

The Chinese Girl

Wonder Bakery

I had opened my private investigation firm, better reopened. The acceptance was very good, more inquiries than I could handle. I chose routine jobs. At this moment it was important for me to get job practice. My interest in spectacular cases was not very big, not now - I tried to get something like a regular life. Therefore I had a free day today, no work today.

I decided for Chinatown - always a good choice. At least for a person like me who loves to eat. One of my favorite places - Gingo's Cafe and Deli! Okay, noodle soups always fantastic, but also all the other dishes and not to forget the daily specials. And if you needed a bit more space, only a few yards - Hop Woo. And.....yeah, this was Chinatown, food and restaurants seemingly without an end.

But there was another place, a place you could name, if it would be not too affected, a simply wonderful place - Wonder Bakery! I loved this place, at Chinatown's tourist hot spot number one. One of the special things there? Tables! Inside and outside a few tables who invite you to sit down, have a rest, drink something and eat something, a cake or a tart, or why not an ice cream. Not that common in this city! Now you maybe wanna say that in summer, a lot of tourists, but it was no summer, it was early in the morning, I arrived with the yellow line and looked forward to sit down and to read my L.A. Times.

As always it was a torment! All this wonderful cakes, tarts, cookies, pastries....always I was surprised about all this offers. Not, that you not would be able to find other fine cafes in this city, but it was not that easy and this was without any doubt a very special one. The friendly young woman behind the counter smiled, yes, as always, I needed my time and decided for a simple coffee with milk and sugar and a slice of the velvet cake. Yes, I know, it was early morning, but.....my free day.

I decided to sit outside, it was a very friendly morning, took my L.A. Times and started to read. Out of the corner of my eye I saw that a person came out of Wonder Bakery, not walked away, but stopped and obviously looked at me. I raised my head and a young Asian girl stood in front of me, looked at me, with a cake and a tea in the hand. It seemed that she was unsure, whether she should sit down or not. I smiled at her.

"What are you doing? You are a tourist? You have no work?"

"Wow, that are many questions? You wanna sit down?"

"Maybe? What are you doing?"

"I read the newspaper."

"At this time of the day? Here?"

"I have not to work today. It's a nice day and I thought I sit down here, drink a coffee and eat a cake and read the newspaper."

"Coffee and cake.....newspaper? Who reads the newspaper in a cafe? You have an accent."

"My ancestors came from Germany, at home we still spoke sometimes German."

"Germany?"

"Yes."

"Do you like the Japanese?"

"Why you ask?"

"You fought together."

"You know a lot about history - can I ask you how old you are?"

"Twelve, I will become thirteen soon."

"You've learned this in school?"

"Humph, no. Such things, you do not learn in school."

"You are interested in history?"

"In the history of my people - yes."

"You mean China - or?"

"I mean the history of the Chinese people who came into this country. But yes, also China."

"Will you sit down?"

"Yes, you read the newspaper every day?"

"Sure, it's no fault to get informed. You also?"

"I have my own newspaper."

"You mean a newspaper written in Chinese?"

"Yes."

"You master both languages, English and Chinese?"

"You master English and German."

"But German not very well. So you're interested in.....yeah,...both. The Chinese in America but also the Chinese history?"

"You have to know where you come from."

"That's true - why you asked about the Japanese?"

"You know what they have done with the Chinese people during the war?"

"You mean the war crimes? Yes, but I know also what the Germans did."

"The Japanese...you really know what they did?"

"I know that they did extremely cruel things. But, the Holocaust - it's not appropriate to offset the one cruelty against the other cruelty."

"Not in that way. Germans and Japanese were monsters. But after the war."

"After the war?"

"The Germans apologized, they showed regret, they felt ashamed - the Japanese never apologized!"

"I think as a German I should not judge the Japanese."

"I'm not German - I'm allowed to judge!"

"But you live here, in the US. Little Tokyo is not far. Is this a problem for you?"

"They live there, we live here. No."

"Sounds not that good. L.A., everything has its place. Chinatown, you live here."

"This is not the real Chinatown."

"Sorry, I don't understand you."

"You have no knowledge about our place, or? Chinatown!"

"Not that much. You live here, the Chinese live here. It's not the richest part of the city. The average income is....."

".....you have no idea from our history! You were born in this city?"

"No, but I live since a very long time in it now. Yes, Downtown West, Chinatown, Crenshaw.....yes, I like it to be there, to walk around, to look at the people, to eat their food, to sit here and read the L.A. Times - I know nearly nothing from your history, I mean, the history of the Chinese who came into this country. I feel stupid!"

"You read your newspaper every day, you can't be stupid! Are you interested in the history of Chinatown?"

"Would you tell me something about?"

"You not know that this is not the original Chinatown, or?"

"Now I really feel stupid. No!"

"The original Chinatown was where today the Union Station is."

She looked at me, looked at my reaction, and I was surprised! Union Station! I loved the Union Station! The floor, the wooden ceiling, the leather armchairs, the piano - so often I was there, I came from there with the Metro - nothing I knew!

"Wow, that's in fact new to me. Would you tell me a bit more?"

"I have to leave, use the internet - Wikipedia!"

"That's a clever advice and you are a clever girl. Maybe we meet again one day."

"I've vacation."

"I've to work ."

