

Lovers
&
Comrades

ROBERT BLAIR OSBORN

Lovers & Comrades

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This book is dedicated to Clay, whose life ended too soon.

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Foreword

To write this book, I relied upon personal accounts, official testimony, oral history, biographies, and monographs. While the main characters of the story are fictional, they are based on real people. Any misrepresentation or omission of historical events is mine alone.

"Lovers & Comrades" draws upon several periods in the twentieth century. The story jumps around in time and refers to period-specific events, people and items. I have provided a list of characters, a timeline, and a glossary to help the reader in this regard. Highlighted words appear in the glossary at the end of the book.

Also, a few words about romanization. The Wade-Giles system of romanization was used widely before 1949. For historical reasons, I still use Wade-Giles for Chinese words that appear in settings before 1949. I use the other major system of romanization, Pinyin, for words that appear in settings after 1949. The major exception is "Ai-ling," which in Pinyin is written, "Ailing."

List of Characters

Lisa - Hong Kong born Chinese American. In the present day, she works in the pharmaceutical industry and travels frequently to China and Japan.

Quentin - retired foreign service officer paralyzed by a major stroke. Fired by the State Department in 1951 for aiding a Communist government. Former lover of Ai-ling and Marisa.

Ai-ling - interpreter for Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party during the War. In 1949, she escapes to Taiwan with the Nationalists. Quentin's former lover.

Professor Mathieson - Professor Emeritus of modern Chinese history at U.C. Berkeley, and Quentin's former boss.

Marisa - former secretary of Quentin's at Hancock Oil and Gas in Rio de Janeiro. Later becomes an executive at Chevron in California.

Tak - second generation Japanese American, retired professor of Chinese history at Sacramento State, former officer in Army Intelligence. Served with Quentin in Taoyuan, China.

Matsuda - former Japanese prisoner of war in Taoyuan. Later, becomes well-known labor organizer and AIDS activist in Japan. Reputed father of Ai-ling's son.

Nationalists (also, "K.M.T.," or "Kuomintang") - until 1979, the only Chinese government recognized officially by the United States before, during, and after World War II. The Nationalists were led by Chiang Kai-shek.

Communists (also, "C.C.P.," or "Chinese Communist Party") - fought against the Nationalists for control of China, and ultimately succeeded in 1949. Led by Chairman Mao Tse-tung.

Timeline

1909 - John Quentin Liege ("Quentin") is born in Peking (Beijing), China. He is the fifth of five boys.

1932 - Britka and Quentin meet at U.C. Berkeley.

1936 - Britka and Quentin marry in Berkeley after graduating. They move to Shanghai. Quentin gets a job at an import export company.

1937 - Quentin is hired by the State Department. He and Britka move to Peking.

1939-1945 - Quentin and Britka move to Chungking. Quentin begins work at the American Embassy.

1944 - Quentin is assigned to PAX Mission in Taoyuan. Britka is evacuated from Chungking. She ends up in San Francisco.

1945 - Quentin is recalled to Washington, D.C. Before he leaves, he meets Ai-ling one last time in Shanghai. She is pregnant.

1951 - Loyalty Research Board investigates Quentin's dealings with the Chinese Communists. State Department fires him.

1956-58 - Quentin and Britka move to Rio de Janeiro. Quentin gets a job working for an American oil company. He has an affair with his secretary.

1958 - Back in the U.S., Quentin gets a job at U.C. Berkeley.

Mid-1980s - Quentin retires from U.C. Berkeley.

February 1989 - Britka dies.

May 1989 - Ai-ling reappears after a 44-year absence to see Quentin again.

June 1989 - Quentin suffers a stroke that leaves him unable to move or talk. In Beijing, thousands of protesters die as the People's Liberation Army retakes Tiananmen Square.

October 1989 - Quentin dies at St. Matthews Senior Care in Albany, California.

Lao Du

Until 1979, my father hated Mao Zedong. He had been a card-carrying member of the Chinese Communist Party in his youth back in China, but a series of events changed that. When I was in high school, we were living in Oakland, California. My father told me one night, after my mother and sister had gone to bed, that my mother had a miscarriage back in China. He called it "Blue baby sickness." It was what happened when pregnant mothers didn't get enough protein. The history books referred to that period as the Great Famine, and it continued for another couple years. Left with nothing to eat but tree bark and insects, half my father's village died of hunger.

