

Between Heaven and Earth: Book Two - A Cross to Bear - Chapter Four - On The Town

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The hour that Guy had spent chatting with Jeong Sook in the coffee shop had been delightful. They talked in both broken Korean and broken English but the real communication was taking place on a different level. Guy really liked her. She was his style. At the same time he could tell somehow that she also really liked him. It was an intoxicating feeling.

Guy couldn't help feeling that there was something special here. He had no idea where this was heading but he knew there was potential in this thing. They exchanged phone numbers and without promising anything Jeong Sook took her leave. He stood at the window and watched her head down the street towards the subway entrance.

"Ah, Jeong Sook," he said her name in order to remember it.

Writing finished for the day, Guy thought about getting something to eat. He did a mental inventory of what he had at home and came up with ramen, half a dozen eggs, and some slices of cheese food. Can't beat that; an omelet and cheese

ramen. He would stop at the market for an onion to chop for the omelet. The rain had let up but the humid air hit him like a tropical blast as he exited the coffee shop.

By seven thirty when he heard from Kyle he had finished his bachelor dinner, washed three days' accumulated dirty dishes, and was listening to some mellow jazz over the internet.

"Yo dog, what's up," Kyle asked when Guy took the call.

"Not much, just kicking back at home. Been taking it easy this weekend. Where are you?" Guy knew his buddy Kyle was at least half in the bag. All he had to do was check his watch and he could estimate how drunk he was.

"Itaewon baby, it's Saturday night and time to get it on! Guess who I'm with?" Kyle slurred into the phone.

"I give up, that ladyboy you been texting?" Kyle had gotten wasted in Itaewon six months ago and picked up a transgender person. It wasn't clear if he didn't know the gender of his friend or he just didn't care. Guy regularly ragged him about it.

"Hey fuck you! I quit texting Nicky a long time ago."

"Her, don't you mean him? It must get confusing," Guy hit him again.

"Kiss my ass. Anyway I'm with Alpha. He just got in from Bangkok. Get your ass down here. We're way ahead of you," Kyle urged him.

"I'm not that crazy about your man Alpha. He usually pisses me off with his shit. Besides, I'm trying to get some work done."

"He's got some kick ass weed. We're gonna party hardy tonight," Kyle assured him.

It was about the only redeeming quality of Alpha. He did usually have some good smoke, a rare and good thing in Korea. Ah well Guy thought, he had been pretty good last night. Maybe he could go out for a couple of hours.

"So, where you guys at?"

"We're at Gecko's having cocktails. Hurry up. He ain't got no money and the old lady is gonna be pissed off when she sees the credit card bill."

"Always better to be pissed off than to be pissed on."

Kyle's wife didn't like Guy. She thought he was a bad influence on her man. She hated Alpha cause she knew he was the worst influence.

"By the time Guy got to Itaewon it was past ten pm. The Saturday crowds were swelling and excitement was in the air. Itaewon had been the entertainment district for foreigners in Seoul for more than a hundred years. For forty years it had been the main 'ville' for The US Army troops from nearby Yongsan Garrison. Before the Americans, the Japanese Imperial Army occupied the same piece of real estate. Before them it was a Chinese Army.

The main drag was about seven blocks long and was lined with custom made suit shops, various large size clothing stores, and all kinds of souvenir shops. Up the various side streets were the clubs, bars, and other establishments that attracted the young and far from home military guys. The 'juicy bar' proliferated, where men could sit with young and not so young women, buy them overpriced 'lady's drinks' in exchange for company, and progressive levels of touching, groping, and straight up sex. Freelance girls and ajumas, middle aged women pimps, worked the streets.

Years ago, on his first night in Seoul, Guy had asked a taxi driver to take him to Itaewon. The driver dropped him at an intersection at the foot of a narrow street that continued up a steep hill. He later learned that this street was known far and wide as 'Hooker Hill.' The reason was apparent. The intersection was crowded with partiers, mostly young soldiers, young Korean girls, and the ajumas. When he stepped out of the cab, he was approached immediately by a late teens or early twenties girl who let him know her business.

"Hey handsome, I like you. You come my house," she cooed.

"Ever the smart ass, Guy countered, "you come my house," and was surprised when she didn't miss a beat, grabbed his arm, and said, "Ok come on we go."

Unfortunately or fortunately the negotiations broke down over money but it was a lesson learned. Guy had heard it said that three out of ten women in Korea were involved in some form of prostitution. After his first experience on the hill it would be easy to believe such a thing. Now twelve years later he knew that it couldn't be an accurate depiction of Korean society or it's women. In his experience Korean women were quite sexually conservative.

