

## READING EXERCISE

### The Adventures of Lola Badiola

#### CHAPTER 47 – THE FINAL DATE

It was a fifteen-minute walk to the meeting point with the Girl with the Almond Eyes, but Park was running late so he hailed a taxi. A small but powerful man on a bicycle stopped and Park jumped into the carriage at the back. He told the rider where to go and flashed his identity badge from the Ministry of Information. He warned the rider that he had official government business, so speed was essential.

The bicycle and carriage dodged through the mixed traffic on the roads of Pyongyang. There were horses and carts, big diesel buses and black limousines competing for the smoothest parts of the road. The rider peddled as fast as he could, weaving in and out of the other vehicles and doing his best to avoid the potholes that scarred the road.

During this brief but bumpy journey, Park had a moment to think back to what had happened during the day. He went through all the events that had taken place and all the conversations that he'd had. Slowly but surely, it dawned on him that he was being tricked.

Why had Kang acted in such a sinister manner? Why were the two secret policemen sitting right in his line of sight on the bus? Why had the intruders in his apartment used up some of his aftershave?

It was all too obvious.

If Kang really suspected him, he would have been more subtle about it. If the secret police really wanted to follow him, they could have done it without being noticed. If an intruder really wanted to break into his apartment, he could have done it without leaving a trace.

This was an intimidation tactic, a psychological trap. They wanted to make him feel like he was under suspicion, put him under pressure, force him to make a mistake that would then reveal the truth. He was being tested.

On that short ride, Park realized that all was not lost. He just needed to be really careful, strip away the fear and paranoia, and focus on his work. After all, if the authorities really believed he was an accomplice to Kim's crime they would already have arrested him.

The bicycle carriage arrived at its destination and Park jumped out feeling a whole lot better about the world. He thanked the driver for his incomparable speed. Then he headed swiftly towards the bench for his romantic rendez-vous.

The Girl with the Almond Eyes was sitting alone, dutifully waiting for him. Her chaperone was pacing backwards and forwards in the distance. They both looked relieved to see him when he finally appeared. He sat down on the bench and apologized for being late. He explained that he had been delayed by his work, which was not very far from the truth.

It was their seventh meeting together and they had developed both mutual trust and respect. Their personalities complemented each other. He was serious and introverted, a D level employee at the Ministry of Information with a tendency to take himself too seriously. She was young and curious with a good sense of humor and plenty of self-confidence. That evening she was particularly excited to see him again.

"I have some good news for you!" She said as she looked around to make sure the chaperone wasn't listening. "You have won my family's approval."

"Really?" replied Park.

"They are very impressed with your CV - the double bachelor's degree in maths and physics, the master's degree in computer science, the internship with National Aerospace Development Program and now the position at the Ministry of Information. Your career progress has been stellar."

Park smiled. He was proud of his resumé but didn't want to appear that way. "Life is not a checklist of academic achievements. My qualifications are not who I am as a person." He said with false modesty.

The girl looked at him flirtatiously.

"I bet you were a real teacher's pet at school." Then, she leaned forward and whispered in his ear. "Do you know what this means?"

"What?" replied Park.

"It means that the next time we meet each other, we will be completely alone."

The significance of this news started to sink slowly into Park's brilliant but naïve brain. "Without the chaperone?"

The Girl with the Almond Eyes nodded her head and looked at Park with strange intensity. "You can show me your fridge. You can show me your television. You can show me your bed."

She gently kissed Park's cheek, then she pulled away and looked down at the floor.

Every cell in Park's body came alive. It was as if his whole nervous system was wide awake for the first time in his life. An hour ago, he had reached rock bottom, but that simple kiss had put him back on top of the world.

mind went completely blank. He had never been in this situation before. He searched for inspiration, he wanted to arouse her in the way that she had just aroused him, but no ideas came to him. Eventually three simple words popped out of his mouth.

"I love you."

The girl looked up at him in shock. She put her hand over her mouth and started giggling. She couldn't control herself. She bent over double with laughter. Park joined in. His laugh was nervous. Her laugh was hysterical.

Eventually they calmed down and recovered their composure.

"I love you too," she replied.

There was nothing quite as intoxicating as young love. It could move mountains, make rivers run backwards and bring the whole world to a stop. But it could also be dangerous, it could lead to foolishness, obsession and in the case of Romeo and Juliet, tragedy.

In this state of euphoria, Park Jae Bong temporarily lost control of his mental faculties. He forgot where he was, who he worked for and how to behave in the People's Democratic Republic of Korea. He made exactly the mistake that the authorities were waiting for.

And the next words that came out of Park's mouth were the last he would ever say as a citizen of the Fatherland.

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. How does Park travel to Chung Hwa Park?
2. What conclusion does he come to during the journey?
3. Why does he feel much better about the world at the end of the journey?
4. How do the Girl and her chaperone react when they see him?
5. How do Park and the Girl's personalities complement each other?
6. Why is the Girl excited? What news does she have for Park?
7. How does Park react to the news?
8. How is "young love" described in the chapter?
9. How does "young love" affect Park's mental faculties?
10. What do you think are the next words that come out of Park's mouth?