



Chapter Four

Jasmine felt sick, and it wasn't because the wagon she was riding in kept bouncing up and down on the rough paving stones.

How had everything gone so crazy? If being transported back to the past wasn't bad enough, now she had come face to face with her own ancestor. How could that be? No one in her family had ever talked about Charlie and Hannah Fong living in San Francisco. Too bad they hadn't explained that to the man she just met.

"We should ask him," said Oz. They were sitting on large bags of rice in the back of the wagon, where the man probably couldn't hear them.

"Ask him what?" said Jasmine. "Hi, are you my great-great-grandfather, who's supposed to be in Nebraska?" I don't think that's going to work."

"We don't have to put it that way," said Oz. "We can just ask him about his life. You know, make conversation. He was nice enough to give us a ride, so we should at least be friendly."

"I'm not sure he wants to be friendly," said Jasmine. "You saw how that shopkeeper had to talk him into taking us."

"Yeah, but we're already on our way now. Maybe he'll be in a better mood."

Jasmine sighed. As she had expected, Oz was handling their predicament better than she was. But they both needed to hear what their driver might tell them, so when Oz got up and started toward him, she reluctantly followed.

"Hey mister," said Oz, leaning over the back of the wagon seat. "Thanks again for giving us a ride. What did you say your name was?"

“You may call me *Mister Fong*,” the man said gruffly. He had a strong Chinese accent, even more pronounced than Wai-po and Wai-gong had.

“Oh, so your name’s *Charlie Fong*, then?” Jasmine asked. She was already dreading the man’s answer.

Mr. Fong looked at her strangely, then began talking in a rapid, singsong tone, uttering syllables that Jasmine recognized but didn’t understand.

“Can you say that in English?” she asked him. “I don’t speak Chinese. Sorry.”

But that only made Mr. Fong more agitated. “You only know American language?” he exclaimed. “Wear American clothes and go with American boy?”

“She’s from Nebraska,” said Oz, jumping in. “They don’t have many Chinese people out there.” She glanced meaningfully at Jasmine again before continuing. “You know, you should think about visiting sometime. In Nebraska, I mean.”

Mr. Fong snorted dismissively. “Why do that? Chinese belong with Chinese.”

“Well, maybe your wife would like it there,” said Jasmine. She glanced over and reflected Oz’s expression back.

Unfortunately, Mr. Fong didn’t like her suggestion. “Enough talk!” he snapped at them. “You ask for ride, not talk! Go sit and be quiet!”

With that, he turned back around and very deliberately kept his eyes on the street. Jasmine sighed and went back to her spot on the bags of rice. Oz lingered a moment longer before joining her.

“Well, that was a bust,” said Oz.

“It must not be him after all,” said Jasmine. “There’s got to be more than one Charlie Fong in the world.”

Oz looked at her dubiously. “Do you really believe that?”

Jasmine was about to respond, but her argument fell flat before it even reached her lips. She had seen photos of Charlie Fong her entire life. The man driving their wagon may have been younger, but his face was the same.

Oz continued to muse over their situation. “If Charlie Fong is here, that must mean something’s gone wrong with history.” She leaned forward gravely. “We’ve got to get it back on track, or the whole world could change back in our own time. You might not even exist anymore!”

“Cut that out!” Jasmine cried. She tried to laugh, but the sound came out with a nervous edge to it. “I’m having a hard enough time without you putting ideas in my head.”

“I’m not doing much better,” Oz admitted. “Just figuring out how we’re supposed to get home was bad enough.”

The wagon rumbled on through busy streets and over steep hills, until they turned a corner and entered another world. The buildings along the street were decorated with elaborate Chinese designs and signs written in Chinese characters. Red and gold paper lanterns hung from all the balconies, next to wind chimes and other ornaments. But at the same time, everything looked worn and grubby, as if the area wasn’t being kept up as well as the rest of the city. The buildings Jasmine saw when she peered down the narrower side streets looked even more rundown and dirty.

The street was also crowded. There were more Chinese people than Jasmine had ever seen in her life, even when she had been to Chinatown before. They were all men—no matter where she looked, she couldn’t find a woman or a child. They were mostly dressed alike in plain, dark clothes, and all of them had long hair that ran down their backs in single braids, just like Mr. Fong.

