

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

THE
GOD
COMPLEX

A Novel by

Chris Titus

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GuruKnee Press

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Kata design and artwork by Sensei Troy Price

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To anyone desperately seeking a cure ...

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The past fifteen years have led me to the doorsteps of many gifted teachers whose care and guidance proved invaluable in my search for a cure. Without your support, I might never have overcome my ailments. I would like to thank a few people in particular who influenced my journey—Sensei Dave Castoldi, Ines Hudson, Dr. BJ Wang, Dr. Kwok Lap Wong, Dr. Song Li, Dr. Ariana Fucini, Sensei Darryl Rambo, and Dr. Tom Tam.

I would also like to extend additional thanks to Sensei Troy Price for the use of his Kyusho-Jitsu kata and artwork.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Let me start by saying that this is a fictional work and is not intended to provide any medical advice. The *kata* described in this book is potentially dangerous and should not be attempted—period.

The God Complex takes readers on an adventure through Eastern medicine that draws upon a real life health care crisis spanning fifteen years and confounding over 140 health care professionals. Passages from my own personal journal have been woven into the story, detailing symptoms and situations I faced along the way. By constructing a story around the emotions, pain, drama, intrigue, and enlightenment that come through such a journey, my goal is to provide you with an entertaining and effortless way to learn about traditional Chinese medicine.

I have written this book to address many audiences—family, friends, patients, health care professionals, and martial artists. In my opinion, we all need to take greater responsibility for our own health care. An important first step is to better understand the options available—namely complimentary medicine. I believe the solution to the world's health care problems can be found in a combination of Eastern and Western medicine.

It should be noted that I am not a health care practitioner and make no claims to be. The views of traditional Chinese medicine I have presented are admittedly limited and rudimentary. The leaps I have made to bridge Eastern and Western medicine were done so to fit within the context of the story and may not be entirely accurate. It is my intention to use the proceeds of this book, if sufficient, to return to school and study traditional Chinese medicine.

In some sections, dates have been changed to fit within the context of certain historical events.

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Chapter 1

Prague, Czech Republic

The scent of burnt flesh canvassed the quaint Czech neighborhood of Nusle Valley, lying low in the shadow of the Nusle Bridge. It was another reminder of this neighborhood's unwanted infamy.

Shortly after dawn, the local police station had received multiple calls complaining of a nauseating stench conflicting with breakfast. When the call came from his station's dispatcher, Lieutenant Marek was long awake, engaging in his strict early morning routine of stretching and martial arts practice. Once a labor of love, his efforts had become a tedious burden for this middle-aged lieutenant to keep pace with younger subordinates whose structured buzz-cuts and chiseled physiques outshined the glistening sweat now rolling over his

slightly protruding belly. Before the phone made its way to the cradle, Marek's mind had already concluded the obvious.

The Nusle Bridge, known as Suicide Bridge, had been the site of approximately three hundred suicides since opening in 1973. Anytime he was called to this part of town, it had been to investigate a jumper. In the past year alone, there had been sixty-three attempts, averaging more than one per week.

Something was peculiar about this jump. *Burnt flesh*. It was obviously a jumper. It's always a jumper. *But burnt flesh?*

Traffic on the E50 was beginning to pick up speed at the same rate thoughts accelerated around Marek's brain. Uncomfortable with the details, his mind darted down every path that rose from the chaotic amalgam of thoughts stewing in his head. *Was he burning on the way down or after? Did this poor soul get tangled up in a part of the local electrical grid? Was it a mafia hit made to look like a jump? After all, the Russian mafia's strength in Prague had been growing in recent years.*

"We've never had a fireball," he muttered aloud in Czech.

He arrived to the valley where he was greeted by his band of subordinates at the bottom of Kresomyslova Street. From there, they followed the pungent odor down a grassy path leading from the roadside. Noses angled toward the sky and sniffing like bloodhounds, their pace quickened with each new waft of singed flesh. The group encircled a small construction site storage area at the bottom of the valley. A chain-link fence covered by dark army green tarps kept Marek and his hounds at bay. After circling the boxed-in area a few times, it was clear that the smell was originating from inside.

Marek barked out an order. A junior officer jumped forward to cut the lock on the fence door and tried opening it to

no avail. Marek shoved the officer aside and buried his shoulder into the metal mesh. It refused to budge, dragging something with it in the dirt. With the help of another officer, Marek finally forced the door open a crack and squeezed through.

Two-by-fours were strewn about the yard. In the middle lay a disfigured body, charred and smoldering. The sight of the encrusted body revolted Marek, making the stench emanating from it much more unbearable. Marek started choking and reached for a handkerchief to cover his face. The body slumped over a shortened stack of lumber where its initial impact had sent wood scattering in all directions.

"We've got another jumper—a male who went down in a ball of fire. Send over a clean-up crew. We're in a construction storage area at the bottom of Kresomyslova under the Nusle." Marek turned off his radio and began clearing the pile of wood blocking the door. He felt clever for deducing what he deemed to be an obvious conclusion.

