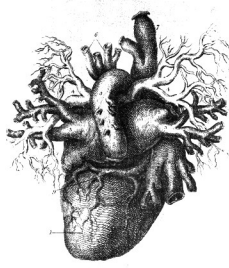


Take All of Murphy

The three of them stood beside the wrapped body on the metal table. They all wore clean new laboratory coats, which still had creases down the arms and over the breast pockets from being folded and stacked in a box. These white coats were the same size, even though the wearers were of varying build. All three medical students were size medium, but differently framed. Ming had her cuffs rolled up twice.

They had come in from the hot, early afternoon of an autumn day, a remnant of summer. They had entered the basement by an unmarked inner staircase, and then approached the lab through a plain, combination-locked door. There were fourteen dissection rooms, eight tables per room, three students assigned per table, checking the tags to find their cadavers, whispering and shuffling like white-coated ghosts in the basement anatomy lab. No windows. Instead, a dry fluorescent light flattened every surface.

“You want to go first?” said Ming.

“I don’t mind,” said Sri.

“Me neither,” said Chen, holding the blade hesitantly between his thumb, and the second and third fingers.

“Well to me, it doesn’t matter,” said Ming. “What about you?” she asked, turning to Sri. When he paused, she said, “If it’s a problem for you I’ll start the cutting.”

To Sri, Ming seemed both overly eager and fearful regarding the task, and Sri did not want their dissection to begin with this mix of emotions. Sri felt only the single emotion of fear, which he felt was a better way to begin this undertaking, and so he said, “I’ll start.” He gripped his blade handle firmly.

“Not if you don’t want to,” said Chen, seeing Sri’s discomfort. “I can.”

“I’ll start.” Sri shifted closer.



That morning, they had been briefed in the lecture theatre by Dean Cortina,

“A few of you might be upset initially. You may temporarily excuse yourselves if necessary. In any case, I would rather you be a bit emotional than, shall we say, overly cavalier. Keep in mind that distasteful incidents regarding cadavers have, in the past, resulted in expulsion.”

She reminded them that there was to be no eating or drinking in the dissection rooms, although snacks could be consumed in the anatomy museum so long as it was kept tidy.



“I think it’s easier if you hold it like a pen,” said Ming. When Sri said nothing, she said, “All I’m saying is that if you hold it like a... Well, never mind, suit yourself of course, it’s only that-”

“Just let me do it,” said Sri. “Let me stand here.” He moved to stand where Ming was, without waiting for her to move. She shifted, avoiding collision. Ming and Chen were quiet.

Sri began to cut the cotton, a stringy damp net, discoloured yellow in its folds. It smelled tough. First he cut down like when you lean with the first finger on a boned meat. This dented it, but the fabric was swelling inwards instead of giving. He turned the scalpel upwards, and lifted the edge of the fabric to slip the blade beneath the fabric. He sawed back and forth, and the threads twisted when severed.

“What about scissors?” whispered Chen.

Dr. Harrison, their anatomy demonstrator, appeared at their table, congratulated them upon entering the study of medicine, and said, “This fine cadaver is your first patient. Dignity and decorum are crucial. You must be mindful of this gift you are given, and treat your patient nobly.” He paused. “Nobility. You may give him... or her?” Harrison checked the tag. “Ah, him, a name if you like. Or not. That’s up to you. No frivolous names. Questions? No? Very well. Continue, then.” All of this, he managed to say with his hands crossed neatly in front of himself, and then he was at the next table, nodding seriously.

The fabric now open, Ming took scissors and cut it wider in a quick, impatient motion, spreading the fabric up to the neck and then down to the navel. The damp skin of the cadaver’s chest was a shocking beige within the yellowed fabric that had been cut apart.

“There,” said Ming.

“Are you going to do it?” said Sri, not offering the scalpel. He hadn’t moved, and she had leaned across him to open the swath of cloth.

“I was just trying to help, you know, get things going.”

“I already said I’ll do it.”

“As you prefer.”

Sri now held the scalpel like a pen. He looked at the manual. The manual was very particular, and Sri wanted to follow it with clarity. At the top of the sternum the incision should begin, extending downwards to the xiphoid. ‘A central incision’, it read. Ming opened the fabric, pulled it to either side, the nipples purple on the rubber-cold skin. Still not moving, Sri held the scalpel like a pen, stared at the manual’s exact instructions. There was a dotted line drawn from the top of the sternum in the illustration, an arrow pointed towards the navel but stopping short of it. Sri straightened the veil, covered the nipples. He gripped the scalpel hard, like a dull pencil.

