


When the family secret is a secret family . . .

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# THE NOH FAMILY

GRACE K. SHIM

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GRACE K. SHIM

ISBN: 978-0-593-46273-7

Trim: 5 1/2" x 8 1/4"

On sale: May 2022

Ages: 12 up | Grades: 7 up

384 pages

\$18.99 USA / \$24.99 CAN



Kokila

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BY GRACE K. SHIM



KOKILA  
An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, New York



First published in the United States of America by Kokila,  
an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

Manufactured in Canada

ISBN 9780593462737 (HARDCOVER)  
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

ISBN 9780593532324 (INTERNATIONAL EDITION)  
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

FRI

Design by Jasmin Rubero  
Text set in Basilia Pro

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*Dedication TK*

# CHAPTER 1

Next to kimchi, Koreans have perfected one other thing: The Dramatic Pause. It's that moment right after an epic reveal that lasts only a minute but stays with you forever. After countless hours in episodes of K-drama bingeing, I have yet to find one that doesn't have The Dramatic Pause. It's like the Lee Min Ho of K-dramas; it never gets old.

I have somewhat expertly (see aforementioned amount of episodes watched) narrowed down The Dramatic Pause into three broad categories:

(1) The good: Two star-crossed lovers finally meeting face-to-face after missing each other one too many times. Often in the rain and almost always without an umbrella. (Swoon.)

(2) The bad: The main character finding out they lost their entire family fortune in a terrible economic investment and are now destined to a life of destitution and degradation. (The shame!) Extra pause if this was orchestrated by their best friend, who secretly hates them because they are embroiled in a love triangle.

(3) The unexpected: The main character discovering that their father is not actually their father and that their

life is about to change . . . *dun. Dun. DUN!* (Like in the episode Hazel and I are watching now.)

Every Friday after school, Hazel, Seb, and I have a standing appointment to binge K-dramas at my house. Since today is graduation, I wasn't sure if they'd be able to make it. But here we are, crammed onto my twin-sized bed, watching a much-needed episode of the K-drama *My Professor, My Father* on Hazel's laptop.

Since Seb likes to pretend he isn't into K-dramas like Hazel and I are, we sent him on a very important errand that should take precisely three minutes.

"Chloe Chang! Some of us have to read the subtitles." Hazel taps me on the shoulder. "Any closer and you'll be in the screen."

I give her a pointed look. "Just because I'm one hundred percent Korean doesn't mean I don't have to read the subtitles either." Technically, not quite 100 percent Korean, but close enough.

"Okay, but . . ." She motions at the space I'm taking up, which happens to be in direct view of her phone. I scoot back, only mildly embarrassed. As my best friend since forever, Hazel knows I lose all sense of time and space when it comes to Dad discoveries.

We would've been less cramped at Hazel's, but she has five sisters (yes, five), each with very strong and very different opinions about everything. Even though she lives in a six-bedroom McMansion, Hazel claims there isn't enough space to avoid what she calls the ¡Qué quilombo!, or the shit show of personalities. Real-life drama, Hazel claims, is not as much fun as K-drama.

When I inch closer to the screen again, Hazel shoots me a dirty look.

“You’re doing it again! Great, now I missed what he said!”

“He said he can’t believe that all this time, his professor was his father!”

“Oh my god! Finally!” She squeals with me.

Then it comes: The Dramatic Pause.

We hold our breaths and watch as if in a trance as the camera pans from one character to the other. Cue the surprised look on their faces. Cue the single tear trickle. Cue the original soundtrack. *Ugh*. Even when I know to expect it, it gets me. Every. Time.

Then, as we knew it would, the episode ends abruptly, leaving us completely hanging.

“Noooo!” I yell up at the ceiling.

“Arrghh! Why do they always do that?” Hazel protests with her fist in the air.

I smile at her ridiculously. Hazel and I have reached that level of obsession with K-dramas where we’ve started to mimic their exaggerated reactions ourselves. “How much time do you think we’ve wasted watching K-dramas?” Just hours after our last day of high school, and already I’m feeling nostalgic.

“Wasted? Omo!” she gasps with a hand to her chest. “You mean invested.” She checks her phone and says, “And for the record, according to MyDramaList, we’ve watched five hundred and sixty episodes, which is roughly twenty-three days of continuous viewing. I have no regrets.”

I laugh. “You’re right. It was totally worth it.” We lie

side by side on my bed, staring up at the popcorn ceiling. All those memories of Hazel, Seb, and I spent holed up in my room bingeing K-dramas will somehow have to sustain me for the next four years without them. Pretty soon, Hazel and Seb will be off to California.

While I'll still be here, in same old Oklahoma.

Seb walks in right in time with some comfort food.

"Did someone order a bowl of Shin Ramyun?" He sets down a tray with two steaming Styrofoam bowls of instant noodles on my desk.

We don't dignify his question with a response and instead grab our bowls, snapping our wooden chopsticks apart. Seb knows that when it comes to the Shin, we don't joke.

"Sebastian Elias, you are the best." Hazel gives Seb a quick peck on the lips before mixing her noodles around with her chopsticks.

How do I feel about my best friends suddenly having feelings for each other? *Psshhhh* . . . totally fine.

And, at the same time, not fine at all.

The three of us have been hanging together since middle school, geeking out over our shared interests in fashion and TikTok dances. The summer before junior year, however, Seb grew five inches, developed muscles, and basically became objectively hot. He was the same Seb to me, though. The brother I never had. I thought Hazel felt the same way about him, until they came out to me as a couple at the beginning of our senior year. I should be used to it by now, everyone moving on while I'm standing still. Story of my life.



We both take turns inhaling the noodles, then coughing up the spicy soup base that somehow always goes down the wrong pipe.

“Whoa, heavy episode? You guys seem slurpier than usual today,” Seb says.

“It’s been a day,” I manage to say while chewing the noodles. “Just glad it’s over.” Big events, the ones where families are expected to attend, send my nerves into hyperdrive. Maybe it’s because I don’t have a “normal family” like everyone else. My dad was killed in a car accident less than a year after my parents left Korea, which changed everything for my mom, who was six months pregnant with me at the time. Now, she’s all the family I’ve got. I swear, my life sounds sadder than a K-drama when I think about it.

“Hey, I’m sure your mom will make it up to you. She always does,” Hazel says, setting her chopsticks down and putting a hand on my shoulder.

“Theresa Chang may not be around to make the Shin,” Seb says, motioning to the bowls of noodles.

“Or come to graduations,” I mutter loudly.

“But”—Hazel smiles with her head cocked to the side—“you know she loves you.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Next to my mom, Hazel and Seb know me better than anyone. They know that sometimes when Mom’s at the hospital, she just plain forgets about everything, even me. Like the time she couldn’t make my eighth-grade art exhibition where I showcased my first fashion designs, or the school performance where I played the role of Chip in *Beauty and the Beast*, or parent-teacher

conferences—every one of them. I know it sucks now, but Hazel and Seb are right. Mom might have missed my high school graduation, but I know it doesn't mean she doesn't love me.

We're like the Korean *Gilmore Girls*, except without the cute boyfriends and rich grandparents. So, like, the poor, lonely reboot version.

"I was kinda hoping Ted Takahashi would show up." Hazel nudges me, snorting.

"Whatever happened to the 23andMe test we got you?" Seb asks.

"Oh, that," I say, setting the bowl of Shin Ramyun aside.

It was last year that Seb first noticed my uncanny resemblance to Ted Takahashi, the weatherman on our local newscast. Seb wasn't totally off base—I look nothing like my mom, while Ted and I have the same widow's peak hairline and almost identical low-bridge noses and full lips. Since I don't know anything about my dad, we convinced ourselves that I must be Ted's daughter. Anyway, Seb and Hazel got me one of those DNA kits for my eighteenth birthday back in March. It wouldn't exactly confirm whether Ted Takahashi is my dad, but it would at least point me in the right direction, since Mom is Korean and Ted Takahashi is proudly Japanese.

The test was supposed to be a joke, but to be honest, I wanted it to be true. Not that I dream of being the illegitimate daughter of Ted Takahashi. But lately, I've been feeling a bit, I don't know, left behind. I always felt different next to Hazel and Seb, who both have these big families with not only a mom *and* a dad, but also siblings

and cousins. Over time, there were other glaring differences. Like when Seb joined a robotics club and Hazel enrolled in a film class that took up their spare time. I tried to ask my mom about taking fashion design classes, but if regular extracurriculars cost money, fashion classes cost beaucoup bucks that we don't have. Now they'll both be off to college, leaving me behind once again. So when Hazel and Seb spun a fantastical story about my parents' ill-fated romance worthy of any makjang drama, I wanted it to be true. That way, if Ted *is* my dad, I'd at least know something about him.

As it turns out, science does not take into account a person's wishful thinking, no matter how much they want it. I had to learn the hard way.

"Got my results this morning. I'm 95.1 percent Korean. Ted is Japanese, so not my dad. Sorry to disprove your theory."

"What? No way," Hazel says at the same time Seb says, "It's gotta be wrong."

Surprisingly, they're serious. Which makes me realize it wasn't a joke to them, either.

I shake my head. "It's DNA. How can you doubt factual science? It's how murder mysteries are solved and how rapists are convicted."

Seb winces. "This conversation turned dark real fast."

"Does it at least tell you which region of Korea you're from?" Hazel asks. "Maybe that could point you in the right direction."

Seb raises a quizzical brow. "It's DNA, not GPS."

Hazel shoots him back a look. "I don't know how DNA works. I'm only trying to be helpful."