Neighbors gathered at the U Skokana (Czech for *At the Jumper*), a local bar within shouting distance of the bridge. Business always picked up on these days, with locals streaming in and out, mimicking an informal wake for a victim they never knew. Many would sit chatting about the possible problems that could drive someone to take such actions. Others would complain about how such events have cast a pall over their neighborhood, wishing these people would solve their problems elsewhere. On rare occasions, a family member of the deceased would venture into the bar.

Marek had become a regular at the Skokana, greeted each time with a cheerful smile by its owner.

"Don't get me wrong, Jaroslav, but I'd rather not see so much of you," Marek said with a short-lived grin. "What can you tell me?" His tone turned matter-of-fact.

Jaroslav had become one of Marek's best pulses on the neighborhood. "Nothing. Nobody saw anything. I smelled the body as I was cleaning up from last night, probably around four thirty this morning. I didn't even bother going home. I can tell you this—if this keeps up, I may be the next one up there. The only thing keeping me from doing it is that there would be nobody here to open the bar for you in the morning." Jumpers turned Jaroslav's twelve-hour workday into thirty-six. More than one jumper a week had taken a toll on this forty-eight-year-old, painting his hair prematurely gray.

"Well, you better hurry before they build the barrier up there," Marek responded with a smile. He was referring to a city-commissioned metal overhang to be built atop the existing fence that would make it impossible for people scale it and jump.

"If they'd hurry up and agree on a design, I might start getting some sleep and wouldn't have to think of such things."

Marek heard the clean-up crew arrive. A forensics team wearing white lab coats and carrying expensive-looking equipment exited a procession of boxy Mercedes vans. Photographers and forensic analysts scoured the grounds looking for clues. Samples of hair, clothing, and possible accelerants were bagged for evidence.

A junior detective called out Marek's name. He found the detective bent over behind a pile of lumber. As Marek approached with the lead forensic specialist in tow, their gaze landed upon a partially burnt wallet three meters away from the victim. The forensic team began measuring its distance from the

body and the possible trajectory it traveled after falling forty-two meters from the bridge above. Holding the bagged wallet, the lead specialist carefully removed a blue plastic identification card.

"Steve Benson." The library card identified him as an employee of one of the many language schools dotting the city.

Each year, thousands of Americans, Brits, and Aussies flocked to Prague to live a twenty-two-year-old's dream of drinking \$.50 pints of the world's best beer, dating Czech supermodels, and wandering streets paved with extravagant architectural wonders.

In exchange, teachers worked a grueling schedule with the majority of class hours beginning early in the morning and ending late at night. The middle of the day provided just enough of a break to scarf down lunch, plan afternoon lessons, and travel to class. Shortly after arriving home, lesson planning resumed for the following morning. When a teacher's pay was averaged across the total hours spent planning, traveling, and teaching, the true hourly wage fell to less than \$5 per hour, far from the vacation they envisioned. As a result, many teachers turned into *runners*.

"British?" Marek asked.

"American," the specialist replied.

"Age?"

"Thirty-nine years."

"That's a bit unusual." Marek cocked an eyebrow. "Most teachers are typically recent college graduates or retirees. How long has he been here?"

"Eight months."

The lieutenant's voice showed signs of apprehension as he called the victim's name into the station. With thousands of

teachers flowing through Prague each year, this was the first jumper who was a teacher. His thoughts turned to the international stir this might create—crisis management, media, public relations, and all in English. Like most officers in his department, Marek's English skills were poor enough to make him fret over the media circus that might follow if not properly managed.

"Who here speaks English?" Marek's voice carried across the storage area.

A nearby forensic analyst stood up. "I do."

Marek told her that she would help by contacting the family and school and that under no circumstances was the press to be informed. She gave a halfhearted smile and nodded before resuming her work on the wallet's trajectory.

Chapter 2

Boston, Massachusetts

A woman's voice crackled over the loud speaker. "We will begin boarding sections one through three." Paul Benson remained seated by Terminal E's Gate 32 at Boston's Logan International Airport. He dug his ticket out from the inside pocket of his leather coat. *Section 5 Row 18 Seat B. The middle seat.* Unlike most travelers, Paul preferred the middle seat. Aware that most people are overly conscious of the middle person, overcompensating in the amount of room they leave, he was often afforded extra room on most flights. It was a gamble he was willing to take.

Gripping his newspaper firmly, his eyes were unable to focus on the words in front of him. He repeatedly turned to his carry-on bag, rummaging through it as if he was looking for something, but he didn't know what he was looking for. The

news of his brother's death was overwhelming. Unable to focus, he decided to stand up and walk around. Realizing his section would be called any minute, he sat back down.

"Sections four through six may begin boarding at this time."

The sound system electrified Paul. He shot out of his seat like a wound spring and queued up in line.

Upon finding his seat, he promptly popped one of the Valium pills his doctor had prescribed for the trip. Paul had never been good at relaxing. Unable to easily let go of things, his stress was constantly spilling over into his sleep. When they had lived together years earlier in Boston, his brother Steve would routinely wake in the middle of the night to hear him debating the pros and cons about whatever situation was plaguing him at the time. However, if all went well, these pills would provide passage to his first deep slumber since learning of his brother's death two days ago.

