel... actually he was not that big a deal on the grand scheme of things. The Emperors of China and India and the Middle East were much greater. But

look today at the President of the United States or Donald Trump. Actually they just wear a suit and tie. What's so great about that? Do they look better in a fancy jet than a flower poking up through the concrete in the ghetto? Of course the flower only lasts a season, or until you or some other child plucks it up. But people are the same. They all have their own season. Didn't Steve Jobs die just like any other man? He died young despite his billions. We all have our time, and during our time how are we? How wretched or how great?

Well one way to think of it is it is all decided by God or by fate anyway."

I suddenly thought of a question and interrupted my mother. "Mommy did you ever meet god?"

"It depends what you mean."

"Did you see him, in person and talk to him."

"There have been times in this life when I felt that I had a glimpse of God, that I talked to him, but not a conversation like we are having. Not with words, but with feelings and sounds and call and response but not like talking like this. But in all the time I was in the spirit world... that was different, it's like you are swirling mass, maybe part of God... just like we are part of the earth, But when you are on the earth you do not really feel it do you? You do not understand that it moves. I believe that you come closest to feeling God in this world, in the physical world, when you are alive. And that is why the spirits try to come to live and seek out life even though it is difficult."

"Why is it difficult to live?" I asked, "I thought you just said that weeds-

"Yes, but you can't breathe in space. There are so many places where life cannot exist in the universe, in this solar system. But thoughts, and spirits and ideas, wandering around... they can exist anywhere. Of course they are strongest when they live near intelligence... whether that intelligence is a group of bacteria, a beehive, a forest, or a whole city of people. But they always have to be on the edge of alive thought, the spirits."

"In any case.. My point was Well why worry about it so much when even weeds can look wonderful. And why worry about things necessary for life when you are a spirit? So in the spirit world... I didn't care even if I didn't get anything for it. I would attack the kings and queens with their real treasures and servants that were buried alive with them and for what? I wanted to show people a

different way. And although much of the Church in the Spirit world was against me, I will tell you that Jesus was with me. His spirit that is, the Jesus that people believe in.”

“How did you fight so many people Mommy? Or spirits or whatever they were.” I asked

“Well honey,” My mother began again, “most times, people would end up joining me. Now in the spirit world, people aren’t the way they are here exactly. People can be tied together and sort of become one. And I don’t even mean in love. I just mean when people agree with each other or stand for the same thing, they sort of turn into one entity. And likewise, the other thing can happen where if you’re of two minds about something, you can end up being two different people without even knowing about it. That’s what I mean. And whole lands and countries can double and triple and multiply. It’s a dream world, there may be rhyme and reason to it, and rules, but damned if I know what they are. In any case, I robbed China. I robbed their really, ancient emperors, selfish self important bastards, and many people joined me. And it wasn’t long before I met your father, Cheung Po Tsai, and we started to become like one person.”

“Now there are laws and rules in certain parts of the Spirit world, but only for people who follow them and have their minds stuck in that way of thinking, and it that sense a lot of figures representing a pantheon they were against us and hated us. Have you ever heard the saying, “If you see the Buddha kill the Buddha?” Essentially I did a lot of that. Because there are cold stone ideas of Buddha and God and the Jade emperor floating around, and those ideas? Well I knocked them all down and broke them all to pieces. I stole the gold and powers and prayers. But see, the real Buddha. He wasn’t with me or part of me per se, but he would sit with us and talk like anyone else and smile and laugh. But the Gods. The Statues. The ORDERS. I broke their images and took them for my ships.”

“But isn’t stealing gold being trapped in the ways of the world? Isn’t that kind of closed minded” I asked

My mother rubbed her hand on my head, “Yes we are all stuck in are ways. And as much as I broke down limitations with your father, the both of us are stuck within our own ways of thinking and our own guidelines and prisons. But I believe that is why we had you... because you will be able to move forward and break through even further.”

The Helm

I was playing pirate, and as you could imagine, my parents really encouraged this. They usually let me jump about the apartment fighting pretend bad guys (or good guys) with my toy sword I had cut out of cardboard. My parents did not usually interrupt my play unless it looked like I was going to break something.

“Come here I want to show you something.” my father said, pulling me right out of my imaginary world.

“Pirate Fighting?” I asked.

“Pirate Kung Fu.” Baba said.

“Do I get a cutlass and a blunderbuss?” My mother sung all sorts of songs that mentioned a blunderbuss. She told me it was a special type of gun. But I liked the sound of it. Plus saying a big word made me feel smarter.

Baba looked at me and then looked quizzically at Mommy, “We’re going to start with hands.” he said.

I put up my hands in a boxer’s pose, the way I had seen boys in the neighborhood do and pranced around.

“Okay... not bad but I want you to make circles like this.” Baba held his hands in front of him sitting down and made circles, “Not just random circles all over the place. You have to use your brain, what’s coming at you, what’s protecting you and what’s striking. Just hands first before we do feet. Get into a Dahn Been Ma like you are shooting the lion head out, right here in front of me.. Good. Now hands up, in circles.. There! See that! I can hit you. Don’t let me! Attack my attack with your circles, like a ring of asteroids spinning round, and then when you strike you just lengthen the circle into an ellipse. To switch it up you turn the circle in different directions. Up, down, side, in, out, play with it. Change into wind mills and uppercuts and hooks and back fists and then back to the small circles.

Keep going.”

I did, laughing. I don't know if I was doing a good job or not. But I liked being able to freely play around with my movements.

Baba went over to the wall where the helm of a ship hung, like one of those decorations at a Fish and chips place, but this helm had only eight spokes instead of ten. I thought that maybe because it only had eight, that the restaurant hadn't wanted it and that's how Baba got it.

He brought this wooden wheel over to me and held and touched each spoke and had me do the same.

"How many spokes are there?" he asked.

I knew already. But I counted them out one by one.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight."

"Good."

"Where are the other two?"

"What other two?"

"There should be ten." I said.

"Why should there be ten?"

"Well we have ten fingers.. So there should be ten."

"We do have ten fingers. But this has eight spokes for a reason. These eight spokes are broken into three concepts."

"That doesn't make sense. That isn't even even. There should only be six spokes then."

"Just listen first. Hold you hands pressed together like this." He looked like he was praying or meditating. "Breathe in" he said and pushed his hands up up and up to the sky and I copied him, then he made hard fists and breathed out pushing down, down, down... slowly with power in his hands. I copied him. He showed me to grip the ground like I was doing the Lion Dance poses, even though my feet were together like I was standing normally, except my knees bent a little more than usual.

"That's one breath for Wisdom." Baba said and I did it again. "That's a second one for how you act" he said and I did it one more time, "and that's one more for Focus." As I finished my breath he let me pause there and said, "Now slowly start your circles."

“You can circle slowly around the room now too, moving in a circle, forward backward, inside outside, short circles, long ellipses, S curves play with them all and think about what I tell you. Sink down in your stance and turn your body too, spin bob and weave, but in circles, round and round twirling and bending like grass in the wind.. But learn to turn back any force.” And with that he pushed me until I fell over. I started crying and I yelled at him. I was mad at him for that. With tears I ran at him to strike him but he deflected me and I fell again and I fell again and I cried and was angry. Mommy came in with a stick to yell at Baba.

“He’s learning... don’t get mad, just try to turn the circle.”

“Well! I just Can’t!”

“Of course you can’t now, but as you practice you will be able to. Keep turning and listen to my words, because I’m going to tell you things.”

“No!”

“Okay fine then practice later by yourself. Come to this wheel now and I will show you each spoke.”

I wanted to pout. But the wheel also looked pretty cool.

Each spoke pretty much looked like the other with no difference.

“This first one is perspective. It is how you look at things. Like right now you can’t even see because you are crying.”

“That’s YOUR fault.”

“Okay. You can look at it like that and be mad at me, or you can it look at it like I’m teaching you. You can be mad because you fell down and lost to me and see it as a competition, or you can look at it as a learning experience. One way you just get tense, angry and full of hate. Your anger will make me angry and we end up arguing. If I lose my temper, maybe I end up beating you. If I manage to keep my cool I just leave you alone. Maybe you think that you want me to leave you alone. But then one day I will be gone and you won’t have the opportunity to learn from me any more. Maybe you can talk to my spirit and learn from me that way. But it isn’t the same.

That's one perspective. One way of thought.

The other way you practice and learn how to fight by turning circles and use people's power against them."

I thought about that. I was still mad. So I hit Baba as hard as I could. He took the first punch and then deflected the second and moved on to the second spoke on the wheel.

"Here is the second one, meaning or planning. It is what you mean to do. Intent. Yi. For instance what are you turning your circles on me for? Is it to hurt me? Or do you practice your circles to protect yourself and the family. Or if you turn your circles and beat someone up, why? For fun? To take their money? Or is there a greater purpose. I guess you could call this one purpose too."

"But you steal money with the spirit lion." I said.

"We're going over the wheel now, the eightfold path."

"Yeah and you use bad intent. You take an art that is magical and that can be used to protect your family and you take it to rob and steal. You break the eightfold path."

"Ehh?" Baba looked at me for a moment. Then he started laughing and clapped his hand on my circle. "So you really are paying attention!" He stroked his beard and thought for a moment. "You know... one excuse is that I steal to have money for the family and give you something to eat other than the things from our magic pot, which is also good for the local stores I spend that money at. Also I teach these drug dealers and thieves a lesson by stealing from them....but you are right, perhaps in the end I am just a pirate and I am abusing the art and power and philosophy that I have discovered. But then, these are arts that I picked up and in a way, stole to begin with. Now I am passing them onto you and you are learning them in a proper way. The way one should, a father and mother teaching their son. So maybe you can be the one to bring these arts and this philosophy back to the true path. We didn't just have you to teach you, your mother and I. We had you because we knew that we would never be able to break free of who we are without your help. And that is one of the reasons why we came to this world to have you. We had you with purpose, with intent."

He paused a while. And then interrupted his own thoughts.

"But you know.. You can't look down on my way either. My way is the way of the world. There were a lot of monks that I came across and priests. They were fools. They were taught their philosophy

at a temple, properly. But in the end not only were they not able to cope in the real world... they were also evil themselves. They ended up being the worst thieves and back stabbing hypocrites.”

Baba paused for a long times staring off into space. He sat on the rocking chair with green leafy patterns on a white background rocking back and forth and my eyes began to wander into the pattern. I grew sleepy almost and felt I was walking in the woods. I walked along alone for a while. I was no longer a boy but a grown man, and next to me was a monk. He walk near me and looked at me. We continued on our way. He turned to me and began to speak. He was calm and had an enlightened look on his face. The moment was long. It seemed almost eternal. An awkward silence where yes I was his son and he was my father and we loved each other and I was sitting by his lap... but I had questioned his beliefs and he was questioning them, just as I, in silence was questioning the wisdom in having gone against him.

I asked him what the next spoke on the wheel represented.. I did not want to continue in this feeling of calmness above interior tensions of hearts and minds.

“This third one is talking and words. Speech. This is very important. What you say matters a lot. Do you talk about people behind their back? And when you do, why? All these are interconnected too. Use your words with purpose, with intent, not just saying whatever comes to mind for the purpose of saying it.

What you say comes from a certain view. But what you say creates a certain view for others as well. If you become a leader your words can sway others so you must take this into account before speaking. An example is Sufi Islam is the three gates of speech. You should think about whether what you are saying is true. That is number one. Then Number two is whether or not what you are saying is necessary. And finally you should think about whether what you are saying is kind. Now there is still some speech that you may feel at the time will pass all three of these gates, and yet you will lose a lot of friends over what you have said. It is inevitable. Right action, right speech, right intent... all of this is not necessarily about making friends. ”

“Action? Which one is action?” I asked because we hadn’t covered that yet.

“Oh right. This next one, the fourth one. This one is action. Doing. Like fighting or killing or saving someone or cooking or sweeping up the house. Whatever you do you want to do exactly what

you intend, with purpose, with the right view and perspective and you should do what you say you will do. That is the fourth one.”

“This fifth one is who you are, your trade. I have been a pirate. It is what I do every day. That isn’t a good thing to be exactly, but even as a pirate you can be just and fair and lead people along the right path. Maybe you are taking a side route but you see where the right path is. You know how to get there.”

“The sixth one is effort. Because whatever action you are taking or speech you are saying... it will all take effort. So you see how they are all connected. The Seventh is Mindfulness and the eighth concentration. It’s just whatever you do or say or act has to be with these. They are spokes, eight different spokes, but they are all part of the same wheel. I’ll write them down on the spokes... here actually they are already written down.”

I couldn’t read then, but it doesn’t matter, they were the same eight things that all Buddhism and Yoga teaches, a secret hidden in plain sight... View, Speech, Action, Livelihood, Effort, Concentration, Mindfulness. In many ways are these things are just one thing. Mindfulness. Or at least you could say there is some repetition. It might be that the number eight is just an important number and if the number 6 was more important their would be six spokes or if ten were considered more important that would be the number of spokes. But there are eight directions. The four North East South and West and then the diagonals. There are ten fingers, but in terms of making your way in the world, traveling or making cuts with a sword, eight is really the number. So it is eight, for whatever reason.

I think that was the last time that I remember having a real conversation with Baba. He started lying down more and later that week, he was taken to the hospital.

Book 2: The effects of the Nian

I was sleeping having my dreams. Most of my dreams at that young age were terrifying. I would dream of my mother and she would tell me, “Don’t worry I am your mother this is not a dream.” But then suddenly her face would twist and contort and she would be a demon and I would awaken to see children eating rice at my feet and they would fade away. I would run to my mother and she would say, this time it is real, you are safe... and again her face would contort. I never knew if I was in reality or the

dream world. My mother said not to worry about it. It was because I was the child of spirits that had come back by force trickery and strength of will, and so I could see into the spirit world. My Lion Dance Practice and my wheel of Kung Fu would help sort it all out. I would be able to go with the flow in the dream world and reality, because the truth was that they were both versions of the same truth and there were many more versions out there. There was a whole multiverse out there. My mother told me not to worry so much about not knowing what was “real.” That didn’t matter. What mattered was feeling happy and unafraid regardless of what was going on.

One night Baba was not home yet, he was out gambling late. Mommy didn’t like it, but then again she didn’t care much either. After all she was like me. One moment you actually know how to fly through the air and soar over the whole city... The next moment you have a twisted ankle and you can barely crawl to a bench with pigeon poop all over it in the projects. What difference did thousands of dollars make? Baba could make it back, hell I could make it back. One lion dance meditation and I would good hit on the right guy carrying that cash and I could steal it and nobody would be the wiser.

Though I began to question ever more seriously whether this was “Right action.” Perhaps that spinning wheel made sure that we lost that money through gambling because it was not rightfully ours in the first place. Perhaps we remained poor BECAUSE we used the pot of plenty to feed ourselves. If we had starved ourselves, just a little, maybe we would find a better solution, a better business plan. Perhaps it was the treasures that were our safety net, that also acted as a ceiling net, keeping trapped below it, unable to ever fully rise above it.

I woke up in the middle of the night and mommy was peering out the window. We were on the sixth floor so I wondered what she was looking at. I went up there with her but she pushed me back.

“Stay away from the window.”

“But-”

“Did you hear that?”

“Hear what.”

“It was gunshots, when you hear that you don’t go near the window.”

“Then why are you?”

“Huhhhhhh. Okay I just don’t want you to get hit by a stray bullet.”

Mommy laid back down...”It’s nothing, go back to sleep.”

Surprisingly I did, and quite easily. What difference did it make? Monsters in my dreams, gunshots in real life? It was all the same.

Pretty soon after that, perhaps the next night, there were alarms of a sort I had never heard in the apartment before. It wasn’t the smoke detectors. My mother was dressed and picked me up in my blanket.

“What’s going on?”

“We’re getting out of here.”

“Why? Let me put my clothes on first.”

I had always slept naked. The apartment was always very hot in the winters even if we didn't turn our heat on. In fact, the thermostat was not in our apartment. It was in some other unit and all the heat from the units below us rose up into ours. I had my underwear on this time though. My mother just picked me up, blanket and all, down the stairwell that smelled of human feces and urine.

I looked at the numbers as we passed them.

6... walking walking walking 5 walking walking... I had not even had time to put my shoes on and so I could not walk. Their might be broken glass on the stairs. My mother may have been a pirate in another life, or even really in shape earlier in this life. But right here, right now, she was over weight and carrying me was a difficulty.

"Is the elevator broken?" I asked.

"You don't use the elevator in a fire."

