HOMEWARD

"Stop squirming, Dori. *Please*!" That exasperated tone. She was trying, really, to please her annoyed mother, but the hot seat was cracked and pinched at Dori's legs. Carefully she scooped her hands beneath her bottom as if to straighten her dress, but she couldn't help wincing when her fingers pressed down and pried the skin on her thighs free from the plastic seat. This did not escape her mother, who turned away and gave a small shake of the head. "For goodness sake, you're almost ten years old. Act like it." Her father, chatting with the *tuktuk* driver as they bounced over the rutty road into Siem Reap, didn't notice their secret exchange.

Dori straightened and stared at the sweat on the back of the driver's blue and gray checked shirt. The dark spot looked like a horse's head, but as she watched it began to spread longer and wider until it reminded her of a very fat moth, the kind that battered against the window screens at night.

The cart springs squeaked as they came to a stop, and the motorbike engine belched one last gasoline burp into the dust.

The driver spat on the road through his stained teeth as he took the fare from her father, who returned his wallet to his trouser pocket, whispered into her mother's cheek, gave her a kiss, and glanced at his watch. "Meet you at 3 o'clock," he said. He was wearing a suit.

The motor started up again with a shudder, ticking the way Dori's bike did when she and her father put cards between the wheel spokes. The driver proudly blared his transistor radio: "They caw me mana-nana," he wailed to the music, "Caw me mana-nana." He grinned and looked over his shoulder at them. "Donovan-singer," he smiled. "You know Donovan?"

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The marketplace at Siem Reap where the driver dropped them off swarmed with people, animals, flies, and greedy crows who stubbornly prodded at scraps of dough in the dirt even though a woman with a baby on her back kept shooing them away with a straggly broom. Why they had to visit another market, gritty and brown and packed with sweaty, jostling bodies completely mystified Dori, but her mother had insisted. It was their last stop before heading for the United States, for good this time, and her mother was bent on photographing everything they were leaving so they could sit in the dark in a new living room in Washington and see the places they'd lived and the people they'd met projected onto the wall, a way to remember the world they'd left, clicking one by one through the slide carousel. Some of the photos became black and white pictures for things her father wrote. "Everything here," her father told her, "is going to change."

When her mother pressed the camera to her face and focused its dark, bottomless eye Dori lost her to the world in front of the lens. As if she wasn't there, Dori thought as she trailed her mother, fingering the buttons on the front of her dress. Her grandmother had mailed this dress for her last birthday, folded in a cloud of white tissue paper in a big box labeled "First Class International Airmail" and addressed to Miss Dolores Colton, c/o U.S. Embassy, Singapore.

Dori followed the crickety *tchk-tchk-tchk* of the camera, passing the lady with sweaty hair pulling steaming *bao* from her basket, past a clump of women in batik skirts and their children squatting over piles of dark beans, a tiny shop selling carved beads and good luck charms. She stopped at a stall to try on a tangle of brass bracelets. A pack of men pushed through, handing

out flyers. The bracelet vendor, an old man with a clean-shaven, big face, shooed them away. "Communists," he snorted.

A sharp burst of whistles shrieked, and the men scattered like startled birds. The bean-sorting women whisked up their skirts as a pair of soldiers ran through, scattering the crowd and kicking up swirls of powdery earth as they disappeared down the straggly path between shops.

Shouts and the soldiers' mechanical clanking faded until Dori could hear the tinkling ox bells in the distance. Gradually the gauzy air settled and re-filled with the chatter of vendors and customers haggling, but Dori had lost the *tchk-tchk* sound. She whirled around: bright silk scarves fluttered, chickens squawked and clawed the dirt, a group of boys kicked a blue ball with their dusty feet. But no mother.

She pushed through the stalls, trying to retrace her steps. "Mother! Mother?" Her voice felt thin and rough.

A breeze from the river brushed Dori's skin, and she realized she had run in the wrong direction, toward the edge of the market. She turned back into the throng of stalls and saw her. Her mother was talking with two police officers or army men – they wore white and dark blue uniforms – and they were holding her open camera.