The snippiness in their tone with each other is unusual. The disappointment must be getting to them, too. Before things get worse, for any of us, I decide to be the first to accept my fate. A life skill I've grown accustomed to.

"Look, I appreciate it, but let's face it. My mom is right, and there are no big secrets. My dad is just some guy who died and had no other living relatives. Take it or leave it, this is who I am."

"Can I see the results?" Seb asks, and I hand him my phone with the website pulled up.

"Oh, look, it has this section about finding relatives," he says, scrolling down. "I guess if anyone you're related to also took the test, you could connect with them."

"It requires you to opt in," Hazel reads over Seb's shoulder. They both look up at me, wide-eyed.

I shrug my approval.

"Yes! I'm downloading the app and opting you in!" Seb fiddles with my phone.

"Okay, but let's not get ahead of ourselves like we did with the Ted Takahashi thing." Even though it was a far-fetched idea, I didn't realize until now how much I wanted Ted to be my dad. I don't know if I can guard myself from being sucked into the idea of yet another story about a long-lost family, and I definitely can't handle the disappointment again.

Hazel cocks her head to the side and stares at me with her big brown (technically hazel) eyes. "Another episode?"

"You read my mind." I give her a weak smile.

She pushes the mouse on her laptop to start the next episode of *My Professor, My Father*. Seb joins us in

solidarity, and we cram together on my twin-sized bed. Pretty soon I forget about being alone and get sucked into the lives on-screen, proving once again that K-dramas are the perfect answer to everything.



A couple of hours later, I'm fully expecting Mom to come through the door at any minute with balloons. Or tacos. Or both. Instead, my phone buzzes.

"Ahhh, my Chloe-yah! Congratulations!" Mom's voice booms out of my phone, and I briefly check to see if I accidentally have her on speakerphone. Nope, not on speakerphone. "You're officially done with the high school!"

"Thanks, Mom," I say, chuckling. Mom left Korea precisely eighteen years and nine months ago. Besides a hint of an accent, her English is near perfect. Except she hasn't yet mastered the *and's* and *the's*. At this point, I'm not sure she ever will.

"How does it feel, now that you're a college student?"

"Community college, Mom," I correct her. "I feel, I dunno, the same?"

"I'm so glad you'll still be close by. Now I have you all to myself for four more years."

"Yay." The snark in my tone is unintentional. No matter how hard I try, I'm just not as thrilled as she is about going to Meadowland Community College down the street from Meadowland High School. "When are you going to be home? I'm starving."



“There’s some leftovers in the fridge.”

“Leftovers? You’re not coming home for dinner tonight?” First she misses graduation, now dinner? This is not my idea of making it up to me. In fact, this is the exact opposite of making it up to me.

“I forgot to tell you. I took an overnight shift.”

“Again?” Last time, it was for the laptop I needed for school. The time before that was because our ancient car finally went kaput and we needed a new one. Well, new to us at least. We’re not destitute or anything, but Mom’s single-income salary as a nurse never seems to be enough. I know it’s not her fault, but it just doesn’t seem fair.

“Now that you’re starting the college—”

“Community college.”

“I thought it would be a good idea. You know, for the tuition.”

“It’s just tuition, Mom. Not *the* tuition.” I can’t help the disappointment in my tone. Hazel’s family rented a banquet hall, and Seb’s family is at one of those fancy restaurants that serves bite-sized food with stuff like garnishes and sauces. Then there’s me, alone at home, on the phone with Mom, hearing about the extra shifts she has to pick up since I’m going to start community college in a couple of weeks. On a day like today, I was hoping it would be a little more formal and a little less sweats-and-a-T-shirt. Maybe something where I’d finally get to wear one of the pieces I designed.

“Oh, don’t worry. We’re going to be just fine. It’s always nice to have some cushion. You know, a ‘just-in-case’ fund,” she says in her nurse-voice.

Great. Now I feel guilty for making her feel guilty.

“Maybe I’ll take a part-time job at Sew Fantastic. You know, that cute fabric store downtown?” Not only would I be able to help with tuition, I could snag myself a 20 percent employee discount.

“No, no, no. You’ll be too busy studying for your clinicals,” she says quickly.

“Don’t you think you’re getting ahead of yourself? Clinicals aren’t for a while.” Ever since I told Mom I was considering becoming a nurse like her, she treats me like I’m some sort of child prodigy.

“Don’t worry about the tuition,” she says. Any time I mention the idea of a part-time job, she shuts me down, like it’s her responsibility alone to financially provide for us.

I sigh quietly. Growing up, I really believed that Mom could do it all. At the school’s annual father/daughter dances, she’d dress up in a suit and tie, even drawing a silly mustache using eyeliner on her upper lip, and insist on taking me. On Father’s Day, she’d take me to Six Flags, let me eat eleven-dollar funnel cake and ride the upside-down roller coaster as many times as I could without puking (and sometimes with puking). That was when I was younger. I’m eighteen now, and I want more than a distraction on designated Dad days that only remind me I don’t have one. Mom simply cannot do it all anymore. The problem is, she won’t admit it.

“By the way, I’m sorry I couldn’t be there today. I had to—”

“I know. You had to work.” There’s a quiet lull between

us. Mom must've given me this excuse a million times. I thought once I graduated from high school, things would change and we'd spend more time together. But I'm realizing that, with community college tuition, nothing's going to change. Mom's going to be busier than ever.

"Mom, I . . ." My voice quivers. I'm thinking about what I really want for graduation. It isn't a big party, or an out-of-state-college, or even tacos. I want to know more about my family. "Do you think you could tell me about Dad?" I never ask, especially knowing how difficult it is for Mom to talk about him. Maybe this can be her way of making it up to me for not making it to my graduation.

"Chloe-yah," she says, her voice sounding more like a sigh. She draws in another deep breath, letting it out just as slowly. Then, there it is.

A long.

Dramatic.

Pause.

As if we were in some medical drama, even the hospital machines in the background begin beeping loudly in anticipation of Mom's response. I hold my breath. This is it. The day has come. She is finally going to tell me about my dad. The real story about who he is, not some vague answer about how he died in a car crash and that was the end.

"Nurse Chang! We need you!" A sharp voice cuts through the receiver, and I deflate.

"Oh, Chloe-yah. I'm sorry, but—"

"Yeah, yeah. I know. A patient needs you." The sigh on the other end of the receiver is filled with so much

remorse, it seeps into my soul and makes me regret what I said.

“I’ll make it up to you. I promise,” Mom says. “Okay, now I really have to go. Congratulations, Chloe-yah. I love you.”

“Love you too.”

After we hang up, I decide to pull out my latest design. Now that I have all night to work on it, I could probably finish it. Mom calls it a hobby, but this so-called hobby of mine started in the sixth grade when I first met Hazel and Seb and we decided to go to our first dance together. I knew Mom couldn’t afford a new dress, and the ones in my closet were so basic. That’s when I started making my own outfits. I even found a way to repurpose old clothes from Second Time Around, the local consignment store. I turned a muumuu into a romper, slacks into cigarette pants, and a day dress into an evening gown. Every outfit I design gives new life to an old garment. In fact, I’m quite envious of my creations. Sometimes I wouldn’t mind fashioning a new life for myself.

I’m currently working on a midi day dress with a pleated pleather skirt and a ruffled top. It was supposed to be for my first day of college until I overheard Mom talking to Nurse Linda, saying that she couldn’t even pay for in-state college. After that, I knew fashion school was out of the question. Now I plan on doing with this dress what I do with every one of my creations—sell it on Etsy to someone else who has a more fabulous life than I do.

My phone pings with a text notification, interrupting my thoughts, and I reach for it. Maybe it’s Mom telling me

she got someone to cover for her and she's coming home early to be with me. Maybe it's Hazel or Seb, ditching their families to hang out with me. I'm not usually susceptible to pity hangouts, but I'd make an exception today. No one should be spending the night of their high school graduation alone.

I check my phone and instead of an invite, it's a string of pictures from Hazel at her graduation dinner. There's a long table decorated with the University of Southern California flags and maroon-and-gold balloons tied to the chairs. On the back wall is a banner with Mylar balloons spelling out her name. Then Seb replies to the group with photos of his own family, who are each holding bighead cutouts of him with different expressions over their own faces; a UCLA banner hangs behind them. I smile at my phone, scrolling through photo after photo. When I think of how to respond, my smile disappears. What am I going to send them, a photo of me in my Meadowland High School sweats, eating leftovers, *alone*?

I don't reply. Instead, I do something stupid. *Really* stupid. I pull out a letter that's folded and tucked under my mattress and read it for the hundredth time.

*Dear Ms. Chang,*

*We are delighted to inform you that you have been accepted to the Fashion Design Department at the Fashion Institute of Technology. In addition, we are pleased to award you with a scholarship due to your outstanding qualifications and impressive*



*portfolio. Kindly let us know by July 25 of your decision. We look forward to hearing from you, and congratulations on your accomplishments!*

Tears blot the paper before I finish reading it. I'd never even told my mom about it. It would be pointless. Even with the scholarship, the cost of living in Manhattan is more than ten times what it is in Tulsa. I fold the letter up again, shove it under my mattress, and try to convince myself that not attending FIT is a decision I'm making and not a decision that's being made for me by my circumstances.

I stare up at the popcorn ceiling, lying in my bed thinking about my dad, and once again I'm steeped in disappointment. Deep down, I thought that finding out who my dad was would help me know who I am. Because being a nurse and living in a small town may be what my mom wants, but it's not my dream. This can't be it for me.

Another notification lights up my phone, and I pick it up lazily, thinking it's more pictures from Hazel or Seb. When I notice it's a different kind of alert from an app I'm unfamiliar with, I jolt up. I click on the icon, opening up 23andMe.

