

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Miracle Submarine Owners

The Yoo Family

Pak Yoo, a Korean immigrant and licensed operator of Miracle Submarine LLC, a hyperbaric oxygen therapy center in Miracle Creek, Virginia

Young, Pak's wife and co-owner of Miracle Submarine

Mary, their only child

Miracle Submarine Patients

The Thompson/Cho Family

Matt Thompson, a radiologist and the first patient of Miracle Submarine, being treated for infertility

Janine Cho, his wife, an internist and Miracle Submarine's medical advisor

Mr. & Mrs. Cho, Janine's parents, family friends of the Yoos, and Miracle Submarine investors

The Ward Family

Elizabeth, a divorced stay-at-home mother and former accountant

Henry, Elizabeth's only child, being treated for autism, ADHD, and OCD

Victor, Elizabeth's former husband and Henry's father

The Santiago Family

Teresa, a divorced stay-at-home mother

Rosa, Teresa's teenage daughter, being treated for cerebral palsy

Carlos, Teresa's son, her younger child

The Kozlowski Family

Kitt, a married stay-at-home mother of five children

TJ, her youngest child and only son, being treated for autism;
nonverbal

Trial Participants

The Honorable Frederick Carleton III, judge

Abraham Patterley, or **Abe**, prosecutor

Shannon Haug, lead defense attorney

Anna and Andrew, Shannon's associates, junior members of the
defense legal team

Detective Steve Pierson, police detective and arson specialist

Detective Morgan Heights, police detective and investigative
liaison to Child Protective Services

THE INCIDENT

Miracle Creek, Virginia
Tuesday, August 26, 2008

MY HUSBAND ASKED ME TO LIE. Not a big lie. He probably didn't even consider it a lie, and neither did I, at first. It was such a small thing, what he wanted. The police had just released the protesters, and while he stepped out to make sure they weren't coming back, I was to sit in his chair. Cover for him, the way coworkers do as a matter of course, the way we ourselves used to at the grocery store, while I ate or he smoked. But as I took his seat, I bumped against the desk, and the certificate above it went slightly crooked as if to remind me that this wasn't a regular business, that there was a reason he'd never left me in charge before.

Pak reached over me to straighten the frame, his eyes on the English lettering: *Pak Yoo, Miracle Submarine LLC, Certified Hyperbaric Technician*. He said—eyes still on the certificate, as if talking to *it*, not to me—

“Everything’s done. The patients are sealed in, the oxygen’s on. You just have to sit here.” He looked at me. “That’s it.”

I looked over the controls, the unfamiliar knobs and switches for the chamber we’d painted baby blue and placed in this barn just last month. “What if the patients buzz me?” I said. “I’ll say you’ll be right back, but—”

“No, they can’t know I’m gone. If anyone asks, I’m here. I’ve been here the whole time.”

“But if something goes wrong and—”

“What could go wrong?” Pak said, his voice forceful like a command. “I’ll be right back, and they won’t buzz you. Nothing will happen.” He walked away, as if that was the end of the matter. But at the doorway, he looked back at me. “Nothing will happen,” he said again, softer. It sounded like a plea.

As soon as the barn door banged shut, I wanted to scream that he was crazy to expect nothing to go wrong on this day, of all days, when so much had gone wrong—the protesters, their sabotage plan, the resulting power outage, the police. Did he think so much had already happened that nothing more could? But life doesn’t work like that. Tragedies don’t inoculate you against further tragedies, and misfortune doesn’t get sprinkled out in fair proportions; bad things get hurled at you in clumps and batches, unmanageable and messy. How could he not know that, after everything we’d been through?

From 8:02 to 8:14 p.m., I sat and said nothing, did nothing, like he asked. Sweat dampened my face, and I thought about the six patients sealed inside without air-conditioning (the generator operated the pressurization, oxygen, and intercom systems only) and thanked God for the portable DVD player to keep the kids calm. I reminded myself to trust my husband, and I waited, checking the clock, the door, then the clock again, praying for him to return (he *had* to!) before *Barney* ended and the patients buzzed for another DVD. Just as the show’s closing song started, my phone rang. Pak.

“They’re here,” he whispered. “I need to stand watch, make sure they don’t try anything again. You need to turn off the oxygen when the session ends. You see the knob?”

“Yes, but—”

“Turn it counterclockwise, all the way, tight. Set your alarm so you won’t forget. 8:20 by the big clock.” He hung up.

I touched the knob marked OXYGEN, a discolored brass the color of the squeaky faucet in our old apartment in Seoul. It surprised me how cool it felt. I synchronized my watch to the clock, set my alarm to 8:20, and found the ALARM ON button. Right then, just as I started pressing the tiny nub—that’s when the DVD battery died and I dropped my hands, startled.

