



# CHOJUN

*a novel*

*by Goran Powell*

# THE TYPHOON MAN

I sit now to write my memoirs, not because I am a man of any great importance to the world, but rather because I knew such a man. His life changed the lives of millions and changed mine in ways I could never have imagined when I first met him, all those years ago, as a boy of just nine years.

Today his name is written in karate histories as one of the truly great Okinawan masters. It has even been immortalized in a series of Hollywood movies, but apart from featuring a karate master of the same name, the movies bear little resemblance to the man I knew or the times in which he lived. The Mr. Miyagi I knew was called Chojun Miyagi, and he lived and died in Okinawa. He was born in 1888 in the island's capital, Naha, and rarely ventured far from the warm embrace of his Pacific home. He traveled occasionally to China and the Japanese mainland, and once spent several months touring Hawaii and demonstrating his art, but he never made it as far as America where his karate is so popular now.

Miyagi died relatively young, in 1953, at the age of sixty-five. People say karate training is good for the health and promotes longevity, and I believe this to be true. However, no amount of training can protect against heart disease or temper the soul for the tragedies of the war that descended on Okinawa with such ferocity in 1945.

Chojun Miyagi died a long time ago, but to me, he is still alive. Each day when I practice karate he is with me, beside me, his hard hands guiding my own, his soft deep voice in my ear,

urging me to stand firm, to tense here, to relax here, to inhale deeply, to exhale slowly.

When I retired from my job at the harbor, I realized I was the same age as Miyagi was when he died, and ever since that realization, I began to feel his presence more persistently. His ghost visited me not only in my karate, but also in my dreams and even in my waking moments, sitting on my tiny balcony, staring out over the uneven rooftops to the sea. It seemed my long-awaited days of lazing in the sunshine in tranquil retirement were not to be. Miyagi had other ideas and I could feel his disapproving gaze upon me as I sat watching the waves while my wife tidied around me and my neighbors tended their gardens below. It took me several days to realize what my heart, and Miyagi's ghost, was telling me: it was time to stop idling and put down on paper my memories of my master, my teacher, my sensei. It was time to pay tribute to the name of Chojun Miyagi.

I am still on my balcony. I have moved my writing table out here, which means there's even less room than before, but if I go inside I won't be able to see the sea, and who would ever choose to go inside when they could watch the waves, forever changing and re-forming, yet never becoming anything more or less than a single ocean? Who would give up seeing the boats going in and out of the harbor, and the wind at play in the palms? Besides, these things remind me of Miyagi. They inspire me, as he inspires me.

I met Chojun Miyagi by the sea, at the end of the long, hot summer of 1933. It was a day I'll always remember, for many reasons, though it began like any other on our island. The sky was a fathomless blue, as vast as the ocean beneath it, the sun was rising slowly over the tall Ryukyu palms, casting pointed

shadows on the white sands below, and the sea was moving in gentle swells, with only the occasional ripple of white foam beyond the rocky headland.

I'd been wandering along the shoreline from my hometown of Itoman to the little village of Nashiro, where the long beach provided rich hunting grounds for sharks' teeth and other treasures left by the sea. I was moving quickly, stopping only to examine any unusual shells or stones that caught my eye, or to prod the dried remains of a sea creature lying in the tidemark. When the sand of the sweeping bay gave way to stony ground, I chased crabs in the shallow rock-pools, following a haphazard trail through the rocks to the rugged cliffs of Cape Kyan, the southernmost point of Okinawa. The sea was rougher here, and ten-foot swells surged below me, sending white foam fingers reaching up the cliff-face for my feet, and then retreated to reveal sharp coral rocks hidden beneath. I continued along the cliff-top path until I came to a rockfall at the beginning of a pristine cove and scrambled down the rocks to the deserted beach below. It was a place all to myself, away from the world.