## 23andme.com

### **MESSAGES (1 NEW)**

**From:** Noh, Jin Young

**Subject:** Hello, Cousin

**Monday, 7:00 AM**

Dear Ms. Chloe Chang,

I am Jin Young Noh. I received a notification that our genetic tests indicate that we are a 15.5% genetic match, suggesting that we are first cousins. Hello! This is a fortuitous chance meeting.

**From:** Chang, Chloe

**Subject:** RE: Hello, Cousin

**Saturday, 12:03 AM**

Dear Jin Young,

Cousins? Sorry, there must be some mistake.

Unfortunately, I don't have any cousins. My parents are only children who do not have any siblings. I'm afraid this must be a mistake.

**Saturday, 12:04 AM**

Wait. This is DNA. There aren't any mistakes with

DNA. My parents are Joon Pyo and Theresa Chang.  
Are either of these names familiar to you?

From: Noh, Jin Young

Subject: RE: Hello, Cousin

Saturday, 12:20 AM

I don't know about Chang Joon Pyo, but I had an uncle named Noh Joon Pyo. He's my father's brother who died in America right around the time I was born. I go to college at the Johns Hopkins and the rest of the Noh family is in Korea.

From: Chang, Chloe

Subject: RE: Hello, Cousin

Saturday, 12:21 AM

Does this mean we *are* cousins? Am I a part of the Noh family?

When you say "the rest of the Noh family," how many of you are there? Not that I'm freaking out or anything. Well, I'm partly freaking out. I've never had a big family before—not even a small family for that matter. This is a big deal! Okay, I need to sit down or else I'll pass out . . .

From: Noh, Jin Young

Subject: RE: Hello, Cousin

Saturday, 12:26 AM

I completely understand this may come as a shock to you. The family is not large, but we are very close.

We live with Halmoni, our paternal grandmother, who had three sons. My father was the middle son and your father was the oldest son. There is also a younger uncle, Noh Han Pyo. He is forty-one years of age and unmarried. I have a sister, Soo Young, so now you have two cousins.

From: Chang, Chloe

Subject: RE: Hello, Cousin

Saturday, 12:27 AM

Wow, that *is* a big family! It's just me and my mom here. She's a nurse and a workaholic, so I'm alone a lot. Now that you're telling me I have family, that makes me feel like I'm not alone. Even if you are halfway across the world. I'm so eager to know more about you!

From: Noh, Jin Young

Subject: RE: Hello, Cousin

Saturday, 12:27 AM

I am so eager to learn about you too! What is your blood type?

From: Chang, Chloe

Subject: RE: Hello, Cousin

Saturday, 12:30 AM

My blood type? I do actually know my blood type since my mom says it's good to know it in case of an emergency situation where a blood transfusion

could save your life (which is my mom in a nutshell).  
My blood type is B. Why do you ask?

**From:** Noh, Jin Young

**Subject:** RE: Hello, Cousin

**Saturday, 12:33 AM**

Oh, forgive me. In Korea, your blood type is how we know about a person's personality. B means you're creative, outgoing, and optimistic. I have a feeling we would get along really well. Along the same lines, I know this may seem rushed, but my family would like to invite you to Korea to visit us as soon as possible. Of course, we will arrange your travel and accommodations. We are so very eager to connect with you, our long-lost relative. Please let me know at your earliest convenience.



## CHAPTER 2

Of course my mom is working an overnight shift on the night that my long-lost cousin pops virtually out of nowhere and into a DNA website messaging platform. Rude.

I should be more skeptical of Jin Young's messages. I mean, what if he's a scammer? What if the next message he sends is going to ask me for my Social Security number and bank account info? Oh, and why not throw in my passwords while I'm at it. The sad part is, if Jin Young did make those super sketchy personal identity theft requests to get to know more about them, I would hesitate, just a second, before saying no. That's how desperate I am for his story to check out. I'd have a connection to my dad and a real family with cousins, aunts, uncles, and a grandma, just like everyone else.

First things first, I check my most reliable source when it comes to all things unknown—the internet. I type in the search box: Noh Jin Young. About fifty different websites pop up, each with a different Noh Jin Young, and the articles are mostly in Korean. There's no way I can Google Translate my way through that fast enough.

Remembering he said he goes to Johns Hopkins, I add

the school's name in the search box next to his name, then refresh. I click on the first page that comes up, which is the Johns Hopkins website. Under the Business Administration department, buried in a long list of student names, is the name Jin Young Noh, which confirms it's the same person—my cousin.

Goose bumps line my arms and neck. I have a cousin.  
Make that *two* cousins.

I add Soo Young's name to the search, refresh the page, then click on the first link. It appears to be some kind of business trade publication. I try to make sense of the article, but it must have been translated by a badly programmed bot, because it's mostly incoherent. It isn't until I scroll down to the bottom of the article that I find what I'm looking for: a photo.

*Whoa.*

Hair immaculately styled. Makeup flawless and tasteful. And their attire? Ridiculously glamorous, dressed in head-to-toe couture. Jin Young and Soo Young are standing together with a fashionable-looking older woman. Is that their mom or grandmother? It's hard to tell. I can't be related to *these* people.

Can I?

Pacing the living room, I wait for Mom but then begin to worry about how she'll take this information. This isn't only huge for me, but for her, too. Unless . . . no, she couldn't have known about my dad's family.

Could she?

Before I jump to any conclusions (I mean, *any more*

conclusions), I begin to scour our tiny two-bedroom apartment for any clues or hints, starting in the most obvious place—our living room.

My mom has efficiently compartmentalized everything about my family history to one day. Every year on October 26, she prepares an annual *jesa*—the memorial of my dad’s death. Tulsa has one Asian market. It’s small, far away, and expensive, so we usually never shop there, which means Mom never makes Korean food. Dad’s *jesa* is the one time each year that she spends the entire day making a drool-worthy spread that includes rice cake soup, steamed dumplings, and vegetable pancakes. In addition to savory foods, she also makes a wide variety of sweet rice cakes and cookies accompanied by trays of fruit. It’s the only time we eat homemade Korean food; the only time we do anything Korean, really. More to the point, it’s the only time we acknowledge my dad. We don’t even talk about him. We sit there, staring at a crappy photo of him, in silence. It’s so enlarged, it’s too grainy and pixelated to make out any of his features. Honestly, that’s how my dad is to me in real life, too. This blurred, undecipherable being.

So that’s it. That’s everything I know about my dad—a framed photo of him on a black lacquered table adorned with an ornate mother-of-pearl design in the far corner of the living room.

I don’t find any new information about Dad in the living room, and I know for a fact there’s nothing about him in my room, so that just leaves Mom’s room. I slide open the door to Mom’s closet, which is pretty sad. It’s sparse,

filled with more scrubs than regular clothes. After rummaging around, which takes approximately two minutes, I notice an unmarked shoe box on a shelf in the corner. The hairs on my arms shoot up as an eerie feeling creeps over me. Maybe there's more to this story than I know. Maybe Mom knew about Dad's family this whole time. Holding my breath, I lift the shoe box lid.

Inside the box, nestled in crumpled-up tissue paper, is a pair of unflattering black pleather shoes with an insane amount of arch support. *Nursing shoes?* I roll my eyes at no one. How easily I forget who I'm dealing with here. Of course Mom doesn't have any secrets.

As I'm putting back the shoe box, something falls from behind the shelf and slips down the back wall of the closet. When I bend to pick it up, I instantly recognize the Polaroid photo.

I run over to the corner in the living room and confirm that it's the cropped photo of my dad, the framed one we stare at during *jesa* every year. Except this one is the original, and it's not blurry at all. Staring at my dad's face with this level of clarity is almost as if I'm staring at him in person. I can actually see the resemblance. Not shown in the framed photo is my mom, who is next to him in this original one. She's wearing a uniform shirt with embroidery on the lapel, the letters *S* and *W* interlocked. My dad's arm is slung over hers, and they're smiling from ear to ear. In fact, I've never seen my mom look so happy before, which simultaneously tugs at my heart and tears it into tiny pieces. Behind them is a shiny gray-brick building with Korean letters on the signage. They must have been in Korea.

*Maybe Mom does know about the family.*

I'm still staring at the photo of my dad when I hear the key turning in the door.

"Mom!" I shoot up and practically lunge toward her.

"Well, I missed you, too! Maybe I should work weekends more often." Her hands are full of take-out boxes from Seoulful Tacos, but she still manages to open up her arms to hug me.

Instead of a hug, I pocket the Polaroid and shove my phone with the messages from Jin Young in her face. She stares at the screen with her arms still suspended in the air. After a frozen second, she slowly puts her arms down and sets the take-out boxes on the kitchen table.

"Who sent you this?" she says instead of an answer.

"This guy, Jin Young, reached out to me on 23andMe and said—"

"23andMe?" She shifts her position, folding her arms across her chest.

"It's this company that analyzes your DNA and links you to anyone with a genetic connection. Anyway, the website says that Jin Young and I share 15.5 percent of our DNA, which means we're cousins."

"Cousins?"

"I know, right? Then I told him I don't have any cousins because you and Dad are only children whose parents both passed away, right?" I carefully inspect her facial expression for any signs of preexisting knowledge of this information. She gives me none. She just stares at me blankly, unable to form words, so I continue.

"Anyway, when I told him your names, he sent me

these messages.” I hold up my phone again. “If Dad is Noh Joon Pyo, not Chang Joon Pyo, then that means he has a brother. Which also means I have an uncle and a grandma and cousins!”

