

Between Heaven and Earth: Book Two - A Cross to Bear - Chapter Seventeen - Reckless

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It was almost three a.m. when Guy got back to his place. Although exhausted, he wasn't ready to sleep. He flipped on the light in the spare bedroom that was his work space, sat in his desk chair, and put his feet up on the oak table. It had been a long eventful day and his head was spinning. He needed to sort things out a little.

After bidding Rev. Kim goodbye and wishing him a safe trip back to China, Guy and Jeong Sook had made their way to a nearby hotel. They had gone through this same routine many times before but this time there was an added urgency that they both felt as they took the elevator, up to the third floor,

and got to their room. The love making began almost before the door was closed. When round one was finished they were both sweaty, sated, and the sheets were soaked. Not an intelligible word had passed between them.

Round two was a lot more urethral. She asked him several times if he really loved her and then again,

"Why did you come to me now?"

Other than to say that sure he loved her Guy didn't try to answer. He knew there was something much more that she was asking. He just wasn't sure what it was. Soon Jeong Sook became very quiet and only held on to him. As they dressed to leave Guy asked her,

"Are you happy Jeong Sook?"

"Happy, I don't know what that mean. I'm always happy to be with you. I'm happy if you really love me. Happy is like smoke. If I try to catch it and keep it, it just disappears in my hands."

Guy had no response. Had she said yes or no? He kissed her again and said,

"Let's blow this pop-stand!"

This made Jeong Sook laugh. She had no possible idea what it meant but it sounded funny and she was smiling again when Guy ushered her into a cab out on the street. Then he walked, smoked, kicked some more leaves, and pondered life's mysteries before he got his own cab. The neighborhood was deserted when he arrived on his doorstep.

Even though the building was definitely 'non-smoking' and he usually had to go up to the roof or to a stairwell to get his fix, sometimes late at night when he had a lot to consider he broke the rule. From the kitchen sink he fetched an unwashed coffee cup to use as an ashtray and lit up as he reviewed the evening's conversation, mainly looking for clues as to Jeong Sook's unfathomable ways.

The everyday norms of Korean society are pretty much dictated by doing the correct thing at the right time and of course in the correct way. It was most certainly a remnant of the legacy of Confucius. Now days after a meal, lunch or dinner, with friends, coffee is taken. To rush off would seem cold and at least impolite. So it was only natural for the three to repair to a nearby Tom 'n Toms to continue the evening.

The place was packed but the wait for a table was merely ten minutes. Jeong Sook ordered a latte and the men both got ice-coffee. In addition, she indulged her sweet tooth with a large piece of cheesecake. Neither of the gentlemen were interested in it but that was no problem because, as Guy knew well, the lady could easily finish it herself.

Once the drinks and the sweets were retrieved, Jeong Sook lost no time in bringing up the reckless abandon thing.

"Reckless, what that mean? Sounds like careless and foolish to me."

Guy tried to explain, "Reckless abandon is an idiom. You can't understand it by knowing what the

individual words mean. They go together and the meaning comes from using them together."

"So what they mean together?" Jeong Sook was really trying to get it. The preacher was also leaning in close to catch Guy's explanation. His English was a lot better than Jeong Sook's so Guy directed his comments towards him.

"The expression is actually 'play with reckless abandon.' Of course it originates with football and means to disregard and abandon everything else, including life and limb, to make the yardage, the catch, or cross the goal line. It's a single mindedness that is considered a virtue in not only sports but in successful people in all aspects of life."

As usual Kim, after Guy explained a few of the gridiron terms, was quick to catch on and he spent a little time translating it for Jeong Sook.

"Ah yes, maybe what you are talking about is the sacrifice necessary to accomplish things," the clergyman's mind was working fast to connect the ideas in two different languages.

"I suppose you could say that. You have to sacrifice the now to get something in the future." This was heady stuff and Guy was working his way through it.

"Of course the concept of sacrifice is central to being human. Only we can conceive of a future. We give up something now to get something better in the future," the pastor said.

Kim was doing his best to translate all of it into Korean but he had plenty more to say.

"In most religions, sacrifice is essential to redemption. Of course, we Christians rely on the sacrifice of Jesus for salvation." This was basic for Kim.

