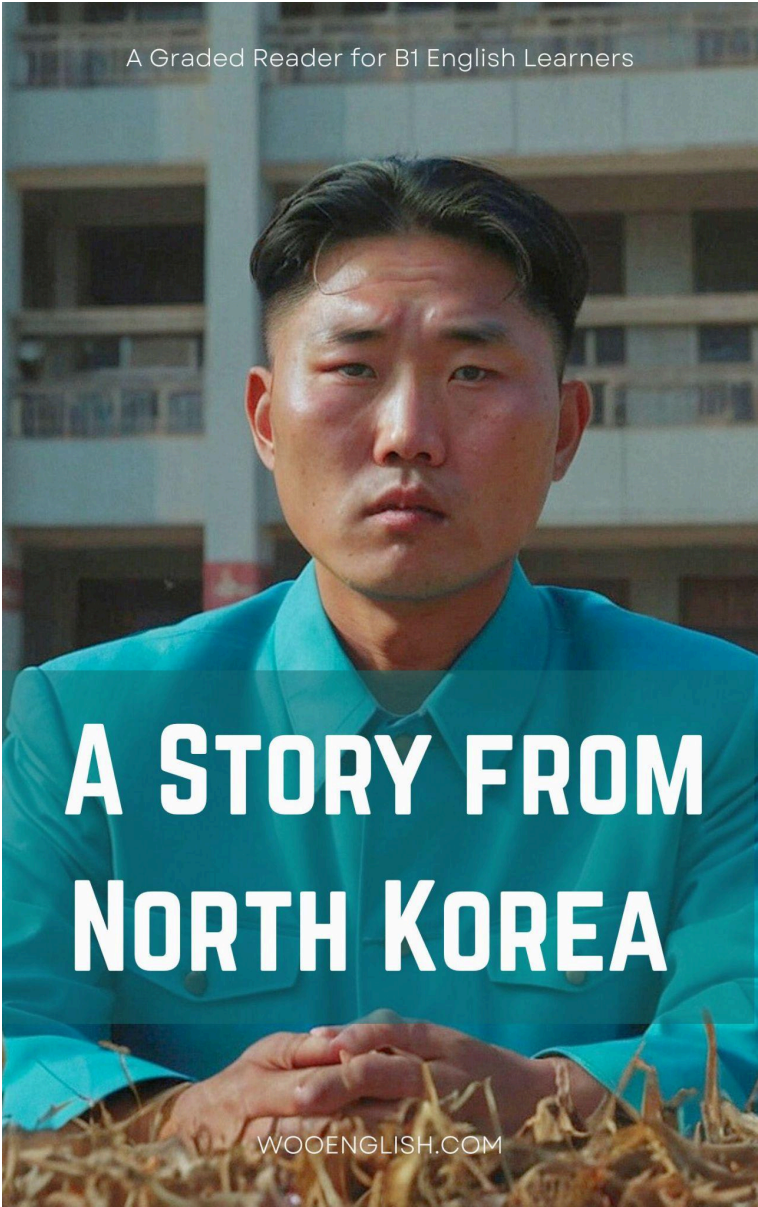


# **Whispers of the Wind - A Story from North Korea**

by WooEnglish

A Graded Reader for B1 English Learners



**A STORY FROM  
NORTH KOREA**

WOOENGLISH.COM

***Welcome to WooEnglish!***

**Where English comes alive... one story at a time!**

**Are you ready to learn English *with your heart*? Not just with rules and grammar... but with feeling, with drama, with imagination?**

**Then you're in the right place.**

**In today's story, you will travel to a world few have seen...**

**You'll meet Min-jun, a brave boy from North Korea, who dares to dream of something bigger.**

**You'll walk beside him through snowy streets... listen to whispers in the dark... and one day... stand with him beneath a sky full of stars.**

**This is not just a story—it's a journey.**

**A journey of hope... of questions... of quiet courage.**

**And every sentence... every word... will help you *learn English naturally*, with real emotion, real rhythm, and real connection.**

**So put on your headphones... open your heart... and get ready.**

**Because the story is about to begin...**

**And you?**

**You're going to *feel* English like never before.**

## Chapter 1: The Morning Bell

*Whispers of the Wind: A Story from North Korea*

The bell rang.

Not loud. Not soft.

Just... clear.

*Ding... ding... ding...*

Min-jun opened his eyes.

It was still dark outside. The sky was gray. Cold air touched his nose. He pulled the blanket up to his chin, but it didn't help. His toes were still freezing.

