

The Fall of the House of Moon

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One Sunday morning in February 2010, Bob Exler, a fifty-something engineer, arrived at the faded ranch house in northwest Houston where he regularly worshipped the Reverend Sun Myung Moon. Most people know Moon for his mass weddings and his ultra-conservative newspaper, *The Washington Times*. But Exler, who joined Moon's Unification Church in 1972, had been inspired by Moon's mission to rebuild the traditional family. As he told me, "I didn't wanted to be part of this McDonald's Drive-Thru society, where you go from one partner to another."

For many years, the Sunday service had followed an unchanging routine. Exler and his wife, Susan--who were matched by Moon and married in a mass ceremony at Madison Square Garden--would join fellow disciples in pledging their loyalty to a portrait of Moon, or, as they called him, "True Father." They would then sing hymns in Korean and English, and listen to sermons by a rotating cast of elders.

But on this particular Sunday, Exler and his fellow congregants arrived to find that the portrait of their leader, in his traditional Korean robe, had vanished. In its place was a wide-screen television with simulcast footage of the Reverend Moon's 45-year-old daughter, In Jin, speaking from a podium at the Manhattan Center, the concert venue where "America's Got Talent" was filmed. With her thick makeup and sculpted red hair, In Jin bore a striking resemblance to a game-show host. After welcoming the "one hundred six churches all across the country" that were tuning in, she pointed out the church's new "Liberace piano," a rhinestone-encrusted Baldwin grand. Her love of Liberace, she explained, dated back to a show she'd seen in Las Vegas as a child. "I must say that he was fabulous," she recalled, in an affected British accent. "He used to fly through the air, hoisted on a cable. He wore glorious capes--some were rhinestone, some were velvet, and they had all different textures." At first Exler was intrigued, but after months of watching In Jin's broadcasts, which had replaced the church's normal services, his fascination turned to dismay. "We just turned on the TV, sat there for ninety minutes, then everyone went home," says Exler. "The sense of community was destroyed."

In Jin had assumed control of the U.S. church at a precarious moment for Moon's religious empire. Her father had come to the United States from Korea nearly 40 years earlier, aiming to "subjugate" America as the first phase in a plan to establish a new world order. Moon had gone on to amass extraordinary political influence, building a vast network of powerful right-wing organizations and forging alliances with every Republican presidential administration since Ronald Reagan's. In 2004, he and his wife even staged an elaborate coronation ceremony in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, which at least a dozen lawmakers attended. Republican Roscoe Bartlett bowed down before the couple, and Democrat Danny Davis carried in one of two golden crowns that were placed on their heads. Moon then informed the audience that "kings and presidents" had declared him "humanity's savior" and that Jesus, Buddha, Hitler, and Stalin had been "reborn as new persons" through his teachings.

But in recent years, Moon's plans to remake America and salvage humanity had run into trouble. Followers had drifted away; his political influence had ebbed. With his ninetieth birthday approaching, he increasingly looked to his children to preserve his life's work.

In Jin, Moon and his wife's fourth child, seemed suited for the task. She had a modern American upbringing and a master's degree from Harvard. In 2009, she took over the Unification Church of America and introduced a bold modernization program. Her aim, she said, was to transform the church into one that people--especially young people--were "dying to join." She renamed the church Lovin' Life Ministries, shelved the old hymn books, and launched a rock band, an offshoot of which played New York clubs under the moniker Sonic Cult. She also discarded the old Korean-inspired traditions: bows and chanting gave way to "Guitar Hero" parties, open mics, concerts, and ping-pong tournaments. What's more, In Jin broke some long-standing taboos. Rather than adhering to the church line on arranged marriage, for example, she encouraged young people to play a role in choosing their own spouses.

Her reforms were met with heated resistance. Across the country, Moon's disciples took to the Internet to denounce In Jin's "bling-bling" style and her "ridiculous accent." One online critic dubbed her ministry the "mushroom church," because "all you do is sit passively in the dark and are fed bovine excrement." Within two years, nationwide monthly attendance plunged from roughly 26,000 to less than 7,500, according to internal church documents.

