

Mountains, Streams, Plants, Trees 산천초목 [1912]

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Translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé and Jeongsoo Shin.

As the sun slowly sets with a preoccupied air behind Tunggu Ridge to the west of Seoul, it looks back at everyone, as if bidding them, “Have a good night. I’ll be back tomorrow,” and at that moment the clear, bright moon merrily rises from the slopes of Mount Nak-san to the east. Just when the moonlight has spread across about half of the western portion of T’apgol Park, suddenly *Tra-la-la, la-tra-la, la-la-tra*, a trumpet performs a fanfare, followed by the clash of rashly beaten hourglass drum, little drum, gong, cymbals, sounds heard each and every day at this time, summoning people to the Yŏnhŭng Theater in Sa-dong.

Everyone hears the same sounds with the same ears, but some people clap both hands to their ears and screw up their eyes in a scowl:

“Yeuk, that racket again! How can people live with such noise? What’s worse, they claim to be acting plays, yet they produce nothing historical or scholarly that might help people improve their manners or increase their knowledge; instead they operate a den of vice that corrupts people’s wives and children by smutty jokes; why don’t the authorities ban such things?”

Other people, hearing the trumpet, start to sway their shoulders in time and hurriedly swallow down their supper:

“Hey, Yi Tong-baek and Kim Pong-Mun are great singers. That dwarf’s conjuring tricks are really clever too. I could attend performances at Yŏnhŭng Theater all day and all night without ever getting bored. And talk about killing two birds with one stone! I can watch the show and ogle the whores in the women’s seats to my heart’s content at the same time, too! You know, there really are a lot of whores going there. I reckon that any Seoul whore only has to hear that trumpet calling and she gets as excited as I do.”

Women with skirt-like cloaks covering their heads, women in rickshaws, men in suits, men wearing hats, good-looking folk, bad-looking folk, sometimes in gangs, come crowding in until Sa-dong’s wide road is packed, while coming down the hill from the neighborhood gate, dressed smartly, sucking on a newly lit cigar the size of a club, glancing at a jeweled watch drawn from his waistcoat pocket, busily heading for Sa-dong, comes a notorious lad, *Sijong*ⁱ Yi. This *Sijong* Yi, the nephew of a certain influential high official, born into wealth and honors, wanting for nothing, well-fed, well-dressed, is occupied day and night with only one thing, and that is not a wish to cleanse his name of any lack of loyalty to the family history, repaying to some slight extent the honors and favors his celebrated family have received from the state, nor is it a wish to avoid being an unworthy descendant by following the cultivation of the mind practiced by his ancestor, a great teacher who composed a famous treatise on the Rituals of the Land of the East, an expression of a concern always to act carefully and speak politely while faithfully performing the prescribed rituals of life and death. The only aspect of his family’s accumulated learning that now remained fixed in his brain, like opium, was the joy of being a swallowtail butterfly in paradise, embracing a three-colored peach blossom and dancing rapturously.

He not only associated with every kisaeng, prostitute and whore in the city without exception, if there was a presentable or attractive concubine in Seoul, north or south, he

would promptly send in a go-between and have a liaison with her. This evening too he seems to be hatching some dark scheme, he looks to be so busy with something, standing preoccupied on the main Sa-dong street, gazing constantly up and down the road and regularly consulting his watch. He walks some way up the street, then some way down it again, runs to see who it is at the first sign of a skirt, goes to see who is inside at the first sound of a rickshaw approaching, all the time murmuring so quietly that even those close by him cannot hear:

“I really don’t know. What’s happened? It’s already nine, how is it she has not come? She would never dream of not coming, she’s sure to come, but why on earth is there still no sign of her? Mistress Shin would never deceive me, and that woman would never dare disobey Mistress Shin”

All the while he smacked his lips and twisted desperately, like someone engaged in a wager, until he saw two women emerging from the direction of Ch’ölmul Bridge and walking briskly uphill with a clip-clop of heels in the direction of Mount Buak-san, the skirt-shaped cloaks of fine silk covering their heads flying lightly in the wind, the front panels of their satin coats parting.

“What a strong wind there is,” they exclaim, removing their veils, folding them and wrapping them elegantly over their left shoulders as they look toward the door of Yönhüŋ Theater and advance in that direction. Observing their behavior, *Sijong Yi* quickly enters the theater ahead of them and whispers something in the ear of the man selling tickets, who laughs brightly, saying:

“Sure, do as you wish.”

Without another word, the ticket seller withdraws, *Sijong Yi* immediately takes his place in the ticket window and proceeds to sell tickets, looking this way and that through the hole that looked just like the entrance to a dog’s kennel.

Some ten days earlier, *Sijong Yi* had visited Chaha-dong or Chang-dong to inspect a house he was about to purchase and was going down the Hwangt’o-maru Road in front of Kyöngbok-gung palace when he happened to glance from his rickshaw and saw a four-seat palanquin going along followed by a lovebird-like girl servant. If a man is courteous, he is supposed to turn his face away from a palanquin, not look inside, or if he does not turn away he should pass by as though he has not seen it; however, *Sijong Yi* is the last person to behave like a gentleman. His neck craning like an ibis pecking at a fish, he peered this way and that with his mouth gaping, then he murmured to himself:

“Just look at that. No-one can claim to have seen more women than I have, but this is the first time I ever saw one so fresh. I need to take a closer look.”

He called out to the rickshaw driver:

“Hey, stop right here. I have to have a quick pee.”

The rickshaw driver, unaware of the real reason and intent on stopping at once, only advanced a few yards before lowering the rickshaw poles to the ground, at which *Sijong Yi* jumped out in a flash and made as if to seek out a secluded spot in which to relieve himself, staring inside as he passed close beside the palanquin. He was suddenly taken with the idea of following it, only that was impossible because of the presence of the servants; even if he disregarded the servants, if he went after the palanquin without knowing what family the woman belonged to, he might very well be disgraced, so he reluctantly pretended to relieve himself briefly, then regained the rickshaw and went on, full of regrets and schemes.

“Ho ho, I made an overhasty decision. If I had sent the servant on with an empty

rickshaw while I followed the palanquin at a distance and seen where it stopped, I could have used trickery at some later moment to satisfy my yearning, for where there's a will there's always a way. Why, it's still not too late. I only have to go in the direction taken by the palanquin and casually ask those children playing with sticks in the road, 'Did you see such and such a palanquin go by?' I could surely find out."

He called out:

"I have somewhere I have to go on foot. Go on ahead with the empty rickshaw."

Then he walked in the direction the palanquin had taken, his legs emitting flute-like squeaks, and inquired in a round-about way until he found the house the palanquin had entered, stealthily observed the nameplate at the gate, then turned and walked away.

"Now I know whose house that is. What a young wife he has!"

He went straight to visit the woman known as Mistress Shin, told her what had happened, and added:

"I have full confidence in your skills, Auntie."

Mistress Shin was still quite young but she had been through all kinds of difficulties with the result that she knew how to frame her words and how to touch people's hearts through sweet talking. In ordinary times, there were many occasions when *Sijong Yi* used her as an intermediary and many when she had introduced him to women, so that whenever he addressed a request to her, *Sijong Yi* would pester her as much as he wanted and she would struggle as hard as possible on his behalf. Today too, *Sijong Yi* assumed that if he made his request, Mistress Shin would consent to arrange things smoothly, but when she heard his lengthy request, quite unexpectedly she began to clack her tongue and wave her hands in dismay:

(Shin) "Why, you're talking like someone senile. Do you know who she is? That's Major Park's concubine."

(Yi) "I already saw the name on the gate. You think I don't know what I'm talking about?"

S "In that case you're getting even more senile, surely? Why, Major Park must be nearly your father's age."

Y "Tst, who told you to bother yourself about such things? All you have to do is to arrange affairs without asking questions."

S "Be that as it may, no matter how much you keep pestering me, there is another complication getting in the way."

Y "Complication? What kind of complication?"

S "That woman's nickname is 'the Kangnŭng Woman.' Originally she behaved wildly but after her mother and father entrusted her to Major Park, they were able to eat, dress and live thanks to him, and they discipline their daughter so strictly that she's never once put a foot wrong; moreover, she controls herself so tightly that she never looks directly in familiar fashion at any other men, so stop speaking nonsense. Just let it drop. If it's an affair you have in mind, you would do better to go to bed with me."

Y "Are you mad, Auntie? What rubbish are you telling your nephew?"

S "You're asleep and dreaming. Today's world is full of all kind of surprises, and what's so wrong, since I am your Auntie only by name and agreement? Ha ha, you're disgusting, none the less. If people hear me they will think I am speaking like this because I'm really infatuated with you."

Y "Who would be mad enough to believe you meant it? But that's all just for jokes. If I cannot get together with the Kangnŭng Woman, I reckon I'll turn into a vindictive ghost,

young though I am.”

Mistress Shin had made an apparently casual remark, but in reality she greatly admired *Sijong Yi*'s readiness to spend money like water and was provoking him in order to sound out his true feelings. She heard him reply coldly, and at that she felt low-spirited, bitter even, but since she was practiced in liaisons she spoke cunningly, without any change in her facial expression, while inwardly thinking:

‘My, When it comes to affairs, you’re not the only man I can reach out to! Now I’ve got you in my grasp! I’ll procure the Kangnŭng Woman for you, one way or another, and along the way I’ll suck you for all the money and good things I can.’

Then, with an air of feigned innocence, she set about teasing *Sijong Yi*:

S “Now, Sir, have I ever refused your requests? I have obtained all the other things you have asked for, no matter how difficult, only this is really not possible.”

Y “How can you say such a thing? Can I not provide her with as much luxury and support her as well as Major Park does? Am I not capable of supporting her parents too? No more pointless excuses, Auntie, just make an effort, will you?”

S “Seeing you now, you’re just being stubborn as a mule. Only stop and think for a while. Not only does that woman have a firm control over her feelings, but you are suffering after having at least glimpsed her and been bewitched in passing, whereas she has no idea how your nose is joined to your face, so how can you try any of your tricks? Of course, a frog can’t turn into a weasel in three years, as they say, so a woman who has had liaisons in the past can’t stop and earn the title of Virtuous Wife, can she? Even if she happens to have some such idea, changes her way of living and engages in clean living, she only has to see a good-looking or strikingly handsome man and feel attracted to him, in a flash her previous decision evaporates and he becomes a matter of life and death to her, but if I suddenly begin to talk to her about you, completely out of the blue, I’d obviously be asking for a sharp scolding.”