My father left his village and was caught by the authorities. He was sentenced to work in a labor reeducation camp forty miles away. That was where he met my mother. They got married, and my father told her how he had found a shortwave radio and was secretly listening to the **Voice of America**.

That was how my father learned English. He heard about Kennedy winning the presidency and Wilma Rudolph winning three gold medals at the Summer Olympic Games in Rome. He knew that life outside China was very different, and that Chinese news, which was controlled by the Communist Party, was full of lies.

My parents decided to run away together. They hid under seats in a bus leaving town and bribed their way onto a boat going to Macau. From there, they went to Hong Kong and found an apartment in the New Territories.

My parents became anticommunist. When I was four, we emigrated to the U.S., and my sister and I went to Saturday school in Oakland Chinatown, where we learned Mandarin Chinese.

Prominently displayed over the front of the classroom, behind the teacher's podium, was an oversized portrait of **Chiang Kai-shek**, President of the Republic of China. The school forced us to sing the Chinese Nationalist anthem before class began. My sister complied, but I refused and got expelled at age six. My father felt a deep sense of shame.

By 1979, however, my father changed his mind about Communist China. **Deng Xiaoping** visited the U.S., and President Carter established diplomatic ties with the People's Republic. My father started taking flights every year through Hong Kong, back to China, to visit relatives.

My mother, however, never went back to China.

My own feelings were complicated. Growing up in the United States during the Cold War, I knew there were two Chinas: "Red China" (The People's Republic of China) and "Free China" (The Republic of China). Red China was opening up to the West, and I was inclined to think more favorably about my parents' relatives back on the mainland. Unfortunately, a series of events changed that.

In the fall of 1987, I went to the People's Republic of China to study intensive Mandarin at **Beijing** University. There, I saw firsthand the seeds of discontent that fueled the Tiananmen protests a year and a half later. There were handwritten posters pasted to the sides of buildings with the names of Communist Party officials accused of giving plum government jobs to their relatives. Meanwhile, Beijing University graduates were being assigned crappy jobs in remote provinces like Gansu or Anhui.

Chinese students at Beijing University lived six to a room and had hot water every other day. There was zero privacy, so they sneaked off to the campus lake and hid behind the bushes to make love. The dances were policed by school officials and were thoroughly depressing.

Meanwhile, just outside the school walls, ordinary people were starting bicycle repair shops, selling magazines, cigarettes and

food. Some even went high-tech and started selling computers. In the downtown area, you could exchange American dollars for Chinese renminbi with gray market clothing dealers at double the official exchange rate.

It was widely known that bicycle repairmen were making four to five times what university professors made, and many students started questioning the value of a college education, especially when all the good jobs were going to the sons and daughters of Communist Party officials. Student groups formed and began protesting in front of the Communist Party headquarters, but the police shut them down.

After I returned to Berkeley in the summer of 1988, the fervor in Beijing seemed to die. Beijing summers are very hot and sticky. Evening temperatures drop only slightly. I thought maybe the extreme weather doused the revolutionary fire, but I was wrong.

The next spring, students protested again, only this time it was more political. **Hu Yaobang**, the more empathetic of the two chosen successors to Deng Xiaoping, died, and the students demanded a reassessment of his political record. They also raised the same grievances about nepotism and economic inequality. Deng Xiaoping had initiated economic reforms that threatened the traditional "iron rice bowl" of guaranteed employment, but he avoided any political reforms. More and more groups joined the student protests, and the political situation in Tiananmen Square quickly got out of hand.

On June 4, the **People's Liberation Army** went into Tiananmen Square and opened fire on thousands of protesters. The day after, a long convoy of tanks started down the main thoroughfare next to Tiananmen Square. A solitary figure walked out into the middle of the street and stood in the path of the oncoming tanks. The image is seared in my mind from watching it on television. The man wore a white, button-down shirt and black pants, and he held two plastic bags in his hand. The lead tank stopped and then pivoted to the left to go around the man, but he

shuffled sideways to stay directly in front of the tank. Then, he climbed onto the front of the tank and started pleading with the tank driver.