I think about that moment a lot. The deaths, the paralysis, the trial—might all that have been averted if I’d pressed the button? It’s strange, I know, that my mind keeps returning to this particular lapse, given my bigger, more blameworthy mistakes of that night. Perhaps it’s precisely its smallness, its seeming insignificance, that gives it power and fuels the what-ifs. What if I hadn’t let the DVD distract me? What if I’d moved my finger a microsecond more quickly, managed to turn on the alarm *before* the DVD died, mid-song? *I love you, you love me, we’re a hap-py fam-i—*

The blankness of that moment, the categorical absence of sound, dense and oppressive—it pressed in, squeezed me from all sides. When noise finally came—a rap-rap-rap of knuckles against the porthole from inside the chamber—I was almost relieved. But the knocking intensified into fists banging in threes as if chanting *Let me out!* in code, then into full-on pounding, and I realized: it had to be TJ’s head banging. TJ, the autistic boy who adores Barney the purple dinosaur, who ran to me the first time we met and hugged me tight. His mother had been amazed, said he never hugs anyone (he hates touching people), and maybe it’s my shirt, the exact shade of purple as Barney. I’ve worn the shirt every day since; I hand-wash it every night and put it on for his sessions, and every day, he hugs me. Everyone thinks I’m being kind, but I’m really doing it for *me*, because I crave the way his arms wrap around and squeeze me—the way my daughter’s used to, before she started leaning away from my hugs, her arms limp. I love kissing his head, the fuzz of his red hair tickling my lips. And now, that boy whose hugs I savor was beating his head on a steel wall.

He wasn’t crazy. His mother had explained that TJ has chronic pain from intestinal inflammation, but he can’t talk, and when it gets too

much, he does the only thing he can for relief: he bangs his head, using the new, acute pain to drive out the old one. It's like having an itch you can't stand and scratching so hard it bleeds, how good that pain feels, except multiplied by a hundred. Once, she told me, TJ put his face through a window. It tormented me, the thought of this eight-year-old boy in so much pain that he needed to bash his head against steel.

And the sound of that pain—the pounding, again and again. The persistence, the increasing insistence. Each thud set off vibrations that reverberated and built into something corporeal, with form and mass. It traveled through me. I felt it rumble against my skin, jolting my insides and demanding my heart to match its rhythm, to beat faster, harder.

I had to make it stop. That's my excuse. For running out of the barn and leaving six people trapped in a sealed chamber. I wanted to depressurize and open it, get TJ out of there, but I didn't know how. Besides, when the intercom buzzed, TJ's mother begged me (or, rather, Pak) not to stop the dive, she'd calm him down, but please, for the love of God, put in new batteries and restart the *Barney* DVD *now!* There were batteries somewhere in our house next door, only a twenty-second run away, and I had five minutes to turn off the oxygen. So I left. I covered my mouth to muffle my voice and said in a low, heavily accented voice like Pak's, "We will replace batteries. Wait few minutes," then I ran out.

The door to our house was ajar, and I felt a flash of wild hope that Mary was home, cleaning up like I'd told her to, and finally, something would go right today. But I stepped in, and she wasn't there. I was alone, with no idea where the batteries were and no one to help. It was what I'd expected all along, yet that second of hope had been enough to shoot my expectations high into the sky and send them crashing down. Keep calm, I told myself, and started my search in the gray steel wardrobe we used for storage. Coats. Manuals. Cords. No batteries. When I slammed the door, the wardrobe wobbled, its flimsy metal warbling and booming like an echo of TJ's pounding. I pictured his head hammering steel, cracking open like a ripe watermelon.

I shook my head to expel the thought. "Meh-hee-yah." I yelled out Mary's Korean name, which she hates. No answer. I knew there wouldn't be, but it infuriated me just the same. I yelled "Meh-hee-yah" again, louder,

elongating the syllables to let them grate my throat, needing it to hurt and drive out the phantom echoes of TJ's pounding ringing in my ears.

I searched the rest of the house, box by box. With each passing second of not finding the batteries, my frustration grew, and I thought about our fight this morning, my telling her she should do more to help—she was seventeen!—and her walking out without a word. I thought about Pak siding with her, as always. (“We didn’t give up everything and come to America so she could cook and clean,” he always says. “No, that’s my job,” I want to say. But I never do.) I thought of Mary’s eye-rolls, her headphones on her ears, pretending not to hear me. Anything to keep my anger activated, to occupy my mind and keep out the pounding. My ire at my daughter was familiar and comfortable, like an old blanket. It soothed my panic into a dull anxiety.

When I got to the box in Mary’s sleeping corner, I forced the criss-crossed top flaps open and dumped everything out. Teenage junk: torn tickets to movies I’d never seen, pictures of friends I’d never met, a stack of notes, the top one in a hurried scrawl—*I waited for you. Maybe tomorrow?*

I wanted to scream. Where were the batteries? (And in the back of my mind: Who’d written the note? A boy? Waited to do what?) Just then, my phone rang—Pak again—and I saw 8:22 on the screen and remembered. The alarm. The oxygen.

When I answered, I meant to explain how I hadn’t turned off the oxygen but would soon, and that was no big deal, he sometimes ran the oxygen over an hour, right? But my words came out differently. Like vomit—outpouring in one stream, uncontrollable. “Mary is nowhere,” I said. “We’re doing all this for her, and she’s never here, and I need her, I need her help to find new DVD batteries before TJ busts his head open.”

“You always think the worst of her, but she’s here, helping me,” he said. “And the batteries are under the house kitchen sink, but don’t leave the patients. I’ll send Mary to grab them. Mary, go, right now. Take four D batteries to the barn. I’ll come in one min—”

I hung up. Sometimes it’s better to say nothing.

