

THE PACK HORSE DRIVER

by Gye Yong-Mug

Ūng-Pal stooped his horse. He held the reins in one hand and stared at the other, which he held outstretched.

A silver fifty-zōn coin gleamed on his sweaty palm. He had been clutching it so tightly that a round mark which was slow to disappear remained on the two fingers that had been touching the coin. Ūng-Pal gazed at it and opened his round lips that were ringed by a shaggy unkempt beard. He did not touch the coin.

"I.. I've hung on to it so tightly, so it sh-shouldn't sl-slip away!" he stuttered excitedly, and he smiled with self-satisfaction at not losing the coin.

He had earned the money today by driving his horse for a bridegroom. For the first two and a half miles or so of the return journey he had said the same thing perhaps five times already, There remained two and a half miles before he arrived home, and so he might well repeat it half a dozen times more.

He could never put anything important in the pockets of the left and right sides of his overcoat. If the thing were not in his hand, he could not feel easy in his mind about its safety. If he could feel it touching his skin, he knew it had not left him. Yet such caution did not always help him. One day he had received a fifty zōn coin for taking a man on his horse and had come home clutching it in his hand, but when he stopped the horse and looked at his hand he could not find it. A few minutes previously he had relieved himself, and he must have lost it when pulled up his trousers. He realised that that must have been how he had lost it, yet even after that he still would not put money in his pocket. He always held it in his hand and kept looking at it constantly.

For all his cautious nature, however, he was strangely reluctant to suspect other people. He wanted to trust everybody. He could not even dream that anyone could speak ill of him. He believed that other men were honest because he was so honest himself. And this too had brought him no good. For it had led to his losing his wife to another man and to his being obliged to wander about the country like this driving a pack horse for hire.

Ten years previously Ūng-Pal had never been obliged to go to others to borrow rice. He owned some fields, though they were not extensive, and he had inherited some property from his parents, so that he could work with his own hands and was not so poor that he could not live reasonably. But after he had married things gradually became harder for him. A few years later another man took his wife and all his property from him quite unexpectedly. It was just like a horrible nightmare, and he fell into despair and did not know what to do. The real cause of his misfortune was that he had trusted his wife. But she was a double dealing woman and had laid her hands on everything he earned. She just performed her wifely duties in a formal manner and considered privately that her husband was not as clever as other man. She had a lover in secret, and from time to time she gave him money. In the end she stole her husband's seal and ran away after transferring the legal ownership of his fields and house to herself.

So poor Ūng-Pal wandered hither and thither Like a beggar and in the end he

was taken on by his present master, Zin Czo-Si. Despite all his heartbreaking experiences he was still willing to put his trust in others. He felt bitter towards the man who had actually wronged him, but he did not lose faith in other men because of him.

He was extremely trusting, and this money of which he took so much care as to carry it in his hand, he entrusted to his master Zin Czo-Si in the same way as he had in former days confidently placed it in his wife's hands. His share he entrusted to his master with all confidence and not a hint of suspicion, feeling that it was safer there than in his own hands.

"Ah, one th-thousand and seventy won, and a little m-more!" Ûng-Pal had already entrusted to Czo-Si for safe keeping one hundred and seventy wôn, and with the addition of the present fifty zôn it came to one hundred and seventy wôn and fifty zôn. As his savings increased in this way, they would eventually amount to a considerable sum, and with so much money he would be able to get himself another wife. With these dreams in his mind he gazed once again at the coin he had clutched so tightly in his hand, and he urged the horse on with clicks of his tongue.

It was getting dark when he got home. As he went into the stable, the last red evening glow shone on the rooftop. Czo-Si opened the window and looked out with smiling face. "How much did you get today?" he called.

"Only f-fifty zôn !"