"We will be preparing for landing at Prague's Ruzyně International Airport in twenty-five minutes where the local time is 8:45 a.m. The weather is ten degrees Celsius, and the skies are overcast. Please secure your food trays ..." A flight attendant standing in the first class cabin by the cockpit door recited the same standard script being iterated across fleets of planes around the world preparing their descent. The tone in her voice conveyed a disinterest in her job as the allure of free travel had worn off years earlier.

An attractive blonde flight attendant leaned in to tap Paul's shoulder. "Sir, please wake up. You must raise your seat back. We will be landing soon."

Once safely on the ground, Paul retrieved his carry-on luggage and exited the plane. Speeding toward customs well ahead of the other passengers, he imagined he must be the

lightest packed passenger on the flight. His itinerary would not have the usual touristic activities, he thought, *unless providing DNA samples to identify the body of your dead brother and cleaning out his apartment are part of a tour I don't know about.* His depressive thoughts were quickly muted by the lingering drug-induced grogginess.

After exiting customs, Paul instinctually looked around to see if someone was holding a sign saying "Benson." *Who would be holding a sign? My limo driver,* he chuckled to himself. He didn't know anyone there, and nobody knew him. He continued along the rope barriers toward the sign saying Ground Transportation.

"Paul?"

"Y-e-s?" The letters hung in midair as he stood dumbfounded at the slender, yet curvy brunette woman standing before him saying his name. Her eyes were expansive, reaching out as if she knew him. Built like a lingerie model, she moved gracefully toward him. *How did she know my name?* "Are you from the school?" he asked her.

The woman smiled and nodded. "Hi, I am Klára. We speak on phone. How is your flight?" Her voice was speeding through each sentence.

For an employee of an English language school, Paul expected her English to be better. As she stumbled over her words, he could tell she was anxious. It appeared that being confronted with a native speaker only served to increase her anxiety. However, Paul felt too lethargic to comfort her.

He looked puzzled. "How did you know I'd be here?"

"You not remember you say me your flight information?"

He felt guilty for finding her broken English sexy.

"You experience difficult times. I say you I come here today, but you no pay attention. It's okay. I here now."

"Yes, you are—and I am glad." Paul welcomed the surprise.

"This way," Klára motioned to the left. Her curves glided past his eyes, making him forget why he had gone there in the first place.

The spacious new-age style of the Ruzyně International Airport did not extend to the industrial garage structure. After all, how exciting can you make a garage?

As she led him to her car, echoes buzzed by on different levels creating a symphonic effect. She stopped at the trunk of a blue car. *Skoda*. Paul felt like he was in vacation mode. Everything was new—new brands, license plates, languages, and beautiful people. He squeezed his carry-on into the disheveled storage space and slammed it closed. Sitting in the passenger seat, he stared blankly out the window.

The little engine roared to life.

"You stay in Hotel Radcanska. Is correct?"

"Yes, that's correct."

The compact blue car lurched out of its space to join the hum of engines echoing between floors. The gears were whirring louder and louder as the car turned through the floors. In minutes, they were on Evropska, a two-lane highway leading to the city's center. Descending into a rotary, Klára began a tour of the city.

"Here is Dejvice. We also say P6, Prague Six. Many university students are being here. P6 have five universities and many country embassies. Even Czech president live here. Prague have fifteen districts."

"Which district did my brother live in?" Paul was beginning to wake up. He rubbed his eyes to have a better look around.

"P2. This is also rich district—P2 and P6." Her accent roused feelings of excitement in Paul. *So this is the foreign-language effect Steve kept talking about—they say ten words and you interpret a hundred.* In all of Steve's travels, he had learned that flirting was far easier when a partial language barrier existed—when one person didn't speak the common language well. Unobstructed by the façade erected by language, he found it possible to connect on a deeper level with the other person.

The gloomy weather hanging overhead accentuated the drabness of the Soviet-style apartment buildings lining Evropska. Feelings of Stalinist-era oppression invaded the car from every angle. Paul pointed to the characterless buildings passing by.

"Are all Czech buildings like this?" His voice couldn't hide his dislike for the homes.

"You not like our architecture?" she laughed. "Czech architecture is famous. You did not like airport? Is voted best airport in all of Europe." Klára was beginning to relax a bit, allowing her speech to slow down to form more complete sentences.

"Yeah, but it's only an airport," Paul chortled.

"Yes, and these are only apartment buildings. You wait. I show you nice architecture." Klára changed lanes and barreled into the next rotary without hesitation. Paul gripped the *holy-shit* handle with one hand and his seat belt with the other.

"So much for driver's ed classes here." Paul was definitely awake now.

"School teaches driver's ed, too," Klára answered politely, unaware of the joke.

Yeah, but did you take it?

"Look!" She pointed. "There you will see beautiful homes. This is Cubist architecture."

