

## Between Heaven and Earth: Book Two - A Cross to Bear - Chapter Five - Step By Step

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Guy woke up after ten the next morning. He was a little fuzzy headed but apparently only a little worse for wear. A long hot shower cleared most of the cobwebs from his head. His glasses were a different story. They were bent beyond salvage. He spent twenty minutes searching through desk drawers for an old pair that he could wear until he could get the busted pair replaced. He also checked his cell phone that he had neglected to plug into the charger when he arrived home and found the battery dead. After plugging it in he started the Mr. Coffee machine. After his first cup and a piece of cheese food he checked the cell for messages. There were three; two from Kyle and one from Jeong Sook. He ignored Kyle and went straight to Jeong Sook. It was time stamped at 8:20 am.

"Good morning. You ok?"

Guy responded right away, " I'm ok. Tired so I slept in."

A short time later she got back, " Slept in? Slept in what?"

"No, I mean I slept late. I'm at home."

"ㄹㄹㄹㄹㄹ Sounds so funny."

"Let's meet up for coffee."

"I like that. When?"

" How about 12:30 at the same place?"

"Yes ok, bye."

When Guy arrived at 12:20, Jeong Sook was already there. On the way over he tried to recall the connection he had felt yesterday and plot a course of action. He just wasn't sure how to proceed and decided the only option was to play it by ear. He'd be friendly, polite, and open minded. If there was any chemistry it should be immediately apparent. Otherwise he would write it off and beat a strategic retreat.

Of course, in Jeong Sook's case her feelings were about a hundred times more complicated. After three years as a citizen of the Republic of Korea, she had made almost zero progress in coming to terms concerning her financial, social, family, and heartistic issues. She was sometimes happy, but more often, not. Simply put, she felt like a fish out of water in the fast moving, forward leaning South Korean society. As much as she tried she never felt entirely comfortable in her new home. It had often occurred to her that the reason was that she couldn't get comfortable in her own skin. Most of all, she felt that she had no anchor. Like most Koreans, she had always relied on family as her root. Separated from her family still in the north, she was essentially rootless. When she considered her life in the north, she felt fortunate to be in the land of freedom and prosperity. But her feelings remained mixed with a deep guilt over leaving her father and daughters behind.

And now this, all she could think was; why this and why now? The reality was that she couldn't forget the spark she felt at her accidental meeting with the American. She argued with herself that it meant nothing, just a frivolous dalliance. She considered just dropping the whole thing. It could only complicate a life that was already too complicated. But she still couldn't forget. When he suggested coffee, her mind was not yet made up but she agreed almost on impulse. It seemed like she was being swept along on the currents of life.

When he got to the coffee shop, Guy went directly to the third floor and found her at the same table as

before. Somehow he liked that. It was another hot day with high humidity. After the walk over and climb to the top floor Guy became aware that he was sweating bullets, for more than one reason. He hesitated for a minute hoping the air conditioner would be efficient in cooling him down a little. He didn't wait long.

"Oh, you're already here," Guy greeted her as casually as he could. Casual is good, right?

"Of course, we had a promise. Nice to meet you." The phrases from her English text book were coming in handy.

"Nice to meet you too," Guy responded in kind. He had the same text book.

Jeong Sook was dressed casually again, this time in blue jeans, an oversized blue oxford shirt, and sneakers. Her jet black hair was pulled back with a navy blue ribbon. She wore small gold earrings that set off her off light skin. Her floppy hat was on the table. Guy thought that she was perfect; he really liked her style. The fuse was lit and it was a short one.

Jeong Sook insisted on buying his coffee and he insisted on going with her to place the order. While waiting for their drinks, they stood close together. Guy was feeling a little shy and she was almost overwhelmed. But they were drawn to each other as if by a force of nature. Maybe like a planet and its moon. Guy stood a full head and a half taller than her and when he gazed down she was looking up at him. Words were not even needed but they both awkwardly tried.

Back at their table they tried some more. The tall glasses of iced coffee made fine props to keep their hands and eyes busy as they groped their way forward. Jeong Sook found that her mind was almost blank when she searched for English class expressions to put on the table. She tried her best but often unconsciously reverted to Korean. She was surprised when Guy was able to pick up on her meaning. And so it was. They had established their linguistic common ground. Guy's Korean skills were nowhere near good enough to carry on more than a basic conversation. The Korean/English dictionary on her phone and the English/Korean app on his, bridged the gap. With a little humor and a little more effort they were communicating. The strength of their attraction was apparent to them both and it carried them through many false starts and blind alleys.

He wanted to know all about her. She danced around the subject and it only made her more attractive to him. A woman of mystery. How enchanting. Maybe she was a spy he chuckled to himself. She told him she was divorced, had been living in Seoul for three years, and other basic details. On the other hand he told her everything about his life, his work, and his writing. She listened and thought it awful forward of him to reveal so much but she was fascinated.

Finally she asked what was really on her mind.

"Why did you come to me now? Why now?"

It stopped him in his tracks. He had no idea why?

"Why not?" was all he could think of saying and they both laughed.

The question was essentially unanswered and hung in the air between them. After more than three hours in the coffee shop they walked out. Guy had no idea where to go but he didn't want it to be over yet so he took her by the hand and led her down the street. They strolled through the neighborhood across from the campus and down the alley-like streets past low walled traditional Korean houses. Three blocks down they came to a stream that cut through the light industrial and commercial area. They walked along the path that followed the stream. The afternoon was hot and the sun was bright so when they came to a bench under a shade tree they took a rest. Sitting close together they watched the sun begin to dip towards the rooftops on the other side of the stream. Boldly he put his arm around her and pulled her closer. Jeong Sook yielded and willed him to continue. Before the sunset he leaned in and kissed her for the first time. She immediately responded and returned the kiss. He knew he was on the right course. On the next kiss he reached in and fondled her breast. She arched her back and moaned. Of course they had to stop because after the heat of day the pathway began to be active with bike riders, joggers, and dog walkers. It was hard but they did stop and sat together smiling and watching the darkness grow.

After full dark, Guy stood up and gently pulled Jeong Sook up by both hands. They continued down the footpath hand in hand until they came to a bridge and crossed to the other side. Two blocks down they found a market street and Jeong Sook suggested they stop for a snack. The stall where they sat down specialized in seafood pancakes and they ordered makoli, the Korean rice wine, to wash it down. They talked some more and laughed even more as two bottles of makoli were consumed.

By 11pm Guy was feeling like he had spent a lifetime with this woman. It was only natural that he invited

her to come to his place but strangely he was feeling shy again. He didn't want to break the magic of the moment. When she said she had better be getting home. Guy sensed they were at a crossroads. Her domestic arrangements was one of the things she hadn't revealed.

"Sure, how will you go home," he asked?

"I'll get a taxi, of course. The subway is finished."

"Ok, let's go," he said standing to settle the tab.

Out on the main street there was no shortage of cabs. When they flagged one down, Guy, always the gentleman, held the rear door open for her. She got in and he made a half hearted move to get in beside her.

"No, Guy. I'm ok. I go alone," she told him firmly.

"Come on, let me see you home."

"Next time." She was sure.

He gave her a quick peck on the forehead, she closed the door, and she was gone.

Guy stood and watched the cab disappear down the street. He felt a little like Cinderella. His princess charming had disappeared and he was in the dark as to where he stood.

Seven minutes later he felt the buzz of an incoming Kakao message on his phone.

"Thank you Guy. Call tomorrow. Goodnight."

"Ah yes," he thought, "I'll surely do that."