Ûng-Pal fastened the reins in the stable and went over to the reception room. He opened his hand and the money fell down on to the mat, as wet with sweat as if he had been ill with a fever. Czo-Si was quite accustomed to Ûng-Pal's strange behaviour, and he picked up the money without taking any notice of it. Then he entered it in his account book. But no one knew whether he really entered the amount or merely pretended to. Czo-Si always said that he kept a careful record of the money so that it could be used some time in the future to pay for Ûng-Pal's wedding, but in his heart he was scheming quite differently.

Czo-Si had several good reasons for employing a man like Ûng-Pal who was below average intelligence. He employed him because he could pay him much lower wages and work him as hard as he liked.

When he had taken him on, he found he was more suited to his purpose even than he had suspected. Ûng-Pal seemed to him the sort of man he need not pay any wages at all and merely use as a tool to make money for himself.

So Czo-Si tried to please him as much as he could. He decided to give him three sôm of unhulled rice a year, and his wages were to be deposited with him for safe keeping so that when the time came a woman might be procured for him. So he pretended to be sympathetic to Ûng-Pal, poor man that he was, making vague promises that he would arrange a marriage for him some time in the future, and at the same time he hired out his horse to him to do as he pleased with. So whenever Czo-Si's friends needed the horse, they had to pay Ûng-Pal. And Ûng-Pal entrusted this money to Czo-Si for safe keeping and had every confidence in him.

This was Czo-Si's most obedient servant, the like of whom was never seen in the world. In all those six years he never once disobeyed his master. He worked hard all the time except when he was away driving the horse. Latterly Czo-Si had begun to cultivate a rice field of some four or five thousand pyông, and had Ûng-Pal work in it. He managed it well enough and still did as his master asked.

So Czo-Si thanked his lucky stars that he had got such a worker as Ûng-Pal and took care not to hurt his feelings. He often went out of his way to joke with Ûng-

Pal within certain limits that were not displeasing to him so that they could laugh together and their relationship might be less formal.

But rightly or wrongly it is human nature to be jealous of the happiness of others. The villagers often criticized Ûng-Pal to his face. "You fool!" they would say. "You are working for nothing. Even if there were millions entered in the account book, they wouldn't be money, would they?" They said this because Ûng-Pal was never paid a penny for all his hard work.

Ûng-Pal had always had an unusual trust in other people, but such criticism made him feel uneasy. So of late, whenever he handed his money to Czo-Si, he used to ask, "How much does it come to now?" and he would repeat the amount softly to himself so that got it by heart.

Czo-Si perceived a change in Ûng-Pal's attitude. To please him he would tell him the amount when he had entered it in the account book, before he was asked. So as soon as he put down his writing brush he said with a smile, "It's now one hundred and seventy wôn fifty zôn. There's a pretty woman starting to appear, isn't there? Ha, ha, ha ... "

"I-I know, very well. One hundred and s-seventy wôn and f-fifty zôn, isn't it?"

Ûng-Pal had already got the figure by heart as he was driving his horse home. He spoke to show how proud he was that he knew it already. He knew that he was right, but he still repeated it softly from force of habit, and then went out.

Czo-Si was alarmed to see that Ûng-Pal knew the exact figure. He was afraid that it would do him no good if the villagers got to hear of it and it was spread about from mouth to mouth. So from time to time he asked Ûng-Pal what the figure was. He expected that he would have forgotten, and he pretended to be reminding him.

"You cannot read, so you had better record it in your brain."

"Oh y-yes. One hundred and s-seventy wôn and f-fifty zôn isn't it?"

"That's right. You mustn't forget it."

Czo-Si advised him not to forget it, but in his heart he sighed at Ûng-Pal's clear memory.

Now, Czo-Si had a plan. It was not a new idea. He had worked it out long ago, and now he decided to put it into operation in haste. It was that he should marry Sam-Wôl, his maid-servant's daughter, who had been brought up in his house, to Ûng-Pal. In this way he could confuse the sum under pretence of wedding expenses.

Generally speaking, when a maid servant grows up and marries she goes away. If this marriage were successfully arranged, however, he could keep Sam-Wôl, who was a rather pretty girl, from going away.

