

Seoul Legacy *The Orphan's Flu*

Chapter One



Marcia Gudov stood under the dark green canvas and listened as the rain beat a dull cadence to the priest's somber prayer. She stood alone on this side of the small casket wearing a black suit, mid-calf, dark stockings, and flats that added nothing to her five foot six inches. Dry eyes stared blankly at the wooden box. She had no more tears to give as emotions tugged between remorse, regret, and anger. It was her fault, and she knew it, even if everyone else blamed the other driver. He was drunk. He was guilty. His fault.

But she knew. She could have avoided it. Looking back now, it would have been so easy to just swerve out of his way. She could have sped up and minimized the impact too, looking back on it now. Maybe. Everyone else blamed the drunk. Maybe she'd come to blame him someday too.

She looked up from the casket to those on the other side; her ex, his new wife and her two children. *Joe blames me too*, she realized as their eyes met, locked, and darted away, *blames it all on me*. Marcia looked back to the relative comfort of the casket as her mind's ear replayed Joe's curt remark, *You can't even take time off on a Sunday to pick up your daughter!* The rendezvous point where they usually exchanged Jessie one weekend a month was exactly fifty-five miles from each one's new life; hers closer to work in Washington, D.C. where she was a special investigator for the U.S. Treasury. Joe moved in on his father's car dealership.

She heard Jessie's last words on that fateful ride home, *I don't like it, Mommy, I don't want to live with Daddy any more!*

Her career was a lot of why there was a new Mrs. in Joe's life.

Not that she cared. Joe wasn't the prize his good looks would have others believe. Her pregnancy had been the reason they married, and Jessie, the only good thing to come out of their three-year relationship. Now Jessie is gone.

Marcia closed her eyes, but only briefly. Every time she did, she saw the drunk's headlights in her mirror again, speeding, closing at a terrible rate.

She panicked and froze and before she could think ... *Why?* She cursed her poor judgment. *Why didn't you move!*

There were no witnesses. She thanked God for that. She could live her lie, and no one else would ever have to know. *Thank God!*

The drunk never regained consciousness, and now all she had was survivor's guilt. Dry eyes could find no more tears as they lowered the casket. *It should be me in that damn hole! Not you, Jessie! Not you!*

She suddenly realized the priest had stopped talking. He was handing her a small shovel, trowel-size with a rich mahogany handle and a silver blade. She shook her head.

The priest offered the trowel to her ex. Her mouth quivered as Joe stabbed the pile of soil at the foot of the grave and tossed the first dirt on Jessie's casket and the priest continued the prayer.

Tall oaks cast long shadows across Dorchester Park, and a crisp autumn breeze rustled through the leaves as Henry Chu searched around for a man he had never met. He quick-stepped behind Scout. "Heel," he told the black Lab when the leash pulled taut. Scout yelped, leapt and pawed at the air. This was their second lap around the park, and the dog had been just as excited the first time they'd passed this cluster of oaks with its community of squirrels. Scout could be a handful when he set his sights on a squirrel. Even Avery, Florence Chu's 250-pound personal assistant, had difficulty. Avery normally walked the dog.

My Flower, Chu said to himself as his thoughts turned to his wife for the hundredth time today. *She will be getting her morning medication about now*, he realized. He called her nearly every day, about noon her time. She was at her best around noon.

Scout jerked on the leash, and Chu's prescription sunglasses slid halfway down his nose as he ran a step to regain control. "I say *heel!*" Their shadows dashed ahead making Chu appear ten feet taller than his 5-foot, 3-inch frame.

Another man, also walking a dog, appeared as if from nowhere. Scout saw them first, and perked his ears, pulled on the leash. "Whoa, heel, boy!"

Soon enough the two dogs were nose to nose with tails wagging. Scout's new friend was mostly of collie descent.

"Is your dog a mule?" the other man asked.

He meant "male," but Chu knew that. "He is. His name is 'Scout.'"

"Scout is honorable name." The man pronounced the four words slowly.

Chu looked around nervously and then said, "You may pet him."

The man squatted beside Scout and said, "Do these collars hurt dog?"

"You see for yourself," Chu said in a low voice, even though there wasn't another person within fifty yards.

The man reached under Scout's chin and rubbed him until his hand felt a nylon satchel. It made a tearing sound as he freed it from the dog's collar. He scooped it into his pocket as he got up.

Chu asked, "What is your dog's name?" and crouched to pet it on the head.

"Solo."

Chu pet the dog's head then reached under its neck and felt the credit-card sized object Velcroed to the collar. Solo licked Chu's glasses as the Korean-born American tore the object free and slipped it in his jacket. Chu stood up, removed a hanky.

