Adopted

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AMY SCOTT

Adopted
or: How I Learned to Stop
Worrying and Love the Tears

Scene 1: Take 1

It was September and it was hot. The sun melted the sky into waxy rounds. He looked up and thought he could peel it back to reveal black space freckled with Formica stars. Instead, he let his limbs hang in the viscous water. She paddled around him; he watched droplets flick from her pointed toes, perfect, even with the web that fanned between her left foot’s hallux and second toe. He was happy treading water near her untamable limbs, watching her tongue (that spoke less than no English) push salt water away from her throat. Her smile carried him softly.
She had a Korean name that he couldn’t quite pronounce. When she said it, the vowels and consonants reflected her coffee-bright eyes, her swishing black hair, her strong white teeth. He wanted to taste her name so he licked her lips—“Hah-Null-kuh-yawn”—and she fed her name back to him—“Ha-nyuhl-Kwayn”—forgiving his butchered intonation because he was a smiling, blonde, nineteen-year-old soldier abroad for the first time. The waves ran into the shore with a startled hiss and ran back to meet them like hundreds of feet hopping across hot coals. They batted the mist away, laughing.

Cut.

I’ve got it all wrong. It couldn’t have been that easy, their first rendezvous. I’m forgetting Cold War politics and North Korea/South Korea angst. Remember? It would have been late 1983, right in the middle of the “traumatic chain of crises,” as scholar Chae-Jin Lee writes, that led up to the National Assembly elections. Remember.

Scene 1: Take 2

October 1 in Seoul, a month after Korean Air Lines Flight 007 tumbled, burning, out of the sky. October 1, a month after 268 passengers and crew plus U.S. Congressman Lawrence McDonald departed from Kennedy Airport. After their plane cut too far across the Kamchatka Peninsula, violated too much Soviet airspace, and forced Soviet jet interceptors to shoot the plane down. No one survived.

October 1, eight days before a bomb exploded in Rangoon. Twenty-one people were killed including Korean foreign minister Lee Bum Suk, deputy prime minister Suh Suk Joo, and minister of commerce and industry Kim Dong Whie. President Chun Doo Whan, the bomb’s target,
survived because his car got caught in traffic. His survival meant avoiding Korean War II.

What does this mean for my closed-adoption (thus unknown) biological parents? A million scenes that vary from overblown romance to sad, scary, and sadder. When I lie awake at night thinking clichéd existential thoughts, I laugh. To do otherwise is not an option. To do otherwise is to entertain masochistic thoughts like: “She needed the money,” and “She didn’t know any better,” or, “He was young, scared, and drunk,” and “He didn’t mean to do it.” Or, “He meant to do it,” and “She couldn’t stop him.”

Frankly, with all the ethnic incongruities of my face, I don’t even know if she was Korean or if he was. It doesn’t really matter. In my most optimistic moments, I think that both of them were. I think, “They were young college students; they loved each other, got pregnant, and had to make a decision . . .” She told her grandmother—her mother would have freaked out—who told her to think. She thought. She decided not to abort, which meant nine months and birthing a child into a schizophrenic Cold War. I was born. Her grandmother bundled me up and together they walked me to the local orphanage.

Scene 1: Take 3

Some thousands of miles away in Dayton, Ohio, after three years of trying for a third child, Larry and Ann Scott hear the phone ring. They pick up: good news.

Three months later I arrive at LAX where Ann’s mother holds me in her arms for the first time and cries. “I am so happy to see you,” she says, rocking me back and forth. “So happy.”

We get onto another plane and fly into Cincinnati Airport where my grandmother passes me to her daughter’s arms and I look up for the first time into my mother’s face.

I wave my arms—of course—I start crying.