

WHEN THE MOON RISES

by Gim Song

After climbing the high steps, one may walk up a path which slopes up to the mountain. On the right, there is a brick wall, and inside the wall a wide lawn in the centre of which stands a lofty ginko tree with thick leaves.

The two people came to this shady spot under the tree, far away from the annoying crowds, but they found that the lawn was surrounded by the brick wall on top of which barbed wire had been added, so that no-one was allowed to get in there, for the plot seemed rather unexpectedly to have come into someone's possession.

"Some profiteer must have taken over the site and be building a villa!"

Czoe clicked his tongue, as if he was much displeased by the lawn being placed out of bounds.

Sug, the young lady, who had been following silently, said in a low voice, "Where shall we go?"

"With the mountains all round, there is no wind here. Let's climb further up the mountain!", Czoe answered and walked on ahead.

They went round the brick wall and found a hill. It seemed to be windy on the hill. As Czoe climbed up the hill, Sug followed him, gasping and holding up her skirt with one hand.

Water was scarce so high up in this place, so some villagers who lived at the bottom of the pass passed then, carrying water home from the spring, and there were also a few people dressed in white, climbing up the mountain to cool themselves away from their sultry houses at sunset. Some children were there, jumping up and down with their dogs, which they were pulling along by the wire rings round their necks.

There could be heard the attractive sound of some music. It sounded as if some late summer outdoor party might be taking place on the open ground at the bottom of the mountain. A farmers village band was playing its instruments most melodiously.

Going round the hill, could be seen a path leading down to the opposite valley. The narrow path wound through the acacia bushes which lined it on either side over to the rocky mountain opposite.

"Well, how are you getting along nowadays?"

"The same as usual."

"Selling cigarettes?"

"I was forced to sell cigarettes on the street for the sake of my children, but it does not make both ends meet. I'm ashamed of being seen by those I know."

"If that is so, you had better give it up. You had some experience of teaching before the Liberation. What do you think about starting that again?"

"I don't think I could do that now. After my marriage, I had a baby every year, so I stopped teaching and retired to a family life to bring them up. Now I'm a frog in a well, and I may not have enough knowledge."

Their conversation continued as they walked slowly on. Czoe picked an acacia leaf and tried to blow it like a flute in his mouth. The perfume of the acacia

was very sweet. They passed through the fragrant valley of the acacia and began to climb up a rocky slope.

Czoe wore white clothes of a Western style. His hair, uncovered by a hat, was curled and out of place as he perspired. He 'slipped off his jacket, and held it at his side, and fanned himself with a folded evening newspaper. Sug wore a thin ramie jacket and a stiff hempen skirt, which made a noise as she walked.

The setting sun reflected dazzlingly from the west from the glass windows of the tall buildings in the streets. Czoe was still fanning himself with the folded newspaper, but the perspiration was flowing down his back with the effort of climbing the rising mountain slope; Sug's forehead, with her hair neatly divided into two, and her pretty, modest nose were spotted with perspiration. She seemed to be gasping a little, and her voice was not clear when she said, "After the Liberation I came back to Korea with Mr. S. and my two children, carrying one on my back, and the other leading me. I expected that I should do well."

"Was this right after the Liberation?"

"We came back to Korea in what we stood up in without even bringing a wicker suit-case with us. We stayed at first in a hotel. When the 38th Parallel was closed, we got some money with difficulty and rented a room. There were four families squeezed in there. My husband got a job with a newspaper company, but he received a very poor salary, and our life was miserable. After four months, when most of the staff was changed, he became unemployed along with others who were discharged. So, for a while, he was just hanging about the streets, and then he was employed by a magazine company."

"What magazine was it?"

"It was not a well-known company. Their first number was their last ..."

"Yes, there were many such magazines right after the Liberation."