She sits down slowly, digesting this information. Just when I think she’s going to say something important, she starts opening the boxes. “I brought home Seoulful Tacos for breakfast, your favorite.” She slides a plate over to me and puts a taco wrapped in parchment paper on it. “They don’t open until eleven, but when I told the manager you were graduating the high school, he made an exception. Isn’t that nice?” She glances up with a forced smile.

“Mom? Are you hearing me?” Maybe she’s in shock. People act strangely when they’re in shock, right? I’m pretty sure I read it in one of the pamphlets at the hospital Mom works at. “Didn’t you say Dad was an only child?” I try again, this time speaking more slowly.

“I-I said your dad had no other family.” She begins unwrapping a taco on her plate.

I stare at the plate, confused. “How can you think about eating at a time like this?”

Mom sighs, exasperated. “I’m trying to make things up to you, for missing your big day yesterday.” She unfolds a napkin and places it on her lap.

Any other day, tacos would have done the trick to distract me. But not today.

I take her hands to stop her and look her straight in the eyes. “Mom, I know this is a lot to handle, but I need to know. What are you not telling me about Dad?”

“How come you took a DNA test?” Mom asks, completely ignoring my question.

Now it’s my turn to sigh. “It was a gift from Hazel and Seb. At first it was meant as a joke, but if this is true, and this is Dad’s family, then it’s no joke.”

“A joke?” She draws her head back. “What kind of joke?”

I tell her about Ted Takahashi and how we thought he was my dad.

“Well, that’s just ridiculous.” She balks. “Your dad doesn’t look anything like Ted Takahashi.”

“What’s ridiculous is that you hardly ever talk about Dad,” I say, getting worked up. I’m done with getting the runaround. I want to know who my dad was. So I finally ask her, “You’re not surprised by any of this, so you must have known about the Nohs. Did you?”

She winces, rubbing her forehead. “Losing your father was hard enough. Nothing good can come from reopening old wounds.” Her voice cracks.

“Old wounds?” I can’t help but scoff. “I don’t even know who my dad was. That’s not an old wound. That’s just a wound. It needs tending to, or else it will fester. You’re a nurse, you should know.”

“Haven’t I been enough for you? Aren’t you happy with your life?” She looks as if I’ve mortally wounded her, and my stomach writhes with guilt.

“It’s not that you didn’t do enough, but there’s this whole other side to me I know nothing about. I want to know what Dad was like and what traits I inherited from him. I want to know that he’s more than just a corner in our room that we think about one day out of the year.

Maybe it's time you faced the fact that you can't do it all. You can't be mom *and* dad. Not this time." My hand slides into the pocket of my sweatshirt, and I'm about to pull out the photo to ask her about it when she clears her throat.

"There's nothing in the past that can fill the void of losing your father," she warns.

"You're right. Nothing can replace losing Dad. But his family, my family, is still alive. They're inviting me to visit them in Korea—"

"*What?!*" Mom says, cutting me off. "Flying internationally to see people you never even knew existed until now?"

It should make me see how ridiculous I'm being, hearing just how drastic this decision to meet them is, but it doesn't. It makes me even more determined. "Mom, I want to go. I never got to meet my dad, and now I don't want to miss out on the chance to meet his family."

"It's not the right time to take a vacation. I can't take any time off of work," she forges on. "Besides, you'll be much too busy getting ready for college anyway." Then, ignoring me completely, she picks up the taco off her plate.

"*Community college,*" I correct her for the millionth time. Like everything, Mom is in denial. Denial about my future prospects, my interest in fashion, and now, my dad's family reaching out to me.

It's clear to me that Mom isn't going to budge. Anger replaces the guilt, and instead of pulling out the photo from my pocket, I shove it down deeper. It's up to me to find out more about my father.

"In case you haven't realized, I'm eighteen. A legal adult. If Dad's family, *my* family, is inviting me to Korea,



I think I should accept. I don't need your permission. As for money? I have enough to go on my own." I've never spoken to my mom in that tone before. I'm just so tired of watching opportunities pass me by. If I don't take matters into my own hands, I'll be stuck here the rest of my life.

"What?" Mom stares at me as if she's looking at me for the first time.

"I'm grateful for everything you do for me, Mom, but I need to live my life, too. While you've been spending your days *and* nights at the hospital, I've been selling my clothes on Etsy for the past year—clothes I'll never be able to wear if I follow the path you've laid out for me. Fashion is more than a hobby. Just like this trip is more than a vacation."

Unable to speak, Mom sets her limp taco down and swallows the food in her mouth. Her typical go-to response to anything Dad-related is complete silence, and I'm not expecting anything more now.

"I'm going, Mom." The words surprise me as much as they surprise her, but so did this conversation. I never met my dad, and no one can change that. But now that I have the confirmation I was looking for that I have a family, I'm not about to let that go, not even for Mom.

23andme.com

## **MESSAGES**

**From:** Noh, Jin Young

**Subject:** Transportation

**Saturday, 6:23 PM**

Everyone is delighted you have accepted our offer to come to Korea, especially Halmoni. Your electronic ticket was sent to the email address you provided. At the airport in Incheon, someone will pick you up after you go through customs. There will be a sign with your name on it. You will be taken directly to meet Halmoni. I will see you soon.

**From:** Chang, Chloe

**Subject:** RE: Transportation

**Saturday, 6:33 PM**

Got it! I fully intend to pay you back for the flight. Do you have Venmo? PayPal? Zelle? Also, thank you for the neighborhood recommendations. I booked an Airbnb in the Hongdae area in Seoul. I hope it is close to where you live. I am super excited to meet

everyone! Please tell Halmoni I can't wait to meet her, too. I can't believe I'll be there so soon!

From: Noh, Jin Young

Subject: RE: Transportation

Saturday, 6:45 PM

We cannot wait to meet you, too! I will relay the message to Halmoni about your excitement to meet her. She is very eager to meet you. As for your accommodations, do not worry about the location and distance to where we live. We will take care of everything.

From: Chang, Chloe

Subject: RE: Transportation

Saturday, 6:48 PM

Thank you so much, Jin Young. I could not have planned this trip without you!

Wow. It just hit me. We're cousins! It's still so strange to me . . . one day I have no family and then the next, I have cousins, uncles, and a halmoni! Well, I guess that's not entirely true. I do have family, but it's just my mom. She's cool, for the most part, and she does her best, but she's always busy with her nursing job. She has a hard time ending her work when the shift is over. Which I guess I understand since you can't really tell someone who may be dying that you can't be there for them because your shift ended thirty minutes ago. By the way, what about your family? Are you close?

From: Noh, Jin Young

Subject: RE: Transportation

Saturday, 6:53 PM

Your mom sounds pleasant. I think being a nurse is very admirable. You're right, it's hard to tell someone who may be dying that you can't be there for them. I am sure your mom does her best for you. Our family spends quite a lot of time together. We live together in one house. Halmoni is in charge of the family business. We spend a lot of time in each other's company.

From: Chang, Chloe

Subject: RE: Transportation

Saturday, 6:55 PM

Are you serious? You guys live and work together? What kind of family business is it? My best friend, Hazel, has five sisters and I'm always jealous about the noise and energy of a big family. She's always complaining that it's not worth the drama. What is the Noh family like?

From: Noh, Jin Young

Subject: RE: Transportation

Saturday, 6:56 PM

We work in the retail business. There is a fair amount of drama with families. Nothing that can't be sorted out. Halmoni takes care of everyone in the family.

## CHAPTER 3

The next day, I'm in the kitchen pouring myself a bowl of cereal while Mom is getting ready to go to the hospital. Even though neither of us is speaking to the other, the silence is deafening.

Mom grabs her keys and before she heads out the front door, she pauses. After a moment, she finally says, "Are you really going halfway across the world to meet strangers?" With her back still facing me, it seems as if she's talking to the door.

I sigh, placing the spoon down in the bowl. "Are you really not going to tell me about Dad?"

Her silence answers both of our questions, and she leaves abruptly without another word.

Later that afternoon, I invite Hazel and Seb over and fill them in on everything that has transpired since the last time I saw them.

"A week ago, if you'd have told me my best friend was living in an actual K-drama, I would've laughed in your face," Hazel muses from my bed.

"I know, right?" I smile at her. No one thought I'd have a reason to leave this town, least of all me. "It hasn't really sunk in yet."

“I mean, there hasn’t really been time for it to sink in. Jin Young first messaged you on Friday, and today is only Sunday,” Seb says.

“Even though things are moving at lightning speed, it’s, like, not fast enough for Jin Young. As soon as I confirmed we were cousins, he started making travel arrangements.” I shake my head in disbelief, placing my never-used passport in my bag. I was starting to lose hope I’d ever get a stamp in it. Until now.

“Not only was this international trip arranged at a record speed, if he was at Johns Hopkins when you messaged him, it was like one in the morning on a Saturday when he messaged you back. I’d say he’s more excited to meet you than you are to meet them.” Hazel’s eyebrows bounce up at me.

I try in vain not to get carried away again by Hazel’s flair for drama, but there’s no denying it. They do seem eager to meet me. Finally, I’ll have a connection to my dad I’ve been missing my whole life.

“How long are you going to be gone for?” Seb asks, fiddling with my phone.

“One week. It’s not quite enough time to really get to know my dad’s family, but it should give me enough time to find out more about this photo.” I hold up the Polaroid of my parents to Hazel and Seb before tucking it back into my wallet. I’ve spent hours staring at it over the past couple of days. I know there’s more to the story than meets the eye.

“You haven’t asked your mom?” Seb raises an eyebrow at me.