The two men spoke very quietly in their native Korean while Chu attempted to clean his glasses and hold onto Solo's leash at the same time, causing him to side-step and do a complete pirouette in an attempt to keep from getting his legs tangled in the leash.

As Chu was doing this, the other man stated flatly, "There are three healthy choices. All to specifications. You must choose."

"I will not decide from a picture alone."

"All medical records too. Decide one. We arrange for video conference for just one."

"Humph."

The two men walked off in different directions.

Even to the trained eyes of FBI Investigating Officer Greg Traco, it looked innocent enough, just one dog lover acknowledging the breed of another. A friendly scratch behind the ears, repaid with a face lick and then on their way.

Traco trained the Meade CaptureView binoculars on Henry Chu and watched as the small man danced around and tried to hold the dog and wipe off his glasses. From his vantage point in the parking lot two hundred yards away, the focus kept darting in and out in the low light, only adding to the comical display of dog-over-man authority.

When Traco tried to find the other man and dog, they were gone.

Traco took out his notepad and jotted down, *Contact Incident*, then noted, *No physical other than pet dogs*, meaning no handshake or other physical contact. *Conversation unknown*, he continued. He had a parabolic microphone, but with the park full of people he couldn't use it inconspicuously. *Images 12, 13, 14*, referring to the CaptureView's built-in digital camera.

He looked around for the other man and dog again; nowhere. He took one more picture as Chu turned off the trail and down the private path to his gated community. *Number 15, H. Chu goes home*. All of the images were stamped with the time and date, so he didn't bother with that information. The only thing unusual was the fact that Chu himself had walked the dog this evening. Or, to be more accurate, Scout had walked Chu this evening.

Henry Chu's house in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, was modest only by the standards of an NBA star. It had a home theater, just not as large as that of the next door neighbor's; the Detroit Pistons' star forward. But Chu's offered far more titles to choose from. His pool was smaller too, but heated. And at just 3,550 square feet of taxable living space, his home was a dwarf among giants in this gated community. It had the split circular staircase and diamond-cut chandelier behind the two-story high foyer windows, just like his neighbor's, just as Florence insisted. Chu had little use for such ornate fashion, but Florence said such appointments made a house a home.

Chu sat alone in his downstairs office, sipping a Dewar's on the rocks, classical music playing softly in the background. Scout was somewhere in the house. Avery would not be back until tomorrow. Mrs. Chu – Florence – was still recuperating in Seoul.

He inserted the mini CD into the computer tray and put on his reading glasses. Three manila-folder icons appeared on his screen, labeled simply, "1," "2," and "3." Number 1 folder contained two files, labeled "text1" and "image1."

As the image loaded on his screen, Chu's thoughts turned to Florence, and his shoulders dropped. She had had a terrible time delivering the twins, almost eight weeks premature. She had been preparing to leave their home outside of Seoul and return to America for the birth when it all started to go horribly wrong. The girl's umbilical cord had somehow become snared around the boy's foot, and she died in the womb before they could get to the hospital. Then, during the Cesarean birth, the doctor made a wrong cut. Their efforts to prevent Florence from bleeding out called for sudden and certain decisions, and those decisions now assured Florence would never bear another child.

That she was not dead was Chu's only thanks to those doctors.

Chu immediately had mother and child moved to the finest pediatric hospital in South Korea, had the finest doctors flown in from America. But money couldn't save what Chu treasured most, and Henry Junior only lived for three days, every minute of which was traumatic for him and a torture for his father.

The first image on the computer was that of an infant with a shock of jet black hair and golden-brown eyes opened wide, eager to face the world. Text1 file said his name was yet to be determined. His date of birth told Chu he was one month old today. Chu raised his glass and smiled back at the photograph, "Happy birthday, young man"

The mother's medical records followed the boy's in the document, and Chu read them both very carefully. He had been specific about certain bloodlines from the Kumgang Province, just north of the 38th parallel. It was, in fact, where he had been born and raised until the age of six; a fact known only to his wife and very few others.

As far as their friends and business associates knew, Florence was recuperating in Seoul. She had lost the girl, but young Henry's condition was improving with each day, and no, she was not up to talking with anyone just yet.

He opened image2 and sized it next to the first. This boy was leaner, and asleep. His toes were curled, fists clenched. *He is afraid*, Chu thought. He looked at the first image again, then opened the third image without even reading text2. The third baby was also asleep, but smiling. His eye sockets seemed very dark compared to the rest of his face and he had almost no hair.

Chu sat back in the leather chair, steepled his fingers, and studied the three boys. A Mozart symphony filled the air, and he tapped his index fingers together in time to the music.

