

READING EXERCISE

The Adventures of Lola Badiola

CHAPTER 24: THE GIRL WITH THE ALMOND EYES

Park Jae Bong and Kim Lee Son caught the bus outside the Ministry of Security Affairs. It was a 45-minute journey to their apartment in the Chungwha district of the city. They passed through The Arch of Triumph and across the Tae Dong river and then headed down the Pyongyang highway towards the south of the city.

There was never much traffic, but they were often delayed by people on bicycles, horse-drawn carts and government checkpoints. The most common problem they encountered on their journey home was the bus breaking down. It was a diesel vehicle built in China in the 1980s and it had a completely unreliable transmission system. Every time the driver changed gear it sounded like the bottom of the bus was about to collapse.

Park looked out of the window at the grey functional apartment blocks that lined the highway. Everything was uniform, all the buildings looked exactly the same. He imagined what it would be like to travel on a bus outside of London, passing cottages with their thatched roofs, mansions with their iron gates and bungalows where all the old western people moved into when they retired. There was no property ladder in North Korea, the government simply allocated you an apartment and that was where you lived and eventually died.

His thoughts turned to the upcoming attack on Banco Santander. He had breached their security systems on several occasions in the past but never progressed very far. They always managed to kick him out before he could do any damage. The bank had multiple layers of defense and reaching the sensitive information at its core was like peeling an infinite onion. Banco Santander was as safe as houses.

He thought again about Ana Botin and her presentation at the AGM. He marveled at the fact that a woman could have so much power and influence. The Workers' Party in North Korea actively promoted gender equality for the good of the economy, but everyone knew that a woman's place was at home. He remembered the old Korean saying: "It goes ill with the house when the hen sings and the cockerel is silent."

Sitting next to Park on the bus was his best friend Kim Lee Son. At that moment Kim was completely focused on the task of creating an airplane out of a blank sheet of paper. He had many talents and one of them was origami. The paper airplane that he was constructing not only looked exactly like a B52 bomber, it flew like one too.

Kim stood up in his seat at the back of the bus and aimed the airplane at a young woman at the front. He gently propelled the model forward through the air and it sailed across the heads of all the other passengers landing perfectly in the lap of the intended recipient. The young woman picked up the paper airplane and read the message that Kim had written on its wings.

She looked behind her, searching for the person who had sent her the message. Kim waved to her to catch her attention. And then he pointed at Park.

Park was, as always, lost in his thoughts about work. He was, after all, the world's greatest hacker, feared by companies around the world, revered by the underground hacking community, wanted by the FBI, the CIA, the NSA....

His daydream was interrupted by the presence of a woman in the aisle of the bus standing next to him. She was staring at him with quiet determination. She had porcelain skin and almond eyes. For a few seconds the two of them just looked at each other in silence. Park was mesmerized by this mysterious apparition.

The woman leaned forward and gave Park the paper airplane. She nodded, then turned around and walked back to her seat.

Park looked down at the model and read the message that was written on the wings: "Meet me at Chunghwa park this evening at 8pm."

The bus noisily changed gear and headed over the Tae Dong river towards the south of the city. It took a moment for Park to figure out what was going on. Then his heart skipped a beat and his face turned as red as the Chinese flag.

Next to him, his best friend, Kim Lee Son was giggling.

READING COMPREHENSION

1. Where do Park and Kim live?
2. What problems do they usually encounter on the bus ride home?
3. How is a bus ride in Pyongyang different from a bus ride in London?
4. What kind of property do Park and Kim live in?
5. Why is it so difficult to hack Banco Santander?
6. What does Park think about Ana Botín and women in general?
7. How does Kim catch the attention of the girl at the front of the bus?
8. What does the girl look like? What is she like?
9. How does Park react when he sees the girl?
10. How does Park react when he reads the message?