"Mother!" She rushed up to them and her mother's face froze: her eyebrows lurched together; she tightened her open mouth as if she was surprised. Or a little angry. She grabbed her camera from the men and steered Dori away by the elbow. "When we get separated, I've told you, you need to stay put. If you wander around, I may not find you. Stay exactly where you are next time. Do you understand?"

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Her father climbed into the *tuktuk*, his jacket folded on his arm and a newspaper in his other hand. "Disastrous. Dr. King, now this," he said as he handed the paper across the seat. Her mother's eyes went tight as she scanned the headlines. Dori watched as the look shifted to a glazed, fuzzy stare she recognized when her mother was looking right through her, looking at nothing. Slowly, her mother leaned her head into her husband's neck and he stroked her back gently. No one spoke on the ride to the hotel. Dori focused on her mother's arm resting between them: light, freckled, dropped over the newspaper that lay in her lap. The fat black ink of the massive headline just said "RFK SHOT."

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The Angkor Palace Hotel's restaurant was almost empty that evening. It was like being in church with a plate of spaghetti: her parents talked so softly Dori could hardly hear them over the purr of the fan blades turning above and the scrape of forks against plates.

"Sometimes I think I'd feel more comfortable staying here than going back to the States," her mother snorted.

Her father startled and took her hand. "Maggie…"

"What, rioting, hippies, protests? Boys are burning draft cards and the Negroes are being flattened by fire-hoses – or worse."

"Come here, Dori-doll." Her father pulled her chair close and turned to her with a quiet smile. "I need to head up the coast for a meeting tomorrow, so it looks like you and Mother will have to go to Angkor Wat without me. But I'll meet you two at the airport the next day, and then we'll have the whole summer to explore. How would you like to go out to Chincoteague Island and see the wild ponies, like in your book? We can go out with Uncle Cal and your cousins on the boat."

"Mr. Colton?" The waiter wore a crisp white vest over his starched shirt. Her father took the folded paper he held, scanned it, handed it to her mother.

"Your photos. They'll bring them to the hotel in the morning." Her mother didn't look very satisfied.

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She could hear them in the other room while she brushed her teeth, their voices murmuring like the water from the faucet. Something about the men who took her film, then a swirl of questions… why did he need to go to Snookville? …couldn't they have…? and her father, calmly…the last thing… a good source …just to follow through…

Dori was in her blue cotton nightgown when her father came in to tuck her in and say goodnight.

"We can go with you, Daddy. We can all go to Snookville."

He laughed. "Sihanoukville, sweetheart. You would be so bored, it's just another ugly city – lots of traffic, trucks, ships, all coughing up smelly exhaust. Believe me, I wish I could go with *you* tomorrow."

"I don't need to go to another stupid temple." She'd seen plenty already, Thai temples that glittered golden like royal crowns, the enormous bronze bells of the temples in Taiwan. Temples with statues of Buddha or deities, carvings of women dancing with their breasts showing and their hands curved backward like mango leaves. They were stone or wood and smelled of incense and always had too many steps. So why, if she'd already seen loads of temples, did she have to go tomorrow instead of going with her father? She could swim in the hotel pool while he worked.

"Angkor isn't just a temple, honey – it's a whole kingdom, fought over like treasure for thousands of years. Finally it was destroyed and swallowed up by the jungle until the French came and found it. It's like discovering the pyramids in Egypt, Dori-doll, and your mother doesn't want to leave without seeing it."

"Daddy? Are you going to Vietnam?"

"What? No sweetheart, I told you, I'm going up the coast, and the next day we're flying home. We're all going home."

He shut the door behind him and she nestled into the cool pillow. Home. She'd visited home when she was five years old, stayed in her grandmother's white and yellow house. She could remember eating fried chicken on the porch with her two uncles, stroking the soft ears of their pet dog, the swooping feeling in her stomach as her uncles pushed her higher and higher in the tire swing. She remembered the airport, saying goodbye, how her grandmother's lips left a heart-shaped stain on her mother's cheek.

