

# The Hogwon Murders

MARK HILL



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#### Chapter One

In the time-honored tradition of tourists everywhere, the passengers aboard the Nam Yang Travel Company's "conveniently appointed, executive luxury, deluxe visitor limousine bus," were enthusiastically lapping up the most outlandish rubbish.

"On your right please enjoy to feast your eyes on the wonderful statue of Admiral Yi Sun-shin, the internationally famous sailing captain of Korea," said the pretty young tour guide.

"Mmmm, so that's what Admiral Sunshine looks like," murmured a fat man who had never heard of him before.

"Now we are lucky to be approaching the world-renowned Lotte Department Store, featuring a wonderful selection of high quality imported and locally-made products," said the guide.

"Can we stop there. I want to buy some genuine Korean gifts to take home," asked the English lady who, the year before, had come back from Canada with a suitcase full of plastic Mounties.

"Unfortunately, that will be impossible, due to the time scheduling factor of our tour. But I am ecstatically pleased to tell you that we will luckily be stopping in Itaewon. Then you will understand why all the people of the world agree that Itaewon is a shoppers paradise," answered the tour guide.

"I've heard of that place! They say it's a shoppers paradise," exclaimed the woman in the front seat with the short-term memory problem.

The tour continued in much the same fashion as the bus inched its way through the noise and congestion of downtown Seoul.

When the guide mistook her left for her right in pointing out City Hall, forty-three expensive cameras zoomed, exposed, auto-focused and forever immortalized a perfectly ordinary subway station.

Later, the sight of the 1988 Olympic Park prompted shrieks of imagined recognition from two women who'd seen the same TV mini-series about Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding.

And when the Seoul Tower hove into view, everybody on the bus burst into a spontaneous chorus of "On a Clear Day You Can See Forever."

Except me.

I wasn't singing. I wasn't talking about Nancy and Tonya like I knew them personally. And I wasn't taking pictures. I didn't even have a camera. All I had was a small notebook on which I had written "Seoul - Seeing is Leaving."

#

I thought that was pretty funny, but I scratched it out anyway. Nina would never go for it.

Nina is Nina Van Der Klerk, the 49 going on "don't ask or you're fired" Managing Editor of World Horizons, a travel and lifestyle magazine for the terminally un-hip. She was also the reason I was on that wretched bus.

I'll tell you more about Nina later, but right now you're probably wondering who I am. So I'll tell you.

My name is Calvin Scott. I'm a freelance writer. I write articles for newspapers and magazines in dozens of countries around the world. I've been doing it for the better part of six years.

And you've never heard of me.

Don't worry, I understand. Unless you've been reading Bulgaria Today or the in-flight magazine of Air Burundi, this is probably the first time you've seen my name in print.

Believe me, it's not for lack of trying. I've spent so much money mailing query letters, the post office is seriously thinking about bringing out a Calvin Scott stamp.

That's what you do when you're a freelancer. You write query letters, one or two pages outlining your idea and asking for an assignment. You send them out and, if you're P.J. O'Rourke, the magazine sends you a contract and an expense account. If you're Hunter Thompson, they send you drugs and an airplane ticket.

But if you're Calvin Scott, you get a computer generated form letter lamenting the fact that "our editorial calendar is currently full" or "our needs are well satisfied at this time."

Take this Korea gig. I tried everybody. I sent queries to the newsweeklies offering to do an in-depth report on the possibility of North - South re-unification. I pitched the big men's monthlies a story about life with the American troops along the DMZ. I suggested a piece

on the effect of rapid economic growth on ordinary Korean society to all the major travel mags. I ... well, you get the idea.

Three months later, my bank account was on life support and the pile of "best of luck placing this article elsewhere" letters was making free movement about my living room a distant memory.

I gave up and called Nina.

#

"Calvin!" she'd shrieked in delight after I'd identified myself three times and spelled my last name twice. "I'm so glad that it's you. When that blasted phone rang, I said to myself 'What fresh Hell is this?' You can imagine how delighted I am to hear a familiar voice."

That "fresh Hell" business started over a year ago when Nina saw a movie about Dorothy Parker. She adopted all sorts of Mrs Parker's mannerisms but that's the only one left. Office gossip has it that she's actually forgotten all about Dorothy Parker. The "what fresh Hell" line is now just a Pavlovian response to the ringing of a telephone.

Nina copies everybody.

One time she read the first three chapters of a book about Martha Gellhorn and announced her intention to set out for Spain in support of the Loyalists. Only after I explained that multi-party democracy has been a feature of Spanish life since the mid '70s did she abandon her plans.

I should have let her go.

"I have a story idea I'd like to bounce off you," I said, more to remind her who I was than anything else. The first time I called Nina, we were on the phone for twenty minutes before she realized that she was talking to Calvin the struggling writer and not Calvin the wildly successful fashion designer. I've wondered, ever since, whose name is on her underwear.

"Wonderful, wonderful. That's just what I want to hear. I was saying at our last editorial meeting that we really need something fresh and exciting from that talented young Calvin Scott," Nina lied.

I knew it was a lie. I've been in enough meetings with Nina to know that she only ever says things like "if we put him on the cover, can I meet Brad Pitt?" But discretion is the better part of employment and I was willing to be very discreet.

Besides Nina Van Der Klerk's phoniness is an old story and I was calling to pitch a new one. "It's a little different, which is why I called you first," I said. Nina isn't the only liar in town.

"Smart thinking, Calvin. You know, if it's new and unusual it's

just what World Horizons is all about. Our readers are the type of people who appreciate a story that goes beyond the conventional. We definitely target a cutting-edge demographic," said Nina.

This wasn't exactly a lie, more of a carefully maintained delusion. Nina Van Der Klerk actually believes that her readers are upscale, cosmopolitan types who spend their free time and vast incomes jetting about the world in search of ever more exotic pleasures. In reality, most of them are more interested in gum that won't stick to dental work.

Two years ago when the magazine was sold for the sixth or seventh time (I've lost count), the new owners commissioned an independent audit and market survey. It's been kept hidden from Nina ever since, but I've seen it.

Among other things, the survey shows that the average World Horizons reader is a 73 year old, former factory worker with an annual income in the low five figures. The most popular column in the magazine is Doctor Dave's Health Tips, about which a full 38 percent of readers have requested "more advice about coping with Arthritis." And where the survey asked "What do you like best about World Horizons?" nearly half the respondents wrote that it was delivered free to their rest home every month.

"Have you been reading the magazine regularly?" Nina asked. "We've been doing some pretty exciting stuff. Rumor has it that some of those big name glossies are starting to sit up and take notice."

"Never miss it, Nina," I answered.

That was true. I really do read it. It's my monthly reminder that I'm not quite the biggest failure in the business. Every issue is chock full of articles testifying to the fact that, somewhere in the world, there are writers more desperate for an assignment than me.

"False modesty aside, Calvin," she said, "I must claim credit for the astrology page makeover."

"The his and hers star-scopes were your idea?" I asked.

"Yes. I was watching a deodorant commercial, you know the one where the girl explains about men and women having different needs, when I made the connection. The rest was just details."

I couldn't argue with her there. The jump from smelly armpits to World Horizons magazine isn't as much of a leap as you might think.

"Oh, and you'll be delighted to hear that I found someone to do the Safe Summer Sunbathing piece. Should do good newsstand with that now that the ozone's shrinking or growing or whatever it's doing." she said.

Oh God. Even I'd turned that clunker down. 1,500 words to say "stay indoors; wear a hat." That's what I meant about desperate writers.

Speaking of which, I had a story to pitch.

"Sounds like a winner, Nina. I'm looking forward to reading it," I said, with all the heartfelt sincerity of a man who really needs a job. "And while we're talking about winners, I think I've got another one for you."

"I'm all ears, Calvin. You have my undivided attention," she said. That meant I had about three minutes before she started talking again.

"I want to do a feature-length piece on Korea," I said. "There's an awful lot happening there. You've got the North - South situation, tension along the DMZ, rapid economic growth. It's a big story."

"Calvin! I love it!" Nina gushed. "It's just what the World Horizons reader expects from his favorite magazine. That's what we're known for, you know. Taking something unconventional and giving it that special WH spin."

"So that's a go-ahead then?" I said, hopefully.

"Pretty much, Calvin," said Nina. "One or two small points, but pretty much."

I knew what was coming. I knew it before I picked up the phone. It's the same thing every time. She starts off in love with your idea and you think you're home free. But then she gradually bends it around until it's tired and cliché-ridden enough for WH.

See, Nina's a hack at heart. She won't admit it, but it's true. Oh, she's always prattling on about "challenging the reader" and "pushing the envelope," but it's just talk. Nina believes that if it was fresh and exciting in 1936, it's still good enough for World Horizons.

So we get stories about Italy called Remembrance of Things Pasta, restaurant reviews that start with "to eat or not to eat, that is the question" and opinion pieces that end with "only time will tell."

She's the only editor in the world who makes articles longer. In Nina's hands, a car turns into "two tons of hurtling steel" and a lion becomes a "sinewy feline predator." Policemen are "grim-faced" and children are "angelic." Celebrities, of course, are "glamorous" unless you've never heard of them, in which case they're "up and coming."

Imagine if a thesaurus came to life and started eating your children. Call it Attack of the Killer Adjectives! Part III.

Every year, World Horizons runs a Top Ten Hot Spots feature in the Travel section. Basically, every contributor cuts and pastes 800 words out of his last story and WH passes it off as something new.

Last year, we plotted to get our own back. We re-wrote our stuff until it was loaded to the gunwales with "charming villages," "white sand beaches" and "friendly natives." We packed in every last "fiery sunset," "breathtaking panorama" and "exciting blend of the old and

the new" and waited for Nina to give us hell.

She loved it. She gave every one of us a \$100 bonus.

"So, what 'small points' did you have in mind, Nina," I asked.

"Well, I love your idea about the DMZ. It's got real tension.

Brave American troops facing off against the commie hordes. High voltage stuff, Calvin," she said.

"Actually, most of the troops are South Korean," I said.

"But most of my readers are American."

"Good point. I'll highlight the Americans," I said.

"No," she said. "I want you to highlight the girls."

"Girls? What girls?" I asked, lost.

"They have girls in the army now, you know," said Nina. "Talk about them. Tell us what life's like for a pretty young girl, miles from home, surrounded by hundreds of young, hunky men. Find out what they get up to on those late-night missions."

I guess when I told you about Nina, I forgot to mention her deep and abiding passion for gratuitous sex and sensationalist pandering.

Nina was probably quite the babe in her youth, which occurred shortly after the start of the Boer War, and still better looking than most women her age. She's tall, thin, well-toned and still has a pretty decent set of legs.

But she's well past the age of turning men's heads and no amount of ever-shortening mini-skirts and ever-lengthening aerobic workouts is going to change that.

So to make up for the lack of sex in her personal life, she adds huge dollops of it to the pages of World Horizons magazine.

"Nina, don't you think "Hot Babes of the Second Infantry" is more Playboy than WH?" I said.

No answer.

"Nina?"

"...cond Infantry," I heard her murmur. "Sorry, Calvin. Just writing that one down." This wasn't going well, even by Nina's standards.

"All right, I'll see what I can do. Is that it," I said. Press on kid, you're broke.

"Give me something about the food."

"Ahhh, Nina!" I wailed. "You know what I'm like with food. I don't especially enjoy eating it. I can't stand reading about it. And I'm pretty much incapable of writing about it."

"You're such a philistine. You should be looking forward to this. Korean food is really quite good," she said.

"You've tried it?" I asked.

"Once. Something called Bippy-bop or some such thing. A rice dish," she said.

"How was it?"

"Hard to say. I don't really like rice," Nina answered helpfully. "Look, talk to Charlie Burke before you leave. He'll fill you in."

Charlie Burke is World Horizons' Food Editor. He also writes a column imaginatively titled Dining Out with Charlie Burke. He's nice enough for a guy who can tell you what paprika is without looking it up. Still, I didn't see much point in spending an hour with a man who thinks "brash" and "adventurous" are perfectly acceptable adjectives for cheese.

Come to think of it, Charlie probably wouldn't be too thrilled to see me either. He almost choked when he learned that I really have no idea where flour comes from.

"That's not really the point, Nina," I tried. "This is supposed to be a look at a country in transition. It's not a recipe column."

"So work it in," she said.

"Work it in?"

"Exactly," she said. "Give us the information-heavy journalistic stuff if you want to. But break it up with some light entertainment. Blend the two together."

"So what you want," I said sarcastically, "is something like 'with a million North Korean soldiers lined up along the border, poised to attack, trendy Seoul-ites are enjoying tender morsels of succulent roast duck?'"

"Oh, Calvin," Nina gushed. "That's exquisite. You're a miracle worker. The contract is in the mail."

#

Six days later I was strapped into seat 34B on Korean Air flight 749 to Seoul, suffering through what the Captain, in deep, fatherly tones, described as "mild turbulence."

Mild, hell. Someone must have written "shake well before using" on the fuselage. I felt like Sam Shepard in *The Right Stuff* or James Bond in, ... well, actually, every James Bond movie since Sean Connery quit.

I'd been listening to the Golden Oldies show with DJ Larry McKay on Korean Air's in-flight radio, but when we hit the tornado (sorry, "mild turbulence") I turned it off. I didn't want to die to the sound of *The Captain and Tennile*.

In case you haven't figured it out, I'm a touch apprehensive about flying.

Okay, scared shitless.

Yeah, I've heard all the arguments. In the jet airplane, modern science has given us a safe, efficient way to travel the globe.



Statistically, flying is the safest way to travel. You're more likely to die in your bathtub than in an airplane. Blah, blah, blah.

Well, let me remind you that modern science also gave us the eight-track tape player and the K-Tel Veg-O-Matic. Statistically, one in ten adults thinks Elvis is alive. And you rarely turn on your TV set to see rescue workers picking through the charred wreckage of a downed bathtub looking for the flight recorder.

All this was racing through my mind as I sat there looking at the TV screen at the front of the cabin. It showed a computer-generated map of our route with a little red plane to indicate our current position. I remember hoping that the Captain was saving his game regularly in case we crashed.

The screen also popped out interesting measurements like speed, altitude, direction, local funeral homes, and so forth.

At one point, the outside temperature went up from -50 degrees to -16 in less than half an hour. The stewardess claimed that everything was all right, but I wasn't buying it. There was only one plausible explanation -- the engines were on fire.

By now the turbulence had stopped, which worried me even more. It meant we were about to crash.

If you don't believe me, listen carefully next time you see an air crash survivor being interviewed on the TV news. They always say "We had no idea anything was wrong. It was a perfectly smooth flight. Then, all of a sudden, ..."

I pay attention to things like that because, deep down in my heart of hearts, I know that I'm going to die in a plane crash.

Whenever the newspapers report on plane crashes in foreign countries they always say the same thing -- "An Air Whatever jetliner carrying a hundred million passengers crashed into a mountain yesterday killing all aboard, including one Canadian."

That's going to be me. I know it.

And I know that one day, many years after my untimely death, some mountain climber will reach the peak of that mountain where he will find a tombstone marking my grave. Etched into the granite will be the words

REST IN PEACE

Here lies Calvin Scott

"including one Canadian"

#

Back on the tour bus, I'd pretty much dozed off. I'd resigned myself to wasting the 45,000 Won I'd spent on the tour. Now I just wanted to get off and go home.

Won, by the way, is Korean money. It trades at 796 to the American dollar according to the sophisticated, reliable computers at my bank or 800 to the dollar according to my equally reliable but somewhat less sophisticated method of comparing Time and Newsweek cover prices. It also lends itself to all sorts of lame jokes.

"How much is it?"

"Twenty Won."

"21?"

"No, twenty Won."

"Who's on first?"

"Shut up."

The tour was nearly finished so it was just as well that the guy next to me dropped his copy of The Traveler's Guide to Disease and Infection on my foot and woke me up.

He was about forty, dressed completely in polyester and sporting a T-shirt that said "It's hard to be humble when you're purrfekt," which, I'm sure, breaks them up wherever he goes.

He was reading the Korean language section of one of the better-known guidebooks.

"I've noticed," he said, in the weighty tone of a man about to divulge his one original thought for the year, "that most of the words that Korean people use aren't really words at all."

"Huh," I said.

"I mean, they don't just have a different word for everything. They actually make up words. Like, I could understand it if they called a 'palace' a 'bus', say. But 'tae-gwol'," he said, looking at his book. "That's not even a word. I think they just do it to confuse us. You know, 'here comes that American guy -- tae-gwol, ha, ha, ha.' I tell ya, next year I'm going to Australia."

I was about to do the good people of Australia a favor and stab him to death with my mechanical pencil, when our pretty young guide announced that "our exciting tour of the beautiful city of Seoul has now reached its dramatic conclusion." Everybody stood up and started to leave.

I tried to bolt off the bus, but a herd of elephants blocked the aisle. Most of them were wearing running shoes and "active-wear" to disguise themselves as human tourists, but I wasn't fooled.

But I was trapped. There were elephants to the front of me and elephants to the rear. I was stuck.

I was bobbing my head from side to side, looking for an escape route, when I saw her. She wasn't the prettiest girl I'd ever seen, but she would definitely make the semi-finals. I figured her for about 25, which meant she was somewhere between 14 and 97. Her blond hair was tied back with a burgundy ribbon, exposing a face that made you

want to dedicate the rest of your life to making sure nothing bad ever happened to her. She had big, wide eyes, an intelligent mouth and the most bewitching nose since Elizabeth Montgomery.

I caught her eye and smiled. She smiled back. Like me, she was trapped in the herd with no way out. We looked like two compact cars stuck in a convoy of long-distance trucks.

She looked back again. I smiled and mouthed the words "Help me, I'm trapped."

"Take a deep breath," she mouthed back.

"There's no air."

"I'll pass some back to you."

By this time, the herd had moved far enough down the bus for her to get off. I was about four elephants back and reckoned I had about fifteen minutes to go.

I spent it trying to figure out which way she would go once she left the bus. I wasn't going to follow her, you understand. That would be awfully high school. I merely intended to take a walk, a very fast walk, in her direction. If she happened to be there, well, you can't fight fate, can you?

The next fifteen minutes took two hours to pass, but eventually the exit came into view.

And so did she. She was watching the exiting passengers, and smiled when she saw me. I reacted with casual aplomb, which is to say that my knees turned to marshmallows and it was all I could do to keep from drooling.

"Hi," I said, getting off the bus and using up one of my best lines.

"Hi," she said.

"A lot of ahhh ... large people on the bus, huh?" I said, searching for a polite euphemism.

"Substantial," she said, topping me.

"Full-figured," I countered with a chuckle.

"Rubenesque," she said, laughing more than she needed to.

"I'm Calvin Scott," I said.

"Cheryl Haynes," she answered, pushing a stray strand of blond hair back over a very nibble-able ear.

"Good to meet you," I said, it being a touch early in the relationship for a formal proposal of marriage.

#

She knew of a coffee shop nearby, so we set out, joking.

"Is this an absolutely, wonderful, world-famous coffee shop," I asked, in the manner of our erstwhile guide.

"Oh, yes," Cheryl replied. "When we arrive you will see why the entire population of the universe agrees that Seoul is the number one heaven for coffee people."

This was going so well.

"What's that, ahh, thing on your bag," asked Cheryl, pointing to a ghastly piece of garbage I'd tied to my knapsack.

"This," I said, "is a Crystal Pyramid of Universal Power."

"Crystal?" she asked.

"Plexiglas, actually," I answered. "Apparently, it works just as well."

"Apparently," said Cheryl.

"According to my travel agent, yes," I said. "She claims that the pyramid's shape attracts the positive forces flowing through the cosmos and repels the negative ones."

"Who's your travel agent?" she asked. "Shirley Maclaine?"

"Just about," I said. "Her name is Tawny Sky."

"And she gave you that."

"Yeah," I said. "I asked for travel insurance and this was the best she had."

"It sounds like she cares about you, anyway," said Cheryl.

"Oh she does. She just doesn't feel right sending me out into the world without a little bit of new age junk attached to some part of my body," I said. "Of course, with Tawny Sky's unique booking system, I probably need all the protection I can get."

"What do you mean?" Cheryl asked.

"Well, Tawny's obsessed with saving her clients money. She's always trying to slice ten dollars off my trip by sending me to London via Vladivostok or placing me onto what she calls 'competitively priced regional carriers'," I said.

"I'll give you a good example. For this trip, before I put my foot down and switched to Korean Air, she actually had me booked on something called Air Bob."

"Sounds dangerous," said Cheryl.

"Not according to Tawny. She claimed that they have an accident-free record," I said. "Of course, she forgot to mention the fact that Air Bob has only been serving the traveling public since a week last Thursday."

"Sounds like you travel a lot?" she said.

That was my cue. That was the "tell me about yourself" question. Normally, I answer it pretty honestly. But normally, I'm not walking down the street with Cheryl Haynes. It was a tough call.

In the end, I compromised. I resisted the temptation to make myself sound like Woodward and Bernstein. On the other hand, I might have neglected to tell her that the impressive sounding World Report,

where I am a regular contributor, is actually the quarterly newsletter of the International Dental Association. And it may have slipped my mind that Wings Over America is not, as it sounds, a high-end travel mag, but rather a monthly magazine produced solely for the enjoyment of the Butte, Montana Airplane Modeler's Club.

#

It was a short walk to the coffee shop, but easily long enough to cover the highlights of my "career." We arrived, sat down and ordered two cups of weak, four dollar, instant coffee. Then it was my turn.

"So what do you do?" I asked.

"I work at a hogwon," she answered.

"A hog - what?"

"A hogwon."

"Something to do with raising pigs?" I guessed.

"No," she said. "It's a Korean word. It's sort of a cross between a private language school and an exam tutoring outfit. There are literally tens of thousands of them all over the country. I teach English at a hogwon here in Seoul."

Cheryl Haynes turned out to be smart as well as gorgeous. She had recently graduated from some American university I'd never heard of with a degree in Russian and East European Studies and had been accepted at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. She'd taken a teaching job in Seoul to pay off her student loan.

"Can you do that?" I asked. "Do you make that much money?"

"Easily," she said. "On my salary, and with a couple of private classes, I'm able to send home nearly \$2,000 every month."

"But I heard that Seoul was really expensive," I asked.

"It is," she said. "But the hogwon provides your apartment, so there's no rent to pay. Food's a little pricey, but it's not crazy. Aside from that, there's not too much to spend money on."

"How did you get the job?" I asked.

"Oh, anybody can get a hogwon job. All you need is to be a native English speaker with a university degree."

"So you have an English degree as well," I asked.

"No, no. You only need the degree to qualify for a work visa. Nobody cares what your major is," she said.

"So what your saying is that any twit with a degree in Fine Art or Film Studies or whatever can come over here, get a job and clear two grand a month," I asked.

"Yes," she said. "The hogwons are so desperate for native English speakers, they'll take anybody."

"How can they be desperate?" I asked. "It sounds like such a

sweet deal."

"Not exactly," said Cheryl. "Most of the apartments are dumps. The work is pretty boring. Nearly everybody has a long commute to work and a teaching schedule that starts in the morning and doesn't end until night time. As well, the guys running the hogwons range from the ethically challenged to out-and-out crooks. It's pretty common for a hogwon to go bankrupt and the director to vanish with everyone's pay. Then there's the worst thing of all about this job. It's in Korea."

"I take it you don't like the place?" I asked.

"No. It's dirty. It's boring. It's ugly. And the people are rude." said Cheryl, emphatically.

"Now don't beat around the bush," I laughed. "If you don't like it, just say so."

"You know, I was pretty open-minded when I came here. And I've traveled enough not to expect the whole world to look like the U.S.." she said. "But I've been here for seven months and I am yet to find anything in Korea that's worth crossing the street for. And that bus tour didn't change my mind"

"So who comes here" I asked.

"Basically people with big student loans to pay, unemployable losers, and the insane."

"And they stay for the money?" I asked.

"Not always," said Cheryl. "You'd be amazed at the number of people who just pack up and go home. They collect their pay, say goodnight, and disappear. The next morning, their students are sitting waiting for class to start while their teacher is a mile above ground watching the in-flight movie."

"You know," I said, "this is pretty interesting stuff. Might make a good article."

That was a lie. No magazine, not even the ones I write for, would run a story about a bunch of nobodies doing a boring job at the edge of nowhere. But I was prepared to research this unsaleable story to death if it meant hanging around with Cheryl Haynes for a bit longer.

"You know, you're probably right," said Cheryl. "I bet a lot of people wonder what it's like for English teachers over here."

No surprise there. Everybody, no matter what they do, figures their life is pretty darn interesting. Say to a complete dweeb, "hey, I'm thinking of writing a 4,000-word feature about people who do nothing but sit at home and watch TV all day" and ninety-nine people out of a hundred will buy it. They'll tell everyone they know to look for their name in next month's Esquire.

Cute and smart as she was, Cheryl Haynes was no different.

"It could be a bit of a pain," I said. "I'd be following you around,

asking questions, taking notes. You might get sick of me."

"If I do, I'll let you know," she said, smiling.

## Chapter Two

The next morning I was up, showered and dressed by seven o'clock. I felt like a kid with a new bike.

Cheryl had given me a map to her hogwon and we'd arranged to meet later in the day. But first I had another meeting. I had to touch base with Cam Fox.

Cam's a photographer. He thinks he's a war photographer, but the closest he's been to a war zone is the subscription department at Soldier of Fortune magazine.

A tall, husky fellow with deep-set, wary eyes, he wears surplus army clothes all the time, drives an all-black Jeep which, he claims, features "stealth technology" and lives in a big old house chosen for its ability to "withstand a four kiloton blast."

He owns a photographic firm called Lensmasters and gets all hot and bothered when I tell him it sounds like a discount eyeglass shop. His business card reads "Cam Fox -- Tactical Photographer" but "for security reasons" carries no mailing address.

It does have a phone number, though. When you call him, Cam claims to be talking to you via satellite "from the field." He'll tell you to speak up because "we're on the uplink and I'm about to lose the bird."

Still, I work with Cam Fox whenever I get the chance. He may be a second-rate photographer and his Tom Clancy meets Robert Capa lifestyle does get annoying at times, but he has one talent that sets him apart.

Cam Fox is a world-class fixer. He can get you anything anytime, get you into or out of anywhere, and bribe or sweet-talk anybody.

The world is full of guys who can take a picture, but if you want whiskey in Saudi Arabia, hookers in the Vatican, or a taxi in New York, you need Cam Fox.

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We'd arranged to meet at Namdaemun Gate. Getting there called for me to figure out Seoul's subway system. If you've ever scaled the north face of the Eiger or sailed up the Amazon in a rubber dingy, you'll have some idea of what I was up against.

Subways are supposed to be easy to navigate. In fact, experienced travelers (defined as that rare breed of people who can find a brothel, a black market money changer, and a reasonably honest taxi driver within 24 hours of clearing immigration) will tell you that if you're lost in a strange city you should head for the subway.

Subways are all color coded. All you need is the name of your destination in the local language and the ability to read a simple map and tell red from blue from yellow, and you're all set.

Not in Seoul.

The Korea National Tourism Corporation guidebook *Traveler's Korea* claims that "station names, ticket windows and transfer signs are all clearly marked in English" which is the biggest lie since David Hasselhoff said he could act.

The guidebook also says that there are four subway lines. This may or may not be true. I never did find out.

The maps in the subway cars show five lines. The maps on the station walls show six or eight lines depending on which station you're in. Some maps also show proposed, future, and may-or-may-not-get-built lines as well.

If that weren't confusing enough, the colors change. The number of lines varies on different maps from yellow to light brown to bright orange. The blue line often turns gray without warning. This is particularly troubling as the yellow line occasionally turns blue.

It goes without saying that the colors on the direction signs are never the same as the lines they purport to represent.

And all subway employees have been taught to say, in beautiful English, "may I help you." As this is all they can say or understand, it just adds to the frustration.

#

Eventually, I made it to Namdaemun Gate, although I could have sworn that I got there via Pyongyang.

When you see it in pictures, Namdaemun Gate looks like the beautifully restored 14th century city gate that it is. The photos are usually close-ups and you can easily imagine it surrounded by acres of carefully tended gardens with, perhaps, the occasional monk gliding by to add a sense of awe to the place.

In reality, Namdaemun Gate is stuck on a concrete traffic island, surrounded by a two-lane, high-speed roundabout. The only thing gliding by are hundreds of speeding Hyundais and the occasional clapped-out city bus.

When I arrived, Cam Fox was easy to spot. As always, his wardrobe lived up to his name. Looking sharp in U.S. Marine jungle boots, khaki pants and a Desert Storm jacket, he blended in like Nancy Reagan in a crack house.

"Hi Cam. How are things at Lensmasters?" I asked. "Still running that two-for-one deal on bifocals?"



"Man, this is my lucky day," Cam laughed. "I'm standing here waiting for Calvin Scott and, whaddaya know, Billy Crystal shows up."

"Ahhh, you know I'm just kidding," I said. "I wouldn't ask for you if I didn't love ya."

"Lucky for you I was available. This isn't my regular kind of work you know." Cam always says that. He'll do any assignment he's offered so long as you pretend that it's a one-shot while he's between wars.

"So how do you like Korea so far?" I asked.

"It's changed a lot since the war."

"Don't tell me you we're here then?" I asked. Cam's not much older than me.

"Covered it for UPI. I could tell you stories," said Cam.

"Well, it'll be easier this time," I said. "Nina wants stuff from the DMZ. Pretty girls and handsome guys with their shirts off."

"What are we shooting," asked Cam, "a travel piece or a Boyz2Men video?"

"You know Nina."

"All right," Cam said. "I'll get on it and get back to you. Where are you staying?"

I gave him a slip of paper with the name and number of my hotel on it.

"Not that place?" Cam said. "You're being taken for a ride. I'm at the ..."

"Stop!" I yelled. "Don't tell me. I don't want to know. Every time we work together, I settle into a perfectly nice, reasonably priced hotel only to find out that you've got yourself a bigger room with free drinks and dancing girls for half the price."

Like I said, Cam's a fixer.

#

I wasn't about to attack the subway system twice in one day so I took a cab to Cheryl's hogwon. The only world-class thing about Seoul is its traffic congestion so I spent an hour sitting in a beaten up old Hyundai Stellar, sucking in carbon monoxide and listening to the world's lousiest pop music on the world's crummiest car stereo.

Still, the traffic congestion was probably a good thing. Korea is number three in the world for traffic accidents and number five for fatalities. If nothing else, I figured I could probably use up half my assigned 5,000 words with traffic jokes alone.

Q: What do Koreans call someone with an accident free record?

A: A tourist.

Did you hear about the Korean who bought a used car? He bought it from a little old lady who only drove it on Hyundais.

Did you know that Korean life insurance companies don't care whether or not you smoke? But if you fail your driving test they give you a 40 percent discount.

Conversation overheard at a Korean funeral. One pallbearer to another: "Actually, I never really knew the guy. I'm just here to get my hood ornament back."

Fortunately (for you) the cab ride came to an end so I stopped making up jokes.

Cheryl had written Star Hogwon in Korean han-gul letters on a piece of paper for me. Han-gul is a bit like Chinese but easier to read and not so funky looking. I was comparing the characters on the paper with the hundred million or so signs around me when a little man with big, wide-eyes stopped two inches in front of my nose and bowed.

"May I help you," he said.

"Do you speak English?" I asked, in case he was a subway worker.

"I do. Where are you going?" he asked.

"I'm looking for the Star Hogwon," I said, showing him the piece of paper.

"No," he said. "Star Hogwon is no good. You must follow me."

"I can't," I said. "My mother told me never to go with strange Koreans."

"Come with me," he said. "I'm looking for a few good men."

"What are you?" I asked. "The U.S. Marines?"

He held up two hands with a business card wedged in between. "Chong Won-lyul," it read. "Director -- Happy English Language Institute."