"Time to get up, Min-jun," his mother said quietly.

Her voice was soft, like snow falling on the roof.

He didn't move. Not yet.

The bell was always the same. Every morning. The same time. The same sound. It came from the loudspeaker on the electric pole outside their house.

It was the sound of morning... the sound of rules... the sound of life.

Min-jun was fourteen years old.

He lived in a small village near the mountains. There were no big roads here. No cars. Just bicycles... and boots... and dust.

He sat up slowly.

His father was already dressed. Dark pants, gray shirt, simple jacket. Always the same.

"Let's eat," his father said.

They sat on the floor around a low table. His mother placed bowls of soup. Just a little rice... and some cabbage.

They didn't talk much. Talking in the morning was not normal.

But Min-jun's little sister, Ji-eun, was smiling. She was only six.

"Oppa," she said, "I had a dream!"

Min-jun smiled. "What kind of dream?"

She whispered, "I was flying... high above the trees! And I could see everything! Even the city! Even—"

His father looked at her, quiet but sharp.

She stopped talking.

Silence.

Then the bell rang again.

"Time to go," Min-jun's father said.

Outside, the air was colder.

Min-jun pulled his coat tighter. The wind touched his face like ice.

He walked to school. It was not far. Just ten minutes down a small road.

Other children walked too. No one laughed. No one ran.

Everyone wore the same clothes. Black shoes. White shirts. Red scarves around their necks.

The red scarf meant *you are loyal*. That's what the teacher always said.

On the walls of the school... there were posters. Big, bright, colorful. Faces of smiling leaders. Children with flags. Soldiers marching.

One poster said:

**“We are strong together!”**

Another said:

**“Obey, learn, and love your country!”**

Min-jun looked at the posters.

Every day, they were there.

Every day, the faces smiled... but they didn't feel real.

At school, the teacher spoke with a loud voice.

“Today, we learn about history,” she said. “The great history of our nation.”

She opened a book. The same book as yesterday. And the day before.

Min-jun sat in the back. He looked at the window. Outside, the trees moved in the wind.

He wanted to draw them. To draw their long arms, their shaking leaves.

But drawing trees was not in the book.

So he sat still. He listened.

Words came and went. Strong words. Words about heroes and sacrifice... about honor and duty... about loyalty.

Min-jun didn't move. But his heart was not in the room.

It was outside... flying with the wind.

After school, Min-jun walked home with his friend, Tae-yang.

They didn't talk much. Just steps. Just snow under their feet.

But today... Tae-yang whispered, “My uncle came from the city last night.”

Min-jun turned. “Really?”

Tae-yang looked around. No one was near.

“He said... people are hungry there. More than here.”

Min-jun nodded slowly. “That’s not in the news.”

Tae-yang’s face changed. “He also said... he heard something... something about outside...”

Min-jun’s heart jumped. “Outside where?”

But Tae-yang didn’t answer.

They reached the edge of the village. Tae-yang turned left. Min-jun turned right.

They didn’t say goodbye.

At home, Min-jun’s mother was cooking again. Boiled roots, a little soup.

His grandmother sat in the corner, sewing an old jacket.

She looked at him and smiled.

“You’re growing,” she said. “Soon you’ll be taller than your father.”

Min-jun smiled. He liked when she talked like that.

Later, he helped her bring firewood inside.

As they stacked the wood, she whispered, “Did you know, Min-jun... long ago, we could listen to music from other places?”

He froze.

“Music?”

“Yes,” she said, smiling. “With strange instruments... and people singing in different voices. It was like magic...”

Min-jun stared at her. “Is it true?”

She looked at the door. Then back at him.

“Some things... are true even if we can’t say them.”

That night, Min-jun lay on his mat, eyes open.

He listened to the wind.

It moved through the village... soft and cold... but alive.

He thought of his sister’s dream.

Flying...

He thought of the book at school. The posters. The teacher’s strong voice.

And he thought of his grandmother’s quiet words.

Something felt different tonight.

Like a light... small but warm... was waking up inside him.

He closed his eyes.

The bell would ring again tomorrow.

But something had changed.

Inside his chest... a question was growing.

And questions... are powerful things.

## Chapter 2: The Wall of Posters

*Whispers of the Wind: A Story from North Korea*

*Crunch... crunch... crunch...*

Min-jun's boots pressed into the snow as he walked.

The road to school was quiet... but not silent.

The wind whispered through the trees.

A dog barked in the distance.

And from the loudspeaker on the pole... came music. The same marching song... again.  
And again.