Tiananmen was for me what the **J.F.K.** assassination was for my parents' generation, and Tank Man's defiance, bravery, and charity resonated with me.

Twenty-six years later, Beijing is almost unrecognizable, except for Tiananmen Square and the buildings surrounding it. Few Chinese will openly talk about what happened, or how many people died. If you visit China and do a web search from your hotel room, or from any computer, you won't find anything about Tank Man or the student protests, because the government blocks it.

Much has changed since 1989. I'm married, I have two kids in private school, I make two car payments, and I live in a house with a market value that is less than what my husband and I paid. I'm a very practical person, but as I get older, the passage of time reminds me that life is short: friends move away, relatives die, history fades.

The one thing that still bothers me whenever I think back to that time is what happened while I was working as a student intern at a retirement home in Albany, California.

I had just graduated from U.C. Berkeley, and I got a paid internship at St. Matthews Senior Care, which was located just north of Berkeley. Most of the residents at St. Matthews were either comatose or delusional, and had to be medicated regularly. St. Matthews was where senior citizens went to die.

I was living in a studio apartment in Lake Merritt in Oakland with another Chinese American girl who was in her last year at Berkeley. She spent most of her time studying at cafes with her organic chemistry study group. They drank mochas and talked about valence bonds.

I had no aspirations to go into health care. I landed the job at St. Matthews through a friend of my mother's, who owned a

chain of Cantonese-style take out restaurants, and had recently bought St. Matthews as a place to stash his ninety-five year old mother.

My job was to clean bed pans, pick up laundry, and do whatever else the nurses asked me to do. Grunt work was reserved for people like me, because it was cheaper than paying nurse union wages.

I worked four days a week. I had twenty-five residents to look after during my four-hour shift. On good days, the rooms smelled like Pine Sol; on bad days, they smelled like urine.

There were eight nurses on the day shift. Three were Filipino. They did most of the work. The other five non-Filipino nurses showed up for work and did very little. If the weather was good, the nurses wheeled residents out to the garden so they could get some sunshine. If it was raining, the nurses wheeled the residents into the movie room and popped in a VHS tape of "My Three Sons" or "Mayberry RFD." The nurses, meanwhile, were hooked on "Jeopardy" and "The Price Is Right."

I had been at St. Matthews only two weeks when Mr. Liege arrived.

An ambulance brought him from Alta Monte Hospital. One of the Filipino nurses said that Mr. Liege had suffered a stroke and had recently emerged from a coma. A doctor came by on the second day and said that Mr. Liege was paralyzed everywhere but his eyes. He couldn't speak or move.

The doctor introduced himself as "Dr. Merkel." He said it was too early to say how much damage had been done to Mr. Liege's brain, but his outlook wasn't good.

"Some patients experience partial recovery," Dr. Merkel said. "They find ways to communicate. The hardest thing about this is his brain could be working just fine, but he's trapped. His body can't interact with the world around him. If he is going to recover, the speed of the recovery will be a strong indicator for his medium to long-term survival."

According to the chart, his full name was "John Quentin Liege." He was seventy-nine years old. He was born in Beijing, China, on July 2, 1909. His wife was deceased. No next of kin.

Mr. Liege had a breathing tube taped to the bottom of his throat and feeding tube coming out of his mouth. He was unable to swallow. A catheter drained his urine. A bedpan was sandwiched between his legs. A nurse showed me how to adjust the pillows around him every hour or so to keep him from getting bedsores.

*I am at the air base in **Chungking** writing a letter to Britka. Then, I am climbing into a twin engine **C-47**, strapping on an oxygen mask. The pilot says, "Hang on, it's raining; there's no telling how windy it is up there." We take off due east, for the Himalayas. Then, we bank north, toward **Sian**. Many planes have crashed here. Some are shot down by Japs; others catch fire from the engines overheating. The ground beneath us is littered with frozen bodies, ammo crates, and **C-rations**.*

8-23-44 (Wed) Chungking

Taoyuan has a reputation for fresh, edible produce. Apparently, it is the only place in China where they do not use human waste for fertilizer. In Chungking, we've been fortunate to have fresh tomatoes and raw cabbage flown in weekly from Taoyuan.