Ûng-Pal appeared to have been making advances to her, and there could be no reason why he should not be satisfied too. If all went well, he would be able to keep the two of them in his house forever, and they would be settled too. It was not customary for servants to be allowed to leave their master's house until they had a daughter of marriageable age. Even though they might wish to leave his house, they would not seek to do so until the daughter who might be born to, them was at least ten years old. Since Ûng-Pal was over fifty, this meant that they would stay with him always.

With this idea in his mind Czo-Si said quietly to Ûng-Pal one day.

"I've found you a nice woman. I must get you married soon. How can you bear to remain a widower so long? You must be very lonesome."

"Of c-course. P-please I-let m-me g ..get m-married."

Ûng-Pal too had been secretly looking for a girl, for he thought that he had

enough money to get married. So his master's words pleased him very much.

"I've been looking around since last year, and I've found a girl who would be most suitable for you."

"W-where is she, this g-girl?"

"She is Sam-Wôl. I wondered who would be the lucky man who got her, and now you are going to marry her, you know."

Ûng-Pal was taken aback at this. He rolled his eyes wildly and said nothing. Czo-Si had expected him to be very pleased with the suggestion and could not understand why he looked so dubious. He said no more and just watched him.

"W-what! You ... You m-mean Sam-Wôl, do you?" Ûng-Pal asked as if he did not believe his own ears.

"She's very clever girl, isn't she? A girl's got to be pretty. You know her yourself, don't you? She's very modest too, don't you think?"

"You mean S-sam-Wôl, d-do you?"

"Yes, I do mean Sam-Wôl!"

"I-I don't want Sam-Wôl, indeed!"

"Do you mean to say that you don't like Sam-Wôl?"

"Who w-would t-take a p-pretty g-girl I-like that?" he said and shook his head. He seemed to hate the girl. He was quite ready to trust in men, but the thought of taking such a pretty and coquettish girl had never entered his head. There was a bitter taste in his mouth. His former wife who had deceived him and run away was witness to the fact. The villagers had made jokes about her when they had met in the evenings, though he had not taken it seriously, for he thought that they were merely empty jests. Afterwards, however, he found that they found her coquettishness attractive. As the proverb says, there is no tree that will not fall if you but make ten assaults on it. She had in the end deceived him, pretending to love him, but with quite different thoughts in her mind. He was sure that the sorcery of her beauty had been the cause of it all, and so he no longer thought of taking a beautiful woman for his wife. He felt that a woman who was not pretty, was slow of speech, and had a rather broad and flat face and coarse skin and nondescript hair would remain a wife for ever, and he longed for such a girl. He had occasionally made advances to Sam-Wôl, but they were merely a normal widower's reaction to a girl, and he was not really attracted by her at all.

"Ûng-Pal, please take the dinner into the room," was Sam-Wôl's usual request to Ûng-Pal, and her flirtatious eyes seemed to smile, though in reality she did no such thing. They were more attractive than his wife's eyes, that had so bewitched his fellow villagers, and he took them for lies in themselves. So he would not take Sam-Wôl, so attractive, so pretty, for his wife.

"Mr. Czo-Si, I-I like In-Ne, Old Magsôri's daughter, at Mr. Sô Maûl's."

Ûng-Pal had already marked down In-Ne as the most desirable of the village girls.

"What! That girl? The worst of the dregs!" cried Czo-si. "Do you know why she's still unmarried though she is over nineteen? The first requirement in a girl is prettiness. You mustn't set your eyes on that girl. You'd better change your mind, I assure you." Czo-Si really felt like this, he was not merely pretending.

"B-but I don't like p-pretty girls. I m-must s-set m-myself a good wife. I c-cannot live on her p-pretiness alone!"

"I don't agree with you. Listen to me! I'm right, I can tell you! I'll arrange for you to be married sometime this Spring. Let's just fix the date and have her hair

braided up. That's enough isn't it?"

