

## Between Heaven and Earth: Book Two - A Cross to Bear - Chapter Two - A Chance Encounter

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When Jeong Sook came up the stairs, big scuffed leather bag slung over her shoulder, carrying a tray with a large cup of something, and some kind of sweet bread, the earth shifted. Guy looked up and immediately caught her eye. Well maybe it was a good time to take a break. Guy had never considered himself a lady's man but he was a sucker for a pretty face and this lady had it in spades.

As she negotiated the tables towards the bookshelves at the back of the room, Guy detected a soft smile. Arriving at a table she took a moment to get settled and looked over again. No doubt about it, there was a connection.

Guy returned to his story and wondered how things would unfold. Was it fate? Was it destiny? Or was it the product of an overactive imagination? Twenty minutes later when he glanced over again he saw she was studying 'Side by Side', a popular English text book for adults.

"This is right up my alley," he said under his breath.

She was wearing a floppy straw hat with sunglasses perched on the crown. A lace trimmed white peasant blouse that was all the rage that summer over baggy black pants that completed her slightly bohemian style.

"An artist maybe?" he thought.

Anyway back to the book. When he looked up again she was all about studying but then as if on cue, she glanced at him again. It was really a pretty face with high Korean cheek bones and soft brown oval shaped eyes. Guy couldn't help beaming his best smile. She responded shyly with a beautiful smile and then looked down.

"Damn I like Korean women!"

Well it was time for another smoke. On the way back he made a detour past her table and as he passed he took the plunge,

"It seems like you're studying English," he lamely remarked. "Can I help you?"

Jeong Sook looked up startled, hesitated and replied, "Can you speak English?"

"A little bit," Guy shot back wittily.

She laughed and the ice was broken.

That morning Jeong Sook had an appointment with Professor Lee at the Art Department of a second tier university and so had taken the subway to Amsa dong feeling both hopeful and anxious. The meeting was in her view inconclusive. She had shown him her portfolio; all work completed since arriving in Seoul three years ago. Professor Lee seemed more interested in her personal story and asked many questions that only increased her discomfort. She wasn't even sure she wanted the job and she surely didn't want to answer the questions about her family and marital status. She did need a job. Oh well, nothing was sure except the desolateness of these last three years. She tried to forget all that she had left behind but it left a huge hole in her heart.

Kim Jeong Sook had been born in Pyongyang into a family of importance and relative privilege. Her father held an important position in the regime of the Kim family. Her great-grandfather was one of the leaders of the Donghak revolution of the 1870s that was considered by Kim Il Sung, the Great Leader and founder of The People's Republic of North Korea, to be a forerunner of the Glorious Revolution. Her father was the leader of the Way of Heaven Religion and as long as he behaved he held that position in the government department of culture.

On the day he was arrested Jeong Sook was thirty-eight years old, married with two kids and held a prestigious position as a professor in the art department of Pyongyang University. Within three weeks her husband, a minor official in the department of culture, divorced her and took the kids. She had already been dismissed from her position at the university and told that she and her mother had forfeited their Pyongyang resident cards and as undesirables had to vacate the capital district.

She had only a brief meeting with her father and she almost didn't recognize him. He was haggard, pale and the side of his face was swollen and discolored. He couldn't explain anything and only urged her to take her mother and get out anyway possible. Shaken to her core by the sight of her formally robust and masterful father she began looking for ways to get out of the country. Through a university friend that she was close to, she learned that there was a way but her mom refused. She would stay and follow her husband to whatever gulag he was bound for. No amount of words or tears would change her mind. Jeong Sook was torn in two and couldn't leave her children. When she tried to see them she was turned away and told that she was dead to them. Finally her promise to her father won out and with the dollars he provided, she began her odyssey.

Her shift at the noodle shop started at four and since she had time to kill she decided to splurge on coffee and something sweet. Distracted, agitated, and somewhat blue she trudged up two flights of stairs and looked around. Her eyes went immediately to the foreigner sitting at a table near the windows. Later she tried to remember what he looked like that first day but all she could remember is that he looked like a foreigner. Their eyes met and she felt an electric shock go through her body. It was surprising; she had almost forgotten that she had a body.

The blue eyes captivated her and she prayed, "Dear God let it be".

A little confused, she looked down and made her way to a table on the far side of the room. She hadn't had a reaction like this in a long time and Seoul was full of handsome guys. Worse, he was a foreigner and he even looked like an American. She tried to put it out of her mind.

She arranged her stuff and began studying English. Jeong Sook had always heard about Americans. They were soulless materialist, imperialists out for world hegemony and just plain bad. If anything she was afraid of them, then why this and why now?

She had started studying English six months ago not because she had any American dream, surely she didn't even like them, but because everybody in South Korea was intent on mastering the language and, who knew, it might be a leg up somehow. She enjoyed the class at the neighborhood community center but she wasn't very good at it and never dreamed of actually speaking to a foreigner and now this.

"Why now? Why did you come to me now?" welled up inside her mind.

Time and again when she looked up from her book their eyes seemed to meet and when he smiled it lit up her soul and she melted. Of course she endeavored to hide such compromising and perplexing emotions. After all she was a Korean woman.

"Please God," she thought.

Then he was standing right in front of her. Jeong Sook's heart skipped a beat and began to flutter. He was saying something but she couldn't catch it.

She tried to speak but all that would come out was "Can you speak English?"

He laughed and said, "A little bit".

She had to laugh and she was surprised again because she had no recollection of the last time she had actually laughed

Guy didn't know it yet but he was in way over his head.