A shallow reef hugs the Okinawan coastline and I swam out to dive among the coral, searching for oysters that might conceal a pearl. I dreamed of going deeper, all the way to the bottom of the sea like a real pearl diver, but my lungs were too small and I was forced to make do with mussels, clams, and starfish. Beyond the coral shelf, the ocean fell away into an abyss. Whenever I found myself at the reef's edge, I was seized by a lurching sense of vertigo and quickly returned to the shallower water, imagining as I did, some terrible creature emerging from the blackness to drag me to my doom. I held my breath as long as I could, staying down a little longer each time. I must have practiced for several hours, unaware of the

time, until I emerged from one particularly long dive and found myself in darkness. I wondered, had I really been diving so long that night had fallen? Bewildered, I spun around in the water, examining the sky. I could still make out the faint outline of the sun behind a sprawl of angry black clouds. Warm, fat raindrops splashed on my arms and my shoulders, and I heard the growl of distant thunder. I looked to shore and saw a narrow shaft of sunlight cast by a gap in the clouds, illuminating a thin strip of the rocks behind my beach like a beacon in the gathering storm. I swam hard for that beacon. Giant waves were already crashing on the shore. I was forced to swim with all my might to avoid being cast into the jagged rocks at the beach's end. At last, a benevolent wave hurled me safely ashore and I lay in the seething sand, exhausted.

I cursed myself for my stupidity. The wetness of the wind and the growing swells of the sea should have been my clues. I was a child of Okinawa, and every Okinawan knew that in the summer months, the Kuroshio current brought more than warm water from the tropics—it brought typhoons.

It wasn't the first time I'd seen a typhoon, they're common in Okinawa at that time of year. But it was the first time I'd been so far from home. Worse still, the way home would take me over cliff-tops and open beaches where I'd be at the mercy of the wind. I feared I'd be picked up like a leaf and dashed on some hillside far inland. Going home would be impossible, but I couldn't stay on the beach. New waves were reaching farther up the beach, eager to drag me back into their embrace. I rose unsteadily to my feet. The wind lashed my back with sharp sand, and a sudden gust hurled me toward the rockfall. I slammed into a boulder, taking the impact on my palms and cursing myself once more.

I had to think. I had to find shelter, but my mind was a blank. The answer came to me through my hands. It was in the rocks that I was holding. I remembered a small cave that I'd noticed at the top of the rockfall. I didn't relish the idea of climbing up the rocks in this wind, but it was my best hope of survival, and I had to do it now, before the full force of the storm hit. I pressed my body close to the rocks, my fingers digging hard into the glistening surfaces, and climbed swiftly and evenly up. The wind snatched at my limbs playfully and slapped me heartily on the back with a warmth that belied its murderous intent. I wasn't fooled. This wind was merely flexing its muscles in preparation for what it was to become. Near the top of the rockfall, I caught sight of the cave exactly where I'd remembered it. There was a huge boulder like an enormous stepping-stone lying at its entrance. I stood on it and at that moment, when I wasn't holding on, the wind made its final play for me. A furious gust sent me tumbling over the side of the boulder. I felt myself falling but the sensation lasted only a moment. To my good fortune, there were three smaller boulders on the other side, their ends close together and forming a rough plateau. It was here that I landed on my knees and my forearms. I was shocked rather than injured and breathed hard to recover my composure before turning to assess my situation. The big boulder was acting as a windbreak. For a moment, I considered staying where I was, but it wasn't safe, not like the cave would be. The wind could change directions. The wind was treacherous. I climbed back up onto the boulder and entered the cave on my belly. Inside it was cramped and dark, but that didn't matter. It would make a safe place to wait out the storm. And I was in for a long wait, that much I knew. The storm could last throughout the day. It might be morning

before I'd be able to return home. I resigned myself to a long, cold, and miserable wait in the dank cave. Almost immediately, my belly began to grumble. It had been a long time since I'd eaten, and it would be a long time till I ate again.

Outside, the wind announced its mounting anger ever more loudly. I became curious and peered out from the cave mouth to watch it unleash its full fury on the island. The grey air swarmed with leaves, stones, rocks, and sand. Palm trees were bent at impossible angles, their branches thrashing frantically under the frenzied attack. The ink-black sea was an ugly landscape of torn hills and valleys, so different from before that I wondered if I could possibly have been swimming in it just a short time earlier.

I was about to return to the dimness of the cave when to my astonishment, I saw a man on the cliff-top. At first I imagined that, like me, he'd become stranded on the beach and was trying to get away. I shouted to him, urging him to shelter in the cave with me, but the wind stifled my cries. The man was standing on the highest point of the cliff. I watched in horror, sure he would be seized by the dreadful wind at any moment, but he stood firm, facing out to sea, his arms raised before him, his hands balled into fists, and like one of the palm trees, he appeared rooted in the earth.