Y “Then how best to go about it? Suppose I spread dregs of powder over my face and hung around at the gate of the house so that she could catch sight of me?”

S “Look, you’re talking like a country bumpkin who came to town only a couple of days ago. Are you going to apply powder to your face shamefully, as if you are not handsome enough to attract a woman? If the original is unpleasant to look at, what use would layers of make-up be, let alone dregs of powder? It only becomes more repulsive. Also, how will you know when she is going to come out so that you are there at the right moment, all ready and waiting, in front of the gate? Are you going to quit your official position, and make it your new appointment to stand in front of her gate? Even if she does happen to come out, by a stroke of providence, she will simply ignore you and walk past; is she really going to look at you and think, ah, that fellow’s come all this way because he fancies me? Just you listen to what I’m going to say.”

She whispered something in *Sijong Yi*'s ear, at which he began to beam broadly.

Y “What you say will work for sure. On that day I will eat supper early and go there, Auntie, hm hm.”

S “It seems that ‘hm hm’ is the only love-song you can sing for the moment. Take your time and enjoy at least a glass of my wine before you go, even though I cannot offer any proper dishes to accompany it.”

She clicked open her handbag and produced some money, calling out:

“Oknang! Oknang!”

Y “I would drink even if you had not offered, and I will not say no to your wine, but I have

urgent business to attend to, so how can I stay drinking? I'll have to be going now, as though I had already drunk it."

Mistress Shin went directly to visit the Kangnŭng Woman and as they conversed of this and that she slipped in a phrase that aroused the other woman's curiosity.

S "My dear, you live such a quiet life; while a scatter-brain like myself goes roaming around like this all the time, you just have to sit quietly and keep your old man happy. Isn't it rather dull? I don't suppose you have even once been to see the show at the Yŏnhŭng Theater?"

K "I've been several times to watch shows at the Tansŏng Cinema, the Changan Theater and the Wŏngak Theater, but although I have heard of it, I've never once been to the Yŏnhŭng Theater."

S "I'd never been there either, but people kept saying it was so good until finally I went a couple of days ago, and do you know, it's really worth seeing. I didn't realize until I was inside and sitting down, but all our friends keep meeting there."

On hearing what she said, the younger woman pricked up her ears.

K "You make it sound too good to be true. Shall we go together one day? Why not watch the show together?"

S "My dear, if you say you're going, I'll drop everything to go with you, but won't your husband scold you if you go out?"

K "Scold me? What do you mean? He's not full of suspicions like other men, he doesn't worry about me. I haven't been going out much because I don't enjoy watching shows, but if I say I'm going somewhere, he'll give me the money for travel and help me prepare, too."

S "You shameless hussy, praising your husband without blushing. Are you going on a diplomatic journey, not just to see a show? Money and help preparing, too, you say? Right, shall we go today or tomorrow? It's late for today, because when will you find time to ask your husband? Rather let's prepare well and go tomorrow."

K "Then will you come to our house tomorrow early?"

S "Very well. That means I'll have been here twice, today and tomorrow, just in order to get you to see a show."

K "Why, you're talking nonsense. I mean, why don't you come here every day, even when it is not a matter of going somewhere?"

S "I'll be back tomorrow for sure; just be sure to get his permission, even if it means massaging his thighs in bed tonight."

K "My dear, you are so good at making jokes, ha ha ha."

S "Ha ha ha."

Once she reached her home, Mistress Shin wrote a letter and sent Oknang to take it to *Sijong Yi*. So the next day he waited impatiently for the sun to set like Yi Toryŏng eager to meet Ch'unhyang, then went hurrying to the Yŏnhŭng Theater.

The Kangnŭng Woman and Mistress Shin arrived neck and neck at the theater door, where the former said:

K "Look, dear, I'll give you the money, if you wouldn't mind buying my ticket too."

S "In a place like this, part of the fun is each one using her own money and buying her own ticket; I've brought enough money for my ticket. No more fuss, now, let's each buy our ticket and go in."

K "I'm so shy, I don't know how to buy a ticket . . . why don't you go first?"

S "Hey, stop putting on airs. Shy? Of a rat's ass?"

She went ahead to the ticket-window, drew money from her purse and placed it

before the window.

“Please give me one special class ticket.”

As Mistress Shin stepped aside after receiving her ticket, the Kangnŭng Woman could barely suppress a laugh as she likewise laid the money she had taken out before the window.

“Please give me one special class ticket, too.”

As she was waiting for the ticket, she glanced inside as the ticket-seller tore out a ticket and handed it to her.

“Sorry, please let me have that one back, it’s an ordinary class ticket.”

The Kangnŭng Woman handed back the ticket she had been given and stood there while the man inside the window picked up one ticket after another, shuffling through them as if he was looking for something, then finally emerged carrying a ticket and approached her politely.

“I am so sorry to have kept you standing here like this. All the special class tickets have been sold, this is all I have left, but it’s not a ticket for sale, it’s a complimentary ticket. Please take back your money and use this to go in.”

The Kangnŭng Woman did not reply but turned toward Mistress Shin.

“You go ahead and enjoy the show, dear. He says all the tickets are sold out, so I . . .”

S “We should have made more effort to come early. If you are going home, there is no reason for me to watch the show, is there? If you leave, I shall go too.”

Perhaps afraid of being ignored again, the ticket-seller addressed Mistress Shin:

“Why are you talking about going instead of watching the show? The house will be more than grateful if you accept this free ticket and watch the show, rather than buying a ticket. Don’t be worried, just go in and enjoy the performance.”

S “It’s as he says, so just accept the ticket. We’ve been so looking forward to this all along and it’s not as if we can come every night; we’ll truly regret it if we came here for nothing.”

Reluctantly, the Kangnŭng Woman took the ticket and followed Mistress Shin into the theater, as the ticket-seller led the way.

“This way, please. Up here, now. These are the special class seats. The toilet is through there.”

Clapping briskly twice, he summoned a boy and ordered him to bring cushions, bring a brazier, then he brought them coffee, offered cigars, before he went and took his place in a seat directly opposite theirs, from where he kept staring intently at the Kangnŭng Woman, constantly making little coughing sounds. Every time he coughed, Mistress Shin tugged at the Kangnŭng Woman’s skirts:

S “Just look at him, dear.”

K “I already saw him. Why, judging by his appearance and dress, that handsome young man must be the son of some high court official.”

Delighted to learn on hearing those words that *Sijong Yi* had impressed the Kangnŭng Woman, Mistress Shin shrewdly set about sounding out her feelings.

S “What are you talking about, son of a high court official? He looks like someone who sells tickets in a place like this, then once he has earned a little money he squanders it on extravagant clothes and taking care of his appearance, so he looks smart. You seem to have taken a liking to him.”

The Kangnŭng Woman tapped Mistress Shin on the shoulder.

K “Why, are you mad, dear? What a thing to say! I would never speak any such nonsense in

front of you!”

S “I was only joking, too, but it is strange. With such a good bearing, he could do anything, so why does he earn a living selling tickets in a theater? Yet I have the impression I have seen his face somewhere several times before. Who can it be? There’s someone I know over there. I’ll go and find out.”

She duly disappeared somewhere, then returned again and pressed her lips to whisper in the Kangnŭng Woman’s ear at which the Kangnŭng Woman smiled and looked across at *Sijong Yi*.

K “So he’s fallen victim to misfortune on account of the bad *feng-shui* of his family graves, and in spite of respectable circumstances he comes here to do this kind of work!”

S “There’s no denying it. He might be working in this way as a prank by a high spirited youth, though it is hard to do so in his circumstances. But hearing that and looking at him again, I’m sure that’s who it is. He and I are vaguely acquainted by sight, so if he happens to come this way, I will try to find out what the problem was.”

Then she went on lavishing praises on *Sijong Yi*.

S “People curse his family and speak ill of them, but when it comes to rank in power or status, it’s clear who is highest. I reckon that any woman who lives with him would enjoy luxury to her heart’s content, even if she plays the role of two women, and could die without regret after a single day.”

K “You’re talking nonsense. Whether you’re lucky or unlucky, it’s all a matter of fate, how can we force things to happen? There are so many people worse off than we are, already, and are they to die without living less than a day?”

S “Ah, you talk like that because although your man is growing old, he knows how to behave correctly and thinks so highly of you that you have no need to be envious of others.”

As she spoke, perhaps she made some kind of secret signal, unseen by the Kangnŭng Woman, for *Sijong Yi* rose from the seat he had been occupying on the opposite side and slowly made his way toward the women’s seats, all the time clearing his throat.

S “Why, there’s *Sijong Yi* coming. I’m going to ask him over here, and get the story out of him.”

K “Ask him? How could you do that? It makes us look so vulgar in the eyes of others.”

S “There’s nothing vulgar about it. Once the city gates are shut, we’re all part of the same household, so why are you talking about the eyes of others? Are we living in this world for the sake of other people?”

K “Still, I don’t like it. Rumors spread so fast. If you invite a man from some other family to come where women are, that looks strange to a lot of people and who knows what rumors will have spread like wildfire by tomorrow? Do you want to see me kicked out of my home, leaving on tiptoe?”

S “You mean you’re unable to do anything for fear of what people might say, just like being ‘unable to make soy sauce for fear of maggots’? Life is nothing but ‘a dream in springtime,’ so if you’re afraid like this, what sort of life are you going to have?”

K “My dear, you’re such a good speaker. I only said a few words, do you need to scold me with so many? If you really want to meet that man, do as you wish, I don’t mind if you meet him or not.”

S “How could I insist on something you dislike? I’ll pretend to be going to the toilet, find out his story, then come back.”

She disappeared somewhere beyond the special class seats and returned after the time

it would take to smoke a cigarette, smiled brightly at the Kangnŭng Woman and seemed about to say something, but remained silent.