"Today you are lucky teacher," he said. "I have rescued you from Star Hogwon and saved you from an unhappy life."

"Thank you Mr Chong," I said. "But I'm not an English teacher."

"Then you are extremely fortunate today," he said. "Thanks to the fine reputation of the Happy English Language Institute, an additional quantity of students have enrolled in our school. I am therefore seeking a qualified applicant to fill a teaching position."

"But Mr Chong," I protested, "I'm hardly qualified."

"You are a native English speaker?"

"Yes," I said. "But ..."

"Perfect!" he said. Cheryl was right.

"Look, Mr Chong. I'm sorry, but I'm not interested in teaching English. I'm only here to meet my friend," I said.

"Your friend is a native English speaker?"

"Yes, she's American," I said.

"Well, that's simply wonderful," beamed Mr Chong. "Bring her also. The more the merrier, I always say. Fortunately, I happen to have

two positions available. How lucky for you."

"I don't think she's interested."

"Don't worry about that," he said. "We have many lovely western girls working at the Happy English Language Institute. What kind of girl do you like?"

By this time I'd pretty much decided that the only way to get away from Mr Chong was to kill him. I was working out a method when I caught sight of Cheryl Haynes coming down the street.

"Let him go, Mr Chong," she said, pushing him aside and leading me away.

"Did you have any trouble getting here?" she asked.

"No," I lied. "Piece of cake. I took the subway. Of course, I didn't reckon on meeting Mr Chong."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Well, he just doesn't give up," I said. "He's like a pit bull."

"Actually, as hogwon directors go, he's a lightweight. Wait 'til you meet the guy I work for," Cheryl said. "Come on. I'll show you the way."

#

"The building is a bit noisy, but you'll get used to it," said Cheryl as we approached her hogwon. She was half right.

It was noisy in the same way that Dante's Inferno was warm. But it seemed like the only way I'd ever get used to it would be to puncture my eardrums with chopsticks.

There were screaming children everywhere. Bad music emanated from the piano school on the third floor. The cheesy soundtrack to the latest Steven Seagal action flick spilled out from the video screening room. The Taekwondo school down the hall added in a variety of "huuh!" and "yaahh!" sounds. And on top of the whole cacophonous mess, from the aerobics studio there came the over-amplified rhythmic beat of a disco version of California Dreamin".

"How do you stand this?" I yelled.

"If you think it smells bad now," Cheryl answered, "you should be here in the winter when all the windows are closed."

Cheryl had misunderstood my question, but it wasn't hard to see why. Despite the open windows (both of them), the air in the building was old enough to qualify for the seniors' discount. The fly and mosquito-infested bathrooms were pumping out the aroma of the two things that bathrooms are best known for. And there was something else I couldn't quite identify.

"Is there a laundry or something in this building?" I asked.

"No," answered Cheryl. "Why?"

"It smells like dirty socks," I said. "What is it?"

"That delightful fragrance," said Cheryl, "is the unique scent of Star Hogwon."

"What does it come from?"

"A million and one things," she answered. "Dozens of kids, some of whom aren't too clean; spilled food; dampness from a leaky water cooler; bugs; all sorts of things."

"Don't they clean the place?" I asked.

"Actually," Cheryl said with a resigned shrug, "no."

"Never?"

"Not really," she said. "The director's wife sometimes picks garbage up off the floor, and now and then she takes a wet cloth to the chalkboard. But I can honestly say that I've never seen soap and water applied to any part of this hogwon."

"Are you sure this is a hogwon, and not a secret army chemical weapons plant?" I asked. "If you bottled this air and blew it across the DMZ it would definitely keep the North Koreans from dropping in unannounced."

Cheryl took me into the office and I saw instantly that Star Hogwon was not only loud and smelly, but ugly too. I've seen some dumps in my time (my apartment springs to mind) but that place was in a league of its own.

There were six desks in the center of the room, each one a slightly different height and each covered in coffee cup stain rings. The director's desk was at the back of the room, but I don't know if it was covered in stains. In fact I don't really know if it was a desk at all. It may have been a self-standing junk pile. I only assumed it was a desk because there was a ripped black vinyl chair behind it.

There were ashtrays everywhere, each one filled with used tissue paper and candy wrappers. For the convenience of smokers, a line of cigarette butt-filled soft drink bottles lined the window ledge.

Along one wall were three identical green picture frames. One held an upside-down map of the United States. The second, a Korean flag. The third a carefully hand-painted sign. "Our Mottow," it said. "To always be teaching of English incorporating diligents and kindness every time."

The office was packed with people of all ages. Young children were screaming just to make noise. Teenagers were yelling at each other from across the room. And adults were chatting in the traditional Korean way which meant they were sitting six inches apart and yelling at the tops of their voices. There was a television in the corner, but because this was, after all, a business, the volume had been turned down to a level only slightly higher than that of a space shuttle on lift-off.

Not exactly the Ivy League, I thought.

#

"Let me introduce you to the gang," Cheryl said as she shot her hand into a cluster of people and pulled out what looked like a bundle of Salvation Army rejected clothing.

Closer examination revealed it to be a person, a young man to be exact. He was tall, but he made up for it with the worst posture since Quasimodo. He had a scruffy beard and long hair tied back in a ponytail. His jeans looked like they hadn't been washed since the Nixon administration. And hanging off what passed for his shoulders he wore some kind of a circa-1974 ski parka that had been patched up in places with gray duct tape.

All told, he looked like a cast member from a Methadone Clinic Theater Company production of An American Werewolf in London.

"Calvin," said Cheryl, "I'd like you to meet Dave Stevens. Dave, this is Calvin Scott."

"Hi," I said.

"Hello - Calvin," said Dave Stevens. "It's - very - nice - to - meet - you - today."

He sounded like a character out of an old cowboy and Indian movie. You know the type. John Wayne rides up and asks the old Indian where the cattle rustlers went. The chief, who looks suspiciously like Rock Hudson in war paint, replies "white - man - with - forked - tongue - he - go - that - way." Dave Stevens talked like that. I tossed Cheryl a questioning glance.

"Dave's been here a while," she answered.

"Good to meet you to," I said, offering my hand. "How long have you been here?"

"Pardon - me - please," said Dave. "What - did - you - say?"

"I - said - how - long - have - you - been - here?" Good heavens. He not only couldn't speak normal English, he couldn't understand it either.

"I - come - to - Korea," answered Big Chief Running Dave, "many - many - long - time - ago. I - come - Korea - more - two - years."

"I don't suppose you wrote that sign?" I said, pointing to "Our Mottow."

"Please - one - more - time - speak."

"Just kidding," I said. "I mean ... Where - are - you - from?"

"I - come - Korea - from - America. far - far - away," he answered.

As far as I could tell, old Dave was still far far away. Fortunately

he had a class and had to leave (or rather, me - go - teach - students - now.).

#

"Hey, Albert! Wait," yelled Cheryl into the stream of humanity flowing past the door.

A tall, handsome guy who looked like a cross between James Spader and that kid who used to be on Family Ties detached himself from the stream, shook my hand and introduced himself as Albert Gossage.

"I didn't know we were getting a new teacher," he said.

"Oh, Calvin's not a teacher," said Cheryl. "He's a writer."

"Writer, huh?" said Albert Gossage. "Friend of mine's a writer, maybe you know him -- Bob Woodward?"

"You know Bob Woodward?" I said, floored.

"Oh yeah, helped him out a few times. Of course, I made him keep my name out of it," said Gossage.

"You must be Deep Throat," I said, laughing.

"No, not me," said Gossage. "I know who he is, but I'm afraid that's classified."

"But even the government doesn't know who Deep Throat is," I said, confused.

"You think the government doesn't know," he said. "But there are a lot of things we know that we prefer John Q. Public to think we don't know."

"So you're with the U.S. government, then," I asked.

"I didn't say that," said Gossage in his most cheesy Steve Trevor to Wonder Woman voice.

I shot Cheryl a glance which she answered by raising her eyes skyward and shrugging her shoulders slightly. Clearly Albert Gossage had some sort of deep-seated need to make himself seem powerful and well-connected. I'm no psychiatrist but there was no doubt in my mind that he was in serious need of help.

Well he wasn't going to get it from me. This was just too much fun to pass up. I started off gently.

"So what brings you to Korea, Albert? The money?"

"No, not me," he said. "Since Uncle Bunky died and left me the trust fund, I've had more money than I know what to do with."

"Ahhh, so maybe you have another reason for being here," I said with all the subtlety of a water buffalo in heat. "Some sort of hush-hush thing, maybe?"

"I can't tell you much, what with you being media and all," he said. "Let's just say that Langley likes to know what the North Koreans

are up to."

"Langley, eh," I mused. "I wish I'd known you when I was covering the space shuttle explosion. I'll bet you know what really happened."

"I did some consulting work on that one," said Gossage. "All I can say, and even here I'm saying too much, is that if you look at the videotape, you'll see a tiny explosion seconds before the big one."

"Funny," I said, "I saw the tape on the news but I never saw a small explosion."

"Of course not, they edited it out."

"Who?"

"The people who control the media."

"And you know who they are?" I asked. This was just too easy.

"Certainly," said Gossage, "but there's no way I can tell you."

Cheryl was just barely holding on to her composure. She threw me a "stop before I crack up" look, but I pressed on.

"It's just so hard to believe," I said in the voice of a TV housewife who's just discovered that new Sudso! really does get clothes whiter.

"Let me ask you this then," said Gossage. "How do you explain the fact that Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw and Peter Jennings were in exactly the same city, at exactly the same time, no less than 42 times in the last year alone?"

"Maybe they were chasing exactly the same news story," I guessed.

"That's what they want you to think," said Gossage. "But if it's all so sweet and innocent, how did the small explosion get edited off the space shuttle tape?"

Cheryl just lost it. Her jaw was still clenched shut but the giggles found their way out through the gaps in her teeth, air started escaping from her ears and nostrils, and her whole body began to shake.

"Something the matter, Cheryl?" asked Albert who just didn't seem to get it.

"Well, I was just, ahhh, laughing at, you know ... Miss Park's T-shirt," said Cheryl recovering suddenly and pointing at a young Korean girl who'd just walked in.

As Albert Gossage made his departure (no doubt off to save western democracy as we know it), the Korean girl said something to Cheryl. I didn't catch what she said, though. I was preoccupied with reading her T-shirt.

"Western Lifestyle of America," It read in bold pink lettering on purple polyester. "Big Fun Hot Sexy Time."

Well you couldn't argue with that.

#

Cheryl was about to introduce us, but the girl didn't wait. Bowing slightly and offering her hand, she said, "Hello, how are you? What is your name, please?"

"Calvin Scott."

"My name is Miss Park. I am Star Hogwon English teacher."

She was pretty in the way all Korean girls are pretty, which is to say she could have been Dracula hiding behind six pounds of carefully applied cosmetics.

"Really?" I said. "An English teacher."

"Yes," she said. "Our Motto is to always be teaching of English incorporating diligence and kindness every time."

"Well it's a pleasure to meet you, Miss Park," I said.

"Now I must go to the teaching of my classroom students," she said with pride. "When you are free, we can have English conversation."

"She's an English teacher?" I said, turning to Cheryl.

"Sort of," Cheryl answered. "All the hogwons have girls like her. They only know about twenty words of English, but they work for very little money. The hogwons hire them to keep the little kids busy. They recite the alphabet about a hundred times a day, sing a few simple English songs and generally act as glorified baby-sitters. The hogwon tosses in a foreigner for ten minutes every few days so the kids go home and tell their parents that they're learning English from a native speaker. Like everything else in the hogwon business, it's a scam."

"Nice T-shirt though," I said.

"She always wears stuff like that," said Cheryl. "She thinks it makes her look comfortable with English. We call her The Fashionable Miss Park. She spends every won she earns on overpriced Konglish."

"Konglish?"

"Yeah. It really means Hong Kong English," said Cheryl, "but it's all over Korea too. People out here think American things are glamorous and exciting, so manufacturers put English words on their products to make them look Western. Some of it's pretty funny."

"Give me an example," I said.

"Well, let me see," said Cheryl, thinking. "Okay, the front of the gas stove in my apartment says 'Nice Cooking Joys of Home' and the fridge says 'Happy food with designers feeling'."

"What's it supposed to mean?"

"Beats me, but it's everywhere. The best Konglish is on clothing, but you'll see some good examples on fancy stationery and on the backs of schoolbags. There's one kind of T-shirt you see all over town.



It's some kind of Nike rip-off. It says "Just Do Me" in huge white letters."

"Oh, I like that," I said. "I think I'll get one of those for my editor."

"Well, there's the odd thing. It's only made in children's sizes."

"That's hilarious," I said. "Reminds me of that old joke -- I used to be a pedophile but somebody stole my bicycle."

"That's awful," said Cheryl. "Come on, I'll introduce you to the others."

"Others?" I said. "Dave and Albert aren't the only teachers?"

"Oh no," said Cheryl. "We're just the normal ones. Now I'm going to show you the weirdos."

#

Wendel Clemker looked like, well ... a Wendel. He was a tall young man with no chin and a forehead that seemed to have been installed backward.

But he made up for his lack of physical charm with the whiniest voice this side of Ross Perot and an annoying habit of cleaning his ears with a ball-point pen and periodically sniffing the end.

Wendel was sitting in a small room off the main office, smoking his way through a pack of Omar Sharif cigarettes, and gazing intently at a small black portable computer that looked capable of space flight and probably cost a million dollars.

"So you're a writer," he said, looking up from his computer and at me by way of Cheryl's legs.

"It beats working."

"You must have quite a set-up then?" asked Wendel.

"Set-up?"

"System," he said. "What's your system like?"

"I don't understand," I said. This was getting altogether too weird.

"Computer system," he said. "You do have a computer, don't you?"

"Oh yes," I said.

"What kind of computer?"

"A personal computer," I answered.

"No, no, no" he said, annoyed. "I mean, is it a ... Pentium? or ..."

"Pentium?" I asked, puzzled.

"Pentium processor," he said. "Is it a Pentium processor?"

"I don't think so."

"What kind of processor is it?" asked Wendel.

"It's a word processor," I said.

Wendel just looked at me like I was only marginally smarter than Loni Anderson and sighed.

This was going nowhere so I tried to change the subject. "What are you doing there?" I asked, pointing at the Enterprise shuttle craft.

"Surfing the Net," said Wendel.

"Ahh, I know that one," I said, trying to lighten things up a little. "Wasn't that on the B-side of California Girls?"

Wendel looked blank.

"Sorry," I said. "Just a little computer humor. You were saying."

"I'm accessing my Internet account," he said. "I don't suppose you're wired?"

"Wired?"

"Do you have an E-mail address?" he asked.

"Yes, actually, I do," I said. "I'll give it to you." I picked up a pen and a scrap of paper and wrote:

calvin@home.inbed.asleep

"Odd looking address," said Wendel without even a flicker of a smile, "but we'll give it a try." This guy must have had his sense of humor surgically removed.

As he bent over his keyboard and got ready to type, I snatched back the piece of paper. "It's just a joke," I said.

"Let me see," he said, taking back the paper and examining it for best part of the afternoon. "Yes, of course. A joke. At home, in bed, sleeping. I see. A joke. Yes, that is certainly quite funny. Quite funny indeed."

I could tell we were going to be the best of friends.

#

Jennifer Downs was a bit older than the other teachers. She wore her brown hair tied back in a severe bun, too much makeup, and a pair of Eisenhower-era reading glasses secured with a thin cord. She looked like a high school librarian.

Actually, she looked like a porno movie actress playing a high school librarian. I half expected her to toss out some cheesy line like "I can't give you the book, but maybe I can give you something else." Then that tacky string music that you only ever hear in porno movies would fill the room and we'd all be treated to half an hour of soft-focus oral sex. Call it *The Hogwon Was Hog-Wild!* VHS. 96 minutes. Color. Please rewind.

"Nice to meet you, Calvin," she said, shaking me out of my little daydream.

"Yes, yes, aahh, me too," I said. "I ... aahh, like your shirt."

She was wearing the biggest T-shirt this side of Roseanne. In four shades of purple, it showed a picture of some guy I didn't recognize with an Arthur Fonzerelli haircut. "Who is that?" I asked as if I cared.

"Shawn Michaels," she said, holding up the bottom of the shirt where, printed in huge black letters, was the name SHAWN MICHAELS.

"Singer, actor, ...?" I guessed.

"He's a wrestler," she said. "They call him the Heartbreak Kid." She turned slightly to show me the back of the shirt which featured a large yellow World Wrestling Federation logo, the official emblem of people dumber than lettuce.

"Wrestling fan, are you?" I said.

"Big time," said Jennifer. "I like most sports, but wrestling is by far my favorite."

"Is wrestling really a sport?" I asked with a certain curiosity. Jennifer Downs seemed like a bright enough girl. And she was the first wrestling nut I'd ever met who didn't have a shoe-size IQ.

"I'll tell you something," she said. "Behind all that glitter and glamour, wrestling is a serious sport. Those guys train long and hard. They're real athletes."

"Come on," I said. "Everyone knows those fights are rigged."

"Rigged?" she asked. "How can they be rigged? Every match is carefully supervised by an official representative of the World Wrestling Federation. Do you think they'd allow that kind of thing?"

"Well, I guess not," I said with my tongue firmly in my cheek. "I mean, if you can't trust the WWF, who can you trust?"

"Exactly," said Jennifer turning her attention to the books and papers on her desk.

"I'll let you get back to work," I said, turning to leave.

"Stick around if you want," she said. "I don't mind talking if you don't mind me working at the same time. I just have to prepare for my next class."

"When is your next class?" asked Cheryl.

"In two hours and twenty three minutes," answered Jennifer looking at the clock on the wall.

"Jennifer does more preparation for one class than the rest of us do in our entire year," said Cheryl to me.

"And I'm not ashamed of it, either," said Jennifer. "I take my work seriously and I'm proud of it."

"Perhaps a bit too seriously, don't you think?" said Cheryl.

"No," said Jennifer. "The work we do here will have an effect on the lives of these kids. We're educators, you know."

"Educators!" laughed Cheryl. "Get serious. We work in a hogwon."

We're not exactly Oxford dons."

"This may not be the greatest place in the world, but that's all the more reason to rise above it," said Jennifer with at least as much emotion as she'd used to defend Shawn Michaels. "Frankly, I'm sick and tired of people who come over here and do nothing but waste time and goof off."

At that moment, the door to one of the classrooms opened and students began to pour out. From inside, a teacher's voice said "don't forget, the last student to exit the training facility must extinguish the overhead illumination."

"Speak of the devil," said Jennifer Downs.

#

The devil who "exited the training facility" was a pudgy young man with bad posture dressed from head to toe in budget backpacker chic.

He had longish blond hair which he kept tucking behind his ears like a girl. Over a New York Review of Books T-shirt, he wore a vest made of that colorful hand-woven fabric you see all over Mexico and Central America. His pants were loose, fastened with a draw string and looked like the bottom half of Hugh Hefner's pajamas. On his feet he wore (surprise, surprise) Birkenstock sandals. A small chunk of some semi-quasi-not-very-precious stone hung from a leather thong around his neck. Wire rimmed glasses, a native Indian-looking brass bracelet and a knitted wool bookbag completed the "my one goal in life is to be in a Sting video" look.

You see people like this all over the world. Make that all over the third world, since that's where they congregate. They spend their lives traveling to places where you can live on five dollars a day and trying to get by on three-fifty.

They romanticize the poverty they see and are always saying things like "they had so little, but they were happy" or "even though they were desperately poor they invited me home to eat in their simple house" which sounds just swell until you think about it. What kind of a bum scrounges dinner off people who live in tin shacks?

Wherever they go, they pick up little accessories to wear at home. Comment on one of them and they'll bore you to death with stories about "proud native craftsmen who make wonderful things using simple hand tools." They don't tell you that they spent nearly an hour beating the proud craftsman down from three bucks to two.

And on top of all that, nearly all of them write poetry.

"The temperature in here is less than balmy," said the young man who's name, I would later learn, was George Bateman. "Would

anyone voice an objection to my activating the cooling device?"

"If you mean 'does anybody care if I turn on the fan'," said Jennifer sarcastically, "the answer is no."

"Well, I guess you're the English expert, Jennifer," he said. "You do nothing but study it."

"At least I go to class prepared," she said.

"Prepared for what?" he sneered. "It's a no brainer. You turn up in class, tell a few jokes, waste some time with the textbook, answer a couple of silly questions and you're done. Anybody can do it."

"Anybody can do it," said Jennifer. "Don't you mean 'it is an activity that may be successfully undertaken by the majority of the population'?"

"She's got a point," I whispered to Cheryl. "Does he always talk like that?"

"Most of the time, yes," she answered.

"He sounds like Alexander Haig," I said.

"Who?"

"Alexander Haig," I said. "American army general and later Secretary of State. He talked like that all the time. Used to refer to 'peacetime' as a 'pre-hostile environment.' His term for bombs dropped on innocent civilians was 'collateral damage.' He was the first person to replace the word 'now' with 'at this point in time.'"

"Sounds like our George. Watch this" said Cheryl turning to Jennifer's desk where the two teachers were sparring. "Hey George, are you busy?"

"No, not at this point in time," said George Bateman, looking confused as Cheryl and I dissolved into giggles.

"Good," said Cheryl. "Then I'd like you to meet Calvin Scott."

"How do you do, Calvin," said George, shaking my hand. "Might I assume that you are also currently employed as an English language instructor?"

"No, I'm not a teacher," I said. "I'm a freelance writer. I'm researching a story about life as a foreigner in Korea."

"Well, it's not all that exciting, I'm afraid," he said. "Still, it does give me some quiet time to work on my poetry."

Strike One!

"No, when I'm finished here, I'm going to Nepal" he said. "You can live there for a month on the price of a meal in Seoul."

Strike Two!

"Then again, I may go back to Guatemala," he continued, interpreting the fact that I hadn't actually run away as a sign of interest. "It's a poor country, but the people have such spirit."

Strike Three! George Bateman, you're out!

## Chapter Three

Cheryl had a class and we both agreed that it would be good for my "research" if I sat in.

I brought along a notebook and a small tape recorder. The tape recorder was a prop. I really don't know how to work it. Mostly, I use it on interviews. At the beginning, I make a big show of turning it on and, near the end, I make a big show of turning it off. Nine times out of ten, the person I'm questioning assumes that the interview is over and we're just two people making small talk so they relax their guard. I get all my best quotes that way. You may have seen some of them in this month's edition of The Saskatchewan Veterinarian.

This time, though, the tape machine was only there to support my this-is-a-big-story-I'm-covering-and-the-fact-that-you're-a-drop-dead-walking-away-babe-o-licious-love-bunny-has-nothing-to-do-with-it image.

There were eleven kids in the class, five boys, five girls and one undecided. They all looked about ten years old, although, to me, everybody under the age of 18 looks pretty much the same.

As we walked in, the noise was indescribable. Children were screaming, shouting and making that mysterious kid noise that, like a cat's purring, can't be imitated by adults. Two of the girls were crying. Two more were yelling at them to stop. And a boy was singing "Born to be Wild" in Korean. On top of it all, there was a steady, rhythmic pounding as Undecided attempted to find out what happens when an unstoppable pencil case meets an immovable desk.

Cheryl introduced me, but the kids couldn't care less. Then she handed an attendance sheet to the first child. It seemed to take forever for each kid to find his or her name and mark himself present with an X.

"Not exactly speedy, are they?" I said.

"Hey," said Cheryl. "If it wastes time, it's okay with me."

"All right. Settle down," said Cheryl to the class. "Open your books to page 56."

Cheryl opened her copy of American English For Everybody to page 56 and, sooner or later, so did the class. There were nine pictures on the page showing people in various occupations. The occupations were printed in English below the pictures.

"A teacher," said Cheryl.

"A teacher," repeated the class.

"A doctor," said Cheryl.

"A doctor," repeated the class.

"A baker," said Cheryl.

"A baker," said the class.

This continued through dentist, policeman, truck driver, fireman, and other pillars of the community. Less conventional professions, such as drug dealer, prostitute, liquor store owner or used car salesman were noticeably absent from the pages of American English For Everybody.

Cheryl went through the nine professions three times. Then each student in turn had to read them aloud. There was a huge range of ability. Some of the kids read beautifully while others were unable to master the first word in "bus driver."

After yet another reading of page 56, Cheryl had the class write the nine occupations out in their notebooks. Again, the level of skill varied. A couple of the kids produced camera-ready copy. Most of them came up with readable lettering. And a few turned out writing so bad it could have been, well ... mine.

Cheryl waited until all the kids (even the little boy with three days worth of supper on his T-shirt and the apparent IQ of motor oil) had finished. She glanced at the clock, read page 56 one more time, made the children read what they had just written in their notebooks, then dismissed the class.

#

"So what was that about wasting time?" I asked as we left the class.

"That's what teaching in a hogwon is all about. You go in and you look for ways to waste time."

"So George is right, and Jennifer is wrong?" I asked.

"Yeah," said Cheryl. "I like Jennifer a lot more than I like George. But in this case, what he says is true."

"What's the point of it all?" I asked.

"The point is this," said Cheryl. "In Korea, your entire working life depends on what university you went to. And that depends on how well you do on the entrance exams. A big part of the entrance exam is English."

"So nobody really cares about learning English," I said. "They just want to pass the entrance exam."

"Actually, it's the parents who want the kids to pass the exam," said Cheryl. "So they send them to school all day, send them to hogwons all evening and make them study all night. They have no time to play, no social life and not much time to sleep."

"So by the time you get them," I said, "they're hyperactive, bored to death and sleep deprived."

"Right. And I get class after class of them, for six hours every day," said Cheryl. "When I first got here, I tried to capture their

interest and teach them something. But you can only keep that up for so long. Now I just try to get through the hour."

"Don't the parents complain?" I asked.

"No. Don't forget, they don't speak English," said Cheryl. "So they don't really know what they're paying for. If their kid spends an hour a day with a native English speaker, they reckon they're learning something. On top of that, I think most parents just want a guilt-free baby-sitter to keep the kids out of their hair. So that's what the hogwons do. They herd the children into a classroom, throw in some American or Canadian with a textbook and a piece of chalk, and rake in the money."

"Pretty useless system," I said.

"Completely useless," said Cheryl. "This country spends literally hundreds of millions of dollars a year on language training and almost nobody here speaks English."

#

As if to make a liar out of Cheryl, a young Korean man with perfectly manicured nails, perfectly coifed hair and wearing a perfectly tailored suit, approached us and said, in perfectly accented English, "Good afternoon, Cheryl. Are you going to introduce me to your friend?"

"Calvin Scott," said Cheryl, "meet Mr Kim, one of the few people here who does speak English."

"How do you do," I said. "Are you a student here?"

"Hardly," he laughed. "I am the eldest son of the director. The teachers call me Mr Kim the Younger."

"And I presume they call your father Mr Kim the Elder?"

"You're quite right," he said. "Although when I'm not around, I suspect they may call him something quite different."

"I'm afraid I haven't yet met your father," I said.

"But you have seen his handiwork?"

"You mean this hogwon?"

"Yes," said Mr Kim the Younger. "What do you think?"

"Well ...," I said, hedging.

"Oh, go on. Be honest," he said. "You won't offend me. I'm not responsible for this."

"Well," I said, "it does seem a little primitive. Are all hogwons like this?"

"Many of them," he said. "But the business is changing. The bigger, more organized hogwons are taking over. They're building better facilities, sprucing up their classrooms, using more sophisticated advertising, and so on. Some of the smaller operators are doing the



same thing. But many of them aren't, and they're going bankrupt as a result."

"And your father?" I asked.

"He sees money spent on improvement as profits lost," said Mr Kim. "I've told him to invest in the future, but he doesn't listen to me."

"I take it you don't work here then," I asked.

"No."

"What do you do?" I asked.

"At the moment, nothing."

"Are you going to school?" I suggested.

"No, I did that. I got a degree in business," he said.

"That's a marketable degree," I said, trying to sound encouraging. "You can go far with that."

"In your country, perhaps," said Mr Kim. "But here it's not the degree that matters, but the school from whence it came. If you get a degree, any degree, from Seoul National University or Yonsei, then doors open for you. But if, as I did, you get a business degree from a little-known university in a little-known city, your opportunities are limited."

"So why don't you work here?" I asked.

"My father and I don't work well together," he said. "I'll introduce you and you'll see why."

He called ahead to The Fashionable Miss Park who was admiring herself in the mirror and adjusting the hem of a bright red T-shirt with a German flag and the words "Go For Life -- Fashion of Italia," and sent her off to fetch his father.

#

Less than two minutes later she returned, short of breath, white as a sheet and screaming in Korean.

Mr Kim the Younger listened for a moment, then turned to me. "According to Miss Park," he said, altogether too calmly considering our conversation, "my father is dead."

#

Mr Kim the Elder was by no means a handsome man. Of course, he probably looked better alive. Most people do. Still, even accounting for his dead state (what George Bateman would call a failure to fully maximize his health potential), he was no candidate for the Chippendales floor show.

He was a bit taller than that little guy on Fantasy Island but without the Sonny Bono hairstyle. The first and last time I saw him he

was lying on the floor at the front of one of the upstairs classrooms with his right hand pointed up at the chalkboard. The board hadn't been erased from the previous class and the words "Future Imperfect" made the whole scene a bit too ironic for my taste.

"How do you know he's dead?" I asked The Fashionable Miss Park.

"For living man," she said, "this is not normal."

"Well, we'd better check anyway," I said.

That was easier said than done. My entire medical training consists of watching the Rescue 51 boys on Emergency! and a couple of Quincy re-runs. Short of dragging him out of a burning warehouse or checking under his fingernails for fibers from the prime suspect's living room carpet, there wasn't much I could do.

Fortunately, Mr Kim the Younger had grown up in a house without cable. He placed his fingers against a vein on his father's neck and pronounced him dead.

I stood there for a minute, saying nothing. I wasn't in shock or anything. I was waiting for him to give me a time of death and a probable cause. Maybe even a murder weapon. Then the Chief would turn up and tell me that "the press are having a field day with this one" and that I'd better "catch this guy or you'll be walking a beat in the South Bronx." It's this kind of thing that makes me think I watch too much TV.

#

With ruthless Korean efficiency, the police arrived two hours later. Like nearly every public official in Korea, the detective in charge claimed to speak English. And, like nearly everyone making that claim, he actually knew eight words of the language, none of which were verbs. Fortunately, Mr Kim the Younger smoothly assumed the role of translator.

The children were sent home and the adults assembled in the main office. The gossip grew to absurd proportions as people who didn't know much interrogated people who knew even less and passed on what they learned to people who didn't know anything at all. Pretty soon, the accepted story involved Mr Kim the Elder being shot to death in a fierce machine-gun battle with a platoon of North Korean commandos.

We were taken away, one by one, for questioning.

"Don't forget," Cheryl whispered in my ear as I left for my turn with the thumbscrews and rubber hose, "anything you say may be taken down, twisted and used to frame you."

In fact, the cops seemed too bored to frame anyone. Only when

my immigration status came into question did they show even a flicker of interest.

"Let me see your Certificate of Alien Registration," said the detective through the medium of Mr Kim the Younger.

"I don't have one," I said. "I'm not a resident."

"Then let me see your visa."

I handed him my passport.

"This is a tourist visa!" he said, like he'd just figured out Hubble's Constant.

"Yes."

"You can not teach with a tourist visa. You must have a working visa."

"I'm not a teacher. I'm a tourist."

"A tourist in Korea?" he said. Hey, I'd be skeptical too.

"That's right."

"Why do you come to a hogwon? A hogwon is not a tourist attraction."

"I'm visiting a friend," I said. "A pretty girl."

"Ahhh," he said, understanding. "Your friend, the pretty girl, is she a teacher?"

"Yes"

"Does she have a working visa?"

"I don't know," I answered.

"If she is a teacher, she must have a working visa."

