

Chapter 71.5

Darkness for the Eagle

May 10

"Welcome home, Zhi Peng," said the man in the back of the Hongqi limousine at the Beijing airport.

"My pleasure, General. I was well prepared and well supported," said Zhi. "I am honored to have been chosen for the mission."

General Ming Rong smiled. "We could not have asked for more from you." He handed Zhi a pack of Hao Mao cigarettes. They were only available to the highest levels of the Communist Party.

Zhi smiled and completely relaxed in the comfortable back seat of the limousine. He had been in uncomfortable airline seats for the past ten hours. Now he was at home, in Beijing, after fleeing America as it was falling apart, due, in large part, to his work. He smiled.

The General looked over at Zhi and he quickly stopped smiling. It was impolite to gloat, and even more impolite to feel important around a superior like the General.

"No, no, no," said the General with a big grin. "Smile, Zhi Peng. Smile. You deserve it." The two men broke out into a laugh. "Tell me how you did it," the General said.

Zhi spent the ride back to the offices of the Geng Huichang, or the Ministry of State Security, China's foreign intelligence agency, telling the General what he had done.

"It was a Saturday," Zhi began. "I was at home in Colorado. I needed to mow my lawn, they have lawns in America, but it was hot outside so I wanted to stay inside."

He then told the General about how he decided instead to read one of the many technical journals he enjoyed so much. Zhi had come to America fifteen years earlier as a much-needed electrical engineer. He was needed because America decided to study soft topics instead of hard sciences.

Zhi's job was to sit in front of a giant wall-sized computer screen showing the entire Western U.S. electrical grid. He would route the electricity where it needed to go. Well, actually, the computer routed the electricity, but he was there to make sure the computer did it correctly and to take over if the computers failed.

As he settled into reading the technical journal, the doorbell rang. He wondered who would be coming to his house on a Saturday. Some salesman, he assumed. He answered the door and knew exactly what was going on when he saw the man standing there. He was Chinese; Zhi had met him once before. The man at the door looked at Zhi and said, in perfect Mandarin and with no emotion, "One wonders why a bumblebee can fly when, mathematically, it should not be possible."

Zhi, embarrassed that he was excited and not emotionless like that man at the door, responded, "A rainbow appears after a rain shower."

The man at the door looked Zhi in the eye, smiled slightly, and said, "Darkness for the eagle."

"I understand completely," Zhi said, trying to suppress his excitement. Years of dreaming of this day finally came true. He would be a hero. He was fighting for his country.

The man at the door nodded and left without a word.

Zhi closed the door and looked out the window to see the man get into his car. As soon as he did, Zhi started jumping up and down. He caught himself and stopped. He knew that the hidden cameras placed in his house by his employer—his real employer, not the power company—recorded everything.

Zhi calmly walked over to the TV and turned it on. Nothing was on the news—yet. Of course not, he realized. His mission was what would start things. Days later, Zhi thought, Americans would turn on their TVs and see what he had done. Well, they would try to turn on their TVs. He smiled.

The rest of the day was excruciating. He wanted so desperately to go to work and get started. But, he had to wait until Monday. He thumbed through his books by Confucius, Sun Tzu, and Mao and looked for guidance on patience. He found many passages about it and slowly took control of his emotions. By Saturday evening, he was calm again. He actually went back to reading his technical journal. As it got dark, he looked outside at his lawn and thought he should mow it. Then he laughed. "I will be gone soon and a nicely mowed lawn will no longer matter," he said out loud. Zhi was alone in the house. The Party did not permit agents with missions like his to be married, so he obeyed his orders and never sought out a woman. He would have plenty of that when he fulfilled his mission and went back home. He smiled once again.

On Sunday he awoke early and went over every detail of the mission. He did this dozens of times until it was dark.

He sprang out of bed at 3:30 a.m. on Monday and decided to go to work early. Very early, actually. He knew this was not in the plan and could be a risk. He had done everything perfectly for years; he was entitled to this one little slip.

He drove the few miles to his office and pulled up to the security gate.

"You're awfully early today, Mr. Peng," said the security guard.

"Yes," Zhi said. "I've been thinking about a way to do something better and I wanted to see if it will work." Within a few minutes, he was in the control room sitting in front of the giant computer screen studying the Western U.S. electrical grid. He knew exactly how to crash the grid but, more importantly, he knew how to create unnoticeable flaws in the system's security that could be exploited by someone else on a computer far off in Beijing. Or, as it turned out, in Flint, Michigan and Lima, Peru.