I ran to the kitchen sink. The batteries were there like he said, in a bag I’d assumed was trash, under work gloves covered in dirt and soot. They were clean just yesterday. What had Pak been doing?

I shook my head. The batteries. I had to hurry back to TJ.

When I ran outside, an unfamiliar scent—like charred wet wood—permeated the air and stung my nose. It was getting dark, harder to see, but I saw Pak in the distance, running toward the barn.

Mary was ahead of him, sprinting. I called out, “Mary, slow down. I found the batteries,” but she kept running, not toward the house, but to the barn. “Mary, stop,” I said, but she didn’t. She ran past the barn door, to the back side. I didn’t know why, but it scared me, her being there, and I called again, her Korean name this time, softer. “Meh-hee-yah,” I said, and ran to her. She turned. Something about her face stopped me. It seemed to glow somehow. An orange light coated her skin and shimmered as if she were standing directly in front of the setting sun. I wanted to touch her face and tell her, “You are beautiful.”

From her direction, I heard a noise. It sounded like crackling, but softer and muffled, the way a flock of geese might sound taking off for flight, hundreds of wings flapping at once to scamper skyward. I thought I saw them, a curtain of gray rippling in the wind and rising higher and higher in the dusky violet sky, but I blinked, and the sky was empty. I ran toward the sound, and I saw it then, what she’d seen but I hadn’t, what she’d run toward.

Flames.

Smoke.

The back wall of the barn—on fire.

I don’t know why I didn’t run or scream, why Mary didn’t, either. I wanted to. But I could only walk slowly, carefully, one step at a time, getting closer, my eyes transfixed by the flames in orange and red—fluttering, leaping, and switching places like partners in a step dance.

When the boom sounded, my knees buckled and I fell. But I never took my eyes off my daughter. Every night, when I turn off the light and close my eyes for sleep, I see her, my Meh-hee, in that moment. Her body flings up like a rag doll and arcs through the air. Gracefully. Delicately. Just before she lands on the ground with a soft thud, I see her ponytail, bouncing high. The way it used to when she was a little girl, jumping rope.

MARY YOO

SHE AWOKE TO THE SOUND of her mother's voice. "Meh-hee-yah, wake up. Dinnertime," she said, but in a whisper—as if, contrary to her words, she were trying not to wake her. Mary kept her eyes closed and tried to quell the surge of disorientation she felt, hearing her mother say "Meh-hee" in a gentle tone. For the last five years, her mother had used her Korean name only when she was annoyed with her, during fights. In fact, her mother hadn't said "Meh-hee" at all in a year; since the explosion, her mother was being extra nice and used "Mary" exclusively.

The funny thing was, Mary hated her American name. Not always. When her mother (who'd studied English in college and still read American books) suggested "Mary" as the closest approximation of "Meh-hee," she'd been excited to find a name with the same starting syllable as her own. On the fourteen-hour flight from Seoul to New York—her last

hours as Yoo Meh-hee—she'd practiced writing her new name, filling an entire sheet with M-A-R-Ys and thinking how pretty the letters looked. After they landed, when the American immigration officer labeled her "Mary Yoo," rolling the *r* in that exotic way her Korean tongue couldn't replicate, she felt slightly glamorous and dizzy, like a butterfly newly emerged from a cocoon.

But two weeks into her new middle school in Baltimore—during roll call, when she was secretly reading letters from friends back home and she didn't recognize her new name and didn't answer and the kids started tittering—the newborn-butterfly feeling gave way to a sense of deep dissonance, like forcing a square into a round hole. Later, when two girls reenacted the scene for the cafeteria, the ramen-haired girl's crescendoing repetition of her new name—"Mary Yoo? Ma-ry Yoooo? MA-REEEEE? YOOOOO?"—felt like hammer blows, her square corners shattering.

She knew, of course, that the name wasn't to blame, that the actual problem was not knowing the language, customs, people, anything. But it was hard not to associate her new name with the new her. In Korea, as Meh-hee, she'd been a talker. She got in trouble constantly for chatting with friends and argued her way out of most punishments. The new her, Mary, was a mute math geek. A core of quiet, obedient and alone, wrapped by a carapace of low expectations. It was as if discarding her Korean name had weakened her, like cutting Samson's hair, and the replacement came with a meek persona she didn't recognize or like.

The first time her mother called her "Mary" was the weekend after the roll-call/cafeteria incident, during Mary's first visit to their host family's grocery store. The Kangs had spent two weeks training her mother, and they'd deemed her ready to take over the store's management. Prior to the visit, Mary had envisioned a sleek supermarket—everything in America was supposed to be impressive; that was why they'd moved here—but walking from the car, Mary had to sidestep broken bottles, cigarette butts, and someone sleeping on the sidewalk under torn newspaper.

The store vestibule was like a freight elevator, in both size and looks. Thick glass separated the customers from the vault-like room containing the products, and signs lined the lazy Susan transaction window:

PROTECTED BY BULLETPROOF GLASS, CUSTOMER IS KING, and OPEN 6 A.M. TO 12 A.M. 7 DAYS A WEEK. As soon as her mother unlocked the bullet- and apparently odor-proof door, Mary got a whiff of deli meat.

