

Between Heaven and Earth: Book Two - A Cross to Bear - Chapter Eight - And so it Began

Michael Downey
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And so it began; where it would end there was no telling. It began in the dog days of summer when it was almost unbearable to be outside for long. It only continued to heat up as the skies turned a deep blue and the temperatures began to moderate. Both of the lovers were busy, Jeong Sook with her two jobs and an occasional job interview. Guy had several deadlines to meet and he had to keep prospecting for the next assignment. The unfinished novel was always weighing on his mind. They continued their romance daily on Kakao. Guy figured he had the situation under control but that was something like imagining a hastily built sea wall would withstand the storm surge driven ashore by hurricane force winds.

They met several times a week as the summer waned when they could coordinate their schedules. Of course as a freelancer, Guy had a lot more flexibility than Jeong Sook who was punching two time clocks. They ate together, drank together, Jeong Sook was crazy about the country club, and made love. Neither of them was looking to the future, it was enough to enjoy what they had now.

It was the outdoor drinking season in Seoul and Kyle, possibly the season's number one advocate, noticed that Guy's enthusiastic participation wasn't what it used to be. In the past they had spent many hours drinking outside convenience stores, in parks, and out on the trails that ran along the Han River. Now days, more often than not, Guy declined to join in the great outdoor festivities. He always had a good excuse like work or another appointment. It just wasn't like Guy and Kyle wasn't buying it. He knew it had something to do with that woman.

"Hey dog, why ain't you with that Yoko Ono chick tonight?" Kyle was more than half in the bag.

It was two o'clock in the morning on a sweltering Thursday. Kyle had woken Guy up an hour ago with persistent phone calls insisting that he join him for a nightcap at a 7-11 around the corner from Guy's building.

"Her name ain't Yoko, it's Jeong Sook," Guy informed him for maybe the third time.

"Kyung Sook, Bum Hook, it don't matter. Does she speak English?" Kyle had a bone to pick and he was gonna get to the bottom of this.

"Yeah, a little, and she's getting better. Why?"

"You told me before you never sleep with a woman that speaks English. You said it was your strictest rule."

Guy may have said something like that to Kyle at some point but he didn't recall it and anyway context was everything.

There was only one appropriate response, "Go fuck yourself. How about Niki," the Itaewon lady boy that Kyle may or may not have had a thing for, "how's her English coming along?"

"Who?" At this point, Kyle was seriously slurring his words and was about to slide off the plastic stool he was half sitting on. It was about time to bring this delightful evening to an end, thought Guy.

"Anyway, what makes you think I'm sleeping with her?" Guy couldn't resist trying to get in the last word.

"Cause I know you, that's why. When am I gonna get to meet her?"

"She don't like drunks or ancient aliens. It's late. Time to go home," Guy had enough for one night.

"So dog, let me hold a tenner so I can get a couple tall boys for the ride home." Kyle never had enough; beer or money.

"You are already wasted. You don't need any more," Guy reasoned. "How you gonna get home?"

"I'll take a cab. Got a credit card but the wife will kill me if she sees any booze on it."

Guy gave up and handed over the money. A happy camper, Kyle flagged a cab and with sufficient refreshments, headed for Myeongil-dong.

"Ah well, at least he speaks English," Guy mused as to why Kyle was a good friend.

Jeong Sook was much more circumspect about her new relationship. She told no one. Who was there to tell? She did think about Guy and considered all kinds of possible outcomes. She came to no conclusions but she realized that she was suddenly happy. One day she splurged and bought new underwear from a department store, lingerie in fact. Her life was changing, she just didn't know if it was for better or for worse. She didn't care, she was all in.

As their relationship grew, their ability to communicate across the language barrier improved in fits and starts. It was by no means perfect. There were plenty of misunderstandings, some minor and some that erupted into fights. Guy did his best to let most of it go but Jeong Sook was a lot more emotionally volatile. She shouted at him a couple of times and told him she never wanted to see him again once over stuff that just baffled Guy. He developed the strategy to hold his tongue and let it blow over and it always did; sometimes in a day and at most three days. One time she went ballistic over something that had absolutely nothing to do with Guy. Along the alley that led up the hill to the country club were a slew of 'buy me a drink, juicy bars' where scantily clad women did their best to entice GIs and others in to sample their wares. Jeong Sook had seen them many times and, like everyone else, seemed to ignore them. Then out of the blue as they sat at the club she became at first sullen then angry and silent. She was angry at Guy and of course he had no inkling as to why. It took a while but he was finally able to coax it out of her.

