

Turning the Law Wheel

Following her job at the Shanghai Wild Animal Park, Meiying Connors is chosen to sell Marla King Cosmetics. She knows it is because of her Occidental looks and the wheel of law.

Her father, Army Sergeant Charles Connors, is a black Korean War prisoner who was transferred to Beijing in 1969, and then she was born, in 1986, into a family that is usually considered a pariah to the People's Revolutionary Party. Meiying's mother, Xiaoxiao, dies when Meiying is born, and Meiying spends most of her development years on the road with her father making movies for the Communist Party.

Because of Sergeant Connors' American good looks, Meiying's father is used as a propaganda tool. Films are made by the Ministry of Culture about how communism is so much more compassionate to "people of color," and Charles is viewed by audiences lifting bales of hay on a communal farm and smiling and joking with his fellow workers. Or, he is seen standing with some Party dignitaries at the launching of a new war ship or some other new weapon meant to stop the "tide of Western Imperialism."

Her father is later employed in Chinese movies as the "evil American officer" who is always defeated by the People's military hero. Even though she knows her father secretly drinks too much and smokes big cigars, she also understands that he loves his job because he believes in China's future. In fact, he tells her, just before he dies of a heart attack, "Back in Alabama, where I was born, I would be lucky to be just another poor nigger working in the fields or inside some factory. In China, I am a movie star. The world has awakened a sleeping giant, my daughter. China will now lead the way."

When her father dies, the government has a big funeral for him out on Tiananmen Square. That's where Meiying first meets Colonel Wang Dongbin. Colonel Wang is the Beijing head of the People's Ministry of Culture. It is here at her father's death celebration that Meiying is given her first chance to work for the government.

"The Shanghai Animal Olympics are to be the great precursor to the World Olympics," Colonel Wang tells her at her father's funeral.

She sits across from him on a hard bench in Tiananmen Square. The goose-stepping members of the People's Liberation Army march past them, and the wind kicks up colored paper strewn over the huge expanse of concrete. Meiying can feel the vibration of the soldiers' boots hitting the pavement.

Colonel Wang explains to her that she will be important to the country's attempt to lure the West into more business relations with China. "You, if you will excuse my boldness, are one of them," says Colonel Wang, smiling broadly and patting her hand. "We want you to work at the Animal Olympics, so they can see we employ all kinds of ethnic groups."

Meiying knows she is being used as a token for propaganda purposes, just as her father was used before her; but, in modern China, one does what one can do for personal survival.

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Meiying's time in Shanghai is being scheduled and paid for by the government. As China is hosting the human Olympics in 2008, the government believes that if they give their annual animal Olympics a world audience then more people will want to come to their event in Beijing. Meiying has never attended the animal Olympics, which have

been going on for four years, but her friends have. They tell her it is a lot of fun, and the shopping in Shanghai is supposed to be much better than in Beijing.

She is put up in the American-style, Four Seasons Hotel, Number 500 Weihai Road, near the People's Square. She is also given a Jiaotong card, which can be used in the subway, taxis, buses and boats. It seems she can also use it in McDonald's, although there is usually at least a two-hour wait for Shanghai fast food. Meiyong prefers to take her own lunch of dumplings and tea when she rides the subway to the Shanghai Wild Animal Park. Located at Sanzao Town in Nanhui District, it takes her approximately forty minutes by rail to get there. Meiyong notices that most of the passengers in Shanghai push and shove to get on and off the train. They also never smile. She remembers her father's smile, and she also remembers the pictures of Americans she has seen. They always seem to be smiling.

Her American appearance, even though she is a chocolate color, causes Meiyong to get appointed by the park committee to the job of official greeter at the main gate leading into the 153 hectares of park. The park, which contains the largest zoo in China, was first opened in 1995. She is told by her supervisor, a woman named Zhong Dandan that she is to smile and speak only English to any foreign tourists who come to see the Animal Olympics. Mrs. Zhong has graying hair, bad teeth, glasses that always need cleaning and the accent of a recent immigrant from the provinces. Her Mandarin is also full of grammatical errors.

