

Between Heaven and Earth: Book Three - Destiny and Fate - Chapter Four - A Way Out

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"Hey you, looks like I wasted my money on you," Grandma complained to Jeong Sook one early summer morning after breakfast.

She had been up before dawn, fed the pigs and chickens, and the family. Now she was squatting on the floor washing the dishes in a tin tub, and planning to spend the rest of the morning hauling water from the stream. The old one so seldom spoke to her she was somewhat taken back.

"Ma'am?"

"You've been eating here for months and have produced nothing. I should send you back"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean ma'am."

"I mean the pig, the bitch dog, and all the chickens are producing offspring. What's with you? Are you barren? I'd send you back today but you owe me a lot of money for your food and upkeep. Then there is the matter of the fortune I spent on you in the first place. I can't afford to continue feeding a freeloader forever."

Jeong Sook was stunned. After the months of daily intercourse with one or other of the males in the family she wondered why she hadn't conceived. She hoped she was just lucky. It was possible that Hyungsang and his father were both shooting blanks but it didn't seem likely. She worried that she was somehow damaged inside but for the time being the last thing she wanted was a child that would tie her to this place and this family.

Now for the first time it was out in the open. There was no baby and the witch wanted to get rid of her. The way out was to pay this old bitch off. But how? She hadn't seen actual cash money since she had arrived here. There had to be a way to get money.

These thoughts occupied her as she hauled the water. The stream was a twenty minute walk down the cow path and across the main road. She had been to it two or more times a day since she had arrived. It was her primary job and it was necessary to have enough water for cooking and feeding the pigs. Any water for washing of bodies that was done was recycled as water for the few plants in the garden. During the coldest part of winter she carried an old wooden handled axe to chop through the ice and reach the fast flowing current down below that never froze.

She had been given two five liter plastic cans by Hyungsang when he handed the responsibility off to her. Carrying them, once they were filled, was backbreaking work that turned the return trip from twenty minutes into several hours. Today, on her third trip she took a rest in the warm sunshine. She lay on the bank, dreamed, and schemed.

The sound of footsteps on the path brought her back into the moment. Always cautious, she sat up and waited for whoever it was. She had sometimes met the occasional neighbor on her trips to the waterhole. Acutely aware of her illegal status and also having no confidence in the odd guttural dialect that was spoken around here, she usually just politely exchanged greetings, avoided giving any specifics as to where she was from, and made herself scarce as soon as possible.

Today she was feeling bolder. When the person stepped out of the foliage along the river bank Jeong Sook realized she had seen this woman here before. She seemed a few years older than herself, was dressed in the same poor farmer's uniform of a rough cotton jacket and pants, and was carrying almost identical water cans as she was. Jeong Sook made up her mind; she would reach out and see if she could somehow make contact with the outside world.

"Well, what a nice day it is," Jeong Sook called out.

A little startled the woman replied, "Oh yes it is."

Then she turned and smiled. Right away Jeong Sook felt she had made the right choice. She realized that she hadn't been graced by such a warm friendly smile in ages.

"Older sister, haven't I seen you here before? You must live near by," Jeong Sook continued.

"Oh sure, just down the road. Our family is farming. I come here several times a week for water. We have a pump but nowadays it produces less and less."

The next thing Jeong Sook realized was that they were chatting in Korean. The older woman was using a dialect that was similar to the one Hyo Jin had used. This woman was from Korea and very well may be in the same boat she was in.

"I'm Kim Jeong Sook of the Andong Kims. Please call me Jeong Sook, older sister."

"Are you from the north or the south?" the other woman asked.

"Of course from the north. I crossed over last winter and have been living on a farm with the Jang family."

"Wow! Me too I got out last summer." After blurting it out she rushed over and embraced Jeong Sook. "I've been trapped here for almost a year. Sometimes I think I'm worse off here than back home. I'm Lee Han Sul. I'm from a village outside of Hungnam."

