

Hana's Perfect Christmas Plans A Short Story

by
Kathy Watkins
and
Susan Irwin

Copyright © 2016 Joyel LLC

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher and copyright holder except for the use of brief quotations in a book review. Printed in the United States of America First Printing, 2016, Joyel, LLC, Oklahoma City, OK 73162
www.JoyousAdventuresinWriting.com

Hana's Perfect Christmas Plans

1

Hana reviewed her mental list for her perfect Christmas plans. She was excited that Appa Ronald and Umma Lily and Ray were flying from Seattle to South Korea to help her celebrate her first Christmas with Sang Ki and the kids.

Hana closed her eyes and imagined the perfect first Christmas with her new husband Sang Ki and their orphans. In a mere half hour, her new surrogate parents, Appa Ronald and Umma Lily, would arrive with her new surrogate brother Ray. The children were already dressed and on their best behavior. They would line up on both sides of the door and greet her new family and use their best manners for the rest of the evening. Appa Ronald and Umma Lily would be impressed by how nice the house and the Christmas tree were, how delicious the dinner was, how happy she and Sang Ki were, and most of all, how well-mannered the children were. Everyone would love each other and smile

and laugh a lot. It would be like the Christmas scenes that she saw on TV and in Christmas cards. She had always wanted a Christmas like that and wanted that kind of perfect Christmas for everyone else too.

Hana surveyed herself in the mirror, smoothing down her green satin dress at her waist. She opened her mouth and took a moment to apply the lipstick that she had carefully selected to match the poinsettias. She popped her lips together and checked for any stray marks. None. Perfect...just like her plans. That would leave her some time to double check the food, decor, gifts, and the kids. She left their bedroom with a confident smile of anticipation. Nothing could ruin this most wonderful time of year!

She reveled in the happy sounds of the children helping each other to stay clean and reminding the younger children to remember to be good. What good children they were! How she loved each and every one of them! They were so precious to her and loved her and welcomed her to Sang Ki's orphanage. Ever since she and Sang Ki returned from their honeymoon, life had been glorious. They had a marvelous time in the Phi Phi Islands while Appa Ronald and Umma Lily took care of the children.

There really hadn't been much time to prepare for Christmas after that. She taught the children about American Christmas traditions and they were excited and on their best behavior for Santa's arrival. Hana didn't have any trouble obtaining their cooperation to decorate the house. It was a joy to see their beaming faces as they put up their first Christmas tree and decorated it. She had a wonderful shot of Sang Ki as he held little Mia up to the top of the tree to add the gold and white angel. Mia had been their adorable flower girl at the wedding. The excited wonder on her face was priceless and the lighting made the photo quite striking. She was quite proud of it. She had a nice assortment of photos of all of the children. She looked forward to sharing those with Appa Ronald and Umma Lily and Ray. Appa Ronald shared her love of photography and Umma Lily was an artist so she knew that they would appreciate the photos. She had even developed the pictures with duplicates so that she could present them in a photo album of the children and a few pictures from their wedding. The children had helped her with the layouts of each page and suggested little sayings for each picture. Everyone was very excited about this gift. Hana could hardly wait to see Appa Ronald and Umma Lily. She hoped that she would remember to call them Grandma and Grandpa now for the children's sake. She wanted the children to feel like they were part of a real family.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Mia and Yun, who darted from the ministrations of Kyung and Eun. Eun continued to work on Seung's hair. She was just one year old and excited to have her hair pulled back for the first time. Yun and Mia ran to Hana and clung to her legs, each looking up at her with excitement and talking at the same time.

"We're ready, Umma Hana."

"I'm bery clean, Hana."

"You look very nice and clean, Yun," Hana agreed as she rubbed off a smudge from his cheek.

"I have big girl hair, Hana. I purty."

"Yes you are very pretty, Mia." She tried to pin a stray lock up again, but the black

curl popped back out. “Now let Kyung and Eun just put a few finishing touches so you are perfect for Grandpa Ronald and Grandma Lily. And please, bring the babies too.” Hana mouthed to the teens, “Thank you,” and gave a little bow with her head. She was thrilled with their smiles and left the cute preschoolers in the teens’ capable hands.

She checked on each child as they sought her approval from their bedroom doors. “You all look just wonderful! Meet me at the front door as soon as you can.”

Hana continued to sweep through the living room and surveyed the beautiful Christmas tree. Of course, it didn’t look exactly like an American Christmas tree, but it was lovely. The Korean fir was the same shape and was very full. It had bright green branches that were bright white underneath. The pine cones were a violet that was almost blue and the full effect was quite stunning. It was even more special because they all picked it out together after she told them about the tradition and how people first wanted to bring evergreen trees inside to represent the new life that Jesus offers. The tree was perfect and the presents under the tree were wrapped in beautiful red, yellow, and lucky blue Korean papers. She ran through her mental list and ensured that every gift was there. She stopped to retie one bow and straighten another. Perfect.

On to the kitchen. She hoped that she had done a good job on the bulgogi. It was a marinated grilled beef that Umma Lily and her sister Haneul had showed her how to make. She checked the turkey and basted it again. It was cooked to a perfect golden brown. She lifted her nose and sniffed the luscious harmony of fragrances. The smells were sublime. Perfect. The kitchen and meal could also be checked off her mental list.

She started to leave the kitchen and landed in Sang Ki’s arms. She laughed as he embraced her and placed several nice kisses on her mouth. “Well, Mrs. Yeong, are you ready for our first Christmas together?”

“Well, I was, but you should stop or my lipstick will be all over us both,” she quipped, but didn’t protest too hard. She took the hand that he offered to her. “Lead on, my beloved. I am ready. This is going to be perfect.” Sang Ki smiled that adorable smile that made her want to follow him anywhere.

“Come, children. Line up. It’s almost time,” called Hana and the children flew to the front door, lining up according to size with the tiniest children closest to the door just the way they had practiced. Boys were on one side and girls on the other except for Yun and Mia, who refused to be separated. Hana’s heart throbbed with pride and excitement. They held hands at the end of the two lines.

“Wait a minute. Where is Jin?”

Sung, the ten year old girl said, “I saw her in her room reading that silly Nancy Drew book.”

“Of course! She certainly does like those Nancy Drew mysteries. I should have known. Would you go get her please, Sung?”

In a few moments, Sung entered the room with Jin in tow. “Just like I said, she still had her nose in that book.”

“Hurry, Jin. It is almost time for Grandpa Ronald and Grandma Lily and Ray to arrive.”

“I’m sorry, Hana.” Jin slid into her place in line. Hana was thrilled with the order of it all once Jin was in place. Jin really was a sweet girl, but too quiet and studious sometimes. She was very intrigued with Nancy Drew and solving a mystery. That didn’t help her make friends. The other children either ignored her or teased her and that didn’t help with her loneliness. Hana would have to help her with that, but it would have to wait until after Christmas. She thrilled with pleasure to think how pleased that Jin would be with her Christmas gift. It was quite gratifying to see that the girl admired her. Jin wanted to solve a mystery just like Hana had done. She would have to nurture that desire, but for now, they needed to be ready to greet Grandpa Ronald and Grandma Lily and Ray. She took one final “review of her troops” before her new family arrived. Hana was glad that everyone was finally ready.

“I am so proud of you all! You look wonderful! Merry Christmas!”

The children responded with a cheerful “Merry Christmas,” all in unison like Hana had directed. It was so perfect, she felt her heart would explode with pride and joy.

2

There was a rhythmic knock at the door. It was too bad that they didn’t have a doorbell, but that couldn’t be helped now. Sang Ki opened the door wide and the newlywed couple moved forward to welcome Grandpa Ronald and Grandma Lily and Ray into the small orphanage. “Merry Christmas,” chimed the excited children.

Before her new family could enter, Hana felt a shudder of horror as something furry brushed against her bare leg and shot past her, undoubtedly to wreak havoc in her delightful home. What was that? It was not welcome. That was for sure. It was *not* on her list for a perfect Christmas. Instead of her new adoptive parents and brother being greeted by two lines of perfect children, they tripped inside in confusion as the children shouted and ran in a disorderly mob after that unwelcome ball of fur. It was as if a flock of birds on two telephone wires suddenly noticed crusts of bread on the ground. The children scurried in different directions and bumped into each other like bumper cars. Everyone had a different plan to catch the offending intruder. How could this happen? And what was that blur anyway?

“Catch it!”

“It went that way.”

“No, it’s over here now.”

“It got away.”

In spite of the myriad barrage of noise, none of these messages gave Hana any clue about what “it” was. All she knew was that her perfect Christmas day was ruined. She watched in horror as her well-mannered children now raced about the little orphanage in little groups. Some of the older children took the lead and called directions for others to follow and separate into groups in different parts of the house because the creature changed directions as it tried desperately to escape all the people and find a way back out

of the house. They stampeded over packages and turned over the furniture. The creature ran to the couch and then jumped on the back of the couch as one of the boys made a flying leap onto the couch to try to catch it. When it saw that it was almost captured, the furry dynamo jumped down to the floor and the boy scurried after, knocking the couch over. Even her husband raced about trying to catch the mysterious intruder.

The frantic creature ran to the tree, undoubtedly thinking that it was a haven or an exit to the outdoors. Unfortunately, it was not content to just hide in the corner behind the tree. Hana heard the wrapping paper tear on the gifts as the intruder scrambled over them. As the children and Sang Ki and Ray closed in on it, the catlike creature climbed up the trunk of the tree. Ornaments flew off and crashed to the floor. The creature seemed to realize its dangerous plight when it reached the top two feet of the tree. It peered out at everyone, its large cinnamon eyes glowing in anger and fear. It hissed and struck out with unsheathed claws. Its paw reminded Hana of a jaguar. Suddenly, it decided to climb higher and the whole tree toppled to the ground with the soft thud of the tree, the crunching sound of more tree ornaments breaking, and a ripping sound of more gift wrap being torn. The men and children all tried to grab it as it tore past them. There was no order or plan here. And that little monster was headed for her dining room. Hana gathered her courage and looked at the front door to see their visitors' reactions.

Grandpa Ronald stood in the doorway and laughed. His curly grey head was thrown back in merriment. Grandma Lily stood just in front of him, apparently too surprised to enter the house. Ray darted from behind and under her arm. He actually joined the rowdy activity. Hana's own mouth flopped open. She tried several times to regain control and apologize, but merely managed to open and close her mouth like a helpless fish blowing bubbles. Finally, she managed a wan smile and extended one hand toward the interior of the orphanage while she shut the door. "Welcome," she mumbled. Unfortunately, her emotions did not cooperate with her brave effort and her chin trembled while tears began to ooze from her eyes.

Umma Lily gathered her into an immediate warm embrace and patted her on the back. "There, there now, child. There is no need for tears. It is all okay. After all, I have never been greeted like this." Lily held Hana back to look at her and supported her chin with a soft caress. Hana was surprised to notice a grin that soon bubbled over into her musical laugh.

"What a creative welcome," asserted Grandpa Ronald with a wink and a friendly twinkle in his eye. "Shall we?" He linked arms with Hana and Lily and guided them into the fray. Soon the entire household cornered the intruder. After a slight pause and a sniff of its nose, it had darted into the kitchen. Obviously, it smelled Hana's perfect meal and headed right for it.

