

Birth of a Tiger

by Larry Strattner

Jin Zhēn lay in the dark waiting. No matter she felt fear, loathing or crawled upon by insects; he would come. Her name referred to a flower. He had called her a flower. She was hardly one; thanks to him.

She knew the moment she arrived home from school. Sleek party dresses were laid out on her Mother's bed; choices to make before dressing for an evening.

"Your father and I are going to dinner with a business associate," her mother said. "Uncle Zhū will be here soon to sit with you. We should not be late."

It depends upon your definition of late, thought Jin Zhēn. You are already too late. Zhū is his nickname because of his squashed nose and piggy eyes. Why no one suspected what lay beneath the porcine eyes Jin Zhēn could not fathom. Why they left him alone with children was beyond her. More than one relative used his services. Probably more than one child as well, she supposed.

Her mother and father went out laughing at some private joke. Uncle Zhū watched them go with one little eye. He kept the other on her budding body. He never stopped looking at her, even when she went to her room to get ready for bed.

He lets me take off my own clothes now, she thought. Why waste effort when I can enable his obsession with fewer preliminaries. She shuddered.

Her bedroom door opened. His shape silhouetted against the dim hall light. She had left the covers down. He was instantly on her,

pulling at her nightgown with one hand and his trousers with the other. She lay unmoving listening to his panting. “Jīng huá.”

Right, she thought, I've got your flower right here.

She lifted the ice pick from Ace Hardware lying beside her, laid her index finger on its point. Found his ear in the dark. Raising her other hand as if helping him to lift her nightgown she held the steel spike steady. She slammed the wooden handle with her palm driving the pick through his ear canal into his brain.

Sudden intake of Uncle's last breath cut the darkness. She wiggled the pick to scramble as much of his brain as possible.

He slumped on her. She pressed a towel on the side of his face to catch any blood. The book about Al Capone quoted him saying the puncture would be clean and not leak much blood. Nevertheless, one could not be too careful.

She pushed him off her and the bed, onto her Winnie the Pooh rug. Al had been correct about very little blood. She drew the ice pick from Uncle's ear; wiped the small bit of bleeding. She was satisfied. Uncle had received what he well deserved.

Winnie the Pooh helped her drag the corpse across polished floors of the house. Out on the patio she rolled Uncle off the rug with his face in the koi pool. The ice pick handle broke a pane of glass next to the deadbolt inside the French patio door. Her hand wrapped in the towel was not touched by broken shards sprinkled into the house.

She wiped the shaft and handle of the pick. Grasped the shaft with the towel and flipped it far out into the backyard; discarded by a fleeing intruder. Done. She went back into the house and returned to bed.

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The following day an evidence technician found the ice pick in the yard. They took a closer look at uncle and found the hole in his ear. They agreed a strong assailant must have grappled with him to kill him in so close. They pared uncle's fingernails, swabbed his mouth scanned for threads and particles on his clothes. No further evidence was discovered.

Grown from these seeds sown her name became appropriate; Tiger Lily.