"After the first number of the magazine had been issued, he was unemployed again. So when the children fell ill, no treatment was given to them. As soon as we had finished breakfast, we started worrying about supper. We all lacked nourishment, and our faces became very yellowish. So I blamed S., telling him how foolish he must have been, to have been fired by the newspaper company and to join such a badly edited magazine. But he complained that the world was in chaos and that there was no democracy in our politics. I protested that in any age and in any society, if a man was clever enough to see the realities of the situation and grasp his opportunity, there was no reason why he should not maintain his family. I blamed his weak will."

"Perhaps he was a leftist, was he?"

"No, he belonged neither to the left nor to the right; just a vague neutral of a grey shade."

"Surely, since he had no will to establish, he must have been of the left, mustn't he?"

"No, he had no will to establish, but he had no will to destroy either. He was in the middle."

The two of them had been concentrating on their conversation for a while, so that they had not noticed that they were gasping until they had got over the steep slope. They had now passed by a big rock which had blocked their way. They reached the flat top where a few pine trees were stood here and there.

Sug stopped, and looked at Czoe. "Going up further?"

Czoe understood her obvious look. "Are you tired?"

Czoe stopped, and Sug sat on the sandy earth, where there were patches of grass about. Then sun set. The mountain valley was now in deep blue. The sound of the folk music came to them from a greater distance now. The burning red of the glow of evening was reflected on the peak of a distant mountain down on the horizon. The light breeze, blowing quietly over the mountain slope, was cool.

"Its a nice place here, isn't it?"

Czoe sat down beside Sug. He took out a cigarette and lit it. He inhaled a mouthful of smoke and blew it out again. The purple smoke vanished in the darkening valley. Sug, who was looking at the vanishing smoke, suddenly asked, "Won't there be snakes here?"

"I don't think so. Why? Why do you ask that?"

"I am afraid of snakes. They are horrible and awful. The snake used to come when it smelled a woman, I heard."

Czoe laughed, but did not answer. All was quiet around, and there was just Czoe, smoking heavily.

"Snakes don't like the nicotine in cigarettes. If they eat nicotine, they will die, I heard. So don't worry about them!"

Sug seemed to feel a little safer at Czoe's words and continued what she was saying.

"Well, after that, the owner of the house asked us to vacate the room, because, he said, the house had been sold. It seemed that the man was unable to maintain his family, and so had put up for sale the house in which they had lived for ten years. So I went round, trying to rent a room. I went to Anam-dong, Sinsol-dong, and Yongsan, even as far as Mapo. I walked round for ten days until my toes swelled up and bled. How difficult it is to get a room like that! I got a pain in my waist, but I went on looking without finding one anywhere until I was taken ill. So I thought that we might live in an air-raid shelter or a refugee camp, but my husband, who had great selfrespect, wouldn't live there and refused to do that. How foolish he must have been not to have got one of so many vested houses-enemy houses! Again I blamed S's inability."

Sug talked on, recollecting her past life. She whispered frankly in a low voice, as if she were making a confession in front of a Catholic Father in a cathedral. She had believed that this S. would be the all-powerful and almighty one who could save her from her difficulties.

"S. was tired of life, and finally was taken ill. That was about the time when the so-called 'Legislative Assembly' was established by the Military Government. It was when we were staying in in a friend's house below the Namsan Hill Park, the third or fourth place we had moved to since coming to Seoul. S. left me two children and no property at all. He had sold all his clothes to pay the hospital where he had been. It was all spent on his treatment. So he and I finally parted from each other, empty handed, as if going to the Hell of the next world."

Tears dropped from Sug's eyes. She wiped them away with her handkerchief. How lovely the appearance of the woman weeping seemed to Czoe! He felt a sort of affection for her rather than pity.

