

Between Heaven and Earth: Book Two - A Cross to Bear - Chapter Sixteen - The Rain Check

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"What do you think? Do you like it?"

"It's real good. Looks expensive," Jeong Sook replied.

They were in the ladies department at the Hyundai Department store. Guy wanted to buy something nice for her but she was dragging her feet.

"Yeah, I like it but I already got a rain coat. You better save your money. Maybe you gonna get married again someday."

The garment in question was a Burberry trench coat and to compare it to a rain coat would be like calling a Lamborghini just a car. It was cut in the traditional design, was a shade of olive green, and it came with a removable liner. Looked like down filled. Furthermore Jeong Sook appeared fabulous in it.

"Let's call it a birthday present. When is your birthday anyway?" Guy's mind was made up.

"Guy, you know my birthday is in July. It's too much. Save your money."

"Christmas is coming up. We'll call it an early Christmas present."

The two sales girls urged her to look at herself in the floor length mirror.

"Oh Samonim, you look so elegant. You must have it," the older girl gushed. She was using the honorific term, samonim, used for addressing an honored teacher's wife.

Jeong Sook frowned but inside she was smiling. Imagine that, they thought she was Guy's wife. Sincere or not, the words sounded good and she was won over.

The purchase made, Guy recommend that she wear the new coat and the sales girl gave them a oversized shopping bag to carry Jeong Sook's slightly ratty long knit coat out of the store. Guy wanted her to just discard it but Jeong Sook said,

"Oh no. I got this when I first came to Seoul. It full of memories. I keep it."

On the way out they passed a boutique style shop on the first floor that sold hand bags and women's hats. Guy usually admired a woman that knew how to wear a hat. He pulled her inside and began looking for the right style and color. Together they chose a forest green felt number with a wide brim. It was just right for the Burberry. Jeong Sook stuffed the floppy hat she had been wearing into the the shopping bag. Next Guy tried to steer her towards the shoe department but she put her foot down this time.

"Let's go! We gonna be late."

"Yeah ok," Guy conceded but he promised himself that he would replace those Ugg (ly) boots she was wearing at the earliest opportunity.

They had a dinner appointment in Gunja dong. It was the rain check they had promised Rev. Kim. On the twenty minute subway ride Guy couldn't keep his eyes off her. She looked, so calm, composed, and sure of herself. She was all smiles but was silent. As usual she was far from sure of herself. She was considering again the things she needed to talk to the pastor about. Things like the meaning and purpose of her life. Why couldn't she be happy and satisfied with her new life in the south? Was she missing

something? This was a chance to sort out some of these pressing things. She was convinced that she was rapidly approaching a turning point in her life. She was ready to move on if she only knew what she was being called to do. Called; this is the first time she had conceived of it in that way, a calling. But she knew immediately that she was being called to do something. But what?

After arriving at the subway station, Guy and Jeong Sook took the short walk over to Rev. Kim's office. Jeong Sook remained silent and lost in thought most of the way. Guy occupied himself by locating and kicking piles of leaves. It was one of his favorite seasonal pastimes. The pastor was waiting for them on the side walk in front of the building. He had a big smile and after greeting them he began to chat with Jeong Sook in Korean. Guy figured they were discussing the merits of different restaurants and he was right.

"He know a good place. Let's go." It didn't seem like it was open to debate so Guy quickly acquiesced.

The clergyman lead the way and flagged a cab down the block.

"It's not far. You all must be hungry." Guy detected a hint of a southern accent in his English.

At the Wangsimni district the cab took a right and entered an alley lined with restaurants, coffee shops, and bars. It pulled up in front of an establishment in the traditional Korean style with a walled-in courtyard surrounded by several tile roofed one story buildings with sliding paper and wood doors. It was dusk and the lanterns that lit the premises glowed softly creating a warm, romantic atmosphere from a long ago time. The hostesses greeted them and showed them to their private dining room. They, of course, removed their shoes at the door and sat on the ornate cushions on the floor. To Guy's wonderment, there was no dining table in site. Not wanting to look more foolish than usual, he resisted the temptation to ask how they were going to eat.

"This is a pretty old house. It has been on this same spot for almost six hundred years." Jeong Sook was translating the information provided by Kim. "It once was an inn used by travelers going to the capital city from their home places. Mostly it was for government officials, rich traders, and their horses. Horses more valuable than poor people and they ate better." The last was an editorial comment tossed in by Jeong Sook herself.

After ordering, Kim and Jeong Sook talked in Korean about something. Guy understood they were discussing China and the churches there but he couldn't catch the gist.

"He talking bout a big problem in China. He really worried now. The Chinese Communist Party going after the house churches all over China. They close many churches, take many to jail, and even shoot some people." Jeong Sook sounded as concerned as Kim.

