

## Path Out of Darkness

by Deb Walsh

**Author's Note:** This vignette occurs between the final scene and the tag of the *Kung Fu: the Legend Continues* episode "The Possessed."

S

haolin priest Kwai Chang Caine and his son, Metro Division Detective Peter Caine, walked side by side through the streets of Chinatown. Around them shimmered the neon lights of the city, the scents and sounds of American urban life. Behind them lay the nightmare of the demon warrior, Sung Gwai, two dead priests, several injured people, and a security guard terrified within an inch of his life. Ahead lay ... silence.

After the appearance of the police, led by Peter's foster father Captain Paul Blaisdell, at the Art Institute following Caine's battle with Sung Gwai, Peter had not said a word that was not part of his report to his superior officer. The lack of words hung between them as they walked, another presence dividing them, keeping them apart.

At last, Kwai Chang Caine touched his son's arm, the electric shock of contact almost driving his hand away. Softly, he prompted, "You are troubled, my son."

Mouth set and jaw rigid, Peter shook his head, unwilling to speak, staring ahead to the pavement that stretched out before them, thronged with people. Caine's hand tightened on his arm, and as Caine halted, Peter was pulled up short. He wheeled on his father, anger bubbling to the surface in the quickness of his movements.

"We are free of Sung Gwai's evil. He is vanquished. Lawrence and Helen will recover. It is done," Caine told him firmly.

"Done? What's done? We've conquered a demon, you and I. A demon, father! How do I fit that in my report, huh? How do I put into words what happened? What happened back there? What did I do?" Peter demanded urgently, his face clouding with pain and confusion.

Caine stood staring at his son, his eyes fluttering shut for a brief moment as he lifted his shoulder in an eloquent shrug. "I do not know how you can describe the experience in your reports. I —"

"Damn right you can't! Nobody but Paul's gonna believe it anyway. And that's only because he trusts you completely. Isn't that a kick in the head — my foster father trusts my father more than I do!"

The urge to step back, to recoil from the anger radiating from his son was great, but Caine held his ground. "I did not know you felt this way, my son," he answered, his voice steady but his tone one of great pain.

Raking his fingers through his dark hair, Peter shook his head. "I don't. I'm sorry, Pop. I just ... I'm so confused. What happened? What exactly did I do back there?" He turned eyes haunted and full of terror on his father. "What have I become?"

The silence threatened to return as Kwai Chang Caine looked at his anguished son. At last, he said, "Come, back to my apartment. We must talk."

**P**eter leaned against the low brick wall that ran around the balcony of Caine's apartment. Below and around him, the city's lights twinkled, the neon sang, and a gentle breeze rustled through the plants that thrived on this little patch of serenity. But there was no serenity in Peter Caine's soul this night. Instead, there was only confusion and fear. All of his life, he'd been an outsider. First, at the temple, yearning after the normal life of the kids living in the town across the lake. Then, orphaned into the alien culture of the west, he'd struggled to comprehend the strange ways of the people around him, to fit in and go unnoticed. As a policeman, he had finally carved out a place for himself in the world. And until his father had returned, he'd known and understood that place implicitly. Now ... now that understanding, that knowledge, threatened to slip away like wisps of fog in the night.

Inside, his father prepared tea. When it was ready, he set the pot and two cups on a tray and carried it out to the balcony. He poured the tea and walked over to Peter, lifting his son's hand and placing the cup in it.

"Tell me what you remember," Caine ordered gently.

Sipping at the hot tea, Peter grimaced at the temperature of it, set the cup down and sighed. "You and Lawrence, arguing. You telling Sung Gwai to show himself. Then ... Lawrence, dropping like a stone. One second he was standing there, threatening you, the next he crumpled to the floor like a ... sack of rice. And you ... you were standing there rigid as a statue, I could feel such ... agony ... coming from you. I felt so helpless. And then ..."

"Yes, my son?" Caine prompted, his fingertips resting lightly on Peter's hand.

"And then I knew you were in danger. Not just physical danger. Spiritual danger." He raised his face to look at his father, his expression one of remembered horror. "I knew you were in danger of losing your soul."