"Not the whole day, or?"

"Actually I'm a freelancer. I can plan my day relatively free."

Sure, I had regular office times, but during an investigation I was often the whole day on the road. No secretary, maybe I should change this. In the meantime a possible client had to call me when I was not in my office, call forwarding or if not possible he had to leave a message on the answering machine.

"Tomorrow, same time?"

"Maybe?"

"Don't play with me. I'm really interested. Also about what you said about the Germans. Some things you can read on the internet, but it's very interesting to talk with the people."

"Tomorrow, same time! And read a bit about Chinatown, then I have not to explain everything!"

She stood up and a second later she was around the corner. Also I stood up, took my back pack and started to discover Chinatown, this time not only the restaurants.....

Wonder Bakery Again

We met again, same place, same time, this time I had a slice of the chocolate grenache cake. And this time, I not forgot to ask for her name - Minh, the beautiful queen.

"You did your homework?"

"Not very good, I fear - got a phone call. Unfortunately I had to work for some hours. But at least I have read the Wikipedia article about Chinatown. And I used some of the links - Little Italy in L.A., that was really new for me - also the Massacre of 1871....."

"Not bad for the beginning. What's your profession?"

"I'm a private investigator."

"Really? I mean not as an actor...."

"Yeah, really. I'm no actor, I'm a real private investigator."

"Do you have spectacular cases?"

"Well, yeah...."

"You were in the news - right?"

"Yes, but I'm not proud of it - both times."

"You're a bit famous...."

"As I said, I'm not proud of it."

"Maybe I will need a private investigator one time. Then it would be good to know you."

"Everybody can hire me."

"Are you expensive?"

"No, but I think for a twelve year old girl - you need one?"

"Not now, but you never know what the future will provide you. It's always good to know people."

"That's true, for instance.....you."

"What do you think about our history? The history of the Chinese in this country?"

"Not very glorious, no good moment in the history of this country - like the history of the Afro-Americans, not to talk about the people who lived here before "we" came, not to talk about today and the nonsense against the Latino-Americans. All this, and other things, shows only the pathological fear of everything that's strange, different, unfamiliar.....name it as you like - we fear to much."

"And you?"

"I can not talk about the past, the past is past and gone. But today, in the present,.....do you think that young Latinos are a danger for our country or a gift?"

"Do you think young Asian-Americans are a gift for this country?"

"In the same way as young Afro-Americans are a gift for our country. The youth of a country, its youth, is always a gift for the country."

"Do you say this also when a young Afro-American steals your car, when a young Latino-American

mugs you, when a young Asian-American kills you?"
"I hope that they all will be prosecuted."
"Wow, no clever words now, about the white Americans."
"You're old enough, and also widely read, that you know that Lady Justice is not totally blind when we talk about wealth and "skin color"!"
"Says the white man, sitting in Chinatown - do you like the plaza here and the streets around you?"
"You know that I've read the Wikipedia article and who designed this here. Not any longer, that much than before. I mean it's not that horrible like the Hollywood Boulevard with its fantastic highlights for tourists, but....."
"But its not the real, the Old Chinatown - or?"
"Yes,....I love Union Station, I always loved railroad stations."
"Union Station is beautiful, I'm twelve, I have to use public transport. You have read about the decline of Old Chinatown?"
"Yes, but I had the feeling that the article became somewhat confusing there. Was the decline real? Was it all a manipulation? Speculation with building ground? At least it seemed, what a surprise, that the people who lived there were the losers."
"Welcome to today...."
"Yes, also the Chinese-Americans today have a lot of problems, but also the Koreans, the Thais.....also the Japanese...."
"Yes? Aren't they the nice ones? With green tea and bonsai trees, sushi and ramen?"
"You try to trap me?"
"Why?"
"Green tea - China, bonsai trees - China, the oldest pasta - China. Well, sushi..."
"Welcome, trap!"
"Sushi?"
"Wikipedia....."
"Wow, I will do! Paper, porcelain - china! Is there anything, not invented by the Chinese?"
"I think so. And we live today...."
"Would you like to live there, in China?"
"It's not important, where you live. It's important, how you live."
"Are you sure, that you're twelve?"
"No. Tomorrow?"
"I have to work. But how about Saturday?"
"Yes. Interesting case?"
"Not really, at least nothing for Hollywood....the ordinary life, only."

The Ordinary Life

Santa Monica Beach, the pier and the Ferris Wheel to the left - I'd solved a case today! A man found regularly waste in his garden, especially after he had night-shift. He accused the neighbor and opened a heated quarrel. At least he was that clever, not to try to solve the problem with his gun - at least sometimes the people tended thereto, to use their guns too fast. So I observed the house for some time and saw, what a surprise, a young boy who thought it would be cooler not to dispose the waste into the garbage can, but rather in my client's garden. It was the young boy from the other side of the street. His parents were not very happy about it, but my client was forgiving. He also apologized to his neighbor and all were happy. Nice suburban neighborhood.....

It started to getting dark and a young woman spread a yoga mat, not that far from me. She had an extremely athletic body and the fitting clothes - some clothes, very fitting. I felt a bit like on the other side of the pier at Old Muscle Beach, sitting on the "grand stand" and looking at the gymnasts and acrobats. Also their exercises were very "acrobatic" and I definitely not knew what she did, but

I was sure, no classic yoga. After a while, as the sun nearly touched the water, she stopped with it and sat down. Now it seemed that she prayed. To my luck a young man passed by and asked her what she's doing. She answered him that she was here, to say goodbye to the sun. That, I could understand very well, and after all, this was L.A., this was California.....