The street opened up, and an array of ornately decorated homes rose from the road in front of them. Each looked like a small castle featuring dynamic depths, a variety of shapes, angles, and dimensions.

Paul fell silent as the elaborate edifices enchanted him one by one. Surrounded by uniquely foreign homes, he finally felt like he was in Europe. "Okay, you win." He smiled at her.

"We are coming to P2. Do you see dancing building? Is called Dancing House."

A curved glass structure was sliding out of the building in front of them. A ten-story hourglass figure embedded in the side of the building landed on the sidewalk. Matched by the building's uneven windows sitting at different heights along each floor, the building appeared as if it was moving.

"Wow!"

"Yes, wow. Original name of building was Fred and Ginger, your Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Persons call it Drunk House. Is easier to dance drunk. And window is ... are funny. Very nice restaurant is up there. What you thinking about Czech architecture now?" Her smile beamed across the car as she turned right at a KFC restaurant. "For you, Americana," she pointed and laughed. "Your hotel is on right. We to stop for few minutes and go to brother's apartment down street after." Her words reminded Paul of the purpose of his trip.

Having booked his room online, Paul already knew that Hotel Radcanska's grand architectural style as seen from the road masked the rundown interior awaiting him inside. With Klára's help, they got his room squared away before driving

another three hundred meters down the road to Steve's apartment.

Chapter 3

Prague

Le Devon! I hear this hotel name," Klára said, as her blue Skoda pulled up to the entrance. "Is five-star hotel ... very famous."

Next to the opulent hotel entrance was a smaller, less pronounced doorway that read Residence Devon. A few years earlier, as the real estate boom swept across Eastern Europe, the owners of Le Devon capitalized on the trend by developing the lands behind the hotel. The equally luxurious permanent dwellings that share the hotel's amenities had been open just over a year.

Steve's apartment waited just beyond the interior sliding glass doors. Paul and Klára were greeted by a pair of security guards keeping watch over the building's exterior and courtyard from a row of closed-circuit video cameras. Klára uttered a few

words in Czech, and one of the security guards handed her a set of keys as he motioned them toward the doors.

The doors opened to a brick courtyard enclosed by three modern buildings. A white Lamborghini parked in the middle of the yard acted like a magnet for Paul. He walked over and pressed his face against the glass.

"Is very nice. Now, come, this way!" Klára said, increasing her pitch and ringing the keys in her hand like she was summoning a dog.

Paul reluctantly smiled and followed. He looked back at the sports car he could only imagine owning. Behind the car, along the side of the yard, he noticed a number of police vehicles. As he approached the entrance, he could smell the odor of new construction and the distinctly sterile atmosphere of modern living.

"We look for thirteen."

"That sounds about right." Paul's voice turned down, and Klára quietly agreed.

Klára walked to the elevator, confusing Paul. *Thirteen should be on the first floor*, he thought. After Klára pressed the button, the door opened, and they entered the shiny new metal box. There it was. The first-floor button was where the second floor button should be. *Ah, right! In Europe, the first floor is the second floor in America.*

When they exited the elevator, their strides echoed in sync down the quiet hallway. "Last door on right is what guard say," she whispered as if afraid to break the silence.

The door was slightly ajar. For such a heavy door, it swung open effortlessly. A marble, spa-style bathroom could be seen immediately to the left. Passing through the short breezeway, Klára entered the living area where detectives were combing

through every inch of the fifty-square meter apartment looking for clues.

Her eyes were drawn to the windows, and she let out a loud sigh. "*Magnifique!*"

The world fell away under them. The level street leading up to the complex gave no indication that it sat perched high upon a hill overlooking all of southern Prague. While the view was not the most picturesque, it had character. Each morning when the sun rose, ten kilometers of character were projected through a series of floor-to-ceiling windows, filling the apartment with natural light. At night, specks of light throughout the valley below formed a pointillistic landscape.

The man in charge spoke to Klára with an air of authority. It seemed they had met before. Dressed differently from the other officers, he carried himself in a militaristic fashion—disciplined, stern, and aggressive. Paul guessed that the lieutenant was in his early forties, slightly older than himself.

"Paul, here is Lieutenant Marek. He leads investigations for your brother's death. He does not speak English. I will translate."

Marek extended his oversized hand, which had an equally overpowering grip. Paul couldn't wait to retrieve his hand. The lieutenant pointed to a stack of journals on a wooden desk in the corner and uttered something for Klára to translate.

"These journals are strange for the English teacher. This home is strange, too. Lieutenant Marek asks how teacher lives here. Only wealthy business men live here. Many are mafia."

Mafia? This made Paul feel queasy. He explained that his brother worked as an equity research analyst for an investment management firm in Boston for many years. Despite earning a pittance next to the exorbitant Wall Street salaries, one month

of Steve's base salary paid what an English teacher might hope to earn in an entire year. Add to that an annual bonus amounting to one-third of his total compensation, and it was easy to understand why Steve chose to live here. Similar apartments in Boston would cost three times what he was paying for in Prague.

