

Chapter 1

Lotus Jewel – War Prisoner

I sat by the kitchen table in a bare room,” said Lotus Jewel, “two officers, working in relays, talked to me. A guard with a loaded gun stood at my shoulder. They tried to get me to accept their way of life and give up my religion.

” ‘But I can’t do that,’ I told them. ‘I can’t give up my faith in Jesus Christ. He has been my Friend since I was a little girl.’”

These were the words of a South Korean nurse, twenty-two years of age, weighing only eighty-three pounds.

When the Korean hostilities opened, Lotus Jewel, a graduate nurse, was employed in a mission hospital east of Seoul. In relating her experiences, she said:

“What happened within the few hours after the first contingent of troops crossed the thirty-eighth parallel, I’ll never forget. When we reported for duty the following morning and found that our missionaries had been evacuated during the night, we did not know what to do.

“As enemy forces marched down the road, bombs and shells burst all around us. Within a few hours the 150-bed mission hospital was occupied by the enemy, and three hundred wounded were brought for emergency care. They were lying on the floor, on tables and chairs, and in every nook and corner. Nurses and doctors worked day and night. I don’t know how we lived through those fearful days.

“A month later, as enemy forces pushed farther south, forty-five nurses were loaded on trucks and taken along. We were divided into groups of five and sent to nine different field hospitals.

“About seven weeks later, when the tide of battle turned, a number of the nurses were forced to join the prisoners of war in a march to the rear.

“Being a trained nurse, I was ordered to supervise a group of one hundred sick and wounded soldiers. One Korean doctor and five nurse’s aides were assigned to my company. The confusion and the noise of battle were terrifying. More than half of the patients, unable to continue the forced march, dropped out by the way.

“All that we had to eat was rice or grain that the soldiers could scrounge along the way. We carried dried corn in our pockets. When

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hungry we chewed on the corn and then looked for water to quench our thirst.

“Sometimes I fell to the ground from sheer hunger or fatigue. Then I would be bundled into a truck and given a ride for a few hours before being compelled to march again. I don’t know how I ever lived through it. It was only through the mercy of God that I made it.

“Since many of the bridges had been demolished, we were obliged to make long detours. Finally we reached our destination, near the Manchurian border, where the sick were quartered in the homes of civilians. Each family was ordered to vacate a room to provide space for four or five patients.”

Lotus Jewel, the only trained nurse in the group, took charge of the surgery, one of the larger buildings in the village. A Chinese doctor and a Russian surgeon performed the operations, which consisted mostly of amputations.

As this routine continued day after day, pressure was brought upon Lotus Jewel to renounce her faith. Three times she underwent days and nights of grueling questioning; three times she was thrown into prison. Of this trying experience the charming brown-eyed nurse said:

“I told them that I could not renounce my religion. It was then that the guard hit me across the wrist with the barrel of his gun. As I fell to the floor, crying with pain, the guard raised the gun again.”

Lotus Jewel pulled up the sleeve of her pink jacket, that I might see the white scar on her right wrist. She said, “I am sure he would have killed me if one of the other officers had not intervened. Later this kind officer told me that I had reason to be thankful that I had taken the nurse’s training. ‘The army needs nurses badly,’ he explained. ‘That’s the only reason you are alive today.’

“Next we faced a secret enemy as hundreds of soldiers came down with typhus. Finally it caught up with me, and I was too ill to leave my bed.

“Because there was a shortage of nurses, I was ordered to get up and go to work. But I was too sick to stand on my feet. My head ached and my cheeks were flushed. When the doctor came to take my temperature, it was 104 degrees. Then I was taken to a mountain hospital, close to the thirty-eighth parallel.

“In the first few weeks death would have been a welcome release. But in my loneliness I clung to Jesus and prayed for strength and courage. I prayed earnestly that God would open the way of escape, and permit me to return to my home in South Korea.

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“While convalescing I made friends with a young widow, a nurse’s aide. Having left her baby with her mother, naturally she was eager to return to her home in the south. Together we prayed and planned to escape.

“The day that I was able to leave my bed for the first time found a new guard assigned to our hut. That night I packed my nurse’s kit, my friend threw a blanket over her arm, and with a small bundle of rice in her hand, we ventured forth. When the guard questioned us I pointed to my nurse’s kit and explained that I was a nurse and my companion a nurse’s aide. Without a word he allowed us to pass!

“The Lord was with us, and we hastened on. We struck out through the woods until we came to a narrow mountain path. It was cold and dark, too dangerous to travel over an unknown road. So we spent the rest of the night in the mountains, waiting for the break of day.

“In the morning I noticed three farmhouses in a hollow at the foot of the mountain. My friend and I started down the narrow path, hoping that we were going in the right direction.

“At one farmhouse we asked for a drink of water to see if the people were friendly. As I told my story and asked for assistance, the woman went into the house to consult her husband. After a time she returned with the joyful news that they would help us. They gave us civilian clothing, burned our prisoner-of-war uniforms, and led us to a cave barely large enough for us to enter on hands and knees.

“This cave was just large enough for the two of us to sit on a straw mat with a blanket thrown around our shoulders. A small pine tree shielded the entrance of the cave, and at night we would scramble to the house for food.

“One night we learned that the military police had been looking for us; but we were thankful that our newfound friends had not betrayed us.

“After spending five days in this cold, miserable cave, I pleaded with this kind woman to let us sleep in the house. I also volunteered to help with the work on the farm.

“My request was granted, and we moved into the house and slept on a warm floor. For several weeks I worked with the women out in the fields and in the evening I treated the sick that came to the house.

“As our desire to push southward increased, I prayed for strength to travel. One morning in June, three months after we had left the

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POW camp, my friend and I decided to try to locate our families in the south.

“Thanking our kind friends for their love and hospitality, we went on our way. By avoiding the highways and keeping close to the wooded hills we finally reached the Imjin River. However, the bridge across the river had been destroyed and for a time we did not know what to do.

“As we walked along the river bank, wondering what to do, we came upon an R.O.K. (Republic of Korea) intelligence office. Here, at last, is freedom, I thought. But alas, I was mistaken. The officers took us to be spies!

“We were loaded onto a train and taken to a prisoner of-war camp in Yong Dong Po, a suburb of Seoul. Here we exchanged our civilian clothing for POW uniforms.

“I spent eight months behind barbed-wire fences, ministering to the sick and wounded. During this time I had no word from my family or friends. However, through the grapevine I learned that they had been evacuated to Pusan.

“When I heard that a doctor from the camp had orders to go to Pusan, I persuaded him to try to locate my friends. He kept his word and after searching diligently, he located a branch of the Seoul Sanitarium and Hospital.

“Dr. Rue and his wife lost no time in coming to my aid. It took weeks of negotiations before I was cleared of the charges of being a spy, and it was only after Dr. Rue vouched for my loyalty and promised to be my guardian that I was released.”

Time and again, as Lotus Jewel related her experiences, she would say, “But God’s love to me was wonderful ! Jesus was ever at my side. Faith and prayer carried me through those trying days. I am sure that God spared my life for a purpose and I am determined to serve Him as long as I shall live.”