I started to gag from the stench. My mother stumbled.

"I can't carry you can you walk?"

I was up now so I could.

"Stay away from the corners where people pee." I stepped gingerly with my little white and dainty feet. It was too slow, so my mother picked me up again. Somehow, we made it all the way down.

We found people waiting outside. They had all taken the elevator.

There had been a fire at the A & P where mommy worked. The fire trucks came.

"Is it a drill? Is it a drill?" People asked.

Mommy said she had seen flames herself, it was no drill.

The fire trucks came and it was fine.

"Where's this boy's clothes? Aren't you worried?" The black mothers said, "A white boy naked like that around here? What if something happened?" They shook their head at my mother as if she should know better as a white woman herself. I didn't know what they were talking about. Indeed my mother only vaguely knew. She had been raped in the middle East. But the states were not the middle east and she never thought of the projects as particularly dangerous in THAT respect. The black women were shocked that she didn't think this way... because they did.

But it was all fine after all and after a few hours people went back into their homes.

But it was just a warning of what was coming. These events come in threes, and the final event was the arrival of the Nian, a bad nian, a trouble maker ready to devour and attack our family.

Baba gets sick

I was playing with my lionhead that Mommy had made it for me. I went through my stances and drills, the tail tucked into my red sash. In fact the tail and my sash were made out of the same material. Baba was sleeping in the bedroom and suddenly I got a strange feeling, a chill in my back around my lungs spreading like cold water seeping into a cloth. I turned with my lion head. It was another creature. It was real where I was a mask and paper. I was afraid. It was about my size. I danced toward it trying to scare it off and then I saw next to it, a creature much larger form out of the shadows, an adult. A real Nian. A year beast.

The story of the lion head made out of paper and bamboo and cloth was all well and good, but faced with the real creature, now that was another matter. I jumped back and the adult of them went into the bedroom. The baby nian, the one my size looked at me.

"It doesn't work" she said matter of factly. "That's just in the story. My baba is going to eat and kill and gut your Baba and there is absolutely nothing you can do about it but sit there and watch like the little cry baby that you are. We were never scared of paper lions. It was a coincidence that we didn't show up the next year. We had worked out an agreement with the lion that defeated us, the Nian of the Cedar Forest, guardian of nature, if you knew your history, your human history you would recognize this name.. Humbaba. But you humans tell the story all wrong. My Baba told me everything as his Baba told him. Your dance is foolish and useless and you are going to pay for it. My Baba will eat your Baba and I will eat you!"

I was filled with a rage and with the lion head I used my spirit lion and tried to strike the girl Nian with my horn. She shrunk away into the shadows and my lion head, missing her crashed right into the wall making a hole in the plaster and cracking the horn.

"Honey what are you doing?" Mommy asked looking at me angrily, but quickly he eyes went to Baba groaning in the bed. I looked around the apartment for the girl Nian. Mommy would take the other beast, the adult Nian, and kill him. I went through some imaginary journey where I defeated them both in my mind when my mother called me from the bedroom. I looked up and remembered that not all of this was my imagination. Part of this experience I was having was real, and I did not have control over it.

Mommy was with Baba and talking on the phone and looking at me out of the corner of her eye and looking over Baba and speaking hushed and hurriedly. I saw the Nians and screwed up my courage to fight them but Mommy ignored them or otherwise she did not see them at all.

"Come here." she said to me, "Put the head down and come and lay down with your father." She went out holding the phone. It was the phone with cords and a dial. She had to carry it into the other room.

Baba was sweating a cold sweat and grabbed my fingers. "Are you afraid of them?" He said, "Forget about them, they aren't real, I will show you." He squeezed my finger so hard I burst into tears and indeed the beasts disappeared. I looked at my lion head lying on the floor discarded in a way that a sacred lion head should not be cast down. "Forget the head... Because as much as we treat it reverently it is paper and bamboo. And so is this world nothing but straw and paper and images that can fade from the universe in an instant. The Tao.. the Way of the Universe, treats all things as straw dogs."

"Straw dogs?" I asked.

He panted and was unable to talk, "It doesn't mater it just means everything will fade. Like flowers. They will wilt and die in their time. And leaves fall to the ground to be swept up or to just decompose..."

"But they become soil for new trees.."

“Just listen... and fire takes the old trees, yes it's connected but everyone's time comes. But our spirit can stay. The idea of us, of you of me. It is the idea of the head that is holy and sacred, not the head itself. That is why I showed you the moves without the head first. The head is within you. Does it hurt?” He squeezed my fingers again and I cried, and he frantically squeezed all of the fingers pinching them with adult power not meant for a child's delicate fingers over and over. I cried from the physical pain, not because my father was dying.

“That pain, that feels real, but that is fake too. It's all fake and it's all real. I'll be gone soon but it doesn't matter. What is here with you is always here. What is gone was always gone. The pain let's you know I am still here. The pain let's you know that you are still here. But in another way it's all already gone.”

In the hospital

Lots of people came to see Baba in his hospital room even though he was sleeping. There was stuff on his face to help him breathe. Mommy seemed different. She had always talked about the spirit world and who they had been. But now she seemed smaller, human, broken or something.

Mommy didn't let me bring my lion head to the hospital but instead I had a spinning wheel. It spun on these two metal track like wires. It would go up one end and down the other and it kind of reminded me of the eight spokes on the wheel and the Kung Fu that Baba had been showing me and that I practiced every day. Lots of people came and went and I showed them my Kung Fu and jumped around and played.

Sometimes Mommy would talk to Baba and say it was okay if he went back, if he left us. That it might be too hard for him to stay, and that we would be alright. That he didn't have to stay for us, and that we would all meet up later anyway.

Eventually, as the night wore on people began to leave.

Uncle Chucky stayed the longest.

He was one of Baba's friends. I showed him my Kung Fu, that Baba showed me, the wheels, and also my lion dance moves.

“Hey that's pretty good.” He laughed. “Did he ever show you the animals?”
He had mentioned them and talked about it. Yes he had shown me a little bit.
I showed Uncle Chucky the moves but I couldn't remember it all.

“That's good. You have the moves.”

“But I forget.”

“You don't need to remember, it's really not about the moves. It's something else. I'll show you.” And he made a big roaring face and held his hands out like a leopard's paws and said, “RRRRRRRR AHHHHHHHHWWWWW” and then laughed. When he showed me, I saw a leopard's power. It was very powerful. It was more powerful than my trick where I could knock someone down with my spirit lion. Like he said, it wasn't about the moves. It was about the spirit behind it. The move was so simple it was nothing/ The essence of power was in something else.

"I know the leopard and there are others who specialize in the other animals. But you can know everything because you understand the wheel. The wheel is the whole thing, along with the secret ways to talk, act, .. your father told you right?"

I nodded.

"You just have to do the wheel. Don't worry, you will get it. You will find your own way... and your father will guide you. Even when he sleeps, he will show you in his dreams. When you practice the wheel, he will be closer to you, because the wheel brings you close to everything, and we'll be around watching you too, even though it seems like we are not. We won't forget you."

I felt like I sort of understood what he meant but had the vague feeling that I didn't. Eventually Uncle Chucky got tired and he too had to leave and so the room was empty except my mother, someone from the hospital and me and Baba lying there. People kept coming in and out. They seemed concerned about the room. The space. Not about Baba really. They just glanced over him and would say that more patients were coming in and were we STILL using this room?

I went over to Baba, I felt Baba's hand and it felt cold so I went and put his leather jacket over him.

I watched Baba's throat go up and down as he breathed and for some reason was fascinated by it. Then suddenly it stopped moving, and in that moment, it was on instant, his body looked like it had turned to ice.

"Alright! Aliright ! That's it! Time to go!" Said the nurse in English. She was a young black woman. Her movements were hard and fast as if she we were doing something and had to force her body to keep moving. "That's it, it's all over." She said as she covered up Baba's body taking it away.

"He's sleeping now?" I asked her.

"No he's gone, It's over. We need the room. Ya'll have to go."

The Nian

I was hanging outside at night, which I am not allowed to do, but it seemed natural to me. I did not know that I was dreaming. I suddenly realized that if I moved my arms I could catch the waves of space time and fly through the air as if I flew through the water when I swam. I didn't know I was sleeping. I just thought, "Oh I know how to do this now. I knew how to do this before.. And sometimes I can do it but sometimes I can't. Right now I can."

I was not amazed. I was just glad that I was able to fly again, as I had flown in other dreams before.

It was difficult to get off the ground and I had to hide that I could do it from the other people around. I didn't want them to see me and pull me down. This had happened in past dreams and I knew

it would happen now. In fact, in life it is much the same way. Of people saw that you could fly, they would not praise you. They would be angry with you and try to pull you down, especially if you were weaker than they were. If you were so strong that you could do damage to them, then they would have to accept it. But if you flew and you were supposed to be lower on the totem pole... well then they would punish you for your talent. Such is the way of the world.

I managed to get a little higher and had to make sure I always swam to the walls and didn't let people see me. People tended not to look up much especially in the projects. They all kept their eyes on the ground most of the time.

I saw the Nian. It was beautiful and terrifying at once. He looked at me and I froze in fear. I couldn't fight him. I knew it. He would destroy me and rip me to shreds in seconds. I tried to screw up courage and pretend that I could fight. But instead I didn't move and prayed that he would attack someone else, or move on or do anything but bother me.

He grinned at me, a sick, stunning, toothy grin. "Do you think I am bad?" He said. I shrugged or made some motion that was equally as useless or stupid so as not to say anything. I didn't want to be friends with this creature. This creature that had stolen my father's life. Was he connected to a real person? After all my spirit lion knocked people down and stole people's health. And that spirit lion was connected to me. So who was this Nian connected too? After all wasn't he just a spirit lion as well, except more powerful?

"Don't you speak?" He asked. "I asked you a question. Do you think I am bad?"

"I don't know." I scanned the area looking for any people meditating to see if I could find the spirit lion's source.

"You are looking for something?" The nian said. "But I think you forget, that you are dreaming... and if you are dreaming... that what is everything here connected too?" he laughed.

"You don't know.... You don't know if I am bad. I killed your father and you don't know if I am bad..."

He paused and looked around and then licked his paws for a while.

"How could you know good from bad if you're father is a pirate and your family goes around stealing money."

He laughed and continued to clean himself like a cat. A large, dangerous, monster of a cat.

"But." he said and then continued looking and then spoke, looking down and his voice changing suddenly, "You know that I am not good. That much you know."

I peed myself and that woke me up. Mommy was mad and told me we would have to change the sheets later, she was too tired to just now. So I should just sleep to the side and not be so lazy anymore. I was terrified. I had slept in a crib or on the floor next to my parents. But I always had snuck into the bed with them. But since Baba died it was always Mommy and me.

It was a few nights later.

I was in a sunny field, a beautiful dream, and I saw him in the distance. I turned away from him. I didn't want to see him. But then he was there. It was the Nian again. The bad one. My father's killer. I had seen him in the distance but suddenly he was right behind me. I could feel him breathing down my neck.

"The good Nian knows me. We aren't enemies. We are friends. We have always been friends." The Nian's voice was different this time. She was a woman. A female in any case. Was this the adult version of the smaller Nian? I could not tell. In a way it didn't matter. It was the same creature in a different form. But in another way, it did matter, because this female voice was obviously different. "You think we are different, the good nian and I. That there are two. But the good nian and I are one and the same. I am just as good as he is, and he is just as bad as I am. We are different, but you cannot say one is good or bad. The way I do things, they are not pretty, but the end result may be better."

was afraid again, but Nuwa appeared to me, she was a giant and she spread her arm out and the Nian moved to the side. She laid me down at her breast and I sucked it. I was safe.

A few nights later off and on he would come to me and speak to me a few words at a time. And then... then he started coming to me in the day, in my waking hours too.

He would sometimes just be a voice in the back of my head. I wouldn't even see his form but I knew it was him, or her.

"Look around you. Look at the world. Look at what that one village has become? Countries, empires, buildings, factories, companies. Planes, guns bombs, power plants. Who destroys more? Me or them? Me or you? How much water do you waste with your baths and when you flush the toilet? How much food do you waste? How many animals do you kill?"

"I just eat them I don't kill them."

"Even worse."

I paused and she continued.

"I kept the balance. I kept the great wheel in place."

I chilled at the mention of the Kung Fu wheel. Did he mean the same one. How did he know about that?

"Yes it is related to your wheel. Yes it is." He hissed and I feared his teeth on my throat, "the world was better when I kept humans in check. I never destroyed Nuwa's creation. I just tidied it like clipping at a bonsai tree. I kept it trim and beautiful for her. Yes I worship Nuwa too. She is the one that guides the wheel, that helm that eightfold Kung Fu practice of yours. So you see we are more similar than different you and I.

You think she took my horn in her hands to punish me? No it was to pleasure herself. She took my horn and held it inside her. And she took the good nian too and that is how she created mankind. And there was a third offspring from Dragon as well. That s right, Nuwa is a Dragon, or what do you call a god like snake?

I know you always thought of the Dragon as the man. The dragon emperor, The Dragon is male and the phoenix is female right? Long Fung. Just like the restaurant. But that is a new interpretation because the Dragon is a phallus. But the Dragon can be female too. Like the Goddess Nuwa, She is

one with the Dragon, intertwining with him, creating the genes, the DNA that make up not just human life, but all life. But you are a child and I am confusing you.

Just remember this truth. The dragon, the good nian, the bad nian, we are all different manifestations of the same idea, a beast that Nuwa takes and teaches or submits to, or conquers. The positions and the tempo change, her song and cries may be different but the result is the same, new life.”

I didn't understand him. I didn't want to listen to him. But the words.. I could not forget them and they spread ill feeling in my chest that rang in my ears like black inked poison.

Chinese New Year.

Our magical drum in the corner hadn't played in the house for a thousand years. Or at least since last February. The beat had brought joy to my ears when Baba played it. But with Baba gone, I feared it. How could sound change in meaning so quickly? I wanted it gone from the house. But my mother wouldn't move it. Baba's ashes and a picture of him went on top of it, the glass cover protecting the skin, and the drum became an end table again, that was used as an altar to my father.

A lot of people mentioned that the ashes needed to be put in the ground somewhere, here or China, that was proper Feng Shui. My mother nodded but said she had her own way and frankly didn't give a crap what they thought.

Because it had been so long since I heard the drum, when I finally heard those beats again in Chinatown on the street I was afraid. It was like my father had come back. But in a way that he shouldn't. You would think that I would rejoice that my father had come back. But I knew that he shouldn't and couldn't not on a crowded street. So dread filled my heart along with the excitement of the lion dance drum.

Up ahead were lion heads turning their heads like fierce monsters having some sort of rabid seizure. It was not the way Baba had played the head. What kinds of Nians were these? Good or bad? Was there a difference?

I wandered a bit into an open space and saw him.... The Nian. The Nian that spoke to me in dreams and in the back of my mind. I froze. A deer freezes in headlights. But instead of bright light, this Nian was a Shadow in the middle of the Day that light could not escape... and then he showed his form.

He moved through the crowd.. Not in a dream, here in real life, and I felt fear in my chest. He avoided the lion heads. But the lion heads... they couldn't protect me. They didn't even notice me. They were busy doing their ritual which they performed every year, the dance for the sake of the dance.. But they didn't even see this monster right here. The purpose for which the mask was first created... to defend the village against this monster lurking right here in the crowd, it was useless because the dancers didn't see him.. But HE saw ME and he walked toward me with slow arrogant confidence.

“Honey!” My mother shook my shoulder, “Don't just walk into a crowd like that you have to stay near me.” She scolded.

A man suddenly collapsed and people rushed to help him. They called 911. They moved him over to the corner. I was afraid. I wanted to leave, but then my mother said we should stay. I thought the

man had been attacked by the Nian, the way Baba had taught me to attack those drug dealers carrying vast amounts of cash.

Did Mommy forget that we knew this trick? Or did she just not ever know? I began to think.. Now how was it that I did that again? Maybe I could fight the Nian in this way... but I was all hazy. I couldn't remember how I had done it. In truth, even the look of my father's face was hazy. Like I had said, last February was one thousand years ago.

"We need to stay honey." My mother said, "Look around you, nobody here speaks English." Some of the old men latched onto my mother and brought her to the front. She picked me up and put me on her shoulders. Don't think that my mother was slight of build. She had broad shoulders and was strong as anyone and even more the beautiful because of this.