They spent the next hour talking and filling each other in. Then they helped each other fill all the water cans.

"I better be getting back. If they think I've been gone too long I'll get a beating. I usually go to the village on market day. It's held every five days, on the 4th, 9th, 14th, and so on. Maybe I'll see you there," said Han Sul

"Market. Never been. This is the first I've heard of it."

"Really, most folks in the neighborhood go every five days to buy and sell produce, chickens, or eggs."

A bell went off in Jeong Sook's head. Market, that means there may be cash. She figured she would have to find out more about this.

"If I don't see you on market day, I'm usually here for water on Tuesdays and Thursdays." Han Sul shouted a goodbye and struggled up the path under her beast like burden. Jeong Sook followed her and thanked her lucky stars for this day. She had found both a friend and a way out.

What Jeong Sook needed now was some more information. It would be a few days until she could hope to meet up with Han Sul again. She had only one other line of communication open, Hungsang. He was a man in strength, violent tendencies, and sexual appetites. But he was still a boy in other ways and would respond to a grown woman's motherly as well as feminine charms. Jeong Sook was pretty sure she could get what she needed out of him.

She began her campaign to win the boy over that very day. When ever they found themselves alone together, the teenager attempted to molest her. Usually she resisted and got away from him as soon as she could. When he came to her room at night she lay like a dead fish and let him get it over with as soon as possible. Now she began to cultivate a relationship with him. She determined to become his friend, mother, and lover. She asked him about his life and what his dreams were. She dangled the hook and he took it.

During the day time she smiled and coyly encouraged his advances. At night she became an active participant in his lustful visits. She complimented him on his physique and techniques. She even introduced him to a couple of tricks she had learned as a married woman. After about two weeks she set the hook.

"Oh Hyungsang, are you coming tonight? I really need you."

"We'll see. Once the old man has his liquor and is asleep I'll be able to come."

"Doesn't your father know about us? What would he do if he knew? We may have to tell him and Grandmother eventually."

They were behind the tumbled down outhouse that served as a barn. He took the opportunity to slap her twice.

"Don't be crazy bitch! He'd kill us both. You just keep your mouth shut or I'll kill you myself."

She put his arms around him and tried to placate his violent outburst.

"Oh Hyungsang, I'd never put you in danger. I just want us to be happy together. We can't continue like this forever. We need to make a plan."

Now somewhat calmed down he was open to suggestions. "What kind of plan?"

"I need to get away from here, from your father. Then we can be together." Jeong Sook never considered herself a manipulator of people but this was pretty easy.

"Really, we could be together?"

"Of course, why not? We could be happy together. First I have to get away from here. Will you help me?"

"I don't know. If I can, I'll help. What do you want me to do?"

"Do you go to the five day market?"

"Market day, I have to go twice a month to sell the eggs. Why do you want to know?"

"It could be important. When is the next time you'll go? Do you go alone?"

"Usually I go by myself but sometimes the old man goes. I think he has another woman there."

"Take me with you next time. I want to see what there is to see."

"It will be up to Grandma but I could tell her I need your help. The next time I'll go is the 24th and we'll see."

She hugged him again and kissed him on the mouth, "I know you can do it, you are my hero. Be sure to come to me tonight, I need you."

Hook, line, and sinker, she thought.

On the morning of the 24th at breakfast Grandma informed Jeong Sook she would be riding in the truck into town to deliver the eggs.

"Do what you are told and stay out of trouble. Don't talk to anyone. If I hear of you causing any trouble I'll slap a couple of your teeth loose when you get back here." The old lady was as nasty as ever but Jeong Sook didn't care. Her plan was working.

There were ten hens at the farm and they produced on average one egg apiece each day. Figure ten days and there were around 100 eggs to take to market. Jeong Sook had pocketed more than a dozen and hoped they wouldn't be missed. The next step was to sell them for cash. She didn't plan to come home empty handed.