Min-jun didn't really listen.

He looked ahead... then to the side... then up.

The sky was pale... like old paper.

His breath made clouds in front of him. Small, white clouds... that disappeared quickly.

Just like his thoughts.

He passed the posters.

Big... colorful... loud, even though they made no sound.

Smiling leaders with strong arms.

Children raising flags.

A soldier holding a gun in one hand... and a flower in the other.

Min-jun looked at them... every day.



But today, he stopped.

One poster showed a boy... maybe ten years old... saluting.

His smile was wide.

His eyes were... bright. Too bright.

The words said:

**“He studies hard for the love of his country!”**

Min-jun stared at the boy.

His face didn't look real.

It looked painted... forced... like he was smiling for someone watching.

Min-jun felt a strange feeling in his chest.

Like the smile was... watching him back.

At school, the bell rang.

Everyone stood straight.

The teacher walked in—tall, serious, with short black hair and sharp eyes.

“Good morning, class,” she said.

“Good morning, Teacher,” the students said together.

She nodded. “Today we learn more about the *Great Leader's Journey to the Mountains*.”

Min-jun opened his book.

The pages were clean. The pictures were clear.

There was the leader... walking through snow.

There was the leader... standing with soldiers.

There was the leader... talking to children in bright scarves.

The teacher read from the book.

Her voice was strong. Every sentence sounded important.

“He said,” she read, “*Study with all your heart. Learn with all your power. Your mind belongs to the country!*”

Min-jun’s hand tightened around his pencil.

He looked at the picture again.

The leader’s eyes... were kind. But too kind.

The sky in the picture was blue. Too blue.

He looked up... at the window.

Outside... the sky was gray.

He stopped listening.

His eyes followed a small bird, sitting on a tree branch.

Its feathers were dark brown... with a little red on its neck.

It moved its head left... then right... then flew away.

Min-jun watched it disappear into the sky.

He sighed.

And then...

“Min-jun!”

His head turned fast. The teacher was staring at him.

“What did the *Great Leader* say when he stood in the snow?”

The class was quiet.

All eyes turned to him.

He swallowed. “He... he said we should... study... with our hearts.”

The teacher looked at him for a long moment.

Then she nodded. “Correct. But next time... pay attention.”

Min-jun bowed his head. “Yes, Teacher.”

But inside... something felt wrong.

He had answered the question.

But the feeling in his heart was not right.

After school, he walked slower than usual.

Tae-yang caught up to him.

“Did you get in trouble?” he asked.

Min-jun shook his head. “Not really.”

They walked past the posters again.

One of them showed a rocket... flying high into the sky.

The words said:

**“Our nation rises like fire!”**

Min-jun looked at it... long and hard.

Then he said, "Do you think we'll ever go to space?"

Tae-yang blinked. "What?"

"Space," Min-jun said. "The stars... the moon..."

Tae-yang laughed a little. "Why would we go there?"

Min-jun looked down. "I don't know..."

He wanted to say more.

He wanted to ask: *Do you ever wonder what's outside the posters? Outside the books? Outside this village?*

But he didn't.

Some questions were dangerous.

That night, at home, he sat with his grandmother again.

She was fixing a torn sleeve.

Min-jun stared at the fire.

Then he asked, "Halmeoni... do you think other places are different?"

She stopped sewing.

Her hands were still.

"Why do you ask that, Min-jun?"

"I don't know," he said. "I just... wonder."

She looked into the fire too.

Then she whispered, "Wondering is not wrong. But you must be careful. Some people do not like questions."

He nodded.

Then he said, softly, “I looked at the posters today. I really looked. They... they felt strange.”

His grandmother smiled.

“You are starting to see,” she said.

“See what?”

“That sometimes... things are not what they seem.”

Later, in bed, Min-jun stared at the ceiling.

The light from the fire was soft, dancing on the walls.

He closed his eyes.

He saw the smiling boy on the poster.

He saw the rocket flying up.

He saw the bird... flying away into the gray sky.

And he asked himself... quietly...

“Is there more?”

## Chapter 3: Secret Words

*Whispers of the Wind: A Story from North Korea*

The fire was small that night.

Just a few yellow flames dancing on black wood.

The house was quiet... too quiet.

Min-jun sat near the wall, legs crossed, arms wrapped around his knees. His little sister was already asleep, breathing slowly, her tiny hands curled like leaves.

His parents were outside, talking softly near the shed.

Only his grandmother sat with him... sewing, again... the same slow stitch, in and out, in and out...

But then... she stopped.