K “My dear, you seem to have some good news.”

S “Good news? Well, I suppose you might call it good news . . .”

K “Do tell me. The news seems so good that you can’t stop smiling. So did you meet *Sijong Yi*?”

S “If there’s good news, it’s not good news for me, it’s good news for you.”

With that, she drew close beside the Kangnŭng Woman and as she mellifluously whispered her news, the Kangnŭng Woman’s face grew bright red, her eyes widened, she smiled coyly, she nodded her head.

With that, a boy emerged.

B “Is Mistress Shin here?”

S “Why? Where have you come from? I’m Mistress Shin. What is it?”

B “I’m an errand boy. Down below, his excellency *Sijong Yi* has asked me to bring coffee and tell you he invites you each to drink a cup since it is so cold.”

S “Why, he is too kind. And what’s this?”

B “These are some Kŭngjuji cigars and western-style biscuits.”

Mistress Shin took them and offered them to the Kangnŭng Woman.

S “It would be an insult if we did not accept these. Come on, let’s enjoy them.”

K “I won’t. You take them.”

S “Why, what are you saying? You think he sent them for me? They’re all for you.”

K “Look, that’s ridiculous! Why do you say he sent them for me? It’s thanks to you, so let’s enjoy them.”

Mistress Shin employed her persuasive skills, pouring out honeyed words, and since any tree falls after ten blows of an axe, the Kangnŭng Woman gradually became interested, stopped watching the show, then followed her to another place. There is no need to say whose house it was. The room was beautifully decorated and orders were brought as soon as they were given. *Sijong Yi* was seated here, the Kangnŭng Woman was seated there, with Mistress Shin sitting beside her, mediating their conversation with much hearty laughter; their relationship was established easily, it was a piece of cake.

S “So do I deserve three glasses of wine for work well done, or three slaps on the cheek?”

Y “I have plenty of Champagne at home that I bought to offer you, do you really only want three glasses?”

Mistress Shin turned toward the Kangnŭng Woman.

S “My dear, what about you? Wine or slaps on the cheek?”

K “. . . . we’ll have to wait and see. I’m not sure with what I’ll treat you.”

S “Why, listen to what she is saying. She speaks with such unyielding reservations, Sir, bear that in mind. Else the wrong person will get her cheek slapped.”

Y “Don’t worry! How could I go wrong, even if you do not request it?”

He looked up at the clock on the wall.

“Oh, is it already that late? It’s nearly two.”

As soon as she heard those words, Mistress Shin understood his meaning, like a crafty tiger that has devoured many victims, and sprang to her feet.

S “Why, just look at me! Sitting here not realizing how late it was getting.”

Then she turned to *Sijong Yi*.

S “I hope you will go on savoring your talk with my friend here”

Y “As you wish.”

K “Why are you going so soon? Let’s stay here a little longer, then go together.”

S “What, really? You might at least try to sound as though you meant it! Even if you say that, maybe inside you are silently thinking, ‘Why doesn’t that enemy of mine go away?’ and wish you had a gun that makes no noise. Ha ha ha. Why, I’m only joking. There’s no limit to enjoying oneself but I must stop, it’s already late, and there’s no one to guard my house, so I really have to go.”

In one way replying to the Kangnŭng Woman and in another way giving a hint to *Sijong Yi*, who quietly left the room, apparently to relieve himself, Mistress Shin whispered something in her ear, and then said:

“There is nothing more for me to do, try whatever you like.”

The Kangnŭng Woman made no reply. Mistress Shin called for a girl carrying a lantern to escort her and went out looking extremely satisfied, as though she had accomplished some great feat. *Sijong Yi* followed her out as far as the main gate where they stayed talking for quite some time before he came back.

There is no need to relate what followed, everyone will guess, and from that evening the relationship between *Sijong Yi* and the Kangnŭng Woman grew deeper as they agreed to meet there regularly in the following days, with oaths deep as the sea, promises high as the hills, that neither would forget the other until both had died and turned to dust; they had only one wish, longing above all to stay face to face as if in a mirror, through splendid days and moonlit nights, never parted for even a moment. *Sijong Yi* sent plentiful gifts of local produce and cloth to Mistress Shin, hoping to make her so happy that she wouldn’t refuse anything he requested.

Y “Auntie, thanks to you I have gained what I desired; you have worked hard but there is just one more effort I want you to make.”

S “You mean you need my help? If it lies in my power, I will undertake anything. Tell me what it is you need.”

Y “It is simply that, thanks to your help, I have established a relationship with the Kangnŭng Woman but, as the saying goes, ‘once you’re standing on the porch, you want to go inside.’ I mean that now we have begun to enjoy each other’s company, with our dreamlike encounters only every few days I am beginning to fade away, pining for her. I may tell the Kangnŭng Woman that directly, but if someone like you tells her first on my behalf, persuading her to change her mind, I will have a better chance of managing to tell her later, once I have plucked up the courage; please make just this one more effort on my behalf.”

On hearing that, Mistress Shin tut-tutted and said:

S “Yes, I understand. But what are you telling me? If a man and a woman establish a relationship, jumping over the wall or over the fence is the business of the two of them, I cannot get involved in their relationship, and although it may be something others are prepared to do, I do not care to get involved, even if you scold me.”

Y “You are being too cruel. I am telling you this because I trust you as I would a great mountain, but you begin to be defensive, without listening to what I am really going to say.”

S “What do you mean, not listening? I have become a sharp observer of people after wandering here and there away from Seoul for the past ten years; do you really think that I spoke without knowing what’s in your mind?”

After that she whispered a few words that only *Sijong Yi* could hear, at which he smiled brightly and replied:

Y “You should have said that to begin with; why have you been pestering me to such an extent before saying that? Look, I must rush away, I have official duties at the palace today, so please drop everything else and settle this matter for me.”

S “Don’t worry. I will do all that I can do.”

Once *Sijong Yi* had left, Mistress Shin pondered for a while: ‘There’s no telling if this will work or not, but if I keep going in and out of her house and then the liaison is discovered, I would be the first to be suspected, so I should be discreet. I’ll invite her quietly to my house, then give her a roasting.’ She wrote a letter then sent Oknang off with it, and soon the Kangnŭng Woman came in smiling cheerfully.

K “My dear, have you some special treat for me? Why did you ask me to come?”

S “A very special treat. Come along in.”

She came out into the yard in her stockinged feet to greet her, took her by the wrist, led in her inside, making polite conversation before finally saying:

S “There is something I have been wanting to ask you for some time, dear, but I was afraid you might be angry, so I haven’t dared to, so far.”

K “Why, you are making too much fuss, dear. Whatever could there be that you can’t ask me? Even if you ask something quite unearthly, how could I be angry with you?”

S “Are you really sure you won’t be angry? In that case, I will speak.”

Having prepared the ground well in this fashion, she casually remarked, as though it was a quite different matter:

S “Alas, people who do not know you believe that you are as happy as can be, and they are all filled with envy, whereas I always feel sorry for you.”

The Kangnŭng Woman was about to reply when a couple of pigeons flew down into the yard and started billing and cooing over a chance grain of corn, male and female playing delightfully together, at which Mistress Shin sighed as though her unfeeling heart had suddenly melted.

S “Why, those creatures are better off than we human beings. Those two young things, male and female, unwilling to be parted, happily having fun together. Just look at them, dear. Aren’t they enjoying themselves?”

Receiving no reply, she continued:

S “My dear, I know all the thoughts you never express in words. As the proverb says, the most gorgeous cock is the hawk’s chosen meal, so how has it come about that my charming young friend has met that stooping old Major Park and sacrificed her precious youthful years to him?”

Still there was no reply.

S “Well, it’s because you’re stupid. It’s not as though the world’s so full of beautiful women. With your face and your figure, you can be sure to be treated as well as you are by Major Park wherever you go. Why, that makes me feel sorry for you.

K “My dear, please don’t say such things. Where in today’s world will you find a man prepared to support not only a woman but her mother and father as well? Young as I am, do you think I have enjoyed living with an elderly husband all this time? My parents have no other children to look after them in their old age apart from me, their one daughter, on whom they rely as other parents rely on ten children, and if they have been able to eat well, dress well and enjoy a quiet life all this while, it is entirely thanks to my husband’s generosity; if now I were to ignore his kindness and change my attitude towards him because he is old, why, surely I would deserve to be struck by a thunderbolt from the deep blue sky? In the long

winter nights or when pear and peach flowers blossom in the spring breeze, of course such thoughts come to my mind several times a day but I have resolved to remember my debt of gratitude, bite my tongue and keep my feelings unchanged.”

Mistress Shin listened to her staring blankly at her face, then clapped her hands and burst out laughing.

S “Talk about a bird in the hand being worth two in the bush! I’ve never seen someone so determined keep firm hold of what little they have. Major Park’s heart is not without generosity, but other than stubborn country bumpkins, if a man takes up with a family’s daughter, so long as he is wealthy enough and has a sense of right and wrong, is he going to ignore it if her parents are starving or naked for lack of clothes? Feeding and dressing are not at all a problem, and he may even give a liberal share of his property to her parents. But the least reliable thing in the world, whether in my family or any other, is the fate of old folk. Take old Sō the former magistrate at Kangjin, in the house behind mine; he was still virile at seventy, looked as though he could run as fast as a wild tiger, and had two or three pretty young concubines. Then last month, after being sick for two or three days with some kind of cold or indigestion, he expired wretchedly like a bonfire going out or a drop of water evaporating, and the concubines, too intoxicated with momentary luxury and so not ready for such a disaster, found themselves in a terrible situation, totally unprovided for; and now they are struggling this way and that in search of a solution. It seems those shameless creatures thought their man was going to live for centuries, and were mean to his legal wife. Now as ever, like the stork wanting to peck and the clam unwilling to be pecked, they’re at odds with the wife, they would give anything to escape from her. Since I have recently witnessed that with my own eyes, how can you, still in the first bloom of youth, be ready to believe in your husband as if he were some great mountain?”

“Of course, I would never say this if it were not you but some couple living on good terms together. I mean to say, your husband is already well advanced in age, so how many decades more do you think he is going to live? I know exactly how kind his family are; that old fellow only has to die one day and you’ll be out in the cold without a bean, to say nothing of your mother and father, won’t you?”