"I'll pass that on," I said, trying to combine innocent-bystander-eager-to-cooperate respect with if-you-were-any-dumber-you'd-be-fungus sarcasm.

"What is your profession?" asked the detective.

"I'm a writer."

"What kind of writer?"

"Magazines, newspapers," I said. I would have shown him a sample of my work, but I'd left my copy of this month's Arizona Professional Librarian back at the hotel.

"You will write about Korea?" he asked.

"Yes"

"What will you write?"

"Well, you know, ... the cosmopolitan sophistication of Seoul, the beauty of the countryside, delicious food," I said, spreading it on with a shovel. "5,000 years of history, the glorious blend of the traditional and the modern, the warmth and friendliness of the Korean people."

"Very good," he said. "You may go."

#

Cheryl's turn was next. I decided to wait because it is the natural order of things for guys like me to wait for girls like Cheryl. I bought a can of coffee from the vending machine and joined the five other teachers in the office.

Dave Stevens was pacing back and forth like a man with extremely dirty underwear. "Mr - Kim - he - go - far - away - to - heaven - in - sky. Mr - Kim - no - live - this - place - now," he said, eloquently expressing the feelings of the entire tribe.

Albert Gossage decided that the investigation was doomed to failure. "I mean, the local cops are fine for busting muggers and chasing drunk drivers," he said. "But when an ordinary healthy man turns up dead, you need a more professional approach."

"And you know all about the professional approach, do you?" asked Jennifer Downs skeptically.

"As a matter of fact, I've done quite a bit of consulting work for the FBI. Of course, it's not something I can talk about," he said, talking about it.

"What - must - police - man - do?" asked Big Chief Running Dave.

"Set up a situation room, establish a communications grid, coordinate all tactical assets, and develop a systematized command and control structure," said Albert, showing the debilitating effect of a lifetime of Tom Clancy novels.

George Bateman had other ideas.

"I think you're underestimating the investigative ability of the local constabulary," he said. "In the majority of circumstances, the native law enforcement apparatus is better able to successfully resolve an investigation."

"Really?" said Albert.

"Absolutely," he said. "I remember visiting a small farming community in Pakistan. There was only one policeman in the entire village. He had no sophisticated equipment, yet the place was almost free of crime. The policeman was a simple man, but decent. When I needed to get to the next village, he took me the entire way on his motor scooter."

"Good thing the village was crime free," said Jennifer. "What with George hauling the entire police force off for a ride in the country."

"I agree with Albert," said Wendel Clemker. "Technology can be very useful in police work."

"It's no substitute for an ordinary policeman in tune with the community he serves," said George.

"Perhaps not," said Wendel, "but it can help. For example, there are computer programs that examine hundreds of crimes and identify patterns. And others analyze data from the crime scene to produce a

psychological profile of the killer."

I've seen those psychological profiles. In big cases, the cops release them to the newspapers along with an artist's drawing that never looks even remotely like the guy. The profiles are always the same. They describe the killer as being young, male, economically deprived, disrespectful of authority, chronically under-employed and socially inept.

I don't know much about murderers, but that's a pretty good description of me.

"All I know about the cops," said Jennifer, "is that they're keeping me from my work."

"Cutting your preparation time down to four hours, are they?" said George Bateman.

"Laugh all you like," said Jennifer. "This is a very busy time for me. We're in the middle of a three day seminar on the possessive apostrophe. Then on Monday we start semi-colon week."

"Ooohh, semi-colon week. How exciting," sneered George. "Is there going to be a parade?"

Only The Fashionable Miss Park had anything useful to contribute. "Some policeman good, and some policeman bad," she said. "But Mr Kim still dead."

#

Cheryl returned looking frustrated. "They say there's not much crime in Korea," she said. "If that's true, it's no thanks to the police."

"Not exactly Scotland Yard, are they?" I asked.

"Dumb as a bag of hammers," she said. "The detective spent half the time asking me about your tourist visa."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him that one of your gang had gotten shot in the getaway car and that you and Mr Blue and Mr Pink were looking for a place to lay low until the heat blows over," said Cheryl.

"Ya done da wrong ting, shweetheart," I said. "Dinna I tell ya neva ta say nuttin ta da fuzz? Now me and da boys gonna get sent up da riva, to da big house."

Cheryl laughed. "I found out something, though," she said.

"About Mr Kim?"

"Yeah," she said. "Sherlock Holmes up there is pretty well convinced that it was an accident. He's going through the investigative motions, but nobody is taking this too seriously."

"What do they think happened?" I asked. "Heart attack?"

"No," said Cheryl. "He was electrocuted."

#

At that minute, Mr Kim the Younger walked in, stood at the front of the room and raised his hands for quiet. "May I have your attention for a moment please," he said. "The policemen are taking a short break. They will return shortly to continue their inquiries. Those of you who have already been questioned may leave."

Cheryl looked at her watch and headed for the door. I followed. Mr Kim held up his hand and smiled. "I have a few things to say first," he said. "If you don't mind."

"A terrible calamity has befallen us today," he began. "Our leader, the man who built Star Hogwon from nothing into the respected institution that it is today, has been struck down, the victim of a tragic accident."

Everyone exchanged quizzical looks. Mr Kim the Younger's opinion of his father had obviously jumped a few notches since the old man stopped breathing.

"Now some of you may be asking yourself about the fate of Star Hogwon," continued Mr Kim the Younger (who, I suppose, may now be called Mr Kim the Only, or perhaps just Mr Kim). "Will our school survive without the firm guiding hand of our founder upon the tiller?"

This was starting to sound like a long speech. I turned to Cheryl and whispered. "What else did the cops say?"

But Mr Kim was in no mood to have his Ode to a Fallen Hero interrupted by me. He glowered in our direction and continued. "Rest assured, my friends, that Star Hogwon will continue along the path to greatness. Although my dear departed father is no longer with us, I am prepared to pick up the torch and carry on in his memory."

"Ahhh, so that's it," I whispered to Cheryl who was again looking at her watch. "The King is dead. Long live me."

"In conclusion," said Mr Kim, "I ask each and every one of you to continue your hard work and diligence so that, together, we will make Star Hogwon the number one language school in Korea. Thank you very much."

He stood there for a minute, seemingly waiting for applause. When he realized that it wasn't coming, he slipped out to meet the returning cops.

I turned to Cheryl. "Not exactly racked with grief, is he?" I said.

"No," she answered, glancing at her watch. "Look, I've got a couple of private lessons I'm already late for. Can you meet me here tomorrow, about noon."

"Sure, why?" I asked, somewhat pointlessly. If Cheryl Haynes had asked me to meet her at noon tomorrow to count holes in the ceiling tiles, I would have shown up the next day, without fail, on the

stroke of twelve. As it was, she had something else in mind.

"I don't think it was an accident," she said. "I think somebody murdered him."

#### Chapter Four

The next morning, I grabbed a notebook and headed down to the Korea National Tourism Corporation's downtown office.

As every paid-by-the-word travel writer knows, there's nothing like a few "gripping tales from the pages of history" to spin out an article and pad out a paycheck. I, frankly, am no different.

Most tourist offices have plenty of free material you can look at. The KNTC was a gold mine.

Koreans like to think their country began around the time of Adam and Eve, but the first records start a bit later, in the 1st century BC.

A Chinese general, upset at not being promoted or being forced to wear one of those funny Chairman Mao suits or some such nonsense, fled China and set up a new kingdom near what is now Pyongyang.

He called the new kingdom Chosun, a Chinese word meaning "Morning Freshness."

Before long, "Morning Freshness" was invaded and occupied by the Chinese army who were, not un-naturally, pissed off at having to live next to a country named after an underarm deodorant.

This led to the Three Kingdoms period as the country was divided into the Koguryo, Shilla and Paekche kingdoms.

Interestingly, there is no connection between this period and the popular Christmas carol "we three kings of Orient are ...." This strikes me as a wasted marketing opportunity, but who the hell am I to say.

In 1592, the Japanese invaded. They took most of Korea but were forced to retreat after a stunning naval victory by the Koreans under the command of Admiral Yi Sun-shin.

Admiral Yi used steel-clad ships to drive back the Japanese all-wood fleet. These small, armored craft were originally called Turtle Boats but were later renamed the Hyundai Sonata III.

The Japanese invaded again in 1894, which is odd because very few people who visit Korea ever want to go back.

Still, the Japanese did return. And this time they stayed until the end of the Second World War when they were soundly defeated by actor John Wayne and a few close friends.

After the war, Korea was divided into the communist North and the sort-of-democratic South. This made it easy for one half of the country to be really poor and boring and for the other half to become really ugly, but also boring.

The Korean War broke out in 1950, ran for about three years, and, frankly, I never found M\*A\*S\*H all that funny.

The end of the war brought government by a series of corrupt, strongmen whose names I know you don't care about.

Following the Japanese model, the Korean economy grew at an average rate of more than 10 per cent per year so that, by the mid-1990s, it was the 12th largest economy in the world.

The first clean elections occurred in 1992 when Koreans elected President Kim Young-sam, a jovial, yet ineffectual, little fellow who looked like he'd had one face-lift too many.

Kim Young-sam (known to friends as Cher) left office in 1997, just as the Korean economy was falling apart, and immediately changed his name to Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

President Kim was succeeded by Kim Dae-jung, who quickly changed his name to Ernesto Zedillo.

#

Having completed what, in my business, passes for in-depth research, I took a taxi to Cheryl's hogwon. I still had the map she gave me so I showed it to the driver. "You are English teacher?" he said.

"No"

"Ahhh, very good," he said. This sort of thing was already becoming tiresome. Every Korean seems to know six words of English and will take any opportunity to inflict them upon you. "Where you from," he asked.

"Canada."

"Ahhh, Canada, very good," he said. "What city?"

"Ottawa."

"Ahhh, Ottawa, very good," he said, having no idea whether Ottawa was the name of a city or a secret password known only to the members of an international organization of taxi driver killers. "Do you know L.A.?"

"That's in America."

"Ahhh, America, very good," he said. "Do you know Michael Jackson?"

"Ahhh, Michael Jackson, very good," I said angrily. "No more talking."

"I practice English," said the taxi driver.

"If you want to practice English, go to a hogwon," replied International Goodwill Ambassador Calvin Scott. "Now shut up and drive."

#



It was a warm day so as soon as I entered the office I went straight to the water cooler. The brand new water cooler. The leaky old thing with the ancient water bottle that, according to rumor, Mr Kim the Elder filled up from his kitchen tap, was gone. In its place stood a brand new, state of the art, water cooler with a bottle of spring water from one of those service firms who guarantee you'll never run out. There was even a paper cup dispenser with actual paper cups.

It took me a minute to notice that, next to the new water cooler, was a new photocopier machine.

The old copier was, according to Cheryl, a constant source of annoyance. Legend had it that in the distant past a teacher had actually quit and flown home out of frustration with the Star Hogwon copy machine. It was at least five hundred years old and powered by steam. Inside, an arthritic monkey fed paper into a huge shredder, poured on enough toner to ruin whatever you happened to be wearing that day and tossed the result out the other side.

The new machine was made by NASA, did zero to sixty in 4.6 seconds and came equipped with a driver's side airbag.

The Fashionable Miss Park noticed the surprised look on my face. "Something new," she said, although she might have been referring to her shirt, a striking yellow number with "Show Me Your Happy Thing" emblazoned across the front.

"Come - here - this - way - please," said Dave Stevens who was standing over by Mr Kim's desk.

When I got there he pointed proudly at the fax machine. It looked like the old fax, but cleaner. "Is - that - new - one," I asked, adjusting the tomahawk in my buckskin belt.

"Machine - not - new," said Dave, "but - now - have - paper."

"What's going on?" I said to no one in particular. "When did all this stuff get here?"

"This morning," said Jennifer Downs who was in early, no doubt preparing for the International Year of the Pronoun or some such thing. "Looks like Mr Kim is planning to modernize in a hurry."

"I'm sure you'll all appreciate the new stuff," I said.

"Oh, that's not all," said Jennifer. "Did you see that the computer is gone."

"I hadn't noticed a computer," I said.

"It was almost buried under a pile of junk. Some ancient machine. Whatever comes before a 286," she said. "Anyway, Mr Kim had it hauled away. He's ordered a new one."

"Wendel will be happy," I said.

"We'll all be happy," said Jennifer Downs. "Look at that." She pointed to a hand-written sign on the door. "Important Notice," it read.

"Star Hogwon will be closed this Saturday and Sunday. Weekend classes will be canceled due to cleaning."

"Cleaning?"

"He's going to hire a cleaning company to come in and scrub this place down," she said.

"I hear the guys that did Chernobyl are pretty good," I said.

#

Just then, Cheryl walked in and as far as I was concerned Jennifer, the photocopy machine, the water cooler and all of Star Hogwon simply ceased to exist.

Cheryl's hair was a mess. Her eyes were puffy and sleep-deprived. She had on a stained golf shirt, a pair of torn walking shorts, mis-matched socks and some cheap Chinese tennis shoes. She looked lovely.

After muttering some kind of a good morning, she walked over to her desk and pulled open the bottom drawer where she kept a coffee cup and some packets of instant Taster's Choice. She dumped three of the packets into a cup, filled it up from the hot water tap, gulped down half of it, turned to me and smiled. "Hungry?" she asked.

"Yeah."

"Let's go eat."

#

Cheryl took me to a nearby restaurant, ordered some sort of rice dish for both of us that wasn't bad at all, and came quickly to the point. "How far did I get yesterday?"

"You said that Mr Kim was electrocuted and the police are calling it an accident."

"That's right," she said. "Apparently he reached under the chalkboard to switch on the light. The switch was worn. He touched some open wires and got zapped."

"Hard enough to kill him?" I asked.

"Easily," she said. "Electricity in Korea is either 110 volts or 220 volts. In this building, it's 220."

"Why would a light switch be under a chalkboard?" I asked.

"Have you been upstairs?"

"Briefly," I said, "when we found Mr Kim dead. I didn't get much of a look around."

"Okay," said Cheryl. "Upstairs there are three classrooms. Each one is about the size of the office. But when this place opened, there were only two, a small one and a big one. That light switch was on an

empty wall in the big classroom"

"Right," I said.

"About a year and a half ago," said Cheryl, "Mr Kim decided to split the big room into two by putting up a wall down the middle. When he did that, he went from having one big room running north-south, to having two small rooms running east-west."

"So he had to move the chalkboards," I said.

"Exactly," said Cheryl. "And when he went to put the chalkboard up in that classroom, he found that it was going to cover a light switch."

"Why didn't he move it?"

"Too much trouble," she said. "All he did was unscrew the switch and move it as far down the wall as the wire would allow, then screw it back in. It ended up about eight inches from the bottom of the board."

"And it worked?"

"Yeah," said Cheryl. "The chalkboards are actually mounted about four inches out from the wall. Once you know where it is, you just put your hand up there, feel for the switch and turn on the lights. You get a bit dirty, but it works well enough."

"And the police reckon that the switch was faulty but, since Mr Kim couldn't see it, he touched it and got electrocuted," I said.

"That's what they believe."

"But you don't buy it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"It just doesn't make sense," she said.

"It does to me," I said. "I've seen the wiring in that place. It's a mess. I'm surprised that this kind of thing doesn't happen more often."

"You're right, it's a mess," said Cheryl. "But look at the kind of mess it is. It comes from people connecting up hundreds of extension cords, or trying to plug 47 things into one power outlet, or tripping over a bunch of wires and breaking something. It doesn't come from old age."

"I don't get it."

"Why would a perfectly good switch suddenly turn lethal?" she asked. "Two days ago it was working fine. Yesterday it's broken. If it was any of the exposed stuff, all those electrical cords and outlets lying around on the floor, I could understand it. But that switch was screwed tight into the wall and protected by a chalkboard. If it broke, somebody broke it."

"What do the cops think?" I asked.

"They don't seem to care," Cheryl answered. "They didn't look very closely. They didn't even remove the chalkboard."

"Maybe we should," I suggested, half-heartedly.

Frankly, this whole it-was-murder business seemed a bit far fetched. But I didn't care. If Cheryl Haynes were to get it into her head that Mr Kim had been killed by a squad of highly-trained killer aliens from the planet Gooptar, I'd be more than happy to spend all day helping her check it out.

"That's what I was thinking," said Cheryl. "Let's do it tonight, after everyone's gone home."

"Okay," I said. "But get some sleep first. You're going to have to be awake if we're going to find out what killed Mr Kim."

"Not what," said Cheryl. "Who."

#

If we were going to sneak into Star Hogwon under cover of darkness, I had some shopping to do. I've seen plenty of old movies about daring cat burglars and debonair jewel thieves so I knew exactly what I needed.

I had brought a pair of dark blue pants which would do perfectly. But all my shirts were white so I picked up a jet black polyester turtleneck at Lotte Department Store for not much more than an all-wool hand-made Shetland sweater would have cost back home.

Lotte is supposed to be the last word in shopping luxury, but, to me, it always looks a bit tired. The place always seems a few years late for a renovation.

Like all Korean stores, Lotte was over-staffed to the point of absurdity.

Criminally high prices combined with criminally low wages means Korean shops often have more sales clerks than customers. Hundreds of uniformed women line the aisles waiting to pester passing customers.

"Hello sir," they'll say cheerily. "Would you like a tie? Look at these lovely shoes. Enjoy, sir, our delightful kitchenware."

This goes on throughout the store and can easily turn a relaxed shopper into a homicidal maniac. Were this not such an important shopping trip, I would have fled long ago.

My hiking boots were probably a bit heavy for slinking about in the wee hours, but they'd have to do. This little adventure was costly enough as it was. I did, however, replace my white socks with a darker pair.

I really wanted a black watch cap. You know, the kind of thing World War Two commandos wore for slipping ashore on a quiet beach, strangling a sentry as he tried to light a cigarette, making their way inland with the help a beautiful French girl who's husband has just been killed by the Nazis and meeting up with a famous resistance hero

who will later turn out to be a German spy.

I couldn't find one. I guess the commando business has been in a slump since Alistair MacLean died. I settled for a dark blue baseball cap. With that, and a pair of light cotton gloves so I wouldn't leave prints, I was all set.

#

It took Cheryl a full ten minutes to stop laughing.

"What's so hilarious?" I asked.

"You look like one of the bad guys from Mission: Impossible."

"At least I made an effort to dress appropriately for this operation," I whined. "I, for one, don't want to get caught."

"Caught doing what?" laughed Cheryl. "We're allowed to be here."

"We're not breaking in?"

"No, we're not," said Cheryl. "So if you've brought along any ropes and grappling hooks or diamond drills and nitro, you can leave them outside. We're just going to open the front door, turn on all the lights and have a look around."

"So all this gear was a waste?" I asked, pointing to my James-Bond-meets-Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians active wear.

"Well, you look great," said Cheryl, making the whole shopping trip worthwhile. "Come on."

#

The building was quiet and the lights were off, but the exit signs gave off enough light for us to make our way to the office. There Cheryl reached up to a ledge above the door, retrieved a hidden key and let us in.

Once inside, she took a key ring out of an unlocked drawer in Mr Kim's desk while I surreptitiously threw away the hairpins and paper clips I'd brought along to pick the lock.

The upstairs classrooms were exactly as Cheryl had described. You could see that a dividing wall had been added. It was slightly cleaner than the others. Slightly cleaner in the same way that Bananarama is slightly less annoying than the Spice Girls.

I took a screwdriver from the toolbag we had brought up from the office and started to loosen the brass screws that held the chalkboard to the wall.

"Are they tight?" asked Cheryl.

"No," I said.

"Try the ones on the other board."

We went into the next classroom. I picked a screw at random and gave it a try. I could unscrew it, but it took both hands for the first few turns and a fair bit of elbow grease thereafter.

"Try another one," said Cheryl.

Same thing.

"Well, we know something," said Cheryl as we went back to the other room.

"Somebody's had this chalkboard off the wall."

"Yeah."

"Police?" I suggested.

"No, they didn't bother," said Cheryl. "They just shone a flashlight under the board and took a peek."

By this time I'd removed all the screws. "Okay, give me a hand with this," I said.

"No," said Cheryl. "You do it. Let's find out if just one man can remove and replace that thing."

"All right," I said, "though I'm not sure whether you're the Master Detective or you just don't want to get your hands dirty."

"Now, now, Dr Watson," said Cheryl. "Quit complaining."

In fact, it wasn't hard at all. The chalkboard was just a big piece of painted plywood with a couple of two-by-fours on the back. I wouldn't want to carry it around all day, but it was no trouble to pull it off the wall and set it aside.

"Now let's take a look at the switch," said Cheryl.

You could see that it had been moved when the room was divided. A light patch of wall and a couple of holes marked the old position. The new one was close to the bottom of the chalkboard.

Cheryl took a close look at the switch then turned to me.

"There's no way that was an accident," she said.

I had to agree. The switch was a common design, made up of two parts, a base and a cover. The base screws into the wall and has two pins at one end. The pins fit into holes in the cover. The other end has a clip like the one that holds shut the battery cover on your TV remote, but stronger. The actual switching mechanism is on the base. Two wires, a negative and a positive, run along the base. The negative is not touched. The positive wire is cut and the two ends are stripped of insulation and fastened down with screws.

The idea is that you wire up the switch, fit the pins into the holes, give the clip side a firm push until it snaps shut and the whole thing stays closed and works perfectly pretty much forever.

This one was a bit different.

The clip had been forced open. You could see scratch marks on the outside edge. One of the pins had been broken so the cover hung by the other one, leaving the innards exposed.

And the innards were in bad shape too. The insulation on the negative wire had been burned away and the screws holding the positive wire to the switch mechanism had been loosened and bent closer to each other.

"So what do we do now?" I asked.

"Well the first thing is to fix the switch," said Cheryl. "Can you do that?"

"Sure," I said, "but not with 220 volts running through it."

"Have you got a flashlight?"

"Yes," I said. I'd brought along a small pen light as part of my Secret Agent 007 Junior Activity Set.

"Good," said Cheryl. "I'll go downstairs and turn off the main circuit breaker. When you've fixed the switch, shout out the window and I'll turn the power back on."

"Then I'll meet you downstairs?"

"After you put the chalkboard back up."

"Aren't you going to help me?" I asked.

"Well, I would," answered Cheryl, "but your hands are already dirty and mine ... well ... you know ... aren't."

#

Back downstairs, Cheryl gave me a handy-wipe and a cup of the instant sludge with powdered gloop that she called coffee.

My mind started to wander. Here we were, Remington Steele and Laura Holt, sharing a cup of bad coffee after a risky, yet successful mission. Our hearts still beating quickly. The adrenaline still rushing through whatever it is that adrenaline rushes through. This would be the perfect time to look deep into her big eyes, smile warmly, reach out my hand and ...

"Pass me that notepad."

I did.

"Now let's go over what we've got so far," said Cheryl, all business.

"Well we know that Mr Kim's death was no accident," I said, bringing the full force of my incredible mental powers to bear on the problem at hand.

"What we know," said Cheryl, "is that someone removed the chalkboard, tampered with a light switch, replaced the chalkboard and waited for their handiwork to electrocute Mr Kim. That's the means."

"The what?"

"The means," she answered. "To commit a crime, a criminal needs means, motive and opportunity. Find those and you've found your criminal. I'm surprised you don't know that. Don't you read

mystery novels?"

"No," I said. "I can't stand them. All those independently wealthy debonair detectives and dodderly old ladies with triple-digit IQs running around deducing things. I prefer TV detectives."

"Why?"

"Because, they don't bother with that means and motive stuff. They have a more direct approach. I like it better."

"I know I'm going to regret this," said Cheryl. "But what's the direct approach?"

"Well first, you think up a clever cover story to get into the bad guys lair. Then you walk around a lot until you pass a room where the bad guys are discussing their entire plan in language even a baby could understand."

"Then what?"

"A commercial," I said. "Then a car chase. Then a pretty girl tied to a chair. Then another commercial."

"And after that?"

"You gather all the suspects in a room and show everybody how the bad guy did it," I explained. "At first, the bad guy is pretty smug. He figures he's home free. But when you show him how you matched up the fibers from his tweed jacket with the bullet that killed his wife, he breaks down and confesses."

"That's ridiculous," said Cheryl.

"Tell that to Banacek," I said.

"Let's try my way first," she said, laughing.

"Meeny, miny, and moe?"

"Means, motive and opportunity."

"Whatever."

#

"Now we know the means," said Cheryl, "the light switch. So what does that tell us about opportunity?"

"It tells us that whoever did this, did it at night," I said. "You don't go ripping down chalkboards in the middle of the day with dozens of people around."

"All right."

"Now as far as we can tell, nobody broke in," I said. "So, whoever did this must have known about the hidden office key."

"Oh, everybody who works here knows about the key," said Cheryl. "Mr Kim put it there so the teachers could open the place up for their morning classes or come in at night and watch Star TV."

"Star TV?"

"Satellite TV out of Hong Kong," explained Cheryl. "It's awful,



but it's in English so we all watch it."

"What's on?"

"Mostly junk," answered Cheryl. "Old episodes of Charlie's Angels and The Fall Guy. Some newer stuff like L.A. Law. And Barnaby Jones if you can believe it."

"How can you call that junk," I said. "That's classic TV. I love it."

"No you don't," answered Cheryl. "Trust me. What you love is the memory of it. But when you sit down and try to watch that old stuff, you realize just how boring it was. After a while, the words 'A Quinn Martin Production' will put you to sleep in four seconds flat."

"Be still, thy blasphemous tongue," I cried.

Cheryl laughed. "There's also a Star Sports channel. It's second rate stuff as well, but Jennifer loves it. She's always watching Hungarian motor racing or Malaysian badminton or ..."

"WWF wrestling?" I suggested.

"Yeah," laughed Cheryl. "They're real athletes you know."

#

"Well," I said. "At least we've narrowed it down a little. It has to be someone who knew where to find the key. So our killer must be an employee or a teacher."

"Or someone who used to be an employee," said Cheryl. "Or someone who used to be a teacher. Or one of the morning-class students who saw the school being unlocked. Or one of the night-class students who saw Mr Kim locking up the school at the end of the day."

"All right," I said. "I get your point."

"Or someone who used to be a morning-class student, or used to be a night-class student," said Cheryl. "Or anyone bright enough to reach up and feel around for a hidden key."

"Right guv," I said.

"Guv?"

"Well," I said. "If you're going to be Chief Inspector Morse and I'm going to be Detective-Sergeant Lewis, we have to get the language right."

"A ha!" Cheryl exclaimed. "So you do read mystery novels."

"What are you talking about?" I said. "Morse is a British TV policeman."

"But he comes from a series of mystery books by Colin Dexter," Cheryl said.

"I didn't know that."

"I'm not surprised," she said, laughing "With all the television you watch, you must have square eyes by now."

"Laugh all you want to," I said. "But when I've gathered all the

facts, sifted them through my brilliant deductive mind, and uncovered the one tiny flaw in the killer's diabolical plan, we'll see who's laughing then."

"Feel free to start sifting any time," Cheryl said. "Or was that key business the best your brilliant deductive mind could come up with?"

"All right," I said. "Too many people knew about the hidden key. But what about the circuit breaker? Who knows where that is?"

"Same as the key, I'm afraid." Cheryl said. "Everybody knows about it."

She led me behind Mr Kim's desk, drew back a deadbolt, swung open a rusty steel door and pointed to a box on the outside wall. "This is Star Hogwon's one and only circuit breaker," she said. "Every electrical device in this school goes through here. And nearly every night, when all the lights are on and the fans are running and the air conditioner kicks in, it blows."

"Who resets it?" I asked.

"Whoever is nearest," Cheryl answered. "Usually, Mr Kim. But if he's not around, one of the teachers gets it, or The Fashionable Miss Park. Occasionally, one of the students does it."

I took out my pocket flashlight and tried to flick it on and focus the beam in a single, smooth, one-handed motion. I was trying to look like the sort of dashing fellow who spends a lot of his time sneaking around other people's offices in the dead of night. What I succeeded in doing was dropping the flashlight on the ground then banging my forehead into the deadbolt as I reached down to pick it up. Clearly my covert-operations image needed work.

#

I retrieved my flashlight and shone it inside the box. I examined the back, all four sides, and the circuit breaker itself. I inspected the outside of the box and the surrounding wall. I tapped and listened and poked and prodded and generally carried on like I knew what I was doing.

"What are you looking for?" Cheryl asked.

"Clues," I said.

"Such as," Cheryl said, more skeptically than I would have liked.

"Such as ... a complete set of fingerprints," I snapped back angrily. "Or the butt from a custom-made cigarette. Or a small sample of an extremely rare type of soil found only in a remote region of the country where the killer just happens to have a summer house. Or a signed confession. Or a VHS copy of Korea's Most Wanted."

I'd worked up pretty good head of steam and by the time my tantrum came to an end Cheryl was more than a little downcast. She

looked up at me, wide-eyed like a puppy dog in need of a good home, gently bit her lower lip, and tentatively asked, "are you mad at me?"

"No, I'm not mad at you," I answered, as if I could have said anything else. "It's just that I don't know what I'm supposed to be looking for. Don't let my slick investigative abilities fool you; I'm not a real detective."

"I guess it was a dumb idea," she said. "I should quit trying to be Miss Marple and get back to my teaching. And I should let you go off and get back to writing your Sex Secrets of the U.S. Army story."

"Well, let's not be hasty," I said, aghast at the thought of going off and doing anything other than hang around with Cheryl Haynes. "You may be on to something with that murder theory. I wouldn't want to give up on it before we've thoroughly checked out every possibility."

"Do you really think so," Cheryl said, with smile I'd kick Meg Ryan out of the way to get close to.

"Absolutely," I said. "There is some pretty fishy business going on here. Take that Mr Kim the Younger. He spent nearly an hour telling me awful things about his Dad. He knows his way around this place better than anyone. And he could have easily fiddled with that light switch."

"Means, motive, and opportunity," Cheryl said.

"You got it," I said. "Book 'em Dan-o. Murder One."

"We need more than that," Cheryl said. "We need ..."

"Quincy."

"Quincy?"

"Oh yeah," I said. "Quincy would pull a half-eaten apple out of the dead guy's intestine, match the teeth marks up with hair follicles from the killer's ex-wife's dog, and we'd have an airtight case."

"How about Perry Mason?" Cheryl said with a chuckle.

"Good idea," I said. "We could get him to cross-examine all the witnesses until the jury foreman breaks down and admits that the judge did it."

Cheryl laughed.

"What we really need," I said, "is Banacek."

"Let me try this one," Cheryl said, clasping my hand and sending my heart rate into the fast lane. "Banacek will show us how Mr Kim was killed in one room, dragged into another identical room, and placed near the chalkboard, which is actually a cardboard dummy containing a tiny explosive charge."

"Good work," I said. "But you forgot the part where the killer disables the million-dollar alarm system and escapes into the crowd by disguising himself as The Fashionable Miss Park."

#

The bantering cheered Cheryl up and pretty soon she was eager to get back on the case. We made ourselves some instant coffee and tried to figure out what to do next.

Sticking with Cheryl's means, motive and opportunity theory, it was clear to both of us that anyone who'd ever been near Star Hogwon could have figured out the means to kill Mr Kim, and nearly as many people had the opportunity. The best move, then, was to look for motive. This meant finding out as much as we could about the late Mr Kim.

Cheryl walked over to the side of Mr Kim's desk and showed me a small metal cabinet. It was about the size of a blue recycling box turned on its side. The front was made of hinged pieces of metal that opened like an old-fashioned garage door. And like a garage door, it was locked.

I quickly retrieved the hairpin and paper clips that I'd thrown away, deftly slipped them into the lock, listened for the tell-tale double-click, and smoothly rotated the cylinder. I had it open in seconds.

All right. I made that up. Actually, Cheryl got the cabinet open with a small screwdriver and a little brute force.

"Not much in there," I said.

"What were you hoping to find," Cheryl said, "a smoking gun."

