

Senior Center

by Jack Swenson

Just as I walk into the dining room, the old Chinese man goes down. He's the fellow who goes into classrooms and sleeps. Somebody told me that when he was younger, he taught at a university.

I kneel by his side. He rolls over on his back, his eyes squeezed shut. I don't know whether he's hurt or embarrassed. "Are you all right?" I ask. He blinks. He sits up. I help him stand. He looks sorrowfully at his coffee cup, which is on the floor.

Others are standing or crouching, half up, half down, by tables with place cards and white tablecloths. Some of the elderly men and women are coming forward. A woman in a white apron marches up. "What happened?" she asked.

I take the old man's arm and lead him to the nearest table. I pull out a chair and he sits down. One of the kitchen workers heads for the office to alert the staff. I look up and see the others shuffling toward us from the back of the room, old men and women, dozens of them, bent, slow moving, jostling each other, pushing. They don't want to miss out on anything. They want to see. They want to know if anyone was hurt. They want to see if there is any blood.