We took off from an airstrip several miles outside of Chungking. Once we were airborne, we banked north, heading in the direction of Sian. We passed over shiny green farmlands and small houses that eventually gave way to black and white jagged mountains and steep gorges. We climbed higher, and I could see the immense Himalayas to the west. It reminded me of the hair-raising trip over the **Hump** the day before.

I wore ear protection to drown out the head-splitting drone of the engines. After an hour or so, I fell asleep on a box of toilet paper. When I woke up, I looked at my watch and over three and a half hours had gone by since takeoff. I looked out the window and the ground had changed to dull gray and brown. We were following a small valley, and I saw a pagoda on top of a hill surrounded by small caves.

The plane started descending and we touched down at 15:25 on a tiny airstrip next to the cemetery. As we were finishing our taxi, the right landing gear dropped suddenly. There was a horrible sound from the right engine as it came to a halt.

“We hit a ditch,” the pilot yelled from the cockpit. I looked out from the small window behind the cockpit: impossible to see anything. The whole plane pitched now slightly to the right.

“We’re not getting out of here anytime soon,” the co-pilot said as he pulled off his headset. He worked his way past me down to the back of the plane and turned the handle to open the cargo door. He dropped the step ladder.

I stood up, leaned against the fuselage and walked over to the open door. Sure enough, the right engine’s propeller was buried one foot deep in the ground.

The flight engineer went down first and I followed. We walked over to the propeller buried in the dirt. The air smelled dry and sandy.

In the distance, I saw two camels and an ox-cart coming in our direction. There were three peasants walking with them.

The pilot came down the stairs.

“I’ll be a horse’s ass,” he said. “I’ve landed here five times and this has never happened.”

“We’ll have to radio for parts,” the flight engineer said.

“Maybe not. Let’s see if we can dig it out,” the pilot said.

The co-pilot joined us under the right wing. “We might have thrown a master rod, possibly a bearing.”

“Well, first order of business is to get us out of that ditch,” the pilot said as he turned his attention to the greeting party coming our way. “We’ll have to see if we can get some coolies to help us.”

The peasants stopped ten feet from us.

“*Hwanying, hwanying,*” said one of them with toothless grin. He wore a green cap and faded, button down coat and loose fitting pants.

The peasants took my duffel bag and loaded it onto the saddle of one of the camels. They put the pilot and co-pilot’s bags on the other camel.

The landing strip was on a hill, and the ride down was bumpy with potholes and protruding pieces of granite on the road to town. I saw a group of people in the distance gathered around someone standing on a box talking to them. Further away, peasants with hats and scarves covering their heads were bent over in fields harvesting rice.

When the oxcart arrived in the town, a small group emerged from one of the cave-based dwellings built into the side of the hill. Two young ladies in their twenties stepped out in front. The one on the left was wearing round spectacles and had her hair pulled back in pigtails.

“*Hwanying,*” she said, “Welcome!”

The other had shoulder-length hair held back with barrettes.

“*Wo shih sun aimei,*” the one in pigtails said, “I’m Sun Ai-mei.”

“*Wo shih sun ailing,*” the other one said, “My name is Sun Ailing.”

I introduced myself. They looked like sisters. I asked them, and the one in pigtails said they were not related to each other.

A week after Mr. Liege arrived, he had a visitor. She was Chinese and looked to be in her late sixties. She had dyed, brown hair permed in short curls and wore bifocals with plastic brown

frames. Her handbag had the Chinese character for "peace" embroidered on it.

I asked her how she knew Mr. Liege, and she said they were old friends. She spoke English with an accent that reminded me of my Auntie Lim from Hong Kong, who lived alone in a one bedroom walkup and served tea in imitation Wedgwood China.

I told her my name was Lisa.

She asked if I was Chinese.

"Yes, Chinese American," I said.

She asked my Chinese name.

I told her it meant, "Little deer." I told her how my parents came to California from China.

"It's nice to meet you," she said. She reached out her hand out to shake mine. "My name is Zhang. Zhang Ai-ling."

She put down her handbag and came around to face Mr. Liege. She looked in his eyes.