“She refuses to talk about my dad. Which is why this trip means so much to me. Now I don’t have to rely on her for information about my dad. I can ask Jin Young or his sister or my halmoni.” The smile returns to my face, thinking about meeting them.

“Okay, but what am I going to do without my bepu?” Hazel makes the most pathetic sad face.

Hazel using the Korean slang for *best friend* makes me giggle. Even though she’s 100 percent Colombian, I swear she speaks more Korean than I do.

“Don’t worry,” I say, noticing the torn looks on Hazel’s and Seb’s of their faces. “I’ll be back before you go on your Europe trip. I haven’t quite figured out the long-distance rates, but I’ll make sure to call you from Korea. Somehow.” I scratch my head, wondering if I’ll have anything left over from my Etsy fund once I pay for this trip.

“Speaking of . . .” Seb tosses me my phone. “Your update is complete,” he says, sounding like a bot. When I give him a funny look, he adds, “I researched what you need to travel in Korea and downloaded the relevant apps. KakaoTalk, Naver for maps, Papago for translating. KakaoTalk is for messaging, but you can also use it to call us every day.”

“By ‘every day’ he means multiple times a day. I mean it.” Hazel points a finger at me. “We need updates in real time!”

I smile at the two of them, cataloguing this moment in my memory like I have been every moment since I found out they were leaving for college. Even though I’m the one leaving first now, I’m caught off guard by the swirl

of emotions taking hold of me. The day after I come back from Korea, the two of them will be off to Europe, and then after that, it'll be Los Angeles for who knows how long. It's as if I'm saying goodbye to them forever.

"I'm surprised your mom is taking time off work to go on such short notice. She never takes time off," Seb says, jerking me back to the present.

"Oh. She's not coming," I say quietly.

"Wait. Theresa Chang is okay with you going to Korea? Alone?" Hazel asks.

"I mean, I'm an adult, legally speaking." I shrug.

"Legally an adult. Technically a toddler." Hazel snorts, pointing to the Shin Ramyun stain on my T-shirt.

I pretend to be offended, but we all know I'm hardly adult material.

"Hey, this looks nice. Is it new?" Seb holds out a hanger with my latest design on it. The darts on the skirt came out beautifully and the flutter sleeves are perfection.

"Wow. This dress is really sophisticated, Chlo. I can hardly see the invisible stitching," Hazel says, flipping over the hem of the pleated skirt.

"On pleather, no less." I beam. I can't help but show how proud I am of it.

"What's this?" She reveals an intricate stitching pattern on the inside lining.

"Oh, that? It's my brand." I bite my lower lip, second-guessing the stitching of the first two letters of my first and last name, *C* and *H*, interlocked with each other.

"Your brand?" they both say at the same time.

"Yeah, lots of budding artists do that, by way of marking



their clothes. It's silly, really, but I thought it would make it feel more like an original design than a simple pattern."

"I love it. A real Chloe Chang original," Hazel says. "I think this is the best piece you've made so far."

"How much did you get for this one? I bet you can start raising your rates now that you're more established with a brand and everything." Seb nods at me.

"I'm not selling this one. I'm taking it with me." I smile at the dress, folding it neatly and placing it right on top of my bag. Hazel and Seb don't say anything. They know how much this means to me. This trip will be a trip of many firsts for me—my first time wearing one of my creations, my first time in Korea, and my first time meeting my dad's family.

"Saranghae," Hazel says—"I love you" in Korean—and pulls me in for a hug.

A second later, Seb's arms are wrapped around the two of us. "What she said."

"Saranghae," I say back to both of them.

I pack the dress in my bag and zip it up. Finally, my life is about to begin.



After I say goodbye to Hazel and Seb, I wait in front of my apartment complex for the Uber driver to arrive. Even though I went on that massive tirade about being an adult, I feel like a kid who's in over her head right now. Mom and I haven't spoken about Dad's family since I found out

about them, and it feels weird leaving without saying a proper goodbye to her.

She's still at the hospital, working another overnight shift. Even with the weirdness between us, it feels so strange not to see her before I head to the airport. My eyes start to well, so I distract myself by checking my phone obsessively to confirm that the driver is en route. I hear a car approaching, so I wipe my eyes and gather my bags. When the car comes to a screeching halt, I immediately look up.

"Mom!" The tears I'd been trying in vain to keep at bay come spilling out.

With the engine still on, she jumps out of the car, leaving the door open, and throws her arms around me for a tight hug.

"What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be working?"

"I had someone cover for me so I could say goodbye." Her voice cracks.

"Oh, Mom," I sob.

"You're right," she whispers in my ear. "You have a right to know them. They're your family. They must love you. They must."

I'm so happy she made it in time, I forget about our argument and hug her back. There's still so much we need to talk about, but I know we'll figure it out. "Thanks, Mom. For always being there for me when it counts."

"Chloe-yah, I love you," she says, rocking me from side to side.

“I love you, too.” My voice is muffled from my mouth being pressed up against her shoulder.

She pulls back and studies my face, as if to remember me. “Don’t forget about me when you’re with them,” she says.

“I’ll only be gone for a week. How could I ever forget about you?” I respond with a laugh, hoping she can hear just how ridiculous she’s being.

Instead of chuckling with me, the crease between her eyes deepens. “Remember, just because you share blood, it doesn’t mean they’re not strangers.” Her voice trembles, and a tear streams down her cheek.

It didn’t occur to me until now that she might feel threatened by me meeting Dad’s family. I pull her in for another hug and squeeze tight. “Saranghae,” I say, hoping it’ll mean more to her in her native language.

The Uber pulls up behind my mom’s car, and I try to release myself from the hug when Mom’s grip tightens.

“Uh, Mom? They start adding fees if I’m not on time to meet the Uber driver.”

“I don’t care about the fees,” she says in my ear, which means a lot. Theresa Chang does not like to pay for superfluous things, not if it can be helped. “I just want to hold you one last time.”

“Okay, Mom.”

Seven minutes and five dollars and twenty cents later, I’m in the Uber and off to the airport. I put my hand against the window as we drive off and silently let the tears stream down my face as I watch my mom grow smaller and smaller. It would’ve been weird if she hadn’t shown up to see me off. But she did.



At the airport, I check in at the kiosk and find my gate once I get through the security checkpoint. I have a connecting flight in Dallas, and then Seoul, here I come!

The flight from Tulsa to Dallas is so short, I barely had time to enjoy my drink before the descent. I'm still jittery with excitement when I get to my gate. As a dutiful daughter and friend, I pull out my phone and first send a quick text to my mom.

**Me:** Arrived safely in Dallas. About  
to board the plane to Seoul!

**Mom:** Call me as soon as you  
land. I love you!

**Mom:** And Chloe . . . Be  
careful.

The next text is to Hazel and Seb.

**Me:** Testing . . . is this thing on?

**Seb:** 

**Hazel:** Miss us already?

**Seb:** Are you messaging us from the plane?

**Me:** I landed in Dallas. About to board the plane to Seoul.

**Hazel:** I can't decide if I'm jealous or excited for you?!

**Seb:** Maybe both?

**Hazel:** Yeah, you're probably right. All I know is you're going to have an \*amazing\* time!

**Me:** Thanks, guys.

**Me:** Seb, since you know a lot of random facts about Korea, is it super dangerous or something?

**Seb:** My resources tell me that Seoul has a lower crime rate than the US and is relatively a safe place.

**Hazel:** ????

**Me:** Ever since I told my mom I'm going to Korea, she's always telling

me to be safe and I don't know if  
it's typical mom worry or something  
I should be more concerned about.

**Hazel:** Of course it's typical  
mom worry. This is the  
first time you're traveling  
internationally. By yourself, no  
less!

**Seb:** Knowing Theresa, this is  
more than typical. It's to be  
expected.

**Hazel:** Plus, I refuse to believe  
a country that can produce  
a man as beautiful as Lee  
Min Ho can be anything but  
extremely pleasant.

**Seb:** 🙄

**Me:** LOL, that's a convincing  
argument, Haze. OK gotta go. Love  
you guys!

My pulse quickens with excitement as I pull up my  
boarding pass. There are two lines at the gate: one for  
rows A–E and the other for F–J. Holy mother-of-pearl,  
this is one ginormous plane! I check my boarding pass to

see which line to go in. That's when I realize my boarding pass doesn't have a seat number printed on it.

"Excuse me," I say to the gate agent standing behind the counter. "I don't have a seat number." I point nervously at my ticket.

The agent checks her computer screen, clacking away for what feels like an eternity, only to raise a quizzical eyebrow up at me.

"Is there a problem?" I say, drawing out the words. A part of me believed this was too good to be true; I just didn't *want* to believe it. "Am I not going to Seoul?" I consider emailing Jin Young on the 23andMe app when the agent motions me over to the front of the line.

She talks to another agent at the front of the line in a hushed tone, pointing back at me every now and then. I try to prepare myself for the worst-case scenario, where I'm told this has all been one big hoax. Panic rises in my chest, but before I can emotionally break down, the gate agent returns with a flight attendant from the plane. She's in a fitted cerulean skirt-suit uniform and has flawless skin, neatly tied back dark hair, and ruby-red lips.

"Apparently, the ticket was purchased via a third party with a note attached to it. This flight attendant is going to take you to your seat." The gate agent waves, smiling wide.

"So I am going to Seoul?" I look up hopefully.

The flight attendant nods and directs me to the ramp, bypassing the crowd. I try to avoid their eyes full of judgment. I get it, I'm cutting the line. "Sorry. My ticket was purchased via third party," I say as I pass the other

passengers. Since it's my first international flight, I don't fully know what it means, but I'm hoping they do.