The wagon pulled to a stop in front of an old-fashioned market. Its storefront was completely open, more like a front porch than a room, with vegetables of all kinds arranged on shelves

or in baskets. Dried roots and leafy herbs hung from hooks fastened into the ceiling or above the storefront counter. A door at the back led into the market's interior. Two men were looking over the produce, while a teenage boy attended to them. Another wagon was already parked in front of the store, with a large man sitting on the seat, holding the reins.

Mr. Fong climbed down from the wagon seat and called to the boy in Chinese. The boy excused himself from the men and met Mr. Fong at the back of the wagon. Mr. Fong directed him toward the bags of rice, and then began shoing Jasmine and Oz away with his hands.

“Ride over!” said Mr. Fong. “You go now.”

Jasmine scrambled to her feet and jumped down to the sidewalk. “Go where? We don't know where anything is.”

Mr. Fong pointed in the general direction of some nearby hills. “You go to Mission Home. Sacramento Street, number nine-twenty.”

Oz jumped down beside her. “Will they take me, too?” she asked Mr. Fong.

Mr. Fong snorted at them again. “Mission Home for Chinese girls, not American boys.”

“But I'm not a b—” Oz tried to object, but Mr. Fong cut her off.

“Plenty work for you in town,” said Mr. Fong. “Not need mission ladies.”

At that point, the two men called from inside the market, and Mr. Fong left to attend to them. Oz was still fuming. “He's never going to talk to us at this rate.”

“Maybe we should find this Mission Home first,” Jasmine suggested. “It's not like he's going anywhere, and I'd feel better knowing we had someplace that would help us.”

Oz shook her head. “If history really is messed up, it could just get worse the longer we go without fixing it. We should

try to find out why your great-grandparents are here instead of where they should be.”

“How do we do that?”

Oz looked over at the Chinese boy, who was still unloading the wagon. “Let’s see if he knows anything,” she suggested.

Jasmine started to object, but Oz was already heading for the back of the wagon. By the time she caught up, Oz and the boy were already exchanging greetings.

“What’s your name?” Oz was asking. “I’m Oz, and this is Jasmine.”

The boy looked puzzled. “Jazh...Min?” he said slowly. He pronounced the two syllables as if they were separate words, like a Chinese name.

“Yeah, you know,” said Oz. “Like the flower.” She turned to Jasmine for help.

“*Moli hua*,” said Jasmine.

The boy’s face lit up. “Oh, *moli hua*!” he exclaimed. “Very pretty.” The way he looked at her, though, made Jasmine feel like he was referring to more than just her name. *Oh, great*, she thought to herself. The boys at home were never interested in her. Why did she have to find one now, when it was the last thing she could possibly deal with?

“And what’s your name?” Oz asked the boy again, pointing at him to illustrate.

This time, the boy understood. “Chiang,” he replied.

“Great!” said Oz. “Okay, Chiang, we wanted to ask you about Mr. Fong.”

“Oh, Mr. Fong very good man,” Chiang assured them. “Teach Chiang many things.”

“Has he been working here very long?” Oz asked.

“Many years,” said Chiang. “He work here before Chiang come.”

“But that’s not possible!” cried Jasmine, stepping forward.

Chiang looked at her with surprise. “You English very good!” he exclaimed.

Jasmine glowered impatiently. “Never mind that. Mr. Fong can’t have been here for years. He was working on the railroad!”

Chiang looked puzzled again. “No, no railroad,” he replied, shaking his head. “Work at market for Mr. Chen.”

Jasmine felt a tightening in her chest, but pressed on. “And what about Mrs. Fong?” she asked.

Chiang only shook his head again. “No Mrs. Fong. Mr. Fong not have wife.”

“Are you sure?” asked Oz. “Maybe you just never saw her.”

“No Mrs. Fong,” Chiang insisted. “Mrs. Fong die last year, in China. Very sad.”

The tightening in Jasmine’s chest grew worse, to the point where she felt like she couldn’t breathe. What was happening? How could things have gone so wrong?

Before they could ask Chiang anything else, Mr. Fong called him back into the market. At the same time, one of the other men came out to talk to the large man driving the other wagon.

Jasmine almost felt too lightheaded to stand upright. “What are we going to do now?” she moaned.

“There’s only one thing we can do,” Oz said grimly. “It’s like I said, we have to fix what’s wrong with history.”