Paul turned to the topic that made him uneasy. "The lieutenant said mafia."

"Yes. He asked about journals on the desk. Appointment book on desk have meetings with many mafia in Residence Devon ... what did Steve do with mafia?"

"Meetings?" Paul could hardly contain himself.

"Who was your brother? What was he doing with mafia?" Klára followed up.

Paul could feel Marek's eyes fixated on him, trying to read his face for clues. Paul grew anxious, imagining that this might be the beginning of a cold war-style interrogation.

"I just told you who he was. How should I know what he was doing with them? Maybe he was teaching them English? Or worse—day trading."

"Day trading?" Klára asked.

"Day trading—investing in the stock market. Maybe someone lost money. Are you questioning them?"

Klára ignored his question. "Journals have pictures about body parts. He see this is fighting practice."

"Fighting practice?" Paul clarified. "You mean martial arts." His mind drifted to the times Steve would return from martial arts classes excited to try new moves on him. Paul never liked this as much as Steve did.

"Yes, martial arts. Lieutenant Marek know martial arts, but he not know this martial arts in books here."

"Are you questioning the mafia?" Incited by new information, Paul's mind couldn't move on.

Klára's voice dropped to a whisper. "Officers will to speak to mafia, but many in police working for mafia. Will not be good information source. Lieutenant Marek ask for sample your hair for DNA now."

Paul agreed and leaned forward. She plucked a few strands of hair and packed them away in a plastic bag. She wrote his name and a code on the bag, handed it to an officer, and uttered something before the officer placed it in the evidence case.

"You look like you've done that before," Paul joked.

"I not understand."

"You knew the code, and the officer took orders from you. I would think you are in charge here."

"I am modern Czech woman." She flashed a grin. "We always in charge. Lieutenant Marek ask me to get hair and tell me code."

Paul sensed that the questioning had ended for the time being and walked onto the enclosed sun porch. The heat, trapped by the glass enclosure, hit him like a warm ocean wave. He imagined Steve sitting out there for hours in his shorts letting sunlight wash over him. The view filled Paul's eyes from every direction, breathing energy into his jet-lagged body.

"Is that it?" he asked in a devastated tone, pointing to the concrete expanse monopolizing the far right side of the vista. Cars buzzing along the bridge in the distance created a relaxing, hypnotic effect.

The mood turned somber, and Klára fell silent. She nodded and looked away.

A detective entered the small room and handed Paul two of the six journals.

"What about the others?" Paul demanded.

The detective looked to Klára who translated, "Other journals are English teaching notes—grammar and similar."

"I would like to see them," Paul said, not fully trusting the officers.

Marek nodded, indicating that he understood the difficult circumstances Paul found himself in.

"Can I come again tomorrow?"

Klára began the tedious translation process again. "Lieutenant Marek says apartment open for two days more. Say to guards you come to thirteen."

Paul cringed at hearing the number again. Satisfied that nothing was being kept from him, he took the two books and one last look around the apartment before leaving.

Chapter 4

Prague

Clutching the journals, Paul followed Klára to her car. The hotel was only three hundred meters away, but his body was starting to give out, and he wasn't sure he could make the walk. They sat for a minute in silence before she turned the engine over.

Once in front of his hotel, she turned and handed him a slip of paper. "This is my mobile number. You call anytime."

"Thanks," Paul muttered.

"Number also in phone. I call you here." She held up a generic-looking phone.

Paul thanked her again and trudged his way to the front door. He turned to wave, but her car had already disappeared down the road.

After a long, hot shower, Paul collapsed into bed. Lying on his side, he began pondering the new information—*mafia, journals, detectives, bridges, Russians, thirteen ...*

The reflection of the afternoon sun off the television's faded screen woke Paul. The television and gaudy furniture it sat on reminded him of how he imagined Soviet-era luxury to be. He rolled over and began taking an inventory of his environment. The disproportionately high ceiling made him feel uncomfortable. He wondered if the room was part of a larger room that the hotel had split into three in the name of profit. His eyes followed the cheap molding around the room that divided the muted dark green wall from the ghostlike white plaster ceiling. A circular pattern in the center of the ceiling depicted where a grand chandelier must have hung when it was all one room.

Realizing he forgot to draw the curtains before falling asleep, Paul stood and walked to the window where he imagined ghosts of czars past would be haunting him all night long. Gold trim embedded in the deep maroon velvet curtains caught his eye as it gleamed in the sunlight. He took temporary pleasure in rubbing the velvet before a low rumble below his feet brought his attention to the bright red tram shooting by his window. *Tram #6.*

Paul's neck tensed up. *Fuck! Don't tell me this is going to be happening all night!* He checked his bag for the Valium pills to reassure himself.

