

Between Heaven and Earth Book: One - The Cost of Freedom - Chapter Sixteen - Time to Go

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Over several cups of strong black coffee the evening's events were deconstructed and all the participants congratulated each other. There was no talk of what was next. As the effects of the night's liquor and adrenaline rush wore off, so did the celebratory mood. Rev. Kim suggested that they ought to close with a prayer of thanksgiving, get some sleep, and meet again the next morning.

Jeong Sook led Hyojin off to the room where she was staying. It was easy to find bedding, a space next to her own, and some basic toiletries for her guest. After washing up they laid down close together and tried in vain to sleep.

"I always wanted to believe that you would come for me but I almost gave up. Thank you, again, sister," Hyo Jin whispered.

"I never forgot you but to be honest I almost gave up myself. I can't forget our night out on that ice. When I think of Myung Oke dying out there I still feel despair that I couldn't save her. When those men took you away, I felt the same but as long as you were still alive I thought there was something

I could do if only I could find you. It is really like a miracle and I thank God."

Before they drifted off to sleep, Jeong Sook hugged the younger woman again. Before she slept Hyojin wondered if that handsome guy, Shin, was married. She hoped he wasn't.

The next morning the two women met with Rev. Kim in his office after breakfast. The Rev. Nick Shin was also present. The pastor wanted to open a conversation with the ladies about what was next.

He started out asking Hyo Jin what she wanted to do with her life.

"I really don't know. I'm kind of in shock. It was such a surprise. I'm glad I'm out of there but it was so sudden. I left everything I had behind and I don't know what to do now," she admitted.

"For the time being you are welcome to stay with us here. In fact, there is no doubt in my mind that the folks at that club will be looking for you. You will be safe here and you will have time to sort out your feelings and decide what you want to do." Kim, with a heart as big as all outdoors, extended his invitation.

"Thank you for that. I need some time and at this point I have nothing or anything to fall back on." Although sincerely grateful, Hyo Jin was at a loss as to what she might hope for.

"Oh Hyo Jin, I'm so happy you are here. You always have me. We have so much to catch up on. When I first came here I was in big trouble and the folks here have helped me so much. I hope you let them help us both." Jeong Sook was sure that they could go to the south together.

For the next two weeks Jeong Sook and Hyo Jin lived close together. Jeong Sook had a lot of questions about Hyo Jin's life and experiences since they had been separated. She told her harrowing story and Hyo Jin cried and laughed with her. For her part, Hyo Jin was still too traumatized by the misfortunes that had led her to the club where she was found. Jeong Sook didn't push her to tell more than she was ready to talk about.

Together they followed the mission's schedule and the routine that Jeong Sook had established. Hyo Jin ate like a bird and slept fitfully at first but with gentle encouragement she gradually got better. The most therapeutic thing was to have someone she trusted always close to her. Hyo Jin, like Jeong Sook when she had first come to the mission, had little exposure to religion and specifically Christianity. She just followed Jeong Sook around to prayer meetings, bible study, and worship service.

"Onni, why do they study, sing, and pray so much? Are they like the monks of long ago?" She asked with a very childlike wonder.

"Well, we study the bible because it is the word of God. We pray in order to make a relationship with God. I suppose we sing because it makes us happy. Do you mind?" Jeong Sook found it so easy to answer because she had asked the same questions a couple of months ago.

"No, of course I don't mind. I just wonder."

"If you have any questions I'm sure Rev. Kim or Rev. Shin would be happy to answer them."

Since the rescue, Nick Shin had been around the mission almost every day. Somehow Jeong Sook had gotten the idea that the reason why was because he had taken an interest in Hyo Jin.

And then one day, "Onni, do you think Mr. Shin is married?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Why?"

Well I think he is nice. Don't you?"

"Sure he is nice, why not. He is also a minister of the gospel." So, I was right, she thought. There is something going on. She didn't know what to think.

And she still didn't know what to think when Rev. Kim asked her to step into his office following Sunday service.

"So, how is your Hyo Jin? Is she happy here?"

"I suppose so. She isn't unhappy. I told her that I want to go to the south and that I was hoping that she would go with me."

"Did she say she wanted to go?" For the pastor this was key.

"She was noncommittal. She asked a lot about life in the south but I'm afraid that I couldn't tell her much. She seems to be taken with Rev. Shin."

"Is that right? I've noticed it too. I've already talked to Nick about it. I'm concerned it could complicate her situation. You've grown a lot and have shown a great deal of faith since you have come to us. Because of that you can take the next big step in faith. That's what it is going to take to get to the south. If Hyo Jin focuses on a love relationship with a man, she may become confused."

"What did Rev. Shin have to say?"