Yet In Jin persisted, confident that, with time, she could win over the doubters and bring her father's church into the modern era. In early 2012, she gave an upbeat sermon about music, motherhood, and true love. "This is an incredible year and I feel so many wonderful things are going to unfold," she said. "This is about you and me. This is about America. This is about our future."

But after the service was over, In Jin disappeared from public view. She stopped delivering the weekly broadcasts, and even quit showing up at the church's Manhattan headquarters. After several months passed with no sign of her, some parishioners began pressing for information on her whereabouts. They were blocked at every turn. Even the highest circles of church leadership couldn't--or wouldn't--say what had happened to In Jin Moon.

Before long, it became clear that the House of Moon was crumbling and In Jin had become caught up in its downfall. But her disappearance was only one part of a much more complicated saga--one that involved illegitimate children, secret sex rituals, foreign spy agencies, and the family of Vice President Joseph Biden. Even by Moon's famously eccentric standards, the collapse of his American project would turn out to be spectacular and deeply strange.

Just before dawn on February 12, 1965, Sun Myung Moon shuffled off a plane at San Francisco International Airport, carrying a suitcase of Korean soil. His disciples later drove him to the hills overlooking the city. As a strong wind blew, the wiry 44-year-old buried a clump of the soil, and declared the spot holy ground--"a place where you can come to pray and not be bothered by Satan." He spent the next month touring the continental United States in a blue Plymouth Fury station wagon. All told, he and his followers staked out 55 plots of holy ground, including one on the Ellipse in front of the White House.

This brief U.S. visit was a vital step toward realizing Moon's messianic vision. Born in 1920, he had grown up in a thatched straw hut in northwest Korea during the brutal Japanese occupation. When he was ten, his family converted to Christianity. Moon eventually joined a fringe Christian sect that engaged in sexual "purification" rituals. After Allied forces liberated Korea in 1945, he moved to Pyongyang, which was then under Soviet control, and started his own church. But other ministers complained about his teachings, and, in 1948, Moon was arrested and reportedly charged with "polygamy." According to his memoir, he was beaten until he vomited blood and sentenced to five years in a communist prison camp.

When the Korean War broke out, Moon escaped across the border to the South Korean city of Pusan. From his one-room mud hut, he could look down into the harbor where the United States and United Nations unloaded troops and supplies. It was at this point that he began writing down his theological ideas--a mix of Christianity, Confucianism, shamanism, and anti-communist bile--sometimes on the walls and ceiling of his hovel.

The central pillar of Moon's theology held that Eve had a dalliance with Satan in the Garden of Eden and then slept with Adam, which is how human beings were burdened with original sin. Moon also believed that people, movements, and even entire countries embodied these biblical figures. He himself was the "perfect Adam," and his mission was to help humankind reclaim its original goodness by forging a new world order led by Korea, the "Adam nation." America, the "archangel" nation, would play a key role in this mission by helping Korea to rout communism, after which it would bow down to the Korean-led regime, with Moon as its king and messiah.

The nationalist overtones of Moon's teachings appealed to some influential Koreans, including several English-speaking South Korean Army officers. Among them was a savvy young colonel named Bo Hi Pak, whom Moon tapped as his deputy. In 1961, the military ousted South Korea's democratic government, and several Moon acolytes were catapulted into key posts, including inside the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, or KCIA. Bo Hi Pak was dispatched to Washington, D.C., where he served as a liaison between the KCIA and U.S. intelligence agencies and built political inroads for Moon's

organization.

While Moon's theology had geopolitical ambitions, he saw his family as the means for realizing his vision. At the age of 40, he married his cook's daughter, a delicate 17-year-old beauty named Hak Ja Han. Moon claimed that their union marked the beginning of the "completed testament" era, in which Moon would reverse the fall of man by making his wife pay penance for Eve's sins. For three years, he stashed Hak Ja Han in a rented room, kept her in bitter poverty, and forbid her from seeing her family. The goal was to rid her of Eve-like defiance and cultivate "absolute obedience" so that she could bear children free of original sin. By the winter of 1960, the first of these perfect children had arrived.

Moon told his followers that they could join his sin-free bloodline by marrying a spouse of his choosing and engaging in a series of rituals. First, the newlyweds would beat each other with a bat, and then they would perform a three-day sex ceremony involving prescribed positions in front of Moon's portrait. After the final sexual interlude--in missionary position--the bride would bow down to the groom, a confirmation that they had restored the "lost ideal of goodness."