The sun started to drown in the ocean, this vast, seemingly endless water surface, sometimes plane in an ideal way, sometimes rough and uneven, way more than a rugged mountain, a craggy canyon. Water was the place, of all that begun, and it will be the place, of all what will end. And the sun was the mother who gave the light and warmth therefor. Now they molt, became one, till the next dawn, when they would separate again - I still knew that the earth was a sphere, that this sphere spun around and that the sun.....but not now, now, the sun drowned in the ocean and I with her.....

The young woman furled her yoga mat and left. I looked at the stars, so much now, and suddenly I felt the impulse to stand up, to walk to the waterside, to strip naked and to swim - as long as I would be able to. But I was unable to, to stand up, felt heavy and exhausted, a force pulled me down and I laid me down on my back. Above me, in the night sky, the swan flew down the milky way, and everything around me started to elapse, no space and time anymore, no sound and feeling, I drowned in the sand, I melted with the sand, the sand and I became one, an endless desert, an endless ocean.....

I knew that, would I close my eyes now, I would open them never again, so I observed the swan's flight, through an endless ocean of distant lights, hundreds, thousands, even millions of years old, long there before me, and after me. I closed my eyes and a mellifluous voice sang thereto - *and I will never.....*but I had an appointment, yeah, an appointment, on Saturday, with the Chinese girl.....

Friday

Tomorrow I would meet her again. But after I had done my today's work I decided to spend the afternoon around the Westlake area. I walked down 7th Street, along MacArthur Park, crossed Hoover Street to enter a new part of the big city - no longer Spanish, now Korean - Koreatown. I started to walk around, aimless, and thought about China, the Chinese people there and the Chinese here. Not that much I knew about China, sure read the newspaper everyday and watched the news channels regularly, but in the end.....what a huge country, unbelievable how many people, so multi-layered, so many different regions, sometimes rice, sometimes noodles, the north noodles or rice?, that I knew. In fact nothing! Sure it was a communistic country, no regular elections, says the man in that country, who, sometimes, the one with less votes becomes president. Okay, communism was no alternative, even I was left-wing. Communism - an almost endless list of interpretations, definitions, theories.....reality? No thanks, democracy looks different for me - communism was no democratic system, at least in the reality and I lived in a reality, in my reality.....

And China, some say to govern such a large and diverse country with a democratic system would be impossible - maybe, but maybe only a fucking lie, maybe only a stultification of the Chinese people, committed by the ruling "class", the Communistic Party of China - maybe. And the ruling "class" of my country - the rich? Who said that a president has to be a millionaire? Wouldn't it be more interesting, whether he or she is a good politician? And China, the list of human rights violations is long, critics live a dangerous life. Yeah, America - "Native"-Americans and their "rights"? Slavery - Black Lives Matter? Dreamers with no future? Chinese and Asian workers for the railways, with no rights - and today? Chinatown - a movie set for tourists? Or was the problem that Chinatown was more than some blocks around North Broadway and North Hill Street? That this blocks not Chinatown were, but North Bunker Hill Street? Was Figueroa Terrace still Chinatown? So little I knew about this city.....

I looked up, corner West Olympic Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue. I saw a Korean and a Thai restaurant, I was very hungry and especially thirsty. But too much Asian in my head for today, and so I decided, to walk some more blocks, till Langer's.....

Langer's was not my first choice when I stayed in this area, but it was definitely not because of the quality of the food! The food was fantastic, everyone who's in L.A. should eat at least one time there, it was the hecticness! They showed you your place, fast service, fast order, fast preparation, fast eating, fast paying and leaving - the next guests are waiting! But come on, this was L.A. - nobody had time in this city! Maybe during rush hour, while waiting for hours on the freeway - but that was another story and I preferred public transport. I decided against a sandwich and ordered the New York Steak with some side orders and a large soft drink. And then, because I had still twelve minutes till closing time, a Apple Pie with Brandy Sauce and Whipped Cream and a large and hot coffee. As I said, absolutely delicious.....

Shortly after 4.00 pm, and now? Enough thoughts about China and Chinatown for today. I decided for Downtown and / or Old Downtown and maybe Skid Row at night.....

Saturday

We met at the morning and I invited her. She decided for a strawberry tart and I chose a lemon pie. As usual we sat outside, a beautiful morning.

"Isn't it a bit strange to spent your time, sitting in front of Wonder Bakery and talking with an old man?"

"That's our third time. We not spend that much time together and we sit here in a public area. So, no problem."

"Do you like it to talk with me? I mean, I obviously have not the best knowledge about this, your, quarter. "

"But you're interested - and you do your homework!"

"You do your homework?"

"Mostly, I'm not the best pupil. I know, we Asians are all mad on, to be the best, all the time - especially what education concerns."

"Yeah, cliches - not all the time wrong, but often not accurate. Reality is not black and white. Reality is often very complex."

"And surprising. Often something is very different from what you think about it."

"You?"

"I'm a twelve-year-old girl."