“Right down the middle,” said Ming. “Like a zipper. But if you’re going to take forever-”

Sri grabbed the scalpel handle like a stick, and buried the short, triangular blade in the midline of the chest. Flesh gripped the blade, and through the handle Sri felt its texture - thick and chalky. Steel scraping on sternum. Sri thought of a beach – of writing with a stick in hard sand thrown halfway up from the tide, with the water not far away. Through his knuckles, Sri felt fibres tearing. The cadaver’s flesh pulled hard at him now. Halfway there. It ripped at Sri, to cut this skin. He tore it, forced his way through. He pulled open the cotton shroud. This old, wrung-out chest with small lopsided man-breasts. Above the left nipple were four tattoo hearts in purple, the shape of the designs

twisted by the skin's movement through its years. A clean jagged tear through the centre – the sternum white beneath. Sri was amazed by the pale ivory of a man's bone.

The three of them stood erect at the shining cold table. The man now lay slightly unwrapped. The cloths wound around themselves up and over his neck, then tenderly wrapped the face. They had been told the heads would all be shaved. The table was indented, and the indentation traced down to a hole between the feet. The hole opened into a spout over a bucket so fluids could escape as they ran down the table. On the steel was the man-form in soaked cloth. His chest was gashed now. The chest was not shaved but was thick with cold hair. Hair parted in one crooked stabbing cut which peeled open the front.

“Good job, Sri,” said Chen.

“Feels funny.”

“I guess it's my turn.”

There were eight dissection tables in the room, and at some tables a person was hunched over a cadaver. Whispers shuddered up from the floor, as the familiar touch of skin became distorted. One hushed voice, *Haven't we all seen bodies before?* At another, one held the cloth up and the other two cut at it. All of the students wore new lab coats, which they had been told they would need to discard once the dissection was done.



One day when Chen was in Dean Cortina's office to discuss student loans, she said to him,

“I remember my dissection group. Oh, what year, I don’t want to tell you. I remember some comments that were made – regarding dissection material. You see, in my time it was all people from the jails or found dead in fights or ditches. No identification and so forth. What you would call bad people. Yours are different, all volunteers. Elderly, upstanding citizens mostly. Ours were young people with fast lifestyles. Virile, some might say. Although I guess it’s really no different once they’re cadavers.

Anyhow. I remember some guy saying, ‘Wow look at this one, what a broad.’ I didn’t like that, you know, I didn’t think it was right. On the other hand, I remember we dissected a big man. Muscular, built, and someone called him an ox... it was to say what a powerful man, a big strong man. So they called him an ‘ox’. Vernacular to be sure, but it was out of respect and to say he must have been impressive. I thought that was alright. I didn’t like someone saying ‘What a broad,’ though. What was he looking at? That sort of sexual appeal was not the right way to think. I spoke up, oh certainly I did, I said to this guy who was laughing, ‘You wouldn’t like a man calling your sister a broad.’ He was angry. He was pissed off and he said, ‘My sister is alive so shut up.’”

Dean Cortina laughed. “So I said, ‘It’s not cool to call your sister a broad because she’s alive?’ Boy, he was upset.”

Chen didn’t know quite how to respond, so he agreed in a polite and very general way, and left without resolving the issue of his student loan.



On the day the ribs were cut to get at the organs, the room shrieked with hand-held rotary saws. Bone dust – it was in your hair, on your lips afterwards.

“Smells like barbeque,” shouted Ming.

Sri leaned off the saw, held it, still buzzing, in front of him, and regarded Ming as if amazed at her. As if about to speak. Instead, he diverted his eyes from her and said, “Where’s the manual?”

Chen walked out quickly, his hand over his mouth, almost running. When he came back he was red and wet in the face, his hair pushed back and damp. “I’m fine. Are you finished cutting?”

The chest opened to show the heart’s chambers, where the great vessels now lay at rest. These sinuous vessels coursed to the lungs, and splayed into the organs and limbs. The lungs were fringed with the gritty black of tobacco.

“Aren’t there people who fill their dead with stones,” murmured Chen, “and sink them to the bottom of the sea?”

“You’re thinking of concrete boots. Gangsters did that.” Ming didn’t look up as she peeled away a strip of fat.