"I was kind of expecting a million dollar life insurance policy and a copy of The Professional Killer's Guide To Making It Look Like An Accident," I said.

Cheryl pulled out a large, stiff-backed book. I couldn't read the Korean label, but I could see that it was an accounts ledger. "This may be our smoking gun," Cheryl said. "Remember what Deep Throat said to Bob Woodward: 'follow the money.'"

"You've been talking to Albert Gossage again, haven't you?"

"I have," Cheryl laughed. "But it's Top Secret. If I told you, I'd have to kill you."

"National security, huh?"

"Let's just say that the President may be involved."

#

The cabinet held more than just the ledger book. There was a file for each teacher containing his or her application documents as well as a messy pile of loose papers. There was too much for us to go through that evening so we decided to photocopy the teacher's files and look at them later. While I fed resumes and university transcripts

and reference letters and visa applications and so on through the photocopy machine, Cheryl tried to make sense of the ledger book.

"Can you read Korean?" I asked.

"Not really," she answered. "I've been learning a bit of the language. This isn't too hard, though. It's mostly numbers. The rest is names, which I know how to read, and column headings, which I look up in the dictionary."

"Anything so far?"

"I'm not sure," she said. "Go through the cabinet and see if you can find a 50,000 won postal money order." She handed me a slip of paper on which she had written the han-gul characters for "money order" and drawn a rough outline of the Korean Post Office logo. Every postal system in the world has some sort of corny envelope-being-swiftly-whisked-through-the-clouds-to-its-final-destination logo and Korea is no different. It didn't take long to find.

"Smoking gun?" I asked.

"Hard to say," Cheryl answered. "We'll photocopy the whole book so I can look at it closely later. Most of it seems to be routine - salaries, expenses, student fees, and such. But two odd things turned up."

She turned the book towards me and pointed to an entry. "Look at this," she said. "It's a debit (money paid out) for 500,000 won, dated three days ago. Now look at the others. They all have a short description in the middle column. This one says Korea Telecom; this one says textbooks; this is for advertising posters. But this one," Cheryl said, pointing to the 500,000 won debit, "just has a name, Kim Jong-min."

"Who is?"

"Mr Kim the Younger," Cheryl said.

"Is that so odd?" I asked.

"It's odd that there is no reason for the debit," Cheryl answered. "It's the only entry like that."

"What about that money order?" I asked. "Anything there."

"Another odd one," Cheryl said. "The ledger book just says 'Post Office money order - 50,000 won.' What you found was the receipt. The money was paid out six months ago to a Mr Yu."

"Do you know him?"

"No," Cheryl said. "But a money order is unusual. Korea is basically a cash society. Most workers are paid monthly in cash and street vendors think nothing of walking around with millions of Won stuck in a shirt pocket. Mr Kim would have to have had a strong reason for using a money order."

"Two good leads," I said.

"Maybe more, once I have another look at these accounts," Cheryl said. "The money order is six months old, so we can get to that later. But I'd like to know what Mr Kim the Younger needed 500,000 won for."

"So would I," I said. "He's looking more and more like our man."

"Well, I don't know about that," Cheryl said. "But he's due for a little gentle questioning."

## Chapter Five

It was as hot as hell the next morning. The sun was cracking the flags and the humidity made breathing almost impossible without SCUBA gear. By the time I arrived at Cheryl's place of work my "strong enough for a gorilla but made for a water buffalo," PH-balanced, clear deodorant had given up the fight and I was drenched in perspiration. I couldn't wait to get inside where I hoped it would be cooler.

It was cooler all right. At least 30 degrees cooler. Thanks to the miracle of modern refrigeration, Star Hogwon was perfectly chilled to a constant minus 5 degrees Celsius. My perspiration turned almost immediately to ice and you could have jabbed wooden sticks under my arms and made a couple of really yukky popsicles.

The first person I saw was The Fashionable Miss Park who was living up to her name in a golf shirt reading "Welcome Sailor -- Go Navy!!"

"Miss Park," I said, "you don't happen to have a side of beef hanging up around here, do you?"

"I don't understand."

"I'm freezing," I said, making a shivering motion.

"Air conditioning, Mr Scott," Miss Park explained with pride. "Air conditioning is provided for the comfort of students by Star Hogwon, where our motto is to ..."

"Yes, yes, thank you," I said. "I just didn't realize that the Ice Capades were in town."

Just then, Wendel Clemker, dressed from head to toe in polyester, entered the building, giving me an excuse to abandon Miss Park. "What's with the frigid air?" I asked.

"It's always like this," he answered. "The air conditioner is either on maximum or switched off. No one seems to understand the concept of a thermostat."

"Well as long as it's on," I said, "maybe I can borrow a pair of skates."

"Huh," Wendel said.

"A pair of skates," I explained. "You know, cold as ice. It's a joke."

"Sorry."

"Is it me," I asked, "or do you just have no sense of humor?"

"It must be you," Wendel answered. "Back home, I'm generally considered to be the funniest guy in the chess club."

#

Everyone was in the office. Albert Gossage was explaining to George Bateman how difficult it was flying the U2 spy plane at supersonic speeds over Soviet Russia. Dave Stevens was on the phone telling a student that "this - day - morning - we - not - have - class. You - stay - your - house - today." And Jennifer Downs was buried in a massive volume entitled "Advanced English Usage: Methods And Practice From The Industrial Revolution To The Post-Modern Age", no doubt preparing for her kindergarten class.

Cheryl was making a cup of coffee. When I walked in she jumped for joy, ran over to me, threw her arms around my neck, and planted a long, slow kiss firmly on my lips.

Okay, she didn't. Actually, she nodded, smiled a bit, and said "you want a cup of this?"

"Sure," I said. "What's going on?"

"Big meeting," Cheryl said. "Mr Kim has canceled all this morning's classes."

"What's it about?"

"He didn't say," Cheryl answered. "We'll have to wait and see."

"I guess we'll also have to wait to ask him about the stuff in that ledger?" I said.

"I'm afraid it's not going to be 'we'," Cheryl said. "It'll have to be you. I've got classes for hours after this."

I must have looked disappointed because Cheryl asked if I had a problem questioning Mr Kim on my own.

"I can do it," I said. "No problem. But I was kinda hoping we could play good cop / bad cop."

"Calvin," Cheryl said, looking mildly shocked. "I've only known you a few days, and ..."

"No, no," I said. "It's an interrogation technique. One of us starts questioning the perp. We get really mad, kicking chairs and banging the table. Just when it looks like we're going to lose control, the other one bursts in, throws us out, offers the perp a cup of coffee and a cigarette and pretends to be his buddy. Works every time."

"Tell me something," Cheryl said, smiling. "In your entire childhood, did you ever once hear the words 'you kids turn that thing off'?"

#

Mr Kim the Younger walked into the office and called for everyone's attention. Jennifer Downs put down her book. Dave Stevens hung up the phone. Wendel Clemker subtly turned around his laptop computer so we could all enjoy his screen saver du jour. And Albert Gossage cut short his story, leaving George Bateman to wonder how exactly he managed to evade a flock of surface-to-air missiles and a squadron of MIG fighters.

"I'd like to start by thanking you all for agreeing to come to today's meeting," Mr Kim began. Almost immediately, Cheryl's hand shot up. "Yes, Cheryl," Mr Kim said, rolling his eyes slightly, "You will be paid for being here."

"Thank you," she said.

"Now," Mr Kim continued. "You may have noticed that in the short time since a tragic accident struck down my father in the prime of his life, some changes have been made here at Star Hogwon. Much of our equipment has been modernized."

To illustrate his point, Mr Kim fully extended his arm and rolled his palm outward until his fingertips came gently to rest against Star Hogwon's brand-new photocopier. He looked like one of those "actress / models" you see at car shows stuffed into a bikini made of dental floss and draped over the front end of next year's Plymouth.

"But to be truly successful," he continued, "we must also modernize our teaching methods." Now he gripped the desk with one hand while pointing skyward with the other, a pose I was quick to label "Mussolini Introduces The New Railway Schedules."

"Changes must be made!" he bellowed. "Changes will be made!"

Dropping the strutting dictator look in favor of something softer, Mr Kim continued. "Over the past year," he said, in the manner of a TV evangelist smoothly introducing the toll-free number, "I have examined hundreds of English classes both here at our school and elsewhere. It is clear to me that one thing separates successful classes from failures. That one thing," he said, with a dramatic pause of William Shatner-esque proportions, "is laughter."

This was greeted by a confused groan which left Mr Kim wondering where he had gone wrong. "Listen," he said. "Students who laugh in class are happy. And when they are happy they don't leave the hogwon. They stay and they tell their friends to come also."

"So what do you want us to do?" Jennifer asked.

"I want you all to use humor in the classroom." Mr Kim said. "From now on, each teacher must make his or her students laugh five times during every one-hour class. This will help us to attract and keep students and make Star Hogwon the number one hogwon in Korea!"

Wendel Clemker was busy punching keys on his computer. When



he'd finished he raised his hand. "Mr Kim, I have a question," he said. "Some of us have a few ninety-minute classes. I'm referring here to the businessmen's classes in the early morning and late evening. Now, as I see it, five laughs per hour works out to seven and a half laughs in ninety minutes which is clearly impossible."

The room filled with the muffled sounds of stifled laughter. I turned to Cheryl and whispered, "I thought he had no sense of humor."

"I think he's serious," she answered.

"Perhaps," Wendel continued, "we could alternate between seven laughs and eight laughs per class for an average of seven and a half. Maybe seven laughs on even dates and eight laughs on odd?"

With that, the stifling got more difficult and a fit of coughing and grunting broke out. Before Mr Kim could address Wendel's problem, Jennifer Downs spoke up.

"Mr Kim," she said, "don't you think that we would be better to improve the quality of our teaching. I'm sure the students would appreciate it. Just last week, for example, one of the girls in my Integrated Fundamentals of Advanced Grammar Workshop told me that ..."

"Of course, good teaching is important," Mr Kim said. "But classes must be fun to attend or the students will go elsewhere."

"But I'm not good at jokes," Jennifer said.

"You don't need to tell jokes," Mr Kim answered. "Tell your students amusing stories. Tell them about your life in the west."

Albert Gossage, who had spent most of the morning examining his very expensive necktie to make sure it was as lint-free as his equally expensive blue blazer, joined in the fray. "I'd be more than happy to share stories from my life with my students," he said. "However, there is a problem of national security. Unless my students are cleared Top Secret, I'm afraid I'll have to stay deep cover on most of the good stuff. I'd like to help out here, but my loyalty to the Pentagon has to come first. I'm sure you understand"

Mr Kim didn't understand, but George Bateman did. "Mr Kim," he said. "You are certainly correct in your assessment of the effectiveness of the utilization of applied humor in a learning environment. There can be no doubt that enhanced entertainment values can qualitatively reduce the client turnover ratio in a competitive business climate."

I felt sorry for Mr Kim. He had no idea what Bateman was saying. He just stared at him with glazed eyes and a vacant smile like a bronze medal winner at the Special Olympics.

"On the other hand," Bateman droned on. "Albert does have a legitimate concern with the protection of proprietary information. Given that ..."

Cheryl had had just about enough and butted in. "Mr Kim," she

asked, "is that all? Can we go?"

"Not just yet," Miss Cheryl," he said. There is one more small matter."

Mr Kim opened a box stuffed with business cards and walked around the room giving each teacher a small pile of about fifty.

"What do they say," I asked Cheryl.

"This is just the name, address and phone number of the school," she said. "But this line here; I don't know what it means." She motioned for The Fashionable Miss Park to come over and asked her to translate.

"In English," Miss Park said, just to make sure we didn't want it in Serbo-Croatian, "that says 'For good time, call me.'"

"I ask each of you to write your name on these cards and carry them with you at all times," Mr Kim said. "As you meet people, give them one of these cards. You are all charming and friendly teachers and I am sure that many of the people you meet will want to study at Star Hogwon. These cards will help them."

"This - very - good - idea," Big Chief Dave Stevens said, climbing down off his Palomino and shouldering his bow and arrow. "Many - people - say - to - me, - you - are - teacher, no? I - say - yes. They - say - where - you - teach? Now - I - have - card - to - give - them."

"Now you all have cards to give out," Mr Kim said, enthusiastically. "And soon many more students will come to our school. Together we can all make Star Hogwon the number one hogwon in Korea!"

Only The Fashionable Miss Park caught Mr Kim's excitement. "Remember our motto," she said, pointing to the sign on the wall. "To always be teaching of English incorporating diligence and kindness every time."

But no one was listening.

#

Mr Kim seemed surprised and embarrassed that his bold vision of Star Hogwon's future had gone over like Tipper Gore at an Ozzy Osborne concert. He welcomed my suggestion that we get out of the office and find ourselves a quiet coffee shop.

"Do you need more information for your magazine article?" he asked.

"Uh? Yes! That's right," I answered. "Just a few things. Background mostly. You don't mind, do you?"

"No," he said. "I'm glad that somebody is interested in my plans for the school. The teachers don't seem to be."

"Maybe they're still a bit numb," I offered.

"Numb?"

"Over your father's death," I said.

"Oh, that," Mr Kim said. "I doubt it."

"Still," I said, "it was a shock."

"Yes," he said, laughing. "An electric shock."

We both had a good chuckle at that one. It's hard to make a joke in a second language and I could well understand how Mr Kim could be so pleased with himself. I didn't mean that he killed his father. On the other hand, it didn't mean that he didn't.

The coffee shop was called The Cotton Club. It was quiet, elegant and comfortable. Like all Korean coffee shops, it was more a meeting place than a shooting gallery for java junkies. The coffee was weak and expensive, but you could stay for hours nursing one cup and nobody would bother you. Even the air conditioning worked properly. I liked the place.

I could think of no gentle way to start questioning Mr Kim about the ledger book. Tact and subtlety have never been my strong points. On the other hand, the "by the way, I was breaking into your filing cabinet last night" approach might get things off to a shaky start. Luckily, Mr Kim solved the problem for me.

"You seem to be very interested in my father's accident," he said.

"I'm a writer," I said. "I just can't resist a good story. It's in the blood."

"But this was nothing more than a common accident" he said. "Where is the story."

"I'm not certain that it was an accident," I said. "It's possible that someone rigged the light switch to kill your father."

"What makes you think that?" Mr Kim asked.

"Nothing in particular," I answered, not wanting to give too much away. "You have to forgive my natural tendency to put a dramatic spin on things. But if someone wanted to murder your father, it wouldn't have been very difficult to mess around with that switch."

Without letting on that Cheryl and I had poked around the school, I told Mr Kim how the "accident" had been arranged.

"Who do you suspect?" he asked.

"That's problem," I said. "Any one of a hundred people could have done it. The question is who would have wanted to. Who had a motive?"

"Who did?" he asked.

"I don't know," I answered, truthfully. "I was hoping you could help. Who would benefit from your father being dead?"

While Mr Kim thought this over, I watched him carefully for tell-tale signs of guilt. I really don't know what I was hoping to see --

beads of perspiration, a maniacal grin and demonic laughter, the growth of horns and a pointy tail. I didn't have a clue.

Finally he spoke. "Actually," he said. "I would."

"You!" I said, laughing as if the idea were quite ridiculous.

"It's true," he said. "Now that my father is no longer with us, the hogwon is mine. That is certainly a benefit, don't you think?"

"I guess so," I said. "So what do I do now?"

"Question me," Mr Kim said.

"All right," I said. "Hmmm. Where were you the night before your father was killed?"

"I was in Inchon, about sixty kilometers from here," he answered. "I was there for two days. I returned less than two hours before my father was killed"

"Okay," I said. "And why were you in Inchon?"

"I had business there."

"What kind of business?"

"Private business."

"You'll have to be more specific," I said.

"I will," Mr Kim said. "But first I need your assurance that nothing of what I tell you will appear in your magazine article."

"Oh, certainly," I said, in a confidence-inspiring tone of voice. I put myself through school selling used cars and I can be very reassuring when I want to be, as many a customer discovered when their 12-year-old, seven-owner, high-mileage, recently repainted, Renault Alliance didn't perform quite as well as promised.

"You have my word," I said. "This is all strictly off-the-record." I wasn't about to admit that not only was there no Star Hogwon story but that even if there were, the magazines I write for would make damn sure nobody ever saw it.

"I went to the immigration office in Inchon to get a work visa for Jennifer Downs," he said.

"Why is that such a secret?" I asked.

"I had to persuade the immigration officials," he answered, a bit sheepishly.

"Persuade."

"Maybe 'persuade' isn't the best word."

"What is?" I asked.

"Bribe," he answered.

This was no surprise. There's very little street crime in Korea but, like most of Asia except Singapore, the country is rotten with corruption. Personally, I'll take street crime any day; at least you can fight back.

"Why don't you start at the beginning and tell me all about it," I said.

"Generally, our teachers at Star Hogwon are all here legally. Before they come, we get them a work visa," he said. "The trouble is that a work visa takes four to six weeks to obtain. When Jennifer was coming, we were short of teachers and needed her right away. My father persuaded her to come on a tourist visa. He said that he'd get her a work visa soon after she arrived."

"And he didn't?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"You can't get a work visa for someone who is already in the country," Mr Kim explained. "My father would have had to send Jennifer out of the country to make an application. That would have cost a lot of money and left us one teacher short"

"Surely your father knew this when he first told Jennifer to come over?" I asked.

"He did," said Mr Kim. "But he thought that once she was here he would be able to persuade her to stay and work illegally. A lot of people do it."

"But not Jennifer?"

"You've met Jennifer, Mr Scott," Mr Kim said. "She's not the sort of person to break the rules. She told my father that if he didn't get her a work visa, she was going to turn him in to immigration."

"So your father sent you to 'persuade' the immigration officials to issue a visa?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Why Incheon?" I asked. "There must be an immigration office in Seoul."

"There is," Mr Kim said. "But I don't know anyone there. And it would probably be more expensive."

"Can you prove this?"

"I don't think so," he said. "These people don't give receipts."

"You said you were gone for two days," I said. "Where did you stay?"

"At a yogwon," he said. "It's like a small inn. But I paid cash and I don't think they'd remember me."

Strangely, the weaker Mr Kim's alibi became, the more I was inclined to believe him. "Who gave you the bribe money?" I asked.

"My father."

"And how much was it?"

"500,000 won," Mr Kim said. "In cash, of course."

In my mind I could still see the 500,000 ledger entry with Mr Kim's name beside it. It wasn't proof and it wouldn't stand up in a courtroom.

But it was good enough for me.

#

"So how did it go with Mr Kim," Cheryl asked when I got back to the school.

"Pretty well," I said. "We had a nice talk, then he took me to his house and let me sleep with his wife."

"Really?"

"No," I said. "Not really. But I'll say this, he was darned good natured about it when I asked."

I told Cheryl how I had come to think that Mr Kim the Younger was probably innocent. She agreed, but that left us without a likely killer. We were back to square one, suspecting everybody.

"I still think you were right about looking for someone with a motive," I said. "If there was some way we could find out more about Mr Kim the Elder, it might point us in the right direction."

"We could try the net," Cheryl said.

"The Internet?"

"Yes," Cheryl said. "There are three or four websites where people post information and warnings about different schools. Maybe we'll find something"

She explained that there were places all over town offering terminals with Internet access. Cheryl had an account at one nearby. She drew me a map for the taxi driver and we arranged to meet that evening after her last class.

#

ClubNet was no different from any other Internet Cafe. Along one wall there sat a row of computer terminals manned by young people with bad skin. There was a place in the corner where you could buy weak coffee and a couch which was probably the last word in comfort in the early fifties. The windows had little "Intel Inside" stickers all over them and the walls were covered with posters showing how Windows95 builds a lasting world peace, protects the environment, saves the whales, stops embarrassing hair loss, and adds flavor to cooking.

I got there first, so to pass time I picked up a two-year-old copy of PC Something-or-other and tried to figure out what "3.1 vs OS/2 Warp: Multi-Tasking Face Off!" could possibly mean. Cheryl arrived before I could read the article so I never did find out. I think it has something to do with hockey, but I could be wrong.

There was plenty of stuff about Korean hogwons on the Internet. As well as the usual tourist-guide stuff, there were hundreds of "jobs offered" and "jobs wanted" listings, plenty of websites devoted to tips

on living in Korea, and still others devoted to teaching techniques. We were looking for information on individual hogwons and directors, specifically Star Hogwon and Mr Kim the Elder.

Cheryl knew about a couple of good sites and the bad-skinned young person at the next terminal added a third. We checked out the "Hot List / Cold List", the "ESL Schools Guide" and something called "Caveat Hogwon". They were all pretty much the same, page after page of horror stories from teachers who had been promised Hamlet and been given Baywatch.

One girl described the apartment that her school had provided for her. It read like a passage from *Down And Out In Paris And London*. Another told of being forced to teach from six in the morning to eleven at night. When she complained, her director told her to catch some sleep on the subway to and from work. The majority of complaints concerned salaries, with a huge number of teachers reporting that they were either paid late, underpaid, or in many cases, not paid at all.

"This is pretty awful stuff," I said. "Are these typical cases?"

"Not exactly typical," she answered. "These are the worst cases."

"So this kind of thing doesn't happen often?"

"Oh, it happens all the time," she said. "But most people don't have it that bad. They get put in apartments that aren't nice, but aren't rotten either. They have minor pay problems, but they get most of their money eventually. That's how it usually works out"

"Does anybody have a really great experience out here?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," she said.

"Like who?"

"Well," Cheryl said. "I haven't actually met anyone. But there must be a few."

We went back to reading the postings, which grew tiring after a while. I felt sorry for some of the people I read about, but others were just plain stupid. What sort of a dummy continues to teach when he hasn't been paid for ten weeks. And in my opinion, the girl who wrote "I really felt that if I worked hard and treated my students well, my director would do something about the lack of heat in my apartment" deserved everything she got.

By the time we finished reading all three sites, we'd seen examples of every slimy trick in the hogwon owner's book. What we hadn't seen was a single reference to Star Hogwon or Mr Kim the Elder.

"So I guess he's pretty clean," I said. "He's not on the list."

"That doesn't mean he's clean," Cheryl said. "There are thousands of hogwons in Korea. These sites only list the ones where a

teacher has had a bad time, has an Internet account, knows about the website, and takes the time to post. I'm afraid this was just a waste of time."

"Oh, I wouldn't call it a waste of time," I said. "Now I can put 'able to use Netscape Navigator' on my resume."

#

"So much for the information highway," I said, as Cheryl and I left ClubNet.

"You're not a big fan of the Internet?"

"It's a racket," I said. "They pass it off as some kind of a learning tool so people will fork out the money to get hooked up. But when you get on it, what do you find? Infomercials, Kylie Minogue home-pages, and Melrose Place chat rooms."

"Yeah, but what about all those free dirty pictures?" Cheryl said, laughing.

"They take forever to download," I said.

"Really, Calvin," Cheryl said with a grin. "And how do you know that?"

"Well," I stammered. "You know. That's what I heard. Somebody told me. Actually, I read about it in a magazine. Yeah, that's right. A magazine. PC Something-or-other."

"Mmmm?"

"In fact," I said. "I didn't even know that they had dirty pictures. I was just looking for information about OXFAM and the United Way when I hit the wrong key and ..."

Cheryl wasn't buying any of it. A fast change of subject seemed like my best move.

"Enough about me," I said. "What about Mr Kim? Who else could tell us about him?"

"Friends, family, former students, former employees," Cheryl suggested.

"Can we track any of them down?"

"The first three could be difficult," Cheryl said. "And if we did find them, we'd have a language problem. But we may be able to find some former teachers."

"How?" I asked.

"Let's go back to the school and I'll show you."

"Tonight?"

"I'll make you a deal," Cheryl said. "Help me with this tonight, and tomorrow I'll take you back to ClubNet and show you how to download Miss June."



#

Cheryl's plan was actually pretty clever. Like every other language school, Star Hogwon advertised heavily. Three or four times a year the school had printed a stack of one-page flyers to be inserted into newspapers or stuffed into mailboxes. The flyers featured a list of courses offered, a timetable, and a photograph and short bio (name, age, place of origin, university attended) of each teacher. As Mr Kim the Elder never threw anything away, there were piles of these old flyers stuffed into out-of-the-way corners all over the school. Cheryl figured we could use them to track down some of Mr Kim's former teachers.

"We'll make a list of names and cities," she said. "Then we'll get someone in the States to look up the phone numbers for us."

"My editor can help us with that," I said with some self-importance. "Every big magazine has fact-checkers."

In fact, the "Research Department" at World Horizons isn't much more than a bookshelf in the basement filled with out-of-town phone books. But that was all we needed. I'd call Nina and get her to send one of her minions down to look up a few names.

It didn't take very long to make up a list. We eliminated everyone whose place of origin was given as a state rather than a city. And we skipped people with too common names (Bill Smith from New York City, for example). When we were finished, we had fourteen possibilities.

I looked at my watch. It was 11:35PM, which meant it was 10:35AM in New York. If I was lucky, I'd catch Nina between her late arrival at work and her early departure for lunch.

"Hullo," a male voice answered. "I mean, uh, World Hor ..., ... Nina's office. Nina Van Der Klerk."

Nina's office staff was an industry joke. Her secretaries were all either 19 year-old, male fashion models, with shapely bottoms, pouting lips and single-digit IQs, or 75 year-old female drill sergeants recruited from the Ladies Auxiliary of the Waffen SS. I'd reached one of the former, doubtless some mental midget with great hair and one of those improbable model-names like Vance or Roget.

"Can you put Nina on the phone?" I asked. "It's Calvin Scott calling."

"Who?"

"Calvin Scott," I said. "I'm a writer."

"A writer, huh?"

"Yes," I said. "You know: words. Those funny black things we use to space out the pictures and the perfume samples."

I heard Nina's girly voice as she took the phone away from the

handsome Neanderthal I was talking to. "I'll take that, Giscard," she said. "You run along and try on that tank-top I bought you."

"Nina, it's Calvin Scott," I said.

"Calvin," she squealed, like the 17-year-old cheerleader she still believes herself to be. "Where are you?"

"I'm in South Korea, Nina."

"What are you doing there?" Nina asked.

"I'm writing a story for your magazine," I said.

"How's it going?" she asked.

"Fine, just fine," I said. "Listen, I need your help with something."

"You've got it, Calvin," she said. "That's what I'm here for. I've always said, you know, that an editor's job is to support her writers. To back them up, so they can do their best work. I'm right behind you. You don't need money do you?"

"No."

"That's good," she said. "We've spent a fortune this month getting Lisette and Veronique for the inner fashions photo feature."

"Inner fashions?" I asked.

"Lingerie," Nina said. "But tastefully done. Very artistic. We brought in Brandon Cooper to take the pictures."

"The guy who shoots those tire company calendars?" I asked.

"That's him!" Nina said, without a whiff of shame.

I told Nina what I needed and she agreed to get the numbers right away and have them faxed back to me. Assuming she assigned the task to someone brighter than Giscard, it wouldn't take more than half an hour. The only drawback was that I couldn't get away without telling Nina what I was up to.

"It's a bit of a mystery," I said. "A man died suspiciously and I'm helping someone look in to it."

"A murder!" Nina screamed.

"Well," I said. "It looks like it, yes."

"Ooohh," Nina said. "A sex slaying?"

"No, I don't think so. Actually, I'm ..."

"Was the victim found nude, Calvin?" Nina asked. "If he was found nude, it could be a sex slaying."

"He wasn't nude," I said. "He was wearing ..."

"If it's a sex slaying," Nina went on, "it may just be the beginning. Who knows when he'll strike again."

"I don't think he's going to strike again, Nina," I said.

"Oh, he will," she said. "These perverts never stop. You could be in for a reign of terror over there."

"I don't think it'll be all that bad," I said.

"It will be awful, Calvin. Just hideous. I shudder to think how many poor unfortunate souls may be struck down by that marauding madman," Nina said, dramatically. "Say, do you think we could get pictures?"

#

Exactly half an hour later, the fax machine sprung to life and out came a blank sheet of paper. A minutes later we got a cover sheet addressed in prissy handwriting to "Calvin Scut." Next came another copy of the cover sheet and the top half of a partially completed magazine quiz entitled "Test Your Skin-Care IQ." Then the machine went dead.

I was just about to call Nina when the fax machine resurrected itself and spat out a third cover sheet, a note from someone called Brandi Wyne who was "sorry about the facks, butt I'm new hear", a 20 percent-off coupon from The Swiss Institute For Organic Cosmetology and, finally, a list of names and telephone numbers.

From the fourteen names we had sent Nina, nine came back with telephone numbers. This was better than we'd expected and we started dialing.

Two of the numbers never answered, one was permanently busy, and another had been re-assigned to a Pakistani gentleman who had never heard of the person we were trying to reach.

All told, we talked to five people. All had pretty much the same story to tell. They had come out with high hopes and been quickly disappointed. Neither the school, nor their accommodations had lived up to their expectations. Mr Kim had been a less-than-perfect employer and some of them had experienced minor problems getting paid.

On the other hand, none reported major problems. And they had all served out their full one-year contract except for one girl who left after nine months when her mother became ill. As for who might want to kill Mr Kim, four of them had no idea.

But Brad Kwinter from Spokane, Washington did.

#

When I called Brad Kwinter's home his mother answered. She said that her son was at work and gave me the number.

"Kwinter & Son," a cheerful voice answered after two rings, "serving your life, home and auto needs."

"Uh, yes," I said. "Does Brad Kwinter work there?"

"He certainly does."

"What kind of business is that?" I asked.

"We are a full-service insurance brokerage offering a complete range of estate planning products, property coverage and automotive policies," she answered. It sounded like I'd reached America's answer to The Fashionable Miss Park.

"May I speak to Mr Kwinter?"

"Certainly, Sir," she said. "May I have your name?"

"Calvin Scott."

"I'll connect you, Mr Scott," she said. "Please hold."

I hate hold. Most of the time it's deathly silent so you think you've been cut off and you hang up just before the person you want to talk to comes on the line. Or it's easy listening music and you have to sit there being driven slowly insane by James Last and Mantovani while trying to decide whether to hang yourself or slit your wrists. And sometimes they just hook the phone up to a cheap radio and you're forced to endure lame jokes from the wacky traffic guy between Aerosmith songs on "CRAP 105 The Home of Classic Rock."

But Kwinter & Son had something even worse -- advertising. For what seemed like an eternity, I was subjected to a series of recorded testimonials from people whose lives had been saved by the miracle of modern life insurance. Some doddering old woman was gushing on about her exciting new Universal-Flexible Term-to-100, Variable Rate Whole Life Plan with Triple Indemnity Accidental Death from the Rock Solid Granite Boulder Mutual Company when a young man, presumably Brad Kwinter, came on the line.

"Calvin," he said, like we were old chums. "How are you today? What can I do for you?"

I told him who I was and why I was calling and asked him about his experiences at Star Hogwon.

"Oh, the usual, I guess," he said. "They told me I'd be working at a nice school and living in a luxury apartment. Well you've seen the school and my apartment wasn't much better. Still, I had student loans to pay so I stuck it out for the year."

"What about Mr Kim?" I asked. "How was he?"

"Not great, but not bad," Kwinter answered. "We usually had to bug him a bit on payday, and once we actually threatened to stop work if he didn't come through with our money, but that kind of thing is par for the course over there. How did the old guy die?"

I told him.

"Was he covered?"

"Covered?"

"Was he insured?" Kwinter asked. "Accidental death, you know."

Pays double."

I told Kwinter that I knew nothing of Mr Kim's insurance situation, assured him that I'd definitely keep him in mind if I ever felt the need for "a comprehensive plan that offers peace of mind for you and your loved ones in the event of your untimely passing on," and started to wrap up the call.

"So you can't imagine any of his teachers wanting to kill him?" I said.

"Not one of his teachers, no."

Something in Kwinter's voice made me risk another sales pitch and question him further. "Someone else then?" I said.

"Well," he said. "I only heard this second or third hand so I don't want to get anyone in trouble."