"You know, we had tea together just the other week," she said to me while looking at him. "His wife, Britka, passed away last year. I recently moved back to the States from Taiwan and paid him a visit. He showed me an album from his recent trip to Brazil. He said it had been over thirty years since he had lived there. We agreed to meet again the following week. When I did come by, there was no answer at the door. I went around back and tried the pantry door, which was open. I went inside and found him on the kitchen floor, still breathing. I called 911 and stayed with him until the ambulance came."

"The doctor said it's possible he suffered memory loss," I said.

She turned her gaze back to Mr. Liege and looked into his eyes. "*Lao du, ni jide ma?*" she said in Mandarin, *Do you remember?*

Mr. Liege stared at her, his eyes blinking naturally. There was no movement around his cheeks or mouth.

She opened her handbag and pulled out a wrinkled black and white photograph with a group of men kneeling side by side a

young woman in calf-length pants and short pigtailed standing in the middle. In the background was a cave entrance.

“Is that you?” I asked her.

“*Shi de*” she said, nodding her head.

She held it up to Mr. Liege so he could see it.

Of course I remember that photograph, Ai-ling. It's from Taoyuan. You still have that smile of yours. Cheeks still rosy like a red delicious apple.

I moved in closer to see if Mr. Liege reacted in any way to her. His eyes darted to the television on the wall. CNN was showing a wrap-up of the events in China in the weeks since Tiananmen. They included the clip of Tank Man standing in front of the convoy.

A man is standing in the center of Chang'An Avenue, holding up his arm. He's holding a plastic bag and swinging it over his head. He's standing in front of a long line of army tanks. The tanks can't get past him. I am there with him, standing before tanks.

“Turn it off!” she yelled at me. “He doesn’t need to see that.”

Surprised by her outburst, I grabbed the remote control and pressed the "off" button, and the screen went dark. I returned to Mr. Liege’s bedside. I asked her if Mr. Liege was in the photograph.

She pointed to a tall, skinny man with a crew cut standing in the back.

“That's him,” she said.

His face had a pained look, whereas the other men were smiling.

I asked her where the picture was taken.

“Taoyuan, 1945,” she said.

I knew that Taoyuan had been the Communist Party's base of operations during World War II. It was incredibly remote,

thousands of miles from the coast, in a high desert plateau region where few people lived. The U.S. Army sent a team of American military observers to Taoyuan to observe the **Communists** and help them recover downed American pilots.

“Were you there?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said, and she pointed to the young woman in the picture. “He was a political advisor for the State Department. I was one of Mao's interpreters.”

There's the old Chinese myth about the fisherman who ventured up a stream and came upon a blossoming peach grove. He followed the trees up to the water source and came upon a cave next to a high cliff. He thought he could see light through the cave, so he got out of his boat and climbed inside. The cave became very narrow, but eventually the fisherman made it to the opening. He came out of the cave to find a beautiful village with cottages arranged neatly in a row. Men, women and children were happily working in the fields and were surprised to see the fisherman. They invited him to their homes and slaughtered a chicken in his honor. They gave him wine and asked him about his home. When he asked them the same questions, he learned that the ancestors of people in the village had all fled from wars over a thousand years before. Since that time, they had lost all contact with the outside world.

Eventually, the fisherman had to return home, but before he did, the villagers made him promise to not tell anyone else about their whereabouts. Of course, once the fisherman returned home, he told people about the village. He even left markers so that he would be able to find the place again. Nevertheless, when he took a group back to the peach grove, the markers weren't in order, and the group got lost. After that, nobody tried to find the hidden village.

8-23-44 19:30 Taoyuan

The other men here are all **G.I.s** (26 total) and are all part of “PAX Team” and led by Chinese-speaking Colonel Hathaway. Colonel comes from farm in Goleta, California. Like me, Colonel Hathaway was born in China to missionary parents, but he returned to California for high school.

Our first dinner was a real “to do.” **Chou En-lai** and other leaders treated us to fabulous welcoming ceremony in meeting hall. After the meal, General **Chu Teh** kicked off the dancing in the *yan-ke* style common to northern **Shensi** and bounded about like a drunk Russian Cossack and then everyone joined in. Chinese ladies from local language schools danced with us and wanted to practice their English.

