Harris

Chapter 1

Inova Alexandria Hospital

Room 501

4300 Seminary Road

Alexandria, Virginia, USA

April 19, 2017

1830 hours EST

Lieutenant Gong Aiguo lay in his hospital bed staring at the drop ceiling. The tile directly above his head was painted with a colorful scene of some mountain range. The foreground contained elk and a cabin of western design. It wasn't China, but it drew his mind elsewhere. He could feel the bitter cold of the Taihang Mountains on his cheeks. Each breath of sub-zero air seared his lungs. Each step through the deep snow was more difficult than the last.

"I am a Siberian Tiger. I am a warrior for the People's Republic of China. I will not yield. I will not surrender," he moaned, as he struggled against the steel cuffs that bound each of his limbs to the hospital bed.

He had been drifting in and out of a drug induced stupor for days as his body tried to heal the damage caused by the impact of two .45 caliber bullets. Steel rods protruded from his left thigh, immobilizing his surgically repaired femur. The huge American's face still haunted his dreams. The searing hatred in his eyes, the barely restrained fury as he bent low over his prey, the spiraled tunnel held in the American's hand that presented itself as a relief from so much pain and torment. The pain told him that he was still alive, and at the mercy of his captors.

"I have not failed my country. As long as I can still breathe, I will still destroy America," he mumbled, as he drifted back into the roiling turmoil of his dreams.

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Hallway outside Room 501

"So we're moving him tomorrow?" Officer Ted Barlow asked, as he stared through the armored glass at the Chinese Special Forces agent.

"We aren't doing shit. Our bodyguard duties end tomorrow when the Feds come and transport this guy to some federal hospital," Sergeant Marshon Morehead replied, as he glanced up and down the hallway of the 5th floor.

"Ten days of this shit is about all I can take," Officer Morehead said, as he and Officer Barlow nodded and fist bumped in agreement.

"I still can't believe they emptied the whole floor just for this guy. Not like he's going to get up and walk out," Officer Barlow said.

Two other officers stood at each end of the hall. Another four officers were stationed near the elevators and stairwells. All the officers had been told was that the man they guarded was extremely dangerous and a threat to the nation. All they saw were metal rods sticking out of his left thigh and a heavily bandaged right chest.

"I heard they're taking him to Walter Reed. Better security up there," Officer Barlow said.

"Yeah, we get off at 6 AM and that's it. Day after that and we're back at the precinct on day shift. Anything's better than being cooped up in here all night. The floor's empty, and only male nurses to look at," Officer Morehead replied, as they both laughed.

As if on cue, a male nurse of Asian descent exited a storage room to their left and headed for Room 501.

"Relax officers, you know the routine. I change the dressings on his chest once a night and verify the tension on the leg bolts," Nurse Walter Yin said, as he wheeled his cart up to the entrance.

"It's chill, Walter. I just didn't notice you entering the storage room," Officer Morehead said, while visually checking the contents on the two-tiered cart.

"That's because there's a door that connects to the nurses' station," Walter said, as he pressed the access panel to give him access to the room.

As the cart rolled past and the glass door shut, Officer Morehead said, "I'm not sure about that guy."

"Marshon, that sounds like racial profiling . . . and from a brother! I am seriously disappointed," Officer Barlow said, while grinning at his partner.

"Fuck off!" Officer Morehead said, while staring through the glass door.

. . . .

Room 501

"So how are you tonight, Lieutenant Gong Aiguo?" Walter asked, his back to the door as he checked the tension in the steel rods protruding from his patient's right thigh.

Aiguo ignored the question, his closed eyes and soft breathing feigning sleep.

"Nice try, but you snore when you sleep. Besides . . . One day as a tiger is worth a thousand as a sheep," Walter said, as Aiguo's eyes gently opened.

"I know you don't trust me, but you are leaving here tonight . . . in less than 15 minutes. You have not been forgotten or abandoned by your brothers," Walter said, while switching over to the other side of the bed.

Aiguo said nothing as his mind ran through various scenarios.