Min-jun looked at her. Her eyes were not on the needle anymore. They were staring into the fire.

The flames moved... and something in her face changed.

Like a memory... had opened.

He waited.

And then...

She spoke.

“Min-jun...” she said softly.

He looked up. “Yes, Halmeoni?”

She didn’t answer right away.

Then, in a whisper... “Do you know what the world looked like... before all this?”

His eyes grew wide.

“No,” he said.

She leaned closer. Her voice dropped lower... almost like the wind.

“Long ago... we had radios that played songs from far away. We had books—real books—with stories from other lands. People wore blue jeans... danced in the street... ate sweet food from carts. There were lights everywhere at night. So many lights, it looked like the stars had come down to the ground...”

Min-jun blinked.

It sounded like a dream.

Or a lie.

But her voice... her eyes... they were too real.

“Really?” he asked.

She smiled. A sad smile.

“Yes, really.”

He looked at the door. Still closed.

Then he whispered, “Where was this?”

She looked at him for a long time.

Then she said... “Everywhere.”

Min-jun’s heart beat faster.

“Even here?” he asked.

She nodded. "Once."

He felt like the fire inside him had grown... not in heat, but in light.

"But why... why don't we have it anymore?"

His grandmother's face became still.

She looked back into the flames.

And for a moment... she said nothing.

Then she whispered, "Because when people want too much... others get scared. They take away what is not their own. They build walls... and fences... and rules."

Min-jun stared at her.

Walls... fences... rules.

He knew those things.

He lived inside them.

"But the lights... the music... the books..." he said, his voice small.

She nodded slowly.

"All gone. At least... here."

The room felt colder.

The shadows on the wall seemed longer.

He looked down.

And then... he asked a question he had never said out loud.

"Halmeoni... do you think... there is still a place like that?"



She paused.

Then... softly...

“Yes.”

Min-jun’s heart jumped.

He moved closer.

“Where?”

Her voice dropped to a whisper, barely a breath.

“There is a place across the river. A place where children wear what they want... say what they feel... read books from everywhere. There are schools with bright windows... and music that plays in the street. There are big buildings... tall ones... and small shops full of colorful things.”

Min-jun’s eyes were wide.

His mouth was open, but no words came out.

His grandmother touched his hand.

“But you must never speak of it. Not to anyone. Not even your friend. Not even your sister.”

He nodded slowly.

But inside... the fire was growing.

Outside, a dog barked.

Far away, the wind moved the trees.

But inside the small house... everything had changed.

One story.

Just one.

But it had opened something... like a crack in a wall.

A place for light to come in.

“Min-jun...” his grandmother said again.

He turned back to her.

“Yes?”

She looked at him with eyes full of years.

“Questions... are heavy. If you carry too many, they will break your back.”

He nodded.

But deep inside... he wanted more.

He wanted to know *why* things had changed.

*When* they changed.

*Who* changed them.

And *how* to see the world she spoke of.

That night, he couldn't sleep.

He lay still, eyes wide, heart full.

He pictured the lights in the street... the music in the air... the food on carts...

He pictured a world where people smiled not because they had to... but because they wanted to.

A world where a poster was not a warning... but a painting.

A world where his question did not bring danger... but truth.

In the dark, he whispered...

“I want to see it.”

And the wind... blowing softly through the cracks in the window...

did not say no.



## Chapter 4: The Shadow Room

*Whispers of the Wind: A Story from North Korea*

It was market day.

Min-jun held his father's hand as they walked through the center of town.

The road was hard, packed with ice and dirt.

Their boots made sharp sounds on the ground—*crack... crunch... crunch...*

They said nothing.

No one did.

The town was full of people... but it was quiet.

Only voices from the loudspeakers filled the air—marching songs, proud speeches, and promises that always sounded the same.

Min-jun's father looked straight ahead.

His face was calm... but serious.

He walked quickly, holding a bag under one arm—empty now, but soon it would carry rice, or maybe beans... if they were lucky.

Min-jun followed closely.

He wasn't sure why he was coming today.

Usually, he stayed home.

But this morning, his father had said... "Come with me."

No smile. No reason.

Just a look.

Min-jun didn't ask why.

The market was not big.

Just a row of stands, some made of wood, some only blankets on the ground.

Women sat behind them, selling small things—dried roots, shoes with holes, potatoes... one or two fish.

People moved slowly, their eyes always watching.

No one laughed. No one shouted.

It felt like the air was waiting... holding its breath.

Then...

It happened.

Three men walked into the square.