In this manner Mistress Shin tickled the Kangnŭng Woman’s heart, for although she was still living with the elderly man, she had all the time been thinking to herself:

“Why, what fun can it be for a young woman to live with such an elderly fellow?”

She had indeed been sighing secretly like this, one sigh after another several times a day, all the time trying to remind herself how generous Major Park was toward her, or how welcoming he was to her parents, things that kept her from betraying him, but the final result of all the disquisitions she kept hearing from Mistress Shin was to make her surrender, so that she lost her previous resolve to be devoted to Major Park, until finally she sat there listlessly and asked:

K “So tell me dear, what should I do?”

S “A thousand others, a hundred others might worry, but what reason do you have to be worried, dear? The moment you decide to leave your Mr. Park, you have *Sijong Yi* who quite adores you; why, he’s ready to serve you on gold and silver trays.”

K “What you say is all very well, but although he’s certainly good at youthful passion, how can I trust him over the long term?”

S “It seems you can never pass under a wall carrying rotten eggs. If someone is as suspicious as you are, how can they ever venture anything? Even though mountains, streams, plants,

trees all change, are you afraid that *Sijong Yi*'s feeling towards you are going to change?"

The Kangnŭng Woman sat with her chin resting on her left hand, blinking her finely lidded eyes, as she reflected for a time, then smiling asked:

"Do you vouch for him?"

Mistress Shin nodded her head repeatedly.

"Only vouch for him? I am even ready to swear an oath."

Having reached this point, they brought their mouths close together and whispered for a long time.

Major Park's personality had always been remarkably passionate, he had had many affairs and taken several concubines, but time had flown past and the hair on his temples was now gray, his youth had vanished like a dream. But his heart had not changed despite the ageing of his body and once he had taken the Kangnŭng Woman as a concubine, fearing that she might find his age repulsive and change her mind, realizing too that he could not rejuvenate his waning physical strength by any human effort, he instead provided her with everything she wished for by way of clothing, food, furnishings and tableware, invariably giving permission if she wanted to go out anywhere, and one day she went out after breakfast, saying she was going to visit a friend and escorted only by a serving girl; the day passed, the night passed, and though he waited open-eyed till the next day, there was no news of her. Major Park could not sleep and at every sound of someone passing asked, "Who is it?" or if the dog barked, "See if someone's coming."

No matter what efforts he made, how could he expect the Kangnŭng Woman to come back when she had already made her 'Sayonara' as the Japanese say. Finally he realized that she had betrayed him and gone, his eyes began to blaze and his fury knew no bounds; he summoned all the servants, men and women, and sent them out in every direction, thundering unreasonable commands.

"You must find out where she went; if you can't, I don't want to see you again."

Among them was a kitchen-maid well-known for her plain speaking. She came forward:

"You can threaten to flog us to death, but none of us has done anything wrong. If you ask the girl Chŏngwŏl who accompanied her all the time on her outings, surely she will tell you. Why are you angry with us who know nothing at all about it?"

At that, Major Park thundered:

"Chŏngwŏl! Chŏngwŏl!"

Now this Chŏngwŏl was not somewhere hundreds of leagues away; she was standing right there beside him and would have **been able to hear him** and reply promptly **if he had summoned her quietly**, but he had shouted with such terrifying fury that her heart froze, her limbs began to tremble and she could not say anything in reply, so that Major Park thought:

"Right! She's obviously guilty. If I put the screws on her I'll find out everything."

He seized Chŏngwŏl and began to whip her hard on the calves, but how could she say what she did not know?

"Spare me, your honor! I don't know anything. How should I know where the lady has gone?"

Normally any servant that a master is especially close to will be disliked by the other servants. Since Chŏngwŏl, as a chamber maid, was close to her mistress, she had been provided with somewhat better clothes and food, provoking the other servants' animosity, and now they turned against her; as they chatted among themselves, they said nothing in her

defense that Major Park could hear.

“Just look at this stuck-up bitch! The Master is so worried, she should reply straight away yet all she can say is that she knows nothing. A really cheeky girl. Every day if the lady said she was going out she invariably carried the lantern before her, so how can she not know? She deserves to be thrashed more.”

Hearing that, Major Park went on beating her.

“Wretch! Will you still not tell the truth? Who was it then who carried the lantern every time the lady went out?”

“I carried the lantern, yes, but usually once we had gone part of the way she always sent me back and went on carrying the lantern herself. I have not the least idea where she went.”

Major Park went on beating Chōngwōl till she was half-dead but the fact was that she had told the truth; how could she tell where the Kangnūng Woman had gone? After that, Major Park’s feelings began to vacillate:

“What went wrong? I had the impression that the Kangnūng Woman’s feelings were such that I trusted her implicitly; though mountains, streams, plants, trees all change Some wicked person must have poured out such sweet talk that her tender heart has been deceived and this is the result But no, it can’t be that. If she had anything human about her, how could she listen to him and betray me, no matter how tantalizing his words, considering that I was supporting her father and mother? If I can just find out where she has gone If I vent my fury, I can do what I like, but if I just consider this as a momentary slip common in all of us, she can mend her ways and I won’t blame her; after all, I have to have a concubine and even if I find a new one, she will not be much different. No matter what she has done, I want to find her as soon as possible”

He concentrated on discovering a way of finding the Kangnūng Woman and once he had an idea he sent out his boarders and servants in all directions to summon all the matchmakers of Seoul, men and women alike, to each of whom he said:

“Now, no matter who it is, if anybody brings me news enabling me to find the Kangnūng Woman, there will be a handsome reward, so please undertake some inquiries for me.”

The folk known as matchmakers have no loyalty, no ideals, all life long they apply their skills to earning a fortune, they spend their lives taking a twenty-percent commission after enticing the youngsters and married women of other families. If some woman has compromised herself or some youth has indulged in wild behavior, the news reaches them more rapidly than any telegram but since they had never been involved with the Kangnūng Woman, and with the Kangnūng Woman’s so cunning tricks and Mistress Shin’s subtle schemes and the cautious methods employed by *Sijong* Yi, how could they find out anything about dealings arranged so secretively? Several people, reckoning it would prove worth their while, went chasing around various dubious localities in search of news.

Meanwhile, *Sijong* Yi had prepared a house in a secluded alley and, once the Kangnūng Woman had moved in, paid frequent visits without the knowledge of any of his servants and enjoyed himself immensely; but as the proverb goes, you can’t keep a perfume wrapped up, and while they were still in the period when even a short moment of separation felt like ten years, they were doomed to be parted; one tenacious matchmaker went hawking fancy goods, entering houses all over the city, and happened to glimpse the Kangnūng Woman’s face when she visited her house. If she had been stupid or dull-witted, she would

have taken the matchmaker for a simple peddler and eventually got into trouble, but since this was the quick-witted Kangnŭng Woman, she recognized her for what she was, casually chatted as if she were a peddler before dismissing her, contacted *Sijong Yi* and prepared an escape plan.

The matchmaker who had visited the house where the Kangnŭng Woman was living immediately went and told Major Park she had just seen her in such and such a place. Immediately Major Park's eyes sparkled. He shouted out orders, calling for his servants, P'andol and Nŭssoe, commanding them to take the palanquin to the place and to bring along a rickshaw.

“Chŏngwŏl, you go running on ahead of the palanquin, enter the house as quickly as an arrow, prevent the lady from going anywhere; Officer Kim, go in the rickshaw with another servant, go in behind Chŏngwŏl and urge the Kangnŭng Woman to get into the palanquin quickly; if she is frightened and hesitates, tell her on my behalf that anyone can make a mistake once in a lifetime, and if she comes home now, I will say nothing; she should not be worried, just come home. Reassure her and bring her back. Officer Yi, you go and patrol near the house; if any wretch makes trouble and tries to stop them taking the Kangnŭng woman for this or that reason, even though you are not currently on official duty, there must be plenty of your colleagues on duty in the police department; have any such people arrested, tied up and taken away, just make sure that nobody is able to jeer or laugh at the Kangnŭng Woman.”

Once he had finished preparing for what seemed like a great campaign and sent them off, he reflected to himself:

“She assumes I believe she has gone far away, or hidden perfectly, so she will be surprised when she sees them suddenly come rushing in where she has been hiding. Hmm, I don't know who persuaded her to leave; she may have already remembered me several times and felt remorse. If I were younger I would teach her manners until it made her weep. But I'm old and getting increasingly feeble; with her woman's limited understanding she would not recognize her mistake and simply hold a grudge against me, so it will be better if I do not show any negative feelings but behave as usual with a bright expression.”

Just then someone in the yard coughed twice to announce his presence:

“It's P'andol, sir, I'm back.”

Major Park rejoiced and sliding back the door, he looked out.

M “So has the lady come back?”

P “I could see no sign of her.”

M “Could see no sign of her? Is it possible she could have gone somewhere else in the meantime? I suppose you were so frightening and awkward that she guessed who you were and went into hiding Yet I told you all plainly what to do, so how is it that Chŏngwŏl was unable to go in first and keep her there Why did she bother going at all?”

Soon Chŏngwŏl came running in.

C “I did just as you told me a while ago, arrived there well ahead of the others and tried to go in but every door was tightly shut, and I was afraid she would be alarmed by the sound of the gate opening, so I crept through the dog-hole beneath the threshold of the gate.

M “Good. And once you were inside, you mean the lady was not there, had gone away somewhere?”

C “It was not just that she was not there. There was no sign of anyone, not so much as a mongrel.”

Major Park was shocked on hearing that and sat speechless for a time before addressing the matchmaker who had come first.

M “Look now, either you mistook the whereabouts of the house or you were mistaken about the person. If you really saw her in that house just now, where could she have gone? You must think again carefully.”

MM “I really saw her. I even spent some time talking to her, so how could I be mistaken about her? As for the house, afraid I might forget it since I am absent-minded, I carefully observed the arrangement of the gateway and its place in the alley, and in addition I left a mark on a pagoda tree growing inside the wall opposite. There can be no doubt about it; that clever, shrewd lady saw through me, understood that trouble was coming, and took to her heels. Don’t worry. She will not have gone far and so long as she remains inside the city walls, the day is bound to come when I set eyes on her again and on that day I promise you I will seize her on the spot with both hands and drag her home.”