Moon returned to the United States in 1971, and two years later brought over the key to humanity's salvation--his rapidly growing family. By now, he and Hak Ja Han had seven children, including eleven-year-old Steve, eight-year-old In Jin (or Tatiana), four-year-old Preston, and three-year-old Justin. (All the Moon kids were given both Korean and American names.) Moon settled the family on a wooded 18-acre estate in the Hudson River Valley, which he christened East Garden.

He also began aggressively recruiting new followers, who were expected to live in monk-like purity. Alcohol and drugs were off-limits, and sex outside marriage was the worst possible sin, punishable by eternal hellfire. His religion appealed to young people who liked the communal ethos of the counterculture, but not the drugs and free love. His growing army of heavenly soldiers raised money by hawking flowers and candles in airports and on street corners. Funds also poured in from Japan (the "Eve nation"), where young devotees persuaded elderly Japanese widows to liberate their ancestors from hell by purchasing grossly overpriced trinkets. By 1974, the U.S. church was raking in \$8 million a year.

Moon plowed this money into U.S. businesses, including a shipbuilding firm, a recording studio, a cable TV network, the New Yorker Hotel in Manhattan, and a 50-state seafood operation. He also began spending generously on political causes. At the height of the Watergate scandal, Moon and his followers organized "God Loves Richard Nixon" rallies on Capitol Hill and bought full-page pro-Nixon newspaper ads all over the country. Moon also assigned pretty young devotees to cozy up to lawmakers, with the goal of planting three in every senator's office. The women managed to insinuate themselves into several offices--including then-Speaker of the House Carl Albert's--where they lobbied and collected information.

These heavy-handed tactics led many to view Moon as a dangerous cult leader. Writing in the Daily Mail, the father of one former devotee described Moon's followers as "mindless" fund-raising "robots" who had no ideals except "the half-baked ravings of Moon, who lived in splendor while his followers lived in forced penury." In 1976, Congress began looking into a massive covert KCIA operation designed to sway U.S. policy toward South Korea. The investigation found that the Moon organization was likely a "political tool" of the Korean spy agency and had "systematically violated U.S. tax, immigration, banking, currency and Foreign Agents Registration Act laws." In retaliation, the church filed a \$30 million lawsuit against Representative Donald M. Fraser, who chaired the subcommittee behind the investigation, and launched a brutal--and ultimately successful--campaign to scuttle Fraser's 1978 Senate bid. But despite their efforts, Moon was charged with tax evasion. A late '70s Gallup Poll found that Moon "elicited one of the most overwhelmingly negative responses ever reported by a major poll," his only rivals being Nikita Khrushchev and Fidel Castro.

Meanwhile, an even greater threat to his American project was brewing, this time in his very own home.

Moon expected his followers to sacrifice everything, but this wasn't true of his own family. His wife and children, who now numbered 13, had the run of East Garden and its lavish manors, one of which contained a bowling alley, six pizza ovens, and a waterfall in the dining room. Moon raised his brood like the royal children he believed them to be. They attended private schools and had tutors imported from Japan, fast cars, purebred horses, and even hunting weapons. Mrs. Moon was not deeply involved in their upbringing--according to former church members, she spent much of her time shopping. Tim Porter, an ex-member who grew up near the family compound, calls her the Korean "Imelda Marcos."

The task of caring for the messiah's children fell to his followers, who didn't dare discipline them. "The Moon kids were like gods--completely and utterly exempt from the rules," says Donna Orme-Collins, a onetime Unificationist whose father directed the British church. Moon's eldest son, Steve, a plain, slender boy, was particularly brazen. In the late '70s, he was expelled from an elite middle school for shooting students with a BB gun. Moon sent him to live with Bo Hi Pak, but Steve's behavior only deteriorated. He started doing drugs and picking fights, and Pak was unable to rein him in. At one point, according to members of the Moon and Pak families, Pak even resorted to spanking his own son--a sweet, studious boy

who went by the American name James Park--when Steve got out of line.

