

EIGHT

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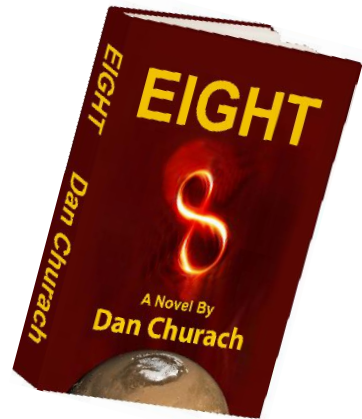
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Wednesday, 7 September; The Bund, Shanghai, China

“So, what do you think?”

Sunlyn leaned on the railing above the glass barrier and looked out across the Huangpu River. The dense forest of hundred-plus storey skyscrapers popping up from the financial district was a familiar sight even to a first-time visitor. “It’s amazing. I mean, I’ve seen so many holovision images of Shanghai, but my first in-person view is quite imposing. The overwhelming size of it all is enough to practically knock you over.”

“They have squeezed some 40-million people in here now and – considering the decreasing land area because of seawater intrusion – the density must soon approach some limit. This is my third visit here, and Shanghai never ceases to amaze me.”



“So, they call this The Bund?”

“They do.” Owen was right beside her, looking across the water at the city.

“Bund... that almost sounds German.”

“Actually, I think the term is Persian and is similar in meaning to an embankment or levee. You can find bunds throughout Asia and the subcontinent... China, Japan, India... I’m pretty sure though that ‘THE’ Bund is quite synonymous with Shanghai.”

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“Do they all have such broad walkways? Except for the fact that it is paved with stone, it reminds me of a boardwalk in Santa Cruz or Atlantic City.”

“Certainly, they aren’t all as grandiose as this.” He swept his hand towards the spectacular skyline of the Lujiazui district with its iconic Oriental Pearl TV Tower still a familiar sight to people around the globe.

“You mention the decreasing land area. I assume you mean the rising water level. That’s been a problem here just like in Florida, Italy, Bangladesh and anywhere else on Earth where low-elevation land meets the rising sea. Anyway, we’re still on The Bund, so at least the water level couldn’t have risen that much around here.”

Owen shook his head. “Not exactly... Okay, let me give just a bit of background here. Look down in front of us here.” He was pointing to discoloured concrete and steel remnants just poking out of the water in front of the glass guardrail they leaned against. “That heavy slanted steel railing was the top of the old barrier or seawall along the Huangpu River here. Since we’re close to the South China Sea here, the river is tidal and therefore responds to tidal effects twice a day, but increasingly at high tide, the river was overflowing onto The Bund. A decade or so back, the Chinese Government spent a great deal of money just to raise the concrete base here and then finish it off with what appears to be that glass pool fence that we’re looking at. My understanding is that it’s some super-duper glass that is watertight and strong. When a high tide and wind occurs at the same time, it can prevent flooding. Now for how long that remedy works, who knows?” Owen hunched his shoulders and threw his hands upward. “Mitigation or not, sea levels keep on rising.”

“That’s not dissimilar to the Floridian projects with walls and pumps... even New York City and the lower Manhattan seawall... I just wonder how powerful we can build pumps and how high we can build walls.” Sunlyn shook her head.

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“D’ya want to catch a taxi or walk over to the Old Town?”

“Can we get there on time if we walk?”

“Sure – we have plenty of time. It’ll only take us 15 minutes or so.”

“Let’s walk.”

Owen turned away from the railing and then headed away from the river. “So, I’m very anxious to meet Professor Childs.”

“She’s a fascinating woman. As I told you, I heard her presentation and had coffee with her a couple of times before she left Washington on her

way here. I quite like her, and we seemed to be very much on the same wavelength. When I found out we’d both be coming to cover the Global Holistic Summit, I was excited to think that I – we – had a head start on everyone else since we have the personal contact with her. Now son-of-a-gun... here we are.”

“Well, I’m looking forward to seeing her as much as you are. Do you know who’s with her, who else we’ll be meeting?”

“Another professor I think – Fiona Wu from the Shanghai Jiao Tong University here in Shanghai. I never met her before, but Kylie mentioned her several times during her presentation last week. I think they do a lot of work together, and they must also be personal friends. It’s such a great opportunity to get to know them both a bit



The waterfront area of Shanghai is called the Bund (*Waitan*).

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better before the Summit. HURRY!” Sunlyn made a sudden dash to cross the broad street with Owen trailing behind.

* * *

They climbed two flights of old wooden stairs into a large shop that looked like a cross between a bookstore and a tearoom. There were a few people scattered about the room as Sunlyn surveyed the area looking for a familiar face. A young woman dressed in traditional, form-fitting, silk Chinese *qipao* dress walked over to them and bowed. “*Nóng hō*... Hello. Would you like some tea?”

“Thank you so much. We are supposed to meet some colleagues here.”

“You are American?”

“Yes, yes, we are.”

The young woman smiled broadly. “Are you supposed to meet Professor Fiona Wu?”

“Why, yes.”

“Very good. Follow me.” The woman turned and headed back to the stairway on the far side of the room and started to climb another flight of wooden steps. They followed her up and entered another, smaller room.

“*Nóng hō*, Sunlyn.” Professor Childs sat at a small table with another woman, obviously Asian and strikingly beautiful.

The woman who had shown them up the stairs again bowed her head. “Thank you very much. Enjoy your tea.” She quietly turned and walked off down the stairs.