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It was the same driver as the day before, in the same shirt, but someone had washed it and pressed neat creases that ran from his shoulders to the end of the sleeves above his ropy forearms. He held a pale yellow envelope in his hands. "For you, Missus," he said, looking very proud. Her mother pulled out the pictures, rifling through them like cards. "Where are the others? There are more," she asked him.

He shrugged. "No, Missus, this is what they give me." He started the motorbike's engine with a thrust of his leg, and the radio blared to life.

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They walked over the moat, its drab brown water studded with blue-eyed water lilies and rotting leaves. The afternoon sun hung over the towers ahead, making her squint. Dori skipped to keep up, stepping through the sharp shadow her mother cast behind her on the long stone walkway leading to the temple. She'd been counting the columns along the edge. One hundred and twenty seven, one hundred and twenty eight…

"Angkor Wat is supposed to represent heaven on earth," her mother was saying. "They say whoever was privileged enough to cross this Rainbow Bridge and pass through the archway would enter heaven itself." Dori looked around but saw no rainbow at all.

After a long time – Dori gave up counting at two hundred and eight five – they finally reached the entrance in the tall temple walls and entered a courtyard from which hundreds – maybe thousands – of steps shot off in all directions toward higher levels, higher doorways, and finally to the massive towers that looked like they touched the clouds. How was it possible something this big could ever get lost?

"Dori, stand over there." Her mother pointed to an open spot so she could get some of the steps and statues into the frame with Dori; her daughter gave the place scale. Dori felt a swoop in her stomach. Her mother had turned that round black eye on her. After a few shots from a distance her mother began walking closer, so close finally that Dori could see the shutter snapping like a greedy bug sucking at the air. Something happening behind her was distracting her mother, who tried to refocus the lens but finally lowered the camera and put it into its case that dangled like a purse from her shoulder.

"Just a minute, Dori." Her mother held her elbow, her dark sunglasses stabbed with shards of sunlight. Dori followed her mother's gaze. Across the huge compound she could make

out a clump of men, talking and smoking, three of them in the same blue and white uniforms she'd seen yesterday. Two others were in Western slacks and shirts, the way her father dressed.

"I'll be right back. Stay put, Dori. Okay?" But she was already running toward the men, who were disappearing through an archway on the other side of the temple.

"Wait! Mother, wait for me!" Dori ran a few steps, but her mother raced ahead as if she hadn't heard, her camera swinging wildly against her hip.

Dori licked suntan-lotion from her upper lip. She could make out the faces on the towers all around her if she shielded her eyes with her hand. She was hot and getting hungry, but she found a spot at the edge of the closest steps and sat on the hot stone. To wait. Her mother'd said she'd be back any minute. And Dori knew, after what happened yesterday, she shouldn't move from the spot.

It seemed like hours. She'd tried counting the steps up to the next level and given up; maybe heaven was only at the top level, where the towers blossomed into stone lotus flowers…She was getting impatient. What was her mother wearing? Dori closed her eyes and tried to remember the pattern or color of her blouse. She couldn't picture anything except the cheese and tomato sandwich she'd ordered for lunch at their hotel, the freckles around the watch on her mother's arm, the strange way she'd held the morning paper: instead of opening it and holding it between them like a screen, she left it folded as she read, so Dori could see her eyes running up and down the page as if looking for something she'd lost.

"Hello?"

Dori's eyes flew open, started at the sight of a red-haired woman, who tipped back her big black sunglasses and leaned toward her with a kind smile. She smelled vaguely of mint. "Waiting for your dad and mum?"

"Yes," she said, blinking sweat or a tear from her eye. "Yes," Dori repeated. "I'm waiting."

The woman nodded. "You're quite an independent young lady. How old are you?"

"Nine. Almost ten."

"Nine years old!" she turned and repeated to the man beside her. Looking back at Dori, she asked, "And where are you from?"

Dori never knew how to answer this question. She knew the city where she was born – Leesburg, Virginia – and could name the six countries where she'd lived, the last of which was Singapore. But now her father was going to work in Washington D.C. and for the very first time, she was going to live in the United States. "I'm American," she answered. That's what her passport said.