Moon eventually shipped Steve off to South Korea. There, according to a speech Steve later gave, he joined a rock band and started chugging a bottle of whiskey a day. According to several sources close to the family, including Trenor Rapkins, a former church member who grew up near East Garden, when Steve returned home in the early '80s, he was more volatile than ever. "He would start yelling, and mucus and spit would start flying out of his face," Rapkins recalls. "Sometimes he would start throwing punches or waving his gun around."

Steve's behavior made a deep impression on In Jin, who had a taste for American culture and chafed at the notion that women should be pure and deferential. According to sources close to the family, by the time she was 16, In Jin was accompanying Steve on all-night drinking jaunts. "She basically worshipped him," says one member of her inner circle. "She was really into partying and rock and roll, because he played it."

Afraid that American culture was corrupting his children, Moon turned to his religion's catch-all solution: marriage. In 1982, he arranged for Steve to wed a naive 15-year-old Korean girl named Nansook Hong. Hong would later recall Mrs. Moon telling her that she had been brought to America to reform Steve and that, should she fail, she would be "failing God."

The following year, Moon's 17-year-old son Heung Jin smashed his Jeep on an icy freeway and died. This created a theological quandary for Moon, since according to his teachings, only married couples could enter God's kingdom. He solved his dilemma by arranging to have his dead son marry Bo Hi Pak's second-eldest daughter, Julia. At the same time, In Jin, who was 18, was to wed Pak's teenage son, James, who had taken the spanking for Steve.

In Jin was mortified, according to family members. She had no interest in James, who was nerdy and quiet, and she was taken instead with his rowdy, handsome younger brother, Sam. But Moon insisted, and his wife stood by him, despite everything she had endured in her own arranged marriage. She even agreed to co-officiate the macabre ceremony. First, In Jin and James traded vows, then Julia trudged down the aisle holding a photo of the dead Heung Jin, after which James gave a groveling speech. "In a million years, I would never deserve to become the husband of In Jin," he said. "My mission is to work to deserve it for the rest of my life." The whole ordeal left In Jin traumatized. "She felt like it was institutional rape," says one member of her inner circle.

Yet whatever resentments In Jin harbored, she remained loyal to her father. Later that year, Moon was sentenced to 18 months in prison on the tax-evasion charges. The church launched a \$30 million campaign to overturn his conviction, with In Jin as its public face. According to *The Washington Post*, in July 1984, thousands of evangelical pastors were invited on an expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C. Although billed as a pageant for religious freedom, the event quickly devolved into a pro-Moon rally, with hundreds of devotees waving placards that read, "rev. moon: innocent victim of bigotry." The emotional crescendo was a speech by In Jin, who wept as she recalled the "tears and sweat" her father had shed for America.

The campaign, which cast Moon as an innocent man who had been prosecuted for his unconventional faith, struck a nerve. A motley coalition, including the American Civil Liberties Union, then-Senate Judiciary Chairman Orrin Hatch, and religious conservative leaders such as Jerry Falwell and Tim LaHaye, eventually rallied behind him. This helped transform Moon from a pariah to a martyr.

By the summer of 1985, when Moon was released from prison, the Reagan Revolution was in full swing and Moon was perfectly positioned to benefit. The *Washington Times*, which he had launched three years earlier, had become a must-read among conservatives--Reagan himself read it every morning. Moon also won points with the New Right by wading into anti-communist proxy wars in Latin America. In 1985, after Congress cut off aid to the Contras, the *Washington Times* Foundation launched a pro-Contra slush fund. According to *Bad Moon Rising*, an investigative history by John Gorenfeld, a Moon front group called CAUSA (Confederation of the Associations for the Unification of the Societies of the Americas) also distributed money and supplies to Contra rebels. In another case, Moon's organization reportedly helped finance a coup--orchestrated by right-wing paramilitaries, cocaine cartels, and fugitive Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie--that toppled Bolivia's democratically elected government. Bo Hi Pak later visited the mountainous Bolivian city, La Paz, and declared, "I have erected a throne for Father Moon in the world's highest city."

