

New Fiction from Jillian Danback-McGhan: “Allied”



James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Nocturne in Black and Gold – The Falling Rocket, 1874

I met the Lieutenant at a diplomatic reception at our embassy.

Carrying papers which issued weaponry to his nation's military, I passed them to my contact – a pock-marked General whose eyes glittered when he seized them. Having done my duty as military attaché, I grabbed a drink and contemplated my exit.

That is, until the Lieutenant lured me to him with a smile; his fiery green eyes blazed over cheekbones sharp as blades. He served in his nation's military police, which his father now led. A young man burning with the promise of his own bright future. He touched my arm as I spoke about my role at the embassy and the room grew hazy. *To our countries' partnership*, he said, raising his glass for a toast. Then the band started playing. He extended his arm to invite me to dance.

We whirled around the room for the rest of the evening, drunk on wine and each other's flattery, our uniforms askew. Embarrassed by the curious looks our cavorting attracted, I turned my head when he moved in and received his kiss on my cheek. He looked wounded.

I leaned back and laughed.

Ten years later, I saw him again. My children fought on the floor as I read the paper and, lured by an article about protests in his country, spotted him in an accompanying photo. He had no name or insignia on his riot gear, but his helmet and protective mask fell askew: I saw fiery green eyes and cheekbones sharp as blades. A Kevlar-clad man standing among burning barriers. Clouds of teargas bloomed in the background and made the image look hazy.

Had the papers I carried issued him the weapon he held his hand? *To support our countries' partnership*? With an extended arm he directed the assault.

Across from him stood a young woman holding a cardboard sign. Other protestors slumped behind her. They looked wounded.

Shards of glass scattered around the woman's feet and glittered on the pot-marked pavement. She turned her head to receive a kiss from a rifle stock on her cheek. The impact forced her backwards and jolted her mouth open.

As if she were laughing at me.