"So salvation is simply believing that Jesus died for our sins?" Guy was familiar with this fundamental doctrine through his Catholic upbringing. He hadn't considered it in many a year.

"Yes of course, that's it but my experience is that it isn't exactly as simple as that."

"What do you mean?" Guy was a little surprised. It had always been presented as a simple unassailable doctrine.

"What I mean is that it depends on what you mean by believe. I've come to see that to believe something means to act as if it was true. When Jesus' disciples asked him what they need to do to be like him he replied; Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. This may be the key to understanding our salvation. It has helped me a lot"

Jeong Sook remembered how these words had helped her in China and understood.

"Then salvation means everybody has to die on the cross like Jesus; not just believing?" Guy was perplexed.

"Well it's something like that. Remember Our Lord said pick up YOUR cross, not my cross or anyone else's cross. God may call each of us to a different responsibility. We may all have our own calling."

Jeong Sook sat up straight when she heard this and dropped a fork full of cheesecake in her lap. This is what she had to know. What is my calling? She knew that this was her salvation.

"Rev. Kim, do you have a calling?" She asked in Korean and waited while Kim translated into English for Guy.

"Yes of course. Sometime ago I decided that God was calling me to this work to rescue North Koreans trapped in China. It is surely my calling and my cross."

"Wait a minute, you said that you yourself decided what your calling was. Didn't God himself call you?" This seemed contradictory to Guy.

"Isn't it the same thing. How exactly would an invisible and voiceless God go about calling someone?" Kim had worked all this out to his own satisfaction sometime ago.

"God may call you in different ways including the small quiet voice he uses to guide us," was Kim's answer.

Jeong Sook was stunned. The small voice, it was God calling her. All she had to do was to ask what her

calling was.

"It is my belief that accepting Jesus as Lord is only the beginning of a process of redemption. Real salvation is won everyday as we overcome the darkness in our souls little by little and are born again as slightly better people. In order to overcome our own darkness we have to give up or sacrifice that part of ourselves. We do this by setting our sites on the highest good we can imagine and struggle to achieve it. This is what Jesus meant when he said pick up your cross and follow me."

"But isn't Jesus the messiah," Guy wanted to know.

"Yes of course. He is the messiah, the Christ, the logos made flesh and we should also become the fullest embodiment of the logos as we possibly can. I believe that we all have within us the potential to do that. Each of us has the power to transform ourselves, our families, the society around us, and even nations. We can make things better or at least not make things worse." Kim spoke like he knew what he was talking about and it was convincing.

When he paused in order to translate, Guy thought about what he had heard. The idea was empowering and thus very attractive. Imagine that, a calling. He had always wanted to be a hero when he was a kid. But as good as it sounded it might all be just the wild ramblings of some kind of religious nut. After all, what did he really know about this Rev. Kim?

"Yeah sounds a little dangerous to me. Messiahs usually get crucified," Guy piped up.

Kim threw back his head and laughed, "You probably right about that. I'm trying to avoid such a fate if I can."

They had a good laugh together and then Guy had another question, "How would somebody know if they had a calling and what it was. A guy could end up going down one or more rabbit holes."

"Well, I'd say you can never know for sure. You would have to go into it with eyes wide open and lots of preparation. But once you make up your mind, you got to step out in faith, kinda what you said was reckless abandon." Kim was real good at tying things together and explaining it in a reasonable way.

As Kim took the time to translate everything for Jeong Sook, she got more and more excited. She knew she had a calling and also what it was. She wasn't yet ready to tell anybody. It was too far beyond anything she could imagine.

"Yeah, that might be a good way to think of it, playing with reckless abandon," the preacher continued. "It is more than a little scary to commit one's life to one course. You may recall the parable of the lilies of the field; Take no heed for what you will eat or drink. Consider the lilies of the field. Don't chase after money and material things, instead pursue the highest meaning possible. The things you need will come to you. Pick up your cross and follow me."

It was hard for Guy to take it all in. After translating the soliloquy Kim took time to answer some questions that Jeong Sook brought up. It was mostly about his family and he admitted that his taking on such a life was a hardship on them. He had great sympathy for them but no regrets.

Two and a half hours had flown by and it was time to go. As they said their goodbyes and promises to do this again, Jeong Sook was elated and Guy felt mesmerized but also like he was standing with one foot in a rabbit hole.