Moon's think tanks and front groups also advanced his agenda on the home front. CAUSA spent millions of dollars hosting expenses-paid "Godism" workshops, which promoted Moon's theology as an antidote to communism and were attended by a number of Senate staffers. Moon also launched the American Family Coalition, which soon surpassed the waning Moral Majority as one of America's leading religious conservative organizations. And he worked with conservative Christian leaders on a grassroots campaign to push the Republican Party to the right. As his network expanded in Washington, Moon's dream of

remaking America seemed within reach.

By this point, In Jin and James had settled into something resembling Moon's ideal of married life. James, who held a PhD in finance from Columbia and a law degree from Harvard, launched an investment firm, called Paradigm Global Partners, and began carving out a reputation as a hedge-fund guru. In Jin, who had studied philosophy and political science at Columbia, raised and home-schooled their children.

But Steve, who now ran a church-owned music venue, the Manhattan Center, couldn't manage to put his wild youth behind him. Like other Moon ventures, the Manhattan Center was lavishly funded by Japanese "donations," which Steve treated as his private ATM. According to people close to the family, he once marched into the office with \$600,000 in a Bloomingdale's bag and skimmed off \$400,000. It was gone in less than a year.

The cash fed Steve's drug addiction. According to sworn statements from Steve's wife, Nansook Hong, and people close to the family, by the early '90s, he was spending days holed up in his room gorging on cocaine. And he pressured others to join in, including James Park. Hong claimed that, when she was seven months pregnant with her fifth child, she found Steve doing cocaine at East Garden and tried to flush it down the toilet. Steve "smashed his fist into my face, bloodying my nose," Hong later recalled. "He wiped my blood on his hand, then licked it off. 'Tastes good,' he said. 'This is fun.'"

Early one morning in 1995, Hong hustled her five children into the back of a cargo van and fled East Garden. She later filed for divorce and published a devastating exposé of life inside the compound, *In the Shadow of the Moons*. In 1998, she and a Moon daughter, Un Jin--who claimed her husband had abused her, too--went on "60 Minutes" and unleashed a flurry of allegations about sex, drugs, and violence inside Moon's ideal family. Moon was still reeling from this bombshell when, the following year, his second-youngest son, Phillip, who was also trapped in an unhappy arranged marriage, hurled himself from the seventeenth floor of a Harrah's casino in Nevada and died.

The family turmoil made a mockery of Moon's teachings. Moon had already lost some of his political leverage during the early '90s, as communism crumbled and Democrats seized control of Congress and the White House. Now, many disillusioned followers began turning their backs on the church. Moon, who believed that America's culture of "moral degradation" had caused his children's downfall, grew bitter toward his adopted country, which he branded "Satan's harvest."

But he didn't give up on the United States entirely. Instead, he began courting new groups, such as socially conservative black churches and Democratic politicians. The church also launched the Women's Federation for World Peace, which packaged his theology as a tool for the "liberation of women." (Liberation in this case meant reviving traditional families by being "unusually obedient.") Mrs. Moon, whose role in the church had been mostly ceremonial up until this point, was named president. She began traveling the world proclaiming herself a co-messiah and urging women to devote themselves to their families. "We must spread, to the whole world, a model movement ... in which we embrace our husbands and raise our children properly," she told a crowd in Seoul. On several occasions, former President George H.W. Bush, a major beneficiary of Moon family donations, appeared alongside her, as did his wife, Barbara. In a major departure, Moon formally declared Mrs. Moon to be his equal and promised she would "inherit everything from Father."

Moon also tried to persuade world leaders and outside clergy to accept him as their king. In the spring of 2000, he invited 120 American ministers to South Korea, and gave them diamond-studded gold watches. Just after the 9/11 attacks, Moon convened a summit in New York City of religious and political leaders--including Falwell, Dan Quayle, Richard Holbrooke, and the Nation of Islam's president, Louis Farrakhan, whose Million Family March Moon had underwritten the previous year. The goal was to find "solutions to global violence." But the mood was fractious, especially after Farrakhan suggested that Osama bin Laden had been wrongly scapegoated. Instead of uniting behind Moon, as he had predicted, the post-cold-war world was only growing more divided.

With every setback, Moon's plans only grew more grandiose. Later that year, he made an announcement: By February 2013, all humanity would join hands under the banner of a global "nation of cosmic peace and unity," called Cheon Il Guk. Moon and his followers began preparations in Korea--launching a police force, commissioning an anthem, and adopting a flag. They also built Moon an elaborate castle, shaped like the U.S. Capitol building. If Moon couldn't actually conquer America, at least he would do so in symbolic form.