Taoyuan is about as remote as you can get. Take a globe, spin it slowly westward from the shores of San Francisco, across the Pacific, past Japanese island of Kyushu, over to China. Spin a little more, slowly this time, inland across the same latitude, and stop in the center of China. You find an area called “Shensi.” From there, inch up little northward and right between the confluence of two rivers coming down from Huan Mountain lies the village of Taoyuan.

The town’s name, “*Tao*,” meaning “peach,” and “*yuan*” meaning “river source,” comes from the ancient poem by Tao Yuanming about a fisherman who stumbled by accident upon utopia. The people in the poem fled from war during the Qin Dynasty, around 220 B.C., and since that time had lost all contact with the outside world. That certainly is not the case here. There’s radio contact all over China from here.

Nearly all the buildings in town were destroyed by Japanese bombers a few years ago. So, to make due, the Communists built caves into the sides of mountains and moved there. Everyone lives in them.

I asked Ai-ling how she and Mr. Liege met.

“Lao Du came to Taoyuan...” she began.

“I’m sorry...Why do you call him *Lao Du*?” I asked.

“Lao Du -- it is his Chinese name. I don’t know how he got it. ‘Lao,’ as you know, means ‘old,’ and ‘du,’ means ‘capital.’ I think he got it when he was a schoolboy in **Peking**. Lao Du and I met in August of 1944. He came with a group of U.S. Army officers. It was called the “PAX Mission.”

“Was Mr. Liege in the Army?”

“He was assigned to the Army by the U.S. Embassy, so technically, no. When he came to Taoyuan, he had separated from Britka. She had been evacuated from Chungking because of the air raids.

August 23, 1944

Dear Portia,

I’m sorry for not writing sooner. On the eve of my departure from Chungking, I suddenly realized I hadn’t written in almost a year. Quentin and I have split up. He is off on a new adventure to the Chinese hinterland. I am being evacuated.

As you know, we moved to Chungking in the early spring of '39, after Quentin was offered a position here with the embassy. Chungking is the quintessential "Plan B" sort of capital. The Chinese refer to it as one of the three "furnaces," because in summertime you can boil an iceberg. You thought Charlotte, N. Car. was bad. The air sucks energy out of your skin's pores, and, if it ain't violent hot (summer), it's bone-broke cold (winter). I can't think of any place that has fewer days of sunshine. Seattle, which

I've read is the rain capital of America, can't compare. The only silver lining is that the cloudy skies and fog keep the Japs away.

The locals here are loony. Not a week after the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor, the Chinese went bananas, shooting off fireworks and making toasts to each other. We're on the same side as the Chinese, which was why I was confused. My driver explained that they were celebrating the fact that we Americans were going to enter the war. The Japs had been bombing this city with impunity. The Chinese are convinced that this is their moment. The Americans were going to take care of everything!

So much for wishful thinking. Delusional is more like it.

I don't think I can stand another summer of air raids. Last summer was the worst. Sirens daily. Bombers came in waves of five, ten, sometimes twenty planes, with long periods of quiet in between. The unpredictability made it impossible to leave the shelters. I brought books and magazines with me, but words just passed across my eyes. Quentin used a shelter near the embassy. He said that he brought his typewriter and files with him. I wonder how much work he got done?

My life here is through. I married Quentin knowing that life here was going to be hard. Exotic location, new experiences -- those were draws for sure.

Peking was the best. The Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace. **Yunnan**, on the other hand, was a distant second, but even there we were able to travel and see the giant Buddha at **Le-shan** and the caves at **Hsi-shuang Ba-na**. Then, we come to this hellhole.

Exhibit one: the *Good Housekeeping* bunch at the American Club. Like mercury poisoning, I reached my lifetime limit of tennis court gossip -- whose husband was sleeping with his secretary, et cetera. I don't give a damn. If you're unhappy, take matters into your own hands, is what I say. Complaining about it doesn't fix it.

I've learned to counteract the drudgery with little things. Putting sweet jasmine flowers in my morning tea, or watching the mist rise off the Yangtze. However, these are just short-lived mind excursions. I practice French with the bartender at the brasserie near the French embassy. With **de Gaulle** in exile in London, the French here are stateless.