Hana followed the furry critter and everyone else into the kitchen. After setting off a frenzy of commotion and noisy confusion, the creature sat on the counter and gnawed on a turkey leg. Anyone who came too near was rebuffed with growling. Hana finally was able to take a good look at this animal that invaded her orderly home and wrought such havoc. It was about the size of a large cat, but had longer legs and there was actually

webbing between its toes. The mouth was surrounded by white, but the rest of the cat was a light tawny color and it had brown stripes that started at its nose and eyes and went over the back of its head. Hana watched in amazement as the area where these stripes faded and became dark brown spots that covered the rest of its body bobbed with rhythmic motion as the cat ate and growled at the same time in an angry snarl. Sang Ki took a step toward it and it stopped in mid-bite and hissed, its already fluffy tail fuzzed out further as if it had been caught in a light socket.

“Be careful, honey,” Hana warned with alarm. She was relieved when Sang Ki froze in place to think. The cat returned to its lucky meal while keeping a wary eye on everyone. “What is it anyway?”

“It is an amur leopard cat. We studied about it in school last week.” Trust Jin to know the answer.

“Just a minute. Quiet, everybody. Let me think.” Hana’s hero soon took charge with a clever plan. “I will need a box, a long piece of string, and a piece of wood to hold the box up.”

“I saw a wooden crate in the alley behind the Sooks’ house. Would that work?” Hwan offered.

“Maybe we could borrow their dog, Baby, to help us catch the cat,” suggested Yoon. His twin brother, Joon, nodded his approval.

“No, that would be worse!” Hana choked the words out in desperation. She could just see her household in total shambles with the additional animal. She didn’t mention that it could also be dangerous.

“I picked up this string from the street yesterday. Will it be long enough?” Gyeong extracted a length of string from his pocket and demonstrated that it was longer than he was tall.

“Yes, those will do nicely. Kyung, can you take Hwan who knows where the box is? Take Gyeong too and bring me that crate. Search until you find a piece of wood that is about six inches longer than the box is tall.”

The assigned boys rushed off to complete their important task.

“But I want to go help too,” wailed Yun. Several of the other children chimed in their intent to help.

“I need all of you to find me a board or piece of plastic or something that is flat and will work as a lid for that box that the boys will bring back. It is very important.” He held his hands out to demonstrate how big the board should be. The children swelled with pride at being entrusted with such an important task and scurried off to search the house and yard. Each child seemed determined that they would be the one who would find that all-important lid. Some children separated and looked in various places in the house and others headed outdoors to scour the yard for the trophy. Hana was pleased at how the children all liked and respected Sang Ki and wanted to please him. They were all such good children. Each of them had accepted her into the orphanage as their new little mother and had worked hard to help her fit in and learn their names. She felt so blessed to have such a loving husband and such good children!

Then she took a look around the kitchen and gasped. The Korean vegetables for their side dish were splattered all over the kitchen counter and floor. There were chunks of turkey mixed into the mess. It certainly did not look appealing now! She had spent so much time preparing everything so that it would be perfect and taste delicious. She and the girls had cleaned those kitchen counter and floors until they were gleaming. Now it looked like an explosion had occurred...an amur leopard cat explosion! Never mind. There wasn't any time to survey the damage or worry about it now. They had a wild cat to catch before it did any further damage! Hana felt weary at the thought of all that work to do over again. And this didn't count any of the damage that that horrid creature had most likely done in other areas of the house. Hana felt panic and anxiety rise in her chest. She felt heat flush into her face from anger and she was sweating. She began to shake and felt a bit faint. *Take a deep breath. Don't let the kids and your new husband and family see you lose it.* Right now, the important thing was for them to catch that obnoxious cat!

A sudden movement near the intruder caught Hana's attention. Yun and Mia were inching toward the cat. Nice kitty, kitty."

3

"No! Come here to me Yun and Mia." Hana outstretched her arms.

"But,"

Hana heard Sang Ki's voice. It was firmer than she had ever heard it. "Go to Umma Hana right now, children."

Hana shook with relief as the young children ran to her open arms and she held them tight. She looked them in the face and held them by their hands. "Stay right here beside me, children."

"But we want to seee de kutty, Umma Hana," Mia begged.

"Now is not a good time, Mia. That is not a nice kitty."

Hana was relieved when Hwan and Gyeong appeared with the box and string. The other children arrived in a few seconds. They were all out of breath. Ki, the eleven year old girl, handed him the lid from a toy box. "Will this work?"

"That will work quite nicely, Ki. Thank you.

"Good work, children. Slowly bring me those things." Sang Ki directed them away from the cat so that they would be safe and yet not scare the creature. The amur leopard cat watched them warily, but seemed quite content to feast on their turkey. Hana felt the panic feelings again. There was not enough time to cook a turkey again. That took hours. All of her perfect plans were disintegrating into a horrible disaster in front of her eyes.

She watched as Sang Ki took the box from the boys and flipped it upside down on the other side of the kitchen away from the cat, whose wild eyes followed her husband's every move with interest and distrust. It did not stop the creature from continuing to eat, however. Sang Ki told the boys to tie the string around one end of the piece of wood. He

directed one of the boys to hold the piece of wood perpendicular to the ground while he placed one end of the box on the ground and the other end on the top of the piece of wood. He made sure that the flat piece of plastic toy lid that the children brought him was on the ground under the box. Then he held the string and fed it along the ground as he backed away toward Hana and the kitchen door. He made sure the children stayed between him and Hana for their safety. Hana marveled at his creativity and skill. She would not have had a clue what to do. This was a new side of her new husband.

“We need some more food to put in the box, honey. Do you have something I can use?”

Hana’s mind raced through her pantry contents. She had just the thing. She started toward the pantry, but Sang Ki stopped her. “It’s okay. I will get it for you. You stay where it is safe and keep the little ones with you. Just tell me what to get.”

“There is a can of tuna. It is delicious and I think that might smell good and work.” Iseul was twelve and always full of good ideas. It was exactly what Hana had been thinking of using.

“Good idea, Iseul.” Sang Ki retrieved the can of tuna.

“I think the kitty wants cookies,” added Yun, who was always looking for opportunities for himself and Mia to eat cookies.

Sang Ki looked out the pantry door and exchanged a look with Hana as he suppressed a grin. “That’s a great idea, Yun. How did you know the cat would like cookies? I’ll bring some cookies too.” Hana wasn’t sure about the cookies, but she was pleased that Sang Ki humored the young boy.

“I can use the cookies to lure him to the box.” Once again, Hana marveled at her husband’s ingenuity.

Sang Ki set the food inside the box and then scattered some cookies on the floor leading toward the cat. Then he held out some of the cookies and tuna so that the cat could get a good whiff of them.

“Be careful, dear! Don’t get too close.”

Talking in a calm, soothing voice, Sang Ki replied. “I’ll do my best. Here kitty. Take a good whiff of this tuna. Doesn’t that smell good?”

“It likes the cookies.” Yun grinned with satisfaction and pride.

“It really does. It seems interested in sugar too,” Yoon, one of the twins, theorized with surprise.

Sang Ki waved the tuna nearby until he caught the cat’s attention and then dropped some of it on the floor. He backed away and threw some more cookies and an occasional piece of tuna to lead to the box. Hana was relieved when the cat followed the meat toward the box. Once the amur leopard cat was under the box, Sang Ki instructed Kyung to jerk the string and the piece of wood came toward him, releasing the box so that it crashed down with a thud, trapping the wild cat inside.

“Hooray!”

“You caught it!”

Sang Ki hastened to the box and held it down so that the creature could not escape.

The cat snarled and hissed with anger. Sang Ki adjusted the piece of plastic so that it the box was in the center of it. "I need something heavy to put on the of the box."

Park handed him the biggest flour cannister.

"Great thinking, Park. Kyung, I need your help. When I flip that box over, I need you to tie the string around the box as tightly as you can. Park, hold the cannister so it doesn't break."

Ray came and stood nearby so that he would be ready to help with the dangerous process as well. Hwan joined him with his arms outstretched. "I saw them do this on TV to catch animals."

"Thanks, Kyung and Ray. Good job, Hwan. Are you all ready?"

They nodded and Sang Ki flipped the box right side up. The amur leopard cat tumbled to the new bottom of the box with a small thud and a new round of angry caterwauling. Ray and Kyung worked like a calf-roping team to wrap the string around the box and tie it tight while Sang Ki held the box to keep the lid from popping off.

"There."

"Great work, men!" Sang Ki high-fived Kyung, Ray, and the older boys with relief.

"Now, what shall we do with this kitty?"

"Keep it," Yun and Mia shouted in unison. Several other children chimed in with their agreement.

Sang Ki knelt before the young pair. "Do you really think that the cat would be happy here?"

"Sure, Appa Sang Ki, we feed it more cookees."

Sang Ki giggled and glanced at Hana with a pleading look. She joined him facing the preschoolers and held their hands. "That kitty did like the cookies, didn't it?" She was rewarded with enthusiastic nods. "But do you think that it would like being trapped in the house all day when it is used to being free in the woods?" She held her breath and hoped that they would see the logic in that question. She exchanged a worried glance at Sang Ki, who gave a slight nod and grin.

Yun hung his head and shook it, but Mia disagreed. "Yes. It wants to live wid us." When she noticed Yun's reaction, she slowly hung her head and shook her black locks begrudgingly. The recalcitrant lock dislodged again, taking more locks with it and bouncing up and down with each movement of her head. Once again, Hana suppressed a smile as Mia grudgingly admitted, "I guess not."

Hana gave them both a hug. "I know that is not an easy decision, kids. Good job. We will find a good home for it."

Sang Ki stood. "I'm afraid that if we turn it loose anywhere nearby, it will just return." He looked around surveyed the damage. "We can't have that."

"Certainly not!" Hana was horrified at the thought that this wild creature could return and inflict more damage in her lovely home.

"What about the zoo?" Jeong, an eight year old girl, suggested brightly.

"They don't take strays," scoffed Park.

"Wait a minute. That's not a bad idea." Ray rubbed his chin. "It would be a win for

everyone. We find a good home for it so that it doesn't destroy the orphanage, the zoo gets a free amur leopard cat, and the kids can visit the cat from time to time." He paused for effect and winked at the kids and grinned at Hana. "Beside, my sister gets to keep a clean house without any wild animals...except all of you." He made claws of his hands and took a comical menacing step toward the kids. Some of them widened their eyes in mock fear and put their hands to their mouths. Others giggled with pleasure. The older kids laughed with enjoyment.

"You're right, Ray. Anybody want to join me in a field trip to see if our local zoo will take this animal?" Sang Ki's suggestion was met with enthusiastic response from all the children. "Okay, let's first take a quick look around and see how much damage this rascal has caused."

Hana heard a thud and Mia crying. Fearful of what she might find, she rushed into the other room. There, she noticed that two of the older boys had pushed the couch upright again. Hopefully, that was the thud. Joon and Yoon, their ten year old twin boys, nodded toward the tree. There stood Mia, sobbing and grasping a gift almost as big as she was. The wrapping paper was quite torn. Mia pointed under the tree at several other torn packages that lay under the fallen tree. Hana noticed with dismay that several ornaments were crushed under the weight of the tree. Although she was sad and angry at that pesky intruder, she quickly turned back to Mia. "Are you hurt, honey?"

