

CHAPTER ❖ 1 ❖

April

Hyo Kim was a clean-cut Korean man in his mid-thirties. He was flying on an airplane from Korea to Denver, Colorado, in the United States. The large American man sitting next to Hyo said, “Are you going to the States for business?”

“No. My father died. I’m going to his funeral.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. Was he visiting?”

“No. He was working with my older brother in their engineering company.”

“Your English is quite good,” the American said. “Have you been to the U.S. before?”

“Yes, I studied civil engineering at the University of Iowa,” answered Hyo.

The two men talked, slept, ate, and read magazines during the 12-hour flight to Los Angeles. They showed each other pictures of their families.

Hyo said, “This is my wife, Hana, my son, Dak Ho, and my daughter, Cho Hee. He is ten years old. She is six. My wife is an artist. She teaches pottery at the university in Seoul.”

Hyo took another plane from Los Angeles to

Denver. His brother, Kwan, picked him up at the airport. They drove on the interstate highway, I-70, into the city.

“Kwan, how are you? Is Mother well? How is your family?” Hyo asked.

“We are fine, sad, but fine. I’m glad you arrived safely. Mother will be happy to see you.”

The two brothers had only seen each other once since Kwan and his family moved to Colorado seven years ago. Hyo glanced at Kwan. He was still the older brother that Hyo looked up to when they were younger, but he had changed. Kwan was more serious and seemed worried. His face was white from lack of sleep. He was heavier, with stooped shoulders.

Kwan’s house was near the Flower Park. It was a small, red brick house surrounded by tall shade trees and spring flowers. The door opened. The brothers’ mother stepped out, followed by Kwan’s wife, Mi Sun, and their 16-year-old daughter, Su Jin.

Hyo went to his mother and hugged her. Then, with a slight bow of his head, he said, *“Mother, how are you feeling? Are you in good health?”*

“I’m fine, my son,” she said. *“Come in.”*

As the oldest male, Kwan was in charge of all the funeral preparations. Here in the United States, only some of the traditional Korean customs were followed. All the family wore white armbands with a black stripe in the center.

Hyo stayed in Denver for a week after the funeral. Much of the family conversation was about his father. They told stories about growing up in Korea. They laughed and cried.

Kwan took Hyo to his engineering company. He was the owner and president now that their father was dead. It was a small firm of 50 employees. They designed and constructed roads and highways. Hyo observed quietly.

“You have done well, Kwan. This is a good company.”

“It is only luck, and our father’s hard work,” Kwan answered, protesting politely. *“Father had great hopes for the business. You know he always wanted the three of us to work together.”*

Hyo looked at his brother in disbelief. This wasn’t true. His father never said anything at all to him about that.

Kwan continued, *“He left you money, Hyo. He wanted you to move to Denver with your family and work here in the company. Now I do, too. We need your help.”*