Do you remember how we used to speak French to each other because there weren't any French people to be found for a hundred miles?

Quentin used to be around more, and that made life somewhat bearable. In Peking, he came home around five in the afternoon from a full day of language classes, and we drank white wine in the courtyard of the little four cornered house. It wasn't fancy wine, it was whatever we could coax out of the Belgian military attaché who lived next door. Occasionally he came upon real champagne. That was always a treat.

Back then, we really talked to each other. We talked about Amelia Earhart, the Oklahoma dust storm, and the **W.P.A.**

Now, it's "Hi" and jump into the sack. You know the routine.

I would write more, but I think I need to get some sleep. I have something very important to tell you, but it will have to wait.

Yours,
Britka

Ai-ling looked at her wristwatch. She closed her purse and stood up. "I must go now. I look forward to chatting with you again," she said.

Mr. Liege was dozing now.

"Maybe you could come over for tea," she said. "I have more pictures from Taoyuan to show you."

She opened up her purse and pulled out a business card. "Call me tomorrow and we can set something up." She handed me the

card. "Don't hesitate to call me sooner if Lao Du's condition changes in any way." She smiled at me in a sort of wince and said goodbye.

The next day, Dr. Merkel came in with a stack of plastic cards, each with a letter on it. He placed the cards on a table next to the bed. An assistant came in rolling a cart holding a Commodore Amiga computer.

"Mr. Liege, I don't know if you can understand me," Dr. Merkel said. "You have suffered a stroke. From the tests we've run, it appears that there has been extensive damage to your sympathetic nervous system. This means that your body's organs are functioning normally, but you can't feel or move anything. Some patients in your condition are able to partially recover to where they are able to eat food through their mouth. Some are even able to communicate. It takes time. The brain has to heal first. I want to see if you are able to communicate with me with your eyes. First, will you try to move your eyes up and down?"

Mr. Liege's eyes blinked, but there was no movement.

"Okay, it might be kind of hard, so let's try again. Please move your eyes up and down for me."

Again, no movement. Only blinking.

"Okay. Let's try something different. We're going to try a blinking exercise, okay?"

One blink means "YES," and two blinks means "NO." Do you understand me?"

Mr. Liege stared at Dr. Merkel. His eyes blinked, and blinked again. It was impossible to tell if he blinked intentionally or if his eyes were just blinking because they had to.

Dr. Merkel told me that recovery of horizontal eye movement within the first four weeks of trauma was a good sign. After that, speech and swallowing sometimes followed. Some patients even regained partial limb movement.

"I brought along a device that works through a computer that lets you write words using your finger and a touchpad," Dr.

Merkel said to Mr. Liege. He motioned for the assistant to roll the computer terminal over next to Mr. Liege's bed. Next to the terminal was a modem with rubber cups for the receiver.

He asked the assistant to set it up.

The assistant plugged in the power cord and pressed the "on" button. While the computer booted up, he walked over to the telephone in the room and uncoiled the cord connecting it to the wall. He put the phone down next to the modem.

The screen had a blinking cursor. The assistant began typing on the keyboard.

"I don't expect you to be able to do this today," Dr. Merkel said, "but I wanted to show it to you. It may be something you will be able to use in the future."

Dr. Merkel left the room, leaving only the assistant and me.

The assistant lifted the telephone handset out of the cradle and pressed it into the modem cups. He went back to the keyboard and typed in a telephone number. That triggered the sound of a telephone dialing, followed by a long beep, then the sound of white noise.

Just then, Mr. Liege's eyes started blinking wildly and his heart rate jumped to a hundred forty beats per minute. An alarm emitted from the monitor.

"What's going on?" I asked in alarm.

"Hold on," the assistant yelled. He went over to the wall and hit the emergency button. "Wait here while I get Dr. Merkel," he said, and he ran out of the room.

A nurse appeared immediately. "What happened?" she said. She looked at the heart rate monitor and then looked at Mr. Liege's eyes.

It was an eerie feeling, like he was possessed by a demon.

"I'll get Dr. Merkel," the nurse said. She ran out of the room.

Dr. Merkel came in about thirty-seconds later. He leaned out of the door and yelled, "Get me 10 milligrams of diazepam!" He