Black coats.

Black hats.

No smiles.

Min-jun saw them from the corner of his eye.

He felt his father's hand... tighten.

"Don't move," his father said quietly.

The men did not run. They walked... calm, steady, like wolves in the snow.

People stepped aside.

Even the sellers stopped talking.

And then... the men stopped... in front of a tall man in a gray jacket.

He was holding a sack of rice. Just standing. Just breathing.

One of the men pointed.

The man in the gray jacket did not speak.

He didn't run.

He just... nodded.

And then, the black coats took him by the arms.

They walked away... with him in the middle.

No one followed.

No one asked.

Not even a whisper.

Min-jun's heart beat like a drum.

His hands were cold.

He looked up at his father.

But his father's face... was a stone.

They waited until the black coats disappeared behind a large gray building at the edge of the town.

The building had no windows.

Only one small door.

Min-jun had passed it before.

He never knew what it was for.

Now... he did.

They called it *the House of Questions*.

But no one ever asked questions there.

Only answered them.

Min-jun and his father walked again.

No words.

No sound.

The bag on his father's arm stayed empty.

It didn't matter anymore.

That night... at home... the silence was heavy.

Like a blanket... made of fear.

They sat around the fire.

No one spoke of what they saw.

Not his mother.

Not his grandmother.

Not even Ji-eun, who usually asked questions every minute.

Tonight... she only played with her fingers.

Later, when the others were asleep, Min-jun sat up in the dark.

He whispered, “Halmeoni?”

His grandmother opened her eyes.

“Yes, child?”

He hesitated.

“Why did they take him?”

She didn’t speak right away.

Then, in a low voice, she said, “Maybe... he asked the wrong thing.”

Min-jun stared at the ceiling.

The wood above him seemed darker than usual.

He asked... softly, “Will they bring him back?”

She shook her head.

“No one comes back from the shadow room.”

Min-jun couldn’t sleep.

He remembered the man’s face.

Calm. Quiet.

Not angry. Not afraid.

Just... still.

He wondered if the man had said something like his grandmother.

A story... a truth... a song from the past.

He wondered...



What if someone had heard?

What if someone had listened?

What if someone... told?

In the dark, Min-jun's thoughts spun like leaves in a storm.

Was his grandmother safe?

Was *he* safe?

What if someone had heard *her* story?

What if they had seen them talking?

What if... one day... the black coats came again?

And this time... they pointed at *her*?

Or him?

He pulled his blanket close.

His hands were shaking.

His heart felt too big for his chest.

But deep inside...

beneath the fear...

beneath the silence...

was something else.

Not a voice Not a word.

A flame

## Chapter 5: A Book Under the Floor

*Whispers of the Wind: A Story from North Korea*

The storm had come quickly.

Wind howled through the cracks in the window. Snow pushed against the door like a cold, invisible hand.

Inside the house... the fire burned low.

Min-jun sat near it, his knees pulled close, a blanket around his shoulders.

The others were sleeping.

His mother, curled beside the wall.

His father, quiet and still.

Ji-eun... a small shape under thick covers.

And Halmeoni... her soft breathing like a song.

Min-jun couldn't sleep.

Not after the shadow room.

Not after the silence.

His thoughts were loud.

His chest felt tight... full of questions he couldn't ask.

So he stood.

And slowly, carefully, he walked to the old part of the house... where the floor creaked... and dust lived like forgotten time.

There was a corner—dark, quiet, half-covered by a basket full of thread.

He didn't know why... but something pulled him there.

He moved the basket.

There... beneath the wood... was a small board, loose at the edges.

His fingers reached down, slow and nervous.

He lifted it.

Underneath... something wrapped in cloth.

He took it out.

His heart was beating fast now.

He unwrapped the cloth... and there it was.

A book.

Not one of the red books from school.

Not a history book... not a lesson.

This one was old... the cover worn... the pages soft with time.

But the letters... were different.

Strange.

English.

He opened the first page.

A city.

Tall buildings made of glass.

Lights shining in the night.

Below the picture, strange words.

He couldn't read them...

But he didn't need to.

The pictures were enough.

He turned another page.

A boy... in jeans... eating something round with cheese and red sauce.

Next page.

A woman walking down the street, smiling, wearing yellow shoes and a purple coat.

Next page.

A park full of people, dancing... playing music... laughing.

Min-jun's mouth opened.

His hands shook.

His eyes... couldn't stop looking.

He had never seen jeans before.

Not real ones.

Only in stories whispered by Halmeoni.