M “Oh, no matter what magic it takes, you have to find her quickly. I’ll repay you with quite extraordinary rewards.”

Sijong Yi had not had a moment’s peace after hearing that Major Park had sent matchmakers far and wide in search of the Kangnŭng Woman; on learning that a suspicious peddler had come by, he prepared everything without any delay and sent her down to Suwŏn, to a small cottage in the fields. After that he would go down on Saturday, enjoy himself all day Sunday, then return to Seoul by the first train on Monday. Apart from the fact that they were not together in Seoul, it was little different from her being next door, since he could come and go freely, but he did not feel completely secure so he set someone to spy on Major Park’s movements; soon Major Park somehow learned that the Kangnŭng Woman was in Suwŏn and ordered a good number of people to go down by the first train early the next morning, so he took the last train that evening, took the Kangnŭng Woman and hid her in the house of a Mr. Sŏ in Inch’ŏn. He thought to himself:

“Park is extremely eager to find her while I am, if anything, even more determined to hide her. Does he still believe he will ever see her shadow again, with all the efforts he’s making? For my visits, the journey to Suwŏn or to Inch’ŏn is pretty much the same, I will give him time to cool down and once Park has had time to forget her, I’ll buy a cozy little house of reasonable size in the Tabang-gol neighborhood, where so many *kisaeng* live, bring her back and install her there and enjoy myself without further bother.”

With this thought, he was quite easy, living without any concern or worry.

When the Kangnŭng Woman left Park’s house, she should clearly have taken her elderly parents who depended entirely on their daughter with her, but the more people who knew, the greater the risk of trouble, so that would not have worked at all, and therefore she kept them uninformed; it was only after she had reached Inch’ŏn and established firmly a home that she sent off a letter praising the qualities of *Sijong Yi* at length and urging them to come down as if they were going back to their hometown, with neither daughter nor cares in Seoul, promising to send a carriage soon.

Her parents’ feelings were those of relatively respectable folk who had been unfortunate; they had had only one son and one daughter and the son had turned into a debauchee, always pursuing drink and women until he had squandered their considerable fortune, after which he had all the time been on the run and they had not heard from him for the past ten years; the elderly parents, left like a pair of doves with nothing they could call their own, relying completely on their daughter, had come to live in Seoul and regardless

whether their daughter had filial devotion or not, thanks to the generosity of Major Park, who served as a son-in-law, providing a house to live in, buying utensils for cooking, sending every month firewood and food as well as plentiful cloth, they had been able to live comfortably without any worries until suddenly their daughter disappeared, utterly unexpectedly, without a trace and without saying a word, at which they had been quite overwhelmed, the way ahead seeming dark, unsure what they should do, their greatest worry being that Major Park might ask them to tell him where their daughter had gone, or expel them, asking why they were still there now their daughter had left, in either of which cases, since they knew nothing, they would be doomed, and they repeatedly worried together about what they should do, until one day the postman knocked at their door:

“There’s a letter for you.”

Hearing that, the old man went bustling out, took the letter, examined the envelope, confirmed that this was the right address and then, happy to see the handwriting, gladly opened it and read it through carefully from start to finish as he went back into the house, saying to his wife:

He “Hey, wife, our daughter’s gone to Inch’ŏn, there’s a letter from her.”

She “What’s that? Gone to Inch’ŏn?”

She asked her husband to give her the letter, read it once, and again, then again:

She “What a flighty girl she is. After going off in all directions, she made a good match, but she doesn’t know how to appreciate her good fortune and now she’s made another silly mistake, it seems. She praises this *Sijong* Yi to the heavens, but who on earth is he? Do you have any idea?”

He “Do you still ask after reading her letter? He’s the son of Minister Lee Such-and-Such and the nephew of So-and-So. Brainless girl, imagining a whole new world is going to open up to her, letting herself be beguiled by someone, so she’s done this, without consulting her father and mother, and only now a letter, bah, silly girl!”

She “What’s the point in crying over spilled milk? As the general saying goes, having a son-in-law without a daughter is like having a stove without a fire. Major Park has no reason to look after us now, we can’t survive in a barren land where nothing will grow when we have no provisions; I’ve put all my trust in that one child; though I can’t say she’s done well, now that she’s written asking us to go to her I reckon we’d do best to leave here and follow her quietly, like thread through a needle’s eye; what do you think?”

He “Well, it’s a shame to say we should leave, but it’s difficult not to go. When people tell him we have gone too, it might look to Major Park as though we were in collusion with her all along; but if we stay on here, there is no way Major Park, upset by her ungratefulness, would continue to provide us with fuel and food. I don’t know a worse quandary, no matter what we do.”

Just as they were engaged in this empty discussion, the puppy that had been lying under the porch came shooting out and began to bark excitedly.

“Please close the inner gate!”

A hired man came in carrying a bag of rice and bundles of firewood.

“Where shall I put the rice, and where shall I stack the firewood?”

Until then, if there was no more firewood or if they had nothing left to eat, they would keep reminding their daughter until she supplied what was needed, but now they had already pawned this and that several times in order to get by as they were at a loss about what they should do with nobody they could talk to, so without more ado, eyes bright with surprise,

the old couple had the rice poured into the rice-box and the firewood piled up in the shed, their hearts deploring more than ever their daughter's behavior, and feeling intensely grateful for their son-in-law's kindness, and unconsciously gave up the idea of doing as their daughter had written in her letter.

Major Park had still not found the Kangnŭng Woman, though he searched and searched, and he grew increasingly impatient, could neither eat nor sleep properly, and lost interest in everything, while all his close friends kept telling him that the Kangnŭng Woman had surely not deceived her own father and mother when she left, so that if he summoned and interrogated them before they could go away anywhere, he would surely find out where she was, but since Major Park was still convinced that one day or other he would find the Kangnŭng Woman and that they would once again live together, and was worried lest her animosity might grow stronger if he mistreated her parents, he did not listen to anyone's expostulations, and when he happened to meet her parents occasionally, he merely told them that a villain had tricked her into taking this action, and that he missed her, while continuing to provide them with food and money as before; then one evening, as he was returning from the house of a friend who was a high minister, he was feeling extremely low-spirited, whereas the moon was so bright that everyone was filled with an exceptional joy and joined up with others in twos and threes, wandering here and there. With his respectable position, he felt ashamed to speak about his broken heart in case others might hear, so while outwardly he appeared to walk about naturally, inwardly he was thinking:

“Oh, wretch, how did I treat you badly to make you despise me like this and go off somewhere? If you were here, the moon is so lovely tonight, and my throat is dry, we might enjoy drinking a glass of warm wine together. I never stop thinking of you, but on such a night it is so hard to endure. Your parents' house is not far from here, I feel like going there and paying your elderly parents a visit.”

With that, he headed toward the house where the Kangnŭng Woman's parents were living.

That night, in the moonlight Major Park was not the only one feeling low-spirited; the old couple were longing to see their daughter and could not go to bed early, but were sitting facing one another, shedding tears and talking:

She “Husband dear, is not ours a sad lot? On the one hand we feel ashamed to be cared for by a son-in-law who no longer has our daughter, on the other hand it would be ungrateful to break for good our relationship with him and go to our daughter, so what should we do? To be sure, she says that this *Sijong Yi* is extremely powerful and wealthy, but is he prepared to keep our child in luxury for the rest of her days?”

He “Wife, you are misguided. Nowadays, if young men who still have wealth and a good position glimpse a bright young woman, at first they pretend to fall flat and offer her their own flesh to eat, like a butterfly maddened at the sight of a flower, but just think how many bright young women there are in this world! They only have to see another woman and they fall for her instead, even though they swore to grow old together with the first, without looking back for one second. Our child has fallen for the slender affections of this *Sijong Yi*, like a cat that can't see in front of its nose, and she's incapable of imagining what will come next. How could she be so frivolous as to betray a husband like Major Park?”

She “Be that as it may, we have no way of knowing, but when it comes to getting another woman and betraying former affection, why should you be sure that *Sijong Yi* will do that and Major Park not? Menfolk's feelings change at any age; I am certainly not speaking in

favor of *Sijong Yi*.”

He “Of course, men’s feelings are no different, but there are still some distinctions. Listen. Take *Sijong Yi*; his family has a very poor moral reputation, and it is rare for a great dragon to emerge from a small stream, isn’t it? He is going to be like all the rest of his family. Besides, I was young once, and at such an age one’s feelings are not constant but waver this way and that, they cannot really be trusted, whereas Major Park is older, he is different from some flighty young man, his manners are refined, his feelings are devoid of fickleness and when it comes to our daughter, he treasures her more than an old dragon his magic jewel, so though the standards of good manners are lower these days, he is still kind enough to keep our one daughter in luxury; moreover, the way he continues to take care of us old folk proves that the adage is right that says one should only trust people once they are old. Try imagining *Sijong Yi* in his place. Not only would he not keep taking care of us, how can we be sure he would not already have had us arrested?”

She “Why, listening to what you say, I’m convinced you’re right, but don’t people say that “the arm bends only inward,” meaning that we are supposed to be partial in favor of those who are close to us? What good will it do for us to complain once she has already been blind enough to make a wrong decision?”

He “What good complain? As soon as it’s daylight, I’m going to take her letter to Major Park, tell him where she is and urge him to take her back.”

While his wife was saying there was no hurry and he was criticizing her, insisting that there was no need to wait and see, somebody knocked at the front gate and called:

“Please open the gate! Open the gate, please!”

Hearing the voice, the old couple were startled.

He “Who could it be asking us to open the gate at this time of night?”

She “Why, perhaps it’s another letter from our child.”

He “Perhaps so. Let’s see.” Going out, he asked “Who has come visiting?”

On opening the front gate, he found a servant-boy carrying a lantern, with Major Park walking up and down behind him; seeing the old man, Park spoke:

“Oho, not sleeping yet?”

The old man went out to welcome him:

“How have you come visiting so late at night? Please, come in.”