"Six to midnight? Every day?" Mary said before she even stepped in. Her mother gave an embarrassed smile to the Kangs and led Mary down a narrow corridor past the ice-cream cooler and deli slicer. As soon as they reached the back, Mary faced her mother. "How long have you known about this?" she said.

Her mother's face crinkled in pain. "Meh-hee-yah, all this time, I thought they wanted me to help them, as an assistant. I only realized last night—they're considering this their retirement. I asked if they'd hire someone to help, maybe once a week, but they said they can't afford that, not with what they're paying for your school." She stepped back and opened a door to reveal a cupboard. A mattress was stuffed in, almost fully covering the concrete floor. "They set up a place for me to sleep. Not every night, just if I'm too tired to drive home."

"So why don't I stay here with you? I can go to school here, or maybe I can come after school and help you," Mary said.

"No, the schools in this neighborhood are terrible. And you can't be here at nighttime at all. It's so dangerous, so many gangs, and . . ." Her mother shut her mouth and shook her head. "The Kangs can bring you for short visits on weekends, but it's so far from their house . . . We can't impose on them too much."

"Us impose on *them*?" Mary said. "They're treating you like a slave, and you're letting them. I don't even know why we came here. What's so great about American schools? They're doing math I did in fourth grade!"

"I know it's hard now," her mother said, "but it's all for your future. We need to accept that, try our best."

Mary wanted to rail against her mother for giving in, refusing to fight. She'd done the same thing in Korea, when her father first told them of his plans. Mary knew her mother hated the idea—she'd overheard their fights—but in the end, her mother had given in, the way she always did, the way she was doing now.

Mary said nothing. She stepped back and squinted to see her mother more clearly, this woman with tears pooling in the creases between her

fingers, clasped together as if in prayer. She turned her back and walked away.

Mary stayed the rest of the day, while the Kangs went out to celebrate their retirement. As upset as she was with her mother, she couldn't help but be impressed by the finesse and energy with which she ran the store. She'd been training for only two weeks, but she knew most of the customers, greeting them by name and asking after their families in English—halting and with an accent, but still, better than Mary herself could do. In many ways, she was maternal with her customers: anticipating their needs; lifting their mood with her affectionate, almost coquettish laughter; but being firm when needed, as when she reminded several customers that food stamps could not buy cigarettes. Watching her mother, it occurred to Mary: the possibility that her mother actually liked it here. Was that why they were staying? Because running a store was more fulfilling than being a mere mother to her?

Late afternoon, two girls walked in, the younger around five and the older Mary's age. Her mother immediately unlocked the door. "Anisha, Tosha. You both look so pretty today," she said, and hugged them. "Meet my daughter, Mary."

Mary. It sounded foreign in her mother's familiar, lilting tone, like a word she'd never heard before. Unnatural. Wrong. She stood there, silent, as the five-year-old smiled and said, "I like your mommy. She gives me Tootsie Rolls." Her mother laughed, handed the girl a Tootsie Roll, and kissed her forehead. "So *that's* why you come in every day."

The older girl told her mother, "Guess what? I got an A on my math test!" As her mother said, "Wow! I told you, you can do it," the girl said to Mary, "Your mom's been helping me with long division this whole week."

After they left, her mother said, "Aren't they sweet girls? I feel so bad for them; their father died last year."

Mary tried to feel sad for them. She tried to feel proud that this beloved, generous woman was her mother. But all she could think was that these girls would see her, hug her every day, and she would not. "It's dangerous opening the door like that," Mary said. "Why have the bulletproof door if you're just going to open it and let people inside?"

Her mother gazed at her for a long moment. She said, "Meh-hee-yah," and tried to put her arms around her. Mary stepped back to avoid her touch. "My name is Mary now," she said.



THAT WAS THE DAY Mary started calling her "Mom" instead of "Um-ma." Um-ma was the mother who knitted her soft sweaters, who greeted her every day after school with barley tea and played jacks with her while listening to stories about what happened that day. And those lunches—who at school hadn't envied Um-ma's special lunches? The standard lunch-box fare in Korea was rice and kimchi in a stainless-steel container. But Um-ma always put in extras—fluffy bits of fish with the bones plucked out, a fried egg nested perfectly in the rice mound like a snowy volcano erupting yellow yolk, ghim-bop seaweed rolls with daikon radish and carrots, and yoo-boo-bop, sweet sticky rice tucked inside doll-sized pillowcases of fried tofu.

But that Um-ma was gone, replaced by Mom, a woman who left her alone in someone else's house, who didn't know about the boys who called her "stupid chink" and the girls who giggled about her in front of her, who didn't know that her daughter was struggling to know who Mary was and where Meh-hee had gone.

So as she left the store that day, Mary said "Farewell" in Korean—she deliberately chose the formal phrase that implied distance, meant for strangers—then, looking straight into her eyes, said "Mom" instead of "Um-ma." Seeing the jolt of hurt on her mother's face—her cheeks blanching and mouth opening, as if to protest, but closing after a second, in resignation—Mary expected to feel better, but she didn't. The room seemed to tilt. She wanted to cry.

