

Hye-Jin's Tale

Chapter 4

"I'm not going to hurt you, you know. So you don't have to worry." Seung-Jae had to convince Hye-Jin that there would be no need to shout for help or run away once they reached the parking lot.

"How do I know that? How can you prove that no harm will come to me?"

Seung-Jae knew that Hye-Jin had a legitimate concern. How could he show her that he was not going to harm her in anyway, that he needed her to help him get to Pusan? Well, he thought, the truth never hurt, did it?

"My name is Kim Seung-Jae. What is yours?"

"Park Hye-Jin, and I can't really say that I'm pleased to meet you, sir."

"I can understand that, Hye-Jin. Anyway, my Mother is dying, and I have to get to Pusan to see her sister, my aunt. I'm carrying a letter for her from my Mom. It's that simple."

Hye-Jin knew that he had a letter, and it had to do with his mother, as she had overheard him talk about it back up on the mountain. Well, she thought, let's both be blunt about their situation.

"You're from North Korea aren't you, from that submarine?"

"Yes... how did you know that?"

"Your accent, your situation. Let's face it, any South Korean would simply phone, fly, or take the train."

"Good point. I guess walking the length of Korea to visit an aunt is not exactly a common thing to do nowadays..."

"No, it really isn't. But aren't you a spy? Aren't you supposed to be up north looking at military installations and all that spy stuff?"

"No. Simply put, I've deserted. This plan has been in the works ever since my Mother fell ill."

"Well, then, why didn't you desert just after you got off the sub, and then give yourself up to the South Korean army? They'd give you refuge for sure."

"Not necessarily. There were two reasons actually why I didn't do that. One was that the South Korean army was hunting us down and would shoot us on sight. After all, our landing constituted an act of war. And second, my commander was not going to allow the taking of any prisoners."

"Oh yeah, I read about that. There were about 12 of your buddies shot dead with an AK47. It looked like a suicide thing."

"Oh, I didn't hear about that, but it doesn't surprise me." Seung-Jae was not shocked listening to this piece of news. He of course had no idea on the outcome of their landing in the north, as he hadn't read any newspapers or heard any radio news, but it was not surprising. They had all known that capture was not really an option for any of them.

Hye-Jin interrupted his thoughts.

"So what's with the letter? Is it that important that you have to travel all the way to Pusan?"

"Yes, it is. My Mom made me promise to deliver it to my aunt. We don't know where she lives actually, but that's part of my job... to find her after all these years."

"You mean that she stayed in the south while the rest of your mother's family was in the north?"

"Exactly. No contact whatsoever. We don't really even know if she's still alive, if she got married, or if she remained in Pusan. But there is only one way to find out..."

"True. Actually, you shouldn't have too much trouble finding her in Pusan. There's a registry that you can check which will list all married and maiden names, ages, and current addresses. It's quite organized, you know. Anyone who has family in the north is on the list."

"Getting ready for the imminent 'reunification', are you?"

"I don't know why such a registry is maintained, but don't you think the two countries can become one again?"

"I can't see it with our present government in the north. But something must be done to change the way we live. It's criminal what has been going on in North Korea these past ten years or so."

“You know, we don’t get much news about the problems you have domestically... we only hear about the international ones such as nuclear armament and all that wartime stuff.”

“When we have some more time I’ll fill you in on our last 45 years of Korean Socialism.”

“Your sarcasm is coming through, Seung-Jae.”

“Heh, don’t blame me for that! Life in North Korea has made many of us cynics, suffering in silence.”

The two hikers finally arrived at the parking lot and Hye-Jin steered her spy in the direction of the rental car. The group of hikers which had been ahead of them coming down the mountain watched with some curiosity, but Seung-Jae knew that the two of them looked enough like a South Korean couple out for an afternoon of hiking to not arouse any suspicion. He did, however, need a change of clothes. And a shower wouldn’t hurt either.

Hye-Jin opened the doors and the two of them got into the rental. She began to think again about her ‘human-interest’ story.

“So, Seung-Jae, it’s OK for me to begin my video-taping of your story? I really think that it’s interesting enough to record. It may make you famous!”

