

Between Heaven and Earth: Book Three - Destiny and Fate - Chapter Eleven - On the Move

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And Kyle was as good as his word. He coughed up what was left of his winnings to finance the caper, as he called it. He did put a condition on it, and it was a big one. He insisted that he had to be a part of the operation. This caused Guy to hesitate.

"Anyway, I've got to keep an eye on my investment," Kyle insisted.

"I'm thinking it's more like a donation," Guy countered. "An offering has no mouth," he repeated an old saying he recalled from somewhere.

"Come on man, you know me. I'm gonna keep a low profile. When the chips are down you gonna need my help."

"Yeah maybe," Guy had to concede; but knowing his pal well he also was sure that it was just as likely that in a crises, Kyle would do something akin to throwing gasoline on the fire.

"So it's settled. Give me your account number and I'll send the money today. What's our next move?"

Good question thought Guy. With a bankroll it was time to make a move. Problem was it was not perfectly clear what that move was. Neither Guy or Jeong Sook were enthusiastic about the broker Rhee Jong Bok that Hee Soon had introduced. All the money in the world was useless without the contacts to apply it effectively and they didn't have anybody else.

Jeong Sook really disliked the guy and didn't want to line his pockets.

"Better we go to China and talk to Rev. Kim. He know a lot of peoples. He gonna tell us who to trust." It was clear she really trusted the pastor; his advice, his judgement, and discernment.

In the end they decided not to put all their eggs in one basket. They would pay the fee, after some more serious negotiations, to Hee Soon's guy and fly to China to consult Kim. They both worried some more about the best course of action and if they would run out of money. Guy also was concerned about taking their, not all that silent, partner along on an overseas venture.

"You got the money?" Kyle asked the following day.

"I got some of it. Where's the rest?" Guy wanted to know.

"Sorry dog, that's all that's left. I had to dip into it a little."

What was left was \$17,800. Guy would have to make up the rest on a couple of credit cards to have the stake they had planned on.

They were able to make up a little in the negotiation with Hee Soon. It took three days but the deal was cut at \$2,000 to get the introduction to Rhee's connection. Guy couldn't help thinking 'pig in a poke' again. Once the money had changed hands they were informed through Hee Soon that the meeting would take place in Beijing. They better make arrangements to be there the next week. Get a room in a hotel and wait. They would be contacted by Mr. Rhee.

"Great," said Kyle. "I love this cloak and dagger shit!"

Jeong Sook booked three seats on an early morning flight to the Chinese capital for the following Tuesday. She informed her pastor via email that she was coming and she had something really important to talk to him about. He emailed back and offered to pick her up at the airport and carry her back to

Harbin. She didn't mention her two travel companions.

The weekend passed slowly but it did pass. Jeong Sook worked four shifts at the hospital so Guy was on his own; well almost. Kyle figured that they ought to spend all weekend drinking and talking strategy. Yeah, sure.

The opening of the outdoor drinking season had been postponed due to the chilly weather holding on, so Guy and Kyle met up at a joint near the Seoul City Hall called simply Autumn. It was a hole in the wall on the second floor of an old building behind the performing arts center. On a Friday night it featured live music from a group that did a mixture of old pop songs, 70s Korean trot, and jazz. It was packed with downtown office workers, heavy on the female side, who were looking to relieve a week's worth of stress by getting wrecked, cutting loose, and banging hips with the like minded.

By the time the two outlanders arrived, around 7:30, there was already a line formed on the rickety steps leading from the street up to the entrance. It took a good ten minutes to reach the door where the bouncer wasn't inclined to admit foreigners. Too much potential for trouble. Kyle was able to cajole and persuade the gatekeeper to change his mind by using his best Korean and telling the guy they were supposed to meet two ladies inside.

Once inside Guy began to wonder if this had been a good idea. The place was packed and a saxophone was wailing on the bandstand wedged in a corner. The noise was deafening and they had to push their way along the bar, past hordes of middle aged office workers who were in the narrow aisles dancing, to a small table in the back. They ordered two draft beers apiece and a bottle of soju to fortify them with from a harried passing waitress.

They both leaned back, listened to the music, and soaked up the atmosphere. Conversation was a lost cause and Guy figured it was all for the best. The ladies at the next table, six in all, maybe coworkers, took an immediate interest in the two adventurers. It was common for both Guy, Kyle, and most foreigners to become a kind of novelty in Korean social situations. Guy knew all the signs. Most folks were too polite or too shy to actually approach strangers but not all. Of course alcohol reduces inhibitions and produces results, some more desirable than others.