Around this time, In Jin was living in Boston and pursuing a doctorate in divinity at Harvard. Her father, who was splitting his time between New York and his kingdom in Korea, no longer kept close tabs on her. Over time, she shed her sense of familial obligation. She started writing and recording romantic pop songs. ("You see how I burn beneath your steady gaze/You see how I yearn to be a meadow where you graze.") And around 2004, according to a half-dozen sources close to the family, she started an affair with a keyboard player and longtime Unificationist named Alistair Farrant. Soon, Farrant abandoned his wife

and children and began camping out at In Jin's place.

James Park was crushed. "He felt really displaced," says one member of his inner circle. "He felt like he had lost his family and everything that gave him meaning." Park started binging on cocaine and Paradigm, his company, suffered. According to people with inside knowledge, one of Park's business partners began angling for control of the company, and Park began hunting for a buyer friendly to his interests. As luck would have it, he found one in an unlikely quarter: then-Senator Joseph Biden's family.

At the time, Biden was mulling a 2008 presidential bid. According to sworn statements from people involved in the deal, he worried that his son Hunter's lobbying career could hurt his campaign and asked his brother James to find Hunter a new line of work. (Hunter Biden disputed this account in an interview with the new republic.) James Biden approached a business associate named Anthony Lotito, who connected him with James Park's camp, and the three men began negotiating to buy Paradigm.

On its face, the deal looked solid. Paradigm's marketing materials boasted \$1.5 billion under management and generous returns, and Lotito believed they could quickly expand into union pension funds, which tend to have close ties to democratic politicians. So Lotito and the Bidens pushed ahead. In the spring of 2006, they signed an agreement that gave them a controlling stake in the company, in return for \$21 million in cash, to be paid in six months. Hunter Biden--who had no financial industry experience--was named CEO, with a salary of \$1.2 million. But it was clear that they needed James Park's hedge-fund expertise, which meant confronting him about his cocaine habit. According to three sources close to the negotiations, James Biden visited James Park and persuaded him to seek treatment at a center in Florida.

The Bidens soon realized that Paradigm wasn't as solid as they thought. Instead of \$1.5 billion under management, it had just \$200 to \$300 million, and its holding companies were buried in debt. Worse, the Bidens' main financier backed out. But the Bidens found a way around the lack of capital. That summer, according to court documents and people close to both sides of the negotiations, they approached Park, who was still in treatment, and cut a new deal: Instead of \$21 million in cash, they would fork over an \$8 million note. Hunter Biden and his lawyer, Marc LoPresti, maintain that the deal was fair, given the state of the company. But people close to Park say he was emotionally fragile and felt indebted to the Bidens, which put him in a vulnerable position.

Finally, in 2008, the economy collapsed, after which it emerged that Allen Stanford, whose firm was soliciting investors for one of Paradigm's funds, was running a multibillion-dollar Ponzi scheme. While the fund itself was solid, investors were spooked. In 2010, Paradigm filed for voluntary liquidation. "It was a thicket," Hunter Biden told me. "Every time you thought you saw a way out, there would be another road block."

James Park was never able to collect on the \$8 million note and found himself facing a mountain of debt. But James and In Jin were able to fall back on their Moon family ties. According to three sources close to the family, In Jin's younger brother Preston--a Harvard graduate and former Olympic equestrian who controlled most of the family's American enterprises--agreed to bail the couple out with several million dollars. It was a decision that Preston would come to regret.

By now, Moon was in his late eighties and contemplating his legacy. Despite his promises that Mrs. Moon would "inherit everything," he had begun divvying up his global empire among his sons, including Preston, Steve, Justin, and Sean. But once again tragedy struck the family. In 2008, Steve died of a heart attack at 45. This left an opening for In Jin who maneuvered her way to the helm of the Manhattan Center--the only one of Moon's daughters to assume a leadership role. She immediately gave her lover, Alistair Farrant, a top position and fired half the staff, many of them long-standing church members. She also began courting new talent, including a thirtysomething rock musician named Ben Lorentzen.