"A very astonishing twelve-year-old girl."

"I'm a Chinese-American girl. Chinese are so - or?"

"Do you think you are.....we talked about this before? Would you wanna live in China?"

"No. I'm no communist. Not all Chinese are communists."

"Do you think you're an American?"

"As much as you. As much as somebody who enters or leaves the Metro train. We're all Americans or none of us is an American - apart from the people who lived here before we all came."

"Would be a nice motto for this nation, wouldn't be the part with the people who lived here before. Sometimes I have the feeling that this city not is part of America. Chinatown, Koreatown, Little Bangladesh! Little Armenia, Crenshaw, Downtown West, Compton? Long Beach, West Hollywood, Bel Air? Where is the place where the Americans live, I mean the real Americans, they who were here all the time, who lived here long before."

"In numbers, many of them live in California."

"And in percentage under 2% if I'm not wrong. It's not easy to find two percent. You've said that the Asian workers were treated very bad, the workers for the railroad."

"Yeah, you mean, that at least, they were not killed indiscriminatively like the American Indians, say during the gold rush?"

"Makes things not better. It's not really cool to be the white guy."

"You mean the guy who treated the Asians in a bad manner and killed the American Indians?"

"Oh no! We all would be Kevin Costners - friend of all Indians, always friendly to all immigrants from Asia. Havens Gate.....you have to stand on the right side, you have to decide on which side you wanna stand."

"And on which side you stand?"

"On the wrong I fear....don't forget, I'm the white guy."

"Now you're a bit black and white?"

"I don't like my place and the place I like is not my place. It's a bit arrogant, it's very arrogant."

"I'm only a twelve-year-old girl. It would be arrogant, would I give you advises."

"Would you have an advice for me?"

"No, but my grandma always says to me, most important is, to find someone, someone, to spend your life together with him. She and granddad married as she was sixteen. Two weeks later he went to war, and never came back. She never married again, but she was pregnant with mom."

"I'm a single."

"I know."

"You know?"

"You sit here with me, in the morning, reading your newspaper - not looks like you would have something like a family life."

"That's true, no family life. I've read, newspaper, that also the Asian communities get more and more problems, that the solidarity dwindles more and more, the proverbial Asian solidarity. As a result there would be more and more homeless Asians."

"Homeless Asians, homeless Afro-Americans, homeless Latinos, homeless women? Is this what you see on the streets?"

"Homeless white males. I was very puzzled the first time. Later, no longer in the city, I asked myself whether this impression was right or wrong. And then I was for the first time in Paris. I spent the night, while waiting for the train, in the area around the Gare de l'Est and Gare du Nord. Here, in this city, I saw an endless number of homeless, but no child and no mother. There, I saw a child on a mattress under a scaffolding. I got nearer, three or four children, under a blanket, not sure how many. Beside, on another mattress, a women. I was shocked, even in this sick city in this sick country, even in Skid Row, I not saw something like this - but in Paris, in the City of Love, in Europe. I thought about, should I....all my cash? I cried and felt so helpless, so alone - it was such a wonderful festival, I saw her for the first time....."

"Sometimes things are not as it seems."

"Yes, as long as the drowning is not visible, only some lines in the newspaper. But if one would be able to hear their screaming and crying while drowning, but it's good that the sea is far away and large enough, so you not have to - you not have to close your eyes....."

"I'm only a twelve-year-old girl."

"I'm only an old man. When you will celebrate your next birthday?"

"Next Tuesday."

"Wow, really. Then it was good that I asked. I have to look after a birthday present. Any wishes?"

"Something sweet.....sweet like a strawberry tart."

"I will do my best! Any plans for the new life year?"

"No, only for the festive day."

"You mean you look forward to it?"

"No, I have plans."

"Uh, then it will become a very special birthday?"

"I hope so. I'm thirteen then."

"Is there something special to become thirteen? In that sense, that normally the sixteenth birthday is something special. Is there a Chinese tradition?"

"No, it's only for me. For me my thirteenth birthday is something special."

"Maybe it's indiscreet but, would you tell me?"

"Not before!"

"Ah, I see. But thereafter?"

"Thereafter, no problem!"

"Will we meet again before you celebrate? The present?"

"How about Monday?"

"I will arrange it. Same time?"

"Yeah,...."

The Birthday Present

ilCaffè in the morning, Old Downtown in the morning, corner South Broadway and West 9th Street, as always a fantastic mocha. You can have anything in this city, from all the best, the most tasteful, the most exclusive - if you can afford. If not, bad luck for you! It's only on you, you have to wanna it, it's your dream, work hard, work harder, if you really lust after it, again and again, then you will get it, your personal American dream - or maybe not? How many dreams came true in this city? How many dreams faded away? How many dreams became destroyed? How many dreamers became destroyed? Sometimes this city was so charming, sometimes so disgusting....

I pondered about my birthday gift for Minh. Something sweet, sweet like a strawberry tart? Wow, if this was not easy! Should I consider that she was an Asian-American girl, that she was a Chinese-American girl? No, why? On the other hand, why not? Something sweet for a thirteen-year-old girl. Nothing kitschy - or? Pink I don't know - ah, I had no idea! A book? Chinese poetry? Well, I thought, maybe something that's far away from everything girl, sweet, Asian, Chinese stuff - but the task was: Sweet like a strawberry tart!