"After losing my husband, I wandered about the streets like a ship drifting and not knowing for which port it is bound. Then I was obliged to move out of S's friend's house and to rely on my cousin who lived in Myôngnyung-dong. Her husband was a clerk with a company. He came back from Manchuria after the Liberation as a refugee, but he was clever enough to have taken over a vested house, and he could

just maintain his family on his monthly income. I moved into my cousin's house without hesitation and brought my children. With my cousin's children, there were seven or eight children in the narrow house, and the whole house seemed to be having a feast every day with the noisy crowd, so that we were almost driven out of our minds. Moreover, I had no income at all and just ate there for nothing, so that we felt keenly the sorrow which was imposed on us. So I took work with someone in order to manage for myself. I worked at a few places, but I could not make enough for us. I was obliged to take work at a restaurant. Why should I not take anything if it was to keep us alive? It was with this idea of self-sacrifice that I became a waitress in the restaurant. Fortunately, the money I earned there was fairly good. Patrons began to come in from ten o'clock, and I was kept busy until the curfew at night, with the house full of crowds of patrons. Really, it was a very busy place, and my income was proportionately high, too. I got a maid-servant to look after my two children, and the four of us could live fairly well, though my income was not really sufficient. Moreover, the owner of the restaurant rented a house for me for one hundred thousand won, so I was glad to move out of that noisy house of my cousin's. It seemed to me that one could feel the happiness of life and enjoy freedom only by maintaining oneself by one's own power, don't you agree?

"But the attitude of the owner of the restaurant changed, and became rather strange. Must a man be like that? It's very funny. One day he was drunk and said, 'Sug, you are very pretty! Your eyes-your nose-your mouth-you are a beauty from birth! How pretty were Yang Gwi-Bi or So-Si of old China? It is said that Zang Hui-Bin has been the greatest beauty in Korea up till now, but perhaps even she was not as beautiful as Sug is!' That was the way he joked. I wished to spit in his face at the time, but I was patient because my livelihood was at stake. I just kept away from him politely, treating him with the etiquette due to the master of the restaurant.

"Then, later, one day last spring, he called me to his room. We were the only ones in the room. His wife had gone into the country and was not at home. He took this excellent opportunity to tempt me. 'It must be difficult for a woman to manage alone,' he said with a strange look, and I just listened to him with my head lowered. Then, after staring at me with hungry eyes, 'Sug, you had better think it over—you are not like a man; how can you, a woman of just over thirty, live on alone? Do you understand what I mean? Though I have not had much education, fortunately I have possessions enough. If you appreciate my feelings, I'll take care of your children—what do you think? Sug, if you understand how I feel ' He held my hand as he said this. Then he tried to kiss me with his ugly mouth open wide and his bloody eyes challenging me.

"I had been patient with all the unpleasant treatment he had shown to me so often because he was master of the restaurant and I had to keep my livelihood. But I could not bear such insults and disrespect any more. Then I pushed his hand off and slapped him. 'Is money everything? Take care of yourself!', I said. Then I rushed out of the house. That night I wept until my eyes swelled up because of my sorrow at having no husband with me.

"Two days after I left the restaurant, the master of the restaurant called at my house, and he pleaded with me not to make him ashamed of his behaviour at all. I made an excuse of going out for something urgent, and, after combing my hair, I left the room. As I did so, I said, 'I'll vacate this house tomorrow!'. Then I shut the door noisily and left the house."

Sug's story had been very long. She gave a deep sigh, and raised her slender eyebrow. Czoë had listened to her in silence because it seemed to him that no words could soothe her, and he just sucked his tongue.

The electric lights which they could see from the peak were just like star-dust scattered about. The moon was just about to appear like a lantern over the distant mountain in the East.

"Oh, the moon is coming up, isn't it? I like to have the moon. Mr. Czoë, what day is it?"

"Well, it may be the ninth."

"By the lunar calendar?"

"I know. They say it is malbog, but—"

"It looks like the full moon!"

"The moon! It is a wonderful sight to see the moon rising from the top of a mountain! I can still remember the occasion when I saw the moon on the highest peak of Biro-bong, when I visited the Diamond Mountains. The moon then was most impressive!"

"The moon of the Diamond Mountains! It must be beautiful! I wish I could see it once."

"Nobody is qualified to discuss the beauty of the moon unless he has seen the moon on the Diamond Mountains."