On the wall above his desk was a framed picture of himself flanked by the two Presidents Bush – numbers 41 and 43 – all of them wearing *HC Corp* hardhats. It had been taken at his Auburn Hills plant. The walls of this room were filled with plaques, photos, and other recognitions of his achievements in business and community. Detroit was still world headquarters for HC Corporation, even though the company employed five times as many people abroad these days, in places like South Korea, Brazil, and Mexico. Plastic moldings were still HC Corporation's bread and butter, but they expanded into electronics and robotics in the 80's, and into mining and publishing in the 90's. He had grown this empire through 33 years of long hours and even longer airplane flights.

And he loathed airplane flights almost as much as he longed for an heir.

Chu took the last pull of Scotch from the tumbler and sucked on an ice cube as he studied the first child.

He closed out the other two photos, and only the boy with the golden eyes remained. The picture brought a smile to Chu's face for the first time in a month.

He walked over to the bar area and made himself another Dewar's. Above the bar was mounted a larger-than-life canvas, thinly framed in ornate gold. The subject was Florence. Commissioned the summer of their marriage, her peach-colored strapless gown was a perfect complement to her fair complexion, silk-black hair flowing to bare shoulders. Almond eyes sparkled back at him, and dimples punctuated her smile with cunning curiosity. Chu hoisted his glass to the canvas, "For you."

Early in their marriage, Florence had convinced her husband that much joy could come from helping others. She set up the Henry and Florence Chu Humanitarian Trust and began making donations and a difference in several third-world countries.

Chu was known nationally as a generous Republican contributor and locally for his support of the Karmanos Cancer Institute, the Detroit Zoo, and many of the nature preserves around southeastern Michigan, including Dorchester Park.

But for all his headlines, his business achievements and social accolades, Chu was a lonely man. He married late at age 47. The early years of business were too stressful for him to think about anyone but himself. When he chose his wife eleven years ago, he did so with the same exhaustive research he put into any investment. And as he so accurately predicted back then, his relationship with Florence budded and bloomed into something so beautiful that even this portrait could not do it justice.

Now, his flower would never bear fruit.

As an alter ego, Florence was magnificent. As a wife, she was cherished. He hoisted his glass to the canvas once again. As a mother she would be - *complete*. He knocked back the Scotch but left just enough for one more toast.

He turned to the monitor and raised his glass to the boy with the bright eyes.

One Week Later, half a world away ...

From her third-floor apartment near Pearl Wharf, Wonsan, North Korea, Kim Nayoung sat in her rocking chair and gazed out beyond the hustle and bustle of Market Street, past the military vehicles and the colorful anti-West, pro-Kim-Jong-II billboards; the only color in an otherwise drab cinderblock city. The East Sea winds carried the mist this evening, and her nostrils flared as she took in the salty air. It was remarkably warm for this time of year. With five-week-old Roh Jin-seung at her breast and a cup of warm tea at her side, Nayoung sang soft lullabies to her son and rocked slowly in the chair as she watched the distant ships inch out to sea. *Wonsan is not the place to start a family*, Nayoung thought as she stared out the window, only half-listening to the radio announcer.

"When the Americans invade, Wonsan is where they will try to come ashore first," the announcer said in his most frightful voice. "You must stay alert!"

They had been playing the drill over and over for the past month, ever since the United States started its latest round of accusations. This time it was biological weapons the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was accused of mass producing. Her PRK denied it and told the world that the new American president was beating the war drums louder than his predecessor.

Three times a day. You never knew when the sirens would blare. You had to be ready. Five minutes and the streets had to be cleared, or you would be arrested. Many people were arrested. *Wonsan is not the place to raise a family*.

Her husband, Capt. Roh Su-hoon, was stationed in Pyongyang, the capital city of the PRK, on the other side of the country. He had exercised his authority to rent this apartment so close to the hospital, just in case. Her captain was so caring, so loving, but his job was too important to leave. He could only talk for a few minutes the night Jin-seung was born. "Your father is so proud of you."

Nayoung moved him to her right breast. "Such a hungry boy." That was definitely a Roh trait – she was skinny as a silkworm and barely 50 kilograms. Jin-seung did inherit her ebony hair and golden, *enchanted eyes*, as her husband called them. "Just wait until he sees your eyes!" The doctor told her Jin-seung was a one-in-a-million baby to be born with eyes of such color and clarity.

A siren below. She saw two men jump from an army vehicle with assault rifles and run into the market. Moments later the crackle of gunfire made her shiver. Baby cried. Nayoung brought him to her shoulder, got up and stood back a step from the window, patting him gently on the back. "Baby, baby, do not cry."

Another siren, then another, as two more vehicles joined the first. Baby fussed and cried. "Hush now, little one," she whispered and rocked from one foot to the other. Jin Se-seung held his head high and pushed his tiny hands into her.