Caine inclined his head in affirmation. "For a moment, Sung Gwai took control of my body and my soul. I could feel his evil spreading out through my limbs, singing in my blood. The battle was lost."

"I knew ... I knew that I had to save you. I knew if I didn't do something, I'd lost you, completely. That I'd always be alone after that. How could I know that?"

"We are joined," Caine explained simply, spreading his hands. "You are my son, I am your father. A bond exists between us. How could you not know?"

Peter looked at him, tilting his head to regard his father quizzically. "I ... I hadn't thought of that," he agreed, a little of the terror seeping away.

"And then?" Caine prompted again, his eyebrows raised.

"And then I reached for you. I wrapped my arms around you, and suddenly, I wasn't in the Art Institute any longer. I was somewhere else. Somewhere ... alien. The sun was shining down, hot, brilliant. You weren't you ... and then suddenly you were, and we were back in the Institute. And I knew we'd won after all."

"Yes," Caine agreed.

"Yes?" Peter repeated. "What d'you mean, 'yes'? What the hell happened?" he demanded angrily.

For a long time, Caine was silent as Peter's anger simmered. Finally, Caine spoke, haltingly with the effort to put it all in words his son could understand. "Sung Gwai had no form of his own. It

had died long ago, far away and forgotten in time. He existed only in the realm of the spirit. He used the bodies of the living to give himself form in our world. But in his own world, he was master."

"His own world? What, like another planet?"

"No," Caine shook his head. "Another plane of existence. A shadowy region between ... heaven and hell? In his realm, he defeated me. But when you reached for me, you reached into that world where I was trapped. The strength of your love, of your ... faith ... released me, and brought me home."

"Yeah, but how did I do that?" Peter insisted.

"Because you are my son," Caine replied simply.

"So, what does that mean? Suddenly I've got supernatural powers? That I can do weird things like you do?"

Caine smiled as he shook his head. "No. You are what you always have been, perhaps only more so. The potential has always been there. In situations of extreme need, that potential may be realized. The training of your childhood awakens slowly in you, but it awakens just the same. With it awoken ..." he struggled to find the right words as Peter listened attentively, "greater potentials. Whether these ... potentials ... are realized is your choice. Tonight, you chose to save my soul, and so you did, in the only way possible."

"Am I dangerous?" Peter asked quietly, his eyes locked on his father's.

Caine shook his head. "No. Yours is a gentle soul, my son. You would not use such power to hurt."

"But I could?"

"Without training, you ... probably would be unable to tap into that power. It was only the ... urgency ... of the need which allowed you to do it at all."

"Like having a secret weapon," Peter said with a faint smile, the tension draining away from him.

"An unreliable one, if you are not trained in its use," Caine corrected.

"So I don't have to worry about it suddenly breaking loose, like "Carrie", right?"

"Carrie'? Do I know her?"

"She's a character in a Stephen King book — ah, never mind," Peter said with a shadowed grin. "So what happens now?"

"Now, you go home and get some sleep. The experience has drained you — to pass into the realm of the spirit depletes the body as it tires the soul. Rest easy. And tomorrow, we will discuss your training."

"Training, huh? You sure you didn't make this up just so you could get me back in school?"

"I am sure," Caine assured him, bowing. "But your education is not finished. It is about time you completed it."

"Sure, Pop," Peter said, patting his father on the shoulder. Weariness dragged at him, and the

tired folds around his eyes prevented his father from chastising him for — yet again — using the hated appellation "Pop." "I'll see you tomorrow."

Peter touched his lips to his father's forehead and headed for the apartment and the door. As he stepped into the apartment, Caine called, "Peter." Turning in the doorway, he stood, waiting.

Caine slapped his fist into his other hand, and bowed. "Thank you. For my life. For my soul."

Peter returned the gesture with a smile, bowing in kind. "Thank you. For my life. For my ... sanity." Turning, Peter let himself out of the apartment.

Caine turned toward the night, an affectionate smile on his face. "You have come a long way, my son. And the journey continues."