"*That phrase was from my training as a Siberian Tiger. Would the American's know that? Is this some kind of plan to make me drop my guard? They may think that I know more than I do. A fake rescue and then I'll tell them everything. I'll tell them nothing! This is just a ruse,"* Aiguo told himself, while staring into the nurse's eyes.

"Patience comrade, Chénmò de lǎohǔ zǒuguòle yīyè (the silent tiger walks through the night)," Walter whispered, while changing the bandage on Aiguo's chest wound.

*"Only my platoon members knew that phrase. We were the Silent Tigers. This is real. They are coming for me,"* Aiguo thought, as Walter secured the new dressing, stared into Aiguo's eyes and smiled.

Chapter 2

Parking Lot

Beside the Ellen Coolidge Burke Branch Library

Alexandria, Virginia

April 20, 2017

0300 hours EST

"Comrades, it's time to go retrieve our brother," Sergeant Wang Jian said, while tapping Heng on the shoulder.

Heng nodded and started the engine on the Ford Excalibur ambulance. It was painted white with orange stripes down the side. The distinctive shield logo containing the Capitol Building and a purple cross preceded the 'Walter Reed National Military Medical Center' painted in large blue letters on the side.

"Remember, as soon as we leave the ambulance . . . face shields down. Four Asian men dressed in US military garb would draw attention," Jian said, as Heng pulled the ambulance from the shadows behind the library and turned left onto Library Lane.

"Chonglin, prepare yourself? What are you doing back there?" Jian asked, while staring towards the darkened rear of the ambulance.

"Nothing, Comrade. Just focusing on the mission," Chonglin said, while placing his combat knife back in its sheath.

The streets were empty as the ambulance turned left onto Seminary Road. A thick fog had settled in since midnight.

"Two minutes, Comrades. Remember, stay calm, but alert. We are supposed to be transporting a dangerous prisoner. I will be the only one that talks. If we meet anyone and I decide that they need to be taken down I will point at them. Silence is imperative. Our only chance is to get in and out without starting an alarm," Jian said, as the ambulance turned right onto North Howard Street.

"Remember, Heng, second right then curve to the left. The loading dock is on the far side of the hospital," Jian said, while laying his hand on Heng's right shoulder.

They had walked through the scenario for days until all five men knew the assignments of every position, but Jian was nervous. He knew that all plans seemed perfect until they weren't. There were always surprises or holes in the data used to plan an operation.

"I think the fog's getting worse," Heng said, as he slowed the ambulance and took the second exit off North Howard Street.

The four men in the back of the ambulance were all dressed in green camo US Army Combat Uniforms (ACUs). All four were armed with M4A1's with suppressors. They exchanged glances, then lowered the dark visors on their helmets.

"Remember, keep the weapons slung at your side. If you carry them forward the suppressors are too obvious," Jian said, as they drove slowly past the Emergency Room entrance.

No other ambulances were present. The entrance was a bright glow in the thickening fog.

"Slowly Heng, curve to the right past the parking deck on the left. The loading dock is on the right, at the end of the building," Jian said, while staring into the dense fog.

"Wǒ kàn bù dào gǒu shǐ (I can't see shit)," Heng said.

"Just keep going. There's the entrance to the parking deck. Keep going," Jian said, while glancing over his shoulder at the others.

All four men were facing toward the rear of the ambulance, visors down and weapons at the ready. The wheeled gurney they would use to transport their comrade sat between them.

"There, on the right, that's the loading dock. Go a little further and then start backing up. I'll get out and guide you back," Jian said.

The loading dock had two levels. One was for ambulances and the other was for tractor trailers. Jian jumped out of the ambulance passenger side as Heng started to back up towards the ambulance loading dock.

"Good, you're lined up . . . 10 meters, slower . . . five meters . . . one meter," Jian said, while glancing around the loading dock.

It was quiet and no personnel were anywhere in sight. He knew that the dock should be abandoned. The staff only worked two eight-hour shifts and weren't due at work for another two hours.

With a slight bump the ambulance stopped and the doors swung open. Jian climbed onto the loading dock as the rear doors of the ambulance slowly swung open. Four rifle barrels greeted him as he approached the rear of the ambulance.