He brought Major Park into the main living room and after exchanging formalities, the old father spoke first:

He “I have no right to ask you anything but I wonder if you have heard anything from my daughter?”

P “How can I hear any news? I assumed that she had left Seoul for Suwŏn but no matter how many inquiries I make, I can learn nothing further. I assume that she has run away after falling for someone better than myself, but since she left, try as I can, I cannot forget her.”

He “You are so kind, but my daughter fails to appreciate your goodness, so how can she still be considered human? We are so embarrassed that we are ashamed to stand before you or say anything. But I am sure once you forget her and set about finding an adequate replacement, there would certainly be many women who are not at all inferior in person and manners to my daughter. I entreat you for your own sake to stop pining for her.”

P “Oho, are all humans the same? There are some irreplaceable ones, for sure. If I decided to look for a replacement, I suppose there might well be women better than your daughter, but human affection is a terrible thing, you know; she has betrayed me, yet I cannot forget her,

sleeping and waking, to the point that even if a whole pack of legendary beauties like Xishi and Yang Gufei came and sat down beside me, I would not so much as bother to glance at them.”

The old man and his wife said nothing but simply sat staring into Major Park’s face for a time, then:

He “Hey, Wife, where’s that letter? Give it to me.”

His wife hesitated a little:

She “I have it here, why do you want it?”

He “Well, let me have it. One must always speak truthfully in worldly affairs, no matter whether the result is a prize or a punishment. Regarding our wretched child, this respectable gentleman cannot forget her; if we did not tell him everything, we would be making ourselves guilty of wrong-doing, surely? Give it to me at once.”

Having urged his wife to give him a certain letter, he meekly laid it before Major Park.

He “We give birth to our children’s bodies but not their hearts. If either of us had had the slightest idea that our daughter had made such a wrong decision, I would have killed myself by smashing my head against something before her very eyes and then would there have been any prospect of the quandary arising in which we find ourselves today? You have been so considerate of us that you have so far not spoken a single harsh word, for which we are so grateful, painful burden though it is, and on reading this letter which we have just received we were saying that although it was too late tonight, early in the morning we would visit you to tell you about it.”

P “So who is this letter from? Is it from your daughter?”

Without concealing his happiness, he took the letter and read it through from start to finish, enduring the section in which he was treated as a worthless old man, and that in which *Sijong Yi* was lauded to the skies, at which the affection he had nourished for the Kangnŭng Woman fell away abruptly, feelings of indignation arose, his eyes began to twitch uncontrollably, his face grew flushed, if he could not deal with her himself he was going to report her to the police, have her carted off in a flash, swore plentifully, then had second thoughts because the elderly couple might have read the letter and gone off quietly in secret without giving anything away and he would have only wasted his time trying to trace them, but instead they had shown him the letter without any attempt to deceive him, so that his heart filled with gratitude, the previous feelings of fury melted away, and the heart that could not forget the Kangnŭng Woman was restored.

P “Oho, if she comes back again, I will not be disappointed that she made a mistake and will not so much as mention it. When it comes to women, since they are seduced by every kind of appealing trick, it is easy for them to be deceived. It is not for no reason that there are no women in public office, but when it comes to that villain *Sijong Yi*, where can you find a bastard dog to equal him? His father’s a friend of mine, yet he dared seduce his father’s friend’s woman! He deserves to be torn apart! It may not be elegant of me to say such things, but when you see what he has dared to do this time, it shows there’s nothing he would not be capable of. I see what his family is like, too. How much longer is the power attached to wealth going to last?

“Now listen. No matter how exasperating the situation may be now, I am resolved to take back your daughter and go on living with her, so early in the morning I want you to go down with my servant to where she is living, seize her and bring her back. Should anyone say

anything or prevent you from taking her, just send me a telegram and either I will go down myself or have the police arrest the two of them.”

He “If I go, I’ll tie a rope round her neck and drag her back, so why talk of someone showing up to prevent it?”

Major Park, reassured, murmured to himself:

“How wonderful it has been to visit them tonight.”

With that he returned to his house and selected from among his men one who was vigorous and energetic. Once dawn approached, he led the way to the home of the Kangnŭng Woman’s parents and urged her father to leave at once. He called his wife and told her:

“Listen wife, you must come with me. At ordinary times she would only have to hear my voice to come rushing out in her stockinged feet, but now you never know. If the reason for our visit becomes known to her, she might hide herself in a corner and get someone to pretend she is not there. If she does that, I can’t force my way into the women’s quarters of another person’s house and I would have made the journey for nothing. Whereas you, as a woman, can slip straight in and look while I lurk outside to stop her running away. Surely that’s what we should do?”

The two of them left following the servant but after a few steps returned and the father addressed Major Park:

“If I go this time, I am resolved to bring my child back with me. In view of what she has done, she deserves to be put to death or worse. You may treat my child as harshly as you like, but please do not mistreat her too harshly simply to save us old folk’s face; once you are calm, keep a tight hold of her. It may be that the thoughtless creature does not admit her mistake and feels bitter toward us, her parents; in that case there’s no knowing what she may do with her resentment, so I say this now.”

Major Park nodded and replied:

“Don’t worry yourselves. Even without your request, I have had no such thoughts from the very start and if we do not live together again, it does not matter what I do; but since I have decided to go on living with her, it would be more shameful for me than for her if I made a fuss. I shall say nothing to her, so don’t worry, just go and bring her back.”

Since the Kangnŭng Woman had previously written the letter to them, she was unreservedly happy to see them come in and not the least bit uneasy about anything; she knew that even when they were parted for just a day, they used to be really happy to see her again, having missed her; so since this time it had been about a month since they last saw her, she expected them to look most excited on seeing their daughter; but far from expressing their joy, her father’s first words brought her firmly down to earth:

He “What do you mean by this? Let’s go quickly; come along.”

K “Go? Where do you want to go?”

He “Where? What set of circumstances brought you here? You know the proverb, ‘Not even a tiger will bite a woman who has a husband,’ and you’re neither dog nor pig but a person, so what kind of behavior is this?”

If she had been unaccustomed to difficulties, on being confronted with such a situation she would have unburdened her resentful feelings toward her parents with a shower of fierce protests, combining spite and stubbornness, not caring what happened to her the next day; but since the Kangnŭng Woman had had a variety of experiences in life she was quick on the uptake and while her father’s speech was harsh from the beginning, she repressed her resentment and began to cajole her father.

K “Why, father, even if I have to go with you, please sit down first. I will explain everything to you by and by.”

He “What do you mean, explain what? This is just an excuse for trying to gain time so that you can find a way of telephoning to *Sijong Yi* and avoid going. I don’t want to hear anything. Let’s go quickly; come along.”

K “Still, Father, listen to me for a moment. What fun can it be for a youthful woman to live with an elderly husband? Until now I have put up with it, feeling sorry for my father and mother who have no other child to care for them, my only concern being that you should not starve or go naked, irrespective of whether I enjoyed life or not, but *Sijong Yi* is young and he keeps saying things about you both that make me more grateful; whereas if I go on caring for my stooping old husband, who in no time at all will be hearing the funeral bell, I shall become a widow and be cast off, which is not what I want. I would rather die than go back there.”

Hearing her words, her father reckoned that no ordinary response would so much as make her blink.

“So you refuse to go? Very well, if I have to live with such a faithless child, what reason do I have to keep on living? If I were to die here before you, that would be better.”

Then, still fully dressed as he was, he began to beat his head against the ground so wildly that the chamber pot and spittoon beside him went rolling about like a couple of balls, while he struck and crushed his lips and eyes until the blood flowed, and his wife, beside herself with fright, tried to control him, clutching at him with her hands.

“Husband, why are you acting like this? You are reacting wildly without listening to what she is saying; she is only describing her situation, why do you say she is not coming with us? Be patient for a moment and listen to me.”

But her husband, completely disregarding what she said, continued to strike his head against the wall and the ground with increased intensity until it seemed that he might do himself a serious injury.

The Kangnŭng Woman’s heart was full of emotions, being most unwilling to go, but she was, after all, a woman, and her feeble heart made her so frightened that finally, without thinking of what must follow, she surrendered.

K “Why are you acting like this? I will go back with you, Father. Please, calm down. Why are you doing this? Quickly, stand up, and after eating something, for you must be hungry, we will leave.”

He “Who says I’m hungry? I don’t want food, I don’t want drink. If we’re going, let’s be off, immediately.”

He called the servant and had a palanquin brought in; at the same time he urged his wife to move ahead quickly and all in such a hurry that the Kangnŭng Woman was carried off without even changing her clothes and taken back to Seoul by train.

If one is a human being with feelings, on being brought back in such a manner one should blush on seeing one’s husband, not be able to hold up one’s head, stay quite dejected and prostrate for at least three months, but either the Kangnŭng Woman was made of stronger stuff or she completely despised Major Park, for as she came in, although Major Park was so overjoyed that he could not say a word, the first words she spoke were cold and blunt:

“Why have you brought me back like this? If you dislike food, you give it to the dogs, but if you dislike a person, that enmity lasts a hundred years, they say; have you inherited some bad karma with me from a previous existence? I left because I disliked being here; why

did you bully my elderly parents until they brought me back? Slice me up like a scrap of beef jerky! Do you believe that I am going to remain in this house?"

Usually, if a woman acts in that way toward a man, his eyes will blaze, emotion will come welling up and, to put it bluntly, he will relieve his feelings by hitting her until her body aches, or at least scold her harshly until she bursts into tears, but Major Park, no matter what she said, was so immensely happy to have her back home that he burst out into friendly laughter, like a toothless tiger humoring a plump dog.

P "What did I say that makes you talk like that? I have said nothing, so you should do likewise, letting bygones be bygones, and let's try to live happily together without anything of the kind happening again. I will say nothing cunning, simply that ever since you left I could not sleep and food had no taste, with the result that my face has changed as you can see. Seeing you again today, however, I feel as though all the cares of the world have been taken away and I would regret nothing if I were to die at this moment."

K " "

"It is true that I am old, but can't I even now beget a son or a daughter? There is no kind of luxury that I will not provide you with, and why would I make your parents worry about food and clothing for the rest of their lives? Having lived with me for several years, you probably know what I mean."

