

## Between Heaven and Earth: Book Three - Destiny and Fate - Chapter Four - Word

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Words had always been important to Guy. As a lad he had been a voracious reader. Not textbooks or other school materials mind you but novels, biographies, and as he got older, nonfiction such as news articles, histories, and even the occasional religious or philosophical essays. If he had to identify one ingredient that had shaped him it would be all the words he had devoured. Naturally he became adept at using words to express himself. When he began writing he quickly realized that he had a voice and that this voice was derived from the spoken word. He spoke and wrote almost effortlessly and came to trust his instinct to articulate the word.

He had always admired men, and women for that matter, that took action and he aspired to be a man of action. Even more he admired those who were articulate. Word smiths that could weave a tale and put forth a narrative for any occasion. Someone who was gifted in both arenas, JFK came to mind, seemed to him to be at the height of the game.

On the other hand, he was quite limited in other media such as drawing, making music, or even handwriting. His handwriting absolutely sucked and had since he was in the second grade. God bless the advent of the keyboard!

Jeong Sook figured she really liked him for just this reason. She loved to listen to him talk-on about any subject. Although she couldn't understand many of his ramblings in English, she loved the sound of his voice. She often encouraged him by asking questions.

"Guy, why do you write, why do you want to be a writer?"

They were sitting in a restaurant celebrating the coming of spring. Of course it was not yet spring and they still had to bundle up against old man winter when they went out. The day was (입춘) Ipchun according to the traditional Korean farmers calendar and meant the coming of spring. Guy had always found this calendar, which divided the year into twenty-four periods, very accurate. He knew that from then on the days would get warmer even though the nights would continue to be sub freezing. Farmers needed to get ready for planting.

"Well, I guess I write because I like to write. And I think I'm pretty good at it. I have a lot of stories to tell and it makes me feel good when I tell my story. Stories are constructed out of words and words are powerful things. They have the power to move people and change things. I suppose that I want to have an impact on this world."

"What you want to change?" she asked sincerely.

"I want to tell the truth as I see it and see how that changes things, for the better I hope."

"What you know about the truth?" she asked half in jest.

In all seriousness he replied, "You're right about that. What can I know about the truth? I always say 'the truth as I understand it' and I do have some capacity for figuring out what is true and I try to keep my eyes open to other possibilities."

"You ought to tell the truth about North Korea. That what need to be changed," she said vehemently. "But who gonna believe you?"

"I've been thinking about that. I'd like to tell your story. If the story is good enough people might believe it."

She liked that and even though she was uneasy about the thought of her personal life being exposed, it

made her like him and even love him more.

"That's why I'm focusing more on writing fiction nowadays. Embedded in a good story, a lot of truth can be told."

"You may be right. You try that! but be careful."

He laughed at her and said, " I'm not really a careful person."

She worried about that.

Earlier she had filled him in on her meeting with Yu Hee Soon. Now Guy was a practical guy and always needed a plan of action. He considered the meeting had a lot of possibilities but he endeavored to keep his eyes wide open. He now had a to-do list. At the top was raising money. The two thousand bucks for a 'proof of life' for Jeong Sook's father was a reasonable first step. He could swing that fairly easily by getting cash advances on a couple of his credit cards. It probably wouldn't be as easy to pay back but it seemed safer than robbing a bank.

The twenty thousand dollars or more to get him out was a much more daunting proposition. He didn't have it and didn't have a good idea off the top of his head of how to go about raising it. At the bank, when he was getting the cash advance, he involuntarily thought again about Kyle and his caper fantasy. Would it come down to such a thing? He was all-in but there had to be some limit, right?

He had given the bills to Jeong Sook stuffed in an oversized bank envelope. She made a call and said she would go right away.

"I better go with you." He was a little worried about her walking around with the envelope bulging with cash.

"No Guy, I go alone. I'll be ok."

"Why, you don't want to be seen with me?"

"It's not that. Better not to give them a reason to start rumors."

Yu Hee Soon already knew quite a bit about Kim Jeong Sook including about the American guy she was keeping company with. It was not only a curiosity but a minor concern as to who this guy was. What was his role in this affair?

Jeong Sook was more than nervous when she left to hand over the envelope of cash to find news of her father. Guy had called it a 'proof of life'. He had told her that there were rules when purchasing a 'proof of life.'

"Rules, what rules?" She wanted to know.

"You know, rules. You can't just accept someone's word that he is alive. You need to get a photograph, preferably holding a newspaper with the current date. Then you have something that's worth something." Of course Guy knew all about this mostly by watching movies and TV programs.

Jeong Sook wasn't so clear and told Guy, "Okay, I'll ask her."