The next day, her mother started managing the store by herself and sleeping there more often than not. Mary had understood, at least intellectually: the drive home was thirty minutes, time better spent on sleep instead, especially since Mary wouldn't be awake. But that first night, lying in bed, Mary thought how she hadn't seen or talked to her mother all day for the first time in her life, and she hated her. For being

her mother. For bringing her to a place that made her hate her own mother.

That was her summer of silence. The Kangs went on a two-month trip to California to visit their son's family, leaving Mary alone, with no school, no camp, no friends, no family. Mary tried to relish the freedom, told herself she was living a twelve-year-old girl's fantasy—never bothered by parents or siblings, left alone all day to do, eat, and watch whatever she wanted. Besides, it wasn't as if she'd seen much of the Kangs even before the trip—they were quiet and unobtrusive, doing their own activities and never bothering her. So she didn't see how being on her own would be too different.

There's something, though, about the sounds that other people make. Not talking, necessarily. Just their sounds of living—creaking upstairs, humming a tune, watching TV, clanging dishes—that blot away your loneliness. You miss them when they're gone. Their absence—the total silence—becomes palpable.

And so it was with her. Mary went days without seeing another human being. Her mother made sure to come home every night, but not until one a.m., and she was gone before dawn. She never saw her.

She did hear her, though. Her mother always came into her room when she returned home, stepping over Mary's piles of dirty clothes to pull the blanket up, kiss her good night, and, some nights, just to sit on her bed, combing Mary's hair with her fingers over and over, the way she used to in Korea. Mary was usually still awake, consumed by images of her mother caught in gunfire stepping out of the bulletproof vault in the middle of the night—a real possibility, the main reason for her mother's refusal to bring Mary to the store. When she heard her mother tiptoeing in the hallway, a mix of relief and anger coursed through her. She thought it best not to speak, so she pretended to be asleep. Kept her eyes shut and her body still, willing her heartbeat to slow and calm, wanting the moment to continue, wanting to relish the reliving of her mother as Um-ma and savor the old affection.

That was five years ago, before the Kangs returned and her mother started sleeping at the store again, before Mary became fluent in English and the bullies moved on, before her father came to America and moved

them to a place where, once again, she felt like a foreigner, where people asked where she was from, and when she said Baltimore, said, “No, I mean, where are you *really* from?” Before cigarettes and Matt. Before the explosion.

But here they were again. Her mother, combing her fingers through Mary’s hair, and Mary, pretending to be asleep. Lying here in the haze of half sleep, Mary felt transported back to Baltimore and wondered if her mother knew she’d been awake all those nights, how she’d waited for Um-ma’s return.

“Yuh-bo, dinner’s getting cold,” Mary’s father’s voice sounded, breaking the moment. Her mother said, “Okay, coming,” shook her gently, and said, “Mary, dinner’s ready. Come out soon, okay?”

Mary blinked and mumbled, as if just starting to rouse. She waited for her mother to leave and close the curtain before slowly sitting up, re-orienting herself, forcing her mind to take in her surroundings. Miracle Creek, not Baltimore, not Seoul. Matt. The fire. The trial. Henry and Kitt, dead.

At once, images of Henry’s charred head and Kitt’s chest on fire rushed back to her thoughts, and hot tears stung her eyes again. All year, Mary had tried hard not to think about them, about that night, but today, hearing about their last moments, imagining their pain—it was as if the images were needles surgically implanted throughout her brain, and every time she moved the tiniest bit, they poked her, sending white-hot flashes bursting behind her eyeballs and making her want to relieve the pressure, just open her mouth and scream.

Next to her mat, she saw a newspaper she’d picked up in the courthouse. This morning’s, with the headline “*Mommy Dearest*” Murder Trial Begins Today. A picture showed Elizabeth gazing at Henry with a dazed smile, her head tilted, as if she couldn’t believe how much she adored her son, the same way she’d looked at HBOT: always pulling Henry close, smoothing his hair, reading with him. It had reminded Mary of Um-ma in Korea, and she’d felt a pang, seeing this mother’s singular devotion to her child.

It had all been a ruse, of course. It had to be. The way Elizabeth had sat through Matt’s testimony about Henry being burned alive—without

flinching, without crying, without screaming and running out. No mother with an ounce of love for her child could've done that.

Mary looked at the picture again, this woman who'd spent last summer pretending to love her child while secretly planning his murder, this sociopath who'd placed a cigarette inches from an oxygen tube, knowing that the oxygen was on and her son inside. Her poor son, Henry, this beautiful boy, his wispy hair, baby teeth, all engulfed in . . .

No. She shut her eyes tight and shook her head, side to side—hard, harder—until her neck hurt and the room spun and the world zigzagged sideways and upside down. When nothing remained in her head and she could no longer sit, she fell on the mat and buried her face in her pillow. She let the cotton soak up all her tears.