“No, after they die naturally. As a burial ceremony. They take out the heart and lungs and fill this,” he patted the inside wall of the chest, “with stones so the body sinks.”

“What do they do with the organs?” asked Ming.

“I can’t remember that part. Who are they?” He turned to Sri.

Ming turned to Sri, “Do your people do that?”

“We burn them.”

“Must smell,” said Ming.

“What do you think?”

“I guess it smells. Like cutting bone. Like-”, she laughed, “forget it.”

Sri said little for the rest of the lab, and his quietness spilled uncomfortably to the other two, so that all three of them worked in a thick silence for the rest of the day.

Cutting through layers, spreading tissue, saying only what was necessary.

Sri changed all his clothing at the lab. Many people kept a shirt or coveralls in their lockers for dissection, but Sri changed everything – his underwear, his socks, in the men’s room. Always in a stall, preferably with no one else in the washroom. That day, he heard footsteps come into the bathroom a moment after he had taken off his shirt. He kept still, a reflex. The footsteps were not followed by running water, or the hissing of urine on porcelain. The footsteps waited,

“Uh – Sri? Is that you, Sri?” It was Chen.

A pause. “Yeah.”

“You’re cool, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Great. I’m glad. Ming’s got a tough exterior. Right? All bluff, you can see that.”

“I said I’m cool.”

“I’ll see you, then.”

No further footsteps.

Sri crossed his arms, his naked chest prickling in the concrete block basement.

“It’s fine, Chen. Thanks for asking.”

“Right. See you.”

Footsteps, the squeaky door.



When they first started the dissections, there were bright mornings to come in from, and warm afternoons to go out to after the day's work. As the weeks passed, they entered the basement on cooler mornings with a hesitant light, and departed into a fading golden afternoon. The leaves swelled with colour until they became too heavy with the intensity of reds and oranges, and fell to the ground. Each day, more human anatomy was exposed, more of the organs lifted out of their shy hiding places into their first glimpse of light. It was as if the actual daytime no longer existed. Night was just ending as the students arrived in the morning, just beginning as they left. The daytime of sun had been replaced by the fluorescent bathed, whitewashed concrete daylight of the basement, as the inverted parts of bodies were given their belated and temporary glimpses of light.

Sri proposed they name their cadaver 'Murphy'. A dignified, but comfortable name, he argued. Ming refused to use any name. Chen took neither side, suggested that each do as they please. Sri referred to 'Murphy's aorta, Murphy's kidneys'. Ming made a point of saying 'the cadaver's aorta, the cadaver's kidneys'.

Beneath the shield of diaphragm, the liver and spleen were wet and heavy. There was a stickiness to the smell where the formalin had seeped into hepatocytes and gelled the lobes of liver into a single pungent mass.



One day the bowel tore. A line of shit squirted onto Ming's coat. It smelled like formalin, an acidic sweetness, and another smell. She wiped it off, leaving a mark, finished tracing the mesenteric circulation, and laughed when she threw the coat into the garbage. "I wanted a new coat, anyhow," she said. The cuffs of her fresh coat were again too long, and soaked up fluids until she rolled them back. It became easier to dissect, as over the days the cadaver was more fragmented and the pieces more separated from one another. There was less to pry apart – it was more detail work now.

They unwrapped the arm from the wrist upwards. The hand was separately wrapped. Ming held up the arm, holding the hand like a victory grasp. Along the flat back of the forearm was a lightning bolt tattoo, once straight lines – now soft arcs. Each branch of the lightning underlined a word. One 'Golden', the other 'Flash'. Chen rolled back the moist, yellow gauze. Above the elbow was a ring of small figures, crosses? No, airplanes. In addition to the thumbprint-sized fuselage and wings, there were the remnants of little propellers, now faded into age spots and the creases of oldness. Above the airplanes in official type was tattooed RCAF - 17th Squadron. Above this, there was a Spitfire with an open shark's jaw. The tail of the spitfire was ajar from a thick scar across the fuselage that had been sewn shut dirty, long ago. The little ring of airplanes stood wing to wing on the front above the elbow, and then a gap in the inside of the arm.

"Go killer," said Ming triumphantly. Then when they looked at her, "All those planes. He must have shot them down. You'll have to call him Lieutenant Murphy."

"A pilot?" said Chen.

"There's some planes missing," said Ming. "He didn't get enough to go all the way around."

Sri touched the tattooed arm. "I guess the war ended."

"It's good they started the tattoos from the outside," said Ming.