K " "

Major Park received no clear reply from the Kangnŭng Woman but kept murmuring to himself:

"I don't need to keep repeating myself. She should have understood that much by now. And it depends on me whether or not she feels affection for me."

Then without waiting for the Kangnŭng Woman to ask, he began purchasing clothes, food, furnishings, implements, jewelry, all kinds of colorful, high-quality goods without considering the cost, trying his utmost to gain her affection, but the Kangnŭng Woman did not cast an eye on or lend an ear to any of it but instead as time went on felt increasingly that if only she might live once with *Sijong Yi*, she could die without regrets, but firstly her parents were sitting growling like tigers just behind her back, and second Major Park had put his servants on the alert so that the alarm would be raised at once if she ever tried to slip away quietly, and as a result, after her return from Inch'ŏn, although they had occasionally managed to exchange letters secretly, they had had no chance to meet even once, so that as her resentment accumulated, no matter how hard Major Park tried to talk to her, she would only frown and make no reply, and when they went to bed she was like a tethered horse, there was not one skirt-ribbon untied, she went to sleep turned to hug the wall, while Major Park was like a love-lorn goose, so preoccupied wondering how he might regain her affection that he could think of nothing else.

If we talk fairly about all this, there is no difference between the stork that wants to peck and the clam that tries not to be pecked; being an old gray-beard who sets up house with a concubine, then takes her back after she has betrayed him and fritters away his mental powers while being mistreated by her, makes Major Park indecent; *Sijong Yi* was vilely oblivious to human decency when he used wealth and power to seduce the wife of someone old enough to be his father, taking her away and setting up house together; he should therefore repent once the affair is discovered and resolve never to look at her again, but instead he employs a hundred tricks to allure the Kangnŭng Woman, so indeed he is a shameless wretch; and this Kangnŭng woman is so depraved that she deserves to be killed

without anyone pitying for her; if she were a woman, not an animal, once she had already surrendered herself to a respectable high minister, she should be well-behaved, careful not to bring disgrace on her husband, but she not only fell for an adulterer, betraying her husband and running off with him, but even after coming back she harbored thoughts of vicious tricks to despise and abandon her husband again, instead of reforming herself in word as well as deed and appreciating her husband's generosity as she should.

There was an older woman who was a housemaid in Major Park's house, her child was called Chuibul so she was always addressed as "Chuibul's Mom, Chuibul's Mum" and within the walls of Seoul there was hardly a house, from high-ranking ministers down, where she had not worked and everywhere she was famous for bringing her ructions into a previously quiet household. She had somehow ended up serving in Major Park's house and she and the Kangnŭng Woman had been close as sticky rice-cakes, so when the Kangnŭng Woman ran away and Major Park was desperately trying to discover where she was, she after hearing news by eavesdropping, had sent tips to her, making her run away first to Suwŏn and then on to Inch'ŏn.

The matter having unexpectedly been settled when she was caught and taken back from Inch'ŏn for lack of advance warning, Chuibul's Mom was unable to expect any words of praise from the Kangnŭng Woman, like someone who has walked all night long and failed to find a door; Chuibul's Mom, therefore, was determined to serve the Kangnŭng Woman better this time by helping her escape from the Park family, while the Kangnŭng Woman had nobody to whom she could speak the words accumulated in her breast other than Chuibul's Mom, who had been her close confidant. Thus when the Kangnŭng Woman summoned Chuibul's Mom and talked to her in secret, they got on like a house on fire and as kindred spirits hatched a wicked scheme.

K "Chuibul's Mom, just open the door and look out a minute, will you, in case there's someone eavesdropping."

C "Eavesdrop? Who would dare eavesdrop? Still, you never know." She cautiously opened the door and looked around. "Not a soul. Don't worry, you can say what you like, Madam."

The Kangnŭng Woman's eyes were swimming with tears.

K "I tell you. I'm simply dying to see *Sijong Yi*. If I feel like this, what must he be feeling?"

C "Don't worry. If your feelings for one another do not change, the day will surely come when you can meet, don't you see?"

K "What do you mean, surely? Is the word "surely" really going to help me? Why, other women are left a widow several times over, but I have no such luck, even."

Chuibul's Mom sat there silent for a moment, then shook her head with its untidy mop of hair.

C "Why do you say such things, inviting bad fortune? There's nothing so lamentable and sorrowful as being a widow, yet you say you want be one? Before I met Chuibul's father I was looked down on as a widow and it left a bitter taste in my mouth, so finally I remarried, had a son and a daughter, and seemed to be living happily without any troubles, but I tell you truthfully, you should never wish to be left a widow. There is no worse way of being left in the lurch."

K "Who doesn't know that? But my life is so miserable it makes me say these things. What I mean is, if I were a widow, without anything to interfere with me, I would go after the person I want to see and spend even just one day enjoying ourselves together freely."

C "Why, the poor thing. How miserable her life must be, if it makes her think like that."

K “Is there anyone who cares about my affairs as you do? Look, if you will do just one thing for me, I will repay your kindness, even if it means cutting off my hair and making shoes for you with it.”

C “Don’t even think of it. What kindness do you mean? Since I am obliged to serve you, I will do whatever you ask without any conditions.”

At that, the Kangnŭng Woman brought her lips close to Chuibul’s Mom’s ear and whispered some words, then drew some bank-notes from her handbag and gave them to her. Money may be good or evil. If it is used for some worthwhile philanthropic or public-service project, it bears a fragrant name and yields much good, while if it is used with an evil intention for some wicked purpose, that is something that the heavens cannot tolerate and it has for ever been decreed that a punishment will surely ensue.

One day after nightfall, when Major Park entered the Kangnŭng Woman’s room she unexpectedly greeted him gladly:

“Why are you so late tonight? I have been acting so thoughtlessly and you are angry, is that why you come in so late? A cursed spirit must have come into me, I rejected your generosity and betrayed you, but your affection for me is unparalleled, when I think of the gratitude I owe for the help you have given to my mother and father, I deserve to die a dozen times. Husband, dear husband, if you can forgive my mistake, all I have done, I will never be false again but ever remain with you.”

Major Park was so taken happily surprised to hear such words that he replied immediately.

“What do you mean? In my youth I too had affairs; we all have moments when we tread in shit wearing our best shoes. What need is there for me to keep things bottled up tightly in my heart? Strictly speaking, at the very outset I should have shut my eyes, tried to forget you, not bothered to look for you, but it seems we must both be being punished for sins committed in a previous life, because I found I simply could not forget you so long as I am alive, so I did everything I could to find you and fortunately we are together again, so that perhaps we should see what happened as a momentary separation in our heaven-sent union; it was definitely not caused by a lack of affection. Since it happened you have all the time been very unhappy, so that I have been feeling sorry in my heart, but now you have got free and finally spoken your feelings, I have the impression that I did not really know your heart as a husband should, so I feel ashamed and anxious. Whatever happened in the past, so long as in future we manage to live well and happily without dispute, that accident won’t be a problem, will it?”

From that day their relationship was closer than ever; she constantly offered him special delicacies as late-night snacks or early morning refreshment and if ever there was a night when he did not come in, she would send a maid quickly to inquire how he was and bring him in.

So things continued for several days then one evening the Kangnŭng Woman was wearing an apron and seemed to be busily preparing delicacies with Chuibul’s Mom.

P “Ha, today there must be something good to eat! What are you preparing with so much fuss? Surely that woman can do the work alone? Why are you working too?”

K “You see, a fresh pheasant was just brought in and we decided to use it to make some stuffed dumplings, but it’s a lot of work.”

She turned to Chuibul’s Mom:

K “Stop what you are doing; off you go and boil some clear broth. And we can make

dumplings for us to eat later. He must be hungry.”

C “Yes, don’t you worry yourself.”

After a short while, Chuibul’s Mom came in carrying the soup on a small table, the Kangnŭng Woman took it from her, added some shredded meat and pepper, seemingly concerned to season it well, then placed it lovingly in front of Major Park, remarking:

“Why, it’s already late. You must be hungry. Eat this, now.”

After days of seeing nothing but frowns, when Major Park beheld how affectionately she did everything, his heart was warmed and he felt that all his cares had melted away; so he was more than ready to drink up the soup in one gulp and still hunger for more, but reflecting that love between people should always be expressed by sharing, he put down the spoon he had picked up.

P “Wife, how can I eat this all alone? You must eat with me.”

K “Please don’t worry. I ate late this evening and I am still quite full. I will have her prepare some more a little later and eat then.”

P “How can I eat all this? Let’s eat this together, then we can eat again later. Hey, Chuibul’s Mom, bring another spoon and chopsticks.”

Chuibul’s Mom hemmed and hawed while the Kangnŭng Woman kept insisting that she would eat later and Major Park urged her to eat with him, in exchanges that lasted a while, until the Kangnŭng Woman’s mother unexpectedly came hurrying in, spoke a few words of greeting, and observed the scene; when she saw that Major Park was about to eat, unable to resist her daughter’s insistence, she hastened to the table, snatched up the soup and prepared to carry it outside, saying:

“You didn’t eat it straight away, how can you enjoy it now it’s gone cold? I’ll add some hot soup to warm it up again.”

At that, the Kangnŭng Woman exclaimed angrily:

“Mother, you ought to be sleeping and here you are for no purpose, making a fuss. It has only just been cooked, how can you say it has gone cold? If it has cooled to the point where he can’t eat it, why should you deal with it yourself instead of telling Chuibul’s Mom to warm it up again?”

Her mother grew heated in turn:

“There’s a proverb that says it’s a mother-in-law’s task to love her son-in-law. What do you mean by saying that I can’t prepare food with my own hands for your husband to eat?”

The Kangnŭng Woman tried to wrest the soup from her mother, who refused to let go, and after a prolonged struggle her mother angrily slid open the door and hurled the bowl of soup into the yard; it bounced down the stone steps and rolled into the yard, spilling all the soup like the porridge thrown around during a shamanist exorcism, then, since animals have no sense, a female dog that had been lying beneath the porch, assuming that the soup was meant for her to eat, led her pups out and they gobbled it all up.