A fire truck arrived instead of an ambulance. The fireman looked for someone who could speak English. He was nervous and out of his element. He was used to braving flames but he had the fear now that he would be here and be unable to be of much use, even though he was a great hero and saver of lives. His eyes landed on my mother raising her hand. My mother was the one. The one white person in the crowd that is.

"But do you speak Chinese?"

"Enough to help you today."

He nodded eyeing me and my mother. She helped him translate his questions to the man. And soon the ambulance came and he was taken to the hospital.

"Thank you" he shook her hand as a man would shake a king's hand, a leader's hand. "How do you speak Chinese?"

"My husband was Chinese."

"Was?"

"He died last year."

The fireman nodded and reached up to ruffle my hair. He was so tall that even sitting on my mother's shoulders I was not too high for him to reach me easily.

"We'll be going now." My mother said tartly and we walked away briskly. I looked back to see a crowd of firemen following my mother with their eyes, in awe. Though not how you think. Not like she were some object to water their mouths at. Even as a child I could tell. They respected her.

"Mommy I'm hungry."

"Let's go to Mei Sum"

The Bakery

We sat down after mommy ordered two *cherng's*, the fat rice noodles sometimes with meat in the middle. We got one *ha cherng*, (shrimp noodle), and one *Ngau Cherng*, (Beef noodle). She ordered hot

soy milk for me and a yin/yang coffee for her, coffee mixed with strong Hong Kong milk tea. We got *dahn tat's* (an egg custard similar flan) some *Char siu baos* (roast pork buns) *Hong dao baos* (red bean buns). For the wealthy adults, the desire for good food is to have lobster or abalone or shark fin soup. The the rich who have this every day, and are obsessed with trying something new, they will say they want the meat of heavenly creatures like the dragon. Americans dream of whiskey and steak or maybe French cuisine, and snails from the South of France. (You can get some pretty good snails in Chinatown by the way and chinese American children raised on this easily suck the meat right out of the shell handling the snails skillfully with chopsticks.)

But for the real Jook Sing leaning far to the American tradition of preferring what is easy over what is more flavorful, these dishes were the truly coveted culinary treasures. Meat without bones in magical noodles or buns. It was every parent's fear that their child would choke on a fish bone. And some kids did learn how to keep that meat and bone combination at the front of the mouth and then simultaneously spit out the bones while bringing only the meat to the back of the throat to swallow. But after getting used to biting into hamburgers, chicken nuggets, and hot dogs... then the only Chinese equivalent to that sort of laziness was Cherngs and Baos.

But these foods, were deceptive.

I sat down in my chair that looked like it had been stolen from a public middle school classroom and dug into my Ngau Cherng with my fork, leaning forward like I was taught so that the "juice" the sauce, that looked like soy sauce but was more delicious, didn't spill everywhere. I could drink the salty liquid if my mother let me.

"Small bites I don't one you choking."

That was the one danger of cherngs. They were so good you wanted to stuff the whole thing in your mouth and pretty soon you would find you were unable to chew the glutinous substance. For a long time my mother wouldn't let me eat them unless she first cut them up.

I was so excited and happy with my food that I couldn't sop talking. I blurted out loudly with food still in my mouth.

"Mommy! Sometimes when I look into crowds, I can see a big monster. It looks like a lion head, but it's different than a lion head."

My mother, the incarnation of Granny O'Malley, took a bite of the bao quietly. I didn't know this then, but looking back after it was over and I was able to look across time and space through my meditation I that here she began to doubt. She doubted she was Grace O'Malley, she doubted the last 20 years or so of her life, her experiences. Maybe she was just a foolish woman who had never planned properly. Her life, had been an illusion, her powers and illusion, the magical bowl that provided food a hallucination. Baba was gone, Po, he must have existed but he was dead now and the only proof that he had been here was the boy. The young boy, her son looking at her across the table talking about a monster, the lion, the beast, the nian that he saw in a crowd. She knew damn well he wasn't talking about a puppet of bamboo and paper, but a flesh and blood creature, or at least a smoke and light monster of spirit and time. A mirage, a hallucination. And she had raised him to believe in it to practice it and perhaps she was just wrong. And for her to be wrong, that was okay... but should she pass this wrongness onto her son, and force him to exist in it? "Like a lion head from a different school?" She tried to pretend that she was a rational normal person and that her son was of course a rational normal person.

“No it’s not from a school, it’s its own kind of monster, like a different kind of monster, a real one... but kind of like maybe the same as the Lion head. And I could see it next to the man that fell down. And I could see it before when Baba used to take me to the park and it would make people fall down.”

Mommy paused and looked at first as if she might be angry. But then looked at me again and seemed sad. She took a slow breath and then looked again at me and this time her face betraying surprise and a touch of fear and then smiling at memories nostalgia crossed her face. “You and Baba used to love practicing the lion dance. Maybe one of these days you can join a school and learn again.”

“Mommy,” I whispered, “I saw the monster in my dreams.”

“Really?”

“And” I continued very quietly, “I saw it when Baba died. Do you think the monster killed Baba?”

“Baba died of a stroke Honey. It’s like a heart attack. It’s when not enough blood gets to your brain and your brain doesn’t get enough oxygen.”

“I know but what caused it?”

“Diet, stress... genes, I don’t know it’s the luck of the draw and some people end up with the short straw.”

That last reference sort of went over my head but I was too excited to ask about it. I filed it away in my brain as a question to ask later at a more opportune time.. For me.... Like when my mother was cooking or cleaning or focusing hard on something else and would be unable to comprehend what I was asking.

I thought about the Nian. I knew what Mommy was saying, but I knew it it didn’t discount what I was saying. I meant that the Nian could cause the stroke. The way I had use my year beast myself, to make that man in the park fall down. But I didn’t feel like I had to explain this to my mother. I mean she already knew this right? Had she forgotten? It’s like she forgot everything after Baba died, like she had become a normal person.

“Baba loved you very much, and I believe..” She paused then said very quietly, “You know I think sometimes he is near us. You don’t have to believe it, but I believe it. I think he watches over us even though we can’t see him. Like his spirit.” And then she sat back and closed her eyes.

I knew even then as a child, by the way she said that, by her tone, that she no longer saw the spirit world the same way. She could not see like I could see, and to explain to her, would just sound crazy.

Lion in the Bakery

I lifted my dahn tat egg tart flan to my mouth. The yellow custard in the flaky custard held in a nice miniature pie tin. I always used to like save them. Maybe I could make them into something. A

flying saucer, a submarine... something. I bit into the egg tart, it's flaky on the outside yellow jello like yumminess on the middle. I smiled while I bit into this special treat and my mother smiled back.

Suddenly the drum got louder. Really loud. The door to the bakery opened and closed. I looked up. The Lion dancers were right at the door and the head was moving wildly. Twisting and turning like a rabid animal. It was teenagers dancing as hard as they could, pumping their arms and shoulders and turning their waists, but something in the motion was possession. Something in it was more than just muscle holding bamboo and cloth paper mache. It was the Nian, it the wild angry movements of youthful power and bravado, challenging the firecrackers to explode and chancing them to sting the skin.

I was in fear but my mother took it for excitement.

"Oooo it looks like the Lion is coming to see us."

"No!" I said and then "No!" louder and more desperate. The lion was dark, black, white and green. It looked like the Nian. The Nian in my dreams. The nian that wanted to sink its teeth into my flesh and smile an evil smile as it tasted my flesh. I saw the smile now in the drum in the fire crackers, in the laughing young men near the head. Playing and joking with each other being boys, but in a way that only those itching for war and rumbling can joke. I saw the smile of the Nian, a horrible parody of my smile after biting into the dahn tat. Its eyes appeared before me. It licked its lips, waiting there at the door in the unveiled world behind our reality. It had to be invited in. It could not close the distance. As it was but a few feet for me and the lion head, but eons perhaps the breadth of several real universes between the Nian and my soul. But it was there and it had locked onto me.

It bided his time. Waiting for our worlds to collide through invitation, wishing, and incense. He was there, a beast of a cheshire cat. The Beast of all beasts breathed about in any story, and paid homage to with ink or chisel in any ancient text. The origin. The essence. The Nian that killed my father and the man in the crowd and he had finally come for me. I grabbed my mother's hand frantically. "Mommy no, let's go, let's get out of here."

"Honey we can't leave now. Why do we have to, even if we were done eating now's not a good time to leave their about to light the firecrackers and you might get hurt."

I paused as those words came out of her mouth, "I thought you said it was a fake lion and couldn't hurt you."

"Yes but the firecrackers are real. The worst are the ones that spin. One time when I was in Kathmandu I saw one of the spinning shooting ones get caught in a man's sleeve. It went around and around his sleeve, he couldn't get it out until the firecracker itself went out. And I think I heard that later they had to cut off his arm, maybe from gangrene. Now I'm not sure if he would have lost his arm if that happened here in the United States. I mean if anything does happen we have the hospital right there, so as bad as people thought it was that they built here there are soem good things about New England Medical Center... but..."

"Let's go out another way."

"Back there is the kitchen honey we can't go back there. Let's just watch the lion dance from here. They'll close the door and we'll be able to see the firecrackers but it won't be too loud and we can't get hurt. This is the best place to be Okay? We're safe."

Just then the door opened and the Lion started to come into the bakery itself. I ducked under the table. "Get under Mommy! Get under the table Now!"

"Okay but mommy's not afraid it's fine. You can get under the table if you want to."

"Get under NOW!!!"

My mother did and she was half laughing and I saw the lion pass by. It wasn't here to eat us. It went into the kitchen instead.

"It's getting food in their?"

"No they bow to the altar to bless the kitchen. They might have the kitchen god back there too."

"Why?"

"Well a kitchen is a dangerous place, there might be fires or people might cut themselves so you need to bless it with good luck... the lion will come back this way you know."

And it did. It started coming out backwards. I hid a little when the head part passed, but this time I saw the big boys underneath with their sneakers. This time when it passed it wasn't a real monster, it was two young men or big boys wearing a costume."

"Honey you don't have to be scared. Maybe we had enough for today and we should head home."

* * *

That night I had strange dreams again and after months and months and a year passed by, the meaning of the lion head, as it had been in our household when my father was there started to fade. Over the years we still went into Chinatown for Chinese New Year, but there was a disconnect, there was a wall. Only rarely did my mother bump into Baba's friends and even then they didn't recognize her and when they did she would burst into tears. Slowly, slowly our family began to shift our focus from what it was and move toward other things. Away from lion dance...

Book 3 Exodus

It was so early in the morning that it was dark outside.

"Get dressed." My mother tells me. She packs up the car full of the wheel on the wall and some of Baba's things and we go. We leave. We start driving. It is a few hours and I fall asleep. I wake back up and we are still driving.

"Where are we going?" I ask

But my mother doesn't answer. At some point she pulls over in a wooded area. We go pretty far into the woods. It is still dark outside.

My mother lights a bon fire.

“Are we camping Mommy?”

She throws the wheel on the fire and some of Baba’s other things.

“Mommy no I want that!” I start crying but she explains it is a sacrifice. She had a dream and Baba is trapped. It has to be done, in order to free him. It is for Baba’s sake.... So I let her do it. I’m still crying though.

The fire is not that big as you would think. It is pretty much the size of a regular campfire because the wheel, these masks... they are not that big.

I’m hungry.

My mother sings an eerie and creepy tune and plays the flute. I look at her suddenly and realize I really don’t have any idea who she is. This is somewhat fascinating and cool to me. She draws something in the sand and throws different kinds of dirt in the fire. It is all bizarre and terrifying in a way. But finally, it seems like she is done. She pulls out some marshmallows and graham crackers.

“Who wants ‘smares for breakfast?” She asks. I smile at this. Such a thing would never be allowed at home. Maybe her craziness is not all that bad.

As we sit there suddenly there are two men beside us. They are playing a game with pebbles in the sand. I am afraid and I feel tension in my mother’s voice when she says to come sit next to me.

“It’s okay.” Says one man, “Bo Tsai is fine.”

He goes back to his game and the other man nods. “I mean I don’t know your husband but I think it worked. Your good. Have some spring rolls.” He hands them to my mother and she eats them first, “Healthier than smores.” He says.

The man hands her what looks like meat, “Salmon Teriyaki Jerky!” He says expressively. “It takes 54 hours! Try it. It’s smoked!” I eat it too. And my mother relaxes a little bit. The fire fades and the sun comes out and the men.... They fade too, slowly. My mother is taken aback by this at first but then, realizes that it is the type of thing one must expect when summoning spirits.

One man transforms into a crane as he fades and flies off, appearing to go through the sky to another world. The other man, with a long pony tail nods and then runs into the woods with a spear transforming into a man from another time, a hairy ape of a man... our ancestor.

My mother drives more and I sleep through some of it and look out the window silently for a long time. We stop to go to the bathroom, to get lunch, that sort of thing, and then we pull into a driveway that I recognize from Christmases and summer’s past. We are at my grandmother’s house in Philadelphia.

“We’re to live here from now on.” My mother says.

"The Eagle has landed!" Says my Uncle Tommy and we are welcomed in. "Adam my Man!" My Uncle Tommy embraced me. He remembered me but to be honest although I did recognize him I was more just happy to see someone so excited to see me. My Uncle Tommy has Down Syndrome so in some ways, to the family he is more like a kid to them.

We played checkers and all sorts of games and later we played basketball outside. My mother talked with my aunt and her mother for some time. At some point An Uncle came over and the car was taken away and traded in or something. In any case I never saw that piece of junk again. It had a cool name, an Eagle, but it barely made the trip down to Philly.

It was quite a few months before I started school and my days were filled with playing and watching TV and drawing pictures and adventures in the backyard and visiting cousins, like Christmastime in the spring and then summer. A fantasy fairy land for any child.

Sacred Heart

The times of playful fantasy ended in the fall. I was enrolled in the Sacred Heart school and my mother simply told me "Study hard. Become a lawyer or something" as if the first day would lead me directly into higher education. I looked back really unsure of what this was to be.

Most of the classes were extremely easy for me. I basically knew everything already or could simply know what I needed to know by listening once. Nothing really caught my attention except for Religion class with Father Cuwain. I had never heard the stories of the gospels or the old testament before.. I mean other than movies. Even though my mother had gone to Sacred Heart, most of her stories were about mean nuns, and getting into bloody fights with other girls on the steps.

Fr. Cuwain was a powerful looking man, with broad shoulders and thick forearms the size of my thighs. He looked a bit like a superhero in his priest's frock despite his old age. I suppose he was not that big compared to a body builder. But he had spent some time in Asia, and some time in Hong Kong. He impressed my mother because he was able to speak Cantonese better than her. She could speak a lot but nobody really understood her. They began practicing after school. She felt it brought her closer to Baba in a way, and she didn't feel at all threatened by him or that she was being disloyal to Baba either, after all he was a priest. But then I'm not sure my mother really would care about all that... except for my sake.

In any case he had a strong energy in his eyes and he demonstrated some of his feats of strength and tricks that he had picked up from various martial arts. When asked what system he studied, he would often just say he picked things up to show off to young teens and it often got them to come to church and get off the street. He had a lot of stories. He was a real hands on priest, roaming the streets of Hong Kong, Manila, Bangkok or Tokyo.

I really wanted to know all about what the Catholic view of the world... but I consider myself whatever I thought Baba was.. Which was... I wasn't sure what he was to tell the truth. Buddhist or Taoist or something in between. We had that wheel.

I recited the 8 spokes of the Kung Fu I practiced, speech, action, thought, view, concentration, livelihood, effort, mindfulness...

"You know I've heard those" Father Cuwain would say, "And there is nothing in them that conflicts with Catholicism at all. Those are fine. You can believe in all of that and still be a good Catholic you know. And now I'm not going against those eight things but it would seem that there is just speech, action, and faith. Or to tell the truth speaking is an action, so there is the heart and there is duty and that's it isn't it? The good works, and then the prayers and then there is the spiritual. Father Son and Holy Spirit."

I looked confused.

"But it doesn't matter think of it as eight or three it makes no difference."

Heaven

Once in class the topic of heaven came up. We were talking about who got into heaven and who got into hell.

"What if you have mad sex?" Asked one of the boys. (Now I should mention if I haven't already that although there were boys and girls that went to Sacred Heart, everyone was kept separate ESPECIALLY in this particular class. But even in Math and literature we were not in the same classes. I had heard that Sacred Heart used to be two schools. But there was just so little enrollment these days, that is to say, the Church has so much less power, that they had to combine two schools into one and so save money on the teachers... clergy (who were paid for being clergy and that's it) and then there were also lay people willing to work under minimum wage for the Church. Though they received tuition reimbursement at various Catholic Universities. It was an ingenious system when you think about it, and even more so before all the sex scandals and the Church's failure to adapt to the modern world fast enough kind of put people off.

