

ANNE SIBLEY O'BRIEN

IN THE  
**SHADOW**  
OF THE  
**SUN**



ARTHUR A. LEVINE BOOKS

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Map by Jim McMahon

# CHAPTER 1

## OCTOBER 1

The scraping of a door jolted Mia from sleep.

*Click.* The door of the next room closed. Dad and Simon's room.

She reached for her watch and pressed the button to light it. 12:21 a.m.

Mia slipped from her bed to the door, cracking it open without a sound. It took a second for her eyes to adjust to the corridor's dim light. A dark form crept along, halfway down the hotel hallway. She squinted, trying to focus. It looked like . . . Dad?

She started to call out, then caught herself. Her father was moving funny, a little hunched over. He was sneaking down the corridor like he didn't want anyone to see or hear him. It was Dad, wasn't it? Yes, there was his old brown corduroy jacket as he passed under a lamp. He disappeared through the door that led to the stairway.

The *stairs*? Their rooms were on the fifteenth floor.

She stepped back, pulled her door closed, and leaned

against it, tugging on her lip. Her skin had that prickly feeling — *here comes trouble*.

It didn't make any sense for Dad to sneak around the hotel in the middle of the night. They were here on vacation. Dad was just showing them the country where he sometimes worked. But even if he'd been on a work trip, she couldn't imagine that would involve prowling around the hotel at 12:21 a.m.

She could knock on their door and try to wake up Simon. No, that was hopeless. He was taking sleeping pills to get over jet lag. If she did manage to wake him up, he'd just yell at her, then turn over and go back to sleep. She wished Mom were here, sharing the room with Mia as planned.

Maybe Dad was just going down to the lobby for a drink. If she followed, she could sit with him and talk like they did at home sometimes, just the two of them in the dark.

She grabbed a sweatshirt from her open suitcase, yanked it on over her pajamas, and wedged her feet into her sneakers. Grabbing her room key from the bedside table, she eased the door open again, slipped through, and carefully, carefully, let it close behind her.

She looked both ways down the hotel corridor before darting to the elevator. . . . But Dad had used the stairs. If he was trying to be quiet, she wouldn't be helping by activating the lights, sounds, and movement of the elevator.

She opened the stairway door and slipped inside. A dark tunnel plummeted down, down, down, with only occasional pinpricks of light. Clearly, the hotel did not expect their guests to creep down the stairs before dawn. Mia grabbed hold of the railing so she wouldn't miss a step in the gloom.

Maybe Dad was just going to take a walk. He was having a harder time with jet lag than Simon and Mia — because he

was older, he said — even though they'd stopped in Beijing for three nights on the way, and even though he took trips like this all the time. He might have gone to get some fresh air.

But he couldn't just walk out of the hotel; that was one of the things on the tour company's *What Not to Do* list. She kept coming back to how Dad had looked. As if he didn't want anybody to know he was in the hall.

Nighttime activities that had to be hidden seemed even more dangerous.

She started down again. She hadn't thought to count the floors when she began; had she passed by four landings or five? She realized now that she had no way of knowing if Dad had just gone to another floor, to someone else's room.

She stopped again. Maybe she should just turn around and go back to her room. But she didn't know what floor she was on, so she couldn't count her way back up to the fifteenth. They must have been marked with numbers somewhere, but it was really hard to see in the dark.

This was all a terrible idea. She never did stuff like this, jumping in without a plan. Her brother was the one who acted first, thought later. Mia was careful. And right now, here, stuck in a dark stairwell in a strange hotel in a foreign country, she couldn't think of a better plan than being wherever Dad was. She might as well find him.

It seemed as if she had been moving endlessly downward when she noticed she could see a little better. The light was gradually increasing in the stairwell. The door on the landing below her had a glowing window. It must be the lobby.

Mia stood on tiptoes to peer through the glass in the door. All the glittery chandeliers were turned off. The wide

room was lit by only a few lamps attached to pillars. The part she could see looked deserted.

She pushed open the heavy door and slipped through, stepping into the shadow of a pillar to scan the area. Down a far corridor, lights and faint music came from the hotel bar. But no one was in sight in the open lobby area, except a clerk behind the reception desk, who was bent over some work, not looking in her direction.

*Okay, Mia, now what?* She'd gotten all the way down here, but she didn't actually have a plan. Except to be where Dad was. To make herself feel safer. And — somehow — to keep him safe. That seemed kind of ridiculous now.

To her left, a huge framed painting hung on the wall. Kim Il-sung, standing with his son, Kim Jong-il, on top of a mountain. The first two dictators of North Korea, both dead now. Though most of the lobby was darkened, a spotlight was directed on the painting, illuminating the faces of the two men. They were smiling, but here in the hotel lobby in the middle of the night, it felt to Mia as if they were watching her.

Mia shivered. The idea of being watched made her want to crawl into a hole. And if people were observing her, then if what Dad was doing was secret, she might actually put him in danger. But she couldn't stand the idea of going back to her room without finding him. She pressed herself against the pillar, paralyzed with indecision, for long minutes.

Then she heard a door opening. Mia swiveled around the side of the pillar in time to see two figures moving through a side door leading into the lobby. As they passed near one of the lamps, she saw it was her father, with a Korean man. Dad had been outside! But he was safe for now, and the two men were coming in her direction. She had to disappear,

fast. She lurched for the door to the stairwell and fled upward. She took the stairs two by two, remembering to count floors this time, until she had to stop to catch her breath.

A door closed below her. She kept moving again, as fast as she could pull herself up, step after step after step. Fifth floor, seventh floor, tenth floor. She was dragging now, but she had to beat her father back to their rooms. That other man could still be with him. Or Dad might be alone, but she didn't want him to know that she'd followed him when it seemed clear he hadn't wanted to be seen.

Gasping, thighs burning, she finally reached the fifteenth floor. She yanked open the door with what felt like her last strength and jogged down the corridor to her room.

Once inside, she slid the door closed, quietly, quietly, and leaned against it, panting. She'd done it. Now she just had to stand here until she could breathe again, and wait for Dad's door to close.

Mia reached over automatically to flip the wall switch. Everything was weirdly vintage in her room, like a set from one of those '70s sitcom reruns Mom liked to watch. But instead of Brady Bunch innocent, it all looked kind of sinister. Especially in the middle of the night with Dad acting strange.

She thought of the portraits in the lobby, her feeling of being watched. Could there be cameras behind the pictures? Perhaps there were cameras in the rooms too. The tour group pamphlet had mentioned it as a rumor. She sat heavily on the edge of the bed, trying to look as if it was just jet lag that had woken her to leave her room for a stroll. She kicked off her sneakers and collapsed back on the bedspread, pulling the chain holding her locket out from under her

sweatshirt, rubbing the pendant between her thumb and finger. With her other hand she picked up her guidebook. But none of what she needed now would be found in its maps and instructions.

She tossed the book next to her on the bed and picked up her phone, which was useless. Dad said they could survive without their phone connections for five days — one more reason Simon was mad. But even if she could text Alicia and Jess, they were on the other side of the planet, where it was still yesterday.

Ages later, there was another scrape. She sat up, straining to hear. Definitely Dad and Simon's door. Then the reassuring click. So Dad — *It had to be Dad, didn't it?* — was safe. For now.

But they were still in North Korea, and she had no idea what was going on with her father, or her brother, or this crazy country. She switched off the lamp and burrowed under the covers.