I had started to walk around, sometimes a good idea, to get inspired. Along Broadway I had reached 5th Street and decided to visit Pershing Square - why not the Library? I could remember very well, the first time that I walked down Figueroa Street, on the other side of the street The Westin Bonaventure Hotel, and reached 5th Street. I had to wait till the lights went green and looked to my left. A block down 5th Street I saw trees, a plaza and an odd building. I couldn't see it quite good, but it looked somewhat misplaced. All this high glass towers around me and then such a delicate, house of stone, with its nice bright color and some really strange details. I walked to Flower Street and stood in front of a plaza with leaf trees, no palm trees, and a building, that was so beautiful, it really fits not to the buildings, which surrounded it. So many edges, areas, details, the statues - the pyramid! Illustrated! I smiled, never I thought to see such a building her, at this place. But, what I saw not in this moment, what you can see only when you're inside - 5th Street is sloping and not only a bit. When you enter the building from Flower Street, when you walk along the even corridor till - I was totally astonished and delighted. The atrium - how beautiful, and so many books around me.....

I walked up 5th Street and saw the Bunker Hill Steps. They fit very well to the Library, who would expect them in this city, more, who would expect them Downtown Los Angeles. I went upstairs and reached Hope Place and Hope Street - further till 4th Street. There, I decided to enter the plaza in front of the YMCA, walked till Flower Street - better, I looked down at Flower Street, from the building on which I stood. Down, Flower Street, on the other side, The Westin Bonaventure Hotel. Breathtaking architecture? The elevators? The structure, all that glass - The Glass Mountain? The people who stayed there, very exclusive - would it be possible to see Skid Row from above? I thought about Minh - still no idea, still no birthday present - or, maybe?

Monday

We met as always in the morning in front of Wonder Bakery. I took a slice tiramisu cake, she a slice red velvet cake. Also as usual we sat outside.

"Tomorrow is your special day?"

"Yes."

"And I have something for the special girl."

I opened my back pack and got a small present out of it. It was wrapped in bright red paper, with a dark red ribbon - not very heavy.

"Thank you! A box."

"Yes, but not the box as such is the gift, the gift is what's in the box."

"You make me curious!"

"I hope so! And come on, you have to wait only one day then you can open it."

"That's true. Thanks again."

"And tomorrow, a big birthday party?"

"I think so! Well, my parents have planed all. It should be a surprise for me."

"All your girlfriends will come - and maybe some boys?"

"I have not that much girlfriends - boys...."

"Enough time for that, I mean the boys. And I think you not have to have so much friends, to have some good friends, is important. We in America tend a bit thereto, to name everybody we have met, a friend. But I would not call this a real friendship."

"Are we friends?"

"Good question. What do you think?"

"I'm not sure, but I would like it, if you would be my friend. My grandma has said that real friendship shows itself, when you need somebody most notably. The one, who's then at your side, is a true friend."

"Your grandma says a lot of good things, like grandmas do it, all the time."

"Your grandmas?"

"Both are dead. The one....I do not know that much from her. The other cared for me. Both, my mother and my father, worked full time. She cooked all the time, for me and my sibling, when we came from school. I loved her puddings....."

"Do you miss her?"

"Today I see her all the time. I love looking at her."

"She was a friend for you?"

"She was more, much more, but I never said this to her. I have my problems with this, saying such things to people, to people to whom I should say this. Sometimes it's very difficult to say something, to say something you should say, something from which you know you have to say it. But maybe this is not the best topic for today - or?"

"Birthday is tomorrow. Today is an ordinary day."

"Maybe every day is a special day. Every day something special can happen."

"Positive or negative?"

"Wow, I've forgotten that you're a twelve-year-old girl....."

".....thirteen....."

"....that tomorrow has its thirteenth birthday. Never underestimate twelve-year-old girls, not when they have birthday the next day. But seriously, smart question. Unfortunately both ways, but I think that is no new news for you."

"Not really. Should we continue with our topic, that from last time?"

"I would like to ask you what your dreams are, your dreams for the future - would that be okay?"

"Sure, because I'm not sure."

"You've a lot of time, to become assured to your future."

"That's not what I mean. I mean what you said before, that every day something special can happen."

"A singer I love very much sings in one of her songs, a song which I love, among some others, the most: *The world can change in a day* - I love her poetry. Do you think your world will change tomorrow?"

"Not because I become thirteen!"

"No, it's only one day more in the end. But maybe something nice will happen. For instance, I had not expected that I would meet a twelve-year-old girl while reading my newspaper here. But it happened and it was nice. I like our conversations."

"I also. But I have to go now."

"Next time - I have a problem."

"You not wanna talk with me any longer?"

"In the contrary! But I have a job in Van Nuys. It's a long distance from Chinatown to Van Nuys. Also I don't know how long I will need. If it's okay for you, I will give you my business card. You can call me. Would you give me your phone number?"

"You have another business card?"

"Yes, for?"

"I write me number on it."

"Cool, then we can call each other."

"When you will start with the case?"

"I will meet my client at 3.00 pm in Van Nuys tomorrow. After the meeting I will call you - okay?"

"Yes, I will be definitely at home - birthday party! I would say that you can come after your meeting, but I think you're bit too old for a children's birthday party."