"If you have sex with your wife everyday that isn't a sin, as long as it is consensual." Said Fr. Cuwain.

"Yo you can have sex every day?"

"Why not?"

"Yo I can't wait to get married!"

The whole class laughed.

"Wait but if you have sex with someone and you aren't married to them, you'll go to hell?"

"Look actually you can do a lot of bad things in your life but technically if you turn back to God at the last second, now this is in the Catholic tradition, you still have a chance to get into heaven."

"So Hitler could have gone to heaven?"

“Well he killed himself which is an act against god at the last second of life, but technically in theory yes. But he would still have to pay for his sins in purgatory. Probably he didn't but you see all the mafia guys that are Catholic, that is their idea, that they commit many sins during their life but at the end they turn back to God but that is a risky game.”

“Wait so your telling me that Hitler killed 6 million innocent Jews and what really would send him to hell though was killing himself?”

“It's not that killing yourself is such a bad sin. But after death there is no chance to redeem yourself.”

“Why?”

Fr. Cuwain shrugged.

“So could Mother Theresa have gone to hell?”

“Well, if at the last moment she turned away from God...”

“Yo that's crazy man!”

“Look.. What is heaven? Or what do you think of when you think of heaven?”

“Mad women for everyone, with big titties. Mad bitches and Hos”

“Yo what if they all went to hell though?” Said another boy.

“Look, so before in the 60's there was this idea, people would say, ‘Why do I want to go to heaven, because Hell is where the swingers are.... But what is Heaven? White light? And angel sitting on a cloud.. Bored? So that idea probably came from a painting and is Hellenic in nature. In the Old Testament there is no mention of heaven. The souls all collect in Sheol, an afterworld a kind of shadow world... also from the Greek idea of the afterlife. In the middle ages you could get out of purgatory simply by buying your way out through donations to the church....”

“So what about now?” I asked

“Okay, so the modern Catholic Church, after Vatican II, considers Heaven to be a state of Being... ‘Not a State of bein!’ Have you ever heard that song? No your lot is too young.” Fr. Cuwain wrote out State of Being on the board, “It's not a physical place. I mean before when we thought the earth was flat or that it was the center of the Universe that worked but we know more now. The Earth goes around the sun which moves through space and the galaxy moves through space too. Time is affected by gravity and light bends. The Universe expands and is speeding up and maybe there is a multi verse... so where is heaven?”

“Maybe it's in another dimension.” Said my friend.

“Right who knows. But the Catholic Church's teaching is that it is a state of mind. And that goes for the Kingdom of God as well. It's here, it's a state of mind. It's very similar to the Buddhist idea of enlightenment.” Said Fr. Cuwain now looking over at me as the classroom Buddhist... though I was still

trying to figure out if I as indeed Buddhist. I rather liked Christmas and had never celebrated a Buddhist holiday per se.

“What if you’re reincarnated?” I ask

“What if! What if. You’re killing me with the ‘What if.’ Well now that’s one thing that right now the Catholic Church doesn’t accept.”

“What?” Said one of the students, “Yo I believe in reincarnation! Why can’t I?”

“Well you can believe in whatever you want, but can you believe in whatever you want and still be Catholic? It’s something to think about. With Reincarnation I guess that’s a matter of your own believe but in your actions... for instance you can say ‘I’m Catholic but I believe in divorce and abortion.’ But I don’t think you can pick and choose like that. For your own personal beliefs yet. If you are another religion yes. But Catholicism has very strict and rigid rules. The ideas change over time but it’s through the Church. Can you be Catholic and not believe in the Pope? Well then what’s the point of being Catholic?”

* * *

I thought on this and later when I was at home with my mother I asked her.

“Mom are we Catholic?”

She shrugged. “I was raised Catholic and my parents were Catholic. Baba wasn’t Catholic though. You can choose what you are.”

I recalled the old days with Baba and the stories she would tell me herself.

“Mommy, do you think that we can live more than one life? I mean can you be Catholic and belief in reincarnation?”

She smiled and looked out into the distance. She was looking passed the room into waves on the high seas and into another time.

“I can tell you who I was in a past life.” My mother began. My name is Grace in this life and my name it was Grace in my old life as well. I know it was me. And It’s simple to remember it because they made it into a song.

But I was a princess, but not the type you see on cartoons, well you don’t watch those shows anyway, but my point is I shaved my own head to join my father’s ship. They called us pirates but those ships were enemy ships in our waters and so we raided them. We weren’t criminals because that was OUR land.

I was a great leader, and I rescued my own son by going right up to the Queen of England. I sneezed and she gave me her Royal Handkerchief, which I threw in the fire” my mother laughed, “And that was

an insult to her but to me that was natural I wasn't very well going to give a dirty handkerchief back. She freed my son and I promised to TRY not to raid any more of her ships. But we saw eye to eye because we were both women in a man's position at that time in history, and still even today these heads of State positions are mostly men. And I remember all that, and after I died and the afterlife and how it is like the sea itself swelling and pitching and thoughts and ideas drifting in and out among each other. Thoughts of whole cultures rising and falling and pantheons mixing and I met your father, there in spirit form because we represented the same ideas and were drawn to each other across cultures and seas. And we fought all the way out of that spiritual soup of souls and made it back to the spiritual world.

I remember the spirit world. And I remember the physical world and in the physical world, the times I remember I was Catholic and I am Catholic as much as anything else, even though I never married your father. I'm not afraid of hellfire because I've seen what is after death and it is a sea that transposes itself onto our physical world all the time. I know. I see. I feel. And whatever Catholicism says it is, does that make the spiritual world change? A little yes. As it is abused on our thoughts and dreams and what is written and told in story can affect our thoughts and dreams.. But not control them. They can try to control our worldview but they can only succeed to a degree. They can say the Sun goes around the earth and them saying it can make us believe it. But in the end the earth still goes around the sun... but in some parts of the spiritual world it is all a mess and quite unclear what is the earth and the sun to begin with because it isn't even matter."

"Oh." I said.

"I know that may not answer your question."

"I think it does."

"Good."

"Can you sing me the song? So I can remember it?"

"Come sit on my lap and give me hugs and I will sing it to you of course. You say you are too old but you are always my son. I came back from the dead with your Baba just to have you because you are special and eternal just like all sons, so don't tell me you are too old. Just hear my song."

Haiya! Haiyah!
Haiyah! Haiyah!
Praise to you sad woman
we cried when you were
in the hands of those bastards
Thieves owning your country
and your life in their hands,
Politicians are nothing but thugs

Hurray and welcome home!
You'll be home for summer!

Grace is coming over the sea
The Gaels and pirates from other lands!
They'll kick out those foreign foes

It is God's will, she is in the land of the living
Though we might not live another week
Grace and a thousand heroes
Will kick out those bastards for good.

"What about Baba?" I asked interrupting the song. "Isn't he a foreigner?"

"Ah that gets complicated. In truth we were all foreigners to that land, Ireland or Our land. We moved there, just like we all moved to this land, America. In fact, we all come from one village in Africa if you want to talk about genes. But that isn't how we think of ourselves is it."

"The point was the British were oppressing us. That is, the us, that I was in that past life. And that's why the song was sung like that. But in the end we are all the same.. But that doesn't mean you have to take punishment from people. And sometimes you cannot reason it takes too long. Sometimes you just have to fight. But in the afterlife that's different. There is fighting of ideas and stories."

"So back to your father He was a pirate too. A pirate God or saint just as I was. And we arranged to meet here in the mortal world. But we both wandered around a bit before we found each other."

* * *

I didn't always only ask my mother about her past lives, I asked her about this life too.

"Did you ever fight as a child? In this life?" I asked her.

My mother was quiet... "The first time I learned how to fight was from fighting. I was walking home from school with your Uncle Francis. I was holding his hand and then they attacked us, they wanted to hurt him, my little brother. And then, I don't know, I had no choice. I don't even remember what I did. I blanked out. I just went crazy. I knew then who I was, a little, I knew who I was in my past life because it was the same.. The same when you boarded a ship, I gained that strength of my past right there. So in a way I didn't remember what happened. But in another way I really remembered who I was right then, you know beyond this life."

"But anyway, after that I walked home with Francis holding my hand. And I remember we were really quiet walking all the way home. We didn't say a word."

"Have you ever fought like that?"

I thought about what Mommy was saying. How I had never been a situation like that really, where there was nobody to stop what was happening, and how there was no way to stop them from hurting me. That never happened really. Not for long. Well once or twice, but adults were around the corner. Not paying attention... but still right around the corner and there was a limit to the damage that could have been done. My friend and neighbor who was three years older than me had suddenly turned hockey playing in the hallway into a fight. He threw me into the corner and when I stood up the world shook and spun and my vision blurred with tears. Crying, I roared and charged him and he slammed me into

the wall. My punches were useless against his size and strength. He picked me up and tried to intimidate me with his voice while he clutched my throat but I dug my thumb into his cheek and fish hooked him. He ended up crying to his mother. I didn't bring up the incident until I was accused.

But that was nothing compared to what Mommy was describing.

"One time I came home crying and Grandpap told me to go out and settle it before I dared to set foot in the house. After a while I liked the neighborhood because I wasn't getting beat up as much, I knew how to fight. But this one time, in school, it was at Sacred Heart, the girls section... well this girl pushed me down the stair and started hitting me, I couldn't believe she would just start doing that for no reason. I blacked out again, and when I came to I had the girl by the hair and I had rammed her head into the concrete her whole face was bloody. She didn't push me down the stairs again. But another time this girl told me to say that she was stronger or she would beat me up. I told her she was stronger. I didn't pick fights. All the fights I was in I was defending myself, or my brother Francis."

"Did you ever almost die?" I asked.

"We think that we are in control but there are many situations where you realize there simply is nothing you can do and you just wait. I have been in that situation many times in my travels. In Asia and Africa there were storms and Earthquakes and there was simply no right decision, it was all in the hands of the Universe. You could pray or whatever but you just had to wait it out. Then there were other situations. Once I had to dive off a cliff to get away because they were shooting, and later I learned that people had died hitting their head there on rocks. When you jump into water you never really no what's there. This was in Iraq. Before our wars there. They weren't shooting at me because I was American, it was just shooting.

Once I was so sick on a train in India, I almost died or diarrhea. That can kill you too you know. But the clearest time when I knew I was close to death, and when I got a glimpse into that spirit world behind this one was when I was a little girl. I had one of those whistles that you get sometimes in a birthday goodie bag. The kind I always get nervous about when you play with them. They have changed the design now I think. But anyway, I blew out on it and it made one sound and I found that when I breathed in, it made another sound and I thought it was really interesting that the sounds were different. This happened right here in this house. I was outside in the yard where the basketball court is where you and Uncle Tommy play. Only we didn't have the hoop then. I was just breathing in with the whistle when the part that spins and hums came out and lodged itself in my throat. I couldn't breathe. So I went inside to my mother, your grandmother and she told me later that I was turning blue. I didn't know at the time.

And I remember because without thinking, she just reached down my throat and grabbed that part out of my throat, without hesitation and saved my life."

* * *

The Shillelagh

In Philadelphia I began to feel closer to my mother and closer to my roots and that other world. Not through the lion dance and y father so much, but through stories and dreams I had. It was sort of like I could achieve what my father had taught me in ritual, without the ritual, by just being me. By just being human. I didn't practice my Kung Fu as much, and when I did, it was more like playing around like a normal kid. But somehow, I felt like I was getting better. ANd even my mother commented that I was getting stronger and bigger. Maybe it was just because I was getting older and more mature. In

any case, I never felt like I was getting worse. And any time I did play around with those lion dance steps and ideas just for fun... I felt like I had improved somehow as if I had been practicing all along.

Father Cuwain had a a lot of different jobs at Sacred Heart. He taught us Religion, took us out to eat, coached soccer sometimes, and ran a drama and chess club as well. In other words we spent a lot of time together and sometimes it became easier for him to drive me home.

He heard about how I did Lion Dance and had learned some type of fist fighting and he said that maybe we should start a Kung Fu and lion dance club together.

“But we don’t have a lion head.”

“So we make one out of a cardboard box. Who cares? Look. I know maybe it wouldn’t be exactly like your father taught you or like the traditional lion dances in Chinatown. But frankly we are a Catholic school and so we wouldn’t want something that is so pagan. We adapt pagan rituals, like Christmas Trees and Easter eggs. But ultimately the rituals of the Church come first. So we make the thing out of a cardboard box and a blanket and then I bless it in the name of the Father, Son and holy spirit.”

We did start it. And that year we had a Chinese New Year parade, and our club became a weekend activity too. The Chinese people in the neighborhood (there were suddenly more and more) really liked my drumming and my story telling my forms. They liked Father Cuwain’s forms too. He wielded this giant tree of a stick and was so fast with it even though it looked heavy. It danced like a whirlwind in a way that the old Chinese watching were really impressed with... and then he could speak Chinese!

Father Cuwain’s powerful Kung Fu really made me respect his beliefs more and I asked him about reading the Bible.

“Now I really shouldn’t say this, because I’m Catholic and I’m Irish, but I actually prefer the King James version. I can give you my personal copy. And I only feel like I can say that because I know deep down you’re a Buddhist so it’s not like I’m leading you astray by being a priest or anything like that.”

Pretty soon Fr. Cuwain had me running the class. He said I should teach some basic fist moves to warm up the Kung Fu class and that then he would show them some basic stick moves. We got some other members that studied Kung Fu or Wushu before and so I picked up Tai Chi Sword and fan and the kids played with rope dart and spears and all sorts of things. It was pretty eclectic. A lot of it was garbage but we made it look good because I taught them the Lion Dance moves. Not just the moves, but holding the poses and connecting with the ground, with the earth... with the universe. And so we all had some power in every move we did. That gave them the base to make anything they did look powerful. A year or so passed and I started to develop muscles and a strong build.

“You’re turning into a man now.” Father Cuwain said, admiring me. I won’t say that I felt proud for him to say that. Although I admired him I also instinctively distrusted any man that seemed like he was trying to be a father to me. It was loyalty to Baba. Nobody could be my father except him and maybe not even him. In any case I didn’t allow any man that position where I would be looking up to him, seeking approval in that way.

It was a winter Saturday and I was changing back into my Kung Fu clothes. I had worn snow pants because I had come to help shovel and nobody else had shown but Father Cuwain and a few of the girls, who changed in another room.

“Let me look at you.” Father Cuwain said. “Now those are nice pecks,” he said, “Can you flex them? Yes they are hard indeed.” He said touching them and patting them. “Soon you will be a man. A strong man.” To say that this was awkward was an understatement. I once heard a saying that people think that evil is like darkness, but the truth is that evil is actually a bright light. It is like a bright light because when you see evil, it is blindingly uncomfortable to look at and so you immediately want to look away and ignore it. It is obvious to me now what Fr. Cuwain was doing perhaps in hindsight. But even at that I want to make excuses for him. At the time what was I thinking? I simply felt cold and awkward and wanted to ignore this embarrassing behavior and pretend it never happened.

And that’s what I did. I moved on with class. I led the fist fighting and the Lion dance section of the class and then Father Cuwain led us in some Shillelegh drills. He winked at me as he paired me up with one of the prettier girls. We were doing a drill that focused on sticking to the opponent’s stick. It was like push hands, but with the stick, and was a bit of an adaptation from the Tai Chi Sword. We ended class with the girls showing us how to stretch because they had done Chinese folk dancing in the past. We closed up and the Father Cuwain gave everyone a ride home. Tina, the girl who had been paired with me, asked if she could stay over at my house to study for something. Father Cuwain grinned at that when he dropped us off.

“Remember to treat her with respect.” He nodded to me.
His comment was doubly awkward for his strange pass at me earlier.

Nobody was home. Our studying soon became making out, groping and kissing. She had much more experience than me. She licked my ears so voraciously that her breath was like loud wind. She moved down my neck and sucked at my nipples. It felt great. But at the same time I felt like I had to act cool and pretend like it was no big deal. I wasn’t in the moment, and in the back of my mind I kept thinking of Fr. Cuwain, the idea that he was going to ask me what happened and that he had said I was a man and strong and looked at my body. All this while a beautiful girl my age was doing so much for me. I was so foolish because I was thinking, “Oh she isn’t that hot, if only she looked like this or that” for some show or some model. How ridiculous! I could not even recognize the true beauty of youth, vigor and ardent, passionate willingness.