"No, but look what dat kutty did!" This caused a fresh round of tears to erupt from the adorable toddler.

Hana looked at the tree, the shattered ornaments, and the ripped presents. She felt like crying herself. All that hard work that she and the children had done to get ready and now her plans for a perfect first Christmas with her new family was in a shambles. She wanted to run to their bedroom and fling herself on the bed and sob. Instead, she held the distressed toddler close and patted her back.

"It killed my angel!" At this, Mia stamped her foot and squealed with anger that crescendoed into more sobs.

Hana picked up the gold and white angel lying on the ground. Mia had adopted it as her very own ever since Sang Ki held her up and let the toddler place it on the top of the tree. Hana dusted it off with relief. "Your angel is okay. She just flew off the tree to get away from that cat. See?"

At least, that made Mia stop crying. "She okay?"

"She is okay. Look, Appa Sang Ki will hold you up and let you help her fly back up to the top of the tree so she can watch us clean up."

"Goody." Mia held her arms up right away.

"Just a minute, Mia. Let me set this tree back up. Then I will help you."

The little girl kept her arms up anyway. Sang Ki and the older kids straightened the garland and lights then rescued as many ornaments as they could. Eun carried a sack of broken ornaments away quickly so that the little girl wouldn't notice.

Hana took another look at the damage. "I think that everything will be okay. That's why we need to take that kitty to the zoo."

“Are you ready to go with me to take the kitty the to zoo, Mia?”

The mollified little girl managed a few nods and nestled against Appa Sang Ki’s chest when he picked her up and she clasped her outstretched hands around his neck.

“Don’t worry. I will take care of these gifts and everything will be okay when you get back home,” Hana promised. She hoped that she had evaluated the damage correctly.

“Do I need to leave some of the children here with you to help clean up, Hana?” It was sweet of Sang Ki to offer and she desperately wanted to take him up on it, but she didn’t want the children to miss out on an impromptu field trip to the zoo. She couldn’t stand the look of crushed excitement followed by determination to be helpful on their faces.

“No, it’s okay, dear. They are really looking forward to it and it will be good to take their minds off this fiasco.”

“I will stay here and help Hana,” Grandma Lily drew her arm around Hana and gave her a quick hug and a reassuring smile.

“I can stay here too,” offered Ray.

“No, I need you to help me corral the kids and to carry this box.”

“Well, before we go, we will clean some of this mess so Hana and Grandma Lily can work on food. We will want to eat when we get back. Everybody pitch in and help clean something. Quick! See how much work you can get done in two minutes. Ready...set...go!”

Hana shot Sang Ki a relieved and thankful look. He was so thoughtful and so good with the kids. That was one of the things that she appreciated about him. She watched as they all zipped around the house straightening it up before they left. What sweet kids too!

“Ding, ding, ding! Time is up! Hands in the air everyone! Let me take a look. Yes, that is much better and now there is not as much work for Hana and Grandma Lily. Maybe they will have time now to fix food for us.” Sang Ki winked at the women. Children, give yourselves a big hand and then jump in the van. Give me a hand and help me load this box, Ray and Kyung.

“Wait for me, sons! I want in on this fun too.” Ronald put his camera around his neck and grabbed Jeong’s hand. He offered his elbows to Eun and Iseul, who giggled and looked pleased to accept the gracious offer. “Tata! We’re off!”

“Have fun dear ones.” Lily blew air kisses to all.

4

After the children left, Lily and Hana had time for a more detailed survey of the remainder of the damage to the house. There were still some gifts that needed to be wrapped again, or at least, mended. Hana took a moment to set those aside. She examined each one to make sure that the gifts were okay. Thankfully, they were.

“Let’s just leave those in your room for now dear. If we run out of time, I’m sure that

some of the older children and Ray and Grandpa Ronald and I can help make them as good as new. God is so good that all the gifts are okay.”

“Yes, He is. That sounds like a good plan.” Hana was relieved to have a plan and that she and Umma Lily didn’t have to do everything themselves before everyone returned.

Lily looked around and seemed quite satisfied. “Now, let’s tackle that kitchen and our meal, shall we dear?”

Hana took a look around the main room and relieved that it did look quite presentable already. “Yes, that is very important. Everyone will have worked up quite an appetite from their field trip.” She had followed Lily to the kitchen, but now stopped in the doorway. The damage was just as bad, if not worse, here. Her spirits, which had just begun to lift, sank again. She felt weary looking at it all. The lovely, perfectly-browned turkey was in pieces that trailed across the counter and her previously clean kitchen floor. Those Korean vegetables that she had spent hours on were an explosive triangle of brightly colored debris that started at the counter and spread halfway across the entire kitchen.

“Well, we need to throw away all of this portion of the turkey that *that creature* gnawed on and supplement with another meat if possible. Those lovely Korean vegetables can’t be salvaged. We can look in your pantry and see what else we can throw together to replace them. Other than that, it is not too bad really. Is that bulgogi, Hana? It is beautiful and smells wonderful!”

Hana perked up again. “Yes, I tried to prepare it like you and Haneul showed me.”

“Well, it smells like you did a good job. It’s a good thing that the cat didn’t touch it. Let’s clean this floor first.”

The women threw the spilled food in the trash. They swept and mopped. While they worked, Lily sang a hymn, *I Need Thee Every Hour*. Hana felt her spirit lift even more. She could really relate to those words! Soon, she joined Lily in song.

“Would you be willing to carve those bad places off the turkey while I take a look in your pantry and see what else we can throw together for vegetables, dear?”

“Certainly.” Hana gladly worked on the turkey. It gave her something constructive to do and Lily seemed to have the plan for everything. That felt great after her perfect plans had totally fallen apart. It was really nice to have someone else take charge. She tried to focus on her assigned task and not worry about her ruined Christmas. It didn’t work very well, however. Thoughts of the contrast between her perfect plans and how beautiful that the house and the children all looked and the disaster that horrid creature had caused kept torturing her. Tears began to well up in her eyes. She angrily brushed them away with her shoulder while she tried to keep working.

Hana felt Lily touch her gently on her shoulder and take the knife out of her hand. The kind woman handed her a small towel to wipe her hands. She set two cans of mixed vegetables, canned chicken, and a jar of kimchi down on the counter and turned to face her.

“There, there now dear. Everything will be okay.” Lily enfolded her into her arms and held her, patting her back, much as Hana had done to comfort Mia such a short time

earlier. Hana melted into her embrace and sobbed. Her words tumbled out.

“But Umma Lily, everything is a mess. It’s our first Christmas together and I wanted it all to be so perfect for you.” Mortified, Hana heard her voice actually come out in a blubber. Her face flushed with embarrassment and stress that threatened to manifest into a full-blown storm of tears.

“Dear, don’t you know that we don’t need that. The most important thing for us is to all be together and to celebrate Jesus’ birthday.”

Hana felt a flush of shame rise into her cheeks as she realized the truth. She had placed her focus on herself and wanting Appa Ronald and Umma Lily and her new brother to be proud of her and her new home and family. How could she have been so self-centered and forgotten about what was really important? “You are right, Umma Lily. I am so ashamed of myself. I was planning the perfect Christmas instead of remembering that Christmas is all about celebrating Jesus and being together as a family. I’m so glad that you are here.”

“That’s okay, dear. It happens to all of us. At least you had all your little ducklings in a row until that cat intruded on your perfect Christmas.” Lily’s eyes twinkled and she broke into her musical laugh as she spoke. “And this has made a most memorable first Christmas together! We will all have wonderful, fun memories to share together for the rest of our lives.”

Hana managed to laugh at that idea. This probably would be pretty fun to look back on in future years. “It was pretty funny when the boys chased that cat over the top of that couch and turned it upside down and continued to chase it into the kitchen.”

Lily bubbled forth in her own music laughter at that. “Yes, did you see how Joon and Yoon took a flying leap into the couch trying to catch that silly cat?”

Hana joined in Lily’s contagious laughter. “Yes, and Hyun just jumped over the couch without missing a step. It was like it was part of the floor.”

“Hyun likes soccer and he is very athletic. I wonder what that cat thought about that?”

The women laughed until tears came to their eyes. Hana had a hard time catching her breath. Every time that she thought she was finished, Lily would trill into more musical laughter and Hana would join her.

She finally sobered a bit. “It must have been terrified to find itself in here with a house full of children and adults who started to yell and chase it.”

“I’m afraid that we must have scared it quite a bit all right.”

“I think that the turkey and cookies made up for its fright though.” Hana chortled with an actual twinkle in her eye. That set Lily off again.

After a few moments, Lily patted her shoulder. “Don’t you worry about your plans. Remember that God can turn the worst problems into good for us, dear.”

“I’ve got to admit that I am enjoying this laugh with you right now more than I probably would have enjoyed my perfect Christmas plans.” Then she sobered. “But do you think that is true for everyone else, Umma Lily?”

“Of course! I know that I am enjoying these happy moments with my precious new

daughter! Those children all seemed to be pretty excited about a romp with a wild cat and a field trip to the zoo.”

Hana nodded her head thoughtfully. “Yes, I do believe that you are right.”

“Of course I am. Now, we better get started on those vegetables before everyone gets back.” The women went to work and shortly had a delightful dish of mixed vegetables and a platter of chicken and kimchi to fill out the meal. Although Hana saw the wisdom in Lily’s words, she tried not to worry about whether the children’s Christmas had been ruined. They just finished repairs when she heard car doors and the happy shouts of the children. That really encouraged her.

“Umma Hana, guess what we have?”

“You’ll never guess!”

“Don’t tease her, Gyeong. She has had a hard day.” Eun came and squeezed Hana’s shoulders. “You’ll like it, Umma Hana,” she half whispered in her ear.

“Okay, it is time to confess.” Hana was swept into the children’s joy and looked from face to face. She wondered who was going to spill the beans. She should have known that it would be Mia and Yun.

“It’s ice cream!” “Ice cream, Hana!”

“What a nice surprise! Thank you all! That will go perfectly with our dessert!”

“Yes, won’t it, dear?” Lily came and rescued the slightly melted ice cream and put it in the freezer. “That was very thoughtful.”

“It was Grandpa Ronald’s idea.”

“Appa Sang Ki wouldn’t let us have any ice cream at the park.”

“He said it would ruin our appetite.”

“So Grandpa Ronald bought some ice cream for all of us.”

Hana delighted in the breathless interruptions and giggles with which the children told the story. She noticed that Lily went to Ronald’s side and hugged him when she discovered how he bought ice cream for everyone. She gave Sang Ki a hug too. “Thank you for not letting them ruin their dinner, honey,” she whispered.

“I knew that would be too hard for you today.” He squeezed her again.

“You all certainly seem to be in a good mood, children,” Hana noted.

“You have got to be kidding. They had a great time.”

“This is the best Christmas.”

“You said it.”

“I can’t wait to go back to school and tell my friends about our surprise wild cat visitor.”

“Do those children look like Christmas is ruined to you?” Umma Lily helped Hana to face the children.

It was true. They were now bedraggled, shirt tails out, stained clothes, hair askew. In spite of it all, they had bright, happy eyes as if they had really enjoyed their romping adventure. “Thank you, Umma Lily.” Hana fell to her knees and held out her arms. All of the children rushed to fill her arms and fell together in a happy, loving heap at her feet as they tried to show their love the most. “Okay, okay, I give up,” she laughed as she

dropped into the heap and hugged and tousled each one.