"I told him the same thing I just told you. He is interested in Hyo Jin and thinks he can make it work. I counseled him that it could be complicated for both of them. He thinks he can not only help her but be there for her." The pastor was a little hesitant to go further.

"Can't you tell him to just forget about her?"

"Probably not. They are both grown people and have to make their own decisions. They are free as long as they take responsibility for their choices. Who knows? It may be all for the best." Kim knew that there were no preordained outcomes in life.

That evening Kim sat down again with Hyo Jin and Jeong Sook.

"The time has come. We have an opportunity coming up to get some folks out of China and into the south. I have room for both of you but you have to make up your mind that you really want to go.

"Of course I want to go. Hyo Jin won't you come with me?" Jeong Sook was sure.

"Before you decide, I have to be totally up front with you. As I see it, you ladies, have three possible outcomes and none is 100% guaranteed.

The first is to travel to the south of China, illegally pass into Burma, and then into Cambodia. Then you can cross into Thailand where they will send you on to South Korea. You have to know that this is not without risk. Crossing from the north into China is considered by the North Korean regime as an economic crime. If you are sent back you will be punished as an economic criminal. On the other hand, crossing into a third country is considered treason towards the Kim regime and the nation. If you get caught and sent back you will be tried as a traitor and the sentence will be between ten and twenty years at hard labor. If you make it to South Korea, you will be free. Many have made it. More than 30,000 North Korean refugees are living in South Korea today. They are full citizens of the republic and are building new lives.

If you choose to stay in China, you will have to live with the results. You will always be illegal here and

will live on the fringes of society. You have to know these things." He had to be brutally honest.

"I'll go to the south, Heavenly Father help me." Jeong Sook was sure.

"Onni, I want to go with you but I can't now. I need more time. Please understand," Hyo Jin said.

Hyo Jin, please stay with us longer if you need to. We will take care of you. Jeong Sook get ready to go. Your faith has saved you." Kim was not surprised and was satisfied. The die was cast.

"Rev. Kim, when will we go?" Jeong Sook asked.

"It will be time to go soon. Be ready at a moment's notice." The pastor stood up and the meeting was over. Kim had a lot of ducks to get in a row.

Hyo Jin and Jeong Sook spent another night hugging and crying together. Jeong Sook's mind was made up. Hyojin struggled back and forth. She really thought that she and Rev. Shin had a future together. In the end, Jeong Sook was reluctantly convinced.

As Hyo Jin and Shin began making a relationship, they went out on several dates, lunch at a Chinese restaurant and dinner at a Korean place. They spent hours in the mission dining room in animated conversation. Everyone was a buzz about the budding romance, some were delighted and others were pointedly pessimistic. Hyo Jin was all aglow with new love and hope for the future when she reported to Jeong Sook. The older woman only smiled and wished her the best.

As for Jeong Sook, she was occupied with getting ready to go. She had no real idea what she needed to do to be ready.

"We will be going overland to the southern part of China. The journey may take two weeks so you should be ready for anything. I suggest you wear layers of clothes, lightweight garments underneath and warmer stuff that can be discarded as we go south. Don't pack any clothes; wear everything. Also good shoes will be important. There will be plenty of walking. Bring only one bag with things you will need, such as toiletries, a change of socks, and underwear. Traveling light will be important." Rev. Kim knew exactly what she should do. Of course this wouldn't be his first trip.

Jeong Sook assured him she understood and would do what he suggested. She couldn't help asking about the trip.

"Rev. Kim, how and where will be going? Who will go with us?"

"I know you must be anxious about the details but the less you know, the better. Please trust me and follow my instructions as well as you can."

"I do trust you," she told him.

"I can tell you that we will be going together with seven others who are just as anxious as you are. The goal is to reach Thailand. They will send you on to South Korea. Before reaching Thailand you will have to pass through several other countries. We have engaged brokers that will guide you through. The exact details have to remain unspoken until the last moment. Changing circumstances and security require this. Can you understand?" the pastor sought to both reassure her and tell her as much of the reality as possible.

"Yes, of course I understand," was her hesitant reply.

"I told you that your faith has saved you but the time to keep your faith no matter what is coming up. There will surely be difficulties and obstacles to be overcome. Your faith will carry you through and will be a big asset to get the others through. I believe in your fortitude and I'm counting on you. Can you do it?" he asked her again while holding her hand and looking into her eyes.

Once again she replied in the affirmative. She was moved by his trust and determined to do her best.

"Oh, one more thing. Be sure to check your bag and all your things for anything that might lead back to our mission here. I believe that, God willing, you'll make it through but we have to be sure that our work here won't be jeopardized even if you are caught. Please get rid of anything with names, addresses, or phone numbers. The most important numbers you can memorize. I will give you a new bible with no writing in it. Only take that with you."

"Of course I'll do it," she said again.

"Be ready."