"It's too hot to be sitting in the sun. Do you think they can find you if you move just a little, under that doorway?" Dori felt the soft brush of a sleeve against her bare arm as the woman knelt close and indicated the opening through which Dori and her mother had walked earlier.

"She," said Dori. "Just my mother." Dori had been awakened early by the roosters squalling in the yard behind the hotel, and through the crack of her door she'd seen a sliver of her father – his shiny brown shoes and a bit of his face, his dark trousers, his old brown suitcase stamped to look like alligator skin – seen him a slice at a time as he walked past her bedroom door. She heard his murmuring voice followed by her mother's, saying, "It's OK, we're fine. Just go." Then the sound as the door swung open and clicked shut, the stutter of his heels fading down the walkway.

"I think your mum will be very sad if she comes back and finds that you've melted into a puddle," the lady said. She had a pretty, gentle face. "It'll be much cooler in the shade under that passageway. Don't you think you can still see her from there?"

Dori thought about her mother's warnings. The woman *was* a stranger, after all, and even though she seemed nice you never knew…

"I'll stay here," Dori said, looking down at her knees.

The man leaned in and helped the woman to her feet. "We can stay with you till Mum arrives," he offered.

"No thank you, I'm fine." Dori turned her gaze to him, keeping it steady and sure. "She'll be here in a minute."

The man looked at her, checked his watch. "Right then, tell you what. We'll come round in a half hour. If your Mum still hasn't returned, we'll go to find her together."

He unclipped the canteen that hung across his chest and unscrewed the metal cap from the top. "Here," he said, "a little water will help in this heat." He reached into his shirt pocket as she sipped and pulled out a foil-wrapped stick of chewing gum. "And something cool and sweet while you wait," he said, offering it to her.

The woman gave her a gentle pat on the head and swept her fingers lightly along a lock of the warm-blonde hair that curled against Dori's cheek. "She looks just like that little Caroline Kennedy, doesn't she, Michael? Poor family." She took his arm and gave Dori a small wave as they walked away.

Dori waved back and soon they disappeared, bleached into the sun. Her mother would emerge from that hole of white heat, too, if she could just wait. She tucked the stick of gum into

a front pocket and leaned back to look up at the stone steps and corridors threading through the three steep levels in a maze, like an enormous game of snakes and ladders.

Her mother had said that this place had been built for a king, his sacred palace with columns reaching to the sun. Not just for him and his family, not even just for his royal court – his entire kingdom lived here. Dori tried to imagine the people who called this home. Princesses riding royal elephants through the high gateways flanked by huge stone lions painted with gold. Children dashing through the palace chasing their pet monkeys, and shimmering water pouting into jeweled fountains.

She wondered what it would be like to go home. Boxes came from "home" on Christmases and birthdays: a Barbie doll and doll-case arrived one Christmas c/o U.S. Embassy Hong Kong; a round black patent leather pocketbook with shiny silk lining via the U.S. Embassy in Taiwan; headbands and pretty dresses from American stores waited for her at embassies in Burma, Singapore, and Ceylon. In movies and books, "home" meant where you were from. She wasn't really *from* anywhere.

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"Ouch!" She bolted up, feeling a poke at her burnt shoulder.

"Ah! Hah!" A little Cambodian woman smiled and pointed at her, holding her big, round belly with her other arm. Dori turned away, pretending she hadn't felt anything, but the little woman held her arm, saying, "*Venez voyez, Madamoiselle*, some look! Missy, I show you! Come, come see!"

It wasn't a woman with a baby at all. It was a boy, younger than she was, with a dirt-streaked face and a grimy undershirt, under which he held something that bulged like a basketball. "Come see! You got dolla? *L'argent*?"

She shook her head.

"Come on, you got dolla? You got pound, yes?"

"No," she said. "I don't have anything."

The boy pulled his shirt farther down. "No? No dolla?" He frowned at her. "Smokes? You got smokes?" He began reaching for her pockets, and she pushed him away.

"Go away! I don't have anything!" If she could walk away, he wouldn't keep pestering her. But she promised she'd stay put.