Turning back to the room, he eyed the journals on the desk, and a rush of sadness overwhelmed him. Choking back tears, he took a seat at the desk. He fought to maintain the emotion-numbing state he had been operating under since arriving. He

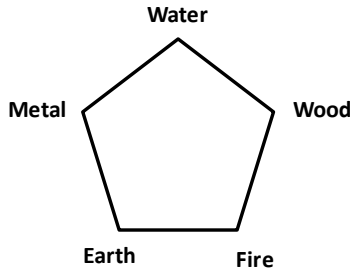
could not accept his brother was gone. *Let's just get through the next few days and deal with these feelings later.*

Chapter 5

Prague

He laid the two books side by side—*TCM* and *Health History*. *TCM? TCM? What is TCM?*

The hard-covered, college-ruled notebook was the sort of book you might use in a science lab course. Its pages were tattered and stained, having lost their strength years ago. Paul recognized it as one of Steve's journals he toted between acupuncture appointments and martial arts classes years earlier. The pentagon drawn on the inside cover was the same Paul had seen on their refrigerator. *Water, Wood, Fire, Earth, and Metal*. For the five years he lived with Steve, he had to look at this every time he opened the refrigerator door. However, this one was slightly different. *Where is the food? Isn't this the Chinese version of the food pyramid? Why isn't broccoli under Metal, or cabbage under Earth?*



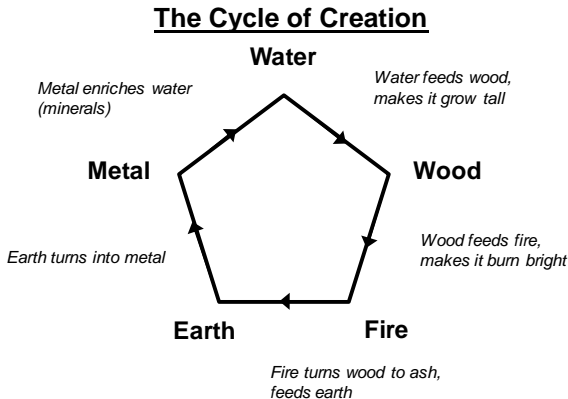
Below the diagram was written:

The five colors blind the eye.
 The five tones deafen the ear.
 The five flavors dull the taste.

Colors, tones, flavors?

Paul turned to the first page. The heading read: *The Cycle of Creation.*

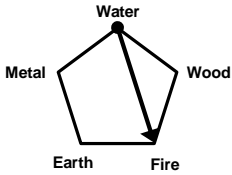
Below the heading was another pentagon—a drawing that took up half of the page. Each point contained an element with an arrow pointing to the next element, and short descriptions explained the relationships between the elements. The notes seemed well planned before being committed to paper.



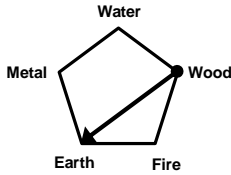
Okay, simple enough, he thought. Eat broccoli to make Water strong. It would be nice if he told me what the hell Water means. Does broccoli make you urinate a lot? I wonder where asparagus fits in here.

The bottom half of the page contained five smaller pentagons with the heading—*Cycles of Control*. Each pentagon showed an arrow cutting across its center from one element to another.

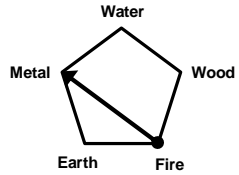
Cycles of Control



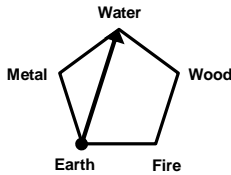
Water controls Fire
(Extinguish)



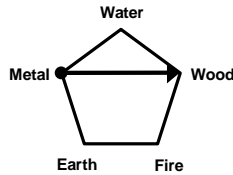
Wood controls Earth
(Roots burrow into soil)



Fire controls Metal
(Melts)



Earth controls Water
(River banks)



Metal controls Wood
(Ax chops tree)

It all seemed logical. But what did it really mean? No wonder the detective wanted help understanding it. Paul wanted help too.

He turned the page. *Great! More pentagons! Is this a damn geometry class?*

"Mother-Son Relationship"

Now we're moving into Oedipal Geometry! Paul was getting frustrated that the answers weren't being spoon-fed.

Lacking patience, he decided to tackle this material later at an Internet café.

He turned to the other journal. Flipping through equally worn out pages, the second journal was written like a diary, occasionally interrupted by notes and lists. He stopped at a list entitled *Symptoms*, recognizing them as a few of the symptoms that baffled Steve's doctors for years.

- Nose bleeds
- Hot flashes
- Urination
- Sleep
- Muscles / tendons
- Eyes
- Hemorrhoids
- Digestion
- Skin
- Dizzy spells

He skimmed further down until a section jumped out that would hopefully shed some light on what had happened. He noted the date of the passage. Steve had been twenty-nine years old.

My Typical Day

4/3/1997: Every morning I wake around 5:30 a.m. Groggy and sore all over, I know I didn't sleep a wink. It feels as if metal wires run through my limbs and someone is pulling on them all night long, keeping me in a constant state of tension. Well, at least I've stopped waking every two hours to run to the toilet, a phenomenon that lasted for six years!