And now... here they were.

Smiling faces. Skies full of color. Streets with trees, and bridges with lights.

Freedom... printed on every page.

Suddenly... he heard a creak.

He froze.

Footsteps.

He closed the book fast, heart racing.

The cloth wrapped quickly around it. He slipped it back under the floorboard. Replaced the wood. Pulled the basket over.

Then he turned...

“Min-jun?”

It was Halmeoni.

She stood in the doorway... her voice sleepy... but sharp.

“What are you doing?”

He swallowed.

“Just... looking for something.”

She stepped closer.

Her eyes were dark... but not angry.

She looked at the basket... then at him.

“You found it, didn’t you?” she whispered.

He hesitated.

Then... he nodded.

She sat down beside him.

The firelight touched her face gently.

“I hid that book before your father was born,” she said.

Min-jun’s eyes widened.

“It was your great-uncle’s. He worked near the border... long ago. He found it, brought it home. And we all looked at it... at night... like it was gold.”

She smiled. Just a little.

“Then the rules changed. And the book became dangerous. We couldn’t throw it away. We couldn’t read it. So... I buried it under the floor.”

Min-jun whispered, “It’s beautiful.”

Halmeoni nodded.

“Yes. It is.”

They sat together in silence.

Just the fire... the wind outside... and the weight of dreams between them.

Then Min-jun asked, “Why did you never tell me?”

She looked at him.

“Because books like that... make you think. And when you think too much... you ask. And when you ask... someone listens.”

Her voice became quiet.

“And sometimes... they don’t like what they hear.”

Min-jun stared at the floor.

The book... was calling him again.

Not with words.

With *possibility*.

With *wonder*.

With *freedom*.

“Can I look at it again?” he asked.

His grandmother nodded.

“But not now. Only when the house sleeps. Only when the wind is loud.”

He smiled.

She touched his face.

“You have the fire, Min-jun. Just like your uncle. Just like me.”

Then... she stood.

“Now sleep,” she said. “Dream... of cities and bridges.”

And she was gone.

That night, Min-jun lay in bed... eyes wide.

The firelight flickered across the walls.

But in his mind... it wasn't wood burning.

It was the city The lights.

The people dancing in the park.

The girl in yellow shoes He saw them all.

And inside him... the flame grew brighter.

## Chapter 6: The River's Song

*Whispers of the Wind: A Story from North Korea*

It was a quiet afternoon.

Cold wind... blue sky... no sound but the crunch of Min-jun's boots on dry snow.

He had told his mother he was going to collect firewood.

It wasn't a lie.

But it wasn't the truth, either.

Because Min-jun... was walking to the river.

The river was not far.

Just beyond the old trees, past the broken fence, near the hills that marked the edge of their world.

No one said it was the border.

No one had to.

Everyone knew.

The trees stood tall and silent.

The air grew sharper the closer he came.

His breath puffed out in little clouds.

The sound of water... soft at first... then louder.

And then...

He saw it The river.



It was wide... deep... and fast.

Its surface moved like silk... gray silk, smooth and cold.

Min-jun stood at the edge, behind the bushes.

He didn't step closer.

Even from here, the water felt... alive.

Like it was watching.

He listened.

At first, there was only the wind.

Then...

*Laughter.*

Far away.

From the other side.

Min-jun froze.

He waited.

And then he heard it again—soft voices... music... a strange rhythm... and something he had never heard before...

*Joy.*

His eyes searched the far shore.

Through the trees... he saw lights.

Not bright But warm Yellow. Soft Moving.

Like a town... breathing quietly.

Then he heard it...

A voice singing.

Not like the marching songs from the loudspeakers.

This one was soft. Gentle.

A woman's voice.

He couldn't understand the words... but he didn't need to.

The music spoke to him... in a way no lesson ever had.

It wrapped around him like a blanket.

He stepped closer to the edge.

The river's sound grew louder.

He looked down.

The water moved quickly... cold, dark, full of secrets.

But still... he wanted to cross.

Even though he knew the stories.

Stories of people who tried... and never came back.

Stories of guards. Dogs. Punishment.

Stories whispered late at night, when only the brave—or the foolish—spoke at all.

He looked across again.

And whispered...

“Is it real?”

A small wind answered... brushing his face like a mother’s hand.

He closed his eyes.

And for a moment...

He was there.

Across the river.

Walking in a place where music played in shops.

Where books were open to all.

Where people danced in parks... and wore colors as bright as birds.

He smiled.

Then—

*Snap!*

A branch.

Behind him.