Of course Itaewon was an aberration. Throughout Seoul and most of Korea there were red light districts as well as nightlife areas where guys could take a walk on the wild side. Room salons, singing rooms, massage parlors, and even motels were thinly disguised whorehouses. Lately the metropolitan governments and police had been cracking down on the most blatant operations. Nowadays the USFK, United States Forces Korea, was enforcing a zero tolerance policy towards prostitution and human trafficking. Itaewon was still the entertainment spot for foreigners but it's face had changed a lot. There was less and less street prostitution and a lot of the juicy bars were shuttered; lack of GIs Guy supposed. In contrast there were a lot of new upscale restaurants and shopping places making for a much more pleasant experience, Guy surmised. Funny thing was there had been an explosion of transgender bars. Also, Middle Eastern and Turkish fast food joints had taken over as the new places to indulge the munchies.

From past experience Guy knew that the revelry would go on till seven or eight the next morning. He made his way from the subway entrance through the throngs to Gecko's, a western style bar with food, music, and darts. Weekends it was standing room only after around eight pm. Guy pushed his way through the mixed crowd of GIs, ex-pats and, Korean girls. He spotted Kyle and Alpha hanging on the bar. Six empty shot glasses, a half pitcher of beer, and two mugs littered the space in front of them. There was an untouched plate of cheese sticks in front of Alpha. Kyle didn't believe in wasting good money on food when he was drinking. Alpha was swapping spit with the young, chubby Filipina on the stool to his right. Guy wedged himself between Kyle and two Hispanic looking GIs working on a pitcher at the bar.

"You're late dude. It's your turn to get the next round," Kyle greeted him. Alpha didn't look up from his seduction.

"Jesus H. Christ, how long you two assholes been here?"

"Long enough to put sixty thousand won on my credit card; the old lady is gonna kill me," Kyle whined.

Guy ordered a martini and three shots of tequila. Alpha turned around long enough to down the shot, drain the half glass of beer in front him, and tell Kyle to get another pitcher. He noticed Guy and asked him what he was doing there. What an asshole Guy thought. The Filipina seemed to be in love with him already.

"Hey Guy, you know about the space aliens?"

Guy had had this same conversation with Kyle more than once before, always when he was on the cusp of being really drunk. Kyle seldom remembered the conversation the next day.

"Stop that shit Kyle! I don't want to hear it again." Guy was straight up with his friend. It didn't matter; none of it would be remembered.

"Why you so closed minded? You need to look into this."

Kyle's wife was a Seventh Day Adventist and they were half heartedly raising their kids in the faith. Kyle's world view tended to the more fantastic. He was convinced, at least when he was wasted, that a race of ancient aliens had visited the Earth long ago and were the genesis of human civilization. He had seen a Discovery Channel documentary on the topic a few years ago.

"I already explained to you three times why that's bullshit. You just can't recall. I don't want to go through it again tonight."

Kyle grinned, scanned his memory banks and came up empty. He did his shot then Guy's and said, "let's go have a smoke."

An hour later they settled their tab and headed out with Alpha and his new love in tow. Guy wanted to sample Alpha's weed so they headed for the lot where Kyle had left his Tico, a sub-compact made and sold mostly to women and kids in Korea. On the way Guy spent a little time talking to Alpha. It was only polite if he was going to share his pot.

"How was Bangkok?" Guy started.

"Fantastic, even you could get laid there!" Alpha was really an asshole.

"Is that right?" Guy told himself not to forget this guy was going to get them high. "How long were you there this time?" was pretty safe.

"Two weeks; lived in a whorehouse and stayed high the whole time."

From previous conversations Guy knew that Alpha preferred underage girls and ladyboys as sex partners. His drug of choice was what seemed to be a kind of methamphetamine smoked in a water pipe. Guy didn't want to get into details and so he caught up with Kyle who was having a hard time remembering exactly where he had left his car.

Through a process of elimination Guy helped his friend find the car. They climbed in the driver's seat and the passenger seat. Alpha and his woman, whose name they learned was Gina, climbed into the backseat and immediately they seemed to commence wrestling. Kyle had bought two sixteen oz. cans of Hite beer, opened them both and handed one to Guy. Being the most sober, Guy was looking around and it being a back row without much light, decided that it was a reasonably ok place to smoke a joint. Kyle drained the can of beer in two pulls and asked Guy if he was going to finish his. Guy with little reluctance turned over the beer and watched Kyle finish it off.

"I thought we were gonna get high," Guy complained

"Yeah we are," Kyle said as he turned around to look into the rear seat at Alpha. "Hey pal, let's have another taste of that weed, and not that crap we smoked before; the good stuff."

By this time Alpha had Gina's blouse open, her bra pushed up and was fiddling with her breasts like he was adjusting the knobs on an old black and white TV.

"Fuck off!" Of course was Alpha's only possible reply.

Couldn't these guys see he was busy? Kyle tossed one of the empty, crushed 16 oz. cans at Alpha but instead hit Gina in the forehead. She screamed and tried to exit the small car. Alpha was able to hold her back and calm her down a bit but the romantic moment was lost. Alpha was pissed, but like everyone else, knew it was useless to be angry at Kyle when he was fucked up. After a while Alpha did produce a fairly tightly rolled brown joint.