"When the 38th Parallel is abolished and if I can go back to my native town, the first thing I shall do will be to visit the Diamond Mountains."

The thoughts of the two people turned to their home town. Sug's face was lit by a sentimental nostalgia. The wind was just then rustling the leaves of the trees, and the insects, seeking their beds in the earth, were singing in the dew-soaked grass. Sug picked some pine needles and chewed them softly as she used to suck the stems of the 'sweeper-corn' when she was a child at home.

When the moon rises, one can recollect one's childhood, and as the memory of one's childhood revives, one feels so much younger.

As they watched the moon, Czoë and Sug recalled in their minds the days of their childhood when they had lived in houses next door to each other in the same village. Czoë wanted to be a poet, and then he was a young man of letters, trying to write poems and get them published in the magazine *Tun* by their circle or in the Seoul newspapers. Sug, too, was a young girl of letters, fond of reading novels, and then in the fourth year class of a girls' High School.

Being fond of novels, she often borrowed them from Czoë. As soon as she had read one novel that she had borrowed from him, she would borrow another and read it through the night. In this process of borrowing and lending, they became as familiar with each other as brother and sister.

It was at the time of this friendship with Czoë that she read those masterpieces such as 'Les Misérables' by Hugo, 'The Resurrection' by Tolstoy, and 'Tess' by Hardy, and thus she received some education in literature. One day, she borrowed 'Traviata' from Czoë, and while she was lost in the excitement of reading the story, she unexpectedly came on some notes. In there was a love-letter from Czoë, or rather a poem:

"The nights when insects sing,
The moon, bright, rises and sets.
I see the moon, weeping,

I see the moon, weeping,
The moon rises in my heart,
The moon sets in your heart.”

Sug read it two or three times. The more she read it, the more she was touched. It was the first time she had received such a shock from a man. It was the last thing she had expected, to receive a passionate poem from Czoë. She liked him a lot, but she trembled with the fear of her innocence of seventeen years being destroyed. She thought that to write an answer would be to lose the modesty of a girl, so she returned “Traviata” at once, though she had not finished it.

After this, their meetings were not as frequent as before, and when they happened to meet, they passed by, watching each other carefully and very shyly.

Later, a distant relative of her mother’s, a painter called S., came into Sug’s acquaintance. S. was a graduate of the Fine Arts School in Tokyo. He had come-back to Korea and was then teaching in the High School in his home town.

One day, while he was drawing a picture by the river-side, he met Sug, and he painted a picture of her under the title of ‘Innocence’. Through this sketch, they got to know each other well, and it led to their being intimately associated.

Whenever Sug looked at the sketch of herself drawn by S., she had a feeling of love, as if she had found in S.’s dim love a shoot from the seed of love planted in her by Czoë. It was a change which had come about in a very short time.

Sug followed S. to Japan, and entered married life, while Czoë left his native place and started a wandering journey. While Sug was enjoying her honeymoon in a foreign country, ‘Czoë was lonely, and crossed in love. For a while he tried to forget with the help of wine. “Let things be as they were before!” he said to himself. The disappointment which he could not bear! The way he suffered, as if he were shedding his blood and beating his head on the floor!

By and by, he became almost a wretched defeatist, with his sorrow, anger, and despair. His poetry abandoned Romanticism and turned to Decadence, a decadence fashioned from his worn mind and body. Then, when the Second World War became serious, he worked as a miner or a sailor. That is to say, when tired of the mountains, he went to sea, and floated on the ocean, haunted by the soul of a seagull. Thus, for about four years, he completely neglected his literary harvest, which had been just on the point of ripening, and his name was no longer heard in, literary circles.

But the Liberation inspired in him a new, strong power of life.

