

Jonar Cowan

Dr. Neel

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Red Dragon Hidden Among Men

The crows' cry startled me awake. My body shivered as the sun had not yet risen. I turned and raised my head to see a red dragon pendant lying on my nightstand. It is my family keepsake that is passed down from generation to generation during the time of betroval. I sat up on my bed and stared at the pendent before I put it on. Time seemed to pass me by as I was lost in thought about my destiny. Before I realized it, the sun had begun to rise as the rooster's call signaled my day to start. I proceeded to tend to my family grounds and ready the materials for the day. Finally free, I strolled past my father's private room, but I turned around and was compelled to enter. As I passed the door I was immediately greeted by my father's armor. Hidden beneath a layer of dust, the armor was riddled with dents and scratches that seemed to carry my father's pride.

"Mulan!," my mother called my name. "Today is the day!," she exclaimed and I headed to her. On my way over, I hear the sound of horses storming the streets. Curious, I decided to make my way to the courtyard to find a warrior handing my father a scroll. When he opened and read it, he dropped to his knees. My mother ran to his aid and quickly understood the situation. After half a stick of incense has passed, my father said "I do not have anybody to send to participate in the war" and the warrior only retorted and said "you are a disgrace to the emperor." The warrior left and my father stayed idle kneeling on the ground. My father's back has never

been so bent. Honor meant everything to my family. In shock with what happened, I ran to my ancestral shrine to pray for an answer. As I arrived in front of the shrine, my family crest, identical to my necklace, rested above the entrance. The pendent began to burn my chest, but I paid no attention to it. I knelt down and bowed. After a considerable amount of time, I raised my head and began to look around. There were gravestones all marked with epithets. As I looked around, my eyes fell on to a particular gravestone that read “Dou Xianniang the Female Warrior.” I felt my pendent burn even hotter this time and I knew what I had to do.

I headed to my father’s private room. I greeted my father’s armor as if it were a companion and cleaned the dust off of it. Once I finished removing the dust, I donned the armor. The weight of the armor caused me discomfort but I preserved. To me, the weight of the armor could never compare to the dishonor my family suffered today. With my back straight and head held high, I headed for the recruitment camp.

Upon entering the camp, I was met with a scowl from an official, who was checking people in. He looked at me from top to bottom then frowned and said “with newcomers like you, we are bound to lose the war.” I hardened my heart and as I was about to give him a piece of my mind the commander walks out his tent. It was as if he was a god amongst men. The environment changed and everybody became silent and lowered their gaze. I held my gaze high and locked eyes with him. He made his way to me and said “lower your head and respect your commander.” His voice was unwavering and I could only abide by his orders. He then said “you are all here because the main army has fallen. You are China’s last hope. Stop your disrespectful habits and line up!” For a moment fear struck my heart and I remembered why I was here. After stumbling to find my place in line, I found myself surrounded by a man the size of a small

mountain, a man who looked as if he would jump from his own shadow, and a burly short man whose face screamed anger. As I was turning away, he grunted and said with his raspy voice, “what do you want, rice noodle?” I stuttered and said “sorry I noticed that you are a lit-” before I could finish his face boiled red and he yelled “oh I look little?” With no warning a fist came in my direction and my face met with it. I was knocked back towards the cowardly man, but caught by a pair of giant hands./ With a soothing voice, the giant man said “get in line or else we will be in trouble.” I nodded and fell back into line with my head down.

Weeks go by and my determination wavered. The running, lifting, and the fighting been brutal on my body. In addition, the short-fused man did not want to leave me alone. I hunched my back as tears started flowing from my eyes as the thought of giving up entered my mind, but I remembered why I was here. I touched my pendent, dried my tears and stood up straight leaving my tent. The weeks passed and my determination did not deter. Everybody started to notice and negative interactions with the hot-headed man disappeared. The three recruits I met the first day became more light-hearted with me. I began to see them in a new light and learned many things from them in terms of temperament and ability.

For a period of time everything seemed peaceful.

One day, a murder crows awoke me from my sleep and not feeling tired I went to walk around. The sun had not yet risen, so the sky sparkled with stars. In the distance I noticed a small ball of flame bouncing towards the camp. After watching the flame, I began to see more coming towards me and I realized we were under attack. I yelled at the top of my lungs to notify everybody. The camp was thrown into disarray as the recruits readied for battle. I ran towards my tent to put on my father’s armor. It felt lighter and more comfortable than before. Cannons

fired as the enemies stormed closer. The recruits seemed to have been missing their marks and began to lose their composure. Frantic for survival, I began to think of a way to slow down or possible stop the enemy. That's when I noticed that the direction they were headed towards was the armory, which was filled with gunpowder. I wait for their advance as I aimed my cannon. More than half a stick of incense had passed before they came into range of the blast radius. I fired. The enemy army was reduced to no more than a handful of people. However, the leader lived. His predator like eyes locked in on me and like a ferocious beast he charged towards me. I steadied my heart and determination as I readied to fight. His grotesque human figure arrived within meters of me and swung his axe. My sword met his axe and I knew I was at a disadvantage. His ferocity intensified and the amount of swings increased. I found myself with a tent to my back. His demonic voice laughed and said "nowhere to run" and in one fluid motion I was struck on my side. The axe pierced my skin and I was barely able to stand. My vision started to blur and as he was about to deliver the final blow, the commander pierced his heart with a spear. It was over. Before I fell over, I met my commander's gaze and did not look down. My head was high and my back as straight as my body would allow me. He stared at me and asked my name and family. "I am Mulan of the Red Dragon clan!"

Analysis

For my re-telling of the story of Mulan, I choose to focus more on the idea of honor and respect. I wanted to keep the same morals in regards to women being able to do the same as men and how preservation is key to becoming an important factor in finding yourself and your destiny. In contrast to the Disney film, I used a red dragon pendant that guides her towards her destiny. The idea of a straight back and bent back was a reference to the Disney film because her father could not participate due to his back. I made a very important reference to Dou Xianniang, who was a female warrior that fought alongside Mulan in the original story. I used the crow in the beginning as a symbol of change and discomfort as seen from her first interaction with the crow and then the second. In the film, the crow is a pet for the enemy and would be used to scout their targets. In my story, I used the concept of putting a person's head down as a sign of inferiority. When I felt Mulan had reached a level of respect and maturity, I had her be able to face the commander's gaze. I omitted multiple parts from the film that includes how China was saved and the revelation that she was a woman. I wanted her to reveal that she was a woman in the end after being able to lock eyes with the commander. I also omitted the cricket and Mushu in place of the pendant. I felt that using the animals as a guide was more childlike and I rather have a deeper exploration of the character by herself than with help from somebody. The marriage at the end of the Disney film was omitted because I feel that Mulan had to be independent of any suitor, which shows her ability to be independent and not constrained to sexist beliefs.