By the third soju bomb, the eye contact, smiling, and flirting was well underway. The boldest of the ladies had some English and leaned over and asked Kyle where he was from. Kyle surprised her by answering in Korean and went on and on about his life in Korea.

One thing led to another and before the fourth round, three ladies had pulled up chairs to the gentleman's table to talk with Guy who in turn had lost track of the family guy. Before long they were all up in the aisles bumping and bumping. Guy had changed partners several times and all were having a great time.

At one point, past the point when things could be recalled much less evaluated clearly, Guy returned to the table to find Kyle in a passionate lip lock with a Korean lady. It may have exceeded the local moral norms but who cared?

Lot's of the things can be excused by the booze. It didn't go unnoticed. A short time later Guy became aware of a commotion in front of the bandstand and Kyle seemed to be in the middle of it. Harsh words led to pushing and shoving and ended in fists being thrown. By the time Guy got to the melee it was a pile of bodies on the floor with Kyle somewhere near the bottom. Somewhat reluctant but without options, Guy jumped in to extract his partner. Most of what happened had to be reconstructed later but needless to say they were both roughly ejected and warned never to return thus confirming the doorman's initial instincts.

Back on the street, Guy found Kyle hugging a tree in an attempt to remain upright. He hustled his good time buddy into a taxi and they headed to Itaewon where the locals to foreigner ratio was more in their favor.

"That motherfucker," Kyle reasoned. "He was just jealous!"

"Yeah I know but you got to be a little more sensitive to the local culture," Guy advised him.

They were in a bar on the main drag that featured oldies and catered to expats as well as the ladies that liked them. Pretty boring but safe.

"You ever been to China before, dog?"

"Sure, took the old lady and the kids two years ago. We walked on the Great Wall and took pictures in the Forbidden City. How about you?"

"No never. I've been to Taiwan but never the mainland," Guy said.

"It's gonna be a great trip. The Chinese know how to eat and drink. I'll show you guys around," Kyle assured everyone within earshot.

"You know this ain't a tourist trip. We got serious business to transact and we gonna have to keep our heads. That means no getting liquored up and causing trouble like tonight."

"Not to worry. That little cluster fuck tonight was just a misunderstanding. It wasn't my fault." Kyle was unrepentant.

Guy woke up the next day with a bad headache and decided to sit out Saturday night. He tried to work and as usual it was the only thing that eased his mind and body after a wild night. The novel was almost writing itself. By evening he was wrung out. Kyle had queried him several times but Guy ignored him. Jeong Sook had the night shift at the hospital so Guy was on his own again. Against his better judgment he got a hold of Kyle.

"Where you at, dog," Guy enquired.

"Home alone. My beloved took the kids to her mom's house for the weekend."

"What you doin'?"

"Watching Discovery Channel and drinking makoli. Bring some soju when you come. We got stuff to talk about."

"You had dinner? I'm starving," Guy let him know.

"We got eggs and some ribs in the fridge. You can eat here."

"Ok. Be there in an hour."

Kyle lived in Myeongil dong on the far east side of Seoul. It was a reasonable facsimile of suburbia for Korea. The apartment complex was aging fast and the residents were all upwardly mobile looking to upgrade to one of the cutting edge up scale apartments that were going up all over; except for Kyle. He was perfectly happy where he was.

He was real happy being a family guy, drinking his makoli, and being part of an international caper.

"Look in the refrigerator and pull out those ribs. Pop them in the microwave and nuke them. Where's the soju?"

Kyle's place was small with two bedrooms, a veranda, and all the amenities of a civilized existence. A big screen TV hung on the living room wall and was tuned to an animal documentary. Kyle himself was parked on the sofa in gym shorts and a sweatshirt, on his fifth bottle of rice wine.

"Cheers, on to China," the host raised his glass.

"Yeah dude, but ya gotta promise to behave. This is gonna be important."

Past eleven they were standing on the veranda smoking when Kyle decided he needed to pee. He pulled up the leg of his gym shorts, hung it over the rail, and let go. Guy thought what the hell and followed suit. Five minutes later there was a knock at the door. It was the security guard and a downstairs neighbor with a bone to pick. All the apologies in the world wouldn't mitigate the hell to be paid once the lady of the house got home and heard the latest exploit of her hubby. Guy took his leave shortly after.

On Tuesday morning Jeong Sook and Guy looked for Kyle at the entrance to the departure area and found him asleep on a chair. He smelled like a bar rag and they were sure he was still drunk from the night before. Or maybe he had woken up early to get a good start on the day. No matter, he was part of the team and they got him to the gate and onto the flight. Whatever was next Jeong Sook and Guy had done all that they could. They were ready to face the future. They were on the move.