I made my usual off-the-record, deep-background, top secret, cleared-to-rumor, burn before reading offer. Brad Kwinter seemed satisfied.

"Do you know that funny little guy who has the school across the street?" he asked.

"Mr Chong?" I said. "Happy English Language Institute?"

"That's him, Chong Won-lyul is his name," Kwinter said.

"Apparently he and Mr Kim the Elder were in the same unit during the Korean War. I don't know the details, but Mr Chong ended up saving Mr Kim's life."

"So why would he want to kill him?"

"I didn't say he did," Kwinter said, cautiously. "All I can tell you is that some time after the war, Mr Chong's business was in trouble, he went to Mr Kim for help, and Mr Kim turned him down. From what I hear, Mr Chong has hated him ever since."

"Hated him enough to kill him?"

"It's possible."

"But why kill him now?"

"I don't know," Kwinter said. "Maybe if you hate someone that much it just grows and grows until it gets too much to handle."

"I guess we'll have to check it out," I said.

"Watch out for yourself," Kwinter said. "If he's killed once, he'll kill again."

"I'll be careful," I said.

"Good plan," Kwinter said. "Another good plan is our Level Premium Term-Life Scheme with a Disability Rider. It offers ...."

#

I got off the phone and looked at Cheryl who had been listening

in on the other extension.

"What do you think of that?" I asked.

"I think," she said, "that it's time you went looking for a teaching job."

## Chapter Six

I only got three hours sleep that night so I was tired the next morning. No. Tired isn't the word. More like Walking Zombie Of The Un-Dead, Part IV: The Monster Returns!

Cheryl had reached the office before me and when I arrived she was busy mixing up a cauldron of her witch's brew coffee.

"Close your eyes," she said, handing me a cup, "or you'll bleed to death."

The coffee didn't wake me up so much as it caused me to forget my tiredness by making me sick to my stomach. I had that queasy, nauseous feeling that you get when you've eaten rotten meat, drunk spoiled milk or accidentally gone to see a Melanie Griffith movie.

The thought of interrogating Mr Chong in my current state didn't help. If I could just get a few hours nap-time without looking like a complete wimp, I'd be okay.

"I'll just keep out of your hair this morning," I said with as much false heartiness as my debilitated condition would allow. "Maybe catch a movie or visit a museum."

"This morning?" Clearly, Cheryl had other ideas.

"Yeah, well, you know," I stammered. "I thought I'd do a couple of things on my own, have a bite of lunch, then come straight back here first thing in the afternoon and get right on that Mr Chong business."

"You'll have to go this morning," Cheryl said. "He won't have time for you in the afternoon. That's rush hour for hogwons."

"So you think later on this morning is the best time?" I said.

"No," Cheryl answered. "I think right now this morning is the best time."

#

The Happy English Language Institute was smaller than Star Hogwon but a little cleaner and a lot quieter. There was no "mottow" on the wall, but I was sure that, here too, English was taught "with diligents and kindness every time."

Cheryl had told me that Mr Chong's school had two foreign teachers, a young American girl and a middle-aged Canadian fellow who had come to Korea thinking that it was a major opium producer. When he found out that it wasn't, he decided to stay anyway. The last

time Cheryl saw him, he was on the phone to his travel agent asking about airfares to Burma and Thailand.

I didn't see either teacher that morning. I heard a male voice drilling a class on the difference between the words "fork" and "pork" but that was it.

Actually, the only person I did see was Mr Chong. He was comfortably reclined in a chair eight sizes too big for him with a cigarette in one hand and a can of Pocari Sweat (which, by the way, tastes as good as it sounds) in the other. His feet were up on his desk and he'd taken off his shoes revealing the oddest little socks.

Normal socks are like mittens - one big sack for all five toes. But these were like gloves. Each toe had its own separate "finger." When he wiggled his toes he looked like a department store Christmas elf. It was the cutest thing I'd seen all week.

Not surprisingly, Mr Chong was delighted to see me.

"Ahhh, Mr Scott," he said in that Bertie Wooster voice of his. "Such a joy and a pleasure to see you once again."

"Nice to see you, too."

"You have discovered that I was, in fact, quite correct about Star Hogwon," he said. "Not a happy place for a young man?"

"No," I said. "When we met last, you mentioned a teaching position."

"You are today a very fortunate man. I do, in fact, happen to have a couple of vacant positions."

"A couple?" I asked.

"Three, in fact," he said. "Well, actually, four. How many in your group?"

"Just me," I said.

Mr Chong seemed disappointed. I was pretty sure that if I and 47 other people had walked in looking for teaching jobs he would have had exactly that number of "fortunate vacancies."

"Well, one is good," Mr Chong said, "especially when that one is you, Mr Scott."

I was starting to like the little guy. Sure he was a hustler, and he shoveled out the flattery like he needed the space, but he was nice about it and, in an odd way, genuine.

But I wasn't there to find out if he was a nice guy. I was there to gently question him about his relationship with Mr Kim. I handed him a short resume that Cheryl had quickly typed up for me. I figured that if I could get him to ask me a few questions about my background it wouldn't seem strange if I asked a few questions about his. That was when I realized that there was no way Mr Chong could be our man.

He took the resume flat on his upturned palm, using his other palm to keep it from drifting away. He lowered it onto his desk,

realized that he'd placed it face down and was forced to use his wrists to awkwardly flip it right side up.

I wasn't sure what was wrong with his hands, but I could see that unless he used his toes, Mr Chong would have had a tough time sabotaging that light switch.

Of course, he could have been faking. I had to continue this phony job interview for a while yet, so I didn't see any harm in a little test.

I asked a few questions about pay and working conditions and started writing them in my little notebook. Trying to make it look as natural as possible, I dropped my pen such that it landed under Mr Chong's desk, near his right foot. It's not that easy to drop something just where you want it and make it look accidental, but I think I pulled it off.

Mr Chong leaned down to get my pen. Reflexively, as if he'd done it that way for years, he turned his hand palm up, placed two fingers on either side of my pen, squeezed them as tightly as he could and carefully lifted it off the floor. From the grimace on his face, it was painful work.

"Sorry, I could have got it," I said. There was no way the little guy was faking and I felt awful for what I'd done.

"Don't feel bad, Mr Scott," he said. "It's a sickness. The English word is ..."

He used the back of his hand to page through the dictionary on his desk and pointed out a word.

"Arthritis?" I said.

Mr Chong had severe arthritis. I could have found that out and scratched him off our suspect list by asking a few people a few questions. The job application charade was a waste of time.

On the other hand, I didn't mind spending time with Mr Chong. He was charming, in an odd sort of way. I'm not sure how far I'd trust him, but if I ever decide to go into the English teaching business, I'll look him up.

#

"Detective Chief Superintendent Inspector Constable Scott reporting in, Guv," I said to Cheryl when I got back to Star Hogwon.

"What did you find out?" she asked.

I told her.

"So what do we do now?" Cheryl asked.

"Look for someone else with a motive," I suggested. "Find out more about Mr Kim."

"I think we've uncovered all we can about Mr Kim," Cheryl said.



"I think we should try attacking it from the other direction. Leave the victim alone for a while and look more closely at the suspects."

"But you said yourself, any one of a hundred people could have done it."

"True," she said. "But let's start with people close to Mr Kim and work out from there. If the killer turns out to be someone who took a single class here ten years ago, then we probably won't find him. But if he's someone closer we may get lucky."

"What are we going to ask them?"

"We'll start by asking everybody where they were the night before Mr Kim was killed."

"So who's first," I asked.

"Let's go talk to Jennifer," Cheryl said. "We can question her and check out Mr Kim's immigration alibi at the same time."

"Makes sense," I said. "Do you want to go now?"

"Yeah," Cheryl said, sliding a sheet of paper into her desk. "I can take care of this later."

"What is it?" I asked.

"It's the latest managerial innovation from our new leader," she said. "It's a form for each teacher to record how many times he or she made the students laugh each class. At the end of each week, we're supposed to make sure that each class averages five per hour."

"Are you going to do it?" I asked.

"Oh, I'll just fake it," Cheryl said. "Fill it all in at the end of the week and jiggle the numbers so they come out right."

"And the others?"

"Well," Cheryl said. "Jennifer will probably spend four hours preparing each joke. Wendel will want to know whether to use the mean, median or mode average. Albert will stamp it "Top Secret" and lock it up with his autographed copy of The Hitler Diaries. And George will most likely initiate the establishment of a series of baseline parameters for effective utilization of the learning process."

"You forgot Dave Stevens," I said.

"Now - class - I - tell - funny - joke - you - laugh."

#

Jennifer Downs lived with two other female teachers at an apartment complex three subway stops from Star Hogwon. The building was pretty grotty looking, but the three girls kept their apartment hospital-clean. There were enough mops and brushes and scrubbers and soaps and disinfectants to open a toxic waste dump. As someone whose idea of cleaning involves little more than opening a window and changing the Roach Motel, it was all rather dazzling.

I left most of the interrogation to Cheryl. Girls have their own way of talking which I, like most men, don't understand. They don't really talk. They just make sympathetic noises like Oprah Winfrey does when she wants Barb ("Says she's not a tease") to apologize to Linda ("Says her friend flirts with her husband"). Some guy wrote a book all about it called Men Are From Mars; Women Are Just Plain Weird. You might have read it.

Anyway, with a lot of empathic murmuring and other touchy-feely stuff, Cheryl managed to tell Jennifer what Mr Kim the Younger had told us.

"That's exactly what happened," Jennifer said. "I only came to Korea as a tourist because Mr Kim promised that he'd get me a work visa once I was here. He put it off for months before he finally admitted that what he really wanted was for me to stay here and work illegally, I refused. I told him that I'd turn him in to immigration and go home."

"Were you serious?" Cheryl asked. "Would you have done that?"

"I don't think I'd have turned him in," Jennifer said. "I was just angry. But I would have gone home."

"So Mr Kim the Younger got you a visa?" Cheryl said.

"Yes," Jennifer said. "Here." She pulled one of those neck pouches that backpackers wear out of the top of her WWF Battle Of The Titans sweatshirt and took out a passport and a small blue booklet.

"Alien card as well," Cheryl said, surprised. "That was quick."

"Excuse me," I said. "Can you explain this visa stuff to me?"

"Sure," Cheryl said. "When you come here on a tourist visa, you just turn up at the airport, present yourself at the immigration counter and they stamp a visa in your passport."

"That's what I did," I said.

"Exactly," Cheryl said. "But when you come here to work, you apply for a work visa in your home country. It takes about six weeks."

"And you have that before your leave?" I said.

"Yes, you show it at the airport and they let you in," Cheryl said. "But that's not the end of it. Within 90 days of arriving here you have to get a Certificate of Alien Registration, this little blue book."

"How do you get that?"

"Your employer takes you down to immigration, you fill in a form, give them your passport and, ten days later, you pick it up."

"Ten days?" I said. "But you got yours right away, Jennifer."

"That's right," she said. "Obviously he paid off somebody. It happens all the time here. Mr Kim the Younger took my passport and two days later he came back with a work visa backdated to the day I got here and an alien card."

"Well that supports Mr Kim's alibi, doesn't it?" I said.

Jennifer was a little confused. Cheryl told her that we were poking into Mr Kim's accident and trying to find out what everybody was doing the night before he was killed.

"Well, I'd really like to help you investigate," Jennifer said. "It sounds like a lot of fun. But I'm swamped with work these days. I'm updating my flash cards and ..."

"That's okay," Cheryl said. "But we'll have to ask you, just to scratch you off the list, where you were that night."

"Me?"

Cheryl made some Oprah-like noises which made no sense to me but seemed to convince Jennifer that we didn't really think she did it but were just going through the motions.

"Don't let this get out," Jennifer said, "but I was with Dave Stevens that night."

Cheryl understood what she meant. I didn't get it.

"What do you mean, 'with' Dave," I asked.

"You know," she said. "I was with him."

"They were together," Cheryl said, which didn't help me at all.

"Together, where?" I went on. "Did anyone see you?"

"Of course not!" Jennifer answered with some surprise. "We were at his place."

"Jennifer was with Dave at his apartment," Cheryl explained in girl-code. "They spent the night together."

"A ha!" It finally dawned on me. "You were having sex with Dave Stevens."

Jennifer nodded sheepishly.

"Can you prove it?" I asked. I can be indelicate as well as obtuse.

"No, I can't," Jennifer said. "But I think Dave can."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Just ask Dave."

I looked over at Cheryl, but this time she was as lost as me.

"Can you explain that, Jennifer?" Cheryl asked patiently.

"No," Jennifer said. "I can't. You'll know what I mean when you talk to Dave."

#

"Boy, she was pretty evasive about sleeping with Dave Stevens." I said, as Cheryl and I left and headed for the subway.

"What do you mean?" Cheryl said. "She told us right away."

"All that stuff about being 'with' him and being 'together'," I said. "That's not telling us right away."

"Yes it is."

"Maybe for girls," I said. "Not for guys. If she'd been a guy she would have been clear about it."

"How?"

"Well she would have rolled her eyes," I said. "And grinned, and nudged me in the ribs, and said something involving the words 'hubba hubba'."

"That's mature," Cheryl said.

"Well at least we would have known."

"So that's what we can expect from Dave?" Cheryl asked.

"Not necessarily," I said. "You know how he is."

"Oh yeah."

"Big - Chief - Running - Dave - take - squaw - in - wigwam. We - go - shaggy - shaggy - long - time."

Cheryl laughed.

#

Dave's apartment was in Tokyo. Or Singapore. Or Luxembourg for all I could tell.

It took us an hour and a half to get there. Cheryl led me on and off a dozen subway trains, across a park, down a street lined with old women selling oranges, through a school playground, and up an alley filled with parked cars. I followed along like one of those puppy dogs you read about in Reader's Digest who run across five states to be reunited with their owners.

"Here we are," Cheryl said.

There are two kinds of apartment building in Seoul - clean, new, depressing concrete monstrosities and run-down, old depressing concrete monstrosities. Like Jennifer Downs, Dave Stevens lived in one of the latter.

But unlike Jennifer's oasis of tidiness, Dave's place was as messy and disordered as, well ... Dave.

"Cheryl - hello. Calvin - Scott - hello. You - come - in - now," he said, waving us inside.

Dave sat us down and offered tea. He had twenty-three different varieties, all sent by a friend named Zippo who lived in a converted school bus outside San Francisco. Cheryl had a Raspberry Zinger Whazzoo Zapper while I, anticipating the arduous trek back to the school, chose something called a Perky Power Picker Upper. It tasted like chicken and made my teeth itch.

I came straight to the point. "Dave," I said. "Cheryl and I think that Mr Kim's death may not have been an accident."

Dave looked thoughtful "I - think - so - me - too," he said. "I -

very - sure."

Cheryl and I looked at each other. We were both asking ourselves the same question. What did Dave Stevens know that made him think Mr Kim may have been murdered? We weren't the only suspicious ones. Dave thought there was something fishy too.

"What makes you say that, Dave?" Cheryl asked. "What do you know about this?"

"I - know - it - no - accident," Dave said.

"Why?" Cheryl and I demanded. We were both perched on the edge of our seats, bubbling with excitement. At last, a breakthrough.

"There - be - no - accidents - in - world," Dave said. "All - of - mankind - one - universe. The - brotherhood - is - global"

Cheryl and I slumped back into our chairs and groaned. That was all we needed. Another damned Tawny Sky.

But Dave wasn't put off. He'd read most of an article in a new age magazine and caught the last ten minutes of an interview with Depak Chopra on Good Morning America and somehow picked up the idea that every person on Earth was psychically connected. He was trying to explain how, because of something called 'Synchronicity', a butterfly could flap its wings in China and cause a natural disaster in the United States.

"A natural disaster?" Cheryl said, skeptically. "Like an earthquake."

"Yes." Dave said. "Or - a - flood. Or - a - tornado. Or - a - hurricane. Or - ..."

"Or another Tony Danza sitcom," I snapped. "Now can we get back down to Earth here?"

"What we want to know, Dave," Cheryl said. "Is where everyone was the night before Mr Kim was killed."

"I - here - my - house," Dave said. "I - with - girl." He rolled his eyes, grinned and nudged me in the ribs.

Cheryl groaned.

"Hubba, hubba," I said.

"What girl?" Cheryl said.

"Jennifer - Downs."

We told Dave what Jennifer had told us, that she couldn't prove that they were together but that he could.

"Jennifer - here," he said. "I - show - you. I - have - camera."

He disappeared into the other room and came out with a Polaroid camera. It was a cheap model, the kind that comes in a range of loud colors, sells for \$19.99, and you hardly ever use because the film is so expensive.

"Smile," Dave said, taking our picture.

He had a pile of Polaroids in his hand which he divided into two

piles. They were all pictures of him and Jennifer Downs together in various stages of undress. In my pile you could see more of Dave. Cheryl's pile showed more of Jennifer. Dave Stevens was either trying to be modest or he thought we were both gay.

"So this is what Jennifer was talking about," I said to Cheryl.

"I can see why she didn't want to talk about it," she answered.

Dave didn't seem at all embarrassed. "Just - fun - good - time," he said. "No - problem."

"Of course, Dave," Cheryl said.

"Yeah, sure," I said. "No problem."

We were just trying to be polite, but Dave must have gotten the wrong idea. Suddenly his eyes lit up.

"Hey, - Cheryl. Hey - Calvin," he said. "You - two - want -to - borrow - camera?"

#

It was getting late so we decided to screw up our courage, stare death in the face, and take a taxi to Albert Gossage's place.

Every Korean taxi driver sees himself as Asia's answer to Nigel Mansell. Basically, they are all frustrated fighter pilots who don't see why a 5G rollover power dive can not be performed in a six-year-old Hyundai.

Our driver was no different. I don't remember asking him to demonstrate the handling characteristics of the base-model Stellar, but that's what he set out to do.

"So what about Jennifer and Dave?" I said, trying to ignore the fact that our taxi was, as far as I could tell, actually airborne. "Can we scratch those two off our list?"

"I don't think so," Cheryl said. "Those pictures only prove that they slept together. They don't tell us when."

"True," I said. "But they've both got an alibi."

"Each other," Cheryl said.

"So they could have done it together?" I said.

"Maybe together," Cheryl said. "Or one of them could have done it and asked the other to cover for them."

By now we were on full afterburner. Apparently, we had a couple of Messerschmidts on our tail and closing fast. Our driver jammed on full rudder, hauled up on the flaps, and tried to get behind the attackers. It bought us some time, but not much. If we didn't find some cloud cover soon, we'd have to bail out.

"Or one of them could have slipped out and re-wired the switch while the other one was sleeping," I said.

"I'll tell you something," Cheryl said as we reached Mach 2 and

broke free of the Earth's atmosphere. "I don't know why anyone bothered to rig that switch."

"To kill him, I guess?" I said.

"They could have done that much more easily," Cheryl said, "just by putting him in this taxi."

#

Albert Gossage didn't have an apartment of his own. He lived with a Korean family, an arrangement known as 'homestay'.

According to Cheryl, the only advantage to a homestay was that you generally found yourself living in a nicer apartment in a better neighborhood. The disadvantage was that your Korean hosts tended to adopt you and treat you like one of their own children. As Koreans keep their kids on a tight leash, this often caused problems. Cheryl said that most teachers preferred to live by themselves or with other foreigners.

Albert Gossage didn't seem to mind. He lived on the fourteenth floor of a modern, twenty-story apartment block in a good part of town. He had his own room and the use of the living room, bathroom, kitchen and laundry facilities.

"Come on in," he said, answering the door. "I don't get many visitors here."

Albert was casually dressed in a pair of gray cotton pants and a yellow golf shirt which, together, couldn't have cost less than a hundred and fifty dollars. He sat us down and offered a choice of coffee, tea, wine, beer or liquor.

He disappeared into the kitchen and came back with a coffee for me, a tea for Cheryl and a glass of white wine for himself. On his next trip he brought out a fruit basket, a plate of assorted crackers, two kinds of pate de fois gras and a fat wedge of brie cheese. I could get used to interrogating Albert Gossage.

"Nice place you've got here," I said.

"Not bad," Albert answered. "The furniture is a bit tacky, but I'm learning to live with it."

"Mind if I poke about?" I said. "I've never seen how ordinary Koreans live."

"Don't mind at all," he said. "I'll show you around."

I got the whole tour, although I was really only interested in Albert's part of the apartment.

His room was just lovely. The furniture was obviously provided by his hosts, but Albert had hung some prints on the walls, put up his own curtains and bought himself a bedspread to match. With that and a few small Nigerian wood carvings he'd transformed the room into

something really pleasant.

He'd even done over his part of the bathroom. The rest of the family had strewn toothpaste and soap and shaving gear and such about the room. But one little corner belonged to Albert. It was a picture perfect display of men's toilet products. There were four brands of expensive cologne, a silver shaving cup with an ivory-handled brush, a collection of designer-label shampoos and conditioners and a wicker basket filled with odds and ends including something called a "Strawberry Essence Skin Rejuvenation Mask."

Say what you will about Albert Gossage. He may have been a liar and a fraud and a generally boring person, but damn he had a good eye.

Cheryl hadn't been there before, but she wasn't interested in looking around. While I took in the latest issue of Better Homes & Gossage, she wolfed down most of the brie. "How do you get along with the family?" she asked when we got back.

"The Parks," Albert said. "They're okay. When I first got here they kept asking me where I was going and when I was coming home. But now, for the most part, they leave me alone. For a guy in my position, that's important."

"Your position?"

"I can't tell you much about that," Albert said. "Cheryl, you're not security cleared. And Calvin, well, you're a foreign national."

"A foreign national!" Cheryl said. "Come on, Albert, he's a Canadian."

Albert seemed to regard 'Canadian' and "bolshie pinko stalinist com-symp' as just about the same thing. Must be the health care.

"All I can say to either of you," he said. "Is that some of my activities are classified. Sometimes, I need to go out without telling anyone where I've been."

"That's why we've come to see you," Cheryl said. She told him what we'd told everyone else so far. That we were curious about Mr Kim's death and we wanted to know where everyone was the night before he was killed.

But Albert just didn't get it. Despite his obsession with silly conspiracy theories, it had never occurred to him that Mr Kim's little fry-up could have been anything other than an accident. It took us forever to make him understand. Finally, he got it.

"Well I didn't kill him," he said.

"Of course not, Albert," Cheryl said. "But we would still like to know where you were, if you don't mind."

"I was out," he said.

"Out where."

"Just out," he said. "I went for a walk."



"Did anyone see you?" I asked. "Did you stop anywhere?"

"No," he said. "Well, yes actually. I stopped at a bar for a drink."

"Which bar?"

"I don't remember," he said, becoming agitated. "I mean, I don't know. I can't read Korean."

"Could you tell us where it was," Cheryl said as calmly as she could. "They would certainly remember having seen you."

"No they wouldn't," he snapped back. "And like I told you, I don't remember where it was."

Funny thing. Here was a guy who would look you square in the eye and make up some wild tale about how he flew the Space Shuttle or broke into the Kremlin. Yet ask him what he did one night and the best he could come up with was a walk around the block.

But before I could find out why he was acting like such a nutter, Albert started gathering up the food and drink. "Is there anything else," he said. "I don't want to be rude, but I have some friends coming over and ..."

That was our cue to leave.

#

I was still tired the next morning. The previous night I'd made it to bed by eleven o'clock, was fast asleep by 11:01, and expected to stay that way for the next nine hours.

No such luck. At two o'clock in the morning Cam Fox called. He claimed to be up at the DMZ and wanted to know if I'd like pictures from the North Korean side.

"How the hell are you going to do that?" I asked.

"You'll have to speak up, Calvin," Cam said though a mess of static. "I'm on a scrambled phone here."

Scrambled head is more like it, I thought. "Cam you can't just waltz across the border, you know. It's heavily fortified."

"I've got a way," Cam said. "Some of my old 'Nam buddies are here."

"What kind of 'Nam buddies?"

"Special Forces Reconnaissance Unit," Cam answered. "They'll take me over."

"I thought you were a chopper pilot in Vietnam?" I asked.

"I did two tours," he answered. "Look I can't tie up this line too long. I'm just calling to find out if you want pictures."

"Sure, Cam. Get the pictures," I said. "Get me an 8x10 glossy of Kim Jong-il in his bathrobe, some color slides from a top-secret chemical-weapons factory, and maybe a nice group shot of the Central Committee to hang on my wall."

I banged the phone down on the receiver and went back to sleep. Three hours later it rang again.

"That's it, Cam! You're fired!" I screamed. "Go home. Go directly home. Do not pass GO. Do not collect \$200. Do not even think about working with me again!"

"Wake-up call," a chirpy Korean voice said.

"What?"

"Wake-up call. Five o'clock," it said again. "Good morning, Mr Peterson."

"Who?"

"Mr Frank Peterson," it chirped. "Room 641."

"You've got the wrong guy," I said. "This is Room 641, but I'm not Frank Peterson."

"Where is Mr Peterson?"

"I don't know."

"But you are in the room of Mr Frank Peterson."

"This is my room."

"Room 641?"

"Yes."

"Room 641," the voice said. "Mr Frank Peterson. Five o'clock wake-up call."

"You've made a mistake," I said.

"Room 641?"

This was more than I could take at 5AM. "Just a moment," I said.

I waited a few seconds. "Good Morning, Frank Peterson speaking," I said in a phony southern accent.

"Mr Peterson," the chirpy voice said. "Five o'clock wake-up call."

"Yes, very good," I said with a drawl. "Thank you very much. Have a nice day."

I hung up the phone and went back to sleep.

An hour later my alarm clock went off.

#

I took a cab to Star Hogwon. My driver was the usual suicidal maniac and the ride was the ritual dance with death, but by now I was used to it. Throughout the trip, my heart-rate never went above 200 beats-per-minute and my blood pressure stayed well within the 680-over-540 comfort zone. I was really starting to get the groove of this place.

The driver stopped at an "Oil Bank" for gas and what a performance that was.

There's no price competition at Korean service stations so they compete on service.

As we pulled in, three chirpy youths in pressed uniforms bounced out to greet us. As one pumped the gas another cleaned the windshield while a third wiped our headlamps.

As the gas pumper collected a huge stack of won from the driver, the other two disappeared and returned with a packet of cookies for me and a box of facial tissues for him.

As we drove out, the three employees, plus a fourth who seemed to materialize from nowhere, lined up parallel to the pumps and bowed deeply until we were long gone.

Compared to my gas station back home where a surly kid who speaks no English sits in a bulletproof booth surrounded by over-priced air freshners while Marilyn Manson blares out of his 100-watt per channel ghetto blaster, Oil Bank was a delight.

I got there before Cheryl. Only The Fashionable Miss Park was in the office. She was wearing a mini-skirt the size of a postage stamp and a skin-tight blouse with a multi-colored "It's All Yours" logo embroidered on each sleeve.

The Fashionable Miss Park made me a cup of coffee which I had almost finished drinking when Cheryl came in.

"Morning," she said, grabbing a pack of instant coffee and heading towards the water heater. "I see you've already got coffee."

"Yeah," I said. "Heidi Fleiss made me this one. But I wouldn't say no to another."

"I can see why," she said. "Don't you ever sleep?"

I didn't feel like re-living last night so I changed the subject. "Who shall we talk to today?"

"How about George Bateman?"

"Does he live far?" I asked. "I'm not sure I'm up for another edition of Around The World On Eighty Subways."

"No," Cheryl said. "He lives close by. We can walk there."

"All right," I said. "We'll see Bateman this morning. Then we can talk to Wendel Clemker this afternoon and that should take care of everybody."

"I've got a few classes later this morning," Cheryl said. "Could you handle Wendel on your own? Then we can meet up later and compare notes."

"Sure, I'll take care of Wendel," I said. "On one condition."

"What's that?"

"You mix me up another cup of this rotten coffee."

#

It was a nice day for a walk. It wasn't too hot, wasn't too cold and the air felt clean and fresh, though I knew that was an illusion. Seoul is one of the most polluted cities in the world.

But you wouldn't know it just from being there. Seoul hides its dirtiness well. The air isn't visibly brown and it doesn't make your eyes water like it does in L.A.. And you don't have trouble breathing like you do in places like Mexico City or Prague.

Living in Seoul is a lot like smoking cigarettes. You don't notice anything wrong until you're fifty-three years old and your doctor says he needs to cut big chunks out of your lungs.

These and other cheerful thoughts were rolling about in my head as Cheryl led me out of the hogwon and towards George Bateman's apartment.

"It's this way," she said.

"You've been there before?" I asked.

"More than that," Cheryl said. "I used to live there."

"With George?"

"No, no," Cheryl said. "When I first got here, Mr Kim brought me to that apartment. I took one look at it and told him that he had seven days to find me another place to live or find another teacher."

"What happened?"

"He didn't think I was serious," she said. "Seven days went by then, on the eighth day, I didn't come to work. We had a big fight and he got me a room at a small inn. I stayed there for a month until he found me the place I have now."

"Was the apartment so bad?" I asked.

"It's a garbage dump," Cheryl said. "You'll see what I mean when we get there. I wouldn't let a dog live in that place."

"George doesn't mind?" I asked.

"I guess not," Cheryl said. "I've never asked him about it, but I've never heard him complain."

"What's your current apartment like?" I asked.

"Oh, it's not too bad," she said. "Actually, I'd say it's probably a lot better than most teachers get. Haven't you been to my place?"

"No," I said. "Not yet."

That was the perfect opportunity for Cheryl to invite me over to her house. And she probably would have done had we not, just that moment, arrived at the home of George Bateman. Another good reason for me to hate him.

George was all smiles when we got there. "Please," he said, "enter my living quarters and feel free to utilize the seating facilities." That was George-speak for "come in and sit down."

Cheryl was right about the apartment. If anything, she'd been too kind. The entire place was made of concrete blocks, most of which

were crumbling or cracking. Half the windows were broken. The other half were missing altogether. There were sliding doors at each end which rattled loudly with each gust of wind.

Even by my standards it was filthy dirty, and my standards are low. Back home, the local health authority recommends a tetanus shot for anyone visiting my place and Friends Of The Earth are campaigning to have my bathroom sealed in concrete. But even I wouldn't live in George's apartment.

The kitchen was the worst part. The cooker was covered in rust and looked like it would explode if you tried to turn it on. The cupboards were home to a family of the sort of bugs you normally only see on The Discovery Channel and the entire room was covered with a thin film of grease. Everything I touched felt slippery and oily like brand-new car parts or McDonald's employees.

George didn't offer anything to eat or drink which was just fine with us. Cheryl and I just wanted to ask our questions and get out as quickly as we could. Cheryl came directly to the point and asked him where he was on the night before Mr Kim went up to the great hogwon in the sky.

"I went to see a film," George said. He didn't seem to mind our questioning him.

"Where did you go?" I asked.

"A screening room nearby," he said. "I don't remember which one."

Screening rooms are like video rental stores. But instead of taking the video home, you go into a little booth and watch it on a TV and VCR. They are as common in Korea as movie rental outlets are in the West.

"What movie did you see?" Cheryl asked.

"I seem to be unable to recall the title," George said. "I think a submarine was involved."

"A submarine?"

"Yes," he said. "Sean Connery was attempting to expropriate a nuclear submarine."

"Ahhh!" I said. "The Hunt For Red October."

"Yes," George said. "That's it. Gene Hackman is in it. And that young fellow who played Malcolm X."

"Denzel Washington," Cheryl said.

"Yes, that's him," George said. "He was attempting to seize command of the submarine from Sean Connery. But Gene Hackman was able to stop him."

George Bateman seemed quite happy to give us a scene-by-scene description of the movie, but Cheryl cut him off. She tried a few

more times to find out the name of the video screening room, but George claimed not to remember.

We said our good-byes and left.

"What do you think?" Cheryl asked as started back to Star Hogwon.

"You were right," I said. "It's a garbage dump."

"No, no," Cheryl said. "What do you think about George's story."