He took a step backward, as if to leave, then spat into the dust and stopped. He lifted the edge of the dirty undershirt just enough so that she could see he was cradling something round and metallic against his belly.

"One dolla! One smokes!" He jabbed his finger in the air and began speaking in a language that was nothing like the Mandarin or Cantonese she knew. It was more…watery. He sounded like he had a cold. Or like Kipling, Mrs. Thayer's Siamese cat, meowing to get into the house.

The boy's words got faster, more clipped, as if they were racing toward her ears demanding to be understood. Finally, angrily admitting defeat, he spun around, kicking the loose pebbles up around her legs.

"No, wait!" She felt around in her pocket for the stick of gum. When she opened her fist to show him, her fingers were sticky with the gray-pink sludge where it had melted out of its foil jacket.

The boy stopped, leaned in. He plucked what was left in the wrapper out of her palm and motioned her closer, using the same hand.

"OK, I show you," he said, pinching the edge of his shirt between his two free fingers and lifting the hem. A grayish-green ball rested on his other arm, its ribbed surface stamped with bumps like a basketball.

The boy squatted in front of her, put the ball on the ground. After a moment, the ball rocked a little until an invisible door opened. Dori stared as two big, lizard-like claws emerged, followed by another section of the ball that unfolded into a long, slim head with mouse-like ears.

The boy grinned. "See? Armadillo!"

Dori squatted over the animal and ran her palm along its hinged back. She leaned in while it shuffled towards her, swabbing ants off the dusty stones with its slick tongue.

She studied its small round eyes, the bumpy mouse ears and rat's tail, so distracted that it took a moment before she heard their voices – the gum people had returned for her. Dori turned away from the direction of the footsteps. She glanced over the armored lizard and its owner and felt the first drops of rain: marble-sized, warm equatorial rain thrummed against her back and splatted through the courtyard. At first the drops hit singly, then spilled quicker and sudden.

The boy scooped up the armadillo and she followed as he ran toward the shelter of a temple passageway. They stared out from their overhang at the thumping rain – a sheet of slanted silver cords that slapped the stones and splashed up like small flowers. Water was already cascading from the top of the tunnel where she stood, a clear curtain separating her from the open-air terrace where she'd sat. The red-haired woman and the man ran by, bent against the rain like two hunchbacks, and then the entire courtyard was empty. Where had everyone gone? Where was her mother?

Dori pulled at the skirt of her dress. It was drenched, but the air was still warm and she knew the rain would end soon, and she could go back out to the place where her mother had left

her. The boy looked at her, pulled at his own soaked shirt, and laughed. He jabbed his thumb under his bottom rib. "Kham Sambo," he said, pointing to himself. "Sam."

"Sam," she said, pointing to him. She tried to control her quivering lip as she indicated herself: "Dori."

The look on his face changed to concern as he studied her. "Okay?" he asked, and touched her forehead.

His fingers felt cool and her skin pulsed with heat when he took his hand away. She looked down at her bright, sunburned arms.

"Dori. Okay?" he repeated.

She shook her head and tried to control the wobble in her voice. "No. I'm sunburned. My arms hurt. I'm hungry. And I need to find my mother."

Sam cradled the armadillo. "*Maman*?" he asked, rocking it back and forth like a baby, and she nodded yes.

"My mother," Dori said in Chinese. "I need…to find…my mother."

She looked out. The rain has stopped. She turned to go back to the courtyard step, but he held her arm.

"Dori OK," he said, using hand signals to tell her to stay in the corridor. "Dori got *Maman*. Okay. I go for you. Sam. Okay?"

Wet and tired, she looked out from her shelter at the empty and dripping courtyard. The sky was shifting to the lavender of twilight.

"Okay," she told him.

Sam stretched out his hand, unfurling his fist to offer the half-melted stick of gum.

Dori laughed. "No. That's for you. You keep it."

Sam shoved it into his pocket and grinned just enough to reveal one of his top teeth, chipped and yellowish around its ragged edge. “I go for you. You okay,” he repeated, and ran down the dusky gallery.

Dori listened to the slap of his feet as he ran, a quick smacking sound as if he were clapping to her, until his steps became fainter and finally faded away.