I saw him punch slowly into the wind, first one hand and then the other, in a silent battle with the typhoon. Occasionally he would turn his back to the sea, fighting to keep his balance, and then spin to face into the wind once more. Suddenly both hands snaked out together, fingertips slicing the air. Three times he repeated the motion, and then stepping back, his arms wheeled before him and extended, one palm high, the other low.

I watched, barely aware of the storm, as he repeated his curious movements over and over. The man was built like a bull. I couldn't tell how old he was, not as old as my father, but he wasn't a young man either. His face was broad and smooth, his lips thick, his jaw strong. The focus of his gaze was on the far horizon, as if challenging the storm. The black hair was oiled and combed back, as was the style in those days. He was naked save for a pair of khaki pants cut off below the knee. His body was heavily muscled, like a strongman's from the comic books I saw from the mainland. His thick neck sloped down to broad shoulders and his chest was deep and powerful. The muscles of his stomach stood out like a ripple of waves. His forearms bulged, and his thick legs held him firm against the wind. But it wasn't the size of his muscles that I found so fascinating, but rather the way they changed and flowed when he moved. I watched him repeat the same movements for what seemed like hours. All fear of the storm banished by the presence of this man who could dominate a typhoon with his bare hands.

The storm battered the island for the rest of the day and into the night. I must have fallen soundly into sleep because when I woke the sun was shining, and I found myself in the strongman's arms. He was carrying me like a baby to my home in Itoman, the storm little more than a bad dream. For a moment I wondered if it had been real at all, but the debris surrounding us confirmed that it had: tree branches in the middle of flattened crops, fencing and roof tiles littering the road, carts upturned and smashed, dead animals dotting the meadows, paper, straw, wood, leaves, stones, strewn across the earth, and a giant boulder at the edge of my village that I'd never seen before.

"Where do you live?" the typhoon-man asked, carrying me as easily as a straw doll. I pointed dumbly to my house, unable



to find the courage to speak. My body felt weak, but my mind was alert. The typhoon-man had me in his arms, arms powerful enough to defeat the dreadful wind. I felt warm and safe and not in the least embarrassed at being carried like a small child.

“Kenichi!”

My mother screamed my name and fell to her knees, crying hysterically and beating the hard ground outside our home. I smiled weakly to let her know I was okay but she didn't seem to notice. I was still wondering how to convince her I wasn't dead when father emerged from the house and took me from the typhoon-man's arms, his jaw set tight. He carried me inside and laid me on the couch and then ran his hands over my limbs. Through my skin, I detected a tremor in his fingertips. Mother appeared beside him, muttering incoherently. She began to examine every inch of my skin for cuts from flying metal or glass, sobbing quietly, and even searched through my hair to check my scalp. I reassured them both that I was fine, but they didn't hear me. Father gathered me in his arms once more and carried me to bed. Mother covered me with a blanket despite the heat of the day and ordered me to sleep. I closed my eyes. I could hear father speaking to the typhoon-man while mother prepared refreshments in the kitchen. I didn't feel tired but I must have dozed off, and when I woke, late in the afternoon, the typhoon-man had gone. Mother brought tea to revive me and fed me bean curd soup like an invalid, ignoring my protests that I was perfectly well. It was evening before I was allowed to get out of bed and rejoin my family for our evening meal.

Father waited till the next day before removing his belt and thrashing me. It was the only time in my life that he did such a thing. He was a very gentle man. The pain of the lashes was

distant, dulled by the guilt I felt for causing my father to act in such a way.

Mother barely spoke to me for several days. It was as if I'd died and returned a ghost-child. My brothers ignored me too, and only my little sister Yuka, who was too young to know better, spoke to me, reassuring me that I existed at all.

Over the next week, the whole village worked to repair the storm damage, clearing the roads and fields, fixing roof tiles and thatch, mending fences and burying dead animals, until Itoman looked normal again. Only then did I summon the courage to ask my father about the typhoon-man. He told me I'd been rescued by Chojun Miyagi, the head of a family of Okinawan nobility. My parents were doubly embarrassed that such a renowned figure as Miyagi had been forced to rescue their son. I didn't dare mention that I'd been perfectly safe all along. Instead, I asked what Miyagi had been doing on the cliffs.

"Miyagi is a master of to-te," My father told me. He was referring to karate by its old name of *to-te*, which means China Hand, and this peaked my interest further, since China was the home of the classical martial arts.

"Did he learn in China?" I asked.

