

Between Heaven and Earth: Book Three - Destiny and Fate - Chapter Two - Conspiracy Theories

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Meanwhile back in South Korea, the land of relative freedom, another pair of conspirators were trying to come up with a plan. After the early snowfalls in late November and early December, the weather in the Seoul metropolitan area settled into a predictable very dry and cold. The citizens rubbed their eyes, spit, and cursed the Chinese for the clouds of fine dust that often enveloped the peninsula. Along with the long padded bench warmer coat, the mask that covered one's nose and mouth had become the fashion trend of the season. Guy thought the look was appropriate for sticking up a liquor store or a gas station but none of his Korean friends got the reference.

He and Jeong Sook had become closer and closer since their epiphany. Although committed to each other and their mutual calling, they were at a loss when it came to coming up with an actual workable plan to get her father and daughters out of North Korea.

"Yo dog, I told you that woman was nothing but trouble!" Kyle was in a foul mood.

He had spent the day at the driving academy. He had let his American driver's license expire and he had to attend a driving school in order to get his Korean license. Guy had explained to him several times that he himself had fulfilled the drivers-ed requirement by viewing a forty minute video at the DMV but Kyle didn't believe it so instead had signed up for a forty hour course at a driving academy and was paying for it; not only in the lesson fee but by enduring the systematic abuse from an overly authoritarian Korean instructor. Guy figured it was a good lesson in the value of paying attention.

"You should have kicked her to the curb long ago when I told you. Then you wouldn't be in this fix."

Guy wasn't in the habit of taking advice from Kyle. But he did try to pay attention and live with his eyes wide open. It was somewhere between being a hard core sceptic and a Pollyanna. It required him to at least listen to Kyle and other producers of eccentric ideas and lifestyles. Usually he felt he was on firm footing when dealing with Kyle's craziest assertions; for example the ancient aliens. He knew there was not a snowball's chance in hell that the theory held water. There was no credible evidence for it and it just didn't make sense. The same was true for most of the conspiracy theories he had encountered. Many things were possible but in reality, most were not probable.

Now he felt like he had his feet firmly planted on shifting sands. He had mentioned the whole North Korea thing to Kyle, not looking for advice, but more like thinking out loud. In the clear light of day it was a preposterous proposition. Nobody in their right mind would seriously entertain the idea of taking on the world's worst tyrannical regime and snatching one of its victims out of the bloody jaws of that paradise. It wasn't reasonable.

They were sitting in a tent bar on the banks of a stream that ran through Anam dong on its way to the Han river. They were both bundled up against the arctic winds, Guy in a ski jacket with several layers of vests and sweaters underneath and Kyle in one of those long padded coats that resembled a sleeping bag with sleeves more than anything else. He was also wearing a black mask on the back of his head. What he was wearing underneath was anybody's guess. All that was visible was two bare white legs shoved into a pair of snopacks. Perfectly reasonable attire by Kyle's standards.

They were on their third bottle of soju when Kyle began to warm up to the caper.

"Here is what we need to do. What it's gonna take is a covert operation. We need to hire some mercenaries, you know, soldiers of fortune with the skill sets to pull this off."

"We?" Guy was alarmed that his erratic buddy now thought he was part of this.

"Sure, I'm all in. You gonna need my help," Kyle said with a level of enthusiasm that scared Guy.

"Your help, how many soldiers of fortune do you know? Maybe we could recruit some ancient aliens for the job." Guy could see that it had been a mistake to mention this thing to Kyle.

"Be serious! We can advertise for the right guys in a magazine, happens all the time. What I'm thinking is an amphibious op. A gun boat tricked out to look like a fishing boat. We would mount out of somewhere on the east coast and motor on up to a river in North Korea. With the right boat we could be in and out before they know what hit them." To Guy it sounded like an 'Ocean's Eleven' type scenario.

"We'd probably have to hit a couple banks first to raise the needed cash," Kyle downed another shot as he mused.

"Jesus H. Christ, I'm sorry I even mentioned it!"

"No man, we can do this. Order another bottle. They got whiskey here?"

Guy reassured himself that Kyle wouldn't remember any of this fantasy in the morning.

Truth is that Guy had briefly entertained a similar scenario and had rejected it as too far fetched and dangerous to boot. His only other idea was to go through international channels and depend on the clout of one of the various human rights groups that have launched protests in order to free individuals being unrighteously detained. Unfortunately such campaigns were seldom, if ever, successful.

