

## Between Heaven and Earth Book: One - The Cost of Freedom - Chapter Eleven - The Mission

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Kim Soo Beak was forty seven years old. He was a native of South Korea and was an ordained minister in the Baptist church. He had been saved when he was seventeen years old and had a dream of becoming a missionary. He had attended a small Southern Baptist seminary in Nashville Tennessee, was trained to be a missionary, and was ordained upon graduation. When he returned to Korea he affiliated with several Baptist churches, trained under their senior pastors, and continued to believe he was called to be a missionary in another country. At first he was focused on Africa or somewhere in the Muslim world. The idea came up about going to China when a pastor who had worked in China visited and spoke at a church where Kim was an associate pastor. He talked about the house church and the underground Church movement that was burning like a wildfire among the Chinese people. The missionary talked about the ethnic Korean population that was living in the Northeast provinces. It was his assertion that church was very language and culture specific.

Koreans living there were in dire need of Korean speaking pastors that could preach and minister to the people. Kim was convinced and became enthusiastic about the calling. He began preparing immediately. He spent two years learning basic Mandarin Chinese and he made arrangements for his young wife and their two toddlers to stay with her parents. He assured her that as soon as he was established in the mission field, he would send for her. He got the support and backing from two churches but it was not enough to survive and build a congregation. He then sold the small piece of land that he had inherited when his father died, packed his bags, and set off for the field.

Harbin was where he determined to plant his church. In the city of ten million there was a large and vibrant Korean population. Many had been born in China or their parents or grandparents had been. They were often bilingual, citizens, and some were even party members. There were also many illegals, North Koreans on the run, and straight up gangsters. These were Rev. Kim's sheep. Within a year he had learned the ropes, made many contacts in the community, and had opened his own house church; not in a house but in an old warehouse space he had rented. He lived in a back room that doubled as his office and counseling room. He owned one threadbare suit that he wore when he preached on Sunday morning but the rest of the time he wore simple everyday clothes that helped him blend in with the working class district folks. He had a passionate prayer life and felt truly alive.

It didn't take him long to become acquainted with the refugees from North Korea who were trying to survive and to get out of China. They were almost all women and children who by the nature of their illegal status were easy pickings for the traffickers who fed the flesh markets. It was only natural that he began to look for ways to rescue them. Jesus could save their souls but he decided he would save as many of their bodies as possible. Salvation meant getting them out of China and into other countries that would recognize them as refugees. Getting them out meant paying money to brokers to guide them out.

Money was the biggest problem. It cost thousands of dollars to travel one of the reliable routes to get one refugee into a country that would send them on to South Korea. Kim began making trips back to Seoul, where he lobbied and begged any church that would listen and provide love offerings for this work. The other problem he quickly discovered is that broker was synonymous with gangster. They had no scruples about promising the world, taking the money, and then double crossing women and children by selling them into the flesh trade. After negotiating and cutting a deal with a broker, he had to go almost every step of the way with them in order to be sure there was no backstabbing. He learned how to drink and smoke because in these circles, business was always conducted with the lubrication of alcohol. He learned to be a cynic, skeptical, and a tough guy. He got good at bluffing and backing it up when need be. In the course of three years he had successfully gotten more than thirty women out.

When he saw Jeong Sook sitting in the restaurant at the bus station, he knew at a glance that she was from North Korea and was on the run. Her nervous, submissive, demure appearance gave her away. He approached her to offer his help but he knew that she would not trust him. When the other woman, who

had pimp written all over her arrived, he knew she was in trouble. He couldn't directly interfere. That was asking for trouble and would only make things worse. He could only make sure she had his phone number and his offer to help. He was also good at waiting.

If Jeong Sook had had access to a phone she would have made the call that very night. Mrs. Bae, the woman that picked her up at the bus station, was in fact a pimp. She would describe herself as a business woman and a procurer of things that people want. That evening she took Jeong Sook to a fancy restaurant and told her new girl to order anything she wanted. With their seafood and noodles, they drank the popular Chinese fire water called baiju. Not having much experience with drinking, Jeong Sook needed persistent encouragement to become tipsy and then loopy. During dinner, the business woman talked mostly about herself and her great success in Harbin.

"You remind me of myself the day I got off the bus. I've come a long way in those twenty years. I have found a life here and am very successful. I own three houses and as many automobiles. What's more, I am a well known and influential person here. Everyone who wants to get something done around here consults me. When folks need money and can't go to a bank, they come to me. I have more than \$200,000 out on loan on any given day. I know how to drink with all the business owners, both Chinese and Korean, and often am able to place people like you in good positions. I also know how to get the cooperation of the local police and authorities. Whatever you need I can get it for you." She went on and on only pausing to urge Jeong Sook to have another drink.