With a nod he reached into the ambulance, removed the gurney, and pulled it to an upright and locked position. The team moved in silence. The last member to exit the ambulance shut the rear doors as Heng turned off the engine. As expected, the entrance door into the loading bay was locked, but was quickly picked by one of the team members.

The storage area was dark, but the exit was visible on the back right. Two double doors with glass inserts cast enough light for them to make their way through the storage area.

Jian pushed open the doors with the gurney as they entered the brightly lit corridors of the hospital. He glanced at his watch . . . 3:10 AM.

"*We should be back at these doors in 12 minutes,"* he told himself, as they wound their way through the twists and turns that led to the main elevator.

As he navigated a turn to the right he almost ran into a janitor pushing his cart of cleaning supplies.

"Jesus, dude! You scared the shit outta me. This place is like a ghost town at night. Whoa, what's with the guns?" the man asked, while brushing his long hair out of his eyes.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. We're here to transport a patient up to Walter Reed," Jian said, while nodding at the team trailing behind him.

"Oh, you must mean the dude up on the 5th Floor. I have to have a cop escort me up there. I'm due to make my nightly run in about half an hour. Rumor has it that he's the one that killed all the staff in the ER a few weeks back. I'll be glad to see that SOB gone," the man said, as Jian smiled and began to push past him.

"Sorry about the scare. We've got a schedule," Jian said, as the man nodded and began to push his cart down the hallway.

Jian turned and stared at the man's back. Then he pointed at the man. Zhang Weimin, the last man in the group, wrapped his left arm around the janitor's neck as the man walked past him. With his right hand he applied pressure and the struggling man was unconscious in seconds.

Jian made a slashing motion across his neck and pointed at a door leading off the hallway. Weiman and Bingwen carried the man and his cart into the room. Both reappeared seconds later and nodded.

"*Two minute delay*," Jian thought, while glancing at his watch.

The hospital seemed empty as they walked up to the main elevator and pressed the Up button on the elevator on the right. When the doors opened Jian pushed the gurney in and walked to the far side of the elevator. His four comrades stepped into the elevator, and unslung their weapons. Bingwen pressed the button for the 5th Floor. All four men shouldered their automatic weapons and faced the opening.

Chapter 3

Inova Alexandria Hospital

Room 501

4300 Seminary Road

Alexandria, Virginia, USA

April 20, 2017

0315 hours EST

Aiguo could feel the adrenalin coursing through his body. He had always loved the feeling as it quickened his mind and his reflexes. Everything started to slow down. He glanced at the clock on the wall. The nurse had walked out of his room 16 minutes ago. If something was going to happen it would happen now.

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5th Floor

Elevator

0316 hours

When the elevator doors opened on the 5th Floor, two Alexandria PD officers were chatting about basketball. North Carolina had won another national title and both men hated UNC. They glanced over at the elevator expecting the nurse to return from the cafeteria. Both men were dropped with single shots to the head.

A wedge was inserted into the elevator doors to hold them open. There were no words as the team exited the elevator, turning left into the main hallway. The four gunners led the way, staggered left and right to give each a clear field of fire. Officers Ted Barlow and Marshon Morehead still stood outside Room 501, 50 feet away. Barlow's head exploded. Marshon flinched, but never felt the bullet crease the right side of his cheek.

There was no time to think, only react. Marshon dove to his left as two bullets thudded into his Covert IIIA protective vest. His vest was not standard issue and would stop a .44 mag. Still, it felt like someone had hit him in the chest with a baseball bat. His 9 mm Glock appeared in his hand and he began firing wildly down the hall. Renshu spun to the floor, hit in the left hip. Weimin was clipped in the left arm. A second round took him in the throat. Both of Marshon's legs were hit, and he tumbled to the floor. As he raised the pistol to fire again, his right arm was shattered by two more rounds. He slumped against the wall, and glancing to his left, saw two US Army soldiers advancing on him.

"What the fu . . ." were his last words as a 5.56mm round entered his forehead and blew out the back of his skull.

Renshu struggled to his feet, cursing in Chinese. Jian silenced him with a gesture as the sound of running feet could be heard coming from two adjacent hallways.