He turned fast.

Nothing.

Just the trees.

But his heart... was racing.

He took a step back from the edge.

Too close.

Too long.

He turned to leave.

Then stopped.

He reached into his pocket... and pulled out a small stone.

Smooth.

Round.

He looked at it... then at the river.

And gently... he threw it.

*Plop.*

It disappeared.

Like a secret.

He walked home quickly.

The wind felt colder now.

The trees... taller.

The silence... heavier.

But inside...

The music stayed.

That night, he couldn't eat.

He couldn't sleep.

He lay on his mat... eyes open.

He heard the wind... but also the song.

He saw the dark ceiling... but also the lights across the water.

“Min-jun.”

His grandmother’s voice.

He sat up.

She came and sat beside him.

“You went to the river today.”

He looked down.

“I heard them,” he whispered.

“I know.”

He looked up at her.

“Is it true? Everything you told me?”

She nodded.

“It’s real.”

He breathed deeply.

“Can I ever go?”

She didn’t answer right away.

Then, softly...

“Maybe. But not now.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’re still growing. Still learning. The world across the river is beautiful... but it is not easy. You must be strong. Here”—she touched his chest—“and here.” She touched his head.

Min-jun nodded.

“But one day?”

She smiled.

“Yes. One day.”

He lay back down.

Closed his eyes.

And listened...

Not to the wind...

But to the song of the river.

Still singing.

Still calling.



## Chapter 7: Footprints in the Snow

### *Whispers of the Wind: A Story from North Korea*

Winter came.

Hard... cold... sharp like glass.

The wind pushed against the house. Snow covered the roads. Even the trees looked tired.

But inside Min-jun's chest... something warm had started to grow.

Hope.

He still went to school.

Still sat through lessons.

Still looked at the same posters... the same faces.

But now... something had changed.

He looked... and saw lies.

He listened... and heard silence.

He obeyed... but inside, he was moving.

Quietly.

Carefully.

Like a shadow.

At night, after the fire died down... he sat with his grandmother.

They didn't speak loudly.

Only whispers.

Only eyes.

Only soft words that could disappear if someone got too close.

“How?” he asked one night.

She didn’t look at him. Just sewed, as always.

“There’s a path,” she said softly. “Through the trees. To the river. But it’s watched. You must go when the sky is crying.”

Min-jun frowned. “Crying?”

She smiled, just a little. “When the snow falls.”

Snow... covers tracks.

Snow... silences steps.

Snow... hides the truth.

And so, they waited.

Day by day.

Watching the sky.

Listening to the wind.

Min-jun prepared.

He didn’t pack much.

Just a scarf. Some dried roots. A small picture of his sister.

And the book.



He couldn't take all of it.

So he tore out two pages.

The city... and the woman in the purple coat.

He folded them carefully. Tucked them inside his jacket.

Close to his heart.

Then, one morning...

The sky turned white.

Not just light.

*White.*

Clouds so thick, the mountains disappeared.

And by evening...

The snow began to fall.

Quiet at first.

Just a whisper.

Then stronger.

Faster.

Covering everything.

That night, after dinner, his father spoke.

"No school tomorrow," he said. "Roads will be closed."

His mother nodded. "Stay in. It's dangerous."

Ji-eun clapped her hands. "Snow day!"

But Min-jun... said nothing.

He helped clean the bowls.

He kissed his sister's head.

Then he went to bed.

And waited.

Hours passed.

The house was dark.

Only the sound of the wind... and the soft breathing of his family.

Min-jun sat up.

His hands were shaking.

But his heart... was steady.

He dressed slowly.

Layers of old clothes. Socks. Gloves.

He opened the loose floorboard.

Took the pages.

Took the roots.

Closed it again.

Then crept to the door.

There, in the shadows...

stood Halmeoni.

She said nothing.

Only looked at him.

Then, quietly... she reached into her pocket.

Pulled out a small cloth bundle.

“Inside,” she whispered, “is a piece of rice cake. And a button.”

He frowned. “A button?”

“It belonged to my brother. He wore it the day he crossed.”

Min-jun stared at it.

Then took the bundle with both hands.

She leaned close.

Whispered... “Run fast. Don’t look back.”

He nodded.

Then opened the door.

And stepped into the night.

The snow... was falling thick.

Heavy.

Cold.

But soft.

It covered the road like a blanket.

Every tree... every roof... every path... hidden.

Perfect.

He moved fast.

Through the trees.

Past the broken fence.

Toward the hills.

Toward the river.