"Yeah, I will come next year....."

Tuesday

10.00 am, no reason to hurry up, plenty of time till my appointment in Van Nuys. I had prepared me an oolong tea flavored with orange, even the preparation was something wonderful. When the hot water meets the tea leaves, when the scent of orange and the tea leaves delights the nose, better a morning can not start - maybe if you would have birthday today, but only maybe. Van Nuys, a serious case, no waste in the garden, an important appointment, a step forward towards a more stable life. If I would be able to handle this case, the next step would be to find a secretary - a redhead of course! The cell phone.....Yves!

"No, I'm not in the office, call forwarding. I'm at home, I have an important appointment this afternoon in Van Nuys - sounds like a very interesting case."

"Do you have some time?"

"Not really. I have to assure that I'm not too late in Van Nuys. Why you ask?"

"You know a Chinese-American girl, here name is Minh?"

"Yes! What has happened! Is she okay? It's her birthday today!"

"She's okay, that's not the problem. She had your business card...."

"I've given her the card. We met in Chinatown - what has happened?"

"She's okay - Van Nuys? At what time you have to be in Van Nuys?"

"Unimportant! Tell me what has happened!"

"I.....you know her....I mean the business card?"

"Stop this shit! What has happened!"

"This is no play! You have to answer me this question first! What kind of relationship you have to her?"

"We met three, no, four times in Chinatown. In front of Wonder Bakery. We talked about China, the Chinese-Americans, the Japanese - about history, nothing special.....I gave her my business card that she can call me. She gave me her number, I said that I will call her after my appointment in Van Nuys. I was unsure when I would be able to meet with her again, because I have to see first... - come on!"

"Sorry, but I have to. You met regularly a twelve-year-old girl in Chinatown to talk about history?"
"The first time she addressed me. It was nice to talk with her - that was all. I mean, she seemed very adult for her age. Can you tell me....?"
"One last thing. Do you think you can come to the department - better I would send an officer to fetch you. He would drive you also to Van Nuys later. But it will be tough for you....."
"Whatever, but please tell me what has happened...."
"She has shot somebody....."
"WHAT! Today? Today is her birthday....."
"Two hours ago. She says nothing, but we found your business card in her bag. That's the reason why I call you."
"Was it an accident? Is the officer on the way? COME ON!"
"It not looks like an accident. We thought that you maybe know her, that you maybe would talk with her? - And the officer is on the way."
"Whom she.....whom?"
"Not on the phone. We talk when you're here."
"And I sit and wait?"
"You can wait in front of the building. Hey, he drives with siren and blue light."
"Is it that bad?"
"Yes...."

The car arrived in fact with siren and blue light - okay, he drove relatively civilized, at least compared to the driving style on duty, not to talk about a car chase. We could use the most time the freeways, not that much traffic at this time, we arrived at the police department. Yves waited in front of the building.

"Thanks that you're coming! Come inside, we have to talk."
We hurried to his office.....
"Take a seat. I still have to ask you some questions - okay?"
"Okay....."
"When did you saw her the last time?"
"Yesterday."
"Wow, yesterday - about what you talked with her?"
"Well, I gave her my birthday present, about grandmas.....wow, that the world can change in a day - I not thought in that way, he leaves her, he not kills her...."
"You talked about that the world can change in a day?"
"Yes! But believe it or not, I started with this topic, not she...."
"Has she said something, something....she has murdered a thirteen-year-old boy, today was his birthday."
"WHAT! ARE YOU CRAZY!"
"It's okay, shout it out!"
"Today was HER thirteenth birthday!"
"And his...."
"So, you tell me, that she murdered, at her thirteenth birthday, a boy, who had also his thirteenth birthday? That's crazy!"
"That's absolutely crazy. And even more crazy is that we see absolutely no connection between her and him. This?"
He laid a box on the table.....
"My birthday present..."
"She had it in her back pack, together with the gun."
"You wanna....that I talk with her?"
"Do you think, you're able thereto?"
"I think I have to. For her and for me - and for the boy. Is it sure that it's a murder case?"
"Yes. She rang and the mother opened the door. She said that she's a classmate from Steve, that's

the boy's name. The mother thought, that she's maybe a secret admirer or something like that. She was surprised, that her son hasn't invited such a charming girl. When her son came, she took the gun out of her back pack and shot. She fired three times, he was dead immediately."

Not now I started to cry, I cried all the time - but I had to do it. It was necessary, sometimes.....

"Can I talk with her?"

"We should wait a moment till....."

".....she should see that I cry. I've no problem therewith!"

"Okay, then we go."

"Can I talk with her alone? I mean alone in the room?"

"Yes."

I took the box and we went.....

We looked through the glass, she sat on her chair, her head was inclined, her eyes were closed - at least it looked such, from my position.....

"She sits there like this, since she's in the room."

"By the way, her parents? A lawyer?"

"Her mother had a mental breakdown, when the police informed her. Her father is in the hospital, by her mother. He said that he has no longer a daughter, he fears that her crime will disparage the whole Chinese-American community. She's all alone in this moment."

"Does he has any idea why she did it? - The problem is, that he's a white boy, no Chinese boy?"

"He has absolutely no idea why. He fears that.....I not have to tell you what mood we have in this country today. Enough groups, who will use this crime for their purposes."