Each of the people involved in that evening’s fuss had had their own thoughts regarding the spilt soup; the Kangnŭng Woman and Chuibul’s Mom had gone to great trouble to prepare the bowl in secret, but then an unexpected accident had prevented them from attaining their goal. They thought: “How best to deal with this situation? Well, is today the only possible day, and no other? All we have to do is try again tomorrow with nobody knowing.”

Major Park thought: “Old folk can be so inflexible, sometimes they act very strangely.

What was she doing, grabbing the food that her daughter had prepared for me to eat with so much effort and spilling it like that? Who said that it was too cold to eat? At least the dogs had a good birthday party.”

As for the mother: “What would have happened if I had arrived even a little later? I had heard of that kind of wicked deed in old stories but who would have dreamed that one’s own child would do such a thing? It would have been better if I had not thrown the soup away but poured it all down her throat. People used to say that ten guards cannot control one thief; you may undertake your plan if you get rid of me first, but so long as I still have even the slenderest thread of life I am determined to prevent you from carrying out such a scheme.”

None of them could speak out plainly, each one spoke and answered inwardly for a while, then suddenly there came a sound of shrieks from the yard that made the roof-tiles tremble, followed by the sounds of a desperate struggle, so that each and all of the people in the room were startled, quickly opened the door and on looking out saw some objects lying scattered in the middle of the yard.

Major Park was fond of dogs and had brought five or six to the house, that he fed with broth morning and evening, so that they grew fat and greasy, and now suddenly without any apparent reason all those dogs had dropped to the ground and were expiring, while no-one knew what was wrong but all simply stared with rounded eyes:

“Why, just look at those dogs! Why are they suddenly all dying like that? It’s dreadful! Unimaginable! Do dogs also catch the falling sickness? Alas, even those big as a horse have died. How was it possible when they were so fat and robust?”

“Why, they’ve vomited blood. They must have been put under a curse.”

Until then the Kangnŭng Woman had simply been standing there dumbly, in the unexpected situation, incapable of speaking, pretending not to see or hear anything, quite speechless, until someone mentioned a curse, at which a ruse came to her, she clapped her hands and said cunningly:

“Why, what you say is right. The ground where this house stands is powerful, so nothing bad happens so long as offerings are made to the spirits every month, but I have been away and then busy with one thing and another, so several months have passed without any offerings, surely? The spirit of the ground must have grown angry.

Chuibul’s Mom, full of cunning, immediately chimed in:

“Why, the house is fortunate that it is not worse. All this while I have been receiving troubled messages in my sleep; I did not say anything, but I have been secretly very worried, but the curse has been transferred and the dogs have died instead, did you ever see such a miracle? You must quickly kill a pig and make offerings.”

Only a man can be taken in by a woman’s feeble tricks, and Major Park duly gave credit to the words exchanged between the two women; her mother had obviously heard from someone that her daughter had been brooding with wicked intentions and had sent Chuibul’s Mom to buy poison, so she had come rushing to find her daughter and made that disturbance having full knowledge of what was happening. She could not be ignorant of the reason for those dogs’ deaths, but it was such an extraordinary incident that if the truth emerged there was no knowing how many other people would be in serious trouble in addition to her daughter, so she feigned ignorance despite what she knew, then later summoned her daughter secretly and scolded her on and on, urging her to repent, but “a frog will never become a weasel even after being buried for three years” and she would never be able to forget *Sijong*

Yi until the end of her life, so, because she could not forget *Sijong Yi*, her sole thought, day and night, had been how to murder Major Park, there was nothing to prevent her buying some poison such as arsenic or opium to mix with his breakfast or supper, but a thief believes everyone suspects them, whereas after she had failed and merely killed a few dogs Major Park harbored not so much as a needle's tip of suspicion, but she had no idea whether he really did not know and was therefore saying nothing or whether he knew more or less and was pretending not to know; besides, her parents were fully aware of what she had done and since they were infatuated with their son-in-law, they might well make a clean breast of everything, so that she would never be able to give him poison again and was thinking of some other solution, when abruptly Major Park left home to see to some urgent business at Suwŏn, after repeating 'fare well' a thousand times to the Kangnŭng Woman and quietly telling the servants to be on their guard, but it was as though she was possessed by a demon and her only thought, day and night, was to escape, so how could a group of servants keep control of her? She whispered a few words in Chuibul's Mom's ear then, a little later, she went out, saying that she was going to make offerings for her parents' well-being on the far side of the Han River, met up with *Sijong Yi*, made a detour without anyone recognizing her, secretly settled on a house in Sa-dong, cut off all relations, stayed inside and kept the front gate locked even in broad daylight so that not so much as a dog, let alone an outsider, could come in, and thought to herself:

"I previously went dashing off to Suwŏn then Inch'ŏn, only to be caught in a violent manner. Now I will not let my parents know where I am, even if it means we never meet again. As the saying goes, we build a ten-thousand-league wall even through a one-night relationship, so that if Major Park had eaten those dumplings and died, I could not hope to escape retribution sooner or later; furthermore, how could I have expected to end up solving every problem like this so smoothly?"

She expected to have a wonderful, exhilarating time living happily together but, *Sijong Yi* was a flighty fellow, although he acted as though he was bewitched by the Kangnŭng Woman and wanted to give her everything at once, she was far from being the only such woman in the city and it is common knowledge that the more difficult it is to get access to her, the more beautiful a woman looks. In the Kangnŭng Woman's mind, mountains, streams, plants, trees might all change but she was utterly convinced that *Sijong Yi*'s heart would never change in the least throughout the years even if she grew old and gray, so that what happened was completely unexpected. For some reason, *Sijong Yi* took very much trouble, seemingly unable to endure spending even a moment without the Kangnŭng Woman, believing that being together again would bring a bliss for which he could die ten thousand deaths without regret; he went so far as to provide a house for her and furnish it, but after that, either because he felt sure of owning her or because he had fallen for yet another flower-like, moon-like beautiful woman, he only paid her brief visits, once in five days, once in ten days.

He provided barely enough firewood and food for her needs, but apart from that there was no sign of a single penny in money; at first the Kangnŭng Woman told herself that there was no reason to think that *Sijong Yi*'s feelings toward her had changed, and spent a few days like that without any suspicions, enduring the poverty, but as the proverb says, a dizzy spell left untreated may turn into epilepsy, and gradually *Sijong Yi*'s visits became as rare as any event that requires too much preparation, and as the saying goes, betrayal by an intimate is bound to leave a deeper scar. At times when she blamed *Sijong Yi*, the memory of Major Park's former affection returned, provoking laments as she lay alone beneath a moonlit

window.

“Why, what a traitor, what a thief I am! He was only somewhat old, but that wretched man blinded me to the good in Major Park so I betrayed him and left home; how could God endure such behavior? And now I deserve this cold treatment! Heaven forbids, but you put me on the tree and rocked it; you said, come out, come out, and brought me here, and now you scorn me like this; my sin has swollen enough to kill me, certainly, but how dare you expect to die a peaceful and natural death? That’s enough! Rather than believe a rascal like you and suffer for it, I’m going back to the house of my husband who still misses me.”

She set out at once and returned to Major Park’s home.

Major Park had hoped to restore his previous relationship with the Kangnŭng Woman and live happily together, so he had made every effort and fortunately she had been brought back by fair means or foul, after which he had hoped for signs of a change of heart through various kind words, but she had taken advantage of a brief absence on his part to escape again, so that his loving feelings had changed to resentment and, having rejected her, he felt no further wish to look for her, as naturally as silverfish growing on a rotten tree. While Major Park was unable to forget the Kangnŭng Woman, everyone high and low had words in her favor ready to please him:

“Why, she is such a sweet-mannered lady. There is no-one like her in this world. How did it happen? She surely did not leave him of her own accord. As they say, any tree will fall with ten blows of the axe. Some wicked person has allured her with sweet talk and she is so credulous that she finally went astray.”

Such was the gossip among the servants.

“Why, is such a change possible? We’ve seen all kinds but we never saw anyone as honest and loyal as the Kangnŭng Woman. How did this come about? She may have been taken in by someone’s trickery and made a mistake but if she once comes back home she will surely make Park’s house her home again till the day she dies.”

Such was the gossip among the family womenfolk but after the Kangnŭng Woman had run away a second time, seeing how Major Park’s affection toward her faded, that he had rejected her and no longer thought of her, they began to vilify her; even if people did not talk directly to Major Park, indirectly they suggested that she had gone mad with love for *Sijong Yi*, mad enough to poison the dumplings in collusion with Chuibul’s mom; they exchanged questions and answers, pouring out curses like rain; at first he paid no attention, so that such reports did not reach his ears, but after he began to take what she had done seriously, he could not let even a word go by; he quietly summoned one by one the people saying those things and questioned them in detail, whereupon he realized that he had narrowly escaped a premature death, was overwhelmed with rage and, if someone could tell him where the Kangnŭng Woman was, he was eager to have her arrested on the spot and bring the full force of the law into play, to uncover all her sins and torment her with them, but then one day, unexpectedly, the Kangnŭng Woman appeared before him, sank to the floor, raised the face that he hated even dreaming about and spoke in a manner that clearly indicated her feelings:

“Sir, I deserve to be struck by a thunderbolt from the deep blue sky. Unable to appreciate your will to the slightest degree, I left home and now, having pondered deeply, I was prepared to cut off the toes from my feet several times a day, and whether I receive sanctions or punishment, I see that coming to you is the right thing to do so I have come, despite my deep shame. Dispose of me as you will.”

As she spoke she shed berry-like tears, and Major Park was as ever incapable of

shrewd thoughts; if he followed his angry heart, he would send for some great, brawny servant, have her strung up and flogged thoroughly; if that was too vulgar, he could forbid her ever to appear before him again and have her dragged away at once, but then, on further reflection, regardless of her crime, taking pity on her, he granted her a corner in a secluded back room, with clothing and food as before, but never again came to sit beside her and talk kindly.

ⁱ *Sijong* was a title used in the later Chosŏn period for a low-level court attendant whose task was to help dress the king and look after his clothes. It is often translated as ‘valet (de chambre)’ but in the present context it seems better to retain the title as such, since its meaning is of little importance.