

## Between Heaven and Earth Book: One - The Cost of Freedom - Chapter Thirteen - Twas the Season

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By December Jeong Sook had adapted well and settled into life at the mission. On the surface she was a well-adjusted and productive member of the small community. She was happy in her work in the kitchen and had made friends with her roommates, classmates, and the staff. Although most of her days were spent inside the mission, on occasion small groups of three to five women were encouraged to venture out on field trips into the city for fresh air, exercise, and shopping. Once, Mother Shin took Jeong Sook and three others on a shopping trip to a large department store. In addition to the pocket money she had earned by working in the kitchen, she also had the money given to her by Rev. Kim. He had told her to buy herself some warm and pretty clothes.

The store was three times larger than the biggest department store she had been to in Pyongyang. It was six stories high and was chock full of luxury goods that made her marvel at how wealthy the Chinese were. She bought jeans, sweaters, and a pair of Nike sneakers. She was also able to buy a

dark blue down jacket, a pants suite, and a matching skirt for Sunday dress up. It was intoxicating to spend the afternoon dreaming of a life where such things were so readily available. For the first time she began to fantasize about a new life in the south or even another country. At least for a short time she was able to suppress the memories of her ordeal and what she had left behind.

As she studied the bible, she became familiar with the main players in both the old and new testaments. Under the guidance of Mother Shin, she learned about the heroic women like Rebecca, Rachel, and Ester. When she was asked if she would like to take a biblical name for her life of faith, she chose Ester.

In late November, Rev. Kim began talking about a festival he had taken a great liking to during his time in America. It was called Thanksgiving and the pastor gave several talks and sermons about its origins and significance. Jeong Sook loved the tale of the Pilgrim Fathers who risked their lives to leave their native land hoping to find a new life in a new world. She commiserated with their hardships and was inspired by their victory through faith. She wanted it to be her story.

Under Rev. Kim, two dozen folks gathered together for the traditional feast. As they enjoyed roast duck, sticky rice, and pumpkin soup, the pastor told them about exotic things like turkey, dressing, and cranberries. Jeong Sook felt truly thankful for her greatly improved circumstances and loved having such a holiday.

Of course, Pastor Kim was also a huge fan of Christmas and throughout the month of December he prepared them to welcome the messiah. He had a wreath constructed out of fresh pine boughs and placed on the main dining table. It had five tall candles, three purple, one pink, and one white. They were told that it was an Advent wreath. Each of the four candles around the perimeter represented a thousand years that the people of Israel had waited for the messiah. Each night at dinner they lit first one candle then on successive weeks they lit another until all four were lit. On Christmas eve they lit the white candle to welcome the birth of the messiah. By then, Jeong Sook was profoundly impacted by the narrative and wanted to be a believer. It was time to take the next step and make it official. At Christmas Day Service during the altar call she went to the front and announced that she was ready to be saved.

"Do you confess your sins and accept Jesus Christ as your lord and savior?" Rev. Kim asked her.

"Yes," was her quiet reply.

She was overwhelmed by the feeling of love, forgiveness, and acceptance. There were lots of hugs and tears. She was sincere in her acceptance but of course deep down inside there was still her Korean identity and self that remained untouched. Later that night Rev. Kim congratulate her and began to talk to her about baptism. It was enough for Jeong Sook.

She continued to study and the first week of January she added a Chinese language class to her schedule. One night in mid-month, after they had laid down to sleep, the pastor and Mother Shin came to their room. They called three of her roommates and asked them to get up, pack their things as quickly as possible, and be ready to go. Jeong Sook and the others were simply told that these three would be beginning their journey out of China. Rev. Kim requested that they not discuss this among themselves but instead pray for these sisters, pray for their safety and success.

"Your time will come soon," he assured them.

Soon is a relative term. When enough money was available, a deal had been struck with the brokers, and the conditions in China were right, a journey could begin. Rev. Kim himself couldn't say when and often he didn't know until the last moment when a move could be made. It was better that way because the more time there was and the more people who know, the more chances there were for betrayal. The pastor-activist was always working on the next deal and always kept his cards close to his chest. In the case of Kim Jeong Sook there was the added complication of her desire to locate and rescue her friend. She had been on the short list for the mid-January action but Kim was making some progress in locating the missing woman. He figured a little more time might bring a life changing experience for both. And so he continued to look.