When we reach the inside of the plane, the flight attendant takes me up to the front, where the business class seats are located. I wouldn't dare to even dream about sitting here.

Although, come to think of it, the photos I saw on the business website did make it seem like the Noh's retail store was doing well. Maybe even well enough to purchase a business class ticket. I hold my breath, hoping the attendant will stop at one of the seats in this section. When we pass the last row of business class seats, I release my breath and continue following her. As she opens the curtains beyond the last row of seats in business class, I laugh to myself. Of course I don't have business class seats. It's ridiculous to even think that I could sit in—

"Here we are." The flight attendant motions for me to follow her through the curtains. "First class."

The flight attendant continues down the aisle while I'm still at the threshold to what apparently is a portal to another world. She stops in the aisle, turns, and motions me to my seat . . . only it isn't a seat. It's a room.

I blink. Then blink again. "This . . . is for me?" I stare at my seat, er, room. With the light turned on above it, the entire space is illuminated, like some kind of a spotlight. When Jin Young said the family would take care of everything, I didn't realize he meant *everything*.

She nods, hiding a chuckle behind her hand. Then she offers to take my bags and stow them in the overhead compartment. "Please, make yourself comfortable," the



flight attendant says when I'm still standing in the aisle.

I sink into the chair, which feels like a cloud. There's a box of chocolates and a welcome kit wrapped like a present. Inside is a fancy bag filled with name-brand toiletries, complete with a toothbrush, toothpaste, face cream, and lip balm. It's Christmas in June! There's even a set of pajamas rolled up and tied with a bow around it. The fabric is a deep navy blue and 100 percent Egyptian cotton. Is this heaven?

Another flight attendant brings me a warmed bowl with roasted nuts in it. Then she asks if I'd like anything to drink. I look around at the champagne glasses being handed out. I'm tempted to ask for one but remind myself that I have a first-class ticket, not a fake ID. Since the atmosphere here definitely calls for something bubbly, I ask for some sparkling water. The flight attendant returns right away with my sparkling water in a champagne glass.

I recline the chair back, kick off my shoes, and lift up the footrest. Before I can think to request it, a flight attendant comes by with an extra pillow and headset. It's like my every need is anticipated. If this is what being a Noh is like, I've got nothing to be nervous about.

## CHAPTER 4

Sixteen hours in first class feels truly magical. I watched a movie (okay, six, but who's counting?), ate caviar for the first time, practiced my Korean using the language app on my phone, and before I knew it, it was time to land. If it were any other destination, I would be sad to leave the lovely luxury cocoon of the first-class cabin. But this isn't just any destination. This is Korea, where I'm about to meet my family for the first time.

I've been up for almost twenty-four hours, but a jolt of adrenaline reinvigorates me as soon as the tires hit the tarmac. I'm the first one on my feet when the Fasten Seat Belt sign turns off. I gather my bags and feel regal as I walk out of the aircraft, but as soon as we get into the airport terminal, I'm swept into a sea of passengers rushing to go through the immigration line. Unfortunately, there is no first-class line here. It's more of a free-for-all, which is quite jolting after spending the last sixteen hours in a private room, being waited on hand and foot.

Now that I'm here, one step closer to meeting my family, I'm nervous. What if they don't like me? What if my mom is right and I'm just a stranger to them? After all, we only found out about each other just days ago.

I already felt out of place in Tulsa. If I don't fit in with my own family, then where do I fit in?

Trying not to spiral before I even meet them, I re-read my messages from Jin Young. The level of excitement in each message screams through loud and clear, setting my mind at ease. Of course they'll like me. They wouldn't have gone to such extreme lengths to get me here otherwise.

In the last exchange I had with Jin Young, he said that someone would meet me at the airport and take me to meet my halmoni. *Halmoni*. That's a word I never thought would hold any meaning for me. The stinging sensation in my nasal passages threatens tears, but I fan them away. To distract myself, I put my earbuds in and practice my Korean using the app. By the time I get through the massive immigration line and reach the exit, I've almost mastered the greetings.

"Annyeonghaseyo," I say out loud. It's the formal way of saying hello. I plan to say it the first time I meet my family. It doesn't quite roll off my tongue the right way, so I keep repeating it over and over while I look for the sign with my name on it.

Suddenly, a guy in a fitted black suit bows to me. "Annyeonghaseyo," he says, returning the greeting.

Oops. I should probably practice in my head now that I'm in Korea. It isn't until I bow apologetically that I notice the sign he's holding. It says my name, CHLOE CHANG, in large block letters.

"Um." I point to the sign, then to me. "Jin Young?" I ask, taking inventory of him. He doesn't look at all like the

Jin Young I found online in the picture with him and his beautiful sister. Not that this man isn't beautiful. He's got the kind of perfect complexion K-drama heroines pine for, a pair of thick, perfectly symmetrical eyebrows, and . . . are those dimples?

His lips break into a small smile and instead of responding, he bows. Tucking the sign with my name on it under his arm, he holds out a business card to me with both hands. It reads: *Mr. Kim, Private Secretary to Noh Jin Young.*

"Oh. I mean, annyeonghaseyo." I bow again, this time with more awareness. On the way up, my eye catches his and I quickly look away. He must be about my age, which is hardly old enough to be "Mr." anything. "Is Jin Young here? Perhaps waiting in the car?" I look around, searching for anyone who resembles the photo I found online. I just thought that when Jin Young said someone would meet me at the airport, he meant someone from the family.

Mr. Kim says something in Korean.

"Neh?" I have no choice but to use my limited Korean with him, seeing as he doesn't seem to speak any English.

Instead of answering, Mr. Kim points to his earpiece. Before I have a chance to be embarrassed, he takes my bags from me and walks briskly through the swarm of people to the passenger loading area. I'm in a full jog trying to keep up with him. Once we get outside the muggy air hits me like a wet blanket. My clothes cling to me like moist plastic wrap, which feels every bit as gross as it sounds.

Mr. Kim leads me outside of the airport, where a sleek, black sedan with dark tinted windows is parked right in front. There's a sign that reads VIP on the window. I'm giddy again, taking note of how my dad's family spared no expense to welcome me here, which helps curb the disappointment of not having any of them come meet me at the airport themselves. Mr. Kim opens the back door for me, then puts my bags in the trunk. Pretty soon, we're off to meet my family. I've waited my whole life for this.



The car stops abruptly and my head whips up. "I'm up!" I yell for no good reason after being startled awake. Mr. Kim looks back at me in his rearview mirror while he waits for the light to change, but he doesn't say anything. I stare out the window to try to figure out where we are. The sidewalks are shoulder to shoulder crowded like it's Black Friday at Best Buy. There must be hundreds of people on this block alone.

"Seoul?" I ask. I haven't yet reached the level on my language app that teaches me how to formulate a sentence in Korean.

Mr. Kim turns his head to the side and smiles, nodding.

Now fully awake, I take inventory of my current state. I breathe into the palm of my hand and almost pass out from the smell. Then I try to recover by pulling up the collar of my T-shirt around my nose, only to get a heaping whiff of BO. I cough, waving the air in front of me.

"Gwenchanayo?" Mr. Kim asks.

“Gwenchanayo,” I say, lying through my morning breath. It’s obvious I’m not gwenchanayo at all. The state of me is an utter and total hot mess. “My God, I stink,” I mutter to myself. This is so not the way I want to meet my grandmother for the first time. If only I could shower or brush my teeth, at least.

Mr. Kim turns and hands me a small tin box. When I open it, a strong whiff of peppermint hits my nose and there are tiny white pieces of hard candy inside. When I glance back up at him, he motions for me to put one in my mouth, which does wonders for my self-confidence. As much as I’d love to pretend I don’t know what he means, I know exactly what he means. Averting my eyes, I shove a handful of mints in my mouth and hand the tin back to him.

The car turns into an underground parking garage of a department store, distracting me with a series of turns that leave me dizzy and disoriented. We finally stop at an entrance with stairs that lead up to a set of glass double doors to a high-end department store. When Jin Young said I’d be taken directly to Halmoni, I just assumed it would be at her home. But this is even better. What better place to meet my family than at their family business?

Two attendants dressed in red blazers and black slacks immediately approach the car from both sides. One opens the door for me, bowing as I get out. The other takes the keys from Mr. Kim. The level of attentiveness can only mean one thing: Dad’s family business must be doing *really* well. There’s even a red carpet that leads us through, making me feel like some kind of celebrity.

“Gamsahamnidah,” I say over and over as people open doors for me. First my car door, then the doors leading into the building, and then a second set of doors after that. An arctic gust of expensive perfumed air hits my face as I follow Mr. Kim through the last set of double doors. Bright lights bounce off the marble floor and shiny white lacquer walls, making everything in the building sparkle.

When we turn the corner, there are rows and rows of shops as far as the eye can see. I feel faint and my knees wobble, which could be an effect of traveling for sixteen hours or even jet lag, but likely it’s because of the sheer and utter grandeur of this place. It’s like nothing I’ve ever seen, definitely not in Tulsa, not on any K-drama, not even in my wildest dreams.

Mr. Kim once again has me speed-walking to keep up with him. I slow my step when I notice a flurry of staff in a roped-off area of the department store’s main floor. Construction workers with vests are hauling in white lacquer blocks and drilling them together. There’s a sign hanging above the area, written mostly in Korean, but some of the words are in English. It reads: Fall Collection.

“Fashion show?” I must’ve said it out loud because the next thing I know, Mr. Kim turns his head to acknowledge me with a closed-mouth smile. I wouldn’t say it’s cute, but at the same time, it’s not *not* cute.