"I don't know," he answered curtly. "All I know is he's a very famous to-te master and he has a school in Naha."

Naha was the capital of our island, over two hours' walk from Itoman. "I wish to learn to-te from Master Miyagi," I said.

"You're too young."

"How old must I be?"

"I don't know," he shrugged.

"Then how do you know I'm too young?"

Father glowered at me and I knew it was time to be quiet. I sat beside mother, who was grating dried fish, and offered to help. She didn't refuse and I sat beside her for an hour, grating silently. When we had finished, she told me to put the flaked bonito in a jar and seal it tight. They were the first words she'd spoken to me since the storm.

Life returned to normal. School reopened, and I went about my daily chores as before, but a new idea was forming in my mind and I was determined to carry it through, even at the risk of angering my father once again.

When the weekend came, I completed my chores in double-quick time, and by the afternoon, I was free to go to the capital in search of the typhoon-man. I went to Naha harbor, where my uncle had a ship, hoping he could tell me where to find Miyagi's dojo. My uncle wasn't around, but one of his crew told me Miyagi's training hall was in a nearby school. I followed his directions, and when the school came into view, I saw Miyagi's broad frame striding a little way ahead of me on the street. I fell in step behind him, summoning the courage to address him.

"You're too young," he said without looking round.

"Too young for what?" I asked, hoping the answer wasn't what I knew it was going to be.

"To learn to-te."

"How do you know I want to learn to-te?" I asked, running to keep up. I can't explain how I'd suddenly become so bold—addressing Miyagi in such a familiar manner when before I hadn't dared to utter a single word to him—except to say that since the typhoon, I'd the feeling our lives were linked by an invisible bond. Perhaps Miyagi felt it too, since he didn't

seem surprised to see me or too put out by my breathless questioning.

“I know.”

We walked side by side in silence. “How did you know I was behind you?” I asked at last.

“I have eyes in the back of my head.”

“You do?”

I stopped in astonishment, but Miyagi went on without breaking stride and I had to run to catch up, “How did you know?”

He fixed me with his dark eyes, “I have a sixth sense.”

“Really? Truly?”

Miyagi didn't answer.

“Can I get it too?”

“If you sharpen your awareness day and night, you may develop it over time.”

“How much time?”

“A very long time.”

We reached the gate of the school where Miyagi had his dojo and he swung open the heavy iron grille.

“How old must I be to learn to-te?” I asked.

He looked me up and down. “Fourteen.”

I was devastated. Fourteen was almost five years away.

“Come back then,” he said, entering the yard.

“But what can I do now?” I asked, desperate to learn right away.

“Do you swim?” he asked.

“I dive for pearls,” I told him proudly.

“Have you ever found one?” he asked, his eyebrows raised in interest.

“No,” I answered truthfully.

“That’s no reason to stop searching,” he said, the trace of a smile on his lips. He came out and stood before me, then bent down and placed his palm on my stomach, below the navel. It felt like a block of smooth oak that had been in the sunshine all day, its warmth flowing through my entire body. “When you’re diving, don’t inhale high in your chest but down here,” he said, pressing gently, “in the pit of your stomach. To-te requires a strong stomach. Strong breathing. If you practice like this, your Sanchin will be very strong.”

“What is Sanchin?” I asked.

“You’ll discover when you’re fourteen,” he answered.

Then he was gone, and I was left to wander the long road back to Itoman alone. By the time I got home, it was dark but my parents didn’t ask where I’d been. I think they knew. That night while lying in my bed, I held my breath for as long as I could, wondering what Sanchin could be. It would be five years before I found out.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Goran Powell is a freelance writer who holds a 4th Dan in Goju Ryu Karate. He teaches at DKK London, one of the UK's strongest karate clubs, and is assistant coach to the Mixed Martial Arts team DKK Fighters who compete successfully in Ultimate Challenge and UFC.

In 2002, Goran undertook the grueling 30 Man Kumite test and wrote of the experience in his first book "Waking Dragons". It became an instant bestseller on Amazon's martial arts listing. In 2008 he edited the widely acclaimed karate book Four Shades of Black written by his Sensei, Gavin Mulholland.

His first novel "A Sudden Dawn" was published in 2010 and won 3 awards for Historical Fiction from USA Book News, eLit and Living Now. In 2011 he converted the book to a screenplay, which has been optioned for production.

Goran Powell is married with three children and resides in North London, England.