It had been years since Guy had smoked pot. The last time was also with Kyle and Alpha. He had been, like just about everybody else in the 70s, a fairly regular imbiber of the herb in college. He loved the buzz but eventually gave it up because it was affecting his ambition and waistline; those munchies you know. Even many years later he remembered both the smell and the high. In Korea, more than several times he could have sworn he smelled pot smoke. Later he learned that a traditional herbal medicine called mogwort smelled exactly like pot. Whenever he smelled it the memories came back and he missed it. Now he wasn't planning to become a pothead but once in a great while was no problem he figured.

Alpha fired up the joint and inhaled deeply, held it as long as he could and coughed out the smoke. Even by the smell Guy could tell that this was kickass. Alpha took another drag, leaned over and exhaled the smoke into Gina's mouth. These two were made for each other. Next the joint went up to Kyle. He took a fair hit and about coughed up a lung. Guy took a hit, coughed it up, took another, and held it. By the time he passed the joint he could already feel the buzz engulfing him. He felt his whole body relax into the high. Damn he felt good. When the end of the roach came back to Guy, Alpha was telling a long story involving his brother, a man in a lime colored suit, and a Grateful Dead concert. For some unknown reason the story was so funny that Guy burned his lip and went into a fit of laughing. He may have hyperventilated and he felt himself lose consciousness and pitch forward. When he came to only seconds later, the car was silent. They all wanted to know what had happened and if he was alright. Guy let them know he was ok but knew he was as high as a kite. He told them he needed air and got out of the car.

Once out of the smoke charged air Guy tried to get ahold of himself. First he checked for his cell phone and next his wallet. He had them both but he seemed to be missing his glasses. They must be in the car. He'd have to go back for them. He made his way down a row of cars, leaned on the back wall of the lot and lit a Marlboro. Feeling the urge to pee he stepped between two cars, unzipped and carefully pissed behind the tire of a Volkswagen. As he emptied his bladder he heard the sound of someone pissing on the blacktop to his right. When he looked down he saw a Korean lady squatting down, skirt hiked up, panties in one hand, and peeing on the ground. She looked up at him and smiled. Equipment still in hand, he stepped towards her and proceeded to mix his urine flow with hers on the parking lot. Their eyes meet and they grinned at each other until the business was done. The connection was almost metaphysical. When she was all done she stood up, stepped into her panties and adjusted her skirt. Guy zipped up and she walked away slightly staggering. Guy made no move to follow her. Wow! That was some kick ass weed.

An hour later Guy caught up with Kyle at a tent bar at the foot of Hooker Hill. They were both drinking soju shots and beer. They both had their free arms around a couple of ladyboys.

"Hey Alpha, where is that Filipino chick?" Guy wanted to know.

"We left her in the car. She was all fucked up. We might go back and get her later. Better she sleeps for awhile," Alpha matter of factly let him know.

"I think my glasses are in your car Kyle. Did you see them?"

"Yeah I saw them. They are all bent up. You really took a header into the dashboard; scared the shit out of me. I thought I was gonna have to explain to the cops what happened to you," Kyle burst out.

Then he leaned into the ladyboy and closed his eyes. He was in the advanced stages of his drunk. Guy reached over and checked the back pocket of his Bermuda shorts for his wallet. Next he patted him down and was relieved that his keys were also there. Guy was thinking ahead as to how this fuck-story was going to end. Then he got the Kakao from Jeong Sook.

"Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you too. Where are you?"

" from Korea."

" no I meant where are you now?"

"ah, ha ha ha I at my home. You too?"

"I'm out with a couple friends."

"you girl friend maybe."

"no, couple of asshole buddies"

" couple of.....? asshole?? , Bad guys??"

"just friends. They bad tonight."

"funny funny. Go home safe"

"yeah going soon."

"i like you.....," Jeong Sook said impulsively.

"Good night," she quickly signed off?

"really??? Me too. I'll call you tomorrow." Guy was more than delighted.

Back at the Tico, Kyle was pissing on the fender of the Sonata behind his car. There was no sign of the Filipina lady but Guy's bent glasses were on the floorboard of the front seat. With an empty bladder Kyle took off for the Family Mart across the street to tank up. Guy was still buzzing and was a little bit drunk. He didn't need or want to drink more. Tomorrow was another day and Guy was looking forward to talking with Jeong Sook again.

The ride home was almost uneventful. Guy took the car keys and called a substitute driver. This service was often a life saver. With one phone call and a twenty minute wait they had a driver that would drive them home anywhere in Seoul for about twenty bucks. When the driver dropped Guy in front of his place Kyle was passed out in the back seat. Guy gave the driver twenty-five bucks and slapped Kyle on top of his head. He didn't wake up. He wondered if Alpha was still with the two ladyboys.

Another night on the town was in the books.