His heart beat like a drum.

Every step felt loud.

But the snow caught the sound.

The world was still.

The only trace he left... were footprints.

White on white.

He remembered Halmeoni's words.

"Follow the edge. Find the big tree. Turn left. Then down."

He moved like a ghost.

Like a dream walking through snow.

And then...

He saw it.

The river.

Wide.Dark.And waiting.

Min-jun crouched behind a tree.

Looked across.

No lights tonight.

No voices.

But he knew... they were there.

He took a breath.

Stepped closer.

Then—

*Snap!*

A branch behind him.

He froze.

His breath caught in his throat.

Had someone followed?

Was there a guard?

A dog?

Nothing.

Only snow.

Only trees.

Only wind.

Still... he didn't wait.

He moved to the edge.

Pulled off his shoes.

Tied them around his neck.

The water would be cold.

But he had no choice.

He looked up.

The sky was crying.

White tears falling fast.

He looked down.

Then stepped in.

The water hit like fire.

Burning cold.

His breath shot out.

His body screamed.

But he kept moving.

Step after step.

Halfway.

The current pulled.

But he pushed back.

Thought of Ji-eun.

Thought of the book.

Thought of the lights across the water.

One more step.

And another.

And then...

His foot touched rock.

Solid.

He fell to his knees.

Snow met him like a friend.

He had crossed.

He looked behind him.

His footprints...

Already fading.



## Chapter 8: A New Sky

*Whispers of the Wind: A Story from North Korea*

The stars...

Min-jun had never seen them like this.

Bright. Endless. Like diamonds spilled across the sky.

He stood in the snow... clothes wet... hair frozen... chest rising with fast breaths.

He was shaking.

But he was smiling.

He had made it.

Across the river.

Into the world of color.

Into the world of questions.

Into... freedom.

But freedom... was not easy.

A man found him that night.

In the trees... on the edge of a road.

He wore a thick jacket... with strange letters on it.

His eyes were kind.

His voice... was soft, but strange.

Min-jun didn't understand his words.



But he saw the man's hands.

Open.

Empty.

Safe.

Later... in a small room with white walls... warm food was placed before him.

Soup. Rice. Something sweet.

Min-jun ate slowly.

He looked at everything.

The light.

The heater.

The chair with a soft back.

Everything was strange.

But nothing felt wrong.

The days passed.

He was taken to a center—a place for people who had crossed.

Other boys were there. Girls. Some older. Some younger.

They all had different stories.

Different reasons.

But the same eyes.

Eyes that had seen silence.

Eyes that now... looked for something more.

Min-jun began to learn.

A new language.

New customs.

How to use a phone.

How to ride a bus.

How to ask questions... without fear.

He made mistakes.

He got confused.

Once, someone touched his shoulder from behind... and he jumped.

Another time, a loud noise made him curl up, hands over his ears.

But no one laughed.

They just waited.

They understood.

At night, he lay in a real bed.

Soft sheets. Warm pillow.

He held the torn pages close.

The city.

The woman with the purple coat.

They were here.

Real.

And yet... sometimes, when the lights went out...

He cried.

He missed Ji-eun.

Her silly smile.

Her wild dreams.

He missed his mother's quiet hands.

His father's silent strength.

He missed Halmeoni.

Her voice.

Her stories.

Her bravery.

One night, he took out the button.

Held it in his palm.

It felt small.

But heavy.

A reminder.

Of what was lost...

And what was given.

Weeks passed.

Then months.

And one morning...

A woman came to speak to him.

She said, in slow, clear words...

“You will start at a new school next week.”

Min-jun blinked.

“A school?”

She nodded.

“Yes. Just like the others.”

She smiled.

“You belong here now.”

The first day, he wore jeans.

Real jeans.

The same blue as the picture.

He looked at himself in the mirror and laughed.

He had never laughed at his own clothes before.

At school, he sat near the window.

He listened.

Took notes.

Raised his hand.

No one shouted.

No one made him recite words he didn't believe.

And at lunch... someone asked him a question.

Not about loyalty.

Not about leaders.

Just... "What do you like to draw?"

And he smiled.

That night, he walked outside.

Alone.

He looked up.

The stars were waiting.

He had seen them from the river.

But now...He could really see No clouds No walls Just sky.

Endless Open He whispered..."I made it."And in the wind...He heard a voice.

Maybe it was memory.

Maybe it was Halmeoni.

Or maybe it was just the night.

But it said...

"Yes, Min-jun. You did."

And for the first time...

He was not afraid.



THE END

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