“Hey, wait for us!” Grandpa Ronald, Grandma Lily, Ray, and Sang Ki all piled onto the floor as well. It was a rolling snowball of love and giggles.

“Come on darling. It’s all going to be okay.” Hana accepted Sang Ki’s help to get up and smoothed her rumpled dress and hair.

“But what about the rest of this mess?”

“There will be plenty of time to deal with that after we eat,” suggested the wise Grandma Lily.

“You said it! Excellent plan, dear,” chimed in Grandpa Ronald.

“Okay, is anybody hungry?” Hana flashed her wonderful husband a grateful smile.

“Boy, I am!”

“You know it!”

“I could eat a bear!”

“Good! Girls, can you help me in the kitchen please?” The older girls followed Hana and cheerfully performed their assigned tasks. Each grabbed a platter and carried it to the table. The younger children set the table. Lily offered to help again, but Hana wouldn’t hear of it.

“You have already been a tremendous help, Umma Lily.”

The older boys seated Ronald and Lily and Ray at the table then helped to bring food while the younger children entertained them. It calmed Hana’s spirit to hear the loving, happy chatter. The fact that everything was going more like her plan for lunch didn’t hurt either. Maybe there was hope for the rest of Christmas to be perfect after all. She would be game and try not to let the rough start ruin everything else.

5

Hana gathered the group together and held hands. That was the cue and the children held hands also. Hana smiled as Mia reached for Yun’s hand and then Ronald’s hand. She could tell by the way that he looked at her that he was quite smitten with this adorable, little toddler. Lily and Ray joined the circle as well and Sang Ki prayed, “Thank You, Lord, for bringing Hana into our lives as my beautiful wife and a wonderful mother for these sweet children. Thank you for the nice new additions to our family: Ronald and Lily and Ray. I am so blessed to have such a wonderful big family with all these great kids.”

“You forgot to bless the food!”

“Oh yeah. And bless this food. Thank you for Umma Hana and Grandma Lily making a delicious meal for us. Let’s eat.”

The children all scurried to the long wooden benches at 3 wooden tables. Mia kept Ronald’s hand. “Come sit with me, Grandpa Ronald.”

He flashed her one of his famous grins and bowed slightly. “I would be delighted to accept your invitation, young lady.”

Mia glowed with pleasure at his response. “And you sit on this side, Grandma Lily.”
 “But what about me,” Yun asked with alarm.

“That’s okay honey. Mia, you need to share your grandparents with the other children. You sit next to Yun. After all, you will have Grandpa Ronald to talk to.” Hana was relieved that her logic seemed to satisfy the tyke. She put the two babies, Gi and Sang, into high chairs and began to spoon soft food into their mouths with Sang Ki’s help.

The conversation at dinner warmed Hana’s heart and she realized again, the wisdom of Umma Lily. The children chattered with great excitement between bites. Their words tumbled out and over one another like joyful droplets of water that fly into the air in all directions before leaping over the chasm and spilling to the river below in a happy waterfall.

“On the way to the zoo, we decided to name the cat.”

“I wanted to name it Big Cat.”

“Kutty cat,” insisted Mia, obviously still unwilling to let go of her favorite name.

Hana became alarmed. “You did drop the cat off at the zoo. Please tell me that you didn’t bring it back to this house!” Her eyes flashed like lightning bolts that endangered everything in the area.

Sang Ki gave her a sideways hug and hastened to reassure her. “Of course we did. I knew better than to bring that cat home again!” He leaned over and gave her one of his big boyish grins. Hana noticed that lock fall over his forehead and thawed somewhat. She couldn’t resist adding, “Fiend would be a good name for that horrid cat.”

Jin ignored her comment and told Hana quite sensibly about her idea. “Cho means handsome or beautiful.” Hana had to admit that the amur leopard cat had been beautiful.

“I still think Big Boy would be good.”

“Drop it, Park. The zookeeper said the cat is a female.”

“Tiger is the best,” declared Yun.

“I see that you had quite a discussion about this.” Hana felt sorry for Ray and Ronald having to endure such an argument. “I hope that they weren’t too much trouble, Appa Ronald.”

“No, they were quite intelligent and fun to listen to. I could hardly wait to see the next name they would come up with.”

Hana hugged him. “You are a dear. Now I am curious. What name did you all decide on?”

“Jeong said its name could be Tiger Lily because it was orange and had spots like the flower.”

“That is a good idea, Jeong.”

“Your Grandma Lily and I love tiger lilies,” Ronald flashed his big smile and kissed his Korean War bride on the lips. That made her blush.

“Yes, we do, dear. Now let the children tell us about their visit to the zoo.” Hana saw that Lily was still embarrassed, but looked lovingly at her husband. She wondered what that was about. Of course, she knew that Lily painted and made jewelry of the tiger lily,

but there seemed to be something more. She had no more time to wonder because the children continued their tale.

“The tiger lily flower is a symbol for friendship and for pride and prosperity.” Sometimes Jin was like a regular encyclopedia. How did she know all of this stuff anyway?

“Well,” Hana searched for words, “that is nice. Is that what you decided to call the cat?”

“We couldn’t decide between Cho and Tiger Lily, but the zookeeper told us that the other amur leopard cat was a male named Cho Du. That means handsome head.”

“Yeah and she loved the idea of Tiger Lily after Jin told her what it meant. She said it showed friendship between us and the zoo.”

Hana looked at Jin in amazement. She hugged her. “Good work, Jin.”

“She said they might even put a plaque up that said our orphanage donated the cat and what her name meant.”

“She said that we could come to the zoo anytime for free!”

”Umma Hana, they were really happy that we brought that tiger cat to the zoo.”

“So I see.”

“Not tiger cat, Hyun. It was an amur leopard cat.” Jin pronounced the words slowly as if she savored each one of them so that Hyun could remember them. Even though he was only a year younger, Jin liked to act superior.

“There are only about thirty of them left in the world!” Ki inserted in excitement.

“Yeah, and they only had one of them.”

“They want to keep them safe and breed more of them,” Iseul informed Hana.

“Now dey can make babies.” Mia made this announcement with pride.

Hana gasped. She was shocked to hear this from her toddler. She hardly knew how to reply.

Sang Ki hastened to explain. “It’s okay, honey. Mia is just repeating what the zookeeper said. She doesn’t understand.”

“They were so excited that to have another amur leopard cat that they gave us all free tickets to the zoo.”

“Pass some more turkey, please. It sure is good.” Several people took more turkey as it was passed around the table.

“Yes, everything is delicious.”

“It’s yummy in my tummy.” Mia rubbed her tummy and everyone laughed.

“Did the cat look happy there?” Hana was almost afraid to ask. Even though she didn’t want it in her house wreaking havoc again, she didn’t want the cat to be hurt or unhappy.

“Oh yes! As soon as they let it loose, it ran to a tree in the pen and climbed it. She sniffed of it and then began to scratch on the bark.”

“The zookeeper explained that that was a good sign. Sure enough, the other amur leopard cat jumped into the tree with her.”

“We were worried that they would fight, Hana.” Jeong’s face was a picture of

concern.

“They didn’t. That boy cat ran up to her and they kissed,” Sung explained.

In disgust, Park retorted, “They didn’t kiss. They were smelling of each other. Don’t you remember the zookeeper explaining that to us?”

“What do you think they did next Hana?”

“I can’t imagine.”

“They started crying and then our cat rubbed her head up against the boy cat. Then they both laid down on that tree branch facing each other with their heads together and their legs hanging off.”

“Yup, they both went to sleep in the tree. She likes it there all right.” Hana was relieved that the amur leopard cat would be happy in the zoo. Not only that, but they could help an endangered species!

“That’s when Jeong and Gyeong got hit in the head.”

Hana whipped her head around to get more information. She held Jeong’s head close to her and examined it for wounds. “Where? What happened? Are you okay, dears? Let me see your head too, Gyeong.”

Everyone laughed. “Yeah, they are both okay. It was only a bunch of leaves.”

“Jeong sure did jump though!”

Hana was relieved. “How did this happen?”

“She was watching the elephants in the next pen.”

“It took water in it’s trunk and sprayed another elephant.” Jeong defended herself to Hana.

“That’s the exact time when one of the giraffes dropped some of the leaves that it was eating.”

“Yeah, and it landed right on her head.” The children giggled again.

“What did you think of that, Jeong?” Hana was still worried.

“I sure was surprised. I held my head and jumped. But it didn’t hurt.”

“Gyeong punched me.” declared Hyun with a scowl. Gyeong scowled at Hyun.

“Did you do that, Gyeong?”

Gyeong hung his head sheepishly. “Yeah, I did. I thought he dropped something on my head.”

“To be fair, there was still a twig attached to the leaves that fell on his head.”

“Oh my! Are you okay?” Hana started to examine Gyeong again. He ducked from under her hands and insisted that he was okay. “Okay, if you are sure, but you let me know if you have a headache or need medicine.”

“Aw, don’t embarrass me, Umma Hana. I’m a big boy now.”

“Okay, but no more punching, young man.”

Sang Ki interrupted. “This sure is good bulgogi, honey.”

“Yes, it is Hana. It tastes familiar. Did you use Haneul’s recipe like she showed you?” Lily grinned at Hana.

“Yes, I did. Did I do it right, Umma Lily?”

“You certainly did, dear. I couldn’t have done better myself.” Hana beamed with

pride. It was so wonderful to have a mother who cared about her and complimented her. Hana had really missed her own parents since the plane crash.

“It’s a good thing that I still had it in the refrigerator before that cat came to visit.”

“It sure is, Hana. It’s really good.” Park complimented as he poked more bulgogi into his mouth with his chopsticks.

“Thank you. Don’t forget to use your napkin, dear.”

“Oh yeah.” Park gave a swipe of the napkin to his cheek.

“Everything is delicious, honey. Thank you.”

“Yes, thank you Umma Hana,” the group cried.

“Bulgogi is still one of my favorites.” Ronald rolled his eyes and rubbed his tummy. When he saw that everyone was watching, he winked. “I even like that turkey leg that the cat chewed on.” Hana looked up in horror and saw that several of the children looked worried. Then she noticed that Grandpa Ronald threw his head back and laughed. “It’s okay, honey. I know that you didn’t serve kitty leftovers to us. It really is delicious,” he reassured her.

“We really did throw the bad parts out.”

“We know. We know.”

“You really had Umma Hana going, Grandpa Ronald!” The group all had a good laugh at Hwan’s observation.

“Now tell me about how this ice cream came home with you, Grandpa Ronald.”

Hana tried to turn the tables on him with mock reprimand.

“We saw dat ice creem man. We wanted ice creem,” confessed Mia.

Grandpa Ronald grinned shyly and made his own confession. “We knew that it would ruin their meal if we bought ice cream right then, but I couldn’t stand it. I’m a sucker for these adorable little faces.”

“It’s true, honey. They looked at him expectantly and he melted. But the good news is that we can have pie a la mode!” Sang Ki spread his hands wide out with a flourish and flashed one of his own wonderful smiles at her.