"No doubt about that," I said. "He's lying."

"He might be," she said. "But then he may just have forgotten the name of the screening room. There are thousands of them around and they all look basically the same."

"It's not the screening room," I said. "It's the movie. He's confusing The Hunt For Red October with Crimson Tide."

"Isn't that easy to do?" Cheryl asked.

Sure," I said. "If you saw both movies months ago and you're trying to make up an alibi. But not if you saw one of them just recently."

"There's another possibility," Cheryl said. "The booths in those screening rooms are quite private. Young couples often go to screening rooms on dates."

"Like the old drive-in movies back home," I said.

"Exactly," Cheryl said. "He may have gone with a girl and not paid much attention to the movie."

"She'd have to be a helluva good-looking girl," I said.

"Why?" Cheryl asked.

"Well," I said. "The Hunt For Red October is a great movie."

#

Back at Star Hogwon, Wendel Clemker was hunched over his laptop computer staring intently at the screen.

Or so it looked. Closer examination revealed that Wendel's line of sight went over the top of his laptop screen and came to rest somewhere near the filing cabinet where the scantily-clad Miss Park was bending over to pick something up.

"Anything interesting on the computer, Wendel?" I said as I slid into the seat beside him. "Anything worth watching?"

Wendel was easily flustered. "Oh, yes, yes," he said. "Just checking a file."

"Oh, yeah," I said in tones of disbelief. The only thing on the screen were Flying Windows. "That's a screen-saver isn't it? Comes on when you don't touch the computer for a while?"

"Yes, it is," Wendel said. "Quite mesmerizing though."

"Mmmm, quite mesmerizing indeed," I said with a leer as The

Fashionable Miss Park stood up and adjusted the tiny piece of fabric that came between her and a charge of public indecency.

Wendel Clemker's face was beet red, his eyes were blinking like Christmas lights, and there was a thin film of sweat on his brow. He was flustered and embarrassed which was fine with me.

"Wendel, Cheryl and I are looking into Mr Kim's accident." I said in my best NYPD Blue, no-nonsense voice. "We're trying to find out who might have tampered with the light switch that killed him. I want you to answer a couple of questions for me, okay Wendel?"

"Sure, okay," Wendel answered. "No problem. Ask away." He was so happy to change the subject I could have asked him anything.

"Where were you the night before Mr Kim was killed," I asked.

"I was at home."

"Alone?"

"Yes, just me."

"Did anybody see you? Did anyone drop by or phone?" I asked.

"No," Wendel said. "I was home all night. I wrote a long letter to my mother, printed it out and went to bed."

"Can you prove that?"

"No," Wendel said. "I don't think so. You can call my mother and she'll tell you when the letter arrives. But she can't tell when I wrote it."

"That's not much help" I said.

Wendel thought for a minute then his eyes lit up. "Wait a second," he said. "I can prove it."

He hit a key on his computer. The screen-saver disappeared and Windows95 came up. He clicked on an icon.

"This is WordPerfect Version 7," he said. "You may be familiar with it?"

"Sort of," I said. "I use an older version."

"6.5? 6.1?" Wendel asked.

"A bit older than that."

"Don't tell me you're still using 6.0!" Wendel gasped.

"Actually, no," I said. "I'm using WordPerfect Version 4.2."

I thought Wendel was going to choke. He couldn't have been more shocked if I'd told him that I hammered out my articles with a chisel on a slab of rock.

Actually, like most professional writers, I'm perfectly happy using an old word processor. Anything that processes words faster than I can write them is good enough for me. But I wasn't interested in a debate over software with Wendel Clemker.

"So what were you going to show me?" I said.

"This," he said. "This is the letter I wrote to my mother. See it's called 'MOMLETTTR'.

I could see that.

"Now look," Wendel said, moving his track ball around. "Here is a list of all my WordPerfect files. See how each one has a date and time beside it. Every time you save a file, the computer records the time and date."

I knew that. My computer did the same thing, although mine was so old that time was given in phases of the moon and the dates looked like MCMMLXXXVIII.

I looked down the list of files until I came to 'MOMLETTR'. Right beside it was the date, May 28th, and the time, 01:26:39.24.

At twenty-six-and-a-half minutes past one o'clock in the morning on the day that Mr Kim that died, Wendel Clemker was writing a letter to his Mom.

#

I hung around drinking coffee until Cheryl's class was over. She had half-an-hour before her next one, long enough for me to summarize what I'd learned from Wendel.

"So it looks like we can take him off the list," I said, proud of my work.

"Not quite," Cheryl said. "Watch this."

She switched on the new office computer that Mr Kim the Younger had just installed. Like every other computer in the world except mine and another one just like it currently on display at the Museum of Ancient History, it ran on Windows95. Cheryl pointed her mouse at the clock in the corner and clicked twice. A calendar and another clock appeared. She did a bunch more pointing and clicking and when she was done the date showed May 28th and the time 01:22.

"Now watch," Cheryl said. "This is Microsoft Word, but it works the same way."

She brought up a blank page and wrote: "Dear Mom, Everything is fine here in Korea. I'm still a geek, though. Love, Your Son, Wendel." Then she saved the file.

When she was done, she brought up a list of all the files. It was shorter than Wendel's list so 'MOMLETTR' was easy to find.

And right beside it was the date, May 28th, and the time, 01:24:46.47.

"So we can't eliminate Wendel," I said.

"Calvin," Cheryl said. "We can't eliminate anybody. We've talked to everyone and all we know so far is that this hogwon is home to the five most suspicious-looking teachers in all of Korea."



#

Cheryl had a couple of classes to teach so I went out in search of a quiet coffee shop. Star Hogwon had been cleaned up somewhat but it was still too noisy for my liking. I wanted someplace quieter, like a police-siren factory or General Admission at a Motley Crue concert.

I found a nice place and spent a pleasant couple of hours listening to music, comparing The Korea Herald with The Korea Times to see which had the most appalling grammar, and thinking about Mr Kim's murder. By the time I was due to meet Cheryl, I had the case cracked.

"I've solved it," I said proudly. "Zee amazing Calvin Poirot as yooszed his leetle gray cells to trap zuh killeur."

"Okay, Hercule," Cheryl said. "Who did it?"

"You sound skeptical," I said. "You don't believe I've figured it out."

"Of course I believe you," she said. "I also believe in UFOs, telephone psychics, astrology, the O.J. Simpson verdict, tarot cards, and the ability of Anthony Robbins' Personal Power tapes to improve my life in a positive, exciting way. Now, who did it?"

"They all did," I said.

"All, who?"

"All the teachers," I said. "Dave, Albert, Wendel, Jennifer and George. It's like Murder On The Orient Express. Did you ever see that?"

"I read the book," Cheryl said.

"There's a book?" I said. "Anyway, Richard Widmark is this nasty kidnapper who is killed in his sleep. Stabbed twelve times and left in a pool of his own blood. Who could have committed this brutal crime? Was it Lauren Bacall? Was it Sean Connery? Ingrid Bergman? Anthony Perkins?"

"I know how it ends," Cheryl said. "Poirot figures out that everyone on the train had a motive to kill Widmark and each person stabbed him one time."

"And that's what happened here," I said. "They all did it. That's why they all look so damned suspicious with their dual alibis and forgotten bars and phony letters to Mom. It's a clever conspiracy, but not cleveur enough for zee great detective Calvin Poirot."

Cheryl started to laugh. "You might be right. Maybe they are all in on it together" she said, still laughing. "I can see how that would work. Jennifer Downs would have gone in first to make sure the coast was clear. If anyone saw her, she'd just say she was catching up on Pronoun Week or something."

"And George Bateman would be next," I said, joining in the fun. "His job would be to disengage the circuit breaker and initiate the cessation of electrical energy. They knew the voltage would kill Mr Kim because Wendel Clemker had worked it out on his computer."

"And Dave Stevens," Cheryl said. "He - big - man. He - take - chalkboard - off - wall."

"While Albert Gossage rigged the switch."

"An easy job for Albert," Cheryl said, "with all his CIA training."

"Okay, Captain Hastings, we've figured it out," I said. "Now what do we do?"

"What did Poirot do in the movie?"

"He decided that the killing was justified," I said. "And he let everyone go."

"Well, we can't do that," Cheryl declared. "Can we?"

"Mais, non! Mon amie," I said. "We can not do zat. We must investigate furzeur and bring zee bad peepke to justeece."

Chapter Seven

Investigating "furzeur" wasn't so easy. We had already questioned everyone close to the victim. So far we'd only managed to eliminate Mr Kim the Younger and Mr Chong from our suspect list. But we had gotten nowhere with the teachers. My little gag about Poirot may have been a bit far-fetched. I didn't really think they'd all joined forces to kill him. But I was pretty sure that each one was hiding something.

Cheryl was thinking the same thing. "Oh, they're all up to no good," she said. "But which one is up to killing Mr Kim?"

"We could question them all again," I suggested.

"Without anything more to go on," she said, "I wouldn't know what to ask them."

"What about the stuff we copied from Mr Kim's filing cabinet?" I asked. "Anything worthwhile in that?"

"Just that 50,000 won money order," Cheryl said. "The one made out to Mr Yu."

"You don't know who this Mr Yu is, do you?"

"No."

"Who would?"

"Show Me Your Big Life. Happy Fun America."

"Let's go ask her," I said.

#

The Fashionable Miss Park was in one of the upstairs classrooms putting away some kids' toys. The toys were cheap plastic animals.

Someone had written the name of each animal in English on one side and Korean on the other.

"Mr Calvin, Miss Cheryl," Miss Park said as we walked in. "Today we are studying animals. Farm animals. For example, chicken." She held up a plastic chicken.

"Horse," she said, and up went a plastic horse.

"Cow." And a cow was presented. This continued through mule, ox, turkey, bird, fish, and the rest of the animal kingdom including a weird-looking thing with five legs whose name I didn't catch.

"Boy, you really know your farm animals, Miss Park," I said.

"Yes, thank you." she said. "I am English teacher. We can have English conversation."

"That's why we're here," Cheryl said. "Mr Calvin and I want to have a conversation with you, a conversation about Mr Yu."

"Mr Yu?"

"Yes," Cheryl said. "Do you know him."

"I have seen him, but I don't know him," Miss Park said. "He is the father of Yu Mee-soon."

Miss Park told us that Yu Mee-soon was a high school girl who once studied at Star Hogwon. About six months previously, Mr Kim the Elder had abruptly kicked her out of the school. She had been pulled without warning out of class and told to go home. The money order was a refund of her tuition fees.

"Mr Kim told me go to bank and collect paper for 50,000 won," she said. "Then he say go to Post Office and send paper to Mr Yu."

"Why was Miss Yu kicked out of the hogwon?" I asked.

"I don't know," Miss Park said. "Some trouble, but I don't know."

"Was she a bad student?"

"No, Miss Yu very diligent student."

"Did Mr Kim kick any other students out?" I asked.

"No," Miss Park said. "Mr Kim always want many students to come. He never want students to leave."

"Do you know where Mr Yu lives?" Cheryl asked.

"Yes," Miss Park said.

"Does he speak English?"

"I think, a little bit," she said, with a big smile in my direction. "Not as much as me. I am English teacher."

"Yes you are, Miss Park," I said with a smile. "And we need your help."

#

As it turned out, Mr Yu did speak a little English. Actually, he

spoke it better than Miss Park. Still, I was glad to have her along to fill in the blanks in Mr Yu's vocabulary. And if the conversation ever turned to farm animals, we'd be home free.

The Yu family lived in a bland, but modern apartment a lot like Albert Gossage's place but slightly smaller. Mr Yu sat us down while his wife brought out coffee, tea, some cookies and a large dish of sliced watermelon. Koreans, for all their rudeness in the street, are very hospitable in their homes. The Yus were no exception.

On the way over, Cheryl had warned me not to be too aggressive with my questions and to expect a fair bit of small-talk before getting to the purpose of our visit. The western habit of jumping head first into the matter at hand doesn't go over very well in Asia. So we spent a lot of time talking about the weather, and baseball, and what I thought of Korea, and Mr Yu's burning wish to visit Canada in general and Ottawa in particular, and how delicious the tea was, and whether I'd tried kim-chi yet, and how much I'd liked it, and so on, and so forth, and such like, and good God would it never end.

Eventually it did and we got down to business. Mr Yu said that he hadn't heard about Mr Kim's death as he had been nowhere near Star Hogwon since his daughter was turfed out.

"She came home with a note from Mr Kim," he said. "The note said she was not to come back. One week later, I received a post office check for her tuition fees."

"Your daughter was a good student," Cheryl said. "Do you know why she was expelled?"

"I don't know," Mr Yu said. "She would not tell me. I called Mr Kim two times, but he would not say either."

"So what did you do?" I asked.

"I sent my daughter to another hogwon," he said. "The Happy English Language Institute."

"Mr Chong's school," Cheryl said.

"Yes," Mr Kim replied. "She is quite happy there."

I spied a family photograph on the end table. There were four people, Mr Yu and his wife, a boy and a young girl. "This is your daughter, Sir," I asked.

"Yes," he said. "That is Mee-soon, taken just last week."

"Very pretty girl," I said. "You must be proud. How old is she?"

"Eighteen."

I took another look at the picture. For a girl of eighteen, she looked awfully young. I asked Mr Yu about it.

"Eighteen is her Korean age," he said.

"Korean age?"

"Koreans base their age on the lunar calendar," Cheryl said.

"They're always a bit older than us."

"So what's eighteen in our system?" I asked.

"You can't just subtract a certain number years," she said.

"Everyone is different."

Cheryl and Mr Yu told me how Korean ages work. It isn't that complicated really. On the day you are born, you are one year old. Then, every January first, you become a year older. You celebrate your birthday on the actual date of your birth, but you only add a year to your age on New Year's Day."

"So if you had a baby on the last day of the year," I said, "then, two days later, your baby would be two years old."

"That's an extreme case, but yes," Cheryl said. "She'd be one year old at birth. Then, on New Years Day, she'd turn two."

"My daughter Mee-soon is like that," Mr Yu said. "She was born on December 27th."

"So how old would she be in the west?"

"Sixteen," Mr Yu said. "Sweet sixteen, as you say."

#

There was no way Cheryl and I could waltz into the Happy English Language Institute without causing a stir. I had some pretty clever ideas about scaling the walls and slipping in through the windows, but Cheryl would have none of it. She had little confidence in my scaling and slipping skills. I told her that I'd seen all the James Bond movies at least twice, but she wasn't swayed.

"We'll send in The Fashionable Miss Park," she said. "She has a friend who works there so they're used to seeing her. Besides, the kid might be intimidated by a couple of foreigners. She'll be more relaxed with Miss Park."

I had to agree. Cheryl's plan made more sense, though I would have liked to have scaled the walls anyway. We carefully briefed Miss Park, sent her in to question the girl, and repaired to a nearby bakery to await her report.

When she returned, Miss Park looked distinctly agitated. Her brow was creased, she was biting her lip, and she even managed to walk past a mirror without pausing to admire herself.

My natural inclination was to hit her with a barrage of questions, but Cheryl knew better. She sat her down, got her a pastry and a soft drink, and waited while she calmed down.

"Are you all right, now?" Cheryl asked in a soothing voice.

"Yes."

"Good," Cheryl said. "Did you talk to Yu Mee-soon?"

"Yes."

"What did she tell you?"

"Very bad thing," Miss Park said. "Very bad for young girl."  
"Did she tell you why Mr Kim sent her away from Star Hogwon."  
"She told me," Miss Park said. "Mr Kim sent her from hogwon because she was being girlfriend of teacher."  
"She was going out with one of the teachers?" I asked.  
"Yes. Miss Yu girlfriend of foreign teacher."  
"Who," I asked. "Which teacher."  
"I don't know."  
"Can you find out, Miss Park," Cheryl said. "Would you try to ask which teacher was her boyfriend?"

"I tried, Miss Cheryl," Miss Park said. "I asked many times. But Yu Mee-soon will not tell. She tell me that name of boyfriend is mortal secret. I know that she will never tell."

"What kind of boyfriend and girlfriend were they,?" I asked.  
"Were they close?" Cheryl had told me that Korean teenage girls often got crushes on their teachers in the same way that western girls got crushes on pop stars. They were fairly short-lived crushes, but the girls took them seriously while they lasted. Maybe young Miss Yu had become infatuated with one of her teachers and created a fantasy relationship.

"Close. Yes, very close," she said. "Too close for young girl."

"When you say 'close', Miss Park," Cheryl asked. "Do you mean friends close or holding hands close or kissing close?"

"I mean ..." Miss Park didn't know the right word. She reached into her handbag and pulled out the pocket Korean - English dictionary she always carried and flicked through the pages until she found the word she was looking for.

"I mean," she said, reading the unfamiliar words carefully, "sexual intercourse close."

#

I actually got some sleep that night and the next day I was looking a lot better. Of course, I'm not a morning person by nature and I could sleep for a week and still not look like those smiling happy people you see in orange juice commercials. But I was more alert, my eyes were no longer bloodshot, and I wasn't drooling all that much. For me, it was quite an improvement.

Cheryl and I had been pretty shocked by what Miss Park had told us about Yu Mee-soon. By morning though, the shock had worn off and we were more interested in how it all fitted into Mr Kim's murder.

"So what we've got," Cheryl said, " is an eighteen year old girl, who is really a sixteen year old girl, who's having sex with a much

older foreign teacher."

"And we've got Mr Kim," I said, "who knew about it, expelled the girl and six months later turns up dead. Sounds like a pretty strong motive for murder."

"Yeah, but for who?" Cheryl said. "I can understand someone killing the teacher for sleeping with the girl. But why kill Mr Kim?"

"Because he knew about it," I said. "Maybe he threatened to call the cops."

"Or maybe Mr Kim was blackmailing someone?" Cheryl said.

"The teacher?"

"Mmmm," Cheryl said. "It's most likely the teacher. But it could be Mr Yu. In Korea, if your daughter isn't a virgin it's hard to find her a husband. Many a parent would pay to hush up an affair."

"He could have been blackmailing them both," I said.

"Or not blackmailing anyone," she said. "We have to find that out first."

"Follow the money," I said.

"What?"

"Follow the money," I said again. "All The President's Men. Deep Throat meets Robert Redford in an empty parking garage. Redford is in a bad mood. His investigation is going nowhere and nobody wants to talk. On top of that, he's partnered up with Dustin Hoffman who keeps dressing up in women's clothes and calling himself Tootsie. Redford wants answers. Deep Throat tells him, 'follow the money', then there's a loud noise and he vanishes."

"I see," Cheryl said, looking at me with the sort of sympathetic expression airline stewardesses reserve for passengers who fall asleep and drool over their complimentary peanuts. "If Mr Kim was blackmailing someone, there should be some money somewhere."

"I think we should take another look at that ledger book," I said.

"I've still got the photocopies at my apartment," Cheryl said.

This was a turn for the better. Cheryl would invite me over to her place to look over the books. Naturally, she'd make dinner. After dinner we'd have a drink, then another, then one thing would lead to another, and pretty soon we'd be calling up Dave Stevens and asking him to send over the Polaroid.

Cheryl took a slip of paper from her desk and drew a simple map and a few Korean words. "I've got a couple of classes now," she said. "But we can check out the books later. Just show this to any taxi driver; he'll know where it is. I'll pick up the photocopies meet you about eleven o'clock."

"This is your apartment?" I asked, holding up the map.

"No, no," Cheryl said. "That's a coffee shop near your hotel."

#

I had nothing much to do while Cheryl taught her classes so I passed the time at Namdaemun Market. The Fashionable Miss Park had assured me that it was just the place if I wanted something unusual to take home.

It turned out to be a huge mess of open-air stalls all jumbled on top of each other and all selling kitchen towels, ladies' nylons, and BYC men's underpants. Not the sort of things you want to bring home as souvenirs.

Actually, I nearly picked up some undies but the sizing had me confused. Back home men's briefs come in small, medium and large. But Korea used some weird metric sizing that started at 80 and went up in increments of five, stopping at 120.

At first I did a little math and figured that if 80 was small and 120 was large, then 100 must be medium which was what I wanted.

All fine and dandy, but Asians are generally slight of build and maybe their medium is our small and I should have been buying size 120 which would be their large and therefore our medium.

I'd just about settled on 110 as a good compromise when it occurred to me that I really had no idea what those numbers actually meant. Maybe it was some strange Korean system that measured the distance in furlongs from the top of your right bum cheek to the middle of your left thigh. If that were the case, I'd definitely be a size 80.

By the time I'd worked all that out, it was nearly time to meet Cheryl. I gave up on the undies, bought a pair of ladies' nylons, hailed a taxi, and left.

#

Cheryl was there when I arrived. She was wearing a reasonably short skirt and an unreasonably form-fitting cotton sweater. Despite my legs turning rapidly to jelly, I managed to lurch across the room to where she was sitting.

I sat down, took a deep breath and handed over what I'd just bought.

"Women's Control Top Fashion Hose," she said, reading the label. "I don't get it."

"Read that," I said, pointing to a sticker on the bottom of the packet.

Cheryl looked at the packet and read aloud "One Size Fits All."

"That's right," I said. "One size fits all. You women don't know how lucky you are."



Cheryl crinkled her brow and rolled her eyes but didn't say anything. I got the distinct impression I'd have been better off bringing candy or flowers.

"Anything interesting?" I said, pointing to the papers strewn about the table.

"Not so far," Cheryl said. "I scanned them quickly, but nothing jumped out and hit me."

I picked up a few sheets. Cheryl had started translating the entries from Korean into English. Most of it was pretty dull stuff -- 100,000 won for textbooks, 9,000 won for felt-tip markers, electric bills, phone bills, a couple of newspaper subscriptions, that sort of thing.

The biggest entry came every month. Under 'Foreign Teachers' Salaries' was the sum of 6,000,000 won.

"How does it feel to take home a million a month?" I said with a chuckle.

"Yeah, it sounds pretty impressive, doesn't it," Cheryl said. "Actually it's one point two."

"Pardon me?"

"The million a month," she said. "It's actually 1,200,000."

"Are you sure," I asked.

"Certainly," she said. "I count it every pay day."

"Does every teacher get paid the same amount?"

"Oh yes," she said. "Everyone at Star makes 1,200,000 won per month. We all have the same contract. One point two is pretty much standard in hogwons these days. Why?"

I showed her the ledger entry. "Look at this," I said. "Six million won divided by you, George, Jennifer, Wendel, Albert and Dave, that's one million apiece."

"Or it's not," Cheryl said. She'd brought a small solar-powered calculator with her and she started punching in numbers.

"Six million won," she said, "divided by five teachers, equals 1,200,000 won each."

"Five teachers," I said. "Someone isn't getting paid."

"Looks like we've got our motive," Cheryl said. "Now what do we do?"

We talked it over for a while. It seemed like we were finally making some progress. We knew that one of the teachers had had sex with an underage girl. We knew that Mr Kim had found out about it and we had good reason to think that he used what he'd found out to blackmail one of his teachers into working for nothing. If we could just find out who slept with the girl, we'd know who had a strong motive to kill the old man.

"So how do we get the girl to talk?" Cheryl asked.

"I don't know that we can," I said. "But I might have another idea." I told Cheryl that I'd get Cam Fox to photograph all the teachers. Then we could get Miss Park to show the photos to Yu Mee-soon.

"You figure she'll give something away when she sees his picture," Cheryl said. "Break out in tears, or something?"

"Maybe," I said. "It's a bit of a long shot, but it's worth a try."

"All right," Cheryl said. "But in the meantime, let's go back and question everyone again. We've got to find out who had sex with that girl."

"I guess we can eliminate Jennifer Downs," I said. "Unless you think she's a lesbian."

"No she's not a lesbian," Cheryl said. "You saw the Polaroids."

"True."

"And we can probably forget about Dave Stevens, too," Cheryl said, "if he's involved with Jennifer."

"I wouldn't be so sure," I said. "He wouldn't be the first Big Chief to have more than one squaw in his teepee."

"You're probably right," she said, looking at her watch. "He'll be at home now. Let's go see him."

"Now?" I said. "Why don't we wait until he goes to work? Then we won't have to trek all the way out to his place."

"Oh, it's not all that far," Cheryl said without a trace of sympathy. "If you get tired, just slip into those control-top support hose of yours. You'll feel like a new man."

#

Once again we made our way to Dave Stevens' apartment by way of Kuala Lumpur. And once again he let us in and offered us one of his twenty-three varieties of herbal tea. I chose something called a Zippedy Strawberry Doo Da which was a first for me as I'd never before tasted tea made from Pepto Bismol.

There was no subtle way to broach the subject so I just jumped in with both feet. I told Dave what we had learned so far and asked my first question.

"So what we'd like to know, Dave," I said, "is whether you ever had sex with a sixteen-year-old Star Hogwon student named Yu Mee-soon."

"No - never - no," Dave said. He was adamant about this.

"She may have told you she was eighteen," Cheryl said. "That's her Korean age. She may have said she was eighteen when she was really sixteen." Cheryl was trying to give him an easy way out.

"There's no way you would have known, Dave," I said,

attempting the same approach. "It would have been an honest mistake."

"Me - never - sleep - with - student," he said. "No - student. I - have - girlfriends."

"You mean Jennifer Downs?" I said.

"Yes," Dave answered. "Jennifer - and ... .. yes - Jennifer - Downs."

"Dave," Cheryl said. "Do you have another girlfriend?"

Dave looked sheepish. "Yes, - before" he said. "Another - girlfriend. Not - now"

"Who?" I asked. "Was it Mee-soon?"

"Can - not - tell - you," he said. "Korean - girl - very - bad - for - her - if - I - tell."

We kept pestering him for the name of his Korean girlfriend. Cheryl felt that his having a steady girl wouldn't eliminate him from suspicion, but it would make him a less likely candidate. I just wanted to know who he'd been boffing.

"Dave," I said. "Cheryl and I will keep anything you tell us in the strictest confidence."

He seemed to be weakening. He was biting his lips and scratching his forehead. It looked to me like he wanted a way out.

"Look, Dave" I said. "You don't have to say her name. Just give us a clue. Maybe you've got some more of those Polaroids?"

"No," he said. "No - Polaroids."

"Love letters?" I suggested. "Lock of hair?"

He thought for a minute, stood up, and walked into his room. When he came out he had a bundle of cloth in his hand and a determined look on his face.

"You - must - never - tell," he said, tossing me the bundle.

I opened it up. It was a bright pink T-shirt with a French flag on the back. On the front, in bold black lettering, were the words "Sexy Europe Good Time With You."

#

Cheryl and I agreed that we could safely eliminate Dave Stevens from suspicion. His relationships with Jennifer Downs and Miss Park didn't entirely rule out one with Yu Mee-soon, but they made it less likely. That was good enough for us.

"That leaves Albert Gossage, Wendel Clemker or George Bateman," Cheryl said. "I've got classes for the next three hours so take your pick, Columbo."

I chose Wendel. At least he wasn't likely to produce a battalion of sex partners as alibis.

Cheryl made me yet another map. I took yet another Cannonball Run taxi ride. And I soon found myself standing outside yet another gray concrete apartment building. This business of being a world-famous detective was less exciting than you might think.

Wendel was happy to see me. I'd called first with some lame tale about needing to upgrade my computer system and wanting his advice and he had agreed to help. Actually he'd said something about "utilizing technology to increase output per unit-labor and maximize productivity within a fixed parameter time-frame" which, as I understood it, was geek-speak for "come right over."

Wendel's place was a shrine to the microchip. There were screens and keyboards and wires and little black boxes making whirring sounds covering every inch of table space and most of the floor.

"Come on in, Calvin," Wendel said. "Want a drink?" He opened a fridge filled with nothing but cans of Coca-Cola and pre-packaged cakes and pastries.

"I'll take a Coke if you've got one," I said, looking about the room.

