

## Between Heaven and Earth Book: One - The Cost of Freedom - Chapter Fourteen - A Sticky Situation

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The Guk Ill Gwan was a popular Koreatown nightclub in the downtown area of Harbin. It was on the third and fourth floors of a fifteen story building. The entrance and main floor stretched out over 2,000 square feet. The room had a stage in the front where various acts appeared. In front of the stage was a dance floor and around the dance floor were tables that would seat four to six customers. Six person booths lined the outside walls. Official capacity was 650 people.

Although ownership of the club was murky at best, the management team was Korean. The staff consisted of mostly twenty something young bloods who worked as waiters, bouncers, and pimps. There was a kitchen that could pump out various Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and even American side dishes and munchies. In fact, Kentucky Style fried chicken was one of the biggest sellers. Almost every night large quantities of alcohol; beer, wine, whiskey, beaju, and other Chinese liquors flowed out of the bar and across the tables. Upon entering the club, customers were seated and they ordered what was known as a basic order. The basic order or kibun consisted of either six bottles of beer, a bottle of whiskey, or a bottle of baeju along with an elaborate fruit arrangement.

From eight in the evening to four the following morning there was entertainment on the stage. There was K-pop wannabes, Chinese pop, old time trot music, and western oldies. Between acts, a DJ spun dance music. The establishment was frequented by folks in their mid-thirties to mid-sixties. There were mixed groups but most of the clientele were groups of men and of course they needed ladies to sit with them, pour their drinks, and chat. It was the asian way. The ladies worked for the house and received a cut of the revenue from any table they sat at. In addition there were other services that the women were expected to provide. The private rooms on the upper floor were designed with this traffic in mind. There were twenty five women, Russian and Korean, who worked the guests and got substantial tips for their efforts. They were even allowed to keep a portion of the revenue that they generated. It was a crude incentive system.

The Rev. Kim Soo Beak had been to the club before. On his first visit a year ago, he had met with a couple of underworld figures who had some kind of influence over a broker who was causing trouble for him in completing one of his moves. Drinking and partying with them left them more willing to put pressure on the broker to do the right thing. At that time, he had sat and chatted up several of the girls.

Now, on his second visit he went in on his own and was remembered by the staff as a man with valuable connections. He was seated in one of the booths and ordered a bottle of the local scotch with all the setups. After the waiter had brought the bottle, an assortment of glasses, a bucket of ice, and the largest fruit plate, he was asked if he would like company. Why not, of course? In short order, two youngish ladies and a woman similar in age to the reverend appeared. The older woman would act as hostess and introduced the others. The first drinks were poured, on the rocks or straight with something on the side, and the game began. All three ladies were dressed to entice. The lowlights of the club made it ideal for the ladies to conceal any imperfections in their faces or figures.

After everyone was settled and on their second drinks, the hostess excused herself. She had other tables

and girls to monitor. The pounding rock music coming from the bandstand made conversation hit or miss and was actually a good excuse to get up close and whisper in your partners' ears. The young ladies played their game and Kim played his. Of course he was looking for information. Before long, he was pretty sure that neither of these two was Hyo Jin. Towards the bottom of the bottle of scotch he did learn that there was a woman working there that may have been known as Hyo Jin. He was good at the game and decided that this intel was worth investing in a second bottle of the overpriced liquor. As both sides held out the promise of what the other was after, Kim learned that a lady known as Jade might in fact be Hyo Jin. Unfortunately she was unavailable that night; she was very popular. When it was time for another bottle to close the deal on the next level of possibilities, Rev. Kim claimed that he had another appointment but would surely return to take the next step towards romance.

The following Wednesday he was as good as his word. This time he specifically requested the company of only Jade and she was available. The hostess brought her to his booth and introduced her. This time the scotch Kim ordered was a top shelf single malt. The young lady in question was nothing special. Once the hostess deemed it prudent to move on, Kim began a strategy to ascertain who this young lady was. It was a sticky game. Kim needed to get some basic facts but didn't want to overplay his hand. Once he was pretty sure she was the Hyo Jin he was looking for he had to effect a rescue. He knew very well that these women were well guarded by their handlers. The front line of house security was the hostess. Although her primary job was to keep an eye on the girls and peddle them to the right customer, Kim figured she may be vulnerable to and be could be distracted by a romantic approach.

Once on the dance floor Kim popped the question to the younger lady.

"Aren't you Hyo Jin? One of the others told me that was your real name."