“That’s ridiculous!” cried Jasmine. “You’ve been watching too many science fiction movies.”

Oz refused to give up. “How else do you explain what’s happened? We go back in time a hundred and twelve years and land exactly where your great-great-grandfather is? Even

though he's not supposed to be here? It's like we're supposed to fix everything."

Jasmine felt the urge to run as far away as possible, but she managed to steady herself. "Look, can we save the universe after we've found some food and a place to stay? This is all just a little too much."

"Good afternoon! Can I be of some assistance?"

Jasmine whirled around to find the Chinese man who had come out of the market standing behind her. He wasn't much taller than Oz, with a wiry build, and he spoke English clearly, with an accent that sounded like a mixture of Chinese and British. The large man who had been on the wagon was standing behind him. Both men had tattoos on their arms, poking out from under the sleeves of their jackets. The large man had a dragon tattooed on his neck as well.

"I sure hope you can," said Jasmine, her face flushing with relief.

"Yeah," Oz added. "We're kind of lost. We're looking for the Presbyterian Mission Home."

"On Sacramento Street," Jasmine added.

The man thought for a moment, and then smiled. "I know the place," he replied. "But they will not help your friend. He is not Chinese."

Jasmine glanced over at Oz and saw the same distressed look that was on her own face. Why didn't anyone want to help both of them? Why did they only want to help one or the other?

"Please, do not worry," the man assured them. "There is another shelter, not far from here. Perhaps they would be more accommodating. Shall we show you?"

"Yes, please!" Jasmine exclaimed. It was the first good thing she had heard since they were in Uncle Morten's attic.

They climbed aboard the men's wagon and rumbled down the Chinatown street. Jasmine stared back at the market, try-

ing to remember what it looked like. They would have to come back sooner or later, after all.

Oz was up near the front, talking to the smaller of the two men. “Won’t your friend be upset that you left him behind?”

“Not at all,” the man assured her. “This will not take long, and then we’ll go back for him.”

They turned at the next corner and went another few blocks, until they stopped in front of a small, dirty-looking alley.

“It is this way, please,” the smaller man told them. He climbed down from the wagon to lead the way.

“The shelter is down there?” Jasmine asked. She crinkled her nose at the smell coming from the alley’s entrance.

“It is near the people who need them most,” the man explained.

Jasmine looked over at Oz dubiously, but Oz could only shrug in reply. The man made sense, in a way, and even if he didn’t, they didn’t have much choice. Not when the alternative was wandering around on their own.

“I can assure you that the inside of the shelter is quite pleasant,” said the man.

Oz nodded slowly and hopped down to the street. But Jasmine remained in the back of the wagon for a moment, staring down into the alley. Something didn’t feel right.

“Come on, Jasmine,” said Oz. “Let’s hope it’s not too far.”

Jasmine frowned, but then climbed down and fell in beside Oz as they walked forward. The larger man brought up the rear. His presence behind them made Jasmine feel even more uneasy.

They had gone a few yards when a door opened in one of the buildings ahead of them. Another Chinese man stepped into the alley and blocked their path. The man who had been leading them looked back and said something in Chinese. Jasmine turned around and found herself staring straight at the large

man, who had come up menacingly close behind them. She shrieked and jumped away from him.

“Hey!” cried Oz. “What’s going on?”

“We only want the girl,” the man who had been guiding them told Oz, his tone suddenly menacing. “Leave her with us, and you won’t be harmed.”

“What?” Jasmine cried. “What do you want me for?”

But the man ignored her, shouting more orders to the other men instead. The man from the alley lunged toward her, and in a terrified panic she turned to run, making it easy for the large man to reach out and grab her. She screamed as his powerful hands lifted her into the air. Below her, she could see Oz trying to pull the man’s arm away, but it was no use.

With Jasmine firmly in the large man’s grasp, the man from the alley turned on Oz instead. Jasmine caught the scent of a chemical as he went past her, and she saw a dirty rag in his hand. But there was nothing she could do about it, not even give her friend a warning. The man shoved Oz against the wall of the nearest building and clamped the rag over her face.

At that point, the large man threw Jasmine over his shoulder and started walking out of the alley. Jasmine kicked and struggled, but she couldn’t break free. She looked back and saw the other men leave Oz lying helplessly against the wall. Then the large man turned the corner, leaving Oz to her fate.