Czo-Si made up his own mind in this way. He was afraid he might be overheard. Then he took the calendar from the top of the chest of drawers, and started to count the days on his fingers. "The fifteenth of the fourth month. It's a very lucky day." He coughed menacingly as if to indicate that the whole thing was irrevocably fixed and that further discussion was unnecessary. He sat down and crossed his legs. He tapped the ashtray with his long bamboo pipe and let it be understood that the problem was settled.

From that moment Ûng-Pal lost his enthusiasm for hard work. There were various jobs that he should have finished quickly, such as roofing, fence repairing and the like, so that he could get on with carrying fertilizer to the rice-field. But in his disappointment because Czo-Si was forcing Sam-Wôl on him as his wife quite against his will, he could not bring himself to do these jobs. And at the same time, he could not look at Sarn-Wôl with his usual feelings. He felt his hair grow chill and his eyes seemed to stand upright.

Meanwhile it seemed that Sam-Wôl had heard of the arrangement, for she seemed more bashful towards him than usual and seemed to turn all her charms on him, but with sorcery and poison behind her apparent modesty. He felt that if all her varied attractions curled their tails around him, he could not escape the same hell that his first wife had brought him to.

He no longer felt towards Sam-Wôl as a widower would, and he felt chilled as if cold water had been poured down his back or as if he had seen afar a monster that he must at all costs avoid.

One day Sam-Wôl said to him, " Ûng-Pal, will you please bring some reeds for the fire?"

But Ûng-Pal merely poured abuse on her. He could not help it.

"You n-nine-tailed fox!" he screeched, "Are your wrists b-broken? You miserable girl!"

In her turn Sam-Wôl got very angry. "Well, you ugly sight! Who said you could take the purse of insults with you? You disgraceful man!"

Sam-Wôl glared scornfully at Ûng-Pal, the cold whites of her eyes gleaming. Ûng-Pal replied with rising indignation, "You, you accursed woman, what did you say?"

"Can't you say anything without abusing me?"

"Look at the witch! You'd answer me back, would you?"

"Oh what a cur you are! To scorn a woman so!"

"You wicked woman! Who do you mean?"

"Please bring in the reeds for me."

Neither Ûng-Pal nor Sam-Wôl would stop talking. They faced one another and quarrelled, one drawing breath sharply and the other roughly, Czo-Si tried to calm them down.

"Another cock-fight, eh? When a man and wife quarrel it's just like cutting water, isn't, it?"

He wanted to settle the matter amicably, but he expressed himself slyly like this, just as if they had been married already. But Ûng-Pal was not persuaded by his advice. He was to be sure grateful in his heart to Czo-Si for being so sympathetic towards him and for trying to get him Sam-Wôl for his wife because she was a pretty and modest girl. He did not guess Czo-Si's cunning scheme. He could not, however, bring himself to live with Sam-Wôl, however hard he tried to follow his master's

advice, when he thought of the sort of woman he would be getting as his bride and that he would have to spend the rest of his life with her.

Then on the other hand he could not forget In-Ne, old Magsôri's daughter, at Mr. Sô Maûl's house. He longed for her constantly. Her rather dark complexion, her broad flat face, her big mouth that seemed to split her face in two when she laughed- he did not find her attractive for her colour or sex, but he was sure that a girl with features like hers would never deceive her husband. So whenever he longed for such a woman for his bride, he could not but long for In-Ne. He wished he could marry her, and he often planned his home with her while he was working, whenever he had a chance to think of it. He thought with a smile that he would be able to have a much more attractive and pleasant home with her than he had had with his first wife.

"My money was one hundred and s-seventy wôn and fifty zôn, w-wasn't it?"

Ûng-Pal checked the amount of his savings with Czo-Si with the intention of getting it back before the fifteenth day of the fourth month so that he could use it to buy out In-Ne.

"Yes, you mustn't forget it."

"F-forget it? Of course not. Let me have it now."