"Oh no, as I mentioned, I'm Jade. Don't you think it's a beautiful name?" The DJ was spinning a slow song that allowed the pastor to hold her tight as he glided her around the crowded floor.

"I have a good friend named Kim Jeong Sook who is looking for you. Don't you know her? She would like to see you."

The change that came over Jade was instantaneous. She pulled away from Kim and in confusion said,

"Excuse me please, I better run to the toilet."

He let her go and returned to the booth. He was now all-in and he could only wait to see what she would do. She could either report his advances to the handlers or take the bait. He poured another glass of the single malt. It was an outstanding scotch. Ten minutes later Hyo Jin rejoined him. She had composed herself and was smiling.

"Do you really know Kim Jeong Sook? Yes, I was Hyo Jin in another life. Onni said she would find me again. I wanted so much to believe that she would but so much has happened to me that I gave up hoping. Now this."

"Yes. She has never forgotten her promise and is desperately searching for you. She won't leave China until she finds you."

Now Hyo Jin was crying again. Kim put his arm around her and whispered in her ear.

"I'll bring her here to see you soon. This has to be our secret. If the people here find out you will be disappeared to another place. Can you keep a secret?" She nodded her agreement.

At that moment the hostess returned to ask how they were doing. Rev. Kim was light on his feet and deftly switched tactics.

"Oh welcome back. I've been waiting for you. You never mentioned your name. Sit next to me, why don't you?"

"I'm so sorry, I'm Plum Blossom. I hope Jade is making you happy. Won't you have another drink? Oh, the bottle is empty. Shall I call for another?" She was well experienced in the game.

"Yes, why not if you promise to share it with us," he was no slouch.

For the next two hours Kim pressed his offensive on Plum Blossom. He was pretty sure he was winning her affections but it was a little like navigating a house of mirrors. She pushed him hard to either share another bottle or close the deal with Jade but the reverend deftly slipped away promising next time. They both walked him to the front door where he paid the tab and was allowed to kiss them both.

"Don't forget our secret, next time I'll bring her," he whispered in Hyo Jin's ear.

Hope was renewed for Hyo Jin and Rev. Kim thought,

"Damn that was good scotch."

Three Days later Rev. Kim called Jeong Sook into his office.

"I have some good news. I think I've found your Hyo Jin," he told her.

"Oh my goodness!" her reaction was one of surprise, shock, and joy. She had never given up but she also knew the odds were against ever finding her friend. She immediately began weeping because the physical impact of the news left her without words. The pastor waited patiently.

Then the words came. They were all questions.

"How did you find her? Where is she? Is she ok? When can I see her?"

"Well, first things first. I'm almost sure she is your Hyo Jin. You will have to confirm it when you meet her. She wants to meet you." Kim had to go step by step. He knew Jeong Sook would need some time to adjust.

"It's not important how I found her. Our God works in ways we can't imagine. Our responsibility is to believe and do what we can. I hope you will understand and your faith will grow because of what God has done." It was important that she knew.

"When can I see her?" She trusted the pastor's guidance but couldn't focus on it now.

"You have to know that she has had a hard time as I expected. She is not in a good place right now. She has a choice to make. She is surely trapped in her current circumstances. If she decides she wants to get out, it could be dangerous and difficult but we will help her. It has to be her decision. Can you understand what I'm saying?"

"I think so. I'm sure she will want to get out. Where is she and what is she doing?"

"Of course, as you can imagine, she is in the hands of some nasty folks. She is working in a business where she has to sleep with men, probably multiple men every day. You should know that once someone is forced or coerced into doing such things there are consequences that are not easy to overcome. The guilt and self-loathing goes deep. You know that our Heavenly Father forgives everything through Jesus but many people can't forgive themselves. This is real salvation. You have to know this. In Hyo Jin's case she has to make the choice to run from her past and embrace a new future like you have." This was not exactly orthodox theology but Kim knew it was accurate based on actual experience.

The thing was, this was also Jeon Sook's own dilemma. She believed that she was saved through her belief and faith but she was aware that in the depth of her Korean soul, her deepest transgressions remained unresolved. She understood completely and determined to do what she had promised to Hyo Jin.

"When can I meet her. I'll bring her out. Just like out on the ice, once she sees the river bank she will run to it."

"We'll go to her soon. We have to be careful. They won't let her go easily. We will make a good plan and trust in God." He was more and more sure of this woman.

"How can I ever thank you Rev. Kim?"

"Don't you know that God's work must be our own? This is God's work. Better to thank God."