She wandered out into the wet courtyard, quiet except for staccato drips of rain off leaves and stones. An occasional bird whirled overhead.

“Hello??” she called. Nothing. Louder. “Hello! Hello, Mother?!” No answer, nobody appearing from around a corner. She breathed in the damp air, summoning all her need and fear into her throat as she ran across the open space, her shoes sucking down with each soggy step. “MOTHER?! MAMA!! MA-MAAAA!”

She listened for a voice, a footstep. Her ribs shook from yelling. Nothing.

She slipped into another corridor and leaned her sunburned forehead against the cool wall. It was so deeply etched that the scene rose out from the surface, casting shadows of its own. Dori ran her hand along the scene, following it as it unfolded: a line of beautiful women with pagoda-tall headdresses, bracelets fastened on their wrists, forearms and ankles, their long earlobes hung with hooped earrings. Some of them danced, their arms and hands extended, feet cocked out from bent legs like magical herons. Others gazed straight ahead, arms outstretched as if inviting her in.

Next, a crowd of helmeted warriors tugging on a gigantic serpent, facing another set of creatures pulling in the other direction: demons with wild eyes and jagged, grimacing mouths. Between the two armies the serpent wrapped itself around a mountain so high that clouds covered the top and above that, small figures danced like angels. After this

scene there was a flatter space, lotus flowers and tall palm trees. Dori pressed her entire face – first her left cheek, then her nose and forehead – against its soothing surface.

She turned to cool her shoulders and noticed, from the corner of her eye, someone standing in the pathway. Moving closer, she could see it was a stone statue of Buddha, draped in a gold monk's robe. This Buddha stood upright and stretched out eight arms, some hung with bright flower garlands. His full lips spread in a smile under his broad nose, his half-opened eyes seemed to take in everything – a face so beautiful she could hardly tell if it was a woman or a man. Dori could see that a long time ago he held something in each of his eight clenched hands; now they were empty fists that shook at the sky. She reached up to the fist closest to her. It was so big she could wrap both hands around its solid, smooth surface without her fingers touching.

She imagined him leading her up the serpent's mountain. The two of them would climb to the peak and look down on the world of warriors and demons, leopards and elephants, flowers, trees, temple. They'd be able to see everything and everyone on the earth and Buddha would send the dancing deities to find her mother, and then her mother would gaze into Dori's eyes and she would hold her tight for a long, long time.

"Dori?"

She woke up at the Buddha's feet. Shadows stretched out long and ghostlike in the fading light, and someone had wrapped one of the statue's golden cloths around her.

Sam jostled her shoulder. "Dori. I bring for you."

She heard the shuffle of rubber *zories*. Someone approached through the dim passageway, holding a bundle. A little shriveled face, dark and shiny, nodded at her.

"Sam's *maman*," he said, and the woman, who looked too old to be Sam's mother, squatted next to them, her yellow batik skirt pooling around her knees. She wore her long dark hair pulled back and her face glowed in the lantern light: tiny lines pleated her cheeks; she had a gentle, full-lipped Buddha smile. She reminded Dori of Ang Sui, her *ahmah* in Burma, who fed her and bathed her and took her to play every day while her father worked at the embassy and her mother was away or in her darkroom. Ang Sui had a son Dori's age, and she looked old, like this woman: wrinkled, with crooked, stained teeth, one thin braid of black hair swinging down her back.

Sometimes in the evening when Ang Sui undid her braid she let Dori brush through her long black hair, slick and shiny like a horse's tail. Once Dori had tried to touch her mother's hair. It was black, too, but shorter and it curled and dipped around her collar. Her mother had pushed her hand away. "Don't touch," she'd said, without looking at Dori.

Sam's mother placed the paraffin lantern and a dented metal bowl on the ground. From the basket on her shoulder she produced a spoon, a Thermos, and a small, steaming basket of rice. The woman opened the Thermos and poured hot tea into its red plastic cup. With hands that looked like old trees she ladled some of the soup into the metal bowl with the rice.

"You take," she said, handing Dori the spoon. "You eat."