THE TRIAL: DAY THREE



Wednesday, August 19, 2009

PAK

PAK YOO WAS A DIFFERENT PERSON in English than in Korean. In a way, he supposed, it was inevitable for immigrants to become child versions of themselves, stripped of their verbal fluency and, with it, a layer of their competence and maturity. Before moving to America, he'd prepared himself for the difficulties he knew he'd experience: the logistical awkwardness of translating his thoughts before speaking, the intellectual taxation of figuring out words from context, the physical challenge of shaping his tongue into unfamiliar positions to make sounds that didn't exist in Korean. But what he hadn't known, hadn't expected, was that this linguistic uncertainty would extend beyond speech and, like a virus, infect other parts: his thinking, demeanor, his very personality itself. In Korean, he was an authoritative man, educated

and worthy of respect. In English, he was a deaf, mute idiot, unsure, nervous, and inept. A bah-bo.

Pak accepted this long ago, on the first day he joined Young at the Baltimore grocery store. The preteen hoodlums saying "Ah-so" in fake accents, pretending they couldn't understand his "May I help you?" and sniggering as they repeated in bastardized singsong, "Meh-yee ah-ee hair-puh yoooooh?"—that, he could dismiss as the antics of children trying on cruelty like a shirt in a store. But the woman who'd ordered a bologna sandwich: her struggle to understand his "Would you like a soda also?"—a phrase he'd memorized that morning—had been genuine. She said, "I couldn't hear; could you repeat that?" After his louder, slower repetition, she said, "Say that one more time," then, "I'm sorry; something's wrong with my ears today," and finally, just an embarrassed smile—the embarrassment for *him*, Pak realized—and shake of her head. With each of the four repetitions, he felt heat radiating through his cheeks and forehead, as if his head were bowed over burning coal and being pushed down centimeter by centimeter. He ended up pointing to a Coke and miming drinking it. She laughed in relief, saying, "Yes, I'd love one," and taking her money, he thought of the beggars outside, taking change from people like this woman, with kind but repugnant pity in her eyes.

Pak became quiet. He found relief in the relative dignity of silence and retreated into invisibility. The problem was, Americans didn't like silence. It made them uneasy. To Koreans, being sparing with words signaled gravitas, but to Americans, verbiage was an inherent good, akin to kindness or courage. They loved words—the more, the longer, and more quickly said, the smarter and more impressive. Quietness, Americans seemed to equate with an empty mind—nothing to say, no thoughts worth hearing—or perhaps sullenness. Deceit, even. Which was why Abe was worried about Pak testifying. "The jury has to think you *want* to give them information," he'd said, preparing Pak. "You take those long pauses, they'll wonder, 'What's he hiding? Is he figuring out how best to lie?'"

Sitting here now, with the jury seated and all whispered conversa-

tions on pause, Pak closed his eyes and savored this last moment of silence before the slinging and pummeling of words would begin. Perhaps he could drink in the silence and keep it in reserve, like a camel in the desert, use it to refresh himself bit by bit on the stand.



BEING A WITNESS was like acting. On a raised stage, all eyes on him, trying to recall someone else's scripted words. At least Abe started with basic questions with easy-to-memorize answers: "I am forty-one years old," "I was born and raised in South Korea," "I moved to America last year," "At first, I worked in a grocery store." The kind of question-answer sets listed in Pak's old English textbooks, which he'd used to teach Mary back in Korea. He'd drilled her, making her recite her answers again and again until they became automatic, the same way she'd drilled him last night, correcting his pronunciation, forcing him to practice just once more. And now, Mary was at the edge of her seat, staring at him with an unblinking intensity as if to telegraph her thoughts to his, the way he used to during her monthly math competitions in Korea.

This was the thing he regretted most about their move to America: the shame of becoming less proficient, less adult, than his own child. He'd expected this to happen eventually, had seen how children and parents switch places as the parents age, their minds and bodies reverting to childhood, then infancy, then nonbeing. But not for many years, and certainly not yet, when Mary still had a foot in childhood. In Korea, *he* had been the teacher. But after his move, when he visited Mary's school, her principal had said, "Welcome! Tell me, how are you liking Baltimore?" Pak smiled, nodded, and was deciding how to answer—perhaps the smile-nod had been enough?—when Mary said, "He loves it here, running the store right by Inner Harbor. Right, Dad?" The rest of the meeting, Mary continued speaking for him, answering questions directed his way, like a mother with her two-year-old son.

The irony was, this was precisely why they'd immigrated to America: so that Mary might have a better life, a brighter future, than theirs. (Wasn't that what parents were supposed to hope for, that their children would become taller/smarter/richer than they?) Pak was proud of his daughter for the speed with which she achieved fluency in this foreign language that eluded him, for her sprint down the path of Americanization. And his inability to keep up—that was *supposed* to happen. Not only because she'd been here four years longer but because children were better at languages, the younger, the better; everyone knew that. At puberty, one's tongue set, lost its ability to replicate new sounds without an accent. But it was one thing to know this, and another thing entirely to have your child witness you struggle, to transform in their eyes from a demigod to someone small.

"Pak, why did you start Miracle Submarine? Korean-run groceries, I've seen. But HBOT seems unusual," Abe said, the first of challenging questions requiring longer narratives.

Pak looked at the jurors and tried to imagine them as new friends he was getting to know, as Abe had advised. He said, "I worked . . . at a wellness center . . . in Seoul . . . It was my dream to . . . start same facility . . . to help people." The words he'd memorized didn't feel right in his mouth, stuck like glue. He'd have to do better.

"Tell us why you got fire insurance."

