

The Eighth God-Damn Piece

Horace wasn't sure how long he'd been under the rubble – days probably. He reached his left arm out, let the slowly dripping water from the nearby broken pipe fill his cupped hand, and greedily drank paltry sips until the pain outweighed his thirst. He tried again to move his legs, but they were firmly stuck and he knew there was nothing to do but wait in hope for a rescue.

He remembered a video he saw about a set of Tai Chi exercises called “The Eight Pieces of Silk Brocade” and settled on trying them. He did some deep breathing and began. “Two Hands Upholding the Sky” – tough while horizontal, but he stretched his arms out anyway and reminisced about doing the move in a beautiful park near his home under a sun-filled, deep-blue sky. “Pulling the Bow” – it felt good to stretch and he was delighted for the mercy of enough room to do so. “Crane Spreading its Wing” – he felt light and graceful as a bird. “Looking Backward” – well, that wasn't quite possible! “Left and Right Swing” – tough to swing your body around in his position, but he enjoyed trying, nonetheless. “Up and Down Stretch” – thinking about reaching for his toes made him laugh. “Toe and Heel Bounce” – he stretched his feet and imagined he was bouncing. He counted the moves he'd remembered – seven. But what was the eighth? He strained with all his will but just couldn't remember the eighth god-damn piece.