Czo-Si was taken aback at this sudden request for the money. He stared at him open-mouthed.

"M-money, m-my money, give it all to me, mow, please, master!"

"What! Are you out of your mind? Why you owe me two hundred wôn for getting Sam-Wôl for you, so you are still about thirty wôn short. You can't ask me for it!"

"W-what! Who said I was going to take Sam-Wôl?"

"What do you mean? The wedding is fixed for the fifteenth of the fourth month, isn't it?"

"I don't want Sam-Wôl, I tell you. I'm g-going to m-marry another girl. You know!"

"No, no, you can't do that. I've been working for your marriage for five years or more. All the village knows that. If you marry the wrong girl, whom will the people criticise? They will blame me, me, I tell you. I've found a clever girl for you at last. If you go and take a different one, then I cannot give you the money. Of course I can't. I'd give you the money only to earn abuse, wouldn't I? If I refused Sam-Wôn for you, then you could get someone else, couldn't you? You had better think it over again."

"I-I'm going to marry In-Ne, I told you. Please give me back my one hundred and seventy wôn fifty zôn."

Ûng-Pal persisted in his demands every day, but Czo-Si refused to listen to him. Time passed, and now a few days only remained before the fifteenth of the fourth month. If he failed to get the money back in the next few days, Sam-Wôn would be his, and he would have to move into a room in the hengnang or gatehouse and live with her. Then the shameless Sam-Wôl would behave as his wife. It was clear to him that, if that happened, then his six years of patient toil as a farm hand would be sacrificed to the conceit and witchery of Sam-Wôl.

At last he got an idea. It was to steal the money. It was unlikely that he would get it any other way. It was a foolish plan, but he felt that it would not really be stealing, for it was his own money and at his disposal. He felt he had a right to take it, and it could not be considered a crime; and even if it were stealing, his motives would be understood at once, and so it could never be considered a crime at all.

Once he had got this idea into his head, he watched eagerly every night for a chance of stealing it.

One night he could not sleep though he was tired out by a whole day's work in the fields, and under the quilt he turned his mind to the problem of finding an opportunity when Czo-Si fell asleep. He knew of old that Czo-Si habitually slept long and sound when once he fell asleep, but up till the present he had not dared to carry out his plan. Now he heard in the darkness the sound of Czo-Si snoring, and he determined to act. He had been rather worried about the problem of opening the locked cupboard, but tonight he remembered that he had been with Czo-Si that day when he sold some unhulled rice and that the money that he had received was still in his pocket. So he decided that it was now or never.

He threw his quilt aside and got up, holding his breath. With great care he crept on his hands and knees near Czo-Si's head and took the bulging brown envelope from his pocket where he had seen it in the daytime.

Next morning the theft of the envelope was reported, and suspicion fell on Ûng-Pal as the most likely culprit, seeing that he slept in the same room.

Ûng-Pal had only one regret. It was that he had not had enough time to put the rest of the money back after he had taken the sum that he claimed from the envelope. He wanted to divide the money in Czo-Si's presence, but it seemed unlikely that he would keep silent about the matter. So he took no notice of his suspicions and kept the envelope for himself.

He was lighting a fire in the fireplace in the detached house when a black shadow appeared in the doorway. It was a policeman.

"I-I'm not guilty!" he cried. "I only want one hundred and seventy wôn and fifty zôn, and I will return the rest. That's the right amount, it is, Sir. One hundred and seventy wôn and fifty zôn is my money."

His voice trembled and he clutched the fire-stick.

"It's - it's true, sir. One hundred and seventy wôn and fifty zôn is my money, sir. It's m-mine, mine, it is, sir!"

But the policeman was busily tying his hands together. He bound them tightly and then took hold of the knotted rope, that hung on his back like the reins of a packhorse and drove him out of the gate.

Though Ûng-Pal knew that he was being taken to the police station, he had no idea why he was to be taken there, and he felt as if he was in a dream in which he did not know whether he had committed a crime or not.