The first day on the job allows Meiyong to meet many Western tourists. Most of them are visiting China for the first time, and their eyes are wide as they take in all the sights, sounds and smells, and they show an instant gratitude when she addresses them in

her excellent English. “Welcome to the Shanghai Animal Olympics!” she says, unaware of what they will soon see inside the park. All Meiyong knows about the event is that there are 26 Chinese provinces represented in these games, and there will be a variety of races and other enjoyable competitions for the children and the adults.

Later that evening, back in the hotel’s workout room, an American Chinese man invites Meiyong to dinner. The man does not work out on the equipment. Instead, he stands in a patch of light by the window and does some strange looking exercises that look like Tai Chi, but his regimen has a deeper, meditative quality. He is a handsome man in his early forties, with clean-cut, oiled black hair, and he sports a white shirt and tie under a black business suit that is the American style of Brooks Brothers.

He tells Meiyong over a dinner of prawns and spicy tofu that his name is Li Hongzhi, and he is from New York City. And then, as casually as if he is telling her it is getting late, he says, “You could be arrested for being with me. I would be imprisoned and then executed.”

“Who are you?” Meiyong asks, in-between bites. She is afraid this man could be dangerous.

“I am in disguise right now,” he says, “and I have come back to China to enlist your help. My Zhuan Falun group believes the Animal Olympics is cultivating evil. The world is getting the wrong message about China. Therefore, I would like you to help me stop this evil practice.”

Meiyong now understands. She knows the Falun Gong. In 1999, the number of Falun Dafa members outnumbered members of the Chinese Communist Party. Thereafter, the government made the practice of “turning the law wheel” illegal in China.

However, here she is, sitting with the expatriate leader of the most dangerous cult in China.

“Are you aware of what goes on inside the Wild Animal Park?” Mr. Li asks.

“No, I am told to greet foreign visitors at the gate. What goes on inside is not my concern,” Meiying says, putting down her chopsticks.

“We cultivate the universal law. Each of us has a law wheel inside that tells us how to let go of attachments such as zealotry, selfishness, greed, lust and pursuit. I am called the ‘living Buddha,’ and I am here to teach followers about how to use their law wheel.” Mr. Li smiles, and Meiying sees the light of his seventy million adherents inside this smile.

“And so, what is the government doing that is against the universal law?” she asks.

“Your government does not allow people and animals to be what they were meant to be. It forces its will upon the people and other sentient beings, and these sacred beings become tools for their sinful purposes. For example, in your Animal Olympics, bears are being forced to box each other. Clown men box with kangaroos, monkeys and bears are forced to race on tiny bicycles, and poodle dogs are required to stand on their hind legs all day.” Mr. Li speaks with a calm voice. “All of the animals witnessed were in an inappropriate environment, unable to express even the most basic natural behavior and under constant stress. The Moon Bears were forced to stand all day and clap their hands continuously, and one poor blind Moon Bear was repeatedly jabbed with a metal stick every time he moved. As with many of the animals in the park, his spirit was completely broken.”

Meiying sees his point, but she also has a bit of her father in her, so she attempts to rebut Master Li's argument with one of her own. "But is this important? How can there be any work or organized society unless there are guided instructions? These animals are not being tortured, are they? True, they are being conditioned to do things they would not normally do, but this is all for the sake of entertainment, is it not? Are we not allowed to be entertained? The Olympic athletes condition themselves to perform at their peak, do they not? The government pays for this conditioning also. Is this not a sinful attachment as well?"

"Yes! The human athletes are often forced to take performance-enhancing drugs, just so they will be victorious for the government. Human beings, however, have a choice. Animals do not. These blessed sentient beings must do what we teach them to do. If we do not stop this ill treatment of animals, then the government will get bolder in its treatment of human beings."