When I stand, my first few steps are tender, like those of an old man. My muscles and tendons resemble taut violin strings that resonate a twang with every step. My knees hurt and my ankles are weak. One wrong move and

something will certainly tear. It's scary, especially for someone who was used to being an athlete all his life.

Once in the shower, my feet begin to melt under the hot water, and my muscles slowly let go. However, shortly after drying off, they tense up again as if warding off something. Like a yin-yang spinning out of control, I'm overheated and chilled at the same time. All of the heat in my body begins rushing to my head, turning my feet unbearably cold. On the verge of perspiring, the mere opening of my pores makes my skin scream, an indication of how sensitive my body has become. I begin walking swiftly through the apartment. My lungs heave, and my heart pounds in an effort to cool off—a desperate attempt to prevent the onset of sweating.

Too late! An electric shock runs through my body. Sweat pours from my armpits, genitals, and backside. Chills race through every organ and my skin crawls. I grab another towel and run back to the shower.

Like clockwork, this happens shortly after I begin shaving every morning. Occasionally, it will strike while I'm on the train going to work, which really sucks. Most days are two- or three-shower days that require me to crawl back into bed, the "incubator," where I warm up. For those special occasions at work or in transit, I keep a space heater under my desk to dry undershirts, socks, and any other articles of clothing I routinely soak through. This isn't the sort of thing you ever get used to. You just learn to deal with it.

His words evoked feelings of guilt. Paul was reminded of the battles that ensued every morning over the bathroom. If he missed his opportunity to shower first, Paul had to walk on egg

shells in anticipation of Steve's hot flashes. *Hurry up for Christ's sake. You're like a menopausal bitch.* He used to routinely curse at Steve for hogging the bathroom. He grew to resent his brother over time, asserting that the various maladies were merely psychosomatic.

On most mornings, I get a strange bloated sensation within a few bites of breakfast. My abdomen becomes so distended that it protrudes a few inches, and I find it difficult to breathe. It feels more like inflammation than bloating, cutting off the circulation to my feet and driving blood to my head.

Somewhere between the constant showering and breakfast, I'll need to run to the bathroom to put out a rapid-onset nosebleed before it hits my freshly pressed shirt. It comes on so fast that there is little time to react. I usually have to cup my hand below my nose as I run for the bathroom because it's gushing out like someone turned on a faucet in my nose.

When I ask doctors about this, they always tell me that it's due to cold weather and the lack of humidity. Personally, I think the fact that this happens just as often in the middle of July as it does in January seems to refute their theory. It seems related to the constipation, bloating, or inflammation, or whatever is happening down there. I wish one of these people had a clue.

Despite the excess blood in my upper torso, my face turns numbingly cold from ear to ear while waiting for the train or bus. It could be August, and my nose would feel frostbitten. My eyes are always dry and irritated, burning a path to the back of my head. My body is on some sort of nervous overdrive. When I try to look up, I can't hold a

gaze, and my eyes return to the ground, or simply close. This inability to hold eye contact has proven disastrous for my interactions with women and colleagues. I'm pretty sure they think I have no confidence.

Once in the city, I make my way up State Street to Court Square. Luckily, working as an investment analyst for Gray Haired Investment Management is a pretty low stress position. I have no deadlines, very little contact with the outside world, and an office far from Mahogany Row. This place moves as quickly as grass grows. Aside from a weekly meeting, I rarely see my boss. If I died back here, it would be weeks before they'd uncover me. For an upwardly mobile young buck, this could be frustrating. Considering my daily torture ritual, this is an ideal situation.

Once at work, I enter my little sanctuary where nobody bothers me. If I had hot flashes on the train, I spend my first half-hour stripping down and standing completely naked in my office where I dry each article of clothing with the space heater. Trying to air-dry is too painful as the wet cloth against my overly sensitive skin only makes matters worse. Fortunately, my office has no windows into the hallway, and the only thing I see from my exterior window is the brick wall of the neighboring building. So far, I've made it three years without anyone walking in on me. Could you imagine having to explain something like this? Aside from that, my only other concern at work is using the bathroom.

At times, I am completely unable to urinate despite my body sending signals telling me I urgently need to go. As a result, I often run to the bathroom for seemingly no

reason. I've learned to ignore many of the signals unless the "ten-minute warning" is given. During this period, my feet turn increasingly cold to the point where they feel frozen. Even the space heater won't help. Then, I know it's real. Where is the connection between needing to urinate and getting cold feet? It's not like I'm about to marry the urinal.

[...]

Chapter 20

Prague

Paul woke with another Be-ton-induced headache. He and Klára had painted Prague's Old Town red the night before, visiting the famous Sex Museum and Astronomical Clock. They had dined in the shadow of the St. Nicholas Church, an eighteenth-century baroque masterpiece that serves as the centerpiece of the Old Town Square. Classical music streaming from its ten thousand pipes had serenaded their meal.

With the music still playing in his ears, Paul was eager to get back to the task of completing the journals. He could see the end in sight and figured the notes would read more smoothly since his meeting with Doctor Huang. He grabbed a quick bite with his fellow travelers and exited the hotel.