Hana couldn’t help it once he did that, especially since that lock of black hair fell down on his forehead. She was a sucker for that cute face. For that matter, she understood how Grandpa Ronald could be bamboozled by all the children’s cute faces. They were quite dear after all. “Okay, okay. I give up. You are officially off the hook, Grandpa Ronald...and you too, you rascal.” She kissed Sang Ki’s forehead. “Now, does anybody have any room left for pie and ice cream?”

“You bet!”

“I cleaned my plate so I am ready. See?” Hwan held his plate up to show everyone. It was very clean. Hwan didn’t like his dessert to touch other food.

“Me too,” declared Yun even though there was still food on almost a quarter of his plate.

“You work on that food, Yun, while I serve the others. Pass me your plates, starting with Hwan since he finished first with such a clean plate.” Hana sliced her pumpkin pie while Lily added a spoonful of ice cream to each plate. “It sounds like everyone had a

good time at the zoo today.”

“We sure did!”

“It was fun!”

“It was a real adventure!”

“This pie is great, Umma Hana!” Joon’s eyes glowed with pleasure as he tried to voice his enthusiastic praise with a mouthful. “I love your pumpkin pie.”

“Me too.” Yoon’s face matched his twin brother’s with satisfaction.

“It’s even better with the ice cream.”

“Thank you, Appa Ronald.”

“It’s my favorite.”

“That’s what you say about everything, Sung.” The table erupted into a cascade of laughter at this before everyone returned to eating their own pumpkin pie. Conversation died down while everyone enjoyed their pie.

Hana looked around the table at her contented family. “Does anybody have anymore room left for yagkwa or shall we wait?” She knew that it was a favorite at the orphanage. She was not disappointed with their response.

“Oh boy!”

“I have room!”

Mia looked down and patted her tummy sadly. “No more room now.”

Ronald stood up and made an announcement. “I have a scientific way to make more room.” Somehow, he always had a knack for obtaining everyone’s attention. Every eye certainly was riveted on him now. “Everybody, stand up with me.” There were groans around the tables from a few people as they tried to pull themselves away from the table. “Now, jump up and down like this.” Ronald jumped straight up and down.

Some of the children, including Mia and Yun, obediently jumped up and down with him. Others cocked their heads in puzzlement, unsure whether to cooperate or not. A few kids looked around to see what everyone else was doing.

Hana could stand it no longer. Although she spoke words of gentle reproof, she laughed out loud. “Grandpa Ronald, don’t make us all laugh. We have full tummies.”

Ronald threw his head back and laughed. He was soon joined in laughter by the entire household.

“I knew it.”

“Yeah, there’s no way that could work.”

“I’m not full anymore,” admitted Yun in all seriousness. That sent the happy family into peals of laughter again.

“Good. I’m glad that you have more room for yagkwa now.” Hana stifled her laughter and brought the surprise dish out to the table. “Thank God that I had the yagkwa in the refrigerator still so that they were safe from that wild amur leopard cat.”

Ronald looked puzzled, but Lily explained that yagkwa was a dessert that was made of fried dough, flavored with sesame oil and ginger, and drenched in honey. “Children in Korea love them. My sister Haneul and I certainly did when we were children. I am looking forward to this.” Lily’s eyes twinkled in genuine anticipation.

“They are definitely a favorite in this house,” declared Sang Ki, his face matching Lily’s eagerness.

Ronald cocked his head and leaned down to examine them more closely. “They look like tiny bundt cakes with five domino dots in the middle. What is that liquid that those dots are sitting in?”

“That is honey. The shape is called a daisy wheel. I know because I helped Umma Hana make them,” announced Eun. She helped to hand the plates out to everyone.

Ronald held his plate up to examine it again, even looking underneath the plate. “Hmmm, very interesting and pretty.”

“What do you think you will find under that plate, Grandpa Ronald?” Jeong furrowed her eyebrows in perplexity.

“You have to eat it, Grandpa Ronald. That’s the fun part.”

This started a chant by the children, “Eat it! Eat it! Eat it!”

Ronald slowly took his fork and picked at the yagkwa as if he was afraid of it. “Are you sure?” The older gentleman delighted in teasing the children.

“Eat it,” they cried.

“Yes, Grandpa Ronald, please stop torturing the children and me and just try it,” agreed Hana. She really hoped that he liked it. It would please her very much to be able to bring pleasure to these two, special, surrogate parents who adopted her into their family so recently.

“I will say that it is a lovely golden brown color. Mmmm. This is absolutely delicious, Hana.” Ronald closed his lips and eyes in pleasure then broke into his familiar wide grin. “You have done a superb job, Hana. Thank you introducing me to another favorite Korean food.”

Ronald’s approval was the signal for everyone else to stop watching his antics and eat their own yagkwa.

“Yumm!”

“Happy tummy, Umma Hana,” cried Mia. Yun nodded his head with enthusiastic approval. He then tilted his head back and forth with delight, making happy noises.

“Thank you, Umma Hana,” shouted all the children and the adults joined in the chorus. This was followed by a stream of further compliments about the entire meal.

Hana felt a warm glow of delight. At least one of her plans for a perfect Christmas had gone well. *Thank You, God, for that.* It was a wonderful dinner.

6

After dinner, Lily’s mouth and eyes suddenly flew open. “Oh honey, we never brought our gifts in from the car.”

“You’re right, dear. Let me go do that now.” Grandpa Ronald hastened to find his car keys.

“We can help, Grandpa Ronald.” “Yeah, me too,” chimed in Yun.

Ronald pointed to three of the older boys and Ray, but tousled Yun's hair. "I think that we'll just keep those gifts a surprise for you, young man."

"Okay," Yun agreed reluctantly. "It was worth a try."

"Yeah, stay wit me, brudder." Mia tugged at his arm.

"We need your help inside now." Sang Ki whistled. "Calling all hands! Let's clear the table off and clean up the rest of the mess so that we have room for presents." The children scurried around the house cleaning as if they were in fast motion. It seemed that every child wanted fresh good deeds on Santa's mind just before the adults handed out the gifts.

The helpers returned in a minute with their arms laden with gifts and placed them under the tree. It now looked magnificent with so many gifts underneath it and all the remnants of damage gone.

Hana enjoyed the beautiful picture. She thought about taking a picture, but then remembered, "Oh, we better repair those other gifts too."

She and Lily and Sang Ki swept into the other room while Ronald and Ray and the children entertained each other. Hana was relieved that the presents were in as good a shape as she had guessed earlier. It was a good thing that the wild creature wasn't any heavier than it was and didn't stay under or inside the tree for very long.

Their repairs were interrupted by an emphatic knock at the door. What could that be? Good news, Hana hoped.

"What is it?" Sang Ki stuck his head out the door. In a moment, he returned with a grim look on his face. "Are you almost finished rewrapping all the gifts?"

"Yes, we are. What is the matter?"

"Eun just told me that they discovered another gift. It is the bracelet for Iseul and it was destroyed by the chaos earlier."

Hana's hand flew to her mouth. "Oh, no! What can we do? All the stores will be closed by now."

"I think that Eun has some ideas. Is it okay if I let her in now?"

"Yes, please." Hana and Lily double checked the gifts to ensure that no surprises would be given away and awaited the teenager.

"I'm sorry, but I just found this under the chair near the Christmas tree. I don't think that it can be repaired." She held out the mangled pieces of what had been a bracelet.

"It was so small that it must have been overlooked before. You're right. This can't be salvaged, but the stores are all closed now."

"I have an idea. I have some pretty beads that I found in the store the other day. I have a chain that I could let her have, but I don't know how to make it work." Eun showed them a half dozen loose beads on a chain and how they moved around. "I don't have enough beads to go all the way around."

Lily clapped her hands together and took the makeshift necklace. "I know just what to do, Eun. This is going to be wonderful. Give me a minute. Watch and I'll show you how to do it."

"Your Grandma Lily makes jewelry. She will know exactly how to fix a necklace for

Iseul.” Hana was relieved. She didn’t even have to do anything, but watch her new mother show her teen girl how to fix the problem. It sure was handy to have her around!

“Wait a moment. I’ll be right back.” Lily darted out of the room. In a moment, she returned and made sure that the door was shut tight. “I always carry a few baubles and tools with me. It is part of being a jewelry maker, you know.”

Lily took three beads off and inserted a larger, light blue bauble and then threaded the three beads back on the other side of it. She gave a few deft movements of her hands and all the beads stayed in the center where they belonged. She held the new necklace up to the light.

“Wow, they all look like they belong together.” Eun was smiling with amazement.

“Yes, they match very well.”

“This will make such a wonderful Christmas gift. It is even better than the bracelet I bought for Iseul. Thank you, Umma Lily.” Hana hugged her. “What would I ever do without you?”

“Let’s not worry about that, dear. Let’s just wrap this necklace and then carry all these gifts to the other room where our eager children await.”

Soon they returned to the living room with their own arm-loads of gifts and tucked them in beside the other presents. Hana had to admit that everything looked wonderful again now. It certainly did look like God had everything under control and was making something wonderful in spite of the mess that wild cat created. Actually, God was using that disaster itself to weave this splendid day. Incredible! She was glad for the children’s sake.

Hana and the others joined the rest of the adults in the living room. “I hope that you have all been having a good time together.”

“We certainly have! The children have all been telling us about themselves.” Ronald and Lily beamed with joy.

The children all agreed. “It’s great to have grandparents!”

Ronald took Hana by surprise and thrust a package into her hands. “We would like for you to open this gift from us first, dear. You’ll see why in a moment.”

Hana’s hands trembled as everyone clustered around her to watch her open the gift. She felt a leather bag inside and removed the rest of the wrapping paper to reveal a new camera bag. “Oh, Appa Ronald and Umma Lily, it is just beautiful. It will fit my camera perfectly.”

“I know. I conspired with Sang Ki and convinced him to bring your camera to me to test it out before we went to the zoo. You will find a new smart card already in the camera. It has a few pictures of the kids that I took at the zoo.” He winked at Hana. “I was even able to snap a few shots of the amur leopard cat and the ensuing chaos. Quite amusing, if I do say so myself.” He chuckled as he patted Hana on her shoulder.

Hana tugged his hand and pulled him down so that she could kiss him on the cheek and hug him. “Why you rascal! Thank you, Ronald. Those pictures will be an extra present and special because you took them for me. And I have a feeling that I could use a

larger smart card today!”

Sang Ki handed Hana her old camera bag, which was looking a little ragged after her worldwide travels. She cradled her fairly new camera and placed it inside her new camera bag with care. “It is just perfect! I will even have room for a couple of new lenses and filters now.”

“That’s my cue.” Ray handed her a small box, which contained a star filter and a diffusion filter.

“These are wonderful, Ray. Thank you.” Hana held up her new filters. “Look, children. This little piece of glass is called a filter and it goes on the end of my camera lens. It will make stars on the pictures. And this one will make things look soft.” Hana threaded the star filter on her lens and took pictures of the Christmas tree. “This will look great with those Christmas lights on. They will look like they are twinkling.”

“You can put the other filter on the end of this, Hana.” Lily handed her another small box.

Hana held her breath as she opened it. There inside, was a macro lens. She twisted it onto her camera body and it fit perfectly. She added the diffusion filter and snapped a picture of Lily. “Thank you, Lily! I have been wanting one of these. See what a beautiful portrait it makes of you with this nice soft effect?” She showed her new mother her picture in the digital viewfinder.

“Oooh, I like that. I want some makeup that will do that all the time.”

The group laughed.