There were ways to find people. It was not unusual for family members to become separated when exiting the north and often folks departed at different times with the plan to meet up once they were in China. Because they were all illegal and susceptible to arrest there was no public clearing house to locate loved ones. But there were ways. There was an underground network of Koreans and others whose business it was to find people. It cost money and was fraught with the possibilities of being sold, turned in, or ripped off in one of many creative ways. Kim used his contacts to make other contacts and carefully spent money to find Jeong Sook's friend. He didn't know her full name or what the connection was between Jeong Sook and this girl but he trusted his gut and so he looked. He had only a first name, her age, the name of her home village in North Korea, and when she had crossed over. With these things and some money he had turned up a list of possibilities. He narrowed down the list to the three most likely and began a surveillance operation. Of course Hyo jin was surely working in the skin trade. Although he was a pastor Kim was not shy about mixing with the underworld or visiting their establishments.

In any business, assets are critical. Assets must produce value. The most important value is continued cash flow. In the skin trade women were the assets and they must be protected and cultivated to maximize cash flow. Any operation to locate and lure these assets away from their managers, owners, or pimps was akin to a hostile takeover and steps were taken to ward off the takeover. Usually the preferred tactics were intimidation and violence. Knowing all this too well, Rev. Kim had to conduct any intelligence operation in a way not to attract attention. His first target was a massage parlor located across from the bus station downtown. It was on the sixth floor of the building and was advertised in neon lights as a men's relaxation emporium. According to his contacts it was a straight up whorehouse with a staff of twenty Korean women who lived on site. The owner was an almost untraceable Chinese corporation but the managers were Koreans. In addition, the business had opened last fall shortly after Hyo Jin had been sold. At least three of the women there were the right age and came from the same region as Hyo Jin. Worth a look.

At three in the afternoon on a Tuesday, Kim took the elevator to the sixth floor and pushed open the door to the 'Play Time' emporium. In the dim light of the lobby he saw an information desk, some couches, and a few half dead potted plants. Not exactly a high class joint. A discrete bell tone sounded and after a few minutes a scantily dressed woman appeared.

"Welcome to Play Time. How can I help you?" The thirty something gal smiled and looked real helpful.

"I'd like to get a foot massage. I heard that you have Korean ladies here."

"Yes of course, have you been here before?" She spoke Chinese with a heavy accent.

Rev. Kim switched to Korean. "No it's my first time. A friend told me you have a pretty lady named Hyo Jin."

"We have lots of pretty ladies but no one named Hyo Jin. I'm sure you will like Jasmine. She speaks Korean and is very pretty."

"Well I had my mind set on Hyo Jin. My friend told me she was quite friendly."

"There are seven girls on duty now. Why don't you have a look at them and see if you see someone who will make you happy."

Kim agreed and was led to a back room where the ladies were lounging on couches. They were all

dressed in short blue robes with the establishment's name embroidered over the left breast. They all sat up and smiled when Kim entered the room. He felt sure he was on a fool's errand here but he figured he'd play the cards he was holding.

"Hello ladies." He addressed them in Korean and he saw right away they all understood. Several answered.

"You all look lovely today. Are any of you called Hyo Jin?" Now there were only blank stares but he continued, "I'm looking for Hyo Jin from the north." He mentioned the county and village that Hyo Jin hailed from. Still no response. They needed customers, not old home week.

"I am a relative and have an important message for her. Her mom is real sick and is asking to see her before it's too late."

Surely they all had sad stories but this one was designed to touch their most vulnerable memories, their moms. He had their attention now but no one knew Hyo Jin or they were not able to give up any information.

One girl spoke for the rest. "We don't know anyone by that name. Sorry, hope you find her."

The interview was over and the front desk lady was pushing him towards the front door. Along the way a door opened off to the right and Kim caught a glance of two tough looking guys standing and watching him pass. Time to go.

It was a long shot and so Rev. Kim wasn't disappointed. He didn't rule out Play Time completely but he resolved to move on. The next target was an outfit that specializes in phone sex. According to his sources there were more than forty Korean women working there. It also opened shortly after Jeong Sook and Hyojin had gone on the market. It was located only a few blocks from the New Light Mission but with other fish to fry that day, he decided to put it off till another day.