Walking along Belehradska, his thoughts were clearer now that he had overcome his jetlag. The stronger connection he was developing with Klára helped improve his mood, as did having more definitive answers about his brother, even though they were not the answers he was hoping for.

He arrived at the Bohemian Brew and descended the stairs. The woman behind the counter smiled, making him feel like a regular.

"Latte?" she asked.

Paul smiled and nodded as he took a seat. He laid out the journals side by side and continued with the diary, thumbing to where he had left off.

4/21/05—Finally! One hundred and forty doctors later and I've found someone who actually knows what the hell is going on.

Paul's eyes were now glued to the page. He looked back at the date. *Two years ago. He had been better for two years?*

A few weeks ago, I was strolling home from work gazing absently through the windows of neighborhood bars when an attractive blonde woman caught my eye. I decided to stop in and take a seat near her figuring I could strike up a conversation.

As usual, the discussion turned to acupuncture. Maybe it's because she was a nurse. Maybe I'm just that predictable. Anyhow, part way through the conversation, she turned to me and said, "Have you been to Tom Tam?" She started raving about his style of acupuncture. Having been in Chinatown for eight years now, I thought I had met every doctor there. Naturally, I was skeptical at first,

but decided to keep an open mind. A few days later, I made an appointment.

[...]

He [Tom] then asked me to take off my shirt and lie face down on the table. He slid his fingers down my spine until he reached the middle of my shoulder blades. He pressed into a point roughly half an inch to the side of my spine [...]. "Do you feel?"

"Yes," I groaned loudly.

"This is the point for hot flashes." His hand slid a little further down to the middle of my back and pressed into another sensitive point. "This is the point for digestion."

He only used a handful of needles, maybe eight in total. He placed them in my scalp, neck, the tender points along my spine, and my Spleen 6 point (just above my ankles). Before he had even left the room, I felt like someone had drugged me. I felt more relaxed than I had in years. Every muscle let go as I drifted off to sleep. This was something I could never do during the daytime—and it was only 9:00 a.m.! It was by far the most amazing acupuncture session I've ever had. I felt completely cured in one session.

A feeling of relief swept through Paul, who had grown weary trudging through his brother's chronicles of torture and needed to hear something positive from all of this. The journal went on to describe how the benefits only lasted a couple of days, forcing Steve to return every few days and drop another \$80 each time. As time passed, however, the effects began lasting longer and longer.

Having found someone who knew the answers, Steve tried to pump him for information. However, Doctor Tam was not forthcoming during the sessions, which annoyed Steve. The most he said was, "Ah, you know traditional Chinese medicine. TCM is a very beautiful philosophy. You see I don't do pulse diagnosis or even look at your tongue. What we do here is TCM 2.0, Pentium chip inside. TCM is still using a 386 processor." Working with a few hundred patients each week, Tam did not have time to sit and explain his system.

Additionally, he did not think Steve was very sick. "Here, we see very sick people. You are not sick. You should go to Doctor Lee. You are wasting my time. There are people with real problems that need my help."

Steve had shot back, "I went to Doctor Lee for over two years—three times a week. Before him, I spent six years working with six other acupuncturists. After all the herbs and acupuncture, I'm broke and still not better. You are the eighth acupuncturist."

After a few weeks, Steve noticed that Doctor Tam's patient base consisted primarily of cancer patients who had heard of him through friends or the Internet. Steve was surprised when he saw a nurse from Massachusetts General Hospital wheeling in a patient to receive treatments. He later learned that the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute had initiated a survey study of the benefits of Tam's Tong Ren therapy. Local area news stations had also begun covering the success rates of his patients. Steve didn't understand how he was just learning of Doctor Tam now.

Curious about Doctor Tam's system, Steve bought his book on Tong Ren healing. He learned that Tam was reviving the lost art of huatuojiaji, an ancient acupuncture style developed by a famous doctor named Hua Tuo who lived during the Eastern

Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) and Three Kingdoms Period. Similar to the wide variety of martial art styles, there are also many styles of acupuncture. Unfortunately, Doctor Hua Tuo's unique style was lost as the result of a political feud. Books detailing his methods were burned, and the doctor was killed. As a result, huatuojiaji, his form of acupuncture, was lost.

In searching the Internet, Steve found many stories of Hua Tuo's legendary healing abilities. While there were many inconsistencies in both the stories and dates, Tam's version of huatuojiaji did for Steve what all the ancient lore claimed Hua Tuo was capable of in his time. Tam had combined what little was known about huatuojiaji with Tui Na, qigong, chiropractics, TCM energy points, and an understanding of anatomy from the West.

Steve found Tam's approach interesting because it agreed with how he understood the differences between Eastern and Western approaches to health. Steve often likened medicine to a clock. The West can tell you everything that goes into making a clock—the hands, gears, springs, batteries, etc. However, despite all of this detailed knowledge, they cannot read the time. The East can read and adjust the time, but they cannot tell you much about the moving parts inside the clock.

Tam was bridging this gap by combining the West's understanding of anatomy with the East's understanding of energy.

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