“Okay. I am ready now. Everyone go get your stockings. You may open them now.” Hana and Sang Ki sat down as they crowd of kids swirled past them and retrieved their stockings. Hana swung her camera around and took snapshots of the children. Each stocking had a piece of fruit, candy, nuts, and a small toy, deck of cards, and a small puzzle or cassette tape inside. Hana was pleased that all the kids seemed to enjoy their stockings.

7

Hana put her arm through Sang Ki’s and whispered in his ear, “Do you think that it is time for the gifts, darling?”

Sang Ki nodded and motioned for her to do the honors.

Hana had rehearsed this moment in her mind many times as part of her perfect Christmas plan. She wanted her new surrogate parents and brother to feel welcome and proud of her and her new family. She wanted the children to honor her and her family. And she wanted to have a wonderful, loving Christmas with her new husband. “Sang Ki, Ray, would you both help me hand out the gifts, please?”

The men distributed the gifts to the children from Hana and Sang Ki. Each child had an item of clothing and a special gift that they would enjoy. The teens all received a new

mp3 player with ear buds.

“This is great! I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“They are brand new. They have just been released this year in Asia. These are some of the first mp3 players in the world, kids.”

“Appa Sang Ki worked hard to find these for you. He heard about them from a donor and we knew that that’s what you would want.”

“Thank you, Appa Sang Ki and Umma Hana!”

“Oooh, purty baby doll!” Mia held up a doll that was almost as big as she was and beamed with excitement. Then she tore her out of the package and held her close. She rocked back and forth and cooed to her new baby.

Hana heard several shouts when some of the boys discovered that they had new soccer balls. She congratulated herself that each one was a different color so that they wouldn’t fight over them.

“Mia, come see! I have a candy game.” Yun was thrilled with his new Candy Land game.

Hana couldn’t help but watch Jin to see how she liked her gifts. She felt like she had done a superb job selecting just the right items that the girl would love. It was easier for her to understand Jin. She was the child that was most like Hana had been when she was a child. She was not surprised when Jin opened the book first.

“Oh, Umma Hana, thank you! It is another Nancy Drew book! I have never read this one. Can I go to my room and read it now?” The usually quiet Jin fairly gushed with excitement now.

“Not right now, Jin. You still have other presents to open.”

“What is this? A detective kit? Really?” Jin actually squealed as she tore the rest of the wrapping paper off her last gift. “Thank you, thank you! I love it!” Jin, showing rare emotion, hugged Hana. “Now I can solve a mystery like you did, Umma Hana!”

Hana could hardly contain her own delight. It was very fulfilling to see Jin’s reaction and she was excited that Jin wanted to be like her. “We can look at it together later and find out how to use it.”

“That would be great, Hana!” Hana watched as Jin took out each item of the kit and examined it in detail. There was dusting powder and brush, fingerprint record cards, a stamp pad, and lifting tape as well as spy glasses, a secret marker, and a code book. Her careful perusal of the kit showed that Jin was going to be a good little detective.

“Let’s give the kids a little while to play with their new gifts. What do you think?” Hana lifted her face to get Sang Ki’s reaction and then looked at the other adults.

“That sounds like a wonderful idea, dear,” Lily agreed.

“Let’s relax and sit for a moment.” Ronald sank into the couch to emphasize his point.

“Children, you may all play with your new gifts for a little bit while we rest.” Sang Ki turned to Hana after calling to the kids. “Besides, this will give me an opportunity to give you your Christmas present, honey.”

A thrill went through Hana when she heard the love in his voice and saw it mirrored

in his eyes. She wanted so badly to respond with a long, warm kiss, but settled for a shorter version. "I'm so sorry, but I need to go get your gift too." The young couple retrieved their gifts.

"Here, Sang Ki. I hope that you like these." Hana handed her new husband a box that contained new running shoes. He was as excited as a little boy and put them on right away. He even ran in place to test them. It thrilled Hana to see his excitement.

"I love them! They are beautiful and fit perfectly. Let's go for a run again soon. Thank you honey." Sang Ki kissed his bride again.

"I would like that, honey."

"Now for your gift." Sang Ki handed Hana a small wrapped box with pretty blue curled ribbons on top. The ribbons actually dwarfed the tiny box.

Hana had a hard time opening the box because it was so small that it was covered with tape so it was hard to find a place to start. "You're really making me work for this gift, aren't you?" She gave her husband an impish grin.

"Of course. It is more fun that way." Sang Ki's playful grin matched her own.

Hana gasped when she saw a silver chain with a beautiful light blue stone in a floral setting. "It is gorgeous, Sang Ki! I love it! Can you help me put it on, please?" She turned around and held her long black hair up so that he could clasp the beautiful necklace behind her neck. "Where did you ever find such a beautiful stone and setting?"

"Did you forget that your new mother owns a jewelry store?" Sang Ki's eyes danced with merriment. "I remembered a necklace like this right after I proposed to you. Do you remember?"

She certainly did! That was such a fun time. "Of course I do. This is a wonderful gift, Sang Ki. And Umma Lily, you did a beautiful job. The setting is incredible. I love it! I love the fact that both of you collaborated on this. And I love you both!" She gave them a simultaneous hug.

"Turn it over." Ronald couldn't stand to be left out and could not wait for anyone else to tell her this.

Hana flipped it over with anticipation and discovered an inscription that read, "I will love you forever." "That is just beautiful, Sang Ki. And I will love you forever too!" The newlyweds embraced with a warm, lingering kiss. Hana hated to interrupt her reverie, but knew that there were many other gifts to open.

"Children, put your presents down for now. We still need to give gifts to Grandpa Ronald and Grandma Lily and Ray. Can you help me with that, please?"

"Uncle Ray, this is for you from us boys." The boys handed him a spherical package. Ray shook it as if he had no clue what the contents could be.

"Open it!"

"Okay, let's see what is in here." The wrapping paper fell off and revealed a soccer ball. "This is terrific, boys. How did you know that I play soccer?" He winked at Hana.

"Umma Hana told us. Will you show us some of your best moves?"

I would love to. We can do that tomorrow. That would be fun."

The girls huddled together as a unit and handed Ray their gift. “This is from the girls, Uncle Ray.”

He opened their gift and gave a wide grin. “How did you ever find a picture of David Beckham? He is the best soccer player ever!”

“The boys helped us with that part. Hyun is a soccer hero and Joon and Yoon really like to play too,” explained Iseul.

“And Iseul and Eun found the photo while they were shopping.” Sung exploded as she told this part of her exciting news. “We all agreed this was your gift.”

Kyung and Eun brought a large scroll and laid it on their grandparents’ laps. “This is from all of us kids. We all worked on it together.”

Ronald and Lily unrolled the scroll and Kyung and Eun each took an end and held it up so that they could look at it.

“Why, it’s a mural, dear.” Lily clapped her hands together and her eyes glowed with joy.

“You children have done a wonderful job on this. Come tell me about it.” Ronald pulled Mia onto his lap and put a hand on Yun’s shoulder. She pointed out her artwork.

“See my barrette? That’s how you can tell that it’s me.”

“I’m standing right beside Mia. This is me.” Yun pointed to himself. Each child tumbled over one another to show their art and picture of themselves. Several of the boys were playing soccer together. Never mind that each of them had a soccer ball.

“Why, it looks like the babies even painted, Lily. Look here.” Ronald pointed out hand prints and foot prints.

“We were almost in trouble over that one. Eun and Iseul had to scrub hard so that Umma Hana didn’t see the paint on their feet and hands.”

Hana was shocked. What clever children she had! How had they pulled this off and when? Everyone had a good laugh.

“We love it! Thank you, children! What a wonderful gift!”

“Let’s give Grandpa Ronald and Grandma Lily our gifts, dear.” Sang Ki retrieved their presents from under the tree and the young couple distributed them.

“What is this?” A gasp of delight escaped Lily. “I love it!”

“This took a lot of time, Hana. It is wonderful. You have done a superb job with this photo album.” Ronald turned the pages slowly and savored each picture. He was also a photographer and Hana was thrilled to see that he still enjoyed her work.

“Look, honey, they even put pictures of their wedding in here.”

“I had them make two copies when I developed them so that I could share them with you all. I made a wedding album for us to keep too. I still have a few more pictures to put in ours after Christmas. When can look at that when you have time too.”

“We would love to see your wedding album. Oh look, there is Mia as the flower girl. Isn’t she darling?”

“Yes, she is. And there is her best friend Yun as the ring bearer. Isn’t he handsome? They did such a nice job.”

“We were very proud of them,” Sang Ki agreed.

“Keep going Grandpa Ronald and Grandma Lily. I’m in there too.” Jeong could hardly contain her impatience and jumped up and down.

“Me too. We’re all in there.”

“And we helped with the photo album.”

“Yeah, Umma Hana took the pictures, but we all helped her know how to put them on the page.”

We told her what to say.” Gyeong stuck his chest out in pride over their important contribution.

Hana nodded. “It’s true. This was a group effort. We all had a lot of fun thinking of you and making this for you, didn’t we kids?”

“We sure did.”

“You could not have given us a gift that we would have treasured any more than this.” Lily flipped through the pages for a moment as a preview and then they started where they had left off for a more careful review of the photos.

The entire household clustered around to watch Grandpa Ronald and Grandma Lily and Ray look through their new photo album. Occasionally, one of the children would point out their contribution or tell the story behind a picture.

“It looks like it’s our turn, Mother,” Ronald picked up some gifts for the children and handed them to her. “Now, we would like to give our gifts to all of you.” Ronald and Lily stood up as one unit and began to hand presents out to the children. Ray commandeered Sang Ki and Kyung and Park and they disappeared outside.

“Where are they going?”

“I thought they were getting our presents.”

“These are for everyone.” Ronald and Lily handed the children about a dozen gifts. The kids opened several puzzles, crafts, and games.

“What a wonderful idea! The children will have fun playing with these all year. Thank you, Appa Ronald and Umma Lily.”

“Thank you, Grandpa Ronald and Grandma Lily!”

“Here, this is for you.”

“And here’s one for you and you.” Ronald and Lily distributed flat boxes with ribbons to each child and to Hana. They left boxes for Kyung and Park and Sang Ki where they had been sitting as well. The children were all thankful and pleased for new clothes.

“That’s my favorite color.”

“Oh, look, it’s a Tare Panda.”

“Mine has Hello Kitty.”

Jin unwrapped a large package and found a nice red and white checkered blouse and cute red newsboy cap. “How cute!”

Kyung and Park returned long enough to open presents before disappearing outside again. Kyung held up a beautiful blue sweater with a light blue shirt and handsome blue tie. He choked up as he tried to thank his grandparents. “I can really use these and they

look great. Thank you.”

“We thought that you could use clothes that are more grownup since you are close to completing your schoolwork. We are glad that you like them.”

Kyung and Park excused themselves and went outside again.

“How did you know my size?”

“How did you know that I wanted something thing like this?”

“Your Umma Hana helped us with your sizes and favorite colors and styles. If anything doesn’t fit, we can exchange it. Merry Christmas, children!” Lily’s cheeks and eyes brightened with excitement.

Thank you, Grandma Lily and Grandpa Ronald!”