Mr. Kim continues leading me down the aisle and straight into an elevator with marble floors, white lacquer walls, and rose gold finishes—which is easily the nicest room I’ve been in my whole life. The Meadowland Mall in

Tulsa is three stories tall and I thought *that* was kind of a big deal. There's even an elevator attendant here, dressed neatly in a red blazer with a white dress shirt underneath. Without even asking, he recognizes Mr. Kim and pushes the button for the twelfth floor. If the staff know who you are, then the store must be doing more than really well.

I can't help marveling at everything around me when something catches my eye. The monogram on the blazer of the elevator attendant is the same one on the lapel of the shirt my mom was wearing in the old Polaroid photograph I found of her and Dad. It's unmistakably the same: an S and a W interlocked with each other. Suddenly, the pieces start coming together. My mom must have worked at this department store. She and my dad probably met here, where his family's store also is. It's all making sense now.

And, at the same time, it doesn't make sense.

Why wouldn't Mom just tell me that's how they met? Something doesn't add up, but I'm sure I'll have the answers to my questions in mere minutes.

I watch as the illuminated light goes up in ascending order, while thinking of what type of store my dad's family owns. Accessories? Shoes? Clothing? The anticipation is reaching its max level when the doors to the elevator finally open on the twelfth floor. Finally!

I peek my head out, holding my breath. As soon as I step out of the elevator, I'm even more confused than before. There are no shops or boutiques. Instead, there's a lady sitting at a desk in front of a waiting area. Her hair is tied back in a low bun and she's wearing a black fitted



skirt suit; her lips are bright red. She immediately stands up from her seat and bows to us.

If there's one thing I've learned from watching hours and hours of K-dramas (I mean, other than the culinary superiority of the Shin), it's the bowing etiquette. In Korea, there's bowing and then there's *bowing*. The first kind, which is regular bowing, is out of courtesy, like when you say hi to a neighbor, the postman, or your pharmacist. The second kind, *bowing*, is more revered, like for when you greet your elder, your boss, or the president. Essentially someone with status.

I suddenly realize that ever since we got here, people are not just bowing, they're *bowing*, as if I have status.

Mr. Kim leads me past the receptionist's desk and toward the double doors on the other end of the room.

"Mr. Kim?" I have a million things I want to ask but don't know how to. When Mr. Kim turns to me, I say the only word I do know. "Halmoni?"

Mr. Kim just points to the placard beside the ornate double door and parrots back, "Halmoni."

The placard reads in gilded English letters:

CHAIRMAN

SAM WON DEPARTMENT STORE

## CHAPTER 5

Okay, there is no need to freak out.

I've only been told that the family's retail business, the one they keep referring to as "the store"—like it's a perfume stand at the mall next to the pretzel hut—is not a store at all. It's a massive, multilevel, luxury department store.

I knew Jin Young was being humble when he referred to it as the family business. If the business article didn't tip me off, the first-class ticket definitely should have. But nothing could have prepared me for *this*.

Before I have time to process any of it, I'm standing in my halmoni's office with my knees buckling under me. I would've been slightly more relaxed had I not just found out that my halmoni owns this entire twelve-story department store. I have no choice but to be cool. *Be cool*. Be. Cool.

As soon as the doors close, I see a woman sitting at an oversized sofa directly in front of me. She has deep lines in her face, her hair is neatly tied back in a low bun, and she's wearing a conservative cardigan set. I feel the wide smile I had on my face slowly turn down. I knew that any form of verbal communication might be a struggle but I thought we'd be able to figure it out using body language

and gestures. Instead, she doesn't move from her seat and stares me up and down. In return, I stand there awkwardly, unsure of what to do next.

Everything about this first encounter feels strange and unnatural, but that's to be expected when meeting a relative I found out about only a few days ago. I mean, it is, right?

In the silence, I take it upon myself to bow, bending the upper half of my body ninety degrees. "Annyeonghaseyo, Halmoni," I say as I reach an upright position again.

Instead of saying anything, she motions for me to step closer to her, so I do. Then she gestures for me to look to my left and then my right. Once she examines my face to a microscopic degree, she begins scrawling notes on a pad. As if she's taking into account every inch of my facial details, fact-checking that I am indeed a relative.

Without another word, she gets up and leaves the office, but not before giving me another once-over from head to toe.

As the door to the office shuts behind her, I'm beginning to doubt myself. I didn't want to believe it, but this cold reception from Halmoni is giving me no choice but to think that maybe Mom is right. Maybe I made the mistake of thinking meeting my dad's family now would make us an instant family.

The door opens again, startling me. This time, a woman draped in a woven silk A-line dress and matching three-quarter-length jacket walks in. She has a slight build, and I'm immediately taken by her tastefully airbrushed makeup. I instantly recognize her from the photo I found online of her next to Jin Young and Soo Young. Before I

can guess how she's related to me, she rushes over and throws her arms around me.

"Chloe-yah. I am your Halmoni. You have no idea what it means to meet you."

"Halmoni?" A million questions race through my brain at once. But between the shock and my air passages being restricted by her death grip, I only manage to eke out one. "You speak English?"

She lets out a soft laugh. "Of course I do. I studied at Oxford University, and not to mention, I have been running a multinational business for decades." She releases me, holds out my hands, and takes a step back to eye me up and down. "Now, let me take a look at you."

I'm pretty sure she got a big whiff of my stench and if she didn't pass out from that, she definitely will from the looks of me. I'm a mess.

"Ohmonah." She covers her mouth that's in the shape of an O and I brace myself. "You look just like my son," she says, taking me by surprise.

*She thinks I look like my dad?*

All my insecurities about not knowing who I am, not having a real dad, a real family—everything disappears in this one crystallized moment.

"I had my doubts at first about this DNA test, but now that you're here, I know you're his daughter. You are the mirror image of Joon Pyo." She wipes her nose with a tissue. "The look he makes when he is nervous, the nose, the profile. Too many similarities." Her voice quivers, sending a chill up and down my body.

Words I've wanted to hear my whole life—*craved* to

hear my whole life—becoming a sudden reality is too much for me. The tears come instantly spilling out.

“You really think I look like my dad?” I choke out through my sobs.

She tilts her head, looks into my eyes, and says, “I bet you are as kind and generous as he was, too.” Her stare is so intense that it makes me believe she knows this about me as confidently as she knew it about my dad.

Her arms wrap around me again and this time she cries with me. I cry harder, struggling to catch my breath with each ragged inhale. My whole life, Dad has been a grainy, distorted photo. Now, he’s starting to feel more real to me than ever before.

After a moment, Halmoni brings me over to the sofa, where we sit side by side, both dabbing our eyes and noses with tissues.

“Let’s see now. I want to get to know all about you.” She gazes at me with soft but curious eyes. “How is your health?”

“My health?” I’m thrown off by the question.

Probably noticing the puzzled expression on my face, Halmoni says, “I’ve missed out on your childhood. I want to know every detail about you.”

“Oh. My health is fine.” I smile through residual tears.

“That’s so good to hear.” She seems pleased.

“My mom is a nurse. She makes sure to take care of my health.”

She startles. “Oh, I see.”

“Did you . . . know my mother?” I ask carefully.

A frown replaces the smile she had before. “The past

can be a terribly painful subject.” She pats my hand. I can see she subscribes to the same coping mechanism as my mom when it comes to grief. “Besides, there’s so much I want to get to know about you. Were the accommodations on the way here suitable?”

When I remember the first-class ticket, I immediately gasp. “Oh, yes! Thank you so much, I have never been more comfortable in my entire life! That bed was as big as my bed back in—no, the whole room was almost as big as my bedroom!”

The smile returns to her face. “I hope you’ll be comfortable in our guesthouse. Our main house is being renovated, so I’m afraid you can’t stay with us while we are temporarily displaced.”

“*Guesthouse?* I booked an Airbnb. I wouldn’t want to impose—”

“We took care of that. You should find everything refunded to your account. We couldn’t have you staying in that tiny studio apartment, could we?” She cocks her head to the side.

“What about you, where are you staying during the renovations?”

“Don’t worry about us.” She smiles reassuringly. “We have apartments nearby.”

“You’re staying in an apartment, and I’ll be staying in a house? That doesn’t make sense, surely I can—”

“No, no. I insist. You are our guest,” Halmoni says to me, in a way that tells me she has welcomed many high-powered businesspeople, government officials, maybe even celebrities into her home before. “I assure you, you

will be very comfortable. The house is well stocked and fully staffed. Mrs. Na is a nutritionist and very good cook. She will take care of your meals. And Mr. Kim, who met you at the airport, is our private secretary. He is my most trusted assistant and will be with you every day. They both don't speak any English, but they are instructed to take very good care of you. If you need anything, anything at all, let me know."

I somehow manage to smile back. This is so unreal. Everything I didn't have in Tulsa is now being handed to me. On a silver platter, no less.

"When will I get to meet everyone?"

She raises an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"Jin Young said he had a sister and I think there's an uncle, maybe his dad?"

She adjusts her glasses. "Did he? He mentioned quite a bit to you."

"And what about that lady who was in your office before? She seemed to have a commanding presence. Is she a relative?"

"Oh, that is Lady Cha." She waves a dismissive hand. "She is my most trusted advisor. She sometimes takes my place when I am otherwise detained."

"I'm so eager to get to know everyone. Eighteen years is a long time to catch up on."

Halmoni gets up and walks over to her desk. "Soo Young is in her last year of high school, a very important year for getting into college. She is probably too busy at the moment."

"Oh?" I try but fail to hide my disappointment. "I

understand. Jin Young and I will have plenty of catching up to do, then.”

“Jin Young?” She shakes her head. “He is not even back in Seoul yet. He arrives on Thursday from college.”