“Hello, Professor.” They walked across the room. “I’d like you to meet Owen Yates, my journalist colleague at GNN and my partner on this assignment. He’s one of our best science people.”

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“And this is my friend and collaborator Dr Fiona Wu who is a professor here in Shanghai at the Shanghai Jiao Tong University.” Kylie stood and gave Sunlyn a hug, then extended her hand to Owen. “Please, sit with us.”

Dr Wu shook hands with both. “Welcome to Shanghai.”

“Thank you.” Sunlyn pulled her chair up to the wooden table as a tea lady came over to greet them. “I didn’t realise you spoke Mandarin, Kylie.”

The professor laughed. “Well, I have gotten good at saying hello in Mandarin, *Nóng hō*. Ah, but then again, I’ve had a good teacher.” She smiled at Fiona.

“...and I have learned to say hello in Australian – ‘G’day, mate.” Fiona giggled at her best impersonation of an Australian accent.

“I’m so glad you could make it. I’ve been here at the Fenghui Tang Teahouse before with Fiona, and it’s an experience like no other.”

Sunlyn sat next to Kylie and reached over to pat her hand, which was resting on the table. “I’m so happy you invited us. And Dr Wu, it’s so nice to meet you. Professor Childs mentioned you quite a bit a presentation which I attended in Washington last week.”

“I hope when she mentioned me it was in a good light.” The stunning Chinese woman’s beautiful smile lit up the room. “And please call me Fiona.”

Sunlyn nodded her head. “She spoke of you in glowing terms, Fiona.”

Fiona Wu almost blushed as she turned towards Owen. “Have you ever been to Shanghai before, Owen?”



Blooming tea.

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“I have, Fiona. This is my third trip here. I love your beautiful city and the people I’ve met here.”

Kylie glance down at Sunlyn’s hand. “You know, I noticed your data band at the GNN offices last week. That is such a beautiful one – actually a lovely piece of jewellery. Where did you ever find that one?”

“Well, of course, it’s just a decorative skin – cover – over the old data band that I’ve had for a long time. Nicolás – he’s my soulmate – gave it to me for my birthday too many years ago to admit to, and I still like wearing it. Of course, it’s no longer functional since I had my SAM implant years ago. I liked the decorative cover too much to stop wearing it even though it no longer hides a functional data band.”

“I guess losing the chance to have a useful piece of jewellery is just one of the many things we had to get used to once the Subdermal Angel Microchip technology exploded back whenever. You don’t often see the old data bands anymore, at least not in Australia. Oh, I should be a bit more specific and say that many kids still use the thin plastic wristband, but even then, families you wouldn’t think could afford SAMs still tend to give them to kids by their 15th or 16th birthday.”

Sunlyn bobbed her head up and down. “That’s pretty much the same in North America. How about here in China, Fiona?”

“Exactly the same. For that matter, I think you will find that about 90 per cent of all the SAMs on Earth are manufactured right here in China, so it’s a no-brainer that we are huge consumers of the technology, too.”

“Well anyway, I do think your non-functional data band skin makes for a beautiful piece of jewellery, and I commend your soulmate, Nicolás. He obviously has excellent taste.”

“That he does... I am hoping you will get to meet him.”

“I would love that. For that matter, I hope you get to meet my

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mate, too. I know I told you about the conference in Sydney, but we have heard some whispers about something big, maybe in Perth, after the Summit here. Things keep changing so quickly now. Whatever, I have no doubt you'd like my Micky."

"That would be lovely. I'd love to meet your mate, Kylie."

A tea lady came to the table and introduced herself as Li Wei. She began explaining a bit about the teahouse, the types of tea they had and for what ailments each tea offered a remedy. After a brief conversation, they agreed to try a variety of blooming teas.



The original tea lady, Fiona, at the Fenghui Tang-Styled Teahouse in Shanghai, August 2017. She made Karn and I tea and we had a fascinating chat with her.

Sunlyn was mesmerised when the tea lady returned with a tray carrying a small glass teapot for each of them along with four glass teacups. One by one, the tea lady took a small ball of tea leaves and held it up. She assured them that each ball of leaves contained a dried flower blossom in the middle. Li Wei ceremonially placed tea balls one by one next to each teapot. Sunlyn had chosen the jasmine with amaranth and marigold and watched intently as the tea lady gently placed the flowering tea ball in her pot. The tea lady then took a kettle of boiling water from the small gas burner and proceeded to carefully pour the water into a pot. She repeated the ritual for each of them. All eyes remained glued on their own teapots as the packets unfolded in the hot water, each pod growing into beautiful blossoms over the next three or four minutes. Sunlyn

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was taken by the silent vigil as the group sat trance-like, watching the blooming tea brew as if a part of some mystical religious experience. Finally, Li Wei slowly nodded her head and smiled. “Enjoy.”

Sunlyn filled her teacup to about two-thirds, carefully placed her pot down on the wooden mat and sipped her tea. She let the flavour rush through her nose and into her nostrils. She enjoyed the silence and let her eyes take in the serenity of the old tearoom. The walls were a muddled arrangement of shelf after shelf of teapots, teacups, tea sets interspersed with row after row of labelled jars of various teas. In amongst all of this was an array of beautiful Chinese artwork. She took another taste of her blooming tea and sighed. “Wonderful.” She looked at Owen. “What did you get?”

“Lychee. It’s fantastic.” Owen took a deep breath. He looked quizzically across the table to the other two women.

“Guava, my favourite,” said Fiona.

“Red Jasmine... yum.” Kylie sipped again.