

The Silent Service

by Bill Lapham

Hong Krushansky sat on a park bench at the mill pond in downtown Smallshirestead. He was leaning forward, his bony elbows digging into his knees. He was causing some discomfort in his legs; he was aware of it, but he didn't care enough to make hurting stop. He intended the pain; rather enjoyed it. He was pinching the skin at the bridge of his nose and swinging his head 'no' in slow motion.

Passersby stared at him. They shook their heads in time with his, like they were commiserating with a dejected fellow human being. Or mentally kicking him in the ass and yelling at him to get to work.

Hong didn't notice them; he noticed the fish in the pond. What were *they* worried about, he wondered: nothing probably. Swim, eat, lay eggs, or fertilize them, repeat. He saw a bass meandering slowly around the lily pads and lake weeds feeding. The fish did not seem to be in a hurry. That much they had in common.

A goose honked overhead, dipped low, featherflaps down, and made a perfect two-point landing on the water. It assumed the 'calm on top, paddling like hell underneath' position of all such waterfowl. Hong was familiar with it. Like a river in winter, its water rushing inexorably toward the sea under a placid sheet of ice and snow. Anxiety masked.

Life was full of such dichotomies, he thought. Like love and pain: one following in the wake of the other. Above the water were tumult, confusion and noise. He heard a train whistle its warning to motorists, a plane, a car horn, a child crying to its mother for ice cream.

Under the water were justice and peace, fluid grace, and order in the absence of chaos. Hong thought, given a choice, which of us would not prefer to live in Santiago's "deep dark water far out beyond all snares and traps and treacheries?"

That was it. Bells chimed. Light bulbs illuminated. He stood, walked across the street, and went in the door marked Navy

Recruiting Office. He told the sailor in the suit he wanted a job in submarines, preferably today.