Two soldiers dragged a man out of the market by his armpits. His head was held down. He was dressed in a soiled tee shirt, gray striped pants, and sandals. It was times like these she wished to be back home, in the Kumgang mountains, in the lush, rich hills where the loudest noise was a dead tree falling. *Was he one of them? Dear Leader says a spy can look like anyone.*

"Not like you," she told her now sleepy son. "You are too beautiful." She kissed him atop his thick hair and tucked him into the bassinet, tucked a yellow and blue quilted blanket around him, and went to close the drape. Another man was being carried from the market now. He wore bloody army fatigues.

Nayoung sat at the Formica table and turned back to finishing a letter to her husband. She picked up the pencil and saw her hand was shaking. *It bothers you more than you admit*, she told herself. She picked up the photograph of day-old Jin-seung and smiled. In this, her hand was steady.

Nayoung awoke with a jolt. *What was that?* She gazed at the digital clock radio, a wedding gift from her husband's commanding officer; 04:14. She listened for Jin-seung. Not stirring. She heard the sound again, only this time recognized it was someone knocking softly on her apartment door.

She threw on her bathrobe and tip-toed to the peek hole.

There was a woman wearing a white medical cap and a man dressed in the drab-brown uniform of the PRK. "Who are you?" she asked through the door, quiet enough not to disturb her son.

"You are Kim Nayoung?" the man asked in a hushed voice.

"Ye."

"Please," the man said, "it is important." He motioned with his hands for her to open the door.

"Su-hoon?" She fearing news of her husband.

"Ye."

She opened the door and saw there was a second man with the nurse.

"Where is the baby?" the nurse asked as she tried to push her way past Nayoung. "We are with the health department."

Nayoung cut her off and ran for her son. "You said it was Su-hoon! What do you want with my baby?" She plucked up Jin-seung and clutched him to her. She turned to see all three of them putting breathing filters over their faces.

"Are you pumping your milk?" The nurse asked as she snapped on a pair of surgical gloves. The question caught Nayoung off guard, and the nurse had to ask a second time.

"No. What does the health department want with my baby?"

The two men started going through the kitchen cabinets.

"What are you doing? Do you know who my husband is?"

"The doctors never should have allowed this baby's release," the woman said. "He must be quarantined immediately."

"Quarantined! Why?" She hugged her son a little tighter. "I saw Dr. Kwan just last week. He said Jin-seung was a perfect baby!"

"Kwan was wrong. I will pack for the baby," the woman said. "You pack for yourself, enough for three days. You come too."

"Where? Why?"

But the nurse asked instead, "Where is the baby's formula? Do you have wraps? He will need a blanket and something for his head."

Nayoung did not budge, hugged her baby all the more. Around her, the men were going through her closet and her dresser, but she couldn't think about that. "What is wrong with my son?"

The shorter man spoke. "He must be quarantined for at least three days while we run tests. If he is not infected, you will both be released."

"Infected with what?" Nayoung demanded.

"Please, you cannot talk here," he said, and stared at her with cold, black eyes. "Bird flu."

Nayoung rocked back on her heels and felt lightheaded.

The nurse took the baby from her without a struggle. He continued in a low voice, "We cannot discuss this here. Now please hurry. Do not alarm your neighbors. It is important that we leave at this early hour. Now! For the sake of everyone in this building!"

If Nayoung heard a word he said after that she made no outward appearance of it. She just stared at the nurse holding her baby and had to be told a second time to get dressed.

Ten minutes later, Nayoung found herself sitting in the back seat of a car wearing one of her husband's army coats over her bathrobe and nightdress, holding Jin-seung in her lap. He was wrapped in his blue and yellow blanket, sleeping, while she stared at her baby, still dazed by the news. The nurse put two bags into the trunk and got in beside Nayoung. The shorter man sat in front, the taller man who had not spoken a word up to this point sat in back. The driver never turned around.

There was a chill in the pre-dawn air as they sped away from her apartment building.

"Now tell me what Dr. Kwan said! How can my baby be infected with bird flu?"

The shorter man turned, leveled a dart gun at her chest and fired, careful to miss the baby.

Nayoung opened her eyes, she was certain of it, but she couldn't see a thing. Nor could she move her arms or utter a sound. She thought she could hear something soft and distant, a cadence, a metallic click-clack, and she sensed she was moving. *The car*, she remembered, fighting to move. *The car!* It was all coming back to her. *Where is Jin-seung?*

Jin-seung was in the next private compartment of the train. He was being fed a bottle by Nurse Moon Min. "How much time?" She asked softly.

"We will be crossing in about thirty minutes," Kang Sa Han, the taller of the two men, replied.

