CHAPTER I

*Summer Shower*

Their lives changed in July. He thought back to the time he spent with her

and the night they took their first drink together.

She wore dull silver earrings. They matched her dull silver watch and

everything matched the duller ring on her right hand. Then it came to

him as he saw her jewelry, the same color as the outer fringes of the clouds

which glided, low, along and past San Francisco Bay where a person lost

the ability to see where the city began and ended. Finally behind the silver

of the clouds and the lining Bay Bridge it felt like a drive off the end of

the world.

When he saw her jewelry, he thought of the Bay Bridge. Now, Niklas

was not sure which reminded him of the end of the world.

Her clothes were as dull as her jewelry. Her smile made up for her lack

of wardrobe attire. She did not need a thing to prove she was a woman.

Her muumuu dress was old but she wore it as elegantly as any ballroom

gown.

They set up a time to meet at Miyake’s, the best sushi bar in Cupertino,

CA, the middle of Silicon Valley. As Niklas waited in the parking lot he

crashed through a memory as he looked up to see the clouds clatter against

the heavens. As she approached him she asked, “Are you Niklas?” He could

tell she was a real type after she asked him, “What’s your racket?”

A sea of clouds rolled in hard. The humid air foretold of a pleasant

summer shower. The sky darkened.

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CHAPTER II

*Attention to Detail*

Better get there early. No matter what day it was, Miyake’s had a line.

Waiters came outside to ask, “Sushi bar or table?” People waited to grab a

seat at the sushi bar. Niklas looked inside as the door closed and he could

hear the sushi chefs yell in Japanese, “*Irasshaimase*,” as the sting of knives

whizzed through the air and sliced soft pieces of the freshest sushi.

She quickly told him her name, “Suria.” Then quickly corrected herself

and said, “But most people call me Foxybird.” Foxy’s protruding green

veins and bony hands told Niklas she was older than he thought. She

explained why she used the name Foxybird. “This is, of course, my email

name. Do you think young men with green eyes would take to me if they

knew my age? Actually, I love birds.” She glowed and went on, “I have to

have an interesting email name. If you have to,” she said with a half laugh,

“you may call me by my first name.” After a pause she repeated, “Suria.”

Later, Niklas started calling her Foxy. There was only one other time he

called her Suria. The name Foxy was a better image for the radiant bouquet

of stories she told with diligently chosen words.

He smiled on her behalf as he said, “I do not care how old anyone is,

as long as they are interesting. That is my racket!”

She immediately realized he did not use contractions when he spoke.

He rarely used them because the more he traveled and the more he

spoke to people around the world he realized they never understood him

when he said something like, “I can’t do that.”

As they waited outside the restaurant, Foxy’s eyes focused on an

ancient-looking Chinese man. He was no more than five feet from them.

The old man had two long strands of hair hanging from the dark mole on

the side of his cheek. Niklas stood next to the sidewalk away from the large

glass windows looking out onto the parking lot and DeAnza Boulevard.

Niklas saw the vein in Foxy’s neck pulse with excitement. Out of the

twelve people waiting to be seated the old Chinese man caught Foxybird’s

attention.

Niklas was next to this eighty-year-old woman, Foxybird, who five

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*Henry Biernacki*

minutes before he had never met. In the Bay area, anything is acceptable.

Niklas watched her closely as she leaned on her fist the way air leans on

mountains. Light! She focused intently on this Chinese man. It was as if

she were a child in her first day of school and was amazed at her teacher.

Conversations surrounded Niklas and Foxy but she watched the old

man. Usually Niklas never paid attention to anything when he had a good

conversation, but Foxy watched the old man, and he observed Foxy. Niklas

had never seen a person look at another with such an interested eye. Most

people have a judging eye rather than an interested one. Niklas looked

back at the old man and wondered what Foxy fancied about him. Niklas

had not seen the details Foxy saw.

Th e ancient man pulled out tobacco and *Rizla* paper, squatted on the

curb to roll a thick cigarette while his family impatiently waited to have

their name called by one of the waiters. The Chinese man couldn’t be

bothered with such meaningless problems and Niklas could see that the

man told himself that his family was being too loud by the way he turned

his head away when they tried to talk to him. The man desperately wanted

to listen to the crackling of the ashes. He smiled at the little girl next to him

dressed in a pink Hello Kitty dress. As the man sucked on the cigarette he

looked at her, trying to tell her to be patient with life.

It should be lived slower. When Niklas looked at the old man with his

gray hair and fair skin, his small squinted eyes told him life, so delicate,

should not slip past people without realizing how special it really is.

Some people gain inner peace in a difficult manner while others seem

to know it innately.

Foxybird saw this in the old Chinese man’s eyes. Niklas saw her smile

as the man looked at her. They understood one another.

As he nodded to her she looked at him and said, ‘how are you,’ in

Chinese, “*Ni hao ma*?”

The man immediately responded, “*Wo hen hao, xiexie*.”

After she said, “I’m fi ne thank you.” Niklas liked the fact that she was a

Caucasian lady who learned Mandarin since she lived in the predominately

Taiwanese community of Cupertino. Also, to Niklas he was not surprised

since Caucasians were the minority in California. The majority *were* Asians,

Mexicans. The man lit the tip of his paper-art filled with a thick roll of

tobacco. He pulled the cigarette away from his mouth and blew on it the

way a person blows on a campfire to get it started. He wanted the ashes to

start burning. As he pulled the cigarette away from his mouth he jerked the

object back to his lips and started sucking it down like a chimney burning

*No More Heroes*

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dry wood. Niklas could see the dimples in his cheeks now and the old man

was finding so much pleasure in his cigarette Niklas could have taken up

smoking at that particular moment.

The Chinese man’s family was trying to get his attention, although he

didn’t pay any attention to them. He wanted to be alone with his cigarette

the way a Priest wants to be alone to pray. The Chinese man paid no

attention to anyone or anything. The little girl in the pink dress pulled at

the old man’s light blue tank top turned inside out. The rest of the family

was dressed neatly while his chest was damp with sweat.

Cupertino was unusually hot that July. Niklas was not sure if the

old man began to sweat before he lit the cigarette or afterward. Maybe it

was because of his excitement with the smoke. The Chinese man found

happiness in his simple action and he wouldn’t move once he lit his treasure

and watched it burn to ash. The old man looked down at his burning art

and realized it was becoming smaller. Then his face saddened because he

realized it was over.

The man finally looked up and saw his family waiting for him. His eyes

told Niklas that he was sad because his once long cigarette was now a bud

on the ground and he had to deal with people again. He was going to eat

which made him happy because he would enjoy another simple pleasure,

food. As he walked in the restaurant, he glanced back at Foxy. Niklas’

attention went back to Foxy and he watched her the way a boy watches his

mother put on make-up. Detailed!

Foxy and Niklas went in right after the family and sat down. Niklas

could immediately smell the finely sliced ginger**,** the green hot wasabi

mustard**,** which always was placed next to the dark soy sauce, the one with

the red top. Green tea steamed off the tops of the small porcelain cups like

steam from hot springs.