Chen bunched up the gauze and snipped it. He continued to unroll, revealing a rich and delicate crucifix within a heart, large over the hump of shoulder. In gothic letters under the crucifix, 'The Lord Keeps Me - Mark:16'. The gauze was off the arm. Ming opened the manual.

"Okay, so down here, and then across." She pointed with the blunt edge of the blade.

"Mark. From the Bible, right?" said Sri.

"It's one of the four books in the second half," said Chen.

"What is that part?"

"Umm. I don't know. The overview is simple: Jesus died on the cross to save us, rose from the dead after three days. As for Mark 16..."

"It must mean something," said Sri.

"I'll look it up for you," said Chen.

"Why don't we cut around?" Sri's small finger traced along one arm of the cross. The cross expanded to curve across each side of the arm in its faded blue wrought ironwork.

"The manual shows," Ming said, "to cut here."

"It is a shame," said Chen, "to cut this apart." The manual's illustration advised an incision directly over the tattooed arm.

"We can easily cut around." Sri spun his scalpel in the fingers of one hand, which he often did until someone reminded him, or he remembered, that it was not a pen.

“What are you going to do,” said Ming, “save this?”

“It’s bad luck,” said Sri. “Cut around here.” He traced around the ornate heart with the handle of his scalpel.

“It’s a nice cross,” agreed Chen.

“You guys.” Ming didn’t look up. She traced the lines on the arm. “It’s not going to work. Don’t you want to see the bicipital groove?”

“You should respect a man’s symbols,” said Sri. “My mother told me that. Look at his arm. These are his symbols.”

“Don’t your people burn the corpses, anyhow?” said Ming, grabbing the tattooed arm.

“He’s not my people.”

“Let’s get on with it.”

“But that’s not the point,” said Sri.

“So what’s the point? You afraid of lightning bolts?”

“I’m not afraid of you.” He twirled the scalpel nervously, met Ming’s stare.

“Why don’t you cut around,” said Chen, breaking their locked eyes. “Then dissect the subcutaneous layer? It’ll be the same.”



Dr. Harrison was an origami man. In his room of eight tables, they first learned how to make paper boats.

“Let me show you how to tuck in the corners so that it’ll be tight and waterproof,” he said. Each day in the lab, after dissection, came the origami.

“All right my friends, I hope you’ve learned well and are ready to set your knowledge free.” Each day, every student had to select a page from the lab manual, cut it out carefully at the spiral binding, and fold it into that day’s paper figure. After the boats came paper frogs. Then the paper balls that you needed to blow into. They were advised to choose a clean page. They learned that it was easy to make swans from knowing a boat, if you had the trick.

“If you want to take more than one page out of your manual, you may do so,” he said, “Of course, I may test you from that page. Only anatomy manual origami is allowed.” It was known that you should make notes before taking out a page. You had to take out at last one page.

The swans were hung over the cadavers with twine, and if you forgot something you could look up and see if it was printed on the wing of a twirling swan.



Halfway through the semester, the days were ending earlier. The sky turned blood to black in the late afternoon. Sri and Chen came in from a dinner break – veggie dogs. Ming didn’t take breaks, instead munched granola bars in the museum section of the basement. They had to stay late because it was the evening before the anatomy midterm. Most of the class was still in the basement, and the two of them found Ming rummaging through the bags of body parts, searching. She explained the situation to them, frustrated but not apologetic.

“What do you mean you lost the right side of the head?” Chen asked quietly.

“No, I didn’t exactly lose it. It’s simply not where I left it,” said Ming.

“You put it in the head bag?” said Sri.

“Anyway, we’ve got the left side. We can look at someone else’s right.”

“The exam’s tomorrow,” said Chen. The right and left halves of the head had been dissected differently, and the parts needed from the right had been removed from the left.

“Just think for a second. Are you sure you left it here?” said Sri, fingering the bag which contained the left half of the head.

“I’m sure. I covered it. I sprayed it. It was right here.”

“You’re always in such a rush,” said Sri. “Maybe if you slowed down. You know how long I spent dissecting those cranial nerves?”

“I bet someone took it,” said Ming.

Sri replied, “Right. Make up a story. You were looking at it, so it was your responsibility to put it back. With the rest of Murphy.”

“Who made you boss? He’s not a Murphy,” said Ming. “Probably someone borrowed it – it’ll turn up.”

“You lost the head,” Sri whispered, leaning forward and looking at Ming, “and I named him Murphy.”