She nodded. "The baby should be asleep by then."

"Our papers are in order," Byun Gi-soo assured them as he cleaned his glasses with a tissue. He jerked his head towards the next compartment, "She will need another injection, just to be safe, ye?"

"Ye," Nurse Moon said and handed the baby to Gi-soo then reached overhead for the medical bag. She removed the syringe works and the two vials of clear liquid, and eyed the third vial, the pale-green one labeled, "baby." Gi-soo hadn't told her what that one was for;

just that she was not to concern herself with it until they were inside South Korea. Moon Min was not comfortable giving any medication to an infant – and outside a hospital! It was a risk only a fool would take. She knew Kang Sa Han, had worked these kinds of adoptions with him before, not many, but enough to know he was not a fool. She had never worked with Byun Gi-soo before.

Moon Min had no such qualms about medicating the mother. The first cocktail she mixed for Gi-soo's dart gun contained too much Midazolam for such a small woman. She realized that now and took the mother's weight into consideration for the second shot.

The adjoining compartments were arranged for sleeping with an upper and lower berth on one side of the window and a single lower berth on the other. The blind was partially opened, and a strong beam of early morning light poured onto the single bed that doubled as a storage bin. The seat cushion was hinged, and just as the nurse lifted it, a streak of light hit Nayoung in the face. The young mother blinked repeatedly.

That caught Nurse Moon by surprise. "You are awake!" She positioned herself between the sun and Nayoung's eyes, now wondering if the new dosage would be strong enough.

Nayoung stopped blinking, still unable to speak or move, but feeling stronger by the minute; her mind raced with one question and one question only. She stared at the woman who appeared to be a nurse but everything was a blur. *What have you done with my baby?* She wanted to cry out, but could not. Nayoung didn't know where she was being held, but it seemed like a coffin. One thing was crystal clear to her now; she was not in a hospital. She eyed the syringe in the woman's hand and started blinking rapidly. *Fight it!* she told herself as the needle plunged into her arm, *fight it!* Her eyelids grew heavy.

Thirty minutes later, the train sat idle at the Gangneung Crossing, the eastern border city on the North's side. The door between the two compartments was now open as the customs agents began their interviews. Moon Min sat in the one compartment still dressed in her nurse's uniform. She had a sleeping Jin-seung in her arms while the PRK border guard examined her papers and those of the baby.

Most "tourists" – what few were allowed to cross – preferred to use the new train instead of the road that connected Mt Kumgang on the North with Samchok on the South, a distance of some 18 kilometers, four of which cut through the DMZ. Tourists in North Korea still required guides, and meeting one's guide at the train station in Gangneung was much more accommodating than having your car cleared to be driven by some stranger.

Kang Sa Han and Byun Gi-soo – now dressed in business suits and purporting to be the baby's father and uncle – were seated in the adjacent compartment being questioned by another agent. He wore two red chevrons on his olive-drab sleeve.

"What was the purpose of your visit?" the agent asked.

"To see our ailing grandmother, and to show Madame her only great grandson before she dies," Kang said as he and his "brother" slowly bowed their heads towards the next room.

"Where is your grandmother?"

"In Pyongyang."

The agent eyed him suspiciously. Pyongyang was on the other side of the country. The Kaesong City crossing was much closer. The guard was doubly suspicious because he knew very few old people were allowed to live in Pyongyang. Only the famous and revered, those capable of contributing to the image of a spotlessly clean society were allowed residency inside the city. "Why do you not cross in Kaesong?"

"It is for this," Kang replied, motioning his hands towards the empty pewter urn Gi-soo carried. "We also carried her son's ashes. Madame asked that we release them across Mt Kumgang."

"Who is Madame?" he asked as he looked again at the name on the South Korean passport. He turned to his partner, and the two of them stared at Kang and his alleged brother as they whispered to each other. Finally, "Madame Nim is your grandmother?"

"Ye," Kang said. *Good*, he thought, *you are old enough to recognize Kang Nim*. She had been the "voice of the 38th parallel" for so many years.

The agent straightened his posture and pointed to the other compartment, "Then, that is her great-grandson?" Madame Nim was an icon in North Korea; there was even a statue of her in front of the State Broadcast Building in Pyongyang. The fact that her scientist husband had run South during the early 50's, taking her son with him, was not lost on the propagandists.

"And the woman?"

"A nurse, provided by my doctor," Kang explained. "My wife did not have an easy birth."

Madame Nim had talked feverishly back then and riled the people to the traitorous ways of the South. For years, she led the Liberation Day Parade where she saved her most vehement accusations for her husband's collaboration with the enemy. Her history had so impressed Kim Jong-Il that he had a new international postage stamp commissioned adorned with her statue. *That way*, he was rumored to have said at the time, *every person sending mail out of my country will have to lick Madame Nim's backside!*

One agent nodded to the other and they withdrew to the aisle.

