

Family Connections  
By Hana K. Lee

I squeezed my boy's foot, and his eyes flew open. I thought he smiled at me through the oxygen mask. I talked to him while I rubbed his bare feet. One of the nurses said that feet have the most sensations. Kenneth seemed to be more alert when I touched his feet.

The white haired doctor walked in quickly to check the chart. He almost left without speaking to me. I stood up and blocked his way.

"Is my son going to die?" I asked.

He tried to smile, but it didn't fit his face. "We're doing the best we can."

I stepped closer to him. "Is my son going to die?"

He sighed. That sigh told me all I needed to know.

I sat down, and the doctor left the room without another word. I pulled out my phone. The doctors agreed that we should be prepared for the worst. I needed to call my family members, but my fingers wouldn't cooperate. I dropped the phone and watched it bounce off the floor.

I thought I saw my boy looking at me. I grabbed his feet and started to tell him a story. He was too old for fairy tales, but I knew he liked happy endings.

\*\*\*

I admired the interior of the Range Rover. I didn't like most SUVs, but I had to admit that this was a nice vehicle. The seats were made of expensive leather. For the first time, I understood how something could be soft as a baby's butt. I always thought that was just a stupid saying.

The back seats were roomy and quite comfortable. I saw why people would pay so much for such a boxy, unattractive car.

I heard the alarm's muted chirp, and the young driver entered the Rover. He didn't even glance back. He threw his coat onto the passenger seat and stuck the key in the ignition.

I don't think he even felt the needle slide into his neck. I guess no one ever warned about checking the back seat before getting in a car. You never know who can be hiding back there.

\*\*\*

He drooled behind his gag, and his head bobbed back and forth. His arms and legs were immobilized by yards of hemp rope. I was worried that he wouldn't be able to wake up.

I glanced at my partner. "Are you sure you gave me the right amount? He's been out for a while."

Jim nodded. "It was the right amount for his size. Give it a few more minutes. See. He's starting to open his eyes."

I noticed the same thing. "Okay, I'll take it from here."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. I'll call you if I need you."

Jim nodded. He knew that I needed to do things my way. He wasn't going to argue with me. Not about this one. He left the room without looking back. I heard him lock the door, and I turned to my captive.

He struggled to keep his eyes open, so I gave him a backhand across the face. I hit him hard enough to split his lip with my ring.

That put some fire in his eyes, and he cursed at me from behind the gag. I was glad that he was alert. I removed the soggy gag.

"You fucking bitch!"

I slapped him again. Harder than before. That quieted him for a second.

"Do you remember me?"

He looked at me, but his eyes weren't focused on my face. I grabbed his chin with my nails and squeezed. He scanned my face, but his expression remained blank. He seemed more confused than scared.

I pulled a chair directly in front of him. I sat down and we were eye-to-eye. He continued to search my face, trying to connect my

features to a distant memory. He thought for a few more seconds, but he gave up.

He tried a softer approach. "Look. I don't know you, and I don't know what you want. If it's money, then take my wallet and my car."

"It is a nice car. Brand new, I think. I don't want your money, and I don't want your car."

"Then what do you want? Who the hell are you?"

"It doesn't really matter. Even if I told you my name, you wouldn't know me. However, does the name Kenneth Choi sound familiar?"

He shook his head. I saw his wrists struggle against the ropes. That would only make the knots tighter. Jim was an expert when it came to bondage.

"Ok, so the name doesn't ring a bell. I didn't think it would, but I thought I'd give you the benefit of the doubt."

I used my foot to slide my bag towards me. When I removed the switchblade, his eyes went round. I took an apple out of my bag, and I started to peel it. He relaxed a little bit, but he still studied my movements.

"So what made you want to become a doctor, Doctor Novak?"

He tried to play stoic. "How did you know my name?"

“Oh. I know a lot about you, Doctor. Let’s just say that I’m in the information field.” I started with the basic stats. “You grew up in Palo Alto. You went to Stanford undergrad, then USC Medical School. Then, you completed your internship and residency at the USC Medical Center before moving onto bigger and better things.”

His poker face started to dissolve with each statement. His eyes remained big and round.

I popped another piece of apple into my mouth. It tasted sour, but I chewed anyway. “Well, that’s just the bare facts. There’s more, but we don’t want to bore each other with facts, right?”

“Who the fuck are you?” His voice was just a whisper.

I pointed the tip of the blade at him. “You know something...food allergies are a dangerous thing. It’s crazy how the wrong piece of food can cause such a bad reaction. Have you ever seen a really bad case of hives? I’m sure you have. Hives sneak up on you. At one moment you’re fine. Then you’re covered with big, itchy bumps.”

