

<Orthodox Version>

PART ONE – a

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Kane can't see, but Mary is barely nodding.

The girl with short blond hair steps forward. She crouches down and rubs Mary's hand under the blanket. She says, "I'm sorry, but I promised Michael I'd go camping with him before school starts, you know? I'm really sorry that we have to leave you here, but I'm sure that..." She turns to the girls. "What was his name?"

The tall girl answers, "Kane."

The girl with the short blond hair turns to Mary. "Ken will take good care of you. Call me when you get back to Texas, okay?"

The girls take turns visiting Mary's bedside. They greet her and leave in blue flares.

The last one passes by me with a nod. I hear the girls chat in the hallway.

Their American tour coordinator, covered in a blue flare, rushes in. He spots me by the door and stops.

I stand up straight.

"Oh, hi. I've got Mary's tickets and the address of our travel agent in La Paz, Bolivia." While taking out a bunch of tickets from an envelope, he

continues. “She’ll have to pay a little extra, but they’ll reissue her tickets back to Texas. So, you know the situation here in Cuzco, I mean Peru right now.”

He’s checking names on the tickets.

I don’t react. We’ve already discussed it all down at the lobby. I’m upset about the way they are leaving a sick girl like this. If they claim to be her friends, why wouldn’t one of the girls stay for her? The sick girl is going to be left alone high up on a mountain far away from home.

While handing me the tickets, he says, “We’re going to take the last plane. They’ll be on strike. So, she won’t be able to fly to La Paz. Just find a way to take her there, okay?”

“Okay,” I say.

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**So, that was it. I got a job to take a sick girl to La Paz. Five bucks a day. And it helped me get to La Paz, Bolivia. All paid for. I couldn’t find a better deal than that, I thought. So I took the job.**

**Hey, Reina. This is how I met Mary. I’m going to tell you everything you always wanted to know about her.**

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The coordinator and the housekeeper leave. She hands me the key to the room.

I close the door. I start talking while moving a chair close to the bed. “Who were they? I mean like one of them was saying she had to attend a

wedding for her own boyfriend. What is—” I stop talking as I find the sick girl’s face in a brown flare.

She doesn’t move or answer, but keeps staring at me.

I put down the chair and walk to her in bed. I place my palm over her forehead. I ask, “May I?”

She faintly nods.

I put my hand on her forehead.

She’s burning.

I say, “You’ve got a high fever. Did you see a doctor?”

She faintly nods.

I grab the chair and put it against the wall to the bathroom, several feet from her bed. Not too overwhelmingly close to her. I sit down and say, “You must have eaten something oily.”

She thinks for a second and nods.

I say, “I’ve had it before. They use very old oil and it kills you. I mean...You should be all right in a few days.”

She has no reaction, but keeps staring at me.

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Waking up from a doze on the chair, he hears a noise coming from the bathroom. He doesn’t see the sick girl in the bed. The bathroom door is half open. He walks to the bathroom. As he looks inside, he says, “Oh, God. What a mess.”

The sick girl is sitting on the floor. She has her hands on the messed-up floor, barely holding herself up.

I enter and crouch down while putting my hand on her shoulder, which radiates a dark brown flare. I say, "Can you stand up?" I hold her up and see her face messed up, her nightdress wet. I look around, but find no clean towel.

She's clinging on to me.

I don't know what to do. The only thing I see is my T-shirt. I take it off, all the while holding her up. I wipe her face. I look at her clothes. "Ah, I mean...You can't go back to your bed unless you take off your nightdress. It's completely messed up." I pause thinking what to do. I can't tell if she's comprehending. I ask, "Should I do that for you?"

No answer. She's holding my arm with her eyes closed, shaking.

I take off her wet cotton dress. While keeping my eyes from her, I ask, "Can you walk to the bed?" I hear her voice for the first time:

"...I can't see."

I walk her to the bed. I flip the blanket.

She lies down on the bed.

I cover her naked body with the blanket.

She starts shivering badly.

Before asking, I pick up the phone on the bedside table. "Shall I call a doctor?" The bell keeps ringing, but no answer. While hanging up, I say, "I'm going to go down and ask for a doctor."

Her hand comes out from the edge of the blanket, trembling. Her eyes closed.

She says, “Hold me.”

I take her hand. I lie down beside her. I hold her, wrapping her more tightly in the blanket, but her shivering does not stop. I hold her tighter still, but her body keeps on shaking. Badly.

I say, “Now, look. I’ll go and get a doctor for you.”

“Don’t leave me alone.”