"Fire insurance is recommended by hyperbaric regulators." Pak had practiced this over a hundred times last night, the seven *r*'s in a row straining his tongue, making him stutter. Thankfully, the jury seemed to understand him.

"Why 1.3 million?"

"The company determined the policy amount." At the time, he'd been outraged, having to pay so much—and every month!—for something that might never materialize. But he'd had no choice. Janine had insisted on the policy, had made it a condition of their deal. Just behind Abe, Janine was looking down, her face pale, and Pak wondered if she lay awake at night, regretting their secret arrangement, the cash payments, wondering how their excited plans had ended here.

"Yesterday, Ms. Haug accused you of calling the company regarding

arson, using Matt Thompson's phone. Pak"—Abe stepped closer—"did you make that call?"

"No. I never use Matt's telephone. I never call my company. There is no need. I already know answer. It is written in the policy."

Abe held up a document, as if to show off its thickness—two centimeters at least—then handed it to Pak. "Is this the policy you're referring to?"

"Yes. I read before I signed."

Abe put on a look of surprise. "Really? It's a mighty long document. Most people don't read the fine print. I don't, and I'm a lawyer."

The jurors nodded. Pak guessed they were in the category of people—most Americans were, Abe said—who just signed things, which seemed to be incredibly trusting or just lazy. Maybe both. "I am not familiar with American business. So I must read. I translated to Korean using dictionary." Pak flipped to the arson page and held it up. The jurors were too far to make out the words, but they could surely see his scribbles in the margins.

"And the answer to the arson question is in that document?"

"Yes." Pak read the provision, a model of American verbal excess, an eighteen-line sentence full of semicolons and long words. He pointed to his Korean scribble. "This is my translation. *You get money if someone sets fire, but not if you are involved.*"

Abe nodded. "Now, another thing the defense tried to pin on you is the H-Mart note the defendant *claims* to have found." Abe clenched his jaw, and Pak guessed he was still upset about Teresa's "defection," as he'd called it. "Pak, did you write or receive any such note?"

"No. Never," Pak said.

"Know anything about it?"

"No."

"But you *do* own an H-Mart notepad?"

"Yes. I had in the barn. Many people use it. Elizabeth used it. She liked the size. I gave her one pad. For her purse."

"Wait, so the defendant kept an entire H-Mart notepad in her purse?" Abe looked shocked, as if he hadn't known, hadn't scripted Pak's answer.

"Yes." Pak resisted the urge to smile at Abe's theatrics.

"So she could've easily crumpled up H-Mart paper and left it for others to see?"

"Objection, calls for speculation." Shannon stood.

"Withdrawn." A smile passed through Abe's face like a fast-moving cloud as he put a poster on the easel. "This is a copy of the marked-up chart Ms. Haug introduced yesterday."

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION FOR DUMMIES

~~DIRECT EVIDENCE~~

~~BETTER, RELIABLE!!!!~~

- ~~• Eyewitness~~
- ~~• Audio/video recordings of *any number of people* commission of crime~~
- ~~• Photos of suspect committing *incl. P. YOO* crime~~
- ~~• Documentation of crime by *P. YOO* suspect, witness, or accomplice~~
- ~~• Holy grail: confession *P. YOO* (need to verify!!!!)~~

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

(Not as reliable, need more than 1 category)

- ~~• Smoking gun: proof of suspect's usage of weapon (fingerprint, DNA)~~
- Suspect ownership/possession
- Opportunity to commit crime—alibi?
- Motive to commit crime—threats, prior incidents
- Special knowledge and interest (bomb expertise or research example)

Pak looked at the red letters blaming him for the destruction of his patients' lives, his daughter's face, his own legs.

"Pak, your name is all over this chart. Let's explore that. First, ownership or possession of the weapon—in this case, Camel cigarettes. Did you have any last summer?"

"No. I have no-smoking rule. It is too dangerous with oxygen."

"How about before last summer? Have you ever smoked?"

Pak had asked Abe not to ask this, but Abe said Shannon was sure to have evidence of his past smoking, and admitting it first would deflate her planned attack. "Yes, in Baltimore. But never in Virginia."

"Have you bought cigarettes or anything else from any 7-Eleven, anywhere?"

"No. I saw 7-Eleven in Baltimore, but I never go inside. I never saw 7-Eleven near Miracle Creek."

Abe stepped closer. "Did you buy or even touch any cigarettes last summer?"

Pak swallowed. There was no shame in white lies, answers that were technically untrue but ultimately served the greater good. "No."

Abe took out a red marker, marched to the easel, and crossed out *P. YOO* next to *Suspect ownership/possession*. Abe closed the marker, the cap's click an auditory exclamation point to the slashing of Pak's name. "Next, *Opportunity to commit crime*. There's been a lot of confusion here, with your neighbor, your voice, all that. So tell us, once and for all: Where were you during the last dive, before the explosion?"

Pak spoke slowly, deliberately, elongating each syllable. "I was inside the barn. The entire time." This wasn't a lie. Not really. Not when it had no impact on the ultimate question of who set the fire.

"Did you immediately open the hatch?"