“It’s only half. And I did not lose it. I left it right here. It’s not where I left it. That’s not ‘losing’ it.”

“Obviously you don’t care,” said Sri.

“Just study it from the manual.”

“I made the cranial nerve page into a swan,” said Chen. He rested his latex hands on the table.

Ming said, "Should have chosen a different page."

At two in the morning, only Sri and Chen were in the lab sitting over the borrowed right half of a head. All the other tables were covered in sheets, and sprayed in the fresh pungency of formalin.

"You know she won't apologise, but you probably should," said Chen,

"Why?"

"Because we've still got the pelvis and legs to do. It'll be better if you make peace."

"This is very bad."

"Sure you guys are upset, so just smooth it out."

"Not just her. Losing half his head is bad. And why did she insist we had to cut through Murphy's cross and heart?"

"She follows the book, Sri. She reads it, she does it."

"My mother told me you should respect a man's symbols. We should have cut around the cross. Did you look up that Mark thing?"

"Sorry, I forgot. What was it again?"

"Mark 16."

"I'll check it for you. Did your mother say anything about losing half a head?"

"Never came up."

They looked down at the open half-head which they had only been able to study after midnight when another group had finished. Ming had decided to study from the anatomy atlas. "Ready for tomorrow?"

“Ready as ever, I guess,” said Sri.

“I guess we’re done here. Hungry?”

“Kind of. I need something filling to help me sleep.”

“Let’s go.”

In the night, walking under blowing elms, they smelled themselves more clearly, their skin sticky in the armpits and elbows. In the creases of their hands. In the washroom of Nona’s, while the round lady heated their calzones, Chen washed his face with his hands, and the more he washed the more that odor seeped from between his fingers and the nails. Under the low wattage light, he used the tepid water and hard soap to wash his hands raw.



After the midterm, Sri went to Dean Cortina and asked to switch to a different group.

He said, “One of my partners is great but I have a communication problem with my other colleague.”

“The course is almost over, and we can’t change the groups. I’m glad you said colleague because that means you think like a professional. Take this as your first professional challenge,” said Cortina. “I remember my anatomy group and I don’t want to tell you how many years ago.” She sat back in her big chair. “We had a communication problem. Men are odd about penises. They don’t want to talk about them but they secretly believe them to be very important, perhaps sacred. So now we got to the penis on our cadaver, and the men wanted to skip it. ‘We’ll look at the book’, they said.

'No way', I said, 'we need to see the inside of the penis.' Corpus spongiosum, all that jazz. Besides, the poor guy's body was lying there. A big man, powerful, and it would have been a shame just to let it go to waste. What did we do? We talked. We talked like professionals, and I saw that it was this one guy's turn to dissect, and there was no way that this man was going to cut up a penis. So I said, 'What if I do it?', and I did it, and I think we all understood the issue better. Does that help?'

Sri couldn't think of anything to say. He thanked Dean Cortina and left her office.



When they got to the penis, there was no problem or hesitation. It was Ming's turn to cut, and she went right through it with one long arc of the scalpel, so that was all there was to it. She said,

“You guys okay?”

“Sure,” said Chen.

“Someone want the testicles?”

Both Chen and Sri declined politely, and so Ming did the rest of that day's dissection – producing a fine display of the epididymis and the spermatic ducts.



Late after the final exam, some of the class were still at the upstairs patio bar of 'The Paradise'. Many of Harrison's group were there, setting liquor-doused paper napkin swans alight in blue bursts. It was their private party, and they were trying to stay warm beneath the stars, helped by flame-ringed overhead heaters which smelled like burp.

Someone had vomited on the toilet seat in the men's rooms and then had just closed the stall door, so now there were lineups for both the male and female washrooms. Others sat in booths, and in a far corner Sri had just bought Ming a vodka tonic. He was feeling good about himself for having bought the drink and she was feeling big about herself for accepting it.

She said, "Guess what, I found the right side of head. It was in the bag with the omentum." Ming couldn't remember exactly how she got it in there, but of course no one had looked at the omentum before the midterm and so she recently found it when she was studying for the final, while looking for a kidney. Then she remembered she must have put it there. A moment of inattention, she said.

"Where is it now?" said Sri.

"Still there."

"With the omentum?" The omentum attached all the intestines into a fan-shaped sheet. "Why didn't you put it with the head?"

"I don't know. The bag wasn't handy, I guess."

