

READING EXERCISE

The Adventures of Lola Badiola

CHAPTER 44 – THE EMPTY SPACE

Park woke up at 7am on a dark winter's morning. He had a freezing cold shower then shaved the few hairs that grew from his chin. He opened his bottle of Dragon aftershave and breathed in the smell, then he practiced some martial arts moves in front of the mirror. He was seeing the Girl with the Almond Eyes that evening. One day, very soon, he would lose his virginity.

He walked into the living room and turned on the television. As always, he watched the sports channel. There was a documentary about the conflict between men and women in the US football federation. The women were campaigning against the gender pay gap that existed in their sport and the unconscious bias against them in all areas of American society. The presenter of the TV program argued that this conflict was evidence of an imminent Marxist revolution in the US. She proudly exclaimed that no such gender discrimination occurred in the Democratic Republic of Korea.

Park carefully opened the door of his dodgy electric fridge, making sure that he didn't trip the electric circuit. It had been broken since he moved into the apartment two and half years earlier. He took out some leftover Kimchi from the previous night and prepared his breakfast.

Half an hour later he was on the way to work. It was a bitterly cold morning in early February and there was a sprinkling of snow on the ground, so he decided to wear his Russian manufactured army coat and boots. They were a gift from the Supreme Leader to all the hackers of section 6523 of the Ministry of Information following the successful ransomware attack of the English Post Office the previous year. The coat was made of compressed sheep's wool wrapped in canvas and was incredibly heavy. But it did the job and kept out the cold. By the time Park reached the bus stop he was sweating.

He sat at the back of the bus. It was a forty-five-minute journey to work which gave him time to review his assignments. His targets were three inter-related companies, Banco Santander, Telecom España and Schwiser Lieben. He also had a personal project in the form of a cybersecurity start up called JBlock. He intended to return to their system later that week and finish the job.

There were few people on the bus at that time of day. He normally chatted with Kim Lee Son on his way to work, but his best friend had degenerated even further in his attempt to convince the world that he was suicidal. Kim had become completely anti-social and spent most nights sleeping at the Ministry underneath his desk. It was February 12th, two days to go until his attempted escape from the Fatherland.

Park got off the bus and entered his workplace. He passed under the huge clock at the entrance of the Ministry of Information. It was five minutes to nine so there was still a little time before his workday officially began. He walked up the stairwell with several other hackers until he reached his department.

The moment that he entered the open plan floor of section 6523 of the Ministry of Information he knew that something was wrong. As he got closer and closer to his workstation the feeling of fear

inside him grew stronger and stronger. His heart started to pound, his head started to throb, and his vision started to blur. It was dreamlike, as if the world around him had become slow and distorted.

He sat down at his desk and mechanically turned on his computer. Then he took out a pen and pretended to make some notes. He was almost too afraid to look up, but he had to make sure that what he'd seen was real. Very slowly and carefully he raised his head and looked across the hallway.

His worse fears were confirmed.

Kim was not there. Kim's computer was not there. Kim's desk was not there.

There was nothing left but an empty space.

READING COMPREHENSION

1. What does Park do in the bathroom after he wakes up?
2. What does Park do in the living room and kitchen before he leaves for work?
3. What is the weather like that morning?
4. What is Park wearing on the way to work?
5. Why isn't Kim on the bus that morning?
6. What projects is Park working on?
7. How many days to go before Kim attempts to escape from North Korea?
8. How does Park feel as he walks onto the floor of his department?
9. What has happened to Kim?