"You never understand. Impossible, you can't know me," she started out defiant.

"What the hell are you talking about? I love you Jeong Sook." Once out of his mouth he realized that it was the first time that he had ever said it.

"Love me? You can't love me! You can't know me, you aren't Korean!" It was like a gauntlet thrown down. Guy declined to pick it up.

"Come on Jeong Sook, what's that got to do with anything? You are you and I am I." Guy was pretty sure of himself and figured he just needed to calm her down.

But she got more wound up, "You foreigner! You mi-kook! You never understand Korean girl," as usual she slipped into Korean when she was upset. Next she unleashed a stream of angry sounding Korean that Guy could only catch a few words of like mi-kook, American and whey- kook, foreigner.

"Ok, ok, you need to calm down and tell me what this is all about." Guy wasn't at the end of his rope but he was close.

With a great effort Jeong Sook did calm down some and tried to explain.

"How you understand Korean people, how they think, how they feel?" By this time she was weeping and the anger began to dissipate.

Guy put his arms around her and she cried and cried. Guy was relieved that it looked like it might be over but he still had no idea what had set her off.

Finally she tried again, "You saw those womens working to get money, selling their bodies. You don't care, nobodies care."

"You mean the juicy girls? They're working girls." He wasn't sure why he or anyone else ought to be caring about working girls. It was a touchy topic and he wisely held his tongue.

"Right, why Korean women have to work like that? They somebody mother, daughter, and sister. Why they have to play with GI? Nobody know how Korean womens have to suffer."

Now Guy got the picture. He was walking through a mind field and he didn't bring up his opinion that most of them had chosen that mercenary occupation. Instead he commiserated with Jeong Sook and continued to hold her.

"How about you, you play with those womens?" She hurled it as an accusation but her emotional furry was about spent and it came out as only a question.

Guy fielded it like an all star shortstop. "Of course not," he lied. She was out at first but the game was not over.

Having been the victim of sex trafficking herself, all the raw emotions of anger and shame had boiled to the surface when she saw those girls working the sex trade. Her pride as a Korean woman was deeply hurt and without warning she lashed out at Guy, the nearest target of opportunity. Apparently Guy had handled it right and after she was spent, they reconciled. Of course Guy really couldn't know then what he had on his hands but he was going to find out before long.

On a different night after getting fairly loaded, Jeong Sook disappeared. When he called her on her cell she excitedly told him that she was with Kyung Hee at the Paradise Lounge two doors down. When he found her she was drinking shots with her new friend Kyung Hee, a juicy girl. Lady's drinks were 25 bucks a piece and Kyung Hee had consumed ten. Of course Jeong Sook didn't have that kind of money and Guy wasn't overjoyed when he had to put it on his credit card. Jeong Sook was quite pleased with herself and Guy let it go. It could have been worse, right?

The Harvest Moon Festival came early that year and by the time it rolled around in mid September the temperatures were slowly cooling off and they grew closer. One thing that Guy had learned about living in Korea was that you could count on the orderly change of the seasons. By August fifteenth the worst of the suffocating heat was over. Then you could start looking forward to the autumn.

Jeong Sook and Guy took advantage of the reasonable evening temperatures to go on long walks. Several times they followed a stream that wound through downtown from Myung-dong towards the Han river. They each practiced their language skills and tried to get to know each other better. When they got too hot or the mosquitoes swarmed, there were plenty of coffee shops just a stone's throw from the walking path. Guy was becoming more and more curious about this mystery woman. He knew she was divorced and that she had two daughters that lived with their father. She told him that she was born outside of Seoul and she wasn't close to her family. This sounded odd but he didn't push her to talk about things she was reluctant to reveal. He was a writer with a nose for a good story and he smelled one here. More than once she mentioned one of her new vocabulary words; privacy.

The Harvest Moon holiday would last for the traditional three days with the two day weekend tacked on for good measure. Since neither of them had any family obligations to visit their hometowns, Guy thought it was a great chance to go away together. He invited her to go with him to the East Sea. They could stay in a nice hotel, eat the freshest seafood, and swim in the sea. She was enthusiastic at first and they made plans. Later she backed out. Her excuse was that she had to fill in at the hospital for co-workers that needed the time off. Ok, it made sense, but still he had never spent one entire night with her. Their love making was always in hotels and afterwards, she insisted she had to go home. He had never seen her place and she always had an excuse when he invited her to his apartment. When he pointed out this behaviour she always told him the same thing.

"Guy, you just don't know Korean people. Someday I teach you."

"Yeah, ok," he replied. We'll see about that he thought.