I frown. “Really? He never mentioned that in his messages.” I’m a bit taken aback. Jin Young seemed so eager to meet me. You’d think he would’ve mentioned that small but highly relevant detail.

“Oh, don’t worry,” Halmoni says, probably noticing disappointment written on my face. “He will be here soon enough, and Soo Young will have some time in between studies, I’m sure. In time you will meet everyone, I promise.” She waves her hand dismissively, again. “Besides, you will be quite busy yourself. I have made arrangements and your schedule is quite full as it is.”

“You made arrangements for me?” I ask, simultaneously shocked and touched.

“Yes, of course. This is the first time meeting you. I want only the best for you.” She leans in toward me, her face practically glowing with excitement. “Tomorrow morning, I will send over a top personal trainer. Travel can be very taxing. Exercise will help your body adjust to the change.”

“Wow, I’ve never had a personal trainer before.”

Her smile widens. “After that, I have you scheduled for a facial—but not just any facial, a very special one. Korea is very advanced in its beauty industry.”

“Top-of-the-line facial?” I muse. “Halmoni, everything sounds great. I just . . .”

“What is it? You can tell me,” she says, sensing my hesitation.



“I thought I’d be getting to know my family better. I will meet everyone else, right?” I was already worried one week wouldn’t be enough. Now she’s telling me everyone is busy, and I don’t know how to interpret that.

“Oh, Chloe-yah. Is that what’s troubling you?” Her eyes crinkle at the corners. “Of course you will be getting to know everyone. In due time.” She squeezes my hand.

Halmoni puts my worries at ease. Maybe this is what Jin Young meant when he mentioned Halmoni takes care of everyone.

“Now, it’s almost evening. I bet you’re exhausted after your trip. Why don’t you get settled in at the guesthouse and we’ll spend more time tomorrow getting to know each other.” She smiles warmly at me.

I don’t disagree with her. After the day I’ve had, I could use a nice, long nap.



Mr. Kim drives me an hour outside of the bustling city to a remote area where there are more trees than people. He opens the car door for me and I step out hesitantly. Then he leads me to a metal and wooden gate hidden among a large stone wall that wraps around the entire block. As soon as he taps his phone to the monitor by the door, the gate releases.

A gasp escapes me at the sight as Mr. Kim leads me through what can only be described as an enchanted garden. The gravel path takes us through lush greenery with different kinds of flowers and plants surrounding us.

There's even a small bridge spanning a pond full of koi. Their bug eyes stare curiously up at me as I walk across the bridge, as if they know I'm a stranger here.

"*This* is the family's guesthouse?" I stare up at the modern three-story home with floor to ceiling windows facing out to the garden. I can't even imagine what the main house is like.

Mr. Kim hides a smile behind his fist and watches me through the sides of his eyes. As a most trusted personal assistant to the family, he might be used to being around this type of decadence, but I certainly am not.

A woman appears at the front door. She's wearing a long beige skirt and a matching sweater with her hair neatly pulled back into a low ponytail.

"Annyeonghaseyo." I bow.

"I am Mrs. Na. I cook for you," she says in broken English.

I'm not even sure how to respond to that. Just a couple of days ago, I was heating up leftovers for myself and now I'm staying in a home more akin to an estate, with my very own cook! I respond in the only way I can.

"Gamsahamnidah." I bow deeply at her.

Mrs. Na tries to hold in a laugh and motions for me to come in. I try to remind myself of etiquette and decorum, but it goes out the door the second we walk through the threshold. I gasp at the turn of every corner as I follow Mrs. Na to my room. The floors are wall-to-wall marble with coordinating furniture, and crystal chandeliers adorn every room. The entire back wall is made entirely of windows that are somehow even more impressive from

the inside, overlooking the immaculately landscaped garden. Everything is sleek, modern, and minimalist, like a showroom from one of those ultramodern furniture stores that smell like wicker and cost a small fortune to shop at.

At the top of the stairs, Mrs. Na shows me to my room, which is as tasteful as the rest of the house. The furniture is made of reclaimed wood and the bed has a floral print duvet with a crap-ton of pillows piled on. There's even a fancy sitting chair in the corner of the room, like I see in extravagant movies about wealthy people who have space and money for furniture that is neither practical nor functional.

Shortly after, Mr. Kim follows with my luggage and sets it in my room. I thank him and they both say their goodbyes, bowing deeply at me before closing the door. Slowly spinning on my heels, I turn, half-expecting this to be a figment of my imagination. When the four-poster bed is still there, inviting as ever, I have no other choice but to do a swan dive right onto it. The landing is as soft and plush as I'd imagined it would be, which is saying something. The reality is living up to the dream in every way imaginable.

After relishing in the decadent satin comforter for a minute, I'm reminded of Mom. I landed hours ago, so she's probably been freaking out for, you know, hours.

I rush to catch Mrs. Na to ask her about the Wi-Fi. When I open the door, she's standing right in front of me. I gasp. "Mrs. Na!"

"Neh?" Mrs. Na's eyes jut around the room and back to me. When Halmoni said they would be available to me at

all times, I didn't think she meant it literally. "Actually, I do need something. Wi-Fi?"

She nods, smiling. "Neh," she says, holding out her hand for my phone and setting it up for me.

"Thank you—I mean, gamsahamnidadh."

As soon as I connect to the Wi-Fi, a slew of messages and alerts flood my phone. I swipe them away and call my mom. The phone barely rings once before she picks up.

"Chloe-yah? Are you okay?"

"Of course I'm okay, Mom."

"Then why didn't you call me right away? You landed hours ago! I was about to come over there myself." Which is the emptiest of threats.

"Sorry, I didn't have time until now."

"Why? What did they do to you? Seriously, is everything okay?"

"Mom, I'm fine." Actually, since I got here, I've been more than fine, and she needs to know that. Otherwise, at this rate, she'll give herself an ulcer before I return next week. "In fact, I rode first class, and Halmoni put me up in their ginormous guesthouse that's the size of our entire apartment complex, and tomorrow, she arranged for a personal trainer to come work with me. Trust me, Mom. You have nothing to worry about."

"Chloe-yah. Of course I'm worried about you," Mom says, pretty much bypassing everything I said. "You're my only daughter. You're all I've got."

Guilt seizes me. It didn't occur to me until now that *I'm* all *she's* got. "Sorry, Mom. I should've called you as soon as I landed."

“Listen, I got in touch with my friend from high school. I haven’t talked to her in years, but when I reached out to her, she said she has a daughter your age. Miso Dan. She goes to the boarding school in Massachusetts but is in Seoul for the summer. I think it’s good to have someone your age there to hang out with.”

I’m speechless. Mom has literally never talked about her past and now she’s rekindling friendships with people she hasn’t spoken to in over twenty years?

“Please, do it for me. It’ll give me some peace of mind, knowing you’re with someone I can trust.” Mom goes right for the jugular. She knows just how to guilt me, even though I’m too old for friend setups.

“Fine,” I concede.

“Great, I’ll send you her contact information. Call her if you need anything, Chloe-yah. Okay?”

“Yeah, sure, okay, Mom. You really have nothing to worry about. Everything has been great so far.”

“What about your halmoni?” she asks. “What do you think of her?”

“Oh, Mom. She is nothing like I imagined her to be like.”

She sighs again. “Chloe-yah, I told you that you might be disappointed by her, that she won’t meet up to your expectations.”

“But that’s just it. It’s better than I expected!”

“Really?” If I’m not mistaken, there’s genuine surprise in her tone. As if she’d expected things to go wrong.

“Not only is she sweet and caring, she’s young and fashionable. They own an entire department store!” I broach

the subject strategically, reminding myself Mom doesn't know I have the Polaroid photo of her and Dad with the logo on the lapel of her shirt.

"They do?" To my disappointment, Mom feigns ignorance. I was hoping she would open up more, now that I'm here with my dad's family. Instead, she's becoming increasingly secretive.

"You didn't know that about Dad?" I give Mom one last chance to open up.

"Your father said he had no family when I met him, remember?"

I let out a silent sigh when I realize Mom is doubling down on her deception. "Yeah, okay. Sure." I've known for some time now that if I want to know anything about my dad or his family, I'm going to have to find out for myself.

A commotion of monitors beeping and doctors clamoring fills the silence in our conversation. A second later, someone yells, "Nurse Chang! We need you!"

"Oh, no, Chloe. I'm so sorry, but I have to go," she says frantically.

"Yeah, sure, Mom. I understand."

"Chloe-yah?"

"Yes, Mom." I perk up.

"Don't forget to call Miso. Okay?"

"Oh. Okay."

She hangs up before saying bye, once again proving that I, Chloe Chang—her daughter—will always come second to her patients.

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## MESSAGES

From: Chang, Chloe

Subject: Long-lost Sachon

Monday, 6:03 PM

I learned from my Korean language app that sachon means cousin. So, hello, Sachon! I guess we are crossing paths. Since your last message said "See you soon," I thought you'd be here by the time I arrived. Halmoni tells me that you'll be in Seoul on Thursday. That's in four -days, which sounds like nothing, but it's more than halfway into my week-long trip. I'm finding that time line almost unbearable. Okay, I just reread that sentence and I cringed. Eager much? Seriously, though, have a safe flight and can't wait to meet you on Thursday!

From: Noh, Jin Young

Subject: RE: Long-lost Sachon

Monday, 6:15 PM

I'm sorry my last message was confusing. I forgot to mention that I am not yet in Seoul, but that I will be soon. My sincerest apologies. I am detained with schoolwork. I will be there in Seoul on Thursday. I am very much looking forward to meeting you then!