“Make room,” called the men and teens as they filed through the door with two huge gifts. The teens were carrying a flat box about four inches deep and about twenty inches by about three and a half feet long. It was wrapped in blue Christmas paper with wreaths on it and a bow that was about a foot in diameter. Ronald directed them to put in a corner. He gave Hana a signal so that she would know where to be to take great shots of this special gift.

Hana positioned herself where Ronald had indicated. She appreciated his flair for the dramatic as all the kids gasped and exclaimed, “Wow! Who is that for?”

“This is for all the boys. Why don’t you come open it up, guys, and see what’s inside?” The boys all crowded around and began to unwrap the box together. Hana began to shoot pictures. Each boy took a piece of paper and pulled until the contents were revealed. Shouts then erupted.

“Wow, it’s a train set!”

“Look at all those cars!”

“It says it’s is to scale too!”

“Thank you! This is the best present in all the world!”

Ray and Sang Ki carried an enormous box that was about two and a half feet wide and the same length, but much deeper, about eighteen inches as a matter of fact. They even had trouble getting it through the front door. They set it in the corner between the train set and the Christmas tree.

Hana knew this time that this would be a special gift for the girls and positioned herself so that she could take photos of the girls with the huge box in the background.

“Girls, this gift is for all of you,” Lily drew near, her excitement evident from her twinkling eyes and rosy cheeks. “Let’s see what’s in here.” The girls were just as excited, but Eun made sure that everyone, including Mia had a piece of the wrapping paper before they began to unwrap their big gift.

Squeals of delight arose from the girls when they saw a Victorian style doll house with white trim.

“I love this kind of house!”

“It’s so pretty!”

“Look it even has a bay window!”

“What does it look like on the other side?”

Ray and Sang Ki turn the doll house so that everyone could see the back side and see inside the house. There were two stories of empty rooms. The girls had fun counting and recounting. They agreed that there were nine rooms.

Hana had a hard time taking pictures because she kept putting her camera down to look in astonishment at the beautiful house. Her jaw dropped open and then she would remember to shoot some more photos.

Ray handed the girls an extra box. “This gift is from me and goes with the doll house.”

The volume in the room definitely went up when the girls discovered all sorts of beautiful furniture to decorate their new doll house with.

“Uncle Ray, Grandpa Ronald, and Grandma Lily, it is so beautiful! We love it! Thank you!” The girls smothered their new family members in hugs and kisses. Hana was delighted with the genuine love between all of her new family members.

Ray handed the boys an extra box, which quickly disclosed some trees, a couple of houses, and a few small figurines for the train set.

“Yeah, thank you, Grandpa Ronald, and Grandma Lily, and Ray! This is the best present ever!” The boys piled on to hug them. They were so exuberant that the girls scattered and let them take their own turn hugging. Ki even got stepped on in the fray, but Hyun apologized.

“This gift is for you Hana and Sang Ki, but I think that the children will all enjoy it as well.” Ronald pushed a large box to the newlyweds.

Ray handed them a small box wrapped in green foil with a red bow. “These go with that gift.”

Hana and Sang Ki looked at each other in bewilderment and started to open the big box together. Sang Ki saw its contents first. “Look, Hana, it is a stereo system. Say, that is terrific!”

“You are right. The kids will love this too.” Hana was delighted at such a useful, thoughtful gift. She opened the small box and showed her beloved husband that there were several CD’s in a variety of musical styles, including a Christmas CD and a CD of Disney stories. “These are wonderful gifts!”

The young couple hugged their new family. “Thank you all.”

Sang Ki and Ronald and Ray set the new stereo up and popped in the Christmas CD. It suddenly seemed more festive to Hana. This was more like the Christmas that she had desired.

“Well, that was exciting! I’m not sure how these children will ever sleep after this.”

“Wait a minute. I see two more gifts under the tree.” Sang Ki pointed.

“I’ll get them!” Hwan ducked under the Christmas tree and retrieved the other gifts that had slipped behind the tree. He brought them to Sang Ki.

“That’s right. We have more gifts for you.” Sang Ki handed the wayward present to

Ronald and Lily while Hana got into position on one knee with her camera ready for a shot when they opened the gift.

“What could this be?” Lily fumbled with the bow.

“Here, let me help, Mother.” Ronald tore into the wrapping paper like a little child.

“Look, it is a picture of us holding our padlock ornament at Seoul Tower.”

“I didn’t know that you took that. You did another nice job with that photo, Hana. This is a wonderful gift. Wait, what is this? There is another box here. I think that you should open this gift, Lily.”

Lily opened the little box.

8

“Oh look, Ronald. It is shaped like the Christmas ornament that you gave to me in Gapyeong so many years ago.” Lily held up the gift from Hana and Sang Ki. They had found a colorful, fragile version of their original wooden ornament.

“Yes it is. That is just like the ornaments that we had when I was a little boy,” Ronald said with joy. He took it from her hand and held it up so that everyone could see it sparkle in the light. He spoke softly, “I remember when I gave it to you, Myeong. Do you?”

Hana loved the look of intense love that showed on Umma Lily’s face as she lifted it to Appa Ronald. “I sure do, Denny, my love.”

The elderly lovers were interrupted from their reverie by shouts from the children. “Tell us the story!”

“Yes, please.”

“What did you call each other and why?”

“We were known as Denny and Myeong in those days, but that is a story for another day.”

The two lovers looked at each other and, without a word, decided who would speak first.

“I bought a wooden ornament just like this one from a boy in Seoul who was just about your age, Yun.” Ronald tousled Yun’s hair just as he had done with the dirty little urchin from whom he had purchased the ornament during the Korean War. “I was on leave that day and wanted to get away from the devastation of the war so I hiked out of town. I found myself in Kapyong.”

Jin interrupted, “It’s called Gapyeong-gun nowadays. We learned that in school the other day.”

“That’s right, Jin. When I arrived, I heard shouting. What do you think it was about?” He stopped and looked with love and amusement at his war bride and then at the children, who had never heard any of their stories.

“Was it more soldiers?”

“It was a party,” whispered Mia, delighted at her own suggestion.

“Naw, it was war. It wouldn’t be a party,” explained Park. “It was probably General MacArthur shouting. It was during the Korean War, wasn’t it, Grandpa Ronald?”

“Yes, it was, Park. You are all wrong, though, about the shouting.”

Lily giggled. “It was me! I was in a tree.”

The children gasped at this confession. “What were you doing in a tree, Grandma Lily?”

“You didn’t tell me this part of the story, Umma Lily.” Hana grinned.

“Well, we were quite busy worrying about Ronald’s health at that time, if you recall. We always intended to tell you.” Lily reassured her before continuing her story. “My nephew, Yong Sun, had kicked his soccer ball and it was stuck in the tree. I climbed up there to get it for him.” Hana noticed that Lily took obvious pleasure in surprising the children and causing their eyes to grow wider. She marveled that her new parents were wonderful storytellers. “That ball was very stubborn, though, and when I kicked it, I fell out of the tree.”

“And right into my arms! She is still beautiful, isn’t she?” Ronald looked at the children for a moment to measure the impact of his words and then shifted his focus as he gazed into her eyes with delight.

“Oh stop, silly. I did fall into his arms, though. I was embarrassed. I was afraid that he could see that I thought he was very handsome. So I asked him to lunch and then showed him around my village.”

“What about the ornament?”

“I showed her the wooden ornament that I had just bought. She didn’t know what it was.”

“So he showed me.”

“What do you mean ‘showed you.’”

“Yeah,” mused the kids.

Lily stood up and pretended to be Ronald as a young soldier. Your Grandpa Ronald held his wooden ornament up to a nearby tree.” Ronald handed her the colorful ornament so that she could act it out. “He tried to explain Christmas to me, but I just didn’t understand. I had never heard of Christmas before.” The children gasped in dismay. Lily held her other hand out to Mia and brought her to an imaginary tree. Lily then held the ornament up to a tree branch that Mia could reach. “When he saw that I understood, he told me about the colored lights that Americans put on their Christmas trees.”

Lily stopped and held her hands out to all the children. “Follow me. Help me hold these Christmas lights so they don’t fall on the ground and break.” The children lined up and joined into the imaginary tale. Lily made a big deal of leading the children in a circle around that imaginary tree and had the older children hold the strand of lights up high as they got near the top of the tree. She stopped and asked the smaller children, “What do you do next? Who knows?”

“Plug the lights in,” shouted Yun and Hyun.

“Good. Come help me plug them into this wall right here.” Lily put her hands against

an imaginary wall to define its location for the children. Yun and Hyun both came forward with excitement and took the plug from her hands and plugged it into the wall. “Great job, children. You can all go and sit down now.”

“I could see that your Grandma Lily really understood. She was very excited now and wanted to know more about Christmas. That’s when I told her about gifts and Christmas lunch and then sang a Christmas song for her.”

“What did you sing, Grandpa Ronald?”

“It was *Away in a Manger*, wasn’t it Myeong?”

“It was. You explained to me that the baby in the manger was the baby Jesus, the Son of God, who came to show all people how much He loves them. I was so surprised when Denny told me this. Do you children know the song?”

“A little.”

“Hana sang it to us the other day,” Jeong smiled at Hana. It warmed her heart to see her love and to watch her new parents and brother interacting with her new husband and their orphans. How she loved them all!

“Good. Why don’t we all try it together?”

Away in a manger,
No crib for His bed,
The little Lord Jesus
Laid down His sweet head.

The stars in the sky
Look down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus
Asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing.
The poor Baby wakes
But little Lord Jesus,
No crying He makes.

I love Thee, Lord Jesus.
Look down from the sky
And stay by my side
'Til morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus.
I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever
And love me, I pray.

Bless all the dear children
 In Thy tender care
 And take us to heaven
 To live with Thee there.

“What did you do next?”

“Well,” Lily widened her eyes and drew the word out to evoke more excitement from the children. “He took me on a sleigh ride!”

“What’s that, Grandma Lily,” Mia asked in breathless wonder.

“Show them, Denny.” Hana noticed that Ronald and Lily always lapsed into their names from when they were younger whenever they talked about that earlier time.

“Well, come here and I will show you children. Come help me Ray and Sang Ki. We will have three sleighs today.” Ronald pointed to the locations for each sleigh and Ray and Sang Ki stood there. “A sleigh is like a pretty, big carriage that carries people in the winter. It has long metal runners instead of wheels so that it can cut through snow sort of like skis.”

“Oh!”

Hana knew that all the children didn’t understand completely, but thought that it was brilliant of Ronald to use skis to help them comprehend.

“Each sleigh has a big, strong horse that will pull it.” He proceeded to lift Mia and the other young children into the sleigh. Ray and Sang Ki helped to lift other children into their imaginary sleighs and the larger children mimicked Lily and Hana as they stepped up into their sleighs.

Ronald stepped into his sleigh and took the reins and shook them to make the horses go. “Giddyup. That means go,” he explained to the children. Ray and Sang Ki followed his lead. Ronald shook the reins up and down and looked back at the children. “Can you feel the cold wind against your face, kids?” Many of the children nodded their heads in excitement.

“Ooh! It’s cold.”

“There are blankets in each of your sleighs. Put them over your laps so you are not so cold. That’s right. One of the most fun things about a sleigh is that there are bells that jingle when the horses run. Americans have a fun song about that called *Jingle Bells*.”

Ronald and Lily and Hana broke into song, “Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way. Oh what fun it is to ride in a one horse open sleigh. Hey!”