“Do you want me to?” she asked. Moving her kisses lower and lower.

“Uhhh. Sure.” I said, “But I don’t want to-”

“That’s fine.” She smiled.

“But I’m going to be a virgin...when I get married.” She showed me a ring that signified this. “Father Cuculllen, told me that it would be good to make the pledge, that it would help me save myself. It would mean more to save myself.”

We kissed and then she kissed me everywhere.
Her teeth went right down to the end. I was surprised she could do that.

In fact I barely felt anything. I barely felt like I was even there. I was in a void. I had no idea why I was doing this or rather why this was being done for me. I mean I knew this was what you were supposed

to do. It was warm and I was glad she was doing this to me. That she chose me, that she wanted to do this for me. I guess it was an affirmation that I was growing into a man. It was affection. But kissing was affection too.

I couldn't enjoy it fully for what it was. I kept thinking that for her this was a sin and that she would confess to Father Cuwain, and then I thought about him touching my chest and saying I had nice pecks.

"That's okay." I said.

"Don't you want to... you know?" Tina asked still moving her hand over me.

I shrugged.

"Here, we'll.... And then do it together at the same time... we can...."

"I just want to," I looked at her, naked now and moved to get on top of her but she pushed me back.

"No."

Her tone cut through me like ice and I lost all desire.

"No it's not like that. I like you. But I told you I want to stay a virgin."

She paused and the silence was awkward.

"Lay back." She said, "And just relax. I'll make you relax."

On the outside I was still there. But on the inside the moment was gone. It was a show what happened next. Like watching a movie.

She knew what to do and my body did what she told it too. Then she took my hand, and with her instructions, her body did what she wanted me to make happen.

"I just love this." she said She was in the moment and enjoying herself and if I had been wise I would have done the same. Not only that I would have stayed with her and done the same over and over for as long as she allowed me too... and why not? What else mattered? Who cared, even if she was saying this or doing that. Young boys are fools filled with jealousies principles and ideals. "I don't think it's true what they say, about losing Chi. I mean maybe it's true, but you're young and you're strong. You almost look like a man now." She said touching my chest, "I mean you're a lot more filled out than the other boys.... Maybe soon I will let you take my virginity. I don't think I'll make it until I'm married.. But I did want to try to wait a little bit longer you know?"

She touched my chest and I thought of Father Cuwain touching my chest.

I didn't talk to her much after that. She was mad at me I could tell. I told her I was trying to save up Chi for my Kung Fu practice. But actually I just knew she went to confession and would tell Father Cuwain and it really creeped me out.

It was months later that Father Cuwain took me and a few other students on a camping trip. And somehow we were alone in the woods. And he talked about Tina. I knew it. I knew she would tell him. And he turned to me and said that there was power in the stick form that he taught me, an internal power.

“Look!” he said dropping his pants, “When we fight, stick in hand, our manhood is hard and strong! Like two bulls locking horns. The one that holds out longer will be the winner and the loser will move off.” And Father Cuwain was indeed like a bull.

He pushed and it was hard and erect. And then it went flacid. And Then it pushed out again like it was throwing punches.

“You told me your father taught yu dragon dance eh? Well this is my Dragon dance. This is the power you can have with the secret exercises that go along with the Shillelagh forms I taught you, and prayers charms and... you have o stop fooling around with Tina. Get the power of the Dragon first. And then you can have her any which way you want. Trust me lad. It will be better if you wait....Look! Hold it!” he said. And I did. I was amazed and afraid and not sure how to take this. He was massive and I felt myself shrink up into me almost into nothing. I was hurt and I wanted to cry. Would Tina have been able to put her teeth to the end of this? I was ashamed.

“Like I said boy...it isn’t just genes.” He said, “Though I was born large, I saved myself and I practiced the hard stick Chi Gung. Whenever I wanted women.” He took his shillelagh, his walking stick and struck himself in front of me. “It is hard as iron. Attain this first, and then go back and show Tina. Give it a 5 years of practice. Then you can marry Tina and you can have her every night. Tell her it will be worth the wait. THat shit you learned from you father is nothing. I can teach you the true secrets to powerful practices. If that shit you learned was so great, then why didn’t it conquer the world? I’ll tell you who conquered the world, the British. But they did it using the Irish and the Sikhs. And I learned all of their knowledge and combined it into the powerful forms I taught you. Listen to me, and you will be the most powerful man in the world. In strength, money and sexual prowess.” He said this zipping up his pants. I’m glad that it hadn’t gone further than that.

I never told the others about that.
I wasn’t sure how they would react.

I myself, wasn’t sure how to react exactly.

Then later walking back he said, “You know Tina does these things...you should think of what she wants too right? She does these physical things... but it is her way of getting closer to you, to opening up. So you shouldn’t shut her out.” I didn’t really know what he was talking about. By the time it occurred to me that Tina was just looking for a friend or companionship and that she could be just as awkward as me.... Well that was many years later.

Reading the Lion The witch and the Wardrobe

In English class we read many books but the Lion the witch and the wardrobe really stood out to me. Mr. Corleone taught us that the book actually was a retelling of the New Testament story and that Aslan was Jesus.

“Yo it says in the Bible that if you add anything to that book you’ll go to hell!” said one student.

“No it doesn’t.” Mr. Corleone shook his head in disbelief. Not in an arrogant angry way. But more like psshhh no way, kind of way.

“Yes it does” but then the bell rang and the world moved on.

Aslan.

Aslan was a lion. C.S. Lewis was just a writer. His lion was not my lion, not the Nian... and it was just a story, not a religious text. But still. I felt something re awaken in me suddenly. That other world. Not Narnia. My other world was not in a closet. But if C.S. Lewis could imagine God as a Lion... maybe there was some connection to the Nian and the Lion and God, or a god or the Divine.

I thought of the Nian looking at me, breathing on me in a different light. What so filled me with terror.. Could this creature somehow be of Love? No! He had taken my father....but then God took away too. All those stories in the Old Testament were horrifying... and then some of Father Cuwain’s religion class discussions came to mind.

“We are anthropomorphizing here. Look God is Omnipotent, and he isn’t human. We acn think of him as human. We call Him him. But that’s not what he is. A tree doesn’t have emotions, and God is above that. He can say one thing and do another... and that doesn’t make him wrong. He didn’t make a mistake, he just changed his mind. We can’t understand him. How can we? We are not God and God is not us.”

I thought about this... and how if the Nian was God... how crazy the lion dance was. We put on a head And we are the thing... we are God... if that’s what the Lion represented. Of course the Chinese tradition didn’t even have God, and the Nian was controlled by a Buddhist Monk and in many stories Kuan Yin, a high ranking Saint, or Bodhisattva, but still much lower than many Buddhas, healed the Lion and re-attached it’s horn. In other words, the Lion or the Nian was like a pet. Even Dragons were just pets to the Saints. (or gods, but they were one human beings, so they were really just exactly like the Catholic Saints.)

It was just something that passed through my mind. But not like a light bulb going off as people talk about suddenly having an idea or coming up with a solution. It passed through my mind and my body like a thundering bell. It was almost a painful experience.

Perhaps the nian was not the devil I feared him to be. Perhaps he was not going to devour me. Or if he did, perhaps it was for a higher purpose, to bring me to a higher plane. Was not the angel of death a messenger from god? The angel of death was not the devil? I wished I could talk to my father. Were all Nian’s one? Were there good and evil Nians? I had no answer to my questions about a creature who, in this world of Jesus and Mary, was nothing but an obscure myth from a foreign people.

But I remembered now.... there was a good one. It was part of the story and it was part of the dance. Even if I was afraid of the bad Nian. There was a good Nian as well. Perhaps the good Nian, was my secret to being saved. Yes Saved, I had started to think in the Christian mind set by this time. But in my old mindset, perhaps the Good Nian had his path laid out for me.

Fr. Cuwain had covered Gnosticism and Dualism. It was one paragraph in our religion textbook. When Yin and Yang was mentioned I was not the only one who related to that. Even the real Catholics related to it. But Fr. Cuwain said that concept was not real Catholicism and that an individual could hold their own beliefs, but that a Church leader or priest to preach beliefs like that was irresponsible. The Gnostics also believed in the Prophet Mani and had spread as far east as China.

Fr. Cuwain looked at me, “Ever watch those TVB dramas with the Demon cult? Proud smiling wanderer? Zhang Mo Chi? Mau Gau is short for Mau Ni Gau or Mani’s religion. In other words, they are an offshoot of the gnostics. I’m not saying they’re wrong in their beliefs, but their not real Catholics, and even in China they were seen as a radical group. At one point they took over the Country and call themselves Ming Gau or Sun and Moon Cult. Ming religion became the Ming Dynasty..... And the moment they gained power what happened to the religious beliefs? The very leaders did away with it because it was not mainstream enough. I think there is something to be said for that. Just like a lot of the ancient pagan gods in Egypt or Greece, who could be replaced and traded... if a system of belief can just be dropped then they must not truly value it, and if they who practice it don’t value it,” Father Cuwain shrugged, “The Church was not always right. Galileo should have been a Saint. But in this case... well I think the Church made the right decision in ousting that group. Whether it was for political or spiritual reasons.”

“So what does the Catholic Church say then if it’s not Yin And Yang with good and evil?” Asked a student.

“God’s power is infinite and God’s power is Love. The devil is not an equal to God. And if he was, that’s not monotheism. That’s at least two different opposing gods. Instead God controls all.”

“So he controls evil too then!”

“He allows evil to happen because of free will. But evil is simply turning away from God. God is everywhere. The farther you move away from God, it does not matter because when you turn back to him he is there, he will meet you.”

“Fr. Cuwain what feels better.... sex or Heaven?”

“Well, from what I hear, sex, the orgasm, is only a few moments. I mean the sex can last longer but the moment of orgasm is what? Less than 10 seconds? But God is eternal. And simply being the presence of God, is ten times more powerful than orgasm.”

Yi

I Graduated from Sacred Heart and I got into a fancy prep school, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Academy. My family was proud. My mom, my aunts... It seemed to mean something to them. I came home one semester and got a letter in the mail from Sacred Heart. It was about Fr. Cuwain.

“We are writing to inform you that there has been an accusation against Father Cuwain, from a student at Sacred Heart during the time that you were attending the school. The matter was handled out of court and Fr. Cuwain had already been retired to a Jesuit nursing home. The allegation was that the boy was alone with Father Cuwain when he was asked to wrap his hand around his penis. We are praying for the boy and his family and Father Cuwain.”

I don't know how I felt about the letter. It wasn't me that made the accusation. But for some strange reason I feel guilty. Was the boy that made the accusation in the same situation that I was? I don't think so. Had Father Cuwain been coming onto me sexually? I really didn't know what to feel or what to think. I threw the letter away but not in any sort of angry way. It was simply junk mail that had let me know some information, which I had read, and now I threw it away. My mother had already read the letter and looked at me with concern. She asked if I read it. I said I had, and shrugged.

It was interesting though... I had always thought that Father Cuwain, had sort of.. Well I thing for my mother. They both loved Martial Arts and really were people of the Sea, Irish people of the Sea. I actually ended up reaching out to him and we met up. He had gone on sabattical. We met up and he brought a sword with him. Not a cutlass like my father had. Itw as a western Jian, like a clamour type. It was old and rusted.

"It's German in style" He said. "I have no use for it anymore. I didn't take care of it. But if you polish it up....It's not old. It's not an antique or anything like that... but it's well balanced."

I asked him about the letter. He shrugged nodded. Kicked his foot. I didn't know what the hell any of that meant.

"What are you going to do now?"

"How's your mother?" he asked.

"She's good."

He nodded.

"I don't suppose she would want to even look at me... given what I am accused of."

He sighed. And we parted ways. He ended up going back to travelling, and no longer part of the priesthood. He decided to continue his journey with God outside of the Church.

"I was always a Christian. I still have faith... but does that mean I have to be a man of the cloth?"

It didn't stop me from having most of my inner dialogue about God, the Christian God, be framed by Father Cuwain. But I started to search for my own path, with what my father had told me, what I had been taught in school and what I began to read at FDR Academy's library. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and a lot of Joseph Campbell. What I could not get out of my mind was that image of Aslan, breath of God, as a Lion, a majestic mystical lion. A holy version of the Nian. I began to practice the Yogic poses and steps that my father had taught me every day. I gained a lot of power actually. I mean I was essentially a superhero. I could send my lion far out away from my body and affect the physical world. If I had wanted too I totally could have robbed people or fixed high school football games from the sidelines but I saw wealth differently now. I mean I think my mother was smart to send me to FDR Academy because I saw that not everyone who had money was happy, and I knew that these little powers were just an illusion. It wasn't the true goal. I felt a little sad that my father and mother had come all the way from the spirit world but had gotten to a low level and used it just to scratch out a living. It made me feel like I would never attain a high level. I talked to my mother about this when she visited.

“No you don’t understand. We had you, I mean we did all that, because we knew that you could attain something incredible. Continue on your path.”

Love Teacher

There was a science teacher, a female Teacher, Miss Bahr, that would often eat lunch with me and talk to me about religion, or how religion was a bit of a waste of time, a true opiate of the masses. She knew I was a really spiritual person and always liked talking to the religion teachers. She didn’t talk to me disrespectfully, but she just mentioned that perhaps I was looking for the answer to everything in the wrong places.

She did not seem to have a lot of friends on Campus. It was a religious school and a lot of people were uncomfortable with her worldview. Even if she had been religious... she wasn’t a Christian. She wasn’t Muslim but she spoke and wrote Arabic and well, she was very much against.. Not religion... but she was against its rules... But she knew so much about religion that she was difficult to argue with. She had seen so many ways religion could be used to control people. She made people uncomfortable in her assertive opinions that were difficult to argue with.

But I didn’t argue. Because I only asked questions. My beliefs weren’t from a book. Yes I knew about religion. But the experiences of my father and mother, the Nian... were those things religious? Superstitious yes. They were true to me. But I knew that they were crazy and I felt no need to prove them to anyone. Why would I want to prove the existence of the Nian? I was afraid of it. I wanted it not to exist.

We began kissing and groping and then I said that I would lose my way on my journey to attaining enlightenment if I were dirtied by the sexual act, and I talked to her about Chi and Father Cuwain’s massive manhood and his power. Miss Bahr tut tutted that there were studies out now that showed that regular self pleasure may prevent types of cancer and that these notions were left over from the middle ages. She also wanted to report Fr. Cuwain to the police. But then on second thought, she realized she was breaking the same laws.

In the end we did do it like animals and it was not the last time. She began studying and reading a lot of the spiritual things that I read too and agreed that there must be something there, but that there must be a place for her in my practice. That we would make love in a spiritual way and that she would not be hindering my practice, but helping it move forward more quickly.

I didn’t even know what I was doing. I wanted to impress her. To show her that I knew more than her. That I wasn’t just a kid.

One time we went of campus and for whatever reason I wanted to show off and I showed her that I could move things very far away from me using my Spirit lion. I sent my spirit lion to knock her over from across the street. And somehow well, my spirit lion was panting on her and holding her down, and then I released her.

“That was incredible. Was that some sort of hypnotism?”

I gave her my explanation which she did not believe. In any case we talked and laughed.

“You can’t tell anyone.” I said.

She shrugged.. “Why not?” and smiled mischievously. “Whatever I won’t I mean you can’t tell anyone. I would go to jail and lose my job. If people found out you can do some sort of trick that makes

women climax and buckle under collapsing to the ground breathless...without even touching them" she laughed and put her hand on my chest, "Look that is not going to be a problem for you okay? Seriously."

The tension, of us looking at each other, not as teacher and student. It made me hard. And somehow it just happened. This time was different. I felt that we were really making love as equals. That I had more of a hold over her.

Other times later she told me to use the spirit lion to mate with her while we were making love. She undressed very quickly and wrapped her arms around me and begged me to do it. She wanted to feel the limits of my power. Not my physical power, but of the lion's. It was a strange thing... but I began to feel jealous of my own lion... that in some way it was the lion she wanted to make love with and not me.

"What's the difference?" She would protest, "It's just part of you right?"

Then she began to stare at me because she understood that maybe it wasn't and that maybe... I didn't even know.

The spirit lion was powerful... and sometimes too much. I would lose control I would not even be myself. I would roar and I would not stop even when she asked me too. She would bleed and I didn't have control. So after that we stopped using it as much. And without the lion.... It was not the same. It was as one would think. She was an older experienced woman and I was just a child. We grew apart... and then, she called me up and we met.