He snapped to attention and said, "To your grandmother's health." He handed back the passports and papers and shut the door on his exit.

Kang sat nervously fidgeting with the elastic band on his watch. He wasn't used to wearing such a cheap timepiece, and it kept pinching the fine hairs of his wrist.

Finally, the train started moving again, and the three breathed a collective sigh of relief.

They proceeded south at a much reduced rate of speed. To their left, the cliffs of Kannan were but a stone's throw away. The mighty East Sea could be heard crashing against the rocky shore 50 meters below. To their right, the new road held more tandem truck traffic than it did passenger cars. Timber and billets of steel crossed the border everyday. A four-meter high fence topped with rolled concertina wire ran between the road and the tracks, its pointy edges sparkling in the early-morning sun. In the background, Mt Kumgang loomed large and snow-capped. The mountain had been a holy worship area for centuries, the home to both Buddhist and Confucian temples and shrines that had stood their ground for over a thousand years. A few of these compounds were turned into private Japanese resorts for that

brief three-quarters century during the Imperial internment years. Recently, the North allowed the South to develop one of these resorts into a modernized reunion villa. They improved the roads and restored the train station, and then the North began to open the border to a few, limited visits per year by their southern cousins and their all-mighty dollar and won. The train came to a stop. Kang looked outside, but they were not at the station. *They are just waiting for the tracks to clear, or something like that*, he rationalized. *Nothing to worry about.*

Kang went into the other compartment and changed his shirt and tie for more expensive versions. *Soon this DMZ may cease to exist, and my orphanage will have an abundant supply of healthy girls and boys.* He smiled to himself in the mirror as he knotted his tie. The train jerked forward, and they were back underway. Kang pulled the leather watchstrap around his wrist and fastened the buckle. "It's good to be home," he said to the mirror.

While Kang changed in the next compartment Gi-soo saw his chance and whispered to Nurse Moon, "I will pay you to administer exactly four cc's of this to the baby. No more or less." He handed her the pale-green vial. "Do it now."

"What is in this?" she turned it over in her hand. It even felt colder than the others.

"You are not paid to ask questions." Gi-soo said. "Do it now before Kang comes in. I will pay you \$5,000 American. Now do it. Before the train starts moving again."

She stared at him.

He removed an American one-hundred dollar bill from his jacket pocket. "You will not say a word to Kang, do you agree?"

Moon Min nodded slowly.

He handed her the bill. "Forty-nine more will arrive by currier in five days. You tell *anyone* and you will never spend even this much of it."

Nurse Moon stuffed the bill down her blouse.

She drew four cc's of the alien liquid into a new syringe and took a deep breath.

When she was through, Gi-soo pocketed the vial and syringe. He was wearing rubber gloves.

Samchok Station was as different from Gangneung Station as Seoul food from soul food. Here, the train came to a stop inside a massive new terminal with white tile walls and a green-tinted Plexiglas roof. This time, the door between the cabins was closed as the guards walked the aisle and told everyone, "Detrain now. Leave all bags and baggage aboard. Bring only your travel papers, and line up to be interviewed."

The nurse looked at Kang, "You said ...?"

"We never detrained before. This is new."

The nurse lifted the seat and covered the mother's face with the army coat, closed it, and put two suitcases on the seat, one unlocked. She closed the door, and they fell in line with the others. She left with a wide-eyed baby wrapped in his blanket.

Armed guards with German shepherds boarded the train after the last passenger was off.

The terminal was so new the chalky scent of fresh plaster still overpowered the mighty diesels. It was a comfortable, 22 degrees Celsius. Soft, flute music played through the speakers mounted halfway up the walls and added a welcoming tone as Kang and the nurse followed the others.

He stood next to her like the couple they pretended to be, while she held a bottle in Jin-seung's mouth. Gi-soo was just ahead of them. They pretended not to know him as they crept closer to the single interviewer.

"I don't like this," the nurse said under her breath, a faux smile painted on her face. "This is taking far too long. Look at that." She glanced at the surveillance camera panning across the platform.

Kang's smile back to her was just as plastic. "Keep blowing kisses at your baby." He looked at his watch and shrugged his shoulders.

It was Gi-soo's turn now. They were only taking one person at a time, even those traveling as companions.

Time dragged on as the inspector went through Gi-soo's papers a second time. He finally returned the papers and pointed to the door marked "cleared" in Hangeul, Chinese, English, and Japanese.

It was their turn. Kang held out his arms for the baby and politely told his "wife" to go.