All Jeong Sook could do was to listen and nod. She was used to such boasting by seniors. It was the Korean way. She was only expected to bask in the light of her benefactor. The image of a spider spinning its web came to her mind and she determined not to get caught.

By the time they were finished, both women were under the influence and the procurement expert had her arm around the younger woman's waist and was leading her to the door.

"We'll get a taxi to my place and you can stay the night. Tomorrow we'll see about getting you started. You really do remind me of myself."

Mrs. Bae lived in an apartment building ten minutes away by cab. On the way she took several calls on her cell phone and spoke cryptically in Chinese and Korean. Once she shouted and threw the phone down, Jeong Sook politely looked out the window.

They took the elevator to the seventeenth floor and Mrs. Bae opened the door to a large apartment. The entrance way was lined with closets and there were at least two dozen pairs of shoes on the floor. That night Jeong Sook was shown to a room off to the left of the main room by a young woman that may have been a servant. The room was large and the walls were lined with luggage. Most of the suitcases were open and strewn with discarded women's clothes. After locating some basic bedding, she laid herself down to sleep. The room spun for awhile and she thought she was going to vomit but eventually she drifted off.

Sometime in the early morning hours she was awoken by the sounds of others drifting in. Several times the lights came on and the sound of muffled voices kept her from sleeping for some time. When she woke up again the morning light was streaming in and she saw the room was filled with groaning, farting, sleeping forms. Clearly this was a dormitory for working girls. She quietly as possible got up, arranged her clothes, and went down the hall looking for a bathroom. Except for sounds coming from the kitchen, the rest of the house was silent.

The bathroom was empty and she locked the door and sat on the toilet. She was sure that she had to get out of this house. Now was probably going to be her best chance. After washing her face and combing her hair she headed down the hall to the big living room. The coffee table was covered with liquor bottles, full ashtrays, and the remains of several meals. Two men were snoring on the sofas. It was now or never and she quickly found her way to the entrance way, located her shoes, and tried the door. It was locked but with a little fumbling she got it open and as quiet as a church mouse she slipped out and headed for the elevator. On the street she turned right and walked towards what she hoped was a main street. She was alone, in a city where she didn't know anyone, but she was free and had thirty some dollars in her pocket. On the main street she found a coffee shop and with a little body language, ordered a cup of coffee and some bread. Then she fished in her pocket for the card that the Christian guy had given her the night before.

Making the phone call was a challenge. After the overpriced breakfast she had only about twenty dollars left. Down the street she found a payphone next to a gas station but she had no Chinese coins. Inside the station, with about five minutes of body language, she was able to buy a phone card. Twenty minutes later after half a dozen attempts she got through.

"Hello, Kim Soo Baek," the voice answered in Korean.

"Yes hello. I'm Kim Jeong Sook. We met last night at the bus station."

"Sure, I remember. Thanks for calling."

"I was wondering if you might meet with me today." She was very hesitant and was not sure how to proceed.

"Sure, why not. Do you need help?" He knew she did.

"I don't know if you can help me but I do need someone to talk to." She was encouraged by his willing attitude

"Where are you now?" He asked.

"To tell the truth, I don't really know. It is my first time in Harbin and I'm afraid I'm lost."

"Are you near the bus station where we met last night?"

"I'm not at all sure. It may be around ten minutes away by taxi." She remembered the cab ride last night and figured it was about right.

"Do you have any money?" He figured if she did it wasn't much. It wasn't unusual for folks to come to him when they were broke.

"I have about twenty American dollars," she hesitantly responded.

"That should be enough. What I want you to do is to find a blue and orange colored taxi. There should be plenty of them around. That company is owned by Koreans and most of the drivers speak our language. Ask the driver to take you to the bus station. I'll meet you at 3pm outside the same place as last night. Don't tell the driver anything except that you are meeting a friend. Try not to talk to anyone until you see me. Talking to the wrong person could be dangerous. Can you do that?" He was no rookie in dealing with this kind of situation and was pretty good at the cloak and dagger stuff.

"Yes, I think so. What time is it now?" She had no watch and could only guess how long she had been out of Mrs. Bae's apartment.

"It's just about eleven thirty. You have plenty of time to get to the station. Wait in the seating area in the main terminal till 3pm. Please try not to talk to anyone."

She was worried that she might not have enough for the taxi fare but hated to ask.

"If you don't have enough to pay the driver, give him my number and have him call me." It was almost like he was reading her mind.

Jeong Sook got a good feeling from him and hustled off to find a cab.