"Let's just try it gently..." She said afterward, "With the lion. Maybe... Maybe you just don't move."

And so we played around and I began to learn more about my spirit lion through this awakening with a mature woman. Once we decided it was something to be practiced, to be trained. It was different. We had control and it became more than just pleasure. She began to develop a spirit animal of her own... a Burak. A woman with the lower body of a horse. And we became more equal.

We had fun in this way with my powers but then she started to test them scientifically. What could I do with it. What could I do without it. She forced me to practice something that I had sort of avoided. She made me practice hitting objects from afar every day to see if I could improve. We experimented with sleep deprivation and meditation and doing it with more stance practice and less. Before making love and after and even after a week or two without making love. Even though she didn't know anything about my powers... in this way she did train me. And then.. She asked to learn.

After learning for a while... she felt that even though she could not feel her spirit lion... if she even had one... that she was more in tune with mine, and that despite the injury from before... which hadn't been serious as I had control to stop when I realized I was hurting her... that she wanted to try again and to go further this time.

"Don't flatter yourself" she smiled. "But actually you are right, if you went full force without holding back trying to kill me the lion maybe could kill me. Just as you could kill me by strangling me or beating me to death, But we aren't doing that we are making love. So just remember that."

It began to be that she would ride me in some astral projection and the lion would take her very far away, beyond the universe.. And we could switch I would ride her as well, her Burak, and my lion could make love to her Burak and in this other plane... we were more equal.

"Now you are as powerful as me." I said.

But she laughed, "I do not know that without you I can be that creature. I have tried actually, but somehow together, our spirits entwine and yes in that state, I am equal to you. But without you I do not even have this power. It is interesting. I wonder if I can take my Burak and ride in the physical world or run around as the Burak without you and explore the universe."

Sometimes in my travels with Kadija (that was her first name) I could sense the presence of the Nian. The one I was afraid of. But now he did not feel overwhelming any more.. Not even necessarily evil. Dangerous yes... but in the way a tiger is dangerous. But I had my lion.

"Who was that?" she asked me.

And I couldn't answer clearly, but I knew she felt the presence of the Nian. I just told her about my dreams and my father's death.

"Was the Nian child, the baby nian, there this time too?"

"I didn't see it." I said.

She was quiet.

*

*

*

I didn't talk to her for some time. She said that she was sorry and that she had a lot of work... and also that the other faculty may be suspected something and that we should stay away from each other for a short period of time but that she would see me in the summer for sure.. Not to worry.

She ended up coming to the house and talking to my mother who uncannily saw right through her but said nothing to me. Remember my mother was a pirate in spirit.

"What's your name, your first name?"

"Kadija."

"What kind of name is that?"

"Urdu."

"Ahh."

"I'm sort of from Turkey, I mean my family and other places too I think, Syria, Iraq... my father named me. He was a poet."

"You're Muslim?"

"Sort of. Culturally yes.. Some of the family was some kind of Manichaean. Part of the family was Jewish, some of our traditions are even Buddhist. We all pretended to be ultra devout Muslims at

some point just because it was easier. When I started reading the Koran, I mean as a woman, I got so mad. I couldn't believe what it said...."

I think I'm really an atheist. But I do... " and she looked at me, "I do believe in something. I'm not sure if it would be called God. But I guess I do believe in things that science can't explain. But that doesn't mean I need faith in them or that I believe for sure. And the way I look at the world.. I mean I still feel a feeling of togetherness with Muhammad, with his search for Allah, with his search for truth... even if I don't agree with everything he did, I still, in the back of my mind take him as a role model, and his favorite wife Aisha, I think of her often of course. But I don't believe the way you are supposed to, but I am sure that many Muslim scientists of the Ancient world... they questioned they didn't just take answers for granted. And part of that is because Muhammad himself questioned and changed his mind about traditions and in the end he didn't rely on Priests to tell him what God felt he sought to connect with God directly. And if he can do that, I know that mainstream Islam does not teach this, but I believe we all have to look to connect directly to that power, whatever it is. Mainstream Islam believes that Muhammad was the last and greatest prophet but the Sufis teach differently. You have to question everything. You can't just believe something blindly. Finding No God and keeping that possibility there, that brings you closer to the idea of God. Maybe God and Allah is just in our mind, a creation and you can't leave that out as a possibility. "

"Do you believe in another world that you can't see then."

"Like the subatomic world? Or the world outside the boundaries of our universe?"

"I mean like a spirit world."

"What would that be?"

"I don't know."

"I guess it is a possibility.... Well Yes I do, I definitely do. I mean I was trying to tell you that. But I don't think you can learn that sort of thing out of an ancient book."

My mother looked at her and nodded her head. "Good."

Later in the kitchen she whispered to me, "She's a nice girl."

I looked at her for calling my teacher a girl. "Mom Ms. Bahr is a teacher."

"Your teacher."

"No I'm not in her class."

"But she'll teach you."

"You want me to sign up for her class?"

"I'm giving you permission to learn from her this summer. I will be starting some some work during the day. Teaching summer school myself. I have taken some tests and certifications. I was a chemist back before you were born you know. Anyway, hopefully this summer gig it will get me ito a teaching job. I hear some of these teachers make six figures. Crazy."

"So..."

"I'm just saying whatever you want to do you can do as long as you want to and you aren't stupid. Your room is your room, this woman has a lot of free time over the summer and you have a lot of free time too. Here bring her this tea."

My mother had made her Moroccan style green tea with mint leaves in it. She liked to put them in mason jars. She talked with Ms. Bahr about her travels in Morocco and crossing the Sahara desert and the time a Camel bit off someone's head but mostly how they would always drink this type of tea and that's why she loved it. She also talked about how in Kenya she ran into two New York Jews who were gun running. The husband got caught and the woman stayed with him, waiting for him, trying to help him get out of jail.

"That takes commitment. I mean there was no way he was getting out. Not wit that kind of charge. He was going to rot there. I had to leave. I suggested she left too. I mean she could go back to America, not problem, but she stayed there. I really didn't understand why they would choose to be in that business in that place. It was amazing to me."

"So I hear around campus that your son does the Lion dance?"

My mother's face changed a little. "He learned it from his father."

"I didn't know there were lions in China."

"There aren't, it's a beast with the face of a lion, but it has a horn , which was knocked off but repaired by Guan Yin or maybe some other goddess and the dance comes from Persia. The whole thing is the Guardian of the Forest if you ask me, but I wouldn't argue that point with Po, that's my son's father. You know in the middle east they defeat the monster by cutting of his head, Huwawa, they kill him and the head wards off evil. But that's all symbolic. Man conquering nature or fighting nature. Cutting it down just like they cut down the trees. But civilization in China, they respected nature. So when it got brought over by the Ming Cult that eventually became the Ming Dynasty.. And then outlawed the Ming cult, funny how that works, well they changed the story because they respected nature, at least in theory, and at least the idea of it. You know, Zen Gardens as well as chopping of trees. In fact some people were total tree huggers. Hug the Tree is a Chi Gung exercise you know? Well so they don't kill the beast, and the beast isn't the Guardian on the Forest anymore, it's just that yearly natural disaster, or winter or the elements, and they make their own nature, their own ENVIRONMENT I should say. You know, like agriculture and being nature's caretaker...in theory... so they make that beast and scare away the old one. Well that's not how they tell the story but that's what I see, from my travels."

"You know my brother actually did Tai Chi and the school he was part of did the Lion Dance I think."

"Uh huh."

“And he had this thing about not dating during training. I mean he is married now of course and, actually I’m staying with his family in New York for the summer.... well I mean I was”

“Needed a break huh.”

“Well yes actually. But he wouldn’t date because he didn’t want to lose chi” Ms. Bahr laughed “I mean I don’t see the science behind it but I was wondering if...”

“My son believes that too I think. Something he learned in Catholic School from a priest who had been to Hong Kong and di Kung Fu. It’s true to a degree but there are other ways. After all his father was married to me and I did Kung Fu of a sort as well. There needs to be balance. You go to far either way and it’s no good.” My mother paused for a bit, “He could use some help finding balance Kadija... too much Yang can break a young man, lead him to do stupid things that will get him injured.”

Kadija ended up visiting quite often and my mother always seemed to make herself scarce.

We began spending more time in my room, curtains drawn and candles lit.

It turns out Ms. Bahr did indeed have a spiritual side after all. She would talk excitedly about new scientific discoveries. But also we would read poetry. She asked me to show her the Yogic Lion Techniques. But she felt that it was difficult to understand the moves without a lion mask.

“Let’s just make one!” she said one day.

She always seemed to be tense and wanting to say something else or do something further but she would stop herself.

Sometimes she would say something like, “I’m old enough to be your mother!” and laugh “But we still have fun talking and everything.”

“My mother is much older than you.”

“Because she had you later in life. But if I had gotten pregnant when I was 17 or something my child would be your age.”

“You got pregnant at 17?” I asked

“No I’m... I’m just saying.” She laughed awkwardly. I heard from my classmates that she was really tough in class. Intimidating. Strict. She was like that around the campus too. People were afraid of her tongue. She wasn’t that tall and kind of overweight if you compared her to the high school girls or the teachers that coached the cross country or lacrosse teams. She wasn’t an athlete.

“I really should start working out, but I never found an interest. Maybe this Lion dance Yoga thing can really help me get in shape.”

It did make her sweat and she enjoyed the meditation too.

Then she would ask me if we could connect in some way. If I had a spiritual lion, did she have one too? Was there a way the two could meet? Through meditation or the Lion Dance Yoga or some other exercise. I told her I wasn't sure. I asked my mother and she told me to ask Kadija.

"She asked me. Why would she know? I'm teaching her."

"Well maybe you should let her teach. I told you how I learned to fight. It wasn't Kung Fu it was natural. Well guess what, some Yogas or Chi Gung's come from nature too. And the same way you have to lose energy in a fight and maybe get beaten in order to learn how to conserve and build up energy and win... well other things are the same way to. Just make sure you talk to her and do what you both want and you can achieve a great and wonderful thing. Now seriously don't ask me again."

We did and we made poetry. She was embarrassed about it but I made her write it out on the back of the lion mask and read it to me by candle light and make changes here and there.

%%%

The Garden

I will teach you young man.

*Loving tonight opens my veins
Straight to the light of god
And will for you too.*

*If you walk in the shade of love
The pardes is underfoot
Tell me, is it not true?*

*Love me, come to me
Roar like a lion and touch my soul
I tell you
walk over to me and lie down
And you are in the Garden,
The Pardes*

*Drinking the sweet nectar
Of the divine life
Flowing from the canal
Of all our origin*

*You have tasted it
and come closer to God
than you Ever could have
meditating like a sorry monk.*

*We climbed the mountain top
you, collapsing
So I rub scented oils
On your Chakras*

*as you lay there
In the flickering candlelight*

*I breathe life into you
Suckin your life into me*

*Our sweat and fragrance mix
As our heads swim
I will nurse you
As teacher tutor and guide.*

*I am old enough to be your mother
But I am your truest lover*

*Feed on my breast and drink the
Spiritual milk of the eternal life.*

*Sing and I am your song,
Your declaration of faith
Close your eyes
and we are holding hands,
walking through that Garden long ago.*

*Have you not come closer to that place
With me? The Lion and the Lamb?
Than you had as Lion alone
Robbing those wretched souls?*

*You are a lion and a man
And I am a woman
And a snake*

*The cat and snake
Can mate in the spring
And the Lion and the Dragon
In the New Year*

*These creatures can love
As well as kill
The snake is not evil
I am not evil*

I am the guide to truth!

*The lion is not evil
He is the guardian of nature!*

We have found our way back

*to our true selves
I have given you knowledge
I had not possessed myself,
Until the moment I gave it to you.*

*You give me what the body craves
We walk in the Pardes*

*We love in all forms
In the light of the Sun
Reflected from the moon
Watch my shadow dance!
Mischievous and shifting in form*

*Watch me in the light of the morning
My body does not block the pure light.
It only enhances it.*

%%%

It was so difficult to stay away from each other when school started. But I knew she could get into deep trouble. In fact it became too much for both of us. She got a job at a school in New York and I just dropped out, left high school. My mother was not as concerned as you may have thought. She demanded that I continued learning and get my GED (which I passed easily). I got a job and used the company to take college courses for free. It was just one class a semester which meant it would take forever to finish college. Kadija got pregnant. I was Seventeen years old. But I wasn't afraid. I really wasn't doing all that much. Kadija's family thought the situation was odd but her brother and his wife helped out and so did my mother.

When the baby was born she was so excited. It was a girl.

"It's so wonderful to have someone that needs me again." My mother smiled as she held the baby. My mother never did get that teaching job... but Kadija did. And by the time the baby came... yep 100k. And there was my job and other gigs with Chi Gung healing that she and her brother had set up. Money was not a problem. Not that it had been of great concern before. So I hadn't finished college, and I was a teen father but so what?

Some people say that when they saw their child, they saw their first love. I held my daughter. She was so little in my hands. But honestly I did not feel much connection. I mean it was like a cute little doll that was alive and I was afraid of breaking. Kadija took care of her for the first 6 months, maternity leave and then summer vacation. I mean I helped of course and her mother helped too and her brother.

They were actually worried about me for some reason. They said maybe it wasn't fair and that I should not have expected to settle down with Kadija. I think they were just worried about the money. I explained that we weren't married and that there was nothing to worry about. I had no claim to Kadija's money. Although Kadija would not agree with that of course. Didn't I steal it to begin with? But then wherever I went in life couldn't I always do the same? In our first months I had lost the ability a little bit, but as Kadija's belly grew, we did not... I was conserving a lot of Chi and I was able to send the Lion out farther and farther.

Having that power was wealth in itself, because couldn't I always take what I wanted if I wanted it? And having that power enabled me to let go of the desire to take things in the first place, because I viewed all things as mine for the taking if I wanted them and so why not just leave them be?

A pull toward China, toward Chinese culture. A pull toward the Sea.

Kadija Dies or runs away or something!!!%%%

I began to pray on the Rosary one day. Not really Hail Mary's or Our Father's. It was a Rosary that had been in the family and I just liked to hold it and meditate with it and move my finger across the beads. Somehow I would slip into dream like state as I said names of the people I knew, people from stories, My Mother, Kadija, her brother Arzu, Baba, Jesus, Guan Yin, Guan Gung...

And then I was dreaming and I saw the many animals in front of me. A Dragon, a snake, a tiger a leopard, a crane. They all were in a line, one for each of the beads of the Rosary. And suddenly they merged back into a long serpent. No, it was a Dragon. And Fr. Cuwain was leading the dragon, golding the head.

I looked into the dragon's eyes and suddenly I recognized it. It was my father! Fr. Cuwain looked up and saw that the head he held and come to life. My father devoured him and curled around me.

"Son I will always protect you. But only if you stand up for yourself. This man, He will die for what he did to you. I will make sure of it. My power has grown since death and I lead a powerful fleet of dragons flying across Time, across universes. Each Universe is a pearl and we swallow them whole if we wish to understand them better. I cannot always look after you, but if you stand up and fight for your self I will sense it, and from within you.. I will support you. Don't ever feel that you have to submit to people.

And if for some reason I am not there, your mother will fight for you. Never be afraid."

And with that the Dragon, who I could somehow tell was my father vanished as incense smoke curls away into the air.

Then I saw the Lion. It was a winged Lion, And then a Chinese horned Lion and he told me his name as he changed shape and was many. I am Aslan. I am Huwawa. I am the Beast. I am Time. I am Good. I am Evil. I am Past. I am Future. I am God. I am Demon. I am Love. I am Hate.

I am Jacob the Lion Of Judah.

I am Humbaba the guardian of the Cedar forest.

And then I thought of Totoro. The Guardian of the forest and the great beast in a Japanese Anime I had seen as a child and I laughed out loud. I couldn't stop laughing. I laughed a deep belly laugh and scared my aunts and uncles. They had never bothered me about sound. In all the time with Kadija and the crying of the Baby. But this woke the baby and they handed her to me. I was able to quiet and sooth

her immediately. I didn't shush. Instead I made a purring roaring sound. I sounded like a crazy person but my little girl, my little Shamat, she was quiet immediately and slept like an angel.

But now, as a 17 year old father, I began to feel like I didn't belong here. I began to have this pull toward China, toward the Lion Dance as it is done in the Chinese way, with the drums and the cymbals, and the gongs and the flags and the clashing of metal weapons against each other. I began to miss Guan Gung and bowing to him and hearing harsh Cantonese and Taishanese or even Mandarin tones.

