

“Alex!” Hammer called.

“Emily!” said Emily. “Hammer?”

“Emily?” said Hammer.

“I go by Emily now,” said Emily.

“Oh. ...Why?” said Hammer.

“Because I want to.”

“Huh. Okay.”

“It was my mother’s name. Well—her Chinese name. Well—it’s what my Dad called her.”

“Huh.”

“美丽. (Ài měi lì). It means beautiful, sort of. It’s the Chinese version of the name Emily. He couldn’t really say her real Chinese name.”

“Oh. ...What are you doing here?” said Hammer.

“I’m a photographer,” she said. “I came here to document the sex trade.”

“The what?”

“Oh, don’t be naive. Don’t you see what this is?”

She gestured around at the gaudy mural of a naked woman on the wall; the women’s skimpy clothing.

Suddenly it became clear to Hammer as well. He turned to Laser; Laser blushed.

Fen Yi walked into the room.

“Fen Yi!” said Emily, warmly.

“美丽!” said Fen Yi.

They conferred in Chinese, speaking faster than Hammer could understand. Their voices seemed to wrap around each other, like two friendly dragons playing in the sky, or two strands of DNA. Hammer focused on Emily: strong-legged, strong willed, and then Fen Yi: thin, timid, but equally as strong somewhere deep down. She would come out of this okay.

The grey-eyed man rushed into the room, swinging his arms in rage.

“I told you to get to WORK!” he said.

Fen Yi turned to Emily and then back to the grey-eyed man. She assumed a strong stance, her legs apart and her arms in fists at her sides.

“No!” she said. “I’m not your property.”

It was only as she said this the grey-eyed man seemed to notice the presence of Hammer, Laser, and

Emily. His rage seemed to leave his body in thick flames.

“外邦人,” he said (“foreigners”)—partly to Fen Yi, partly to himself.

The grey-eyed man frowned. He seemed to be deciding what to do. Then he smiled.

He reached across his body to lift his shirt-sleeve up. Hammer noticed that one of the fingers was missing on the hand that lifted up the sleeve.

Two characters were tattooed on his upper arm: “外邦人.”

Laser’s eyes widened. “We need to go,” he said.

The grey-eyed man started to laugh. He fell into the chair behind him and lost himself in laughter as he pulled a cellphone from his jacket pocket.

Clouds brewed above as Hammer, Laser, Emily, and Fen Yi thundered down the KTV’s concrete steps. The light was fading, but the street was suffused with a green glow. A dragon hovered above them in the street.

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