That summer, Reverend and Mrs. Moon were injured when a helicopter they were traveling on crashed into a South Korean mountainside. While they recovered, their children began squabbling over the only major piece of Moon's empire that remained up for grabs: the Unification Church of America, which oversees the movement's U.S. congregations, along with hundreds of millions of dollars in assets. Preston saw himself as the natural heir. But In Jin also spotted an opportunity. Her family hadn't fully recovered from the Paradigm debacle, and, according to people close to her, she was hungry for additional income. When Justin approached her about staging a takeover, she agreed.

While Preston was out of the country, Sean, who headed the international church, issued a memo saying that In Jin was to be "chairperson of the Unification Movement in America." The American church then convened a board meeting, led by In Jin. Most of the existing board members were pressured to resign and were replaced with In Jin's allies, after which In Jin was formally elected chair. A bitter family feud ensued. Preston later staged his own boardroom coup at Unification Church International, the holding company for the Moon family's U.S. business, giving him unfettered control over billions of dollars in assets. He used the proceeds to fund an offshoot movement that drew on his father's teachings without deifying the Moon clan.

In Jin, meanwhile, assumed the role of chief pastor of the American church and began using it as a vehicle for her own passions. She launched the band Sonic Cult, with Lorentzen as the lead singer. She also pushed back against the traditions that had confined her in an unhappy marriage--openly condoning divorce and encouraging younger members to marry for love.

In Jin had her own reasons for loosening the church's mores, as Lorentzen's on-again, off-again wife, Patricia, discovered. In late 2009, Patricia traveled to New York with their two young sons to visit Lorentzen for Christmas. While they were staying at the New Yorker Hotel, Patricia borrowed Ben's laptop and found his e-mail box brimming with sexually explicit messages from In Jin. "I was so shocked," Patricia told me. "I went back to my room and sat there trying to digest it." She confronted In Jin over e-mail, after which she says Lorentzen and another man turned up at her room and delivered an ultimatum: She and the children had to be out of the hotel by the next morning, or they would be tossed out by security. (In Jin and Ben Lorentzen declined to be interviewed.)

Patricia later tried to alert the church's liaison for family matters, Phillip Schanker, to the affair, but James Park assured Schanker there was no cause for concern. As Schanker explained in a letter to one parishioner, "In Jin's husband came to me, thanking me for being honest and trying to protect True Family and our movement, assuring me that this was a misunderstanding, that he trusted his wife, and that the wives of the men she works with easily became jealous and created false rumors."

Meanwhile, the family feud erupted into open view, as the siblings sparred over billions of dollars in assets in court. And one of In Jin's deputies traveled the country delivering a PowerPoint presentation that cast Preston as a "fallen" Adam who was "being controlled by Satan." This was the state of play in early 2012, when In Jin disappeared.

On September 2 of that year, the movement was dealt an even bigger blow, when Moon died of pneumonia at age 92. Two weeks later, some 15,000 people packed into a Moon-owned stadium outside Seoul for the memorial. Mrs. Moon vowed to continue her husband's quest to build "a world where all people live as one great family under God." After the service, she and her children knelt above his burial vault, clasped hands, and prayed. Through all of this, In Jin remained conspicuously absent.

It was around this time that a birth certificate for a four-month-old boy began circulating on the Internet. To the astonishment of Moon's followers, the child's parents were none other than In Jin Moon and Ben Lorentzen. The baby probably would have come to light sooner had James Park not worked to cover up his existence; according to people close to the family, James helped In Jin rent a house in Cape Cod where she and Ben could lay low during her pregnancy.

Now, on top of mourning their messiah, Moon's American disciples had to digest the news that his supposedly sinless daughter was trampling his most sacred teachings. "The core of our faith is purity before marriage and fidelity between husband and wife," longtime church member Mary Anglin told me. "We've devoted our lives to this vision. Then In Jin turned around and slapped us all in the face."

As it turns out, Moon didn't always live up to his virtuous teachings, either. In April, I spoke by videophone with Annie Choi, a soft-spoken, 77-year-old Korean woman with ruddy cheeks and thick silver hair. Choi, who joined Moon's church along with her mother and sister in the 1950s, alleges that she engaged in numerous sexual rituals--some involving as many as six women--beginning when she was 17 years old. Her story, which is consistent with the accounts of several early followers, supports the claim that Moon's church started out as a sex cult, with Moon "purifying" female devotees through erotic rites.