I had practiced my Yogic Lion Dance this whole time.... But now I wanted the group ritual with the firecrackers... not just to see it, but to lead it.

I talked to my mother about this.

"I will not be here much longer." She said "I will be going to see your father. I think you should try whatever you are saying. Perhaps it is time to begin a new stage in your life, and I don't just mean fatherhood. And new way of looking at yourself and a new way of approaching the arts of your father and mother."

I Kadija decided to stay over at the house in Philadelphia and I spent a lot of time in the yard. I began to feel like it was THEM and me. I felt I was only my father's son and that the house was just a bunch of women.. And Uncle Tommy but I began to feel very disconnected from them. Kadija was one of them and the baby more than me. I spent long hours in the yard just meditating and doing my Yogic dances and painting ink paintings. I was never trained especially. I just made it up. My mother had brushes and ink.

My mother said I should spend more time with my daughter, my little Samhat. I held her everyday. But everyone else wanted to hold her so badly, so I did. Kadija said maybe we should go out as a couple. I shrugged. Yes or no it didn't matter to me.

6 months later I was taking care of Samhat most of the time, changing the diapers and feeding her. Kadija had returned to work and we were staying with her brother and their family still. I spent most of the day out of the apartment. I carried Samhat with me on one of those baby carriers. People saw me like that and thought I was a good father, and so young. But for me I was just walking around aimlessly. Being so young, I attracted a lot of attention from women. They asked if I was baby sitting. I told them I was married. This actually made them more attracted to me. I could see into their heart with my lion's technique.

I was bored. I often went to their apartments and had them play with the baby. I Often Samhat would go to sleep, or I would strap her into the stroller and give her my phone. I would light incense (just normal chinese incense) and burn paper money and light candles. I had a drum I had made with my hours in the yard. It was flat like a lollipop (in fact I have since seen drums like this that have the design of a lollipop on it. But that would not do for my mysterious services) Then I would use the lion technique with the woman. My Lion would go out of me and into her. Sometimes she was married, sometimes single. She was always satisfied in a way she had never been before. Because I had not touched her with my body she would equate her ecstasy with a spiritual experience. I would then through the I Ching coins and tell her fortune.

I had no training except that I read an old book my mother had around and had started playing with the coins. My mother also had some coins in the style of the past dynasties. I'm not sure if they were real or fake. Given my mother's travels they could have been real. But they also could have been from a gift shop in Chinatown. They looked the part anyway.

The Lion's technique would leave her, the woman, the client, always within my power and they would hand over money gladly and ask when I could return. I had found a new profession and use for my skill. I had gone from Piracy to prostituting my power.

I was shameless. Sometimes Samhat was not asleep and she would see the woman sweating and moaning like that and me dancing around drumming in a circle. Perhaps there was nothing wrong with it after all.

And with my power I charged thousands of dollars. After all these women's experience with me was unique, even if they didn't understand why. I did not explain. And I also knew where they lived and where their valuables were. Pretty quickly much of New York's powerful were in some way under my control, through their wives or mistresses.

Kadija found out about it and was furious.

She cried and cried and asked me why. I tell you I felt no guilt. I hadn't slept with these women. I hadn't put her at risk from some disease. I had not cheated in her. What of it if the women paid because they felt something spiritual or physical. The truth is I had no idea how they felt. I know how I felt when I was in the presence of my lion. I simply shared the experience of that with them, and it is true I had shared that experience with Kadija in a more intimate way... but what of it?

Kadija screamed at me, "Is that all your powers are good for? Your lion is a Spirit, a holy spirit, a divine spark of GOD! It is the closest thing I have ever come to a religion, as you know. I had renounced all religion before I knew you and YOU brought me back to considering God or at least the divine though not with any set religion that exists. And is that what you use it for? Yes I know your father was a Pirate and that is your mother's origins too and that's what you come from. But they had you to be more than that. You used the lion and achieved a new self realization with me. We did that together and we created life. We created Shamhat our little girl. And you use that same power to get money from clients like some sort of circus freak? Better if you actually slept with those women in the physical sense and did not use the lion for such filthy base needs. Why did you do this? Do you need money? I make plenty for both of us. In fact you have your own account and your own assets. Are you so bored and dissatisfied with your life taking care of your daughter that this is what you have to do? Why don't you better yourself in some way. Why don't you go to school? I would rather you spent my thousands than make thousands in this way. Life isn't all about money after all. "

Wanderer %%%

Kadija throws me out. I wander around New York. Mainly I continue to do my weird Shamanic treatments. I sleep with a good deal of the women who come to me. Most of them are older women bored with life. I excite them. But some women are my age too. I make a good living and I rediscover how to rob people with my spirit lion. I see a prayer bowl one day at one of those hippie markets. It is Nepalese and made of recycled materials. I buy it.

I find that even though it doesn't not produce any rice balls, that I can stave off hungers for days just by doing a ritual with it.

I take a job as a bartender.

I come in contact with a wanderer who tells fortunes using Runes. He comes into my bar. He is old and has one eye. He says I should take up fortune telling. He teaches me some tricks with the runes and gives a book to me. "The Night Circus." I read it and I enjoy it. I decide to buy some Tarot

cards at this weird shop down the street and I start playing with them. Because of my shamanic clientele I have a lot of word of mouth help and soon I am able to support myself doing readings... (though I continue to rob people for fun.) In fact, the reading help me collect information about who I should rob in the neighborhood. People begin to view me as a spiritual person with great powers.

I start teaching Kung Fu in the mornings. First it is to elderly people but soon I collect a group of young people too. I teach for free because I can and because it is a way to promote myself. I start making my own lion heads and drums and soon I get gigs doing that too.

Kadija finds me. It is months, maybe years later. Shamhat looks so grown up. Kadija yells at me and tells me that I need to raise my stupid daughter with all her stupid notions. And she just leaves angrily. She will later write letters apologizing and saying that she simply had a break down and couldn't handle it anymore.

I raise Shamhat on my own. With her I rediscover my powers. I am Together we are able to rob banks together and do other jobs like Lone Wolf and Cub. I realize that she is way more powerful than I am. A Savant. She learns how to sell online at age 9.

She tells me I should write down some of the Kung Fu that I discovered so that it doesn't get lost. And maybe put it into a story form.

She never goes to school. It is not so much because I am a great home teacher. I just don't care and I am lazy and she seemed to be so smart I didn't much see the point. We go to the library a lot and the Science museum a lot and she learns everything that I know.

She tells me I need to write down some of my stories and I should sell them to the people I teach Kung Fu too and online and try to build a movement. I begin to listen to her and I feel that she is guiding me now more than the other way around.

***(POetry!!!)

The Trinity of Swords-The Buddhist wheel

As you can tell my family is extremely Christian and Buddhist. But in reality, we just use these as tools to seek the truth. We are pirates and our method for truth seeking is often outright robbery. In any case. The school was filled with Celtic Crosses and the eight spoked wheels. Now the Celtic cross was the symbol meant to be from the sunlight casting a shadow on the ground. In other words. The Celtic cross was about your footwork. The forms faced the four directions. And then you circled. And the Eight spoked wheel was for the cuts of the sword (or the whack of the shillelagh, The only difference was in grips to hold the stick versus the sword. But essentially these were details we would show you. But much of what you did in my school was experimentation and finding the best method for yourself, while we guided you in technique and power.

Of course you could reverse the symbols as well. You could do a form facing eight directions for the spoke of the wheel and strike along the lines of the celtic cross and make circles. You were encouraged to do so. But for beginners we just lined someone up with a buddhist wheel and had them follow the cuts, or put them outside in the shadow of the giant celtic cross of Steel we had constructed outside and had kids and adults follow the shadow. And then of course after explaining this once, they should be able to imagine the lines on the ground. If not, we could always draw it in chalk. This was the basic concept. Did I get these concepts from my father? My mother? Father Cuwain?

All of them and none of them. I absorbed it all but I realized that my family's art was really just for me and my bloodline and Fr. Cucullain, though in some strange way I did respect him, I hated him for ruining my ideas of sexuality and the times I could have had with Tina. We reconnected later but it was never the same. I don't regret not being with her more, because I love my children and grandchildren.... But yes, why could I not have had children with her as well? Suffice it to say I did not want to spread out Fr. Cuwain's message or thinking or approach. But I did explain it to some people offhand. But I did not force it. In the end, the sword and shillelaigh styles... were simplified creations of my own based on what I learned and the history of the sword.

The Pirate Cutlass- Father and Mother(History and prophecy)

Japanese Pirate Katana -Son (Present moment)

Pirate sword.

The Boken Sowrd was fine but I started remembering what my father had done with me as a child, playing this game with wooden or cardboard sword. I had been standing up back then but he was low to the ground. I began to play this with my grandson... but now I was low to the ground. I realized that this was a technique. A sword form of being low to the ground, and the game came back to me. Actually it was so simple but I realized it was in genius. It was for close quarters with the cutlass. I practiced every day. Me and Shamat's son practiced under the table. My students thought it was crazy but the quickly realized, this was real stuff and very difficult. Simple and ease were two different things.

Double swords (Under the table) The Holy spirit. The unknown chaos.

Discovering the 18 disciples

Mary Mother of God. The Mother Goddess

"Always remember, this universe, this God... well it is a woman. The God of your mind, the intervener, the Jesus, the son, he is a child. And then there is the Father aspect. The history, the laws. But the Universe itself is the Goddess. The Holy Spirit, it is a she and I am going back to her. And you can think of me when you think of her as you like. We aren't the same.. But everything is metaphor." I cried. I knew she wasn't crazy. I wished we had talked more about this philosophy, but now she was going.

"Do you remember the dance that your father taught you?"

I did.

"Do it now. Dance me back to your father. Remember you don't need the head to do the Ilon Dance. Not our kind. Not your father's kind. It is the dance of time the dance of the Universe itself. Dance my son and bring me back to visit your father before I go to the Mother Goddess. And make sure you practice your father's style.

She passed away, blood trickling up from her mouth, or perhaps it was bile. It was vile in smell. But the sacred and the prince are one and the same.

I was not able to meditate for a long time after she died... and I felt like I actually abandoned the 18 ways of Kung Fu. I instead went back to the first few things my father had taught me and when I did

that... I saw my mother and in this state, this state of her already being dead, I began to learn things from her. I realized through stories here and there she had actually taught me some Kung Fu as well, and I began to develop this system on my own. I practiced in front of people at the school but the truth is I never taught anyone. I let the 18 disciples spread what they spread and I let whatever Kung Fu was taught at my school be taught. It was all different and it was all the same. But I spent my time developing upon those first initial contacts with my parents.

Oar stick form

I thought back to my father playing boat with me and rowing a pretend oar and my mother clapping and playing and laughing too. I realized I had the stick form right there all along and that was all you needed. Those few moves could be 108 moves and could beat the hell out of any of the other stick forms I saw out there. Of course I knew so many forms already but this was all I needed. I saw my parents when I did the form. I rowed across the sea of the Universe... I was like the hand of God interfering with their battles of the spirits, my oar was the guiding hand. And so they were my gods and I was theirs and Shamat's son helped too. I began to see that all was becoming one. 99 things were turning into one.

I saw a book by my mother's bed side. I had thrown it away I think. Its title was about how the Chinese were the lost tribes of Israel or how Tian was really god because it used to be written with an eye on the top. I thought it was nonsense. But as I practiced, I understood the meaning of it, or the truth of it. It was all one and we were all one. There many ripples in one ocean.

Shamhat heads out on her own. She takes up painting and photography and some of her works sell for \$15,000 She gets into a fancy prep school in New England. We have quite a bit of money and are able to pay for it on her own. It is what she wants to do. She begs me to look after myself.

Himiko

Himiko was half Chinese. Her mother used to do the announcements for Sam Sing Trinity School in Boston. Himiko is an artist and an activist. She comes to speak at Shamhat's fancy prep school and Shamhat is the one that gets her information.

"Call my father when you get to New York." Shamhat tells her and sends her power of her eyes into her. Himiko listens.

We get lunch together and Himiko stays the week in my apartment instead of getting a hotel.

Let me explain something. I loved her at first sight... but it was a love of respect.. And it was actually not a sexual love. I don't know how to explain it.

Maybe it was because it was easier to keep Himiko as a constant. We did have intimate moments. I even slept with her. That is SLEPT. I was naked and she was naked. But I feel like a spell came over me and I fell asleep. This had happened three times already. Once there was another woman there as

well. I slept with the other woman but not Himiko. It was like Himiko in way, was not real, not flesh and blood.

Just like that, we begin living together.

Chinese New Year came around again.

We were watching the lion dance and I got turned around and I heard firecrackers. This was strange because firecrackers had been banned in New York for over a decade. But there was the gunpowder smoke and she held my hand and pulled me through.

When she pulled me through I don't know where I was... and then I did.

There were peach trees and rivers and firecrackers going off. There were all sorts of people in many forms of ancient dress. This wasn't China. I don't think this was earth or this universe. I saw the Qilin's dance by in herds and dragons in the sky. It was wonderful. It was like a validation of my life.. That I hadn't been wasting it doing these martial arts and Kung Fu dances.

I looked into Himiko's eyes and she touched me and I turned into the Nian, the lion Beast. And in this form we made love in a way that Kadija and I had never been able too. She grew and was like a snake woman wrapping around me. We did this for three days. But I didn't feel weaker, instead I felt lighter. She had taught me how to fly. She climbed on my back and rode me.

"Where are we going" I asked her as she guided me with her fan of golden eagle feathers.

"The Nian is here."

I saw the Nian. It was destroying the village I chased him and fought against him and drove him all the way back toward the light. This was no the earth and so the Sun was a land all of it's own. A place where one could set foot.

In the golden light I heard a voice.

"You came but where is the sacrifice?"

I suddenly see myself... and I am no longer the majestic beat but a young boy.

The Nian mocks me and laughs at me. He laughs at my weakness. But I did not go through my whole life to be mocked as a child. Child's body or no, I will be a man and I will NEVER be a scared child again. I will die first.

I see a stick on the ground and I pick it up.

I scream and attack. The stick becomes a mighty sword.
But his hide is impenetrable.

I envision the eightfold path and cut on the strokes. The Pirate Bokken of the Buddhist wheel. I don't scream anymore. I am calm and determined and then I start to strike as a practice, simply as a means to enlightenment. I am not frustrated that my cuts do not penetrate his scales.. And that is when I start to cut through him. He is not dead. But he is not flesh and blood. My cuts must be true cuts of the mind in order to affect him. I am not hurting him but I am breaking down a barrier of my own mind, and I am able to glimpse at him with the swishing of the sword through the air.

I crouch low and climb right under him, staying there and cutting his belly and inner legs with my under the table pirate techniques. I jump down his throat and cut my way out. I am learning his true self. He is not the beast of mystery and fear. I hold him in my mind now but cutting him. I hold him in my being.

The sword becomes a staff and I use my Oar Kung Fu. He tries to escape me but one strike of the oar and I fly towards him through the ocean of time faster and faster.

The staff grows a spear head and it grows to 18 feet long . I try to pin the writing Nian down, and he is a Dragon now. There is no mistake. They are actually all the same. The Qilin, the Dragon, the Lion, the Humbaba beast, the man the Garuda, the Bison, it is all one thing I am pinning down now. He is the Coyote and a pack of wolves and the moon and I pin him down and find it is as if I am a dog chasing it's own tail.

The Spear head becomes a sword and I chop at him. It is a Kwan Gung Do. I see Kwan Gung and Zhang Fei as I battle this thing, this concept. I am fighting and at the same time I am in another place, peacefully drinking hot wine with these two men and Liu Bei. They are talking to me about loyalty and respect. I am them and they are the Nian I am fighting. The peaceful talk and the battle they are all one. They are happening at once.

I grow tired and I feel like a young child. A small child. A sick child with a fever that wants to cry for his mommy because he doesn't feel good. I slip and fall against the tile floor with concrete underneath. I cry but I swear I will not be weak again.

He, the Nian Breaks my weapon in two. But they grow into two swords. Jians. I keep him at bay and the

Lion Mask calls out to me.

I drop the swords and pick it up. It grows into a true lion head... and then I grow into a true Lion. A Beast, a Nian. And battle the Nian Himiko is standing by me with her fan of feathers. She is helping me. Her waving of the fan cut through and provide mighty blows against the evil beast. The bastard. I taste blood. I want to end him or devour him.