"No." And it was true, he wouldn't have done that. Pak explained what he would've done if he'd been there: turn off oxygen at the emergency valves in case the controls were damaged, then extra-slow depressurization to make sure the pressure changes wouldn't cause another detonation, resulting in the delay of the hatch opening by more than a minute.

"That makes sense. Thank you," Abe said. "Now, Pak, do you have any other proof that you never went outside by the oxygen tanks before the explosion?"

"Yes, my cell telephone record," Pak said, as Abe handed out copies. "8:05 to 8:22 p.m., I was on the telephone. I called the power company to ask when they will fix, and also my wife, to ask her when she will return with batteries. Seventeen minutes, continuous telephone calls."

"Okay, I see that, but so what? You could've been on the phone while you were outside, setting fire under the oxygen tube."

Pak couldn't help a little smile as he shook his head. "No. That is impossible."

Abe frowned, pretending to be mystified. "Why?"

"There is no cell reception near oxygen tank. Yes, in front of the barn."

Not in back. Inside or outside. All my patients know this. If they wish to call, they must walk to front.”

“I see. So you couldn’t be anywhere near the fire’s starting point from 8:05 until the explosion. No vicinity, no opportunity.” Abe popped the marker open and crossed out his name next to *Opportunity to commit crime*. “Let’s turn to ‘Special knowledge and interest,’ next to which Ms. Haug has written ‘P. YOO.’”

Pak heard tittering, and he thought of Abe’s explanation of the juvenile humor of this abbreviation. “Intentional, I’m sure. I hate that woman,” Abe had said.

“Pak, as a licensed HBOT operator, you *did* research HBOT fires, correct?”

“Yes. I researched to learn how to avoid fires. Improve safety.”

“Thank you.” Under the *P. YOO* next to *Special knowledge and interest*, Abe wrote (*for good reason—safety*) and said, “We come to the last remaining item. Motive. Let me ask straight-out: Did you set fire to your own business with your patients inside and your family nearby to get 1.3 million dollars?”

Pak didn’t have to fake laughing in incredulity at this notion. “No.” He looked at the jurors, focusing in on the older faces. “If you have any children, you know. I never, *never* risk my child for money. We came to America for our daughter. Her future. Everything is for my family.” The jurors nodded. “I was excited about my business. Miracle Submarine! Many parents of disabled children call, we have waiting list for patients. We are happy. There is no reason to destroy this. Why?”

“I suppose some would answer, 1.3 million dollars. That’s a lot of money.”

Pak looked down at his useless legs in the wheelchair, touched the steel—even in this hot courtroom, it remained cold. “The hospital bills. They are one-half-million dollars. My daughter was in a coma. Doctors say maybe I never walk again.” Pak looked at Mary, her cheeks wet from tears. “No. 1.3 million dollars is not a lot of money.”

Abe looked at the jurors, all twelve now looking at Pak with sympathy in their eyes, leaning forward in their seats toward him as if they wanted to reach across the railings and touch him, comfort him. Abe

touched the tip of the red marker to the *P* in *P. YOO* next to *Motive to commit crime*. He stared and shook his head. Slowly, definitively, he put a red gash through Pak's name.

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION FOR DUMMIES

| DIRECT EVIDENCE | CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BETTER, RELIABLE!!!! | (Not as reliable, need more than 1 category) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ← Eyewitness ← Audio/video recordings of commission of crime ← Photos of suspect committing crime ← Documentation of crime by suspect, witness, or accomplice ← Holy-grail confession (need to verify!!!!) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ← Smoking gun: proof of suspect's usage of weapon (fingerprint, DNA) ← Suspect ownership/possession ← Opportunity to commit crime—alibi? ← Motive to commit crime—threats, prior incidents ← Special knowledge and interest (bomb expertise or research example) |

Any number of people P. YOO

P. YOO

P. YOO

P. YOO

(for good reason safety)

“Pak,” Abe said, “Matt Thompson told us that you ran into the fire, into the burning chamber, multiple times, even after you were severely injured. Why?”

This was not on the script, but strangely, Pak did not feel panic at having to give an unrehearsed answer. He looked to the gallery, to Matt and Teresa, the other patients behind them. He thought of the children, Rosa in the wheelchair, TJ flapping his arms like a bird, but most of all, Henry. Shy Henry, with eyes that always floated up, as if tethered to the sky. “This is my duty. My patients. I must protect them. *My* harm, it does not matter.” Pak turned to Elizabeth. “I tried to save Henry, but the fire . . .”

Elizabeth looked down, as if in shame, and reached for her water glass. Abe said, “Thank you, Pak. I know this is difficult. One final question. Once and for all, did you have anything whatsoever to do with the cigarette, the matches, *anything* even remotely related to setting the fire that killed two of your patients and nearly killed you and your daughter?”

He was opening his mouth to answer when he saw Elizabeth's hand

shake slightly bringing the water to her mouth. It came to him then, the familiar image that too often wormed its way out of the recesses of his mind to invade his dreams: a cigarette between gloved fingers, shaking slightly, moving toward a matchbook beneath the oxygen tube.

Pak blinked. He took in deep breaths to calm his racing heart. He reminded himself to forget that moment, just roll it into a tight ball and smother it away. He looked at Abe and shook his head. He said, "No, nothing. Nothing at all."