The real heavy hitters were sovereign nations that were willing to go to bat to free one of their citizens. North Korea, whenever possible, would grab an American citizen, charge the fool with a crime like espionage, and then try negotiating with the highest government official possible for some advantage in the international chess game. Although Guy was a citizen of the United States, Jeong Sook's father was certainly not. He wondered if he married Jeong Sook, If he could adopt her daughters and then ask Uncle Sam to intervene. Maybe worth looking into but it didn't seem very likely. After considering many options, what seemed most likely was failure. To dream the impossible dream was quite romantic but not at all practical.

Jeong Sook was looking at the problem from a completely different point of view. For her it was a calling. If it was indeed God calling her then there was surely a way to do it. Although she wasn't at all sure who was calling her, she couldn't see much difference between a Divine calling, her father's calling, destiny or even her own self doing the calling. Through this realization she entered into a new understanding of God that was outside of the dogma of the orthodox Christianity that she had accepted.

The other thing was that she had a great deal more experience than most folks in what it actually took to escape from North Korea. As she recalled, the key element in her own escape had been money. All other things being equal, she was sure that money was going to be the solution to this problem.

"How much money you got Guy?" It sounded a little blunt but she figured their relationship was strong enough to withstand a foray into such a sensitive topic.

"About twenty thousand won on me. Why, you need something?"

Guy seldom carried much cash on his person. The age of electronic funds was dawning and he carried out most daily transactions using a debit card. He once had a big jar on his desk where he threw in the loose change from his trouser pockets each night. He cashed in the coins once a year, felt like the two hundred bucks was a windfall, and had a huge blow out with it. Those days were gone.

"Not in you pocket silly, in you bank," she explained evenly.

"In the bank? I'd have to look. Why do you want to know? What do you need?"

It was a disconcerting topic. Guy had been dipping into his meager savings to cover expenses over the last few months. As a freelancer he had no guaranteed income. At times he had to hustle more than usual when the coffers were running low. Now was such a time.

"We may need to bribe somebody," Jeong Sook let him know nonchalantly.

"Bribe, bribe who?"

Of course for Guy, bribe was a dirty word. It connoted corruption and the worst kind of third worldism. He preferred the word honorarium. Of course it had not been so long since the Republic of Korea had

been a third world country. Although the 'The Miracle on the Han' had become one of the leading economies in the world and was a powerhouse of both innovation and culture, old habits die hard. Until only recently, the envelope stuffed with cash was ubiquitous. Nowadays, it was against various laws to offer or accept anything of value for a teacher, a government official, or a journalist. Guy had heard more than a couple times folks say with a wink; just drop it on the floor and kick it under the desk. I'll pick it up later, when the envelope was proffered. The truth was it was still a fall back strategy when there was no other way.

"I don't know who but we gonna have to bribe somebody. That's the way things work in the north. There is a saying that you can buy anything, even a cat's whiskers in the market, and in China too. We gonna need some money."

"How much money?" Guy asked.

"I got no idea. Probably a lot. My father gave me \$3,000 to get out and I spent it all. It was almost the same to get free and out of China. I heard it cost \$10,000 to get across that river today."

Guy was flabbergasted. He knew he didn't have that kind of money. Maybe Kyle's idea was the only option. He wondered how crazy this thing was going to get.

"Who exactly do you figure we have to buy?" Guy was ever the pragmatist.

"Don't know yet but we got to find the right person. The wrong person just take the money and disappear. Worse they take the money and then sell you to the police." Jeong Sook knew all too well how it worked.

"How do we know who the right person is?" Guy asked as if there was a well established way to know such things.

"I got no idea but there has to be a way. We gotta figure it out."

As a refugee, Jeong Sook was in touch with other refugees and their informal organizations. The refugee community in South Korea was quite diverse with competing agendas. It was also rife with distrust, jealousy, and backbiting among those who came from the various social and political strata of the Stalinist society that was North Korea. For these reasons Jeong Sook tried to keep her distance from most of these groups and she also never mentioned them to Guy before.

One of the greatest concerns for those who had been lucky enough to reach the south was their friends and relatives that they had left in the north and who remained at the mercy of that brutal regime. They had conspired to circumnavigate the laws of not only their new country, but the laws of both China and North Korea to send the bread of life, money that is, to their impoverished loved ones. In fact, Jeong Sook had heard that the new underground market that now drove the economy of the whole nation was almost entirely financed by money smuggled out of South Korea, through China, and into the hands of the 'Market Generation.'

Surely this was where the expertise and experience of moving money into North Korea was. Jeong Sook determined that this is where she would start.