

Inconveniently Lost and Found

By Walt Giersbach

Huang's first exclamation wasn't surprising. "What are you doing here?" he demanded in English, emphasizing his irritation in Chinese. "*Ni lai gang shemma?*"

The tall — almost two meters — blonde woman answered in English, adding a smile. "Such a prosaic question from an archeologist. You might have asked, '*Where* did you come from?' Or, 'Who are you?' Or '*When* did you get here?'"

Huang didn't flinch, but he moved closer to the mummy, turning his back as if to defend it from the visitor. "*Shao-jye*, the museum is closed and you're trespassing—"

"I know." She nodded. "I'll only be a few minutes. Just continue unwrapping the mummy and I'll be gone."

Huang swore, as if one of his first-year students had misplaced a Chinese dynasty in a final exam.

"Listen," she snapped. "I don't have time."

Something in the woman's odd accent put him off in spite of his familiarity with English. "I must be alone," he explained patiently. "This is the mummy of a Tarim Basin man, a perfectly preserved 3,500-year-old Caucasoid I found in Xinjiang, China. This is a sterile, clean room, and you — whoever you are — have the audacity to risk destroying a link to the Caucasians who populated the Uighur area before our people migrated there."

“His name was Arak,” she said, with a sentimental tone. “He was 198 centimeters tall, blonde of hair, and full of a humor that has disappeared.” She sniffed, as if there might be an allergen in the clean room. “It was wrong, but I...was enamored of him.”

“I’m going to call security.”

“My name is Proctor Ren, Huang *Shen-sen*.”

“I’m *Professor* Huang. ”

She shrugged. “And I’m out of time. Take the wrapping off his face. Quickly. It won’t hurt him — after 3,500 years.”

Mutely, Huang turned, and against better judgment began cutting the gauze. The cloth came away easily revealing a golden mask, oddly similar to Macedonian masks the museum had on display.

“It’s...fantastic,” he said softly. “The workmanship is out of this world.”

“No, it’s of his world, but beneath the mask now...” She reached forward, but he pushed her hand away roughly.

“Don’t touch him, woman!” Carefully, Huang lifted the mask and drew in his breath.

The face of the desiccated corpse had a head of blonde hair, a strong jaw and sharp cheekbones. It looked as if he had just fallen asleep — in the sun on Miami Beach.

“Sunglasses!” he gasped seeing the small rimless oval glasses.

“I’ll take those,” Ren said lifting them from his face. “He took them from me without my knowledge. I had to wait all this time for you to find him.”

“Are you insane?” Huang gasped.

“No. It would be an anomaly if you revealed that Arak had sunglasses. I would lose my position. Perhaps even my life if my carelessness came to light. Now, I have to go.”

“Wait!” Huang shouted at her back exiting the room. “You haven’t explained—”

She paused and sighed. “It was inconvenient losing my sunglasses. As politically inconvenient as you discovering your land was first settled by white Europeans and then Muslim Uighurs.”

Huang said, “I have worked years to find this tomb and its occupant. Imagine Europeans living on the Silk Road.”

“I probably owe you something, Professor Huang. I’ll give you this. If you dig some two kilometers to the east, by the dry creek bed under a bluff, you’ll find Genghis Khan’s tomb. Thank you for my sunglasses. Can we call this even?”

The door closed behind Proctor Ren.

As fast as Huang ran to follow her, the next room was empty, leaving him with a dilemma: Say nothing and become a hero of archeology or explain everything and be committed as a fool. There was no such thing as time travel, just as until now there was no evidence Chinese weren’t the first to inhabit the Middle Kingdom.

#

Bio: Walt Giersbach’s fiction has appeared in *Bewildering Stories*, *Big Pulp*, *Corner Club Press*, *Every Day Fiction*, *Gumshoe Review*, *Mystery Authors*, *OG Short Fiction*, *Over My Dead Body*, *Paradigm Journal*, *Pif Magazine*, *Pill Hill Press*, *Pulp Modern*, *r.kv.r.y*, *Short Fiction World*, *The Short Humour Site*, and, of course, *The World of Myth*. Two volumes of short stories, *Cruising the Green of Second Avenue*, have been published by Wild Child publishing.