“Are you crazy? If you did that... well, there certainly would be trouble at home if my country got wind of it. You must remember, at the moment, North Korean authorities think of me missing and presumably dead. If they found out that I had deserted, my family would be in jeopardy.”

“Who’s the rest of your family, besides your mother?”

“Well, there’s my little brother, and I have two uncles on my father’s side and their families living close by in Hyesan. My father died several years ago.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. And how is your mother doing?”

“She’s not doing very well. The doctor says she has less than a year to live. She’s at home and bedridden most of the time.”

“So what kind of trouble would they be in if the authorities found out all about you?”

“Probably jail, and my mother may not be allowed to see her doctor... stuff like that.”

“That’s criminal!”

“Yes, you’re right. But deserters are treated harshly; it’s a deterrent to others, you know.”

“I can see that. Well, let’s put the TV show on hold for the moment. Perhaps we can talk about it later.”

“Perhaps.”

They drove the rest of the way back to Hye-Jin’s hotel in silence. She wasn’t sure of course that she was doing the right thing, but she really wanted to help Seung-Jae and she really thought she could get a story out of him, eventually. A one-hour documentary wouldn’t be that tough to do, especially if he did meet his aunt in Pusan. But the idea that any public knowledge of Seung-Jae and his whereabouts would bring more hardship for his family kept Hye-Jin’s enthusiasm dampened. She would have to wait until later to decide about the video.



While Seung-Jae was showering and shaving in Hye-Jin’s hotel room, she was out buying him a decent set of clothes. He couldn’t very well travel to Pusan dressed the way he was.

And Hye-Jin thought he looked much more handsome after getting on his new suit, and she told him so while she was putting the old clothes into a bag and then into the garbage. He wouldn’t need them anymore, as she had purchased a pair of jeans, a sweater, and sneakers for him as well.

“Well, don’t you look grand!”

“Thank you, I guess... the suit’s a good fit.”

“It is indeed. We’ll attract a bit of attention now, but not the bad kind!”

They decided to order food from the hotel’s room service. Hye-Jin had brought the latest newspapers for Seung-Jae to look over as well, so while they waited for the food, she made some phone calls to her producer in Seoul and her brother in Pusan and he caught up on the latest news on the captured submarine.

During dinner they decided to take off for Pusan immediately. It would be a couple of hours, and by the time they arrived it would be nightfall, but Hye-Jin had arranged an overnight at her brother's, so they were all organized.



It was just after six o'clock when Hye-Jin entered the rush-hour traffic of Chungju. They slowly navigated to the main highway, which would take them to the freeway to Taejon where they would turn southeast towards Taegu and then Pusan. It was a long journey by car but Hye-Jin could drive fast in the new Hyundai Tuscani that she had rented.

Seung-Jae did not seem as comfortable as he should have been, as he continued looking around him, mostly out the back window.

“Is there anything wrong, Seung-Jae?”

“Maybe. Can you take the next exit?”

“Sure.” Hye-Jin did as she was asked and drove off the highway into a service area.”

“Are you OK, Seung-Jae?”

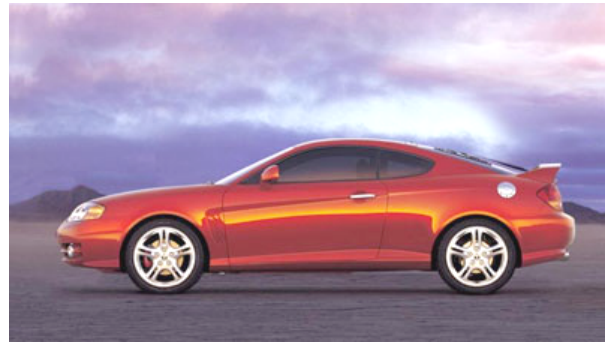
“Maybe. I'll explain in a minute. Now, can you get back onto the highway, and quickly?”

That request was no difficulty for the powerful sports coupe. But as they left the rest stop, both Seung-Jae and Hye-Jin noticed the two men in the car that they were passing. Hye-Jin took a good look, while Seung-Jae ducked down to avoid being seen by the two men in the other car. And then they were on the highway again, heading for Taigu.

“It's just as I thought” muttered Seung-Jae.

“What is it?”

“We're being followed!”



End of Chapter Four