"You guess. So you just left it with all the guts and everything," said Sri. "I'll have to go get it."

"What?"

"I'm gonna go get it," he shouted. No one turned to look, in the way that drunk people do not notice each other as being out of the ordinary.

"You're all screwed up," said Ming quietly, "do you dream about your Murphy?"

"Me? You should have nightmares, the way you treat him."

“Hello? Dead? Remember? I don’t have dreams, because I don’t have hang-ups about the stupid corpse.”

“You-”

“You what?” said Ming, “You don’t like that? Corpse? Piece of Murphy meat?”

“You’re just such a -”

“Just say it. What am I? You want to say it. Call me a name, go ahead and relieve your repressed little self. Say it.”

“No. Let’s just stop. No.”

“Go for it, pick a name. Bitch? Witch? Name your name.”

“I didn’t say anything, you’re picking the words now.”

“You’re such a wimp, I have to call myself names just to clarify what you think of me,” said Ming.

Chen was pushing sideways through the falling dancers. He arrived in time to hear Ming say to Sri, “Just fuck off. See, I can say what I think.” She stalked off, weaving across the floor.

“You guys,” said Chen to both of them but now just Sri.

“It was better for a minute. Believe it or not. I bought her a drink. Then she told me she found the head. Okay, but she didn’t put it back! I can’t believe she just misplaced it like that, like it doesn’t matter, and then she didn’t even put it with the other half? It’s with the omentum.”

“How many have you had?”

“My mother told me that alcohol can build and then burn bridges between people.”

“Your mother.”

“Well, it’s done now. I’m gonna go get the head.”

“Aw... Sri.”

“I gotta get it, put it back on.”

“Whaddaya mean, come on, wait-”

Already walking away, “I gotta go-”

“Hey wait.” Chen, still holding his bottle, went down the stairs after his friend.



In the anatomy lab, Chen summarised the story.

He said, “Yeah, I looked it up for you. Mark 16: So after Jesus is crucified the women go to wash and prepare Jesus’ body with spices. On the road they realise they won’t be able to move this huge stone door in front of the tomb. But when they get there, surprise! The door is open and there’s no corpse. Don’t be scared, says the shining angel who’s there. Jesus has risen so tell the disciples that he will comfort and lead them. The women are scared. Jesus appears to Mary. She tells people about seeing him, but they think she’s crazy, so he has to keep on showing himself to people until they’re convinced. Anyway, Jesus says that things are really going well, and all his people will do incredible wonderful things, and be protected even from drinking poison. He says that his followers will be healers by putting their hands on people. Then he goes to heaven to sit with God.”

Chen put down his beer next to Murphy.

“Is that really what it says?” said Sri.

“Roughly. I looked it up, but I am paraphrasing.”

“It’s good.”

“You still want to put the head back on,” said Chen.

“Yeah.”

They unwrapped the stump neck, and took the left side of the head from inside the belly where they had left it to be moist. They found the right side in the omentum bag, and the right and left didn’t match up exactly anymore because of the dissection. They put the two pieces on top, and Chen could see that Sri wasn’t happy, so he wrapped some gauze around the neck to hold things in place.

“He’s a bit dry.”

“Needs a drink. Bless you, Murphy.” Instead of taking the formalin spray bottle, Sri took the rest of Chen’s beer, and poured it gently and slowly from the lips to the open belly.

“You don’t drink, do you?” said Chen.

“Not usually.”

“You have a knack for it.”

“Why do you think Murphy chose Mark 16?” Sri closed his eyes. “It’s a weird passage. Is that the end of the Jesus story?”

“I guess that a pilot would have figured there wouldn’t be a body left for anyone. Nothing left for his girlfriend, or mother. Maybe Mark 16 made him feel better about that.”

“He was wrong,” said Sri, bowing his head, his arms stretched to the shining table now dull with the running of liquid. Beer dripped into the bucket between Murphy’s feet.

“He’s here for us.”

Sri wound a strip of yellowed fabric up the neck, pulled it tight over the chin so it wouldn’t bunch, then softly over the eyes, and the coldness of the eyelids vanished in the swath of cloth. Murphy’s hair had continued to grow for a little while after being shaved, and Chen held up the stubbled head for Sri to work. Sri wound the fabric around the top of the skull, and tied it onto itself snugly with a slipless knot under the angle of the jaw. Sri stood back, and saw where the tip of the right ear protruded. He tugged gently at a fold of cotton, and settled it around the ear, where it would stay.