It reminded of that scene you see in every thriller movie made since 1980. You know the one where the hero and heroine need some vital piece of information, so they go to see the hero's computer-geek buddy who lives in a crummy apartment filled with high-tech hardware. They tell him what they need, he taps a few keys and they all look at the screen:

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NASTY ROTTEN EVIL BAD GUY
```

```
CENTRAL COMPUTER
```

```
Enter Password: <<<_ _ _ _ _>>>
```

"Oh no, not a password!" gasps the heroine, played by Sandra Bullock who is really Daphne Zuniga from Melrose Place.

"Let me try something," the geek says, confidently. "If I blah blah tap into the mainframe blah blah blah encryption software blah blah blah, I might be able to blah blah blah and get us in." He hits a couple of keys, the screen changes and ... .. well, you get the idea. That's what Wendel Clemker's apartment looked like.

"I've been thinking about your system," Wendel said. "I figure a guy like you probably needs a WindowsNT-based platform running a third-generation word processing package with full desktop publishing capability supporting a high-res color laser."

"That may be more than I had in mind," I said. "I was thinking more in terms of putting a new ribbon in my printer."

"Pardon me?"

I'd forgotten about Wendel's complete lack of a sense of humor. I tried a different approach. "Tell me about your system," I said with as

much enthusiasm as I could fake.

Wendel's eyes lit up. He was like those guys I knew in high school who fixed their own cars and lived to tell anyone who would listen how they had "skimmed the head, ground the valves, dropped in a posi-track" and done a thousand other things that, according to last month's issue of HotRod magazine, would turn their 1976 Malibu Classic into something Jackie Stewart would get hard-ons over.

"What I've got here," Wendel said, "is a bank of Pentium 200s, a double-gig C: drive and a 500 meg slave on the D:. The CD-ROM is an 8-spin. The modem is a 34.4 on a dedicated line. I've got a tape drive for major backups and a 100 meg IOmega Zippy for stuff I want to carry around. The laptop is a standard ThinkPad with a docking port for downloading. The rest is pretty straightforward stuff."

None of that meant anything to me. My knowledge of computers is such that, until recently, I was convinced that UNIVAC was still a going concern. But for the sake of staying on Wendel's good side, I had to show a little enthusiasm.

Looking for something interesting, I glanced quickly about the room and settled on a gray box with a keypad on one side. "What's that?" I asked, brightly. "What does it do?"

"That's not part of the system," Wendel said, sounding a bit hurt. "It's a microwave oven."

#

I managed to mollify Wendel by letting him beat me in a who-can-eat-a-whole-Twinkie-in-under-15-seconds contest, telling him how much I loved the movie Johnnie Mnemonic, and pretending to believe that William Shatner actually wrote those Tek books by himself. By the time I was done, we were getting along like old buddies.

"So tell me, Wendel," I said, helping myself to a Coke, a couple of crackers, and a dollop of "Cheddar Flavored Spreadable Cheese Food Product. "What are you doing with all this fancy computer gear?"

"I'm developing HITMASTeR," he said, "An exciting new software product that's going to revolutionize the music industry."

"You're playing music on your computer?" I asked.

"No, no, Let me explain." Wendel said, standing up. I got the feeling he had given this little speech a hundred times, though 99 of those times had probably been in front of his bedroom mirror.

"Have you ever asked yourself," he went on, "why it is that only a small percentage of songs become hits? Have you ever wondered why the music industry hasn't managed to achieve a consistent level of product quality?"

"Consistent quality?"

"Look at it this way," he said. "Every Toyota that rolls off an assembly line is a well-made, reliable product. So is every Honda, Ford or Mazda. Every single one. The automobile industry produces consistent quality. So does the airplane industry, the clothing industry, the fast-food business, the electronics business, .... I could go on."

"No, no," I said. "I understand. But what does this have to do with music?"

"Quality in the music industry is still hopelessly uneven." he said. "With all the equipment at their disposal, record producers still can't turn out hit songs with any sort of regularity. In my opinion, there's no excuse for this. There's no good reason why a band or a singer should turn out anything less than guaranteed hit music."

"And you're going to guarantee it?" I asked.

"Yes," Wendel said, firmly. "Every song a hit song and every record a hit record."

"But how do you tell whether a song is a hit until people get a chance to hear it," I said.

"With HITMASTeR!" Wendel exclaimed. "The High Intensity Tracking Matrix Audio Selection Test Rating."

"That's a mouthful," I said.

"That's why I call it HITMASTeR," he said. "It's a more groovy-sounding name that should appeal to the with-it musical people who'll be buying the system."

"Groovy-sounding?"

"Yes," Wendel said, very seriously. "It's important for HITMASTeR to be perceived not as a boring piece of computer software, but as a way-cool, rad, funky creative tool for musicians who are hip to the scene, so to speak."

"Hipness is important," I said, trying not to laugh. "You wouldn't want them to think you're geeky."

"No, not at all," Wendel said. "In fact, I have special clothing that I wear while promoting HITMASTeR."

He walked over to a self-standing closet and took out a pair of brightly polished Dr. Marten's boots, a pair of freshly-ironed Levis, a starched plaid shirt, and a denim jean-jacket with the sleeves carefully removed. "This is what I wear," he said. "It's called the 'Scrunch' look."

"I think you mean 'Grunge'," I said.

"Yes, of course," Wendel said, writing the word 'Grunge' on a slip of paper.

By now I was fighting the urge to burst out laughing, but it wasn't easy. I kept picturing groovy Wendel in his shiny new Scrunch clothes standing in the back of the Pearl Jam tour bus promising "every song a hit song and every record a hit record." It took

everything I had to hold back.

"So how does HITMASTeR make hit songs?" I asked.

"It doesn't make songs," Wendel said. "It tests songs to see if they're hits or not hits. If a song isn't a hit, you don't use it."

"How can a computer spot a hit?"

"Well first," Wendel said, "every hit song from the past six months is inputted into HITMASTeR through the CD-ROM. It scans the song at 10 times speed, breaks it down into its component elements, and produces a digital map of the song. Then the maps of all the hit songs are blended to produce a DHMP."

"DHMP?"

"Digitized Hit Music Profile," he said. "Think of it as a digital picture of what a perfect hit song looks like."

"Okay."

"Now," Wendel said. "Let's say a band or singer is ready to release a song. They input the new song into the system for testing. Then HITMASTeR scans the song and compares it against the DHMP. A hit is any song that scores a 95 percent positive match with the Digitized Hit Music Profile. If the song scores less than 95 percent, you re-write it or dump it."

"Why not just play the DHMP?" I asked.

"You can't play it," Wendel said. "It's a six-month, front-weighted, rolling average, pattern matrix. It's not a song."

"But how do you know that the DHMP is an accurate picture of a hit song?"

"Because, it's made from all the hit songs of the previous six months," he said. "Every week the HITMASTeR operator inputs that week's number-one song. The system deletes the oldest song from memory, adds the new one, and re-calculates the DHMP. So it's always right up to date."

I must have looked a touch skeptical.

"I'll show you," Wendel said. "Here's the latest Madonna CD. Track four is the current single. I'll just pop it in the CD drive and click on track four. Now, you see it's asking me what kind of song it is?"

"Yeah," I said. "Why?"

"HITMASTeR isn't just for pop music," he said. "So long as you have six months worth of hit songs in the system, you can do anything -- pop, rock, folk, new age, country. Heck, you could even do classical though nobody would."

"Why not?"

"Statistically," Wendel said, without deliberately trying to be funny "in classical music all hits are either Mozart or Beethoven. You don't need a computer for that."

"I see," I said, wondering what Pyotr Tchaikovsky or Franz

Schubert would have to say about that.

"There," Wendel said pointing to the screen. "Look at that: 'HITMASTeR MATRIX MATCH::: 97.255%' That's a hit. Madonna always scores well."

"Now check this out." Wendel removed the Madonna CD and put in something else.

"What's that?" I said.

"John Denver," he said. "I use it as a test."

Wendel repeated the process and in seconds the screen changed. It read "HITMASTeR MATRIX MATCH::: 12.158%." Take that, Granola Boy, I thought.

Wendel had a stack of compact disks. From the mix of titles I'd say they had been picked at random from a local music store. I found something that appealed to me, a greatest hits disc from The Style Council, my all-time favorite band. Wendel was good enough to put it on.

"Can you turn it up?" I asked. I couldn't hear a thing.

"What do you mean 'up'?" Wendel said.

"Up," I said. "Increase the volume. More sound out of the speakers."

"Calvin, there are no speakers," Wendel said, laughing for what was probably the first time in his life. "That's the beauty of HITMASTeR. You can do all these wonderful things, without ever having to listen to music!"

#

I figured I'd spent enough time getting all warm and fuzzy with Wendel "Dick Clark From Hell" Clemker. It was time to find out whether he'd ever had sex with Yu Mee-soon.

"Do girls go for guys with hot computers?" I asked, easing into it with all the subtlety of a Hard Copy camera crew. "Is it like fast cars or power boats?"

"Not really," Wendel said, wistfully. "Of course there are quite a few on the Internet chat rooms. But many of them are actually men pretending to be girls."

"A lot of good-looking girls here in Korea, though," I said. "That Miss Park, for one."

"True," he said. "But this is a very conservative society. Don't let appearances fool you."

I understood what he meant. I'd seen the same thing in parts of Mexico. Korean girls dressed in the sleaziest, most revealing clothes I'd ever seen on women who didn't do table dances for a living. Yet most (Miss Park notwithstanding) were as pure and virginal as it is possible



to be without actually signing up for the twenty-to-life tour with Mother Superior and the Immaculate Sisters of Mercy.

"Must be tough," I said, "finding a girl to, you know ... boot up your floppy drive, so to speak?"

"Tough, yes," Wendel said. "But not completely impossible."

A ha! Now I was on to something. I'd gained Wendel's confidence and now he was about to reveal himself as the man with the motive. "Oh really," I said, conspiratorially. "Figured something out, eh?" Nudge, nudge, wink, wink.

He couldn't wait to tell me everything. It was probably the first time in history anyone had ever asked Wendel Clemker how to pick up girls. "What you do," he said, "is go to Itaewon."

"The shopper's paradise?" I said, remembering the guided tour that started this whole damned thing.

"You could say that, yes." Wendel said. "The girls are behind the main shopping drag. Turn right at Burger King and left at the guy selling padlocks. Go up the hill. It's like a red-light district."

"Hookers?" I asked. "You've been seeing hookers?"

"Yes," he said. "That's where I was on that night you asked me about. I faked that letter to my mother."

"Clever. I'd never have figured that out," I said. "So tell me about Itaewon."

And so he did. Wendel knew everything. He was the Encyclopedia Britannica of Seoul hookers. He told me about "short time" (60,000 won) and "long time" (150,000 won) and where to go and where not to go and when to go and when not to go and what to look for and what to say and ... well, everything.

And in doing so, Wendel convinced me that he probably wasn't sleeping with young Miss Yu. He'd be too damned tired, for one thing.

So much for my theory about Wendel not producing a battalion of sex partners as alibis.

## Chapter Eight

Cheryl wasn't surprised to hear what Wendel was up to, but she agreed that it probably meant that he hadn't slept with Yu Mee-soon.

"Anybody spending a small fortune on commercial sex," I said, likely hasn't been getting any freebies back at the office."

"You're probably right," Cheryl said, laughing.

"What's funny?"

"I was just thinking of that Dorothy Parker line," she said.

"You can lead a whore to culture," I said. "But you can't make her think."

"That's it exactly!" Cheryl exclaimed. "I am impressed."

"Don't be so surprised," I said. "I told you I don't read mystery stories. I didn't say I don't read anything."

#

Cheryl and I had agreed to split up our last two suspects. She would go to see George Bateman at his apartment while I'd catch Albert Gossage at the school just before his morning class.

As it turned out, I arrived late. Albert was about to start. "That's too bad," I said. "I wanted to have a chat with you."

"Why don't you sit in on the class," Albert said. "And we'll go for a drink after."

I couldn't argue with that. I didn't really fancy an hour in an English class, but at least I wouldn't actually have to do anything. I'd just sit quietly in the back of the room and work on the Patsy-Kensit-in-a-tub-of-whipped-caramel daydream I'd started up a few days ago and hadn't had a chance to finish.

But Albert had other ideas. "I'll introduce you," he said, as we entered the class "And you can say a few words."

"No, really. I can't."

"You don't have to teach," he said. "It's a conversation class. Just get up, say hello, answer a few questions. It's too easy."

By then we standing at the front of the class so I had no choice but to go along with Albert's idea. "I have a special treat for you today," he said to the class. "I'd like to introduce Mr Calvin Scott from Canada."

There were about twelve students in the room, mostly men but a few girls. They all had that look of combined alertness and boredom that you often see on shell-shocked soldiers, death-row prisoners, and people at the opera. A couple of them clapped. A few more smiled. The rest, I presume, were waiting for Pavarotti.

"Good morning," I said.

"Good morning," the class replied in unison.

"It's really nice to be here," I said. "I mean here in your class, not here in Korea. Not that it's not nice to be in Korea. No, I don't mean that. What I meant exactly, was ...."

Nobody moved. Nobody said a word.

"I really haven't prepared anything," I said, just in case anyone hadn't figured that out. "Why don't you help me. What would you like to talk about?"

"Tell us about Canada," a young guy in the front row said. The others nodded agreement.

"Well, lets see. Canada," I said. "Well, uhh Canada is made of

ten provinces. It's a constitutional monarchy. We have a Parliament and a Prime Minister and, ahhh, .... Did I mention the ten provinces? Yes, of course I did. Okay, good."

The class seemed happy enough and when I looked over at Albert he gave me a big smile and a thumbs-up. What the hell, I thought. Press on.

"Manufacturing is the biggest industry in Canada," I said, like I had a clue, "followed by mining, forestry, tourism, and making fun of American beer. The population is twenty-eight million. Well, not exactly twenty-eight million. It's actually ... well, I don't know exactly. But it's pretty close ...."

The door opened and The Fashionable Miss Park poked her nose into the class. "Mr Albert," she said. "Telephone call for you."

Albert got up and looked at his watch. "That will be my folks calling," he said to me. "They call every week at this time. I used to have it free until the new schedule came out. Can you keep this up for a while?"

"Geez, I suppose so," I said. "How long do you mean by 'a while'?"

Albert looked at his watch again. "Say, forty-five minutes."

"Forty-five minutes!" I said. "There's only forty-seven minutes left in the class."

But Albert had gone.

#

If I was going to talk about Canada for forty-five minutes, I'd need help. So I drew a huge map of the country on the chalkboard. It didn't look much like Canada. It looked like Belgium squashed a bit and turned sideways, but I reckoned the class wouldn't know the difference.

"The first thing to realize is that Canada is a very big country," I said, when I'd finished drawing.

"So big, in fact, that if you took all of South Korea and placed it inside just one of the five Great Lakes," I said, pointing to where the Great Lakes would be if they were squashed a bit, turned sideways and moved to Belgium, "you'd have an awful lot of soaking-wet Koreans."

The class found this uproariously funny. A couple of them actually raised their eyebrows and another one almost smiled.

"It's best to see Canada by traveling from West to East," I said, pointing to the West and then to the East like Vanna White in drag, "starting with Victoria, a quaint little town populated mostly by hundred-and-fifty-year-old retired people."

"Next is Vancouver, Canada's third largest city and home to more women with great legs than any other city in the country. I don't know the reason for this. I used to think it came from climbing the steep mountains nearby, but then I went to Switzerland and the women there didn't have particularly nice legs. Maybe they put something in the water? I'll find out and get back to you.

"Moving eastward," I said, continuing the Vanna routine, "you find yourself in the interior of British Columbia. B.C. is a sportsman's paradise and very popular with the sort of fellow who sees nothing silly in spending two weeks in a \$5,000 boat with an \$800 fishing rod to catch \$21 worth of fish.

"Along with the sportsmen, you'll also find plenty of Recreational Vehicles. RVs are huge six-wheeled, motorized living rooms that get three miles per gallon and have the same nimble handling characteristics of, say, the SS Queen Mary."

As a visual aid to learning, I drew a little RV on the board where British Columbia would have been if it too were a part of Belgium.

"The next big city you'll encounter," I said, looking at the map, "is Calgary, Alberta, famous for the annual Calgary Stampede. Cowboys come from all over North America to compete in the rodeo. There are cowgirls too. They come from far and wide to participate in the wearing-skin-tight-jeans-and-doing-your-hair-up-to-look-like-Reba-MacIntyre competition.

"Because of the Stampede, many people think Alberta is cowboy country. However, the real cowboys live next door, in the province of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is actually an old Indian word meaning "that which can not be spelled correctly."

Many modern Canadian words and phrases have Indian roots. The name "Canada" is actually an Indian word, as is 'all-night Casino gambling' and 'tax-free cigarettes sold here'."

By this point I had well and truly lost them. But I didn't care. They were happy enough to sit there taking copious notes and listening to me drone on, so that's what I planned to do. It wasn't like I was getting paid for this.

"The most important city in Saskatchewan is Regina, but there's nothing there. I stopped in Regina once for a cup of coffee and found it to be very nice. The coffee, I mean.

"Next stop is Winnipeg which was quite a big deal in the 1800s during the fur trade. The fur trade had to do with beaver pelts which were used to make felt hats. It ended around 1850, when wealthy Europeans stopped wearing felt hats in favor of L.A. Raiders baseball caps worn backwards."

To illustrate this, I drew a picture of a guy wearing what would

have been a felt hat if I had any idea what a felt hat looked like. Then I rubbed out the guy's hat and gave him a backwards baseball cap. This went over better than I'd expected.

"A ha!" one of the younger students said, pointing to my little drawing. "Boyz II Men, very good." The rest of the class dutifully wrote down "Boyz II Men" in their notebooks.

"Okay, very good," I said, making a mental note to draw more and talk less. "Anyway, the bottom fell out of the fur trade, the beaver hunters went home and the nation was left in the hands of The Fathers of Confederation, a punk rock band out of Thunder Bay. They built a huge railroad stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This was called the CPR after the famous life-saving technique and it enabled a large number of men and supplies to be moved out to the West coast where all the women with great legs lived."

I tried to draw a picture of a woman with great legs. It came out looking like an ostrich dressed as a street hooker. So much for winning them over with my artistic skills.

"The next big event was World War One which was very boring unless you were there and World War Two where the Canadian troops did such a good job that many of them were given English girls to take home. These girls were known as 'war brides' although, today, many people refer to them as 'my ex-wife.' The years after World War Two were known as 'the post-war years.' This was a period of incredible growth and prosperity which lasted until the day before I went looking for my first job. In the meantime, separatist terrorists in Quebec started blowing things up and kidnapping people. The army was sent in to keep order which made for great TV. Eventually it all died down.

"That, in a nutshell, is basically the history of Canada. Pretty exciting, huh?"

Once again, the class remembered to hold their applause for the end of the show. I took a look at the chalkboard for the next city on my West-to-East tour. According to my map, it should have been Brussels.

"Back to our tour," I said. "And on to Toronto, the biggest city in Canada. Toronto's goal is to be a 'world class' city. So the Blue Jays and Raptors are described as 'world class' sports teams. The Skydome is praised as a 'world class' stadium. Les Mis Saigon of the Opera is called a 'world class' stage musical. And the CN Tower is hailed as a 'world class' erection."

Nobody got that joke. It wasn't a language problem. It just wasn't very funny.

"Ottawa," I said, pointing to Antwerp, "is the capital of Canada. The Parliament Buildings are here and if you go you can take a free guided tour. If you do, take note of the white marble statue of a young

Queen Victoria that stands in the center of the library. You'll probably be surprised to see that Vicky was quite the hot babe in her youth. This explains why Prince Albert agreed to marry her even though it meant leaving his native Germany where he was having such a good time getting plastered on Peach Schnapps and racing his 7 series BMW up and down the Autobahn.

"Quebec," I said, drawing an arrow towards West Flanders, "is a large province full of French Canadians. French Canadians can be divided into two groups: those who just ooze style, sophistication and sheer elegance; and the other 95 percent of the population.

"The major city in Quebec is Montreal. There are many interesting and exciting things to do in Montreal, many of which require the participation of those aforementioned little frou-frous."

Every student in the class wrote down the word 'Montreal' as I helpfully pointed out the city of Bruges.

Just then, Albert returned and it was time to put the class out of my misery. I wrapped things up as fast as I could.

"Leaving Quebec," I said, quickly and without so much as a glance at the board "you'll find yourself in one of the four Atlantic Provinces. Major activities here include fishing, dressing up like Anne of Green Gables for Japanese tour groups, and moving to Toronto to look for work.

"Continuing in an easterly direction, you soon reach the North Atlantic. As this ocean is wet, cold and full of live things that can eat you, you may want to stay where you are.

"Thank you very much."

I stood off to one side as Albert came up and took my place. "Well, we're almost out of time," he said, addressing the class. "Are there any quick questions?"

An older man in a blue suit put up his hand. "Mr Albert," he said. "Have you ever visited Canada?"

"Yes, I've been there many times," Albert said. "I'll tell you all about at our next class."

#

"Sorry about leaving you like that," Albert said, as we left the room. "That was my mother on the phone."

"Oh," I said. "Trouble at home?"

"No, she just likes to call," he said. "Apparently, Candice Bergen is giving her a great deal on long-distance."

I laughed. "I suppose it's harmless. If she's got the money to burn."

"Well, we all burn our money on something," Albert said.

"What is it with you?" I asked. "Clothes?"

"I guess so," he said. "People tease me about it, but I think that how you dress is important."

"I've never really cared," I said. That was true.

"You ought to," Albert said. "You're a good-looking guy; you should spend a few dollars on a couple of decent outfits."

"I'll do that," I said. "Just as soon as Vanity Fair discovers what a great writer I am."

It was time to get down to business. I'd wasted an hour already teaching Albert's class. I didn't want to waste another hour talking about fashion.

"Not much point in dressing up in Korea," I said. "It's not like there's anyone to look good for."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it's a very straight-laced society," I said. "It's a sexually conservative country."

"You've noticed?" Albert said.

"It's hard not to," I said. "They're not very modern or open-minded about sex."

"That's true," he said.

"So what's a guy to do?" I said. "It must be terribly frustrating."

"It doesn't have to be," Albert said. "Not all Koreans are so conservative. Some of them are a lot more open-minded than you'd think. You just have to know where they are."

I felt that I was on the verge of getting somewhere. I'd put in a fair amount of effort getting Albert to warm up to me and now it was about to pay off.

"So where are they?" I said.

"I didn't think you were interested," he said. "I saw you with Cheryl and just ..."

"No, no," I said. "There's nothing to that. I'm very interested."

"Well, if you're really interested."

"Oh, yes. I am," I said. "Very interested."

"Then let's go have that drink, shall we," Albert said.

#

Albert didn't say much in the taxi. That was no surprise. A screeching, swaying Daewoo Prince is no place for passing secrets.

We arrived at a coffee shop and went in. It was clean and quiet and tastefully decorated like most of Seoul's better cafes, but it was otherwise unremarkable. The clientele were mostly well-dressed, young guys.

Extremely well-dressed young guys. Tailored suits. Italian shoes.

Silk ties. Perfectly cut and sculpted hair. Except for the fact that they were Korean, they all looked pretty much like Albert Gossage.

"This is the place," Albert said. "What do you think?"

I didn't know what to think. I took another look around the room and another look at some of those well-dressed, young guys.

I hadn't noticed it at first, but they seemed to touch each other a lot more than guys in a bar usually do. And some of them were actually holding hands. I'd seen *The Crying Game* so I had some idea what was going on.

"Albert," I said. "Are you gay?"

"Yes." He seemed a little surprised at the question. "Aren't you?"

#

"Well George Bateman definitely did it," I told Cheryl, when I got back to Star Hogwon.

"What makes you say that?"

"Because he's the only one left," I said. "Simple process of elimination."

"Go on."

"Look at what we've found out so far," I said. "Mr Kim the Younger couldn't have done it because he was at the immigration office. Besides that, he's not a teacher and Mr Kim was killed because he blackmailed a teacher. Jennifer Downs didn't do it because she didn't have a motive. The killer was being blackmailed for sleeping with an underage girl and Jennifer is a woman. Dave Stevens didn't do it because he was too busy sleeping with Jennifer and Miss Park to be messing with the students. Same thing for Wendel Clemker. He's been racking up the frequent flyer points at the Itaewon brothels. And Albert Gossage is in the clear because he's gay."

"So that leaves George?" Cheryl said.

"Yes."

"Well I'm afraid I've got some news for you," she said. "He's dead."

"What?"

"I found out this morning when I went to his apartment," Cheryl said. "He's dead. So it can't be him."

"Sure it can," I said. "I know what happened. He committed suicide."

"I don't think so."

"He must have done," I said. "He must have killed Mr Kim then, filled with remorse, killed himself."

"If George Bateman committed suicide," Cheryl said, "then there's one question that needs answering."



"What's that."

"How," she said, "did he manage to strangle himself, cut his own throat, and toss his own body into a garbage bin?"

#

Cheryl mixed us both a cup of instant toxic waste.

"I met your photographer this morning," she said.

"Cam Fox, yeah," I said. "Remember I said I'd get him to photograph the teachers so we could show them to the girl."

"That's what he told me," Cheryl said. "Though he wasn't too pleased about it. He's really a combat photographer, you know."

"That's what he told you?"

"Yes," she said. "Korean War, Vietnam, Desert Storm. He's been everywhere."

"Don't pay too much attention to Cam," I said. "He's a nice guy and a good friend, but I don't believe a word he says about his war record."

"Stretches the truth a bit, does he?"

"If he thought you'd believe it," I said, "Cam Fox would happily claim to have covered The Battle of Hastings for the Associated Press."

"Funny you should say that," Cheryl said. "He did mention something about The War of the Roses."

"Did he get a picture of George Bateman before he died?"

"No."

"So we'll have to find another way to figure out if Bateman was sleeping with Yu Mee-soon," I said.

"You said before, process of elimination."

"I know," I said. "But we really should try to pin it on him directly."

"How?"

"I think we should learn all we can about him," I said. "Talk to his friends, maybe call his folks back home, see what we can dig up."

"All right."

"I guess the first thing we should do," I said, "is to have a look at those application papers we copied from Mr Kim's files."

"There's a funny thing," Cheryl said. "I thought of that as soon as I found out he was dead so I checked before I left home."

"Anything interesting?"

"That's the funny thing," she said. "There's no file on George Bateman."

"So much for that, then," I said.

"Not necessarily," she said. "We could try the Mugungwha Corporation."

"The what?"

"Mugungwha Corporation," Cheryl said. "It's the recruiter Mr Kim always used."

"Recruiter?"

"Yeah," Cheryl said. "They're all over Korea. They recruit teachers for hogwons. They put ads in American and Canadian newspapers and match up teachers with schools. It's a good business. The standard fee for a school wanting a teacher is a million won."

"So how will this Mugungwha outfit be able to help us?" I asked.

"All the teachers here were recruited by Mugungwha," Cheryl explained. "And Mugungwha processed all our work visa applications. So they'll have copies of all our papers."

"Will they give them to us?" I asked.

"I don't think so," Cheryl said. "We'll have to steal them."

#

That chat with Mom had given me an idea. Before we left, I popped into a nearby classroom to ask Cam a couple of questions. He was a bit surprised but, with some prodding, answered my queries. I took a few notes and left to catch up with Cheryl.

#

The Mugungwha is the national flower of Korea. According to the official government guidebook it "accurately reflects the immortal nature of Korean history and the determination and perseverance of the Korean people."

Mugungwha Corporation wasn't exactly immortal ("serving teachers and schools since 1995"), but it had the determination and perseverance down pat. Mr Chong was a quitter compared with the President of Mugungwha.

Cheryl's plan was that I would present myself to the boss as someone looking for a teaching position while she located and grabbed George Bateman's file.

"Shouldn't be too hard," she said. "It's pretty much a one-man operation. Aside from the boss, there's only a couple of secretaries and they're only there to look good and make coffee. If you keep Peter Park busy, I'll have the place to myself."

"Peter Park?"

"His real name is Park Tae-sun," Cheryl said. "Most Koreans who deal with foreigners take a western name for business purposes."

"But Peter Park?" I said. "He's not going to turn into Spiderman is he?"

"No, but he may spin a web," Cheryl said. "Don't forget, these guys get a million won, that's over a thousand bucks, every time they sign up a teacher."

"So he's not going to let me go without a good fight?" I said.

"Don't be surprised if he nails your feet to the floor."

#

Back in my used car selling days, I would have recognized Peter Park.

Hell. Who am I trying to kid? Back in my used car days, I was Peter Park.

He was warm. He was friendly. He was sincere. And he really wanted to help me.

"Really," he said. "I'm only here to help you."

"And I appreciate that, Mr Park," I said. "I really do."

"Oh please! Let's be friends," he said. "Call me Peter. All my good friends call me Peter."

Actually, his good friends probably called him Park Tae-sun, but I let that pass. "Okay," I said. "Peter. And please call me Calvin."

He'd been calling me Calvin since we'd got there, but I let that pass too.

"Now Calvin," he said. "Miss Haynes has told me that you are looking for a teaching position and she has asked me to assist you. There are many English language schools in Korea, but I can assure you that we deal only with the most reputable."

Yeah, I thought. Like Star Hogwon.

Still, you had to give it to the guy. He was smooth. I've been on the other side of the sales desk and I know all the tricks. This guy was a pro.

Cheryl stood up and grabbed her bag. "Excuse me," she said, in a near whisper. "Just going to the bathroom." Park hardly noticed her leave.

"Let me be honest with you, Calvin," he said, looking me straight in the eye and lying through his teeth. "I want to place you in the best possible school, not only to help you but also to help me."

I quickly adopted the required expression of surprise and curiosity.

"That's right," Peter Park said. "Because, Calvin, when you are happy in your school you will tell all your friends about Mugungwha Corporation and my business will prosper."

Nice work, Spiderman. The old "what's good for you is good for me" line. It sounds great so long as your customer doesn't figure out that "what's bad for you is good for me too."

"Now, frankly, Calvin," he continued, "there are a few language schools that I simply can not recommend."

Another classic from the used car business. Pick a car that you know the guy doesn't want and bad-mouth it to death. It makes you look honest.

"I can not recommend a hogwon where the director is unscrupulous," he said. "Or where the living accommodations are poor."

I'd be careful of that one, Sir. It's got a nasty rattle in the rear differential. And one of the brake rotors definitely needs skimming.

"Many of these low-quality schools," Mr Park said, "offer me great amounts of money to send them teachers. But I refuse. My reputation for honesty is too important."

Just between you and me, my sales manager really wants us to push the Toyota wagon. In fact, there's a bonus commission for whoever sells it. But I just wouldn't feel good about myself if I sold you a crummy car.

"Fortunately," Park said, "I have uncovered a number of very fine schools that are currently looking for teachers."

Now let me show you this lovely 1974 Dodge Aspen. It's just come in on a trade.

Cheryl came back, sat down, and looked at her watch. "We'd better be going," she said. "We have that appointment."

"No trouble at all," Park said. "Now Calvin, just tell me whether you want to start this week or next week and we'll get started."

Wow! An Assumptive Close and a False Choice smoothly rolled into one. This guy was good. And in his second language too.

I wish we'd had Peter Park on the sales team back at Deals On Wheels (Bad Credit? Bankruptcy? See us today!).

He'd be slinging out the bought-em-surplus-from-the-phone-company-and-fixed-em-up-a-bit base-model K-Cars faster than you could say Happy Motoring, Sucker.

"Well, uhhh," I said. "I'd like to think about it."

"Of course," he said, sliding over a small pile of papers and handing me a pen. "Very wise. Now if you'd just okay the paperwork, we'll be all set."

Another smooth move. Nobody likes to sign forms, but who has a problem "okaying the paperwork." I almost did it.

But Cheryl wasn't about to let that happen. "Calvin," she whined. "You promised to take me to dinner. And I'm staarrvinnngg."

"Yes, dear," I said. "We're almost ..."

"Now, Calvin," Cheryl said. "I'm ssoooo hungry."

I shrugged and muttered something apologetic to Mr Park.

"You can come back next week," Cheryl said. "And talk all day."

But now it's time for supper."

Peter Park made a feeble attempt to get my phone number, but he knew he was beaten.

There's nothing you can do when a girlfriend walks in at the last minute and torpedoes a done-deal.

"It's not your fault, kid," my boss, Al "Call Me Al" Montrose, had said the first time it happened to me. "Put yourself in your customer's shoes. You got long legs, luscious lips, and a bodacious set of ta-tas in the one hand. And a '79 Impala with bald tires and a dicky water pump in the other. Which would you choose?"

#

"I presume you got it," I said, as soon as we got outside.

"I did."

"How?"

"I wrote it on a piece of paper, walked into the other room, and handed it to one of those office flowers Park has working for him," Cheryl said. "She opened up a cabinet, took it out and gave it to me. When I got out of sight, I put it in my bag."

"Nice work," I said. "Remind me to lock up the silverware next time you visit the castle."

We were both hungry so we stopped at a little restaurant. I don't know what we had, but I enjoyed it. Korean food is all bits of this and bits of that drenched in peppers. At first it seems pretty boring, but it grows on you and I was starting to like it. I even wolfed down a good dollop of kim-chi.

Kim-chi, for those who haven't tasted Korea's national dish, is basically fermented cabbage laden with garlic and spices then liberally coated with industrial strength tear gas. Most westerners can't abide the stuff, but the odd person develops a taste for it. I must have been one of those people. Either that, or I'm in training for a career with the riot police.

"So let's have a look at that file," I said, when we'd both eaten our fill.

It was the usual stuff, all fourth-generation photocopies. Cheryl flicked through each page before passing it on to me.

"Okay," she said. "What have we got here. Passport. Birth Certificate -- Portland, Oregon, February 10th, 1975. Resume, nothing much, the usual part-time crap. Immigration documents -- address in Korea, Korean references, standard contract with Star Hogwon. University Degree and Transcript -- let's see Bachelor of Arts from Western California University, majored in Business Administration.

Driver's License, State of Montana ..."

"Wait a sec," I said. "What's that university?"