"We had been holding off on crippling America," the General said, feeling like he needed to talk because, after all, he was in charge. The General explained that China had been a business partner with the U.S., but their long-term goal was to replace the U.S. as the world's only superpower. For a while, that meant selling things to the U.S., building up reserves of dollars, and slowly replacing the U.S. manufacturing sector with Chinese factories.

“The Americans were only too willing,” the General said with another smile. He went on to explain that once America had essentially transferred all its manufacturing capabilities to China, the next step for China was to weaken the U.S. until the Americans were no longer a threat to China’s rightful status as the only superpower.

“But, then the Americans decided to spend so much money,” the General said. “We told them not to, that doing so would weaken the dollar and harm our investment in their bonds.” The General shook his head and said, “They said they couldn’t help themselves. They said they had no choice.”

The General paused and said, “We had to cut our losses. We knew our investments in their bonds would be worthless, but we couldn’t keep giving the Americans money. They could never pay us back, so we had to at least cripple them.”

Zhi had always believed that the Chinese people were superior—yes, racially, culturally, and historically superior—to lazy, drug-addicted, dependent, idiot Americans. The Americans thought they were the rightful rulers of the planet just because they were lucky enough to have the first atomic bomb in the middle of the last century. Other than that, they had no reason to claim ownership of the world, Zhi thought.

He began to recall for the General how thrilled he was to have been chosen years ago to lead a team to carry out this glorious mission of showing the world the greatness of the Chinese people. Only a handful of the over one billion of his countrymen would have such a direct and meaningful role in this. He would be remembered in China for a hundred years.

Zhi’s government had planted sabotage teams in numerous U.S. cities. They had deep covers—it took years, or sometimes decades, of blending in—as highly important staff to American government agencies and corporations. Many of his fellow saboteurs were scientists because the stupid Americans were too bored with science or too lazy to study it. They let the saboteurs fill many of the most important and sensitive positions.

Zhi went back to telling the General what had happened. “Monday morning was going by so slowly,” he admitted with a shrug. Finally, after lunch, Zhi returned to his station and looked around. No one was watching.

“How silly of me,” Zhi admitted to the General. “People could watch all they wanted to and only see a trusted employee typing on his computer, which was my job.” He then described how he accessed a file no one knew existed and entered a code phrase of letters and numbers he had memorized. In exactly twelve hours, the secret computer file Zhi activated would disable the computer system’s defenses against one particular and obscure kind of hacking.

After calmly activating the computer file, he kept watching the grid on the screen, making sure that electricity was flowing smoothly, which was his habit for the past few years. Then he thought about how this screen would look in about twelve hours.

Chaos. Panic. Red warning flashes everywhere on the map. Then the system would be restored and everyone would be relieved. Then, in a few hours or days—it was up to the people in Beijing or wherever they were—the system would crash

again. This would go on for days or weeks, or, if the Americans couldn't figure out what was going on, forever. He smiled to himself.

"Sorry, Jim," Zhi said to his supervisor, "but I'm feeling really sick. It must be the bugs going around." Jim smiled at the Zhi's use of the word 'bugs' and said, "Go home Zhi. We'll call in Carl for you. You get over the 'bugs.'"

"Thanks," Zhi said. "I hope to be back tomorrow. It's probably a twenty-four hour thing." He looked around as he was leaving. He wanted to see the place one last time.

He drove home, took his computer, and drove to the Denver airport. He met the man who had come to his house at a restaurant near the airport. The man handed Zhi a plane ticket, and within a few hours, Zhi was in St. Gorge, Utah. He stayed there a week and a half in a hotel as America was collapsing all around him.

"Did you think we had abandoned you?" the General asked.

"Of course not," Zhi said, lying. "Well," he said in candor, as one does not lie to a General, "I thought that perhaps the plan had been changed."

"You were right," the General said. "We had complications, but we came for you, didn't we?"

Zhi smiled and nodded. After eleven days in that horrible little hotel in Utah, a Chinese man knocked on the door, gave Zhi the correct code phrase, and took him to Los Angeles. There, the Chinese man gave Zhi a diplomatic passport, making him immune from arrest by American authorities, and they boarded an Air China flight with other Chinese "businessmen" and touched down in Beijing.

The General handed Zhi a Hao Mao cigarette, lit it, laughed, and said, "Darkness for the eagle."