We are running through a village.

buildings and trample crops and wreak havoc on blood lust trying to get to the Nian.

A light glows.

The Nian runs toward it And I chase the bastard.

"Calm yourselves."

This bastard killed my parents.

The light speaks, "Your parents are here."

I look up and see my mother and father standing there hand in hand.

And all around me I see Buddha's and Goddess Guan Yin and Mary,
and Gwan Gung and Jesus and Aslan,
and Peter Pan, and any childhood hero I ever had.

I cry true tears streaming down. I cry bitterly and mournfully and fully.
I spew snot and blood and sweat and tears and a river flows from me reflecting the
great light. I see 10,000 Buddhas still as stone. I fly now walking on air.

I see into the past present and future all at once.

I see the Nian and the Lion "fighting" all those years ago.
I understand that actually they were playing.
And the two mate and have children.

The voice calls and holds out a golden chalice. No it is a bowl.
"This bowl will sound three times. I want you to drink from it. Drink in the sound of harmony
Do this with a deep breath and restore harmony to the world... to your SELF."

My Self.

Suddenly I see Shamat.

"Baba, there is no self." She says And I feel calm when I think of that and the world world feels calm
suddenly. Great disturbances are just ripples.

The bowl is rung three times and I breathe each time. Then the bowl is made to sing
out continuously. The note sounds and I see the Golden wheel. The eight spokes of the wheel. It is
turning. It is the eightfold path to Buddhism. There is a whirlwind and silence at once.

Peace of mind.

"Ahh, so you can perform the gifts of the mind. That is even better than sacrifice.
whispers the Nian in my ear." The Nian has changed. It is a woman. She is beautiful. But she looks like
poison. I am hardened with desire. I want her.

"You are free." She says.

She puts down the lion head.

I see Shamhat again. Because of Shamat I am able to resist the poison woman. The lion head is just a
cardboard box she has drawn on with Crayon. The voice of the woman, I see her, it is a figure on a
flying Lotus flower. I see a sword before me. It is a sword of light. It encompasses the light, and
righteousness of all the sword of legend and of history from Excalibre to the Green Dragon chasing the
moon. How can a double bladed sword be the same as a single sided polearm? It simply is. I hold it in
my mind and I cut like a calm enlightened bezerker. The woman on the lotus dies. She is an illusion.

The woman who was poison. She is not so bad. She is simply an alternate version of myself. She
climbs back into me through my side. I look around for anything to steal. Shamat goes right onto the
lotus flower.

“Baba Let’s go Home.”

She reaches out to me with her hand and I climb aboard the lotus flower. I feel the poison woman in me... she is suddenly the same as the woman who was here. With her and Shamat altogether we are Guan Yin.

“Yes.” I hear a voice say. “When you see the Buddha kill the Buddha. Because Buddha hood is within you. Within all of us. And Guan Yin and the Mother Goddess too. You only look outside yourself to see a reflection of that Buddha being.

Shamat takes us home on the Lotus. Me (the poison woman is me too get off. Shamat stakes the Lotus flower. It shrinks and it becomes part of her. I am stunned. We are back in New York’s Chinatown.

“Baba where is Himiko.”

“I don’t know.”

“Call her.”

I do.

We meet up in Central Park and then decide to get a hotel. The poison woman within me yearns for her. I talk to Himiko with my soul, in a way that words cannot describe and she understands in a bizarre way. She finds the light in the poison woman and that woman shines like Guan Yin. We kiss each other and caress in a way that I never did with Kadija. It is different. I cry and I move inside her to release all of my pain and sorrow into her. And she takes it in and turns it into light. Together we touch the sun.

I throw down my burden and I want to fly away with her. I call Shamat and I explain this to her. She tells me that it is fine. The school runs on it’s own and if it didn’t she could always find some other business to put there. As it turns out. The school makes a perfect headquarters for the worldwide business me and Himiko begin. We travel the world making love and preaching love and healing people. Some of my disciples are extremely jealous. They think I have gone insane or have been seduced by an evil enchantress. Shamat understands. The school was to work on myself. Now that I am ready I no longer need to be bound by it like a prison. I had a school A school should not have me. Now I let it go. It still makes money for me and for all the instructors. They should have no complaints whatsoever.

Book 5: Using the Drum to Chase the Dragon

Himiko, is a shaman and a prophet. People hear this and think she is a charlatan. But everyone that meets her believes she really does have power. It is a different power than mine. Because mine was hidden, whereas hers is obvious. People who discount her do not say that she is a fake. They simply say she is evil. There are those that say she is some sort of illusionist... but she doesn’t perform magic tricks. It is her speech which simply captivates people. They want to follow her. And she does heal people with touches and words.

We do these speeches which sell out tickets. She manages to negotiate peace between world leaders. And when we make love, we have shamanic visions together. We write them down and try to create a

divinely inspired holy scripture of sorts. People really think I have gone insane. But they realize I do not maintain control over anyone and neither does she. We are not a cult. It's just that what we say makes sense and helps people. We do get involved in politics though and for that we are criticized... but we never condemn any politician. Our focus is on empowering people. We just want to share some of the stories we wrote down.

A lot of these came from visions that Himiko had while I played the drum. But some of these, especially the first, we visions of mine that well, she was in my vision as well and guided me. The technique we used was meditation with the drum while we were in union with each other. From Tina to Kadija, Himiko was the first woman that I was able to be with in this way, and so that is why even when we did end up having a sexual side to our relationship.. It was still in way, not sexual, because even if we did this every day maybe even several times a day, it was working towards something else... to travel in the spiritual realm. Sometimes it was frightening and even dangerous. But I will explain that later.

The Nian story retold (Change, future moment in Time.)

We travelled back and with Himiko I was able to confront the Nian. It was a strange thing, not to be afraid of the Nian finally. Part of it was that I felt that I could not be afraid in front of her.

But because of this we stalked the creature back to before I even knew it, back to before it knew me or my father. We went back to the beginning and found that the story was old indeed.

This creature, this demon, approached a small village and destroyed it, laid waste to it.

It then went to another human habitation, further along. This was a small town. The Nian destroyed it. The Nian seemed to travel around searching for any human habitation that was settled, a village or a town or a city and would do the best it could to destroy it. But interestingly there were times that the Nian approached a group of people living in the woods or faeries with grand cities with buildings that grew through time and space and were alive as the trees are alive. Here the Nian would lie down with children and play with them and be petted by warrior and priestess alike.

Himiko and I approached the Nian several times in these places when it was in a peaceful mood. But he ignored us. He did not spurn us either but would pay us no mind, as if we did not exist.

We wondered why he destroyed some places and not others.

It was not every year that he destroyed one village. He simply went around doing it at random spending time in other worlds as well and with the fairies. Indeed sometimes he lost track of time and fell in love with other creatures similar to him and had children. He had his own life. His life was not destruction. But destruction was a part of it. A part which he did not seem to gain anything from.

We wondered at this.

There was one city in particular that seemed to rebuild quickly. We went back to this city many times. Each time it became harder and harder to wreak havoc. The beast could no longer tear down the walls. Instead all he could do was destroy crops. We noticed that he did not even eat these crops and livestock. In fact, he seemed to eat a different type of food. A spiritual food. For in truth he was not really of this world.

Then right in front of us, as the people watched from the city walls, the Nian destroyed farm lands and suddenly another beast, just like the nian, with wings and a roar of light. The Nian, the one we followed bit the righteous beast and ran and the beast followed in pursuit.

Himiko and I were able to fly after them in pursuit. We saw them circle each other. And battle.

No. they did not battle. It was ... they were mating!

The Nian, the black nian, had been a female. But for me it had always been a male voice. I was confused at this. Afterward, the protector beast was tired and rolled over and the female beast took a human form and danced on him. I watched.. And I was aroused. Himiko held my hand and we went closer.

She saw me but then... it seemed as if Himiko kept her at bay. Kept me from coming forward and biting my head off. I was simultaneously aroused and terrified. But then I put away that fear because I would not be embarrassed in front of Himiko. I stepped forward and it was as if I had taken the form of the beast. The protector. And the Nian, now as a woman, as Time danced on me. That is she mounted me and danced her dance in ecstasy.

I grabbed her and pulled her toward me. Suddenly, as the Beast, the protector of the city... I knew her. I knew her as my lover, and I asked her, "Why do you make those people suffer? Why do you destroy their crops and torture them."

She laughed.

"I serve you. That is why I destroy them. You think you help them by driving me away? Look how I serve you? You think I do this for my pleasure alone? I will prove to you otherwise."

And she was like Tina then, only much more skilled and with the force of all time. She sucked my mind into the abyss of chaos. Himiko rested my head in her lap and played the drum and called to me to make sure I did not fall away and lose myself.

"Who is this?" The Nian laughed, "Well she serves you and so I approve of her because everything I do I have done for you. If you like, I will not attack the city if you are there. You do not have to fight me. As you can see. I am more powerful than you but I bow to you because I love you. I torture them yes... but because I do this I bring those people closer together. Because of me they cooperate and love each other all the more. They cling to each other in fear and love. And they produce children out of love. But if I didn't attack their food supply, then they would increase in number and fight each other and attack each other and they would not cling in love but in blood lust and desire and sick control. They will attack my form, the form you see and enslave it instead of worshipping it. But that is not all. If they become too powerful one day one of theirs with the aid of those who live among us will come and cut your head off.

Next year, when I return to this place, if you like I will stay away from the city if you are there. But I will not visit you in this place either and make love to you. In fact I will stay away from this world altogether if that is what you really want. But you gain nothing by helping them and lose a great deal by losing me. Think carefully on it before you decide to side with them."

With that the Nian left reverting back to her beast form and flying away.

Himiko and I returned to the city. We rented a room at an Inn and she made her way as a Shaman and a healer. We stayed there a year. You may wonder how this can be since this was all in the course of less than a night. In fact, it all happened within our shamanic session in union with one another. How could this happen in a year? Well you must remember that time is not a constant thing. Science says that. And we were travelling in a world where time is alive. The Nian itself, all of them are creatures of time.

And the Female Nian, Was the queen of it. Causing birth and destruction.

The people of the city were anxious, wondering what they should do about the next year when the Nian returned. Some wanted to seek at the Beast of the forest. The Good Nian. They had their own name for him, the creature that I had embodied and had lain beneath the Black Nian dancing on top of me.

They called him Humbaba, Guardian of the Cedar forest.

They sent a girl to ask Humbaba if he would defend the city again. When the Black Nian came. We knew Humbaba's thoughts because Humbaba and my mind had merged. And I knew that no, I would not defend the city, because I knew that one day men from the city would take Humbaba's head, or so was the prophecy that the Black Nian, Kali, told.

And I knew, that Kali loved Humbaba. That she was destroying the city to protect him, to protect the Nian beasts and nature. I understood this, and yet Himiko and I still interfered.

We built a mask of clay and sticks and leaves. And we created Humbaba's likeness.

So that when the girl came back to the city to tell them that Humbaba would not defend them this year, she would have something to give them. We knew the nature of these ancient people, and of people in general. The girl would be killed if she simply forecasted doom.

We told her that if she told them to dance with the mask that they could scare away Kali... which was ridiculous. Why would Kali Nian, lord of the darkness before time be afraid of a mask?

But the people bought it. And they made the masks and danced that year.

Kali saw them, and thought, "Perhaps they will show respect to Humbaba now if they do this dance every year and they will respect us Nians and nature and time." And so she no longer destroyed this city. In fact she tried to help it grow and to help spread the dance across the world. Though she did so from the shadows. Hidden from view.

She was the first Nian. But the Nians that I encountered, the ones that had talked to me in childhood and eaten my father's spirit, powerful as they were, they were the offspring of Humbaba and Kali. Of order and chaos. Not good or evil. For order can be evil or good and chaos can bring about evil or good.

Himiko and I dreamed this dream along with the people all the way through the entire history of the dance in all its twists and turns and changes in ritual and culture and performance until it all burned away like the wisps of incense smoke and we returned to ourselves in each other's arms.

The animals

The formless find forms in countless animals and shapes.

Magic Rocks - The Monkey King and Sysyphus

Long ago there was an ancient man, a timeless man, you was punished by powerful gods. Gods or Demons.. And what is the difference between a god and a demon? Connections? Who is telling the story. In any case the man's name in greek Mythology is Sysyphus. And in that story he is punished by pushing a rock up a mountain and having it roll back down again. And he eventually got satisfaction out of seeing it roll down. But this is a twisted version of the truth.

The truth is that Sysyphus was punished by being chained to the mountain. He could not leave and fly free through the world and the universe and time. He was bound to one place. Sysyphus was a dragon. A creature that is timeless and can cross dimensions and use the forms of many animals. The antlers of the stag, the claws of the eagle, the body of the serpent. The Dragon can be anything. That is why it is the symbol king the emperor of China.

But the Gods saw the Dragons as pets. Only humans could be emperor.

But Sysyphus was a rebel rouser. He wanted a natural order of things. A spiritual anarchy. The dragons would not be direct rulers per se, but would be leaders. The people and the spirits would rule themselves.

The Emperor of Heaven, (who actually was not the Emperor of heaven, just a local powerful deity) through smoke and mirrors made it seem like he was the emperor of the Sky, which is actually the whole universe. And this simply was not true. The Dragon attempted to expose this and so Sysyphus was bound to a mountain and bound to Human form.

Rolling the boulder up that mountain? That was actually Sysyphus idea. And rolling it really was only what was going on on the outside.

Sysyphus may have had a human form but his spirit and his chi was still that of the dragon. Sysyphus worked the stone, moulding it, pushing his spirit into it and forming something on the inside. An embryo of the stone.

The stone, of course, is a part of the earth, the Mother Goddess, Gaia, and all the female Goddesses tied to her. The stone became the egg and the Dragons' chi, the sperm.

Sysyphus had enough of these humans that had set themselves up as gods. Humans like the Jade Emperor. And his plan was to start over. And so in that stone he created a monkey. One day that monkey exploded from the rock. And what this monkey did? Well a version of the story has been passed

down. But the truth is, after the stone monkey cleaned out heaven... that was it. He didn't take over heaven, but everything did start over. And

Gilgamesh retold-

Dance of Kali- With Kadija

It may seem strange that while making love with Himiko we both had a vision of me making love to Kadija. You would think this would make Himiko jealous. Actually we even consulted with Kadija and at that time she had the same dream. Himiko.... Was not the jealous type. She thought differently. Her focus was different. She had no room for jealousy. She really was a holy woman. That's why in some ways, even though making love with her was such an incredible experience... it was almost not sex. It was almost something completely different.

Lions and Dragons and Drums- My workshop

(Long ago, there was a monster.... I am 40 years old now.

The eightfold path and the Beatitudes. The Lamb of God.

Shamhat and Enkidu

I see the Nian, the Year the Beast of Change. I see a man. He is wild, but he is a lamb. A Hippie, that likes to fast and wonder through the forest. He can outstrip any Gazelle. I lie down with him and I devour him, I devour his essence and we create life. We do not go the way of the City, abandoning nature. Not this time. We find a middle path.

Prize Day

Himiko and Shamhat and I all go up to meet at prize day. Kadija is there too with her new husband. Shamhat and her boyfriend and their family and all of us gather around and talk. They have heard of me. They ask me to demonstrate the lion dance. I step back and I breathe within myself. Kadija claps and Himiko beats on her Shaman drum that she always carries. I jump backward throws the air and I am able to make a huge lion appear. I feel like I fly high above my body. I am the Lion, I physically transform into the lion forming in the clouds and I roar... I roar so loudly that everyone bows to the ground face on the floor in fear. I have created a MIGHTY spirit lion with a thundering voice that nobody can understand.. Except Himiko.

The Nian gets out of control and destroys the campus. People run afraid. I kill people too. It is me, but I have no control. But Himiko tames me we open portals and I see the other Nians and portals to other universes to time. I want to rush into them before they close.

"Himiko strokes me, riding me, we will never be able to get into all of them but there is another way.

She focuses and turns back time I see my destruction of the campus in reverse. She captures it into a little ball and turns the event into a door which we place in the chapel, hidden. Shamhat comes to us. She has been able to see everything, unlike everyone else.

“This is what we will do, we will build a school to study these other universes. A secret school within a school. This is as good a place as any.”

“But there are rules here, this isn’t our property,” Shamhat explained to Himiko.

“Look at me and your father.” Himiko said mounted on me as the beast. “We have turned back time together. Neither of us could have done it on our own. I will be able to find a way.”