He flung himself into the Authors’ Group in Seoul, spreading the powerful wings of the new hope of the new age. So whenever a poem was published under the three syllables of his name, the poets’ circle watched it with interest. His ‘Song of Liberation’, ‘The Mountain Range of Everlasting White,’ and the rest of his national poetry, which had developed out of his Decadentism, were recited by people with awe in the midst of the age when a new National Literature was badly need-ed. Now he had a reputation as one of the leading figures in poetical writing, the characteristics of his poetry occupied a page in the history of Korean poetry, and in every university, his poetry was recited in the course of lectures on poetry.

One afternoon, Sug had happened to see Czoë on the crowded street of Czungmu-ro as she passed by, a tall figure, wearing spectacles, and bareheaded.

“Oh! It’s Czoë Yong-Sul!” Sug had suddenly recalled the features of Czoë as a young man, but the next moment, while she had been thinking, with her head dropped slightly to one side, Czoë had at once disappeared into the crowd. She was

very disappointed.

"I may meet him again, unless we die first", she had said to herself, and she had often missed Czoë when he had appeared in her mind since then.

Some time later, one afternoon while she had been selling cigarettes in front of the Y.M.C.A. in Zongno, or Main Street, she came upon his name unexpectedly. It was on a board advertizing 'Poetry Lectures'. Sug emptied her tray of wares, and, as if drawn by a magnet, entered the hall, not even taking the time to see to her own distressed features.

The audience filled the hall. Sug stood in the corner and watched Czoë's face, listening to his voice rather than hearing his lecture. His face had completely changed after fifteen years, although traces of his childhood appearance remained around his mouth. His voice was soft and sublime. She had tried to meet Czoë for two months, but she had hesitated to do so because she was anxious about her poor looks.

"Mr. Czoë!" She waited until the lecture had ended and then called him from behind just as he was going down the steps. Czoë looked at her for a while without suspecting who she was, and then his mind cried, "Sug!", and he said in surprise, "How did you come here?"

He seemed to be glad, the way his peculiar thick teeth showed through his lips.

"H's a long time since I've seen you!"

"Yes, it is!"

When they came out into the street, he was reluctant to part from her.

"Let's have supper somewhere, and . . ."

Czoë led her a quiet restaurant, but Sug thought it painful to walk together with him, since it did not seem natural, and at first she refused his invitation.

Sug's old skirt and her worn-out rubber shoes, and Czoë's grey trousers and brown shoes stayed long under the table.

They met there the following day. And a few days later, they met again.

"Have you read many books since then?"

"No, I couldn't even finish 'Traviata' which I stopped reading then."

"What's the matter, that you haven't been reading the novels which you used to like so much? I sometimes imagined that Sug might have become a great novelist by-now."

"But I've no talent, have I? And then, I was kept busy making my living all the time. I spent all my energy on bringing up my children, and all I could do was to read some magazines. It seems that all the past is meaningless."

"You can still hope, for you have a talent for it."

So their conversation went on. Czoë had not forgotten his old affection for Sug, but, as a middle-aged man, he behaved in quite an ordinary manner, as if he had just met an old friend.

"I should like to see your wife some time. She must be a very nice lady!", Sug said unexpectedly one day.

"My wife! Ha, ha, iha!" He laughed.

"How many children have you?"

He laughed but made no answer but laughed. Because he was hurt when crossed in his first love, he had determined never to get married, but he had to do so, if only to forget Sug completely. So he had married, but it was an unnatural marriage to a woman, towards whom he felt no love, and he was not happy. But now,

with a wife, he could not venture over the line of friendship.

Their relation was thus normal and pure. On some crowded street, in some remote back street, or for an occasional walk in the moon-light until late at night, they met and parted, but they could not hold each other's hands, though they felt that they would more and more, every time they met and parted. If they held each other's hands, it might destroy the beautiful pure love they had when they were young. If their hands or their bodies touched, it would go beyond friendship, and the two or them would start the final adventure of life; so they warned themselves.

The moon was surely hung on the pine-tree, the sky was gradually brightening, and the light of the stars fading. The moon, which had at first seemed cold, was now showing its face in a red-brown, like a torch hung in the sky.

Sug spat out the pine-needles, which she had been chewing quietly.

