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Beyond Lowu Bridge

Roy Cheng Tsung



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In memory of my father
Wei-hsien Tsung 宗惟贤
for his wisdom and strength,
☯

my mother
Julia Shun-ching Liao Tsung 廖舜琴
for her love and courage.

To my daughters
Kristine and Lauren
for whom this story is written.

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Author's Note

All the characters in the story are real. Many names have been changed or purposely omitted. For the most part, the names are spelled in the standard Pinyin romanization system used in Mainland China today. The exceptions are my family name Tsung (宗 zong) and such old familiar names as Sun Yat-sen, Kuomintang, Chiang Kai-shek, Yangtze River, etc., which are spelled in the old Wade-Giles phonetics system.

The Chinese name 一线之隔 on the book cover is not a literal translation of the English title. It means “Separated by a Line.”

Some parts of this book are based on the recollections of my mother, friends and relatives. The conversations are approximations of what was related to me. A few events appear out of exact chronology, but the story is set against an historical backdrop that many of us have lived through.



Prologue

“You are an American citizen because you were born in New York,” my father said to me one day. “But in the eyes of the Chinese law, if your father is Chinese, you are Chinese.” I was not in the least interested in the judicial principles of determining a child’s citizenship. At twelve, my world consisted of reading comic books and swapping bubble gum cards with my pals in Riverside Park.

“Superman?” my father asked, raising his eyebrow and stressing the first two syllables, as he noticed the comic book lying on my bed. “Who is he?”

“A man of steel from Planet Krypton,” I said. As a rule, my

parents spoke to me in Mandarin. But since my Chinese vocabulary was limited, I was allowed to use English on such occasions. “He uses his superhuman powers to save people and fight crooks.”

“Indeed? An extraterrestrial being helping to keep law and order on Earth?” my father replied in English with a comical grin on his face. “What sort of superhuman feats can he perform?”

“Lifting skyscrapers and seeing through walls.”

“Superman . . .” mused my father as he picked up one of my comics, stroking his chin and flipping through the pages. “No imagination,” he said, shaking his head theatrically.

“What do you mean?” I asked, slightly offended.

“Have I ever told you the legend of Sun Wu-Kung? He’s the Chinese version of your superhero, except he was a monkey from our own planet Earth.”

That night after dinner, he began the story of the famous Monkey King from a sixteenth century Chinese folk novel *Journey to the West*. Monkey King’s magic cudgel could shrink into a tiny pin, or expand into a giant pillar. I was captivated by Sun Wu-kung’s ability to perform dozens of transformations. Once he turned himself into a wayside shrine, transforming his mouth into the entrance, his teeth into doors, his tongue into a Buddhist monk, and his eyes into windows.

“Guess what happened to his tail?” said my father.

“Turned into a tree?”

“No,” he chuckled. “He stuck it straight up and changed it into a flag pole! Now that’s what I call original!”

Thus started the colorful bedtime adventures of Monkey King, as my father and I traveled to the faraway land of our ancestral China.

I had no idea then that within a few years, my father would move our family back to that faraway land, to what he believed to be “New China.” But the land I knew from my father’s stories about Monkey King turned out to be quite different from what I had imagined it to be. And contrary to my assumptions that I would grow up in America, I would become one of the few Chinese American youths to be transplanted to China at the height of the Cold War.

Part 1

1949-1958