"She was born in this country, she was an American girl."

"I'm born in this country! I haven't to say, that for some I'm only a fucking Latino who should better go home. The problem is - I'm at home....."

"Will she have a chance?"

"Obviously it was a cold blooded murder - no....."

"That's unfair...."

"You wanna ease your conscience....."

"I have none.....and we're still a death penalty state."

"But since 2006 we haven't executed a convicted criminal."

"That will help her...."

"And the boy?"

"There's something wrong - I have to talk with her."

I entered the room and took a seat on the chair opposite to her. I laid the box on the table.....

"Hi Minh, that's yours...."

She shook her head....

"Take it. I fear you will need it. - Would you look into my eyes?"

She shook her head again....

"You killed a thirteen-year-old boy, you murdered him."

She nodded with her head.....

"So, you agree with me that this was a murder. You killed somebody without a reason."

She shook her head anew.....

"We agreed that it was a murder. That means, that you wanna tell me you had a reason to murder this young boy?"

She lifted her head, her eyes were tear-stained and terribly empty, but she not looked at me.....

"Can you look at me?"

She shook her head, she shivered.....

"You're a smart girl, I not have to tell you what you did. The boy, his family, your family - yeah, and you. You destroyed a lot today, but.....I.....I also killed somebody, maybe I.....and I was at a place were many died, but.....look at me! You murdered a thirteen-year-old boy! Has he done

something? You have to have a reason therefore, you said, that you had a reason, you shook your head! Tell me your reason - please!"

Tears trickled down her cheek.....

"Don't cry, it's enough that I cry - and two families! For what reason you had to do this! - Look at me!"

She moved her head, but she not looked at me, she looked through me, her eyes were dead.....

"Don't look at me with those cute Asian puppy eyes, you're a murderer! TELL ME YOUR REASON!"

Now she looked at me, then she looked at the box on the table and she opened the box.....

"Do you know how old the first female ancestor of our family was, as she arrived in America?"

"How I should? Is this a riddle?"

"Thirteen....."

"Okay, a riddle for me. Thirteen, let's see. A bit strange, because you would think that there would be a women, but a child? Maybe she was accompanied by her uncle, or even more simple, only by her father. Maybe the mother died - come on, for heaven's sake, how I should know this?"

"She was alone....."

"Alone? How should this be possible?"

"She was alone, she arrived alone in San Francisco."

"Okay, I take this. No other Chinese immigrant helped her? Which year? When does she immigrated?"

"1865."

"Okay, difficult time, but you not tell me now, that it was the reason.....what happened? Orphanage?"

"Orphanage! You're a naive person! You not did your homework well!"

"Okay, please Minh. I've read some texts, but I also have to earn money. Forgotten? I've an appointment in Van Nuys today, but I sit here - or?"

"Yes..."

"I thought that we will meet again, that we would continue to talk with each other. I would had been very curious. I know that I don't know that much about your history - and to be honest, also about your today's live. But.....why? What happened?"

"The immigration officer decided that she's an unmoral person, because she was alone."

"Okay, it's not easy with you - no orphanage.....I don't know - a convent?"

In this very moment she bust into tears, she changed, suddenly she was another person.....no longer a thirteen-year-old girl.....

"Yes, an orphanage! A convent! A brothel! She had to work as a prostitute because this man thought she was unmoral!"

"As prostitute! She was thirteen! You're thirteen now, today! What do you wanna tell me?"

"As I would know this....."

Now she was all in tears - and not only she.....

"What does the boy has to do with this?"

"You so naive. She was my ancestor - and the boy....."

"YOU NOT TELL ME NOW, THAT THIS BOY WAS A DESCENDANT OF THIS IMMIGRATION OFFICER - ARE YOU CRAZY!"

"Yes, crazy and a murderer, but no whore....."

"That's insane! You killed him because he was a descendant of this man? Did he knew this?"

"I don't think so....."

"You're totally nuts! We talked about the Japanese, why you not went to Little Tokyo and killed some Japs? Their ancestors did things.....but this boy? Why you not killed me? I have German roots - wow, the Germans! We have killed millions! And I don't not mean the millions who died in a senseless war, a war the Germans began! We gassed handicapped children, we hanged children, we burned them alive, we buried them alive.....and now, what you wanna do with me?"

She shrugged her shoulders.....

"That's a fucking answer!"

I stood up to leave the room.....

"Can you....."

I nearly not heard her, turned around, it was awful to see her....

"Why?"

She only looked at me, now she was only a thirteen-year-old girl, all alone in this world.....

"Why you knew that this boy was an descendant of this immigration officer?"

"I constructed my family tree first. That way I found her and the story of her life - and the immigration officer. Then I constructed his family tree and found him."

"The boy, Steve, but I think you know his name, or?"

She nodded with her head.....

"And you saw that you both were born at the same day? And then? A strange coincident, very strange...."

"And all our lives ended at this age...."

"I've a very bad message for you - your life has just begun, your new life, your life as a murderer - oh, sorry, I've forgotten: At least not as a whore! - I for my side would prefer to be a whore, at least more than to be murderer. I'm so sorry for you, but the boy and his parents - your parents?"

"Do you remember what my grandma has said and what you said about grandmas?"