Her lips were wet with the saliva, which was swelling up, and looked as if it would break off when pressed, like that of a little girl. Sug saw the cold moon every month, but this was the first time 'she had felt it moistening her heart so deep down, seeping in through her eyes, as she did to-night. She stared at the moon for a while and then said in a childish voice,

"What a bright moon!"

"Yes, it is." Czoë responded, as if touched.

The moon slipped out of the thin, misty clouds and painted the rocks and woods a blue, pearl-colour as it floated in the vast sky. The moon was so touching that the waves of passion which had not come upon Czoë and Sug for a long time now seemed to draw near them, rolling on. Czoë found in the moonlit eyes of Sug an expression which traced the dreary days of her twenties, and her eyes which were tracing that dream were really as beautiful as the moon.

"Sug, what are you dreaming about?"

"Nothing at all!", Sug answered in a low voice and just smiled. "Recollecting the past is just like being enchanted by a dream, isn't it?"

"Do you mean the marriage at Tokyo?"

"No!"

"The things of the days when we were much younger?"

"Yes, when you were a girl."

Sug blushed quite violently. The same feeling of longing for a man that she had felt in her twenties swelled up through her jacket and her heart beat loud.

"Sug!"

Their eyes met. Czoë could not bear any more the effort of making it a friendship, and he grasped Sug tightly by the hand with his trembling hand. Sug's eyes were excited.

"Sug!"

She made no answer. "Shall I speak to you?" Still she made no answer.

"Sug! Can our love ripen even now?"

Sug softly covered her eyes with her long eyelashes.

The painful and very sorrowful expression passed by in a moment, but Czoë was gazing at her, trying to find the clear eyes of her virginhood.

"I am rubbish; I've only the ashes left in me."

"Ashes?"

"Though you may kindle it, the flame will soon die away!"

Sug's eyes became dim. Her lips changed into grey again, as if carrying the pain of her heart.

“Mr. Czoel! I am a disabled person who has lost her normal human life. But don’t blame anyone or complain of others. I am a perfect defeatist who has no intention of doing that.”

Sug poured out her tears, her hand held in bondage by Czoel. Now the moon was no longer to be seen. She saw in front of her, the illusion of a woman committing suicide by hanging herself by her neck by a rope which was fastened to the long branch of a pine-tree. She saw the woman biting her tongue with her great pain become as motionless as a ‘stone Buddha fallen down.

It was nothing but an illusion, but she shook and trembled as if waking from a bad dream which might symbolize her own end.

“Mr. Czoel! It’s very late. Let’s go down!”

“Yes, we have been forgetting the time!”

Czoel was obliged to stand up, and he dusted the earth from his trousers. They went down the mountain path for a while.

“Mr. Czoel!”

Sug stopped her steps, and called to Czoel. Czoel made no answer.

“Mr. Czoel! Do not laugh. I’ll recite my favourite ‘sizo’, a sonnet!”

Czoel kept silent.

“I read this in an old magazine, and learned it off by heart.

Planning for ten years, a house I built,

Fresh air occupies the half, the moon the rest.

No room for mountain and river, they’re to be around.

“That is how it goes. You’re a modern poet, and you will laugh at me who prefer such classical poems. I’ve nothing to rely on nowadays, so I recite this often.”

A sad smile showed round Sug’s wet eyes, as if she were lonely.

It was a traditional poem, orally transmitted through the people for four or five hundred years. When Czoel listened now, on the moonlit mountain side, to this native Korean poetry which he had carelessly ignored, he was attracted by a strange feeling, like nostalgia, as if something were choking his heart. The feeling of self-indulgence was more than he could bear, and he gave a deep sigh. He began to walk ahead.

“Let’s go down! Watch the path!”

A big rock stood in their way as they came down the slope. The path crossed over the rock, the small winding path with acacia on both sides which led down into the valley. On this path, cast by the moon light, were the shadows of a man and a woman, walking slowly.

The moon, floating high, scattered her blue colours on the mountain path.

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