“Isn’t hay what you feed the horses? How can they eat while they are pulling the sleigh, Grandpa Ronald?”

The adults chuckled and waited for him to explain. “You are correct, Gyeong. Horses eat h-a-y. This is h-e-y, which is like a fun shout. Let’s try it together.” He held his hands up and then signaled them to shout, “Hey!” They practiced it several times.

“Hey!” All the children chimed in at that point with gusto. As the adults repeated the song several times, the children joined in more, but they always shouted, “Hey!” Hana pointed to Mia and Yun every time and enjoyed their excitement as they cried, “Hey!”

Ronald bent down and kissed Lily tenderly. Hana was delighted when Sang Ki leaned down and kissed her as well. They stopped their kiss abruptly as the children reacted, uncomfortable with more than a brief kiss.

“Oooh! Look!”

“Yuck! Why’d you have to ruin everything?”

“That’s so romantic!”

“Okay, okay. That’s enough.” Sang Ki grinned at the children.

“Where are we going next?”

Hana began to feel like the children would be too excited to go to sleep. Just then, Ronald reined in his horse. “We are almost home now. Whoa.” Sang Ki and Ray were joined by the children, especially the boys, as they all told their horses, “Whoa.”

“That’s it, kids. Now you have been on a sleigh ride. Let me help you out of the sleigh now so that you don’t trip.” Each man began to unload his sleigh.

Hana was relieved. “Let’s all go sit down in the living room and calm down now.”

9

“Would this be a good time to take a look at those pictures that you and I took?”

Ronald’s eyes glowed as he asked Hana.

“What a great idea! Why don’t Kyung and I set them up on the TV so that we can all see them?” Hana handed her camera to Sang Ki and he found the proper cord. He and Kyung had good teamwork to turn the TV on and put it on the correct channel and plug the camera into the right spot on the back of the TV.

“Okay, everyone needs to pick up wrapping paper and put your clothes away in your rooms before we see pictures. Hurry.” Hana guided the little ones and helped them with their gifts. Soon the living room looked orderly again so that there would be room for everyone.

Everyone gathered around and the smallest children sat on the floor. The middle kids leaned back against the adults or held little ones on their laps. Mia claimed a spot between Grandpa Ronald and Grandma Lily while Yun sat next to her on their grandfather’s lap. Hana curled up next to her husband. She and Sang Ki each had a baby in their arms. Hana and the household all squealed with delight to see the amur leopard cat tearing around the house with everyone in pursuit and creating havoc. There were hoots and howls and peals of laughter at her disastrous antics. Hana was thrilled to see the wild cat finally at home in a nice pen with trees and water (and another amur leopard cat) in the zoo.

“Those are wonderful, Appa Ronald! It is so nice to have pictures to remember that fiasco.” She made a silly frowning face at him. “No, really. It does look pretty funny now that it is over and we will enjoy those memories for many years to come. Thank you.”

Hana proudly displayed her own photos of the children opening their presents and playing with them. The children loved seeing themselves and pointing out funny things

in the pictures. Hana had poignant shots of Ronald and Lily and Ray as well. She even had one of Sang Ki making a funny face to show off for the camera. The family enjoyed every minute of the photos.

“I think that you are getting even better with your photography, Hana.”

Hana blushed at Ronald’s compliment. “It is those new filters and the new lens and camera bag, I’m sure.”

“Why don’t we put some Christmas music on our new CD player and let you all play with your new games and toys again?” Sang Ki was interrupted by disapproving glances from the teens. He quickly added, “And your other gifts.”

This suggestion was received with cheers and soon the children all were playing contentedly with their gifts. The adults settled on the couch and nearby chairs to chat.

“Would anybody like hot tea or hot chocolate or maybe hot cider?” The adults gave their preferences and Lily offered to help. Soon they were able to enjoy uninterrupted time together.

“So how have things been going in Seattle?” Hana and Sang Ki were eager to hear about Ronald and Lily and Ray and their adjustments.

“The store is up and running already. We plan to add a few new pieces this next year. I was inspired by returning to South Korea.”

“And the restaurant will be open for business by the end of January as well. We decided that it would be better to wait until we returned to open. We have already had a lot of interest in it though.” Ray filled them in on his business plans and how he would change the web site.

Lily said to Ronald, “Christmas *is* a much bigger celebration than the Dano Festival in Korea.”

“Yes, it has been a big day.”

“It feels good to sit down and just relax, doesn’t it?”

Hana watched her wonderful children as they enjoyed the gifts that she and the others had picked out for them. She was so glad that they liked them. She had spent a lot of time and put a lot of thought into just the right gift for each child.

“Come play Candy Land with me Mia,” pleaded Yun.

“I want to play with my new dolly, Yun.”

Yun held Mia’s hand and pleaded with his best friend. “Please play one game with me, Mia. Look, we can let your new dolly play too. Have her sit in your lap and you can play for her. See? It has candy all over the board, Mia. You love candy.”

Hana watched in fascination as Yun’s logic and acceptance of Mia’s new doll began to persuade her. Once she knew that she could still play with her doll, she was almost convinced. She could not resist when Yun pointed out all the candy. The adorable toddler sat beside Yun and made sure that her doll was comfortable in her lap. Yun handed her a game piece for her doll too.

“You play game too, Dolly.” Mia swiped at the spinner and placed the game pieces for her and for her doll on the colorful candy board.

Hana was satisfied that her two loving preschoolers were content to play Candy

Land. She turned her attention to the rest of the children. Each of the teens was wearing earbuds and listening to music on their new mp3 players. Nearby, Jin was curled up in a chair reading her Nancy Drew book. She had her detective kit right beside her. Every once in a while, she stopped and looked through the magnifying glass or studied the thumbprint she had made. Sung and Jeong were playing with their new Barbie dolls. At a table nearby, Park and Kyung were learning to play chess. A few others gathered around a table to put together one of the puzzles.

Hana looked at the opposite corner. Several of the boys put the train tracks together. Joon, Yoon, Gyeong, and Hyun debated what the configuration should be. Hwan, the oldest in the group, took the train cars out and connected them together onto the tracks once a length was finished. They were having such a good time together. It was very generous of Ronald and Lily and Ray to bring such a nice gift for the boys.

Hana was just as delighted that the girls had gathered in another corner where Ray had set their new dollhouse. Eun carefully took out each piece of furniture and figurine and handed them to the girls, making sure that each girl received the same number of items. The girls oohed and aahed over their treasures and discussed where to place them inside the dollhouse.

The pleasant hum of happy children's voices was broken by an angry voice.

"Somebody took my game piece!" It was Yun. That sounded like trouble.

"I didn't do it," insisted Hyun and others chimed in.

"Well, the green playing piece is missing."

"It's okay, buddy. Let's not think the worst of other people. Let's just take a look around and see if there is another reason your game piece is missing, Yun." Ray's calm manner and logical thinking defused the situation.

In a moment, Joon cried, "I found it! It was just under the corner of the couch." He held the green piece up so all could see it and then handed it to Yun.

"Thanks, Joon. I guess I was wrong about somebody taking it." Yun hung his head.

"It's okay." Hana was glad to hear Gyeong console Yun. Gyeong had a bit of a quick temper. It was nice to hear him forgive instead. "I'm glad that you found it. Can I play?"

"Sure." Soon the children were playing happily together again.

Hana sank back into Sang Ki's arm that was on the back of the couch and smiled. This was so nice and relaxing. She sipped hot tea with the other adults and they discussed the events of the day.

Hana looked around and surveyed her new family. Truly this was a most perfect Christmas. It was far more wonderful and exciting than anything that she could have planned. Once again, she was reminded that God could take anything and use it for good and to bless her and others. She laughed under her breath as she thought of how controlling and self-centered her own plans had been.

"What are you laughing about?" Hana came to as she saw that Ronald and Lily and Ray and Sang Ki were all waiting for an answer.

"Oh, I was just so happy that God's plans are so much better than my plans. I was

enjoying the perfect Christmas that God had planned for us today. I am so happy to have my wonderful new family all together for this most interesting,” she paused and gave a significant look to the adults before continuing with a genuine smile, “and wonderful and perfect day.”

Hana leaned back into Sang Ki’s shoulder again. *I should have known that God could redeem this day. After all, hadn’t I just learned that lesson?* She took comfort in the thought and sent her love to God in her heart. How she loved Him and all of her dear loved ones! “Merry Christmas, Jesus.” Sang Ki squeezed her hand at her whispered love. Hana smiled at her loving husband and then called out, “Merry Christmas family! I love you all!”

“Merry Christmas!”

-The End-

Hana’s Perfect Christmas Plans

Glossary

Umma - Korean word for mom is pronounced oh-ma

Appa - Korean word for dad is pronounced like the a in ap(ple) and like pa, the English word for dad

Gapyeong-gun - town northeast of Seoul was Kapyong during the Korean War

Bulgogi - one of Korea's most popular dishes consisting of grilled marinated beef

Yagkwa - fried Korean pastry dessert flavored with sesame oil and ginger and drenched in honey

Kimchi - traditional fermented Korean side dish made of vegetables with a variety of seasonings

Hana's Perfect Christmas Plans

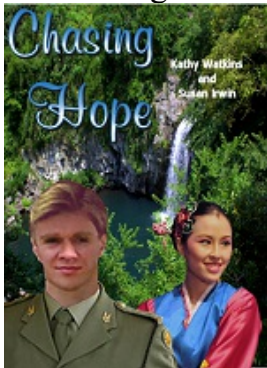
List of People at Orphanage

Name	Gender	Age	
Hana	Wife	20-22	
Sang Ki	Husband	24-26	
Kyung	Oldest boy		16
Eun	Oldest girl	15	
Park	Boy	14	

Hwan	Boy	13
Iseul	Girl	12
Ki	Girl	11 1/2
Jin	Girl	9
Sung	Girl	10
Jeong	Girl	8
Joon	Twin boy	10
Yoon	Twin boy	10
Gyeong	Boy	9
Hyun	Boy	8
Yun	Boy	5
Mia	Girl	3
Seung	Girl	1
Gi	Boy	Baby
Sang	Girl	Baby

Thank you for your time! We hope that you enjoyed our short story.

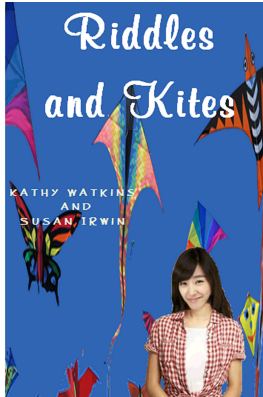
If you liked *Hana's Perfect Christmas Plans*, please order *Chasing Hope* where you can discover how Hana and Sang Ki met, how she became a surrogate daughter, how she embarks on a global adventure, what mystery she solved, and so much more.



Chasing Hope

We are currently working on a sequel to *Chasing Hope*.

Find out more about the characters you have come to know and love.



Riddles and Kites

Hana is a newlywed who juggles a new marriage, 20 orphans, a drug lord, and solves another mystery. Her life falls apart when her brother's kidnapper comes to work at their orphanage.

You can find out about our latest releases at:

<http://www.JoyousAdventuresInWriting.com/books>

As a reader of *Chasing Hope*, you will have access to special content. You can also sign up to be a beta reader and subscribe to be the first to know about our latest books.