The tea was warm and unsweetened, but it soothed her raw throat and reminded Dori how hungry she was. She spooned mouthfuls of the sticky rice and soupy vegetables, smelling the ginger and soy rise from the steam.

"Thank you," she murmured, keeping her eyes low so she could see only the bowl, the hem of the woman's skirt, her cracked and dirty feet.

She felt the woman's flat hand rest against her back. "You mama no come already?" the old woman asked, and her face furrowed into a frown. She shook her head. "Soon she come. You eat." With her hand she firmly patted the ground by Dori's bowl to show how sure she was. For the first time that day, Dori felt safe.

Sam rummaged into the basket for a few flame-orange tangerines, another steaming, covered basket, and a purplish cone of incense. When his mother lifted the basket's cover, a thick cloud of steam billowed out like a puff of magic. Inside, Dori saw a silvery fish, its one still eye staring up from its bed of rice, onions, snow peas. Dori waited for the woman to bring out a spoon for the meal she might share with her son, but instead she gathered the tangerines and incense into her skirt, lifted the basket and walked away, humming a low tune. She placed the food and incense at the Buddha's feet, still humming, her lamp throwing long shadows against the walls. She held something to the lantern's flame that sparked: a twig or reed that she used to light the incense sending one acrid finger of smoke snaking upward.

"For you *maman*," she said on returning to Sam and Dori. "Now she come." She motioned for Dori to stand, opening her dark, wiry arms like the stone deities in welcome, and Dori pressed herself into the embrace: into the chest, warm and thin-boned as a kitten's, that smelled of burnt coal, incense, and smoky fish. Dori felt the first hot tears run down her cheeks and the sensation, deep below her stomach, of her fear unwinding from its tight ball. Her cheek rested against the pulse of the woman's heart, the slow, familiar, rocking thump of cradles and boats. She let herself hold onto Sam's mother while the grief welled up like a ghost, up through her ribcage, through her heart, and waved through her in sobs. Tears drenched her face, and Dori held tight to the swaying woman, whose arms

stroked gently and hypnotically up and down her back. She leaned in, pressing her ear into the fabric of the woman's wet shirt, her sobs and tears free to pour themselves out, loosening Dori from the grip of loneliness and fear. The warmth felt like a cheek touching hers.

It seemed a long time before the sobs subsided. Over the soft and steady heartbeat she heard the night music of frogs and crickets, and slowly, a different sound, a ringing: a shimmering sound, surrounding her like gold dust adrift. The beat of the old woman's heart was answered and then doubled, quickened and deepened by the sound of bamboo against stone, feet stamping the earth. Then there floated a sound unlike any singing Dori had ever heard: high, trembling, cracking into tears. A very sad bird.

"*Venez!* Come see!" Sam beckoned, peering from the corridor into the central arena.

Turning, Dori rubbed the blur of tears from her lashes.

Against the black silhouette of Sam's small body and the hallway's broken arch the courtyard shone, silvery-gold and bathed in electric lights brighter than the afternoon sun had been. Someone had set up for a performance. There, on a low platform just in front of the step she had sat on earlier today, beyond concentric rings of folding chairs filled with men and women smoking, murmuring, wearing cologne and Western clothes, she saw deities and demons in a dance.

Moving slow as a ripple, bright and golden, stacked bracelets ringing, their eyes wide and brightly colored, the deities mingled and separated from the dragon-faced, scowling and jeweled demons. They danced around and through each other, into the fluted music and heartbeat drums.

Three more golden dancers ascended like magic birds in the center, their faces open to the night, turning to her with eyes half-closed. From their shoulders, glittering wings sprouted. Dori knew them: the angels from her dream.

A quick flash of light, electric and whiter than the sparkling costumes, shot through the dancers and disappeared, quick as lightning. She shifted in Sam's mother's arms to search in its direction until it shot out again, then again. She stared straight into it until it blinded her and then she listened for the mechanical shuddering chirp.

Gently, slowly, the old woman's arm released her and she walked into the pulsing light, into the trembling music and the altered night, toward the mother who waited – *must* be waiting – out there.

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