Cheryl picked up the faded copy and read. "Western California University. I've never heard of it."

"I think I have," I said. "Hang on here a sec'."

There was a magazine store across the road. As I dashed out to see if they sold foreign titles, the old lady who ran the restaurant looked at me with alarm. Koreans have funny ideas about westerners and she probably thought I was skipping out without paying.

"Una momento por favor," I said, with a jaunty wave. A little Spanish goes a long way in Seoul.

A few minutes later I returned, out of breath and clutching a small stack of English-language newsweeklies. I started flicking through the classifieds until I came to what I wanted.

"I thought that name sounded familiar. Look at this," I said, pointing to a small ad and reading. "Western California University. Get the Degree and get ahead. Turn your everyday life into a valuable university diploma."

"I don't get it," Cheryl said.

"It's a diploma mill," I said. "You send them a few thousand bucks and they send you a university degree."

"They're selling forged degrees?"

"No, no," I said. "They're real. Real degrees from Western California University which is no more a university than Star Hogwon is the Academie Francaise. Didn't you tell me that you need a university degree to get a Korean work visa?"

"Yes," she said. "Any three-year Bachelor's Degree will do."

"Well it looks like George Bateman got his in a lot less than three years."

Chapter Nine

Cheryl and I were both tired. We agreed to sleep on this latest development and pick it up in the morning. I went back to my hotel and she went back to her apartment which was not how I would have arranged things, but what were you expecting?

Just before settling down, I called Nina to ask her a couple of questions. She was a bit surprised but, with some prodding, answered my queries. I took a few notes, hung up and went to sleep.

#

Everyone got into work early the next morning expecting another round of boring police questions and, with luck, a day off. But the cops didn't show. George Bateman had been killed near his

apartment and the police were concentrating their investigation (such as it was) in that area.

Albert Gossage, fresh from the pages of GQ magazine, sidled up next to me when I walked in. "Calvin," he said. "About yesterday. I'd appreciate a little discretion if you wouldn't mind. It's not something a guy in my line of work wants known."

"I won't tell," I said. "On one condition."

"Name it."

"When I finally get around to a proper date with Cheryl," I said, "you lend me a decent shirt and some of your cologne."

"I'll have you looking and smelling like a million bucks," he said, with a laugh. "I might even be able to do something about your hair."

"If you're getting into the makeover business, you should start with him," I said, as the shaggy, goodwill castoff-clad figure of Dave Stevens approached.

"Calvin - Albert," Big Chief Running Dave said. "Very - sad - George - dead."

"Yes," I said. "The buffalo hunt won't be the same without him."

"How - George - he - be - killed?" Dave asked.

As I described Bateman's ugly death, Wendel Clemker and Jennifer Downs came over and joined us.

"Very - bad - way - for - man - to - die," Dave said. "I - sorry - for - him."

Jennifer wasn't sorry. "You know," she said, "I don't know how many times I told his students, 'if your teacher is no good, just change classes.' There's no need to kill him."

We all laughed, except Wendel who didn't seem to get it.

#

Cheryl was in her usual early-morning position over by the water heater making instant primordial slime. I left the group and joined her.

"So what's the plan for today?" I asked.

"I expect Mr Kim will give one of his 'the King is dead, long live Star Hogwon' speeches, cancel classes and give us the day off," she said. "So we can check out that phony diploma."

"What's to check out?" I said. "He obviously bought it just so he could get a work visa."

"Maybe somebody found out about it?"

"So what if they did?" I said. "It's no reason to kill him."

"Yeah. I'm sure you're right," she said. "I just can't think of anything better. We don't seem to have much to go on."

"No," I said. "So let's keep digging up what we can on George Bateman."

"You still want to call his folks?"

"What I'd really like is a look round his apartment," I said. "But I guess it's swarming with cops."

"They'll be gone by now."

"So all we have to do is break in," I said. "That shouldn't be too hard."

"It won't be hard at all," Cheryl said, smiling. "Don't forget, I used to live there?"

"So?"

"So put away your ropes and grappling hooks, 007," she said. "I've still got my key."

#

Mr Kim didn't make a "long live Star Hogwon" speech, nor did he give his teachers the day off.

He walked in with a few papers under his arm, counted the room to make sure everyone was there, and began. "I regret to inform you," he said, "that, as of today, George Bateman is no longer fully involved in an actively breathing situation."

Everyone laughed, except Wendel who didn't seem to get it.

"This means that the class timetable must be changed to cover Mr Bateman's lessons. I have prepared a new teaching schedule."

He handed the papers to The Fashionable Miss Park who passed them out.

"This comes into effect starting tomorrow?" Wendel Clemker asked.

"No," said Mr Kim. "It comes into effect right now."

Cheryl examined her copy. "It's all changed," she said. "I used to have the morning off. Now I've got classes. Can you find something to do and meet me back here at two thirty?"

For something to do, I grabbed Cam Fox and we set out to see, interview and photograph as much of Seoul as we could in six hours. One of the few good things about working for Nina Van Der Klerk is that you can write your stories without having to do a lot of research. Actually, you can write for Nina without doing any research and many of her regular contributors do just that. But I'm still dumb enough to think that good work counts for something. I'd been jotting down little snatches of local color and I'd managed to fit in an occasional interview, but there were a few places I hadn't got to.

We made a quick dash through the war museum which was a pity since it would have been worth more time. There were so many nifty things to see, including a real B-52 bomber which turned out to be much smaller than they look on those Vietnam War documentaries.



The King Sejong University museum offered displays of traditional dress and furniture which was as exciting as traditional dresses and furniture usually are.

The Kim-chi museum sounded too good to miss, but we missed it anyway. We're like that, Cam and I.

The one place we didn't want to miss was the U.S. military base in Yongsan Gu on the way to Itaewon. If Nina wanted hot, steamy army babes, the base was the place.

I was rather looking forward to this. As a teenager living in Montreal, I remember walking past a police cruiser stopped at a traffic light. At the wheel sat the most perfectly delicious female police constable in the history of law enforcement. She had deep blue eyes, honey-blond hair tied in a naughty-librarian bun, and a body that Claudia Schiffer would be proud to drag down the catwalk. All that and handcuffs too. I was so smitten would gladly have confessed to every unsolved bank robbery in the greater Montreal area if I thought she'd be the one to arrest me. Ever since then, I've had a thing for girls in uniform.

Unfortunately, unlike the Montreal Police, the U.S. Army doesn't recruit from the Ford Modeling Agency. The girls we talked to were nice enough, but they were hardly what Nina was looking for.

Cam did his best, using light and shadow and clever camera angles to try and make the girls look sufficiently titillating for World Horizon's readers. A few of them were beyond hope, so he fell back on the well-known photographer's maxim that 'every girl's a babe when she's covered by a tank'.

I had the same problem. If these girls had joined up looking for a few good men and a romp amongst the howitzers, they weren't about to tell me. Most of them had husbands and kids back home and spent their nights working, sleeping and feeling homesick.

I did my best and was rather proud of my profile of an artillery sergeant "whose heart pounded violently at the memory of her husband back home and their last night of passion before she shipped out," but the rest was pretty dull.

"There was a time," I said to Cam as we left the base, "when the military used to co-operate with the press. You needed babes, they got you babes."

"Those were the days."

"Remember about five years ago," I said. "The U.S. Navy had Suzanne Somers on an aircraft carrier. Now that's the kind of thing Nina would love. What ever happened to her?"

"She's back at the magazine."

"Not Nina," I said. "Suzanne Somers."

"She's on late-night TV," Cam said. "She does ThighMaster

infomercials."

I felt about a hundred years old.

#

George Bateman's apartment was as filthy and disgusting as it had been on our last visit. Maybe he had been killed by a vicious gang of vigilante decorators.

The living room held little more than a few bits of cheap furniture, a beaten-up old TV and a rack for drying clothes.

I turned on the TV. KBS-2 was showing The Fall Guy dubbed into Korean. Just as they got to that scene in every episode where, for essential dramatic reasons, the plot requires Heather Thomas to squeeze into an undersized bikini and cavort about the poolside, there was a loud POP and the screen went black.

"I think that's enough TV for now, don't you?" Cheryl said.

"I might be able to fix it," I said. "They're showing Charlie's Angels later on."

I grew up on Charlie's Angels and Cheryl Ladd's breasts were one of the high points of my teenage years. That shot of her in the jacuzzi from the opening titles is permanently imprinted on my brain. When I'm an old man losing my faculties, that'll be the last memory to go. I'll be a hundred and ten with a long gray beard and no teeth, wandering around the old-folks home muttering over and over again, "great hooters, great hooters ...."

I left the TV and started searching the kitchen. "George was certainly no gourmet," I said. "Just half a bag of rice and a whole bunch of these little packets of instant noodles."

"Ramyon."

"Is that what they call it?" I said. "I guess it's the Korean answer to macaroni and cheese. Quick, cheap, filling food that any dummy can cook. What about you? Find much in the bedroom?"

"No," Cheryl said. "Clothes, a couple of old magazines, a towel, a little money. That's about it."

"How much money?"

"15,000 won and change," Cheryl said. "About twenty bucks."

"Find any condoms?" I asked.

"No."

"Just a thought."

We sat down in the living room and looked over the remains of George Bateman's existence.

"Not much of a life, was it?" I said.

"No," Cheryl answered. "But that's no reason for someone to end it."

"But why would someone want to end it?" I said. "That's the key here, you know, motive. All this running around and we still have no idea why anyone would want these two guys dead."

"What about revenge for sleeping with the girl?"

"You think Bateman was sleeping with her?" I asked.

"Don't you?"

"Not really," I said. "I just can't see a sixteen-year-old girl going for a guy like George."

"Who knows why any girl goes for any guy," Cheryl said. "Back when I was in high school, we had this exchange student from France. He was a complete geek -- ugly and stupid and boring with bad skin and greasy hair. But he came from France and he had this accent and, to us, he was the most exotic thing in the world. Every girl in the school, including me, had a huge crush on him because he was a foreigner."

"I suppose you're right," I said, making a mental note to give my Hercule Poirot routine another try.

"Would you have expected The Fashionable Miss Park to be sleeping with Dave Stevens?" Cheryl said.

"No," I said. "That was surprise."

"More to the point," Cheryl said. "Is there any teacher at Star Hogwon with whom you could imagine any pretty young girl wanting to have sex?"

"Okay," I said. "I see your point. Let's say Bateman had sex with Yu Mee-soon. Then why kill Mr Kim?"

"Because he owned the school," Cheryl answered. "He let it happen. Mr Yu could have done it to avenge his daughter's honor."

"I don't buy that," I said. "If I did something terrible to someone you love, would you kill my editor?"

"Okay," Cheryl said. "Try this. Someone else had a sexual affair with Yu Mee-soon. Mr Kim and George Bateman were both blackmailing him. So he killed the two of them."

"It's possible," I said. "But where's the money. I don't know about Mr Kim, but George sure wasn't a candidate for Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous."

"He could have been sending it all home." Cheryl said. "Maybe he had bills to pay or something."

"Some bills," I said. "Look what he's got here: the clothes on his back, 15,000 won and a pile of ramyon. He makes Gandhi look like Donald Trump."

"Are you going somewhere with this?"

"I think so."

"Where?"

"Well, for starters," I said, "out of this garbage dump and into a

coffee shop."

#

"Let me ask you something," I said, once Cheryl and I were comfortably settled into a couple of The Swing Room's overstuffed armchairs. "If you wanted to kill me, how would you do it?"

"Oh, come on, Calvin ..."

"No, no," I said. "Just play along with this. How would you kill me?"

"Well, I guess I'd, ahh, I'd shoot you."

"Okay," I said. "If you couldn't shoot me, how would you do it."

"If I couldn't shoot you," Cheryl said, "I would probably stab you with a knife."

"And if you couldn't do that?"

"Then I think I'd strangle you."

"And if you weren't able to strangle me?"

"I'd hit you over the head with a hammer," Cheryl said. "Are we finished?"

"Yes," I said. "That's enough."

I took a couple of pieces of notepaper out of my pocket and put them on the table. "Yesterday," I said, "I asked Cam Fox and Nina Van Der Klerk the same question I asked you. These are their answers."

Cheryl picked up both sheets of paper. "Nina:," she said, reading, "Put the phone on call forward and pretend to be in the office while actually being elsewhere killing Calvin; leave the office then dress up as a man, sneak back in and kill Calvin. Do you want me to read all of these?"

"No, no," I said. "But have a look at Cam's list."

"Okay," Cheryl said, "Cam: put a bomb on an airplane when Calvin is a passenger; cut the brakes on his car; put plastic explosive in his fridge and wire it up to the light."

"Notice the pattern," I said. "Your plans are simple and straightforward. Nina's plans all involve the elaborate creation of a false alibi. And Cam's call for some kind of explosives or mechanical trickery."

"So you think one of us did it, huh?" Cheryl said, chuckling.

"I'm just wondering what kind of person kills one of his victims by cleverly sabotaging an electrical switch and kills the other by strangling and cutting his throat."

Cheryl was a smart girl. She got it right away. "Two killers?"

"That's what I think."

"But which two?"

"I've been thinking about that," I said. "Trouble is, once you

accept that there are two killers, you can come up with a million possible scenarios."

"So what do we do?" Cheryl asked. "Go round again and find out where everybody was when George was being killed?"

"That didn't do us much good last time," I said. "Let's leave the theories and dubious alibis aside for now and concentrate on what we do know."

"We know how Mr Kim and George were killed," Cheryl said. "We know that one of the teachers had sex with a girl whom he may have thought was 18 but was really 16. And we know that one of the teachers wasn't being paid."

"And from the dates in the ledger," I said. "We can assume that he wasn't being paid because he was being blackmailed."

"It all comes down to who was being blackmailed."

"Until we know for sure who it was," I said. "We're never going to figure this out."

"So we look for someone who's short of cash," Cheryl said.

"That's not going to help," I said. "Anyone sending home a lot of money would look short of cash."

"Then we look for someone who's not sending home any money," Cheryl said.

"Right! That's exactly what we do."

Cheryl smiled.

"You know," I said. "You'd make a great Charlie's angel. How do you look in a jacuzzi?"

#

"So how are we going to find out who hasn't been sending home any money?" Cheryl asked.

"That's something we'll have to work out," I said. "To start with, why don't you explain to me how it's done. I assume you don't just stuff a wad of bills in an envelope and mail it home to Mom."

"No," she said. "It's more complicated than that. First of all, you have to go down to the bank with your work visa, alien card and a copy of your employment contract and get them to open a file on you."

"Which bank?"

"Well, you can go to any bank," Cheryl said. "But everyone uses the Korea International Bank. They do transfers all the time and they always have someone on the desk who speaks decent English. There's no reason to go anywhere else."

"So how does the transfer work?"

"Oh, it's pretty simple," she said. "You just give them your money, your salary statement, the address of your home bank and the

account number, and pay a 20,000 won service charge. I don't know what they do exactly, but two days later the money is home."

"What's this salary statement?"

"I guess I should explain that," Cheryl said. "The Korean government only allows foreign workers to send home two-thirds of their pay. The salary statement is just a form given to you by your employer to tell the bank how much you earned that month."

"So the bank can make sure you're not sending home too much money?"

"Yes."

"But what if you want to send home more than two-thirds?" I asked.

"Everybody does," Cheryl said. "You just get your director to lie on the form. Put down two million won instead of one point two."

"When do you get these forms?"

"On payday," Cheryl said. "On the last day of each month Mr Kim pays the teachers. Now, of course, his son does it. He gives us 1,200,000 won plus any overtime and minus five-percent Korean income tax. Along with that he gives us a salary statement for two million."

"Does he keep copies?"

"No," Cheryl said. "He has no reason to."

Okay," I said. "So you take the salary statement down to the bank. What do they do with it?"

"They put it in your file," Cheryl said. "They may do something else with it. Send copies to the government or something. I wouldn't know about that. But I do know that the originals are kept in the file."

"You're sure?"

"Absolutely," she said. "I see mine every month when I send my own money home. I know what you're thinking. If we could get those files, we'd know who has been sending home money."

"More importantly," I said. "Who hasn't."

"It's a good idea. But those files are locked in a bank."

"I've got a secret weapon," I said.

"Not your ropes and grappling hooks again," Cheryl said, laughing.

"No," I said. "My photographer. Cam Fox."

#

Cheryl didn't have a great deal of confidence in Cam's talents.

"He's a natural-born fixer," I said. "He can get anything."

"How does he do it?" she asked.

"Bribery? Coercion? Flattery? Charm?" I said. "I honestly don't

know. But he always comes through with the goods."

"I hope he does this time," Cheryl said. "But I'll believe it when I see it."

"Let me tell you a story about Cam," I said. "Last year, somebody tells Nina that nude beaches are popping up all over Mexico. She decides to send me and Cam to cover the story."

"Now, Nina's a cheapskate as rule. She pays less than just about everyone else in the magazine business and most of the time you end up covering your own expenses. But this is a big story. Important journalistic principles are involved, specifically young men and women with no clothes on. So Nina decides to push the boat out and spend a few bucks."

"We meet at her office and she gives us expense money, hotel reservations and airline tickets. We're on Aero Mexico, Flight 139. Economy class. I've got seat 34B; Cam's got 34C."

"Next morning, I turn up at the airport. No Cam. It's final boarding and he's still not arrived. I'm just about to call Nina when an airline clerk brings me a note. 'Change of plans. Meet you there. Cam.'"

"Anyway, the flight is uneventful and we arrive at Mexico City's airport. I'm getting off the plane and the first thing I see is one of those executive Lear Jets parked on the tarmac. You know the kind, plush carpet, leather seats, a well-stocked bar, and a six-foot, 93 pound, fashion-model-turned-stewardess named Brigitte who wants to know if there is "anything else I can possibly do for you."

"So I'm looking at this thing and who walks off it ..."

"Cam Fox?" Cheryl said, impressed.

"Yeah," I said. "Old 34C himself."

"And he wouldn't tell you how he did it?"

"No way," I said. "I still don't know. He said something about eating too many truffles on the flight down, but that was it. Now for a guy like that, a bank should be no trouble at all."

"Well, you may be right," Cheryl said. "We'll have to wait and see."

#

We did wait and I was right. At 10:30 the following morning, Cheryl and I were at her desk drinking coffee when Cam Fox strode in and handed me a fat manila envelope stuffed with papers.

"Here you go," he said. "Photocopies, of course. But they're all there."

Cam left before we could thank him properly. I'd pay him back later in the usual way, by buying him drinks and pretending to believe

his war stories.

#

Cheryl and I were as excited as schoolkids on the first day of summer vacation. We bustled out of the office and into a nearby coffee shop to examine the goodies in Cam's envelope.

The salary statements were all mixed up and out of order. There was a problem as well.

"They're all in Korean," I said.

"Of course."

"How are we supposed to read them."

"Look," Cheryl said. "It's just a fill-in-the-blank form. You can figure it out."

She was right. The teacher's names, naturally, were in English. Koreans use western numbers so the salary amounts were easy to read. And the dates were in written a date-month-year numerical format, so we could work that out too.

"Let's make a pile for each month," I said. "And see who is missing."

We quickly discovered another problem. "There's nothing here for Jennifer Downs," I said "If she's the one, it shoots our blackmail theory down in flames."

"It's not her," Cheryl said. "Remember, until just recently she was working illegally. So she wouldn't have been able to use the bank."

That made sense.

"Okay, then" Cheryl said, when we were finished. "We have salary statements dated January 31st for me, Dave Stevens, Albert Gossage, Wendel Clemker, and George Bateman."

"One for everybody."

"Exactly," she said. "But for February 28th, March 31st, April 30th, and May 31st we only have statements for me, Dave, Albert and Wendel."

"Nothing for George Bateman," I said.

"Which means that George Bateman must have been our blackmail victim," Cheryl said.

"You don't think he was just too busy to get to the bank?" I said, chuckling.

"No," Cheryl said. "If that were true, we'd have found a pile of cash at his apartment. And here's something else." She took a piece of paper from her pocket and unfolded it. "This is the new teaching schedule, the one made to cover George's classes."

I looked at it but it didn't mean much to me.



"Before George died," Cheryl said, "we each taught six hours a day. Our contract calls for 30 hours a week. Above that, we get time-and-a-half, so Mr Kim makes sure we rarely go above it."

"Makes sense."

"Sure," Cheryl said. "But with the new schedule, we're each teaching eight hours a day."

"What's wrong with that?" I said. "You're covering for Bateman."

"Do the math," she said. "Two hours a day times five days a week times five teachers (me, Dave, Albert, Wendel and Jennifer) comes out to fifty hours."

"So not only was George not getting paid, but he was teaching twenty more hours a week than the rest of you," I said. "How come nobody noticed?"

"You wouldn't unless you were looking for it," Cheryl said. "Mr Kim never posted a schedule. He just told each of us when and what classes to teach."

"So if, for example, you had mostly morning classes and, say, Wendel had mostly afternoon classes and Jennifer had mostly evening classes ..."

"... each of us would assume that George Bateman was on a similar schedule."

"Whereas, in fact, he was teaching all day."

"Exactly," Cheryl said. "We'd never notice how much he was working unless we compared notes. And we had no reason to do that."

Something was bothering me, but I couldn't seem to pin it down. "Let me see those statements again."

Cheryl passed them over. I thumbed through the pile, but whatever it was wasn't getting any clearer. "Mr Kim was killed, when?"

"The 30th," Cheryl said. "Of May."

"And George Bateman?"

"June fourth," Cheryl said. "What's on your mind?"

"I don't quite know," I said. "I feel like there's something right in front of me but I just can't grab it."

"Let's go over what we know," Cheryl said. "We can be pretty sure that George Bateman was being blackmailed. He's got no money, he lives like a pauper, and he's working more hours than anyone else."

"Which means that Mr Kim must have been the blackmailer," I said. "It also explains why George put up with that rotten apartment."

"We can also assume that the reason he was being blackmailed was that he had sex with a sixteen-year-old girl," Cheryl said. "She must have told him she was eighteen."

"He probably didn't know about Korean age," I said. "At least, not until Mr Kim explained it to him."

"So Mr Kim makes him work long hours for virtually no money," I

said. "I wonder why he didn't just go home?"

"Kim took his plane ticket." Cheryl said. "We didn't find one in his room."

"That makes sense," I said. "Now, months go by. He's getting more and more tired and stressed out. So, with no apparent end in sight, he rigs up a light switch to kill his blackmailer."

"The police think it's an accident," Cheryl said. "And, except for us, so does everybody else."

"A perfect crime," I said. "He's home free."

"Except that five days later, he's dead."

"Not just dead," I said. "Murdered."

And that," Cheryl said, "is all we know."

"Not quite," I said. "I know who did it."

Chapter Ten

For the sake of privacy, I met George Bateman's killer in one of the upstairs classrooms.

"I've figured out why George was murdered," I said.

"Wasn't he killed for his money? By street robbers?" the killer said. "That's what the police told me."

"Street robbers? You mean muggers" I said. "There aren't many of those in Seoul."

"Not many," George Bateman's killer said, "but some. It's one of the unfortunate effects of westernization."

"No, he wasn't killed for his money," I said. "He didn't have any money. George Bateman was killed because he murdered your father."

"Really!" Mr Kim the Younger said. "I suppose you think that I did it."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, Mr Scott," Mr Kim said. "It's a good theory. If George Bateman killed my father, I'd have a strong motive to kill him. But you're missing an important detail."

"And what's that?"

"Even if I had wanted to avenge my father's death, it would have been impossible. Until now, nobody knew that it was George Bateman who killed him."

"Not true," I said. "You knew. And I can prove it." I tossed the manila envelope on the nearest desk and sat down. "Salary statements," I said.

A look of shock and fear mixed with a tiny pinch of hope fell across Mr Kim's face as he dropped himself into a chair. I knew I was on the right track.

"They prove nothing," he said, in a half-hearted attempt at nonchalance. "Financial documents, nothing more."

"Much more, Mr Kim," I said. "Shall I explain?"

"If you like," he said. He knew most of what I was about to tell him, but etiquette requires that the dastardly killer sit quietly while the brilliant detective explains where he slipped up.

"As you know," I said, wondering if my Hercule Poirot accent would be appropriate, but deciding against it. "These salary statements are issued to teachers along with their pay on the last day of each month."

Mr Kim nodded.

"There are no statements for Jennifer Downs," I said, "because she was, until quite recently, working illegally. There are salary statements dated January 31st for all the other teachers, though: Cheryl, Dave, Albert, Wendel, and George Bateman."

"I know the teacher's names, Mr Scott."

"Yes," I said. "I'm sorry. I'll try to hurry this along. Now for February 28th, March 31st, April 30th and May 31st, we have statements for all the teachers except Jennifer, naturally, and, unnaturally, George Bateman."

I told Mr Kim how Cheryl and I had learned about Yu Mee-soon and discovered that one of the teachers was being blackmailed. Then, I explained how we'd followed the money trail until we discovered that George Bateman was the blackmail victim. The 50 hour-a-week teaching schedule had just confirmed our suspicions.

"Very good, Mr Scott," he said. "Very clever. But what makes you think that I knew all this?"

"Look at these," I said, easing a few sheets of paper out of the envelope. "Salary statements for May 31st. One for Cheryl. One for Dave. One for Albert. And one for Wendel."

"Yes."

"Where is George Bateman's salary statement, Mr Kim?" I asked.

"He didn't get one," Mr Kim said. "You said yourself, he was being forced to work without pay. That's why he killed my father."

"Mr Kim," I said. "Your father was killed on the 30th of May, correct?"

"Yes, correct."

"And payday was May 31st, also correct?"

"Yes, also correct."

"So who paid the teachers for May?"

"I did."

"And who made out the salary statements for May?"

"I did. You know this."

"But what I don't know, Mr Kim," I said, "is why, if you didn't know anything about George Bateman's being blackmailed and therefore having a strong motive to kill your father, you still didn't

bother to pay him?"

The shock and fear were back, although hope was nowhere to be seen. Clearly, I'd struck a nerve.

"Why don't you tell me what happened?" I said.

#

Mr Kim got up, closed the two open windows, checked the hallway for eavesdroppers, closed the door, and sat down. He leaned across the desk and spoke quietly.

"I found out the same way you did," he said, "by following the money. About a month ago I noticed that we had six teachers, but were only paying five salaries. I confronted my father with it and he told me what was happening."

"He was blackmailing George Bateman?"

"Yes," Mr Kim said. "The girl had told my father about sleeping with the teacher. My father told her not to tell anyone. He said that her parents would disown her and she'd be sent to live by herself in the country."

"It worked," I said. "She didn't tell us much. What happened when your father confronted Bateman?"

"He protested at first. He said he that the girl had told him that she was eighteen years old."

"But she was really sixteen."

"Yes," Mr Kim said. "My father explained that. Though I'm pretty sure Mr Bateman knew that the girl was underage. You've seen her, haven't you?"

"Yes," I said. "She's just a kid."

"After that," he said. "I told my father to stop blackmailing the boy, but he refused. Not only refused, but he reduced the small amount of pocket money he was giving him and increased the number of classes he had to teach."

"So when your father turned up dead, you knew who had done it?"

"Of course," Mr Kim said. "I never believed that silliness about the light switch."

"When did you decide to kill Bateman?"

"When I saw my father dead on the floor," he said. "I knew then that I would kill his murderer. My father was not an honest man, Mr Scott, but he did not deserve to be killed."

"Then what did you do?"

"I spent a lot of time trying to decide how to kill Mr Bateman," he said. "I thought of many methods but they were all too complicated or not certain to cause death."

"That's why you didn't pay him," I said. "You knew you were going to kill him."

"Yes," Mr Kim said. "It seemed like a waste of money. If I'd known that you were going to find those salary statements, I would have paid him."

"When you finally did figure out how to kill him," I asked, "why did you do it so violently?"

"I didn't mean it that way," he said. "I went to his apartment and told him to come with me. I said I was taking him to teach a private class. When we got to the alley, I slipped the wire around his neck and pulled it tight. I'd seen it on television and thought it would kill him quickly. I guess you can't always trust television."

"Sure you can," I said. "You're just watching the wrong shows. Anyway, go on."

"I held the wire for a long time," Mr Kim said. "His body was jumping around. Finally it stopped so I lowered him to the ground. I thought he was dead, but I checked his pulse and his heart was still beating. I tossed his body into a garbage container and ran back to his apartment. I took a knife from the kitchen, ran back to the alley and cut his throat."

Conflicting thoughts ran through my mind. I could understand why he'd want to strike back at his father's killer. And I believed him when he said he didn't intend for Bateman to die such a gruesome death. On the other hand, it wasn't a crime of passion committed in the heat of the moment. He'd planned it for nearly a week.

Finally, I came to a decision. I wasn't about to let him get away with it. But I would try to give him a break.

"Mr Kim," I said. "I want you to call the police and give them a complete confession."

"Why should I do that?"

"Because, if you do," I said, "I'll pretend that I know nothing. You can tell the court that you were filled with guilt and were moved to confess. I'm sure the court will show some leniency."

"And if I don't confess?"

"I'll be forced to tell the police what you've told me today," I said.

"Do you think they'll believe you?" he said. "Do you think that a judge will care what you have to say?"

"Why not?" I said. "I'm competent. I'm credible ..."

"You are a foreigner, Mr Scott," he said. "In Korea your word is useless. We are, what is that word ...?"

"Xenophobic?"

"Yes, exactly," Mr Kim said. "Let me tell you a joke, okay?"

"If you like."

"A Korean driver hits a foreign bicyclist with his car, sending him flying into the front window of a nearby store," Mr Kim said. "The police come and the case eventually gets to court. There is a trial and the Korean man is set free."

"And the foreigner?"

"The foreigner," Mr Kim said, "is charged with leaving the scene of an accident, breaking and entering, and operating an unroadworthy bicycle."

"Very funny," I said, "But what's your point?"

"My point is that no one will trust you," he said. "No one will even listen to you."

He was probably right. But I wasn't done yet. I reached into my pocket, drew out my mini-cassette recorder and placed it on the desk.

"They won't listen to me," I said. "But they will listen to this."

#

The tape recorder clinched it. Mr Kim gave me a note for Miss Park instructing her to cancel classes and call the cops. I left him sitting upstairs and went down to the office.

Some of the teachers had already drifted back from lunch. Wendel Clemker was hunched over his laptop computer trying to figure out how Yoko Ono could produce a negative score on the HITMASTeR scale.

Jennifer Downs was preparing for her next class. From what I could tell, her junior high school boys were having trouble understanding the finer points of A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Albert Gossage and Dave Stevens came in a few minutes later. "You - secret - agent - very - exciting," Dave was saying, obviously impressed. Albert smiled modestly. John LeCarre meets Pocahontas, I thought.

Cheryl was still out so I had to make my own coffee. I was drinking it when the cops came. Miss Park directed them upstairs.

They were up there for an hour during which time I pretended to have no idea what was going on. As I spend much of my life having no idea what's going on, this wasn't too hard.

Finally a young constable came down and had a few words with The Fashionable Miss Park.

"Police want to talk to everybody," she said. "First person, please. Mr Calvin Scott."

#

The Korean National Police redeemed themselves by sending an

intelligent, professional officer who also spoke excellent English.

Inspector Lee assured me that the case was just about closed. He was just wrapping up his paperwork and needed the names and addresses of everyone associated with Star Hogwon.

"So Mr Kim confessed, did he?" I said.

"Yes," Inspector Lee said. "He felt a great deal of remorse and decided to admit to his crime."

"Will that help him?"

"I think so," he said. "He will be punished, of course. Murder is a serious offense. But the confession is important. I'm sure the court will show some leniency."

I gave him my name, answered a few more routine questions and got up to leave.

"Oh, Mr Scott," Inspector Lee said, as I was walking out the door. "You are a magazine writer, yes?"

"Yes."

"Then this must be yours," he said, holding up my mini-cassette recorder.

"Ah, there it is" I said, breezily. "Silly me."

Inspector Lee looked admiringly at my little machine then pressed the "Play" button. Nothing happened. He turned it over and examined the back.

"It has no batteries," he said.

"No."

"And no cassette tape," he said.

"No," I said, taking it from him. "It's really just for show. I've never actually figured out how to use it."

#

Having successfully solved the murder, it only remained for me to get the girl.

I went back down to the office and found Cheryl at her desk. Sitting next to her was some guy I'd never seen before. He was tall, blond, handsome, and better-dressed than anyone in the room except Albert. He had his arm around Cheryl's neck and was laughing at something she had said. Naturally, my first inclination was to kill him.

"Calvin," Cheryl said. "I'd like you to meet Brad Farmer, my fiance."

He stood up and shook my hand. "Exam week finished early and Father had some frequent flyer points saved up," he said. "So I decided to come out and see how the old girl was doing."

The "old girl" was obviously doing much better now that Brad had arrived. "Brad's at Dental School," she gushed. "We're going to get

married when he graduates."

"Only a year to go," Brad said. "Then I'll set up the practice, get us a nice little three-bedroom, and start working on that family you're always talking about."

I felt like vomiting, but I held back.

"A boyfriend! I didn't know you had a boyfriend. I guess I'm not much of a detective after all."

Brad had with him a copy of World Report, the International Dental Association's quarterly newsletter and, you may recall, one of my all-too-rare employers. "Not much of detective," he said, waving the magazine in front of him. "And, I'd say, not much of a writer either."

Brad thought this was hilarious and, apparently, so did Cheryl.

She was bent over her desk, clutching her sides, and howling with laughter.

#

I finished up Nina's article and caught the first flight I could get out of Korea.

The last thing I saw at Kimpo Airport was a huge blue banner with a Korean flag and the words "See you again soon."

Yeah right.

----- END -----

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

For more about Mark, visit [www.markhillonline.com](http://www.markhillonline.com).





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