

**HISTORICAL FICTION (NOVELLA): EPOCH OF BELIEF BY KATIE HURWITZ  
SUBMISSION FROM MASSACHUSETTS**

*Summary: My historical fiction novella, "Epoch of Belief" is an allegory to "A Tale of Two Cities," centered around the One-Child Policy in China. When twins are born, a nurse goes to America with one of the babies--the Lucie-Manette-like character--that she was tasked to kill.*

When I saw the innocent visages of the infants, life flashed before my eyes. The mother of the newborns, lying exasperated in bed, told me without any hesitation to do the unbearable. Stifling in the thin air, I tentatively picked up the girl to be carried outside. Her black fuzz of hair seemed so soft, her toes so small, and her eyes barely open. The baby's skin was white as the downy clouds leading to Heaven above, with a complexion of an angel's pureness. I delivered these two babies: the girl and her brother. Why should only the boy live, so that the horrible assignment to kill the girl was passed on to me, the nurse? It was my job to bring life, not take it away. I could not take the pressure any longer. If I killed the baby, then a part of myself would have the same fate of death. Thus, I did what was necessary. Outside the hospital, this frigid December day accommodated a blanket of snow. The untouched ground was the platform for my evidential footsteps. But even so, my feet, not feeling like my own, led me past the bubbling river. This peaceful body of water would be where the girl was to be left to die without any nourishment. She needed to escape to somewhere far away from here: a place without any rules regarding how many children should be in a family. Ultimately, we are all made in God's image. Would God create a child just to have it die within a few minutes of birth? This child will never be deprived from seeing the world and all the beauty it holds. But first, I needed to leave: to flee China and go to America where dreams can become reality. America was the ultimate location to raise my new daughter, Min. I performed the sign of the cross, with my cold fingers marking by

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beloved trinity, asking God to watch over us for safety on a difficult expedition. My reluctance to separate the twins held me back from walking on any farther. But within the commotion of the moment, the unfortunate solution of fleeing was the only way to keep her alive. Kissing Min's small head, I ended my prayer and began our journey.

Sneaking out of China was one of the most difficult moments of my life. Looking down at the baby wrapped in my arms reminded me of the goodness the world still holds. In which case, I did everything possible to come to America without suspicion. We rode together on a train to the airport. The warm air inside the train made me feel safe as we escaped the cold outside. In retrospect, the coal heated up the train to make it push forward; just as my fervor for Min is the force getting us to America. Looking out of the window, everything was a blur, as if every event in my life passed right before my eyes but I could no longer decipher them any longer. It did not matter anymore what went on in my past: its ambiguity was a sign that my future would be clear in America. Sitting on the black cushioned seat hugging Min for my life, we were going too fast to turn back. Looking out of the window would not help me, as all I had to do was close my eyes and believe that everything would work out.

I had seven stops to go before getting to the terminal. At the third stop, I continued to close my eyes, almost to the point of sleep. When opening my eyes, I was shocked to see that I was not alone with Min. A man sat next to me solemnly. I was not aware of him being there or even how long he was there. This man could have been there for several minutes, yet he had not said a word, perhaps recognizing my disquieting mood. As our journey went on, I turned to the man with the white scarf and found out his name was Mr. Zhou. He shook my hand firmly, which counted to me as a sign he could be trusted. He seemed like a man of business. We carried out a conversation until the seventh stop, in which I learned that he was fleeing China, too, for

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reasons unknown to me. At risky times like these, we needed to be clever and quick in order to achieve our ultimate goal of liberation. Mr. Zhou and I decided to team up since we strived for the same result: the opportunity for freedom in America. Our plan would earn me a spot in America as long as we worked together with deception.

In order to board the plane, I had to state my name. I declared that my last name was Zhou and that this stranger was my husband. Therefore, Min would be our child. I regretted lying, but for a minute, the picture of a steady family in my mind warmed my heart despite it all being an illusion. A few hours ago, I was simply a submissive nurse following orders to live. But just a short amount of time later, here I was, breaking my moral standards of telling the truth in order to live. I was lonely before, but now I had a family, no matter how contrived it was. Our shared desperation to get to America made it look like we connected as an actual family; therefore, the lie was believed. We were off to America, where I kept my last name as Zhou despite never seeing the man after our arrival. We parted ways grateful for the power that stemmed from a seemingly innocuous human connection. Knowing the English language from studying as a child and getting a green card right away, I forced myself to feel like I had never been in China in the first place. In spite of my beliefs, this simply was a lie.

Upon arriving in America, my fear of the Chinese government learning about my crime held back the development of a perfect relationship between myself and Min. It was my dream to be a united team with Min and share all the same qualities, as if we were one person. However, her innocence was unfeigned, whereas mine had evanesced over time. As the days went by, I remained cautious and quiet, resorting to my pastime making rosaries. Each bead represented a different prayer, all connected by a golden thread like we all as human beings are connected to God. The paramount piece was the cross itself. Something so small as a cross on a rosary can be

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the mighty reason why everyone is still alive today. I have such great respect for a martyr such as Jesus Christ, selflessly giving up his life because of his unconditional love for mankind.

As for Min, childhood vibrancy filled her with an abiding joy and goodness. Her eyes remained quite small throughout youth, limiting her view of the world so that she saw only beauty. Min learned how to walk at seven months old. Skipping the typical baby's style of crawling before walking, I assisted Min with standing up until she was capable of walking on her own. Each footstep reverberated through our small house. Her steps were slightly precarious at first, and indicating the sense of fear that she would fall. This made my body tremble, as my daughter was walking without guidance and nothing could be done to prevent her from falling. In a way, I empathized with Min at that moment. I, too, had that fear instilled within myself. Despite the glorious moments that come up in life, this terror resonated in my soul ever since the day when I decided to flee China. Unlike my experience with fear, Min's determination to walk eliminated the imbalance in the steps, and made way for steadiness as she walked throughout our house. Her face lit up as she looked at me with the knowledge that she could independently complete a task. Min walked in my direction with rising arms motioning for me to lift her up. Smiling wide with dimples raising up to her small eyes, she let out a laugh of relief. Even with Min in my arms, the magic of that moment was a mere distraction for the incessant fear and guilt engraved in the pavement of my soul.

Our assimilation into America seemed seamless for my daughter, due to her peers anglicizing Min to Minnie. She had no past in China that she could remember, so coming to America started off as a clean slate for her. She could live free from any worries from her real life. However, for me, my only way to conform to American ideals was due to the fact that Christianity was the dominant force in my life, just as it was for most of the western world.