The guard stopped him, shook his head and said, "You go."

Kang walked up to the window and stated his name and nationality.

Suddenly, shouts could be heard from the other side of the train. Two shots, then a burst of gunshots rang out! All conversations on this side of the train stopped. The customs agent stared over Kang's shoulder to the train. Kang turned. Another burst of automatic-weapons fire, and the agent shouted, "Get down!"

The long burp of the assault rifle reverberated off the walls, and it sounded like ten times the fire power. Passengers screamed, men and women alike, but no one's voice was as piercing as the baby's.

Guards hurried aboard the train with weapons drawn, shouting commands to each other. The nurse cuddled over the baby and ducked for cover. She eyed the action intently, and then looked around for Kang. Jin-seung cried and squirmed.

Kang ducked down in front of the interviewer's window. He spotted Nurse Moon and the baby and crawled back to them. The baby was crying louder than the soldiers were shouting. "What happened?" he asked.

Nurse Moon just shook her head and looked at him wide-eyed.

Soldiers were now shouting. "He is down! He is shot!" Border guards could be seen through the train's open doors starting to file through a single opening to the train's far side.

Except for Jin-seung, everyone else on this side of the train was dead quiet. Passenger, inspector, and soldier alike watched through the windows of the train as a person dressed in a drab-green overcoat was placed on a stretcher and taken away.

Questions were asked of the soldiers and agents. Bits and pieces of what had happened started to filter out. Gossip flew among them. "A spy tried to hide under the train ... tried to run and was shot ... Was dead ... Was not dead ..."

The nurse tried to comfort Jin-seung, but she had already given the baby his last prepared bottle. She could smell his soiled wrap, but didn't have a clean one on her as they were told to leave all bags aboard. She tried to quiet the child to no avail.

Kang was instructed back to the window, and the agent acted like this sort of thing went on all the time.

"What was your business in North Korea?" the agent asked as he thumbed through the papers, paying particular attention to the binding area and the way the pages were saddle-stitched together. Kang's answer was a slightly modified version of what he had told the PRK 40 minutes earlier. The agent listened without interruption until his phone rang.

Kang heard the South Korean customs agent say, "A woman? Ye? Ye!" The agent looked over Kang's papers as he continued on the phone with a cadence of yeses. When he hung up, he handed Kang his papers and told him, "Wait inside."

Two minutes later, Kang saw the nurse and the crying baby being escorted by a female agent into the bathroom area. A few minutes after that, he spotted another female agent heading for the bathrooms carrying the baby's bag from the train. Jin-seung could be heard loud and clear every time that door opened.

When the ROK customs agents, nurse, and baby did finally emerge, all were laughing and smiling. The women had merely teamed up, as mothers all around the world will do, to comfort a crying baby.

The agents went back to their other business. Kang and the nurse milled about with the others while they waited for word to board the train. A few people joked on the vocal capabilities of Jin-seung, and everyone commented on how adorable he was. And such eyes!

The passengers idled around and talked in undertones. Jin-seung was comfortable and quiet, but the luster in his eyes was gone. He was clearly tired, but still he refused to sleep.

When finally the novelty of the baby wore off and they were alone again, the nurse told Kang what the agents had confided to her. "She jumped off the other side of the train. They heard her. They didn't shoot her until she tried to run. They didn't know she was a woman until after. I hope she didn't have anything in the pockets of that coat."

Kang looked at her with reproach, pursed his lips, and hissed, "How did she wake up!"

Byun Gi-soo managed the rest of the border crossing without further incident. He detrained in Kansong City and made his way to a safe house used many times before. He borrowed a cellphone and used a prepaid phone card to call Kwon Hyun-kyu's cellphone. He didn't know he was reaching his boss in Manila.

"There were complications at the border," Gi-soo told Kwon. "At Samchok, the mother was shot and taken into custody. She may live, she may die, I do not know. I will find out."

"What about the baby?" Kwon asked.

"The baby is safe; he will be at the orphanage by nightfall."

"Did the nurse do as instructed?"

"I watched her."

"What about Kang?"

"He saw nothing."

“Very good. Let me know about the mother.”

Kwon Hyun-kyu clapped the cellphone shut like a clamshell. “You see?” he smiled across the small table to his clients, Amir al-Rasheed Khadaffy and his sister Rhib. The three were clustered together in a Manila hotel room, one of two rooms that adjoined. They spoke in Tagalog, a tongue that was native to neither. “The baby is in South Korea, as promised. There was only a slight complication with the mother.” Kwon sat back in the armchair next to the window and shrugged his shoulders like it was no big deal. “It will be cleared up in a day or two.” His maroon satin jacket shimmered in the midmorning sun. The patch over his left eye matched his jacket, and a gold, braided chain hung around his neck like a second smile. On the bedside table next to the clock radio was a weathered carpetbag, open. American currency, \$125,000 worth, inside. Kwon looked at it. “When do I get the rest?”