By 1960, when he married Hak Ja Han, Moon was touting marital fidelity as his religion's foundational ideal. But Choi maintains she stayed on as Moon's mistress until 1964, when she moved to the United States. The following year, Moon made his inaugural visit to America. By the time he left, Choi says, she was carrying his child.

News like this could have sunk the fledgling American project. But Bo Hi Pak made sure that didn't happen. According to Choi, who has never before spoken publicly about the experience, Pak's wife stuffed her mid-section with cloth diapers and pretended that she was pregnant. When it came time to give birth, Choi says that Pak accompanied her to the hospital and passed her off as his wife. The following day, he dropped her off at her empty apartment and took the baby back to his home. Later, Mrs. Pak brought Choi some seaweed soup, but Choi told me that she couldn't eat it. "I just sat there crying, with my tears falling in the pot."

Choi stayed in the United States to be near her son, Sam Park--the same young man In Jin had fallen for during her teenage years. (By all accounts, she was unaware that Sam was her half brother.) Then, at age 13, it dawned on Sam that the kindly "aunt" who visited periodically was actually his mother. "Suddenly my life made a lot more sense," Sam told me in April, when we met in Phoenix, where he and Choi live.

Bo Hi Pak later approached Sam and his mother with a contract. As a sign of their "mutual love, affection and respect," it read, Sam, Choi, and Pak would release one another--and the Moon family--from "any and all past, present or future actions," including those arising from inheritance claims. In return, Sam and Choi would each receive \$100.

Alleging that they were victims of "theology-based" racketeering, Sam and Choi are now suing the Paks and Moons for \$20 million. Neither the Unification Church nor the lawyers for the Moon and Pak families responded to requests for comment.

Sam Park's existence was an indignity that Mrs. Moon had to endure. But by the time In Jin's love child came to light, Mrs. Moon's husband and master was dead and she was free to handle the situation as she saw fit. She demanded that In Jin resign. In Jin later issued an apology to members of the church. "It was never our intention to hurt anyone," she wrote. "All we wanted was to love and to be loved."

Next, Mrs. Moon moved to claim the inheritance her husband had promised. She wrested control of the international church from Sean and issued a memo saying, "[E]verything that is carried out in Korea from this day onward will be centered on True Mother." She later ousted Justin, who controlled most of Moon's Korean enterprises. After five decades spent in Moon's shadow, the kingdom was in her hands.

And despite Moon's views on wifely subservience, it soon became clear that Mrs. Moon did not share all of her husband's opinions. She began speaking out in surprisingly critical terms about Moon's preoccupation with America. During a trip to New York late last year, she complained that he had squandered 40 years in the United States for "such little" return. Many members suspect that she will soon turn her back on his beleaguered American project entirely. "Reverend Moon really cared about America," says Richard Barlow, a former Unificationist missionary, who maintains contact with elements of the church leadership. "But his wife doesn't feel that strong connection, and she's ousted her children who do."

In late February, the matriarch celebrated the arrival of Cheon Il Guk--Moon's global kingdom of peace and unity--before some 15,000 devotees who packed into the Moon-owned stadium in Korea, wearing identical wedding garb. The crowd sang the Cheon Il Guk national anthem, and then Mrs. Moon, the former cook's daughter, swept into the stadium wearing a jeweled crown and a purple robe festooned with gold embroidery. She marched slowly up a long stairway to a giant replica of the Moon family palace and took a seat on a white throne. Next to her was an identical throne, reserved for her dead husband. An attendant handed her a "heavenly scepter," and she climbed to her feet: "I proclaim the first year of Cheon Il Guk." Trumpets blared, and the stadium filled with mist.

Afterward, several of Moon's old friends gave congratulatory speeches, including former Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, who lauded the festivities as an "affirmation of marriage and family." "We often take the family for granted," Hastert said. "However, when the family system begins to break down, all manner of personal and social problems emerge." It was a fitting epitaph to Moon's American project and his diminished political empire.

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