He stared at me. I’m sure he thought I had gone mad.

“The worst are the hives that get inside your ears. Sometimes the allergies are so bad that your tongue swells up, and you have trouble breathing.”

I paused. I didn’t want my apple anymore. “My boy had food allergies. Really bad ones. The last one was so bad that I took him to

the E.R. I had to wait two hours for a doctor to even see him. Two fucking hours."

"I'm really sorry," he muttered.

I ignored him. "Then they ran a bunch of tests that they didn't need. I kept telling them I knew what the problem was. The doctor just treated me like I was some hysterical mom."

I was crying at this point, but I didn't care. "Then he went into shock, and his blood pressure dropped like a rock. He went into a coma, and then it was too late."

I wiped my eyes. I couldn't control the shaking in my arms.

He shook his head. "I still don't understand what that has to do with me. I mean, did I treat him?"

I started to dig through my bag. "You know about food allergies, don't you? I heard you have a pretty bad allergic reaction to nuts."

I put the blade against his Adam's apple, and I brought my hand in front of his face. I pushed a handful of peanuts into his mouth.

When he started to spit them out, I pressed the blade into his flesh.

Blood flowed from the shallow cut. He started to chew the nuts. "Please," he begged. "You'll kill me."

"Maybe," I answered. "Let's see how bad your allergies really are."

After the second handful, the hives traveled from his neck towards his face. His cheeks and chin started to swell. It looked like he had mumps. When he spoke, his swollen tongue rolled uselessly in his mouth.

“Why are you doing this?” he asked. “What did I ever do to you?”

I shoved more peanuts into his open mouth. I paused when his breathing started to grow shallow.

I thought about my baby lying in the hospital bed. He looked so small and so fragile. He had been lying there for hours while we waited for the doctor to come. When she did come, she glanced at him for about half a minute. She seemed too young, but that didn't bother me at the time.

I grabbed her arm and begged her to help us. She mumbled something about more tests before walking away. I stayed glued to Ken's side while I waited for the doctor to return.

When she finally came, I overheard her talking to one of the nurses. She said, “I hate working the trauma center. It's such a pain in the ass.” She yawned loudly. “It gets so boring after a while. Same shit, different day.”

When my boy went into shock, the nurses ran into the room. That same doctor walked in with the same bored expression on her

face. Right after they connected my boy to the ventilator, that doctor walked out without speaking a word to me. She acted as if I didn't exist.

I glanced at her name tag: L. Novak. I decided to find out more about this L. Novak. When you use your resources, you can find out anything about a person. She barely passed her medical boards, but her daddy was the medical director at a prestigious private hospital. He pulled some strings for her. She was married, and her husband worked at the same hospital. How convenient.

Some day L. Novak would end up as chief of staff or some high position. It didn't matter that she was just another mediocre doctor half-assing her way through life. She had family connections, and that's more important than any credential.

I found out about the other errors L. Novak had made throughout her short career. Most were minor errors like prescribing the wrong dosage or forgetting the right paperwork. Then, there were a few red flags like making some ridiculous diagnosis that would make a fourth year student laugh. Of course all errors were erased from her record by some kiss ass administrator.

I shoved a few more peanuts into Dr. Arnold Novak's mouth. His eyelids puffed out like two pink donuts. His pulse felt weak against my

fingertips. I didn't know if it would be enough to kill him. His head dropped onto his chest, and I saw the hives covering his scalp.

My partner and I had a thing about going after women. Maybe we're old-fashioned in that way. Because of that, A. Novak would have to be a substitute for his wife.

I called my partner's name, and Jim entered the room immediately. It made me think that he had been waiting just outside the door.

He looked at the doctor. "Is he finished?"

"He's still breathing," I said.

"Not for long." Jim wrapped his large hand around Novak's throat and started to squeeze. He held onto his throat for about five minutes longer than necessary.

Jim pulled his hands away. I looked up and saw the big tears rolling down his face.

He looked directly into my eyes. "I miss our boy. I miss Kenneth."

"Me, too."

Jim wept into his big hands.

I glanced at Novak's cold body. I shook my head. "I thought this would make me feel better, but it doesn't."

My hands felt like they were made of ice. I wanted to rub my son's feet, but I couldn't anymore.

I touched Jim's shoulders with my cold fingertips. "I think we need to find this L. Novak."

H. Kim Lee is working on new stories about crime and violence. She recently finished an erotica eBook under a different pen name.