Mr. Li's tone suddenly became grave, and he bent toward her with a flaming look of intense concern in his eyes. "Your government has arrested hundreds of thousands of my followers. They are being tortured in prisons, and they are also being used as living sources of body parts."

"What? Body parts? You don't mean . . ." Meiying's voice trails off in abject horror.

"Do you know what a live kidney brings on the open black market these days? Westerners pay communist doctors on the average of \$11,000 American dollars for a live kidney. If the government can reap such profits from my followers, what will come

next? Vital organs, perhaps? First, the government controls the animals in zoo prisons. Next, they control the people in State prisons.”

“Tell me what to do,” says Meiyong. “I’ll do anything you tell me.”

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For the first four weeks of the Shanghai Animal Olympics, Meiyong Connors secretly hands out English language pamphlets to foreigners warning them of what is taking place inside the park.

Soon, the British and Australian presses are doing stories on the “abuse of animals,” and animal rights groups in the West are taking up the cause by the millions. Americans visiting the Olympics are outraged also, especially the wealthy wives of industrialists, who are often radical advocates of animal rights.

The uproar is all over the Internet, and the word reaches Communist Party Headquarters in Beijing and Colonel Wang Dongbin. Colonel Wang takes the first train to visit the Shanghai Animal Olympics.

Meiyong is inside her hotel room when Colonel Wang knocks on her door. She answers it, and the short man strides into the room, and his demeanor is livid and his face is red.

“Do you know what happened here?” he asks, drumming his fingers on the front of his legs. “How did the foreign press get involved?”

“I have no knowledge of what occurred, Colonel. I never even went inside the park.” Meiyong’s voice is calm. She is, she believes, turning the law wheel inside her.

“I have arrested the committee in charge of the Wild Animal Park.” he says, and he turns to leave. “You, Miss Connors, will go back to Beijing. You are no longer employed by the government, so turn in all your clothing and other supplies.”

That night, as Meiyong stands outside on her balcony overlooking the People’s Square, she does her qigong, or enlightened physical exercise. The lights are brilliant, and the fireworks go off on Nanjing Road, sending a sizzling radiance into her heart. She feels calm and warm, and her path seems noble.

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On the anniversary of Charles Connors’ death, Meiyong visits her father’s tomb on Tiananmen Square. The foreigners will soon arrive to attend the Chinese Summer Olympic Games. The New China is quickly destroying the Old China. The small town farmers in the provinces are being attacked by the government so as to make room for larger factories and bigger roads. The air is veiled with smog and Meiyong’s eyes sting as she stands before the monument to her father. His smiling, ebony face gazes back at her, and she smiles.

“Miss Connors?” The voice behind her startles Meiyong. She turns abruptly around to face Zhong Dandan, her old supervisor from Shanghai.

“Mrs. Zhong! How good to see you again,” says Meiyong, and she hugs the older woman.

“My master wishes for you to have this,” says the old woman, and she hands Meiyong a small envelope. “Keep turning the wheel,” she says, and just as quickly as she has appeared, she is gone.

The envelope contains official notice of her employment as a beauty consultant for Marla King Cosmetics. She will soon visit the new homes of modern Chinese women who want to join the Western culture of beauty and hope for a better day. She will also win the award as the “best salesperson of the year in Beijing,” and her reward is a trip to New York City to visit corporate headquarters and be wined and dined with all the other best salespeople from all over the world.

The handsome face of Master Li, however, fills her consciousness. He is the one who gave her the gift of the law wheel, and it is he she wants to visit when she arrives in New York. In return for his kindness, Meiying spreads the word of Fulan Dafa to all the women she meets. The wheel of law must continue, even in a world of attachments and desires.

In front of the monument to her father, the American Charles Connors, Meiying does her qigong. She is not afraid of the government. She does not fear her future. She simply breathes in the universal law, lifts her right leg, centers her being, and lets the law turn her wheel.

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