What really churned her stomach was the possibility that her beloved father had already passed away. She knew that it was likely that under such severe conditions in the prison camp, it was more than likely that she was too late.

Hee Soon greeted Jeong Sook warmly when she arrived at the same coffee shop, "So nice to see you again. I didn't expect you so soon."

"Well, you can imagine that my father's fate is a pressing concern to me," Jeong Sook graciously replied.

"Yes of course, you are a filial daughter."

Before passing over the envelope, Jeong Sook mentioned the 'proof of life' issue.

"Would it be possible to get a photograph?" She was not at all confident but had to try.

"I'll request it and if it is at all possible, we'll get it. You have to understand that these are extreme circumstances and it may be out of the question."

Hee Soon thought, what is this? It may be the influence of the American. She took the agreed upon payment and promised to call when something turned up, maybe five days. Jeong Sook began an excruciating period of waiting.

Exactly five days later Jeong Sook got the call.

"There's some good news. According to our information, your father is indeed alive. We need to talk. How soon can we get together?"

The wave of emotion that washed over the filial daughter rendered her unable to reply right away. In fact the tears gushed out of her and she almost collapsed. And that was for good news.

"Are you ok, are you ok? Try to get a hold of yourself. We need to talk." Hee Soon was sympathetic but there were things that should be decided.

"Yes, I'll be alright. It's just such a shock after so long with no news. I can't thank you enough. This news means the world to me. I'm at my job now but I get off in two hours. I can be at that coffee shop in three hours if that is good for you."

Jeong Sook's emotions ran wild from exhilaration to heartache for her father but she was ready to move forward.

"Let's say about eight pm. If you can, why don't you bring the American gentleman along, I'd like to meet him and I'm sure he needs to know about what I have to say."

"Yes of course, eight o' clock will be fine and I will try to bring along the American. He is awful busy."

Guy didn't accompany her to the meeting, mainly because Jeong Sook hadn't let him know about it. Instinctively she felt that she had better keep these things compartmentalized. At the consultation, Hee Soon was all smiles. Jeong Sook had gotten herself under control and was business like.

Hee Soon had with her two brown manila envelopes and as soon as the greetings were out of the way, pulled two A-4 sheets out of one.

"Your father is quite well known in the Democratic People's Republic which made the agent's job fairly simple. As I told you, your father is alive but sorry to say he's not in good health. He is being held in a notorious prison camp but is currently in the hospital unit and doesn't go out to work. His sentence was increased to 'Death' some two years ago but the authorities are hesitant to carry it out due to his popularity among the Way of Heaven believers."

"My father is a good man and is loved by a lot of people."

"Yes, you've told me that and I can understand. I would guess that the authorities plan to let him pass away from illness or old age. That would be convenient for them."

Jeong Sook realized how important it was to free him as soon as possible. Any delay may be too late.

Next, Hee Soon opened the second envelope and produced a six by eight grainy, black and white photo. She slid it across the table and looked into Jeong Sook's face.

The daughter's hands trembled as she looked at her beloved father's face. Surely it was him but the face was gaunt and terribly thin. There was no newspaper with a recent date but she wasn't going to quibble. He was alive, sick, and needed her help.

Hee Soon understood the urgency of the situation and informed her client, "I am still gathering information on a possible rescue. I've gotten some positive feedback. Such a thing has been done before. The how and who can do it is not yet clear. I need to hear from you if it's a go."

"Oh absolutely! I have to get him out!"

"Yes I thought that would be your answer. Now you need to prepare the funds. You see now what can be accomplished with the right amount of money in the right hands."

Guy was in fact busy that evening. Kyle called him all excited about something and proposed they meet up for a drink. Guy thought it might be another tattoo to be shown off. It was more exciting than that.

Due to the rapidly falling evening temperatures, they met in a chain chicken and beer joint. Before the

chicken had arrived at the table and shortly after they had downed their first soju fortified draft beers, Kyle came out with it.

"Hey dog, my number hit!" Kyle announced.

"What are you talking about?"

"The Lotto, I won yesterday," he said triumphantly.

"The Lotto, that mean you're picking up the tab tonight?"

"Are you serious? I'm talking about real money!"

"Real money, how much?"

"After taxes it's about twenty million won. That's a little less than twenty thousand dollars. I'll get the tab tonight and if you treat me right I may get it tomorrow night too."

"You fucking dog, you've done it! What did your wife say?"

"You kidding? I didn't tell her. She would have taken it and spent it already. This is more money than I've ever had in my hands at one time before. I could buy a new car or go on a cruise. Better yet, I want to spend it on something important."

Guy knew exactly what important thing his buddy could spend that money on.

"In fact I think I should use it for some great adventure, something memorable. Don't you think so?"

Guy just grinned, slapped Kyle a high five, and said,

"WORD!"