Universes crashed and exploded in my head - I shrieked, and everything was the same and nothing was alike - a million pictures ripped up my mind and a mellifluous voice sang a million songs at the same time - and time was dead, like everything was dead, as I saw the black endless nothing - in which I looked, looked deep, very, very deep into it.....

It was wonderful to fade away, to become nothing, as if I would had been something before - saw the black swan above me in the sky, or was it heaven, with its wonderful white feathers, and a gorgeous black rose in its tantalizing red beak, surrounded by a million black diamonds, sparkling in the black, dead sun.....

Never I would let her alone, I was her friend, my only friend, the Little Girl, and I asked her:

Why did you do it? It was such a senseless deed.....

She smiled so beautifully and said:

Yes.....

Her honesty was so tender, and I asked her:

Then, why you did it?

Her smile was even more beautiful now, as she said:

Because this life is senseless, because this world is senseless, because everything is senseless.....

Now I felt reassured, and I knew, that I could leave now, everything was said now, everything was done now, everything was fine now, and the ocean washed it away.....

At Home Finally

This time it was extreme, only the fact that we were at a police station, that they had very good first aid equipment, that they were trained, that the hospital was nearby, rescued my life. And maybe - I had a mission now, I was responsible for another person now, another person needed my help and support. Yves was a bit surprised and worried....when he and Elizabeth visited me in the hospital.

"What do you mean with: I've promised it - I not heard, that you said this to her?"

"Later, as we spoke with each other. Sometimes you need no words."

"The grandma that she mentioned?"

"Yes."

"So, you will stand by her side?"

"Yes, I have to...."

"She murdered a thirteen-year-old boy, at his birthday, no good publicity...."

"It was also her thirteenth birthday - she should be not alone."
 "She's a cold blooded murderer, and this time no criminal, this time a young boy."
 "Yes, injustice creates injustice and violence creates violence - always the same shit! It's insane what she did, but.....it was nice to talk with her."
 "Wow, okay, would you do this also, when she would be a he, and he not young and cute?"
 "Yes, when he would had talked with me, while we sit in front of Wonder Bakery, with coffee, tea and cakes."
 "You feel connected to her?"
 "I feel close to her, very close."
 "Okay, some will not understand this, some will...."
 "That's unimportant, she's important. I'm not her judge, we have a court for this, and without any doubt, the verdict will be harsh. She will have no chance - yeah, cute....but, not the all-American cutie. And, what can I do for her? I will visit her in jail, at least, as many years as I - will be able to. More, I cannot do, maybe a cake from Wonder Bakery, but not more."
 "She will like it, when you visit her."
 "I will like it - do you understand me?"
 "I'm not sure. I mean.....yes, I can understand you."
 "Thanks for that - would you give her a letter? I fear, I have to stay a bit longer?"
 "Will be a pleasure for me."

Now I was home again, Yves had asked me whether I would feel guilty, because of that, what had happened – Kishana and her boyfriend? But why I should feel guilty, even after repeated and intense reflection - I had not found any indication, regarding our conversations, which would had implied the coming events. Therefore it was impossible for me to prevent them.

I'd started to visit Minh, she loved it - and I also. Not everybody was happy about it, the boy's family, but that was okay - her family? Her mother began, and the last time also her father was there. He again had a daughter.....

Sure, the Van Nuys job.....but all this, despite that, that some not accepted my behavior, gave me on the other side the reputation, that I was loyal, that I had my attitudes, that I was no opportunist, that I - well, as I opened my office again I get more, much more inquiries than before. That much, that I had severe problems to organize everything. I mean, I should solve cases, not wasting hours with phone calls and paper-warfare. I definitely needed a secretary - but this should be another story.....

The Dream About A Beautiful Queen

Does you see
 The Beautiful Queen
 On her incandescent thoroughbred
 Leading an army of millions
 On their all-devouring black mustangs
 Does you see her

I hope for you
 You never will see her
 The last what you ever will see
 Will she be
 Her beauty undescribed
 No one ever saw her and not died

I saw her once
The whiteness of her horse
And her beauty
Seared my eyes
You ask why I'm not dead
I'm dead - a dead talks to you

You think I'm unhappy
'Cause I'm dead
Happy I'm
'Cause the last thing I saw
Was her beauty
On an incandescent thoroughbred

You're smart
Should describe you her beauty
But you're dumb
Look behind you and see in her eyes
And welcome your death
'Cause I'm her harbinger

I'm the harbinger of death
I'm the servant of a Beautiful Queen
This was my destiny
This is my faith
Till the end of endlessness
Will I be her slave

Author's Note:

One of the inspirations for this story was the exhibition "HERSTORY" about Chinese-American women's history in the USA. I saw this exhibition while visiting the Central Library in Los Angeles during my stay in February 2017. I had in mind, that one wall chart tells a story like the one I tell about Minh's female ancestor. But it seems that I mixed various wall charts. I have found only a few while searching the internet, but the most important. It's: 1874 - Chu Lung vs. Freeman. The text tells the story from twenty-two women who were classified as "lewd", who had to work as prostitutes. It's not said that they were thirteen, no age is given and they are named "women" and not "girls". But because I've written a story and no historic essay I will change nothing. Also it was not uncommon at this time - at this time? - that a girl at this age "worked" as a prostitute.