The first officer came running around a corner to the left and was dropped by half a dozen shots. The second appeared at the end of a hall perpendicular to Room 501. She dropped to one knee and began placing well aimed shots at the attackers. Chonglin was staggered, as two rounds struck him in the chest, but were stopped by his body armor. The second officer's head snapped back, torn apart by the impact of two bullets. Her body jumped and twisted as she was riddled, until she settled into a rapidly expanding puddle of her own blood. Silence and the acrid ammonia smell of spent gunpowder lingered in the hall.

"Chonglin, Bingwen, clear the floor. Kill any hostiles," Jian ordered, while turning, and staring down at the twitching corpse of Weimin.

Blood still spurted from his a severed carotid artery in his neck. His eyes glazed over as the spurting became a dribble.

"Renshu, can you walk?" Jian asked, as he bent over, and closed Weimin's eyes.

Renshu sat on the floor and slit open his pants at the wound site.

"Flesh wound . . . hurts like shit," he said, while removing an Emergency Bandage from a pouch on his web gear.

"May have nicked an artery. As the American's would say, I'm bleeding like a stuck pig," Renshu said, while tightening the Israeli designed bandage.

"Renshu, cover the hall until the others return," Jian said, as he struck the wall-mounted pad that opened the door to Room 501.

"First Lieutenant Gong," Jian said, as he nodded in deference, stepped over to the bed, and inspected the cuffs restraining Aiguo to the bed.

"Sergeant Wang, it has been years. I didn't know you were in country," Aiguo said, smiling for the first time in weeks.

"I also was part of General Kung's program, but that story will wait. We need to get you out of here," Jian said.

"The Hēirén (black) has the keys. They hang from his belt," Aiguo said.

Jian nodded, retrieved the keys, and began unlocking the cuffs.

"We have an ambulance at a loading dock. This gurney is smaller and easier to maneuver. Here, I brought you a pistol. After this mess we may have to shoot our way out of here," Jian said, while rolling the gurney over parallel to the bed.

"You'll have to help me, Sergeant. I haven't been out of this bed in weeks," Aiguo said, while trying to drag himself onto the gurney.

The door to Room 501 opened. Renshu limped in and asked, "What do we do with Weimin?"

"Leave him. Take his weapons. We're six minutes behind schedule. If one of the police called for backup, we may not make it out of here," Jian said, while pulling Aiguo onto the gurney.

"Hold the door, we're leaving," Jian said, while pulling a blanket from the hospital bed and draping it over Aiguo.

"The floor is clear. We jammed the other stairwell doors," Bingwen said, as he and Chonglin ran into the hallway outside Room 501.

"Good, back to the ambulance. Silence anyone that we meet," Jian said, as he began pushing Aiguo to the elevator.

When the elevator doors opened, Walter's eyes widened as he was greeted with three rifles and two pistols pointed at his head. One shot was fired. Blood and brain matter splattered across the back of the elevator.

"Idiot! He was one of ours!" Jian yelled, as Walter's body dropped across the entrance to the elevator.

"You said silence anyone that we met," Chonglin replied.

The doors closed. Then opened again as they contacted Walter's body.

"Pull him out of the way. He was a loose end anyway," Jian said.

"*This is cleaner. They'll think that he was just another victim*," Jian thought, as Walter was dumped in the hallway beside the first two officers that were killed.

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The Ambulance

0330 hours

Heng sat in the driver's seat of the ambulance drumming his fingers against the steering wheel.

"Eight minutes late . . . almost nine . . . something went wrong," he said, while lowering the window on the driver's side.

The fog was still thick. He glanced at his watch for the fourth time in the last two minutes and listened.

"No sirens . . . at least there aren't any sirens . . . yet," he said, then jumped as the rear doors to the ambulance were yanked open.

He started the engine as he glanced back and saw the gurney rolled into the back and locked in place. Counting heads he saw that they were one short.

"What happened? Who's missing?" Heng asked, as Jian leapt into the passenger seat beside him.

"Shut up and drive. Slowly, back out the way we came. Then turn right on North Howard. One missed shot and things got messy. We lost Weimin," Jian said, as the ambulance pulled away from the loading dock.