“When the job is finished,” al-Rasheed, the self-anointed Amir of Basilan Island and the self-appointed leader of the Abu Sayyaf Group, said quietly. He wore a white turban around his head and a ceremonial sword in his waistband, and he led his men along the narrow, twisted Wahhabi path of the late Professor Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. “As we agreed – my brother-in-arms.” His beard was shaggy and his teeth yellowed, and when he spoke, the halitosis was unbearable.

Kwon frowned. *Brothers in arms?* He doubted that. Except for this business deal, he didn't believe for a minute there was any kind of brotherhood between them. Al-Rasheed came to him – two years ago now – with a plan to create a fighting war between the two Koreas; it was to be his small contribution to Al Qaeda's war on democracy. He had the plan, but no access to Korea or Koreans. For that, al-Rasheed said the Abu Sayyaf would pay Kwon, or someone with his kinds of talents, one million dollars. He put \$125,000 on the table to prove it. Rhib said she could create the weapon and put her bachelor's degree in biochemistry on the table to prove it. “You need only deliver it to earn your money,” she told Kwon back then, the only words she spoke, and he agreed.

A clever man, Kwon quickly figured out what they were up to and came back to al Rasheed with an even more clever plan. One that would deliver his sister's weapon into the heartland of America *after* it ignited their war on the Korean Peninsula. For that, he wanted an additional \$4 million. Al-Rasheed blessed Kwon's new plan and declared him a savior in the same breath, and promised he would raise the money from Qaeda.

“My role in this business is done,” Kwon said behind a thinning smile. “What happens now happens by your hand.”

“Alhamdulillah,” al-Rasheed closed his eyes and repeated softly. *All praise belongs to God.*

The \$125,000 al-Rasheed left with Kwon two years ago had long been spent, and Kwon owed more than this \$125,000 in markers all over Macau. He said in a quiet, yet firm voice, “I want at least the first million. The last four can wait until the baby is in America, I don't care, but I want the first million now.”

Al-Rasheed kept his eyes closed and his mouth moving. “Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar.” *God is great.*

In the adjoining room, a television was tuned to some American cartoon program shown in five-minute bites between fast-food and candy advertisements. The sound was turned down, and four of al Rasheed's Abus guards sat in chairs and on the edge of double beds, softly chuckling at the comical situations that played in front of them. Kwon was surprised al-Rasheed let them enjoy such distractions, for he knew how devout he was. The air conditioners in both rooms were turned up full blast, and the noise drowned out the television.

"What more proof do you need?" Kwon asked angrily.

Al-Rasheed pointed to the radio next to the bed and said, "When *that* tells me it has started."

His sister, Rhib, the biochemist, sat in a ladder-back chair beside al-Rasheed. She wore baggy black pants and an old fatigue jacket buttoned to the throat, and dark-tinted, black-framed sunglasses. Rhib had been the silent one in their first meeting in Macau two years ago. Now, she moved around in her chair, crossed her arms, uncrossed them, crossed her legs, until finally she said in her best Harvard English, "We will see nothing for *at least* three days, God be willing. More likely five days. We will pay you when we see the proof." She got up and shut the door to the other room with the guards, turned, and said in a quick voice, "If all that you say is true, then you will need to buy a jungle vehicle. You can not just walk out of the jungle with five million dollars." She walked over to the carpetbag and withdrew a sleeve of \$50's and another of \$100's. "Use this to buy a vehicle like that." She pointed to the Land Rover that sat just outside their first-floor room. "You will take the ferryboat as far as Jolo Island. It leaves three times a week. From there you will need to hire a private boat to take you to Port Isabella."

Kwon started to interrupt her.

"Shut up!" She raised her voice and continued, "Someone will meet you at Port Isabella. By land it is three or more hours from there." She folded her arms and said, "Now, what is your question?"

"I am not going to Basilan Island. You are going to pay me right here, in Manila! Not in some God-forsaken jungle!"

Al-Rasheed clinched his eyes tight and mumbled.

Rhib shook her head. "We will not carry that much money so far north. Meet us here in three days. Be ready to leave."

"That was not our deal!" He spat the words out.

The door opened between the rooms and two of Al Rasheed's guards stood there.

Al-Rasheed said softly, "Much has changed since then, my brother."

Kwon got up and grabbed the carpetbag. "I will not wait around here. I have business in Macau." He got to the door, turned. "I will be back in three days, and I expect you to have the rest of my money. Here!"

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