"The Party in China is threatened by people with strong belief in anything that isn't the Party. It's not just Christians but also Buddhist, Taoists, and any religion. They are scared to lose control of the people. Their repression is becoming more and more brutal," the pastor explained matter of factly to Guy in English.

Guy didn't know how to respond. He knew of the Falun Gong folks who regularly demonstrated in Seoul about the alleged atrocities they were suffering at the hands of the CCP.

"How about your church Reverend," Guy asked politely.

"It's always been dangerous for the ethnic Koreans and refugees from the north. Now it's getting worse. We have to be more and more careful and secretive to avoid the police. The party has a system of informers and monitors that are always watching and reporting. Usually they are your own neighbors. My believers have strong faith but I'm worried about their safety in China." As he spoke, the level of concern showed on his face.

As they talked, the door slid open and six serving girls in traditional simple peasant attire entered bearing three low tables already set for an elaborate feast of fish, fowl, and various meats all prepared in a style fit for royal emissaries. The tables were set before the three guests who marveled at the spread of dishes prepared for them.

"Help yourself!" Rev. Kim invited them to dig in.

After a period of intense eating, and questions and answers about the identity and ingredients of the more obscure offerings, the talk turned serious again.

"Guy, tell him your football stories. I want to hear about 'the zone' and 'reckless abandon' again."

Of course Guy obliged and Kim listened with great interest.

"Americans love their football. I saw a couple of college games when I was at the University of Tennessee. It was mostly a great mystery to me but the enthusiasm was contagious."

"Ah yes, the Tennessee Volunteers. A great program," Guy let them know.

"How about 'the zone,'" Jeong Sook insisted. "And the reckless thing, I want to know about that."

"Yes Guy, I've heard of being in the zone. Can you tell more about it?"

So Guy did his best. "Well Michael Jordan was a great athlete, probably still is. When he played the game it was a thing of beauty. He made it look almost effortless. He played 'in the zone.' He and many other athletes, artists, musicians, and mystics are able to enter into this state of enhanced performance and perception. To be fully engaged in something that has the greatest meaning possible is to be 'in the zone.' It may be that they first pay attention and then narrow their focus down and concentrate on the one thing. The right hemisphere and left hemisphere of the brain are completely integrated. Performance is optimized. Time flies; it disappears," Guy figured he nailed it and looked at the others to see if they got it.

Rev. Kim got it. His eyes lit up and he said, "Yes, athletes, artists, and mystics, maybe this is how you touch God. It reminds me of the Greek word logos. Jesus tells us we must be perfect as our father in heaven is perfect. The logos is the word, the articulated truth, the transforming agent that brought order out of chaos at the beginning of being. We Christians believe that Jesus is the word made flesh, that is the full embodiment of the logos. Surely he meant we should all become the fullest embodiment of the word as possible. Here lies our redemption. This is the transforming work of Christ, the messiah."

The preacher paused and looked at Guy. Jeong Sook was still thinking about basketball and Jesus. Slowly she was putting the pieces together. The biggest obstacle was her English ability and so the pastor repeated the entire exchange for her in their native language. Then she understood, maybe on a deeper level than the two guys.

"Yes, the logos, transforming agent, Christ, the messiah, she was trying out the English words. Was this her calling, to be the agent of change?" Her voice answered right away and she knew. The voice said that she must be perfect as her heavenly father was perfect. Now in Korean the word perfect doesn't mean the same thing as in English, that is, without fault. Instead it is more like complete or fulfilled. She knew she was being called to be complete and then she would find fulfillment.

In three different ways, they each had a moment of enlightenment or even a religious experience. That was even before they got into the esoteric topic of 'reckless abandon.'

The meal finished, the wait staff returned and carried the tables out. How efficient thought Guy. They had completed the feast without the aid of anything alcoholic to wash it down. Yet they were each on a kind of high. Rev. Kim decided they ought to toast the evening and the conversation.

"Jesus himself drank wine with meals as did all of his brethren. Saint Paul advised us to take a little wine for our stomach's sake." He ordered two bottles of a French red wine.

They smiled, laughed, and drank the fruit of the vine. Jeong Sook excused herself to visit the ladies room and the men stepped out into the courtyard and had a smoke. When she rejoined them, Guy and Jeong Sook held hands and strolled around admiring the pools and gardens in the lantern light. While they were occupied Rev. Kim took the opportunity to settle the check. Jeong Sook protested, when she found out. They had invited him and they should pay. But it was a done deal. The only thing to do now was to take him for coffee and get that check.

As they left, Jeong Sook was thinking about perfection.

"It is a perfect evening," she commented to the gentlemen.