

SONATA APPASSIONATA

by Gim Dong-In

The reader may imagine that the story which I am about to tell happened somewhere in Europe or may happen in Korea as it may be some tens of years in the future. Such a thing may have happened somewhere on earth, it may be happening now, or it may happen, in the future. It is possible, certainly—that is ruff the reader needs to know.

He may think of the hero of my story, Bêg Sông-Su, as someone called Albert, or Jim, or Mr. Ho, or Mr. Kimura, as takes his fancy, but he should recognize this as happening on the stage of the human world, with a man as the hero.

With this preamble. I begin my story.

"Do you know that it is what we call "chance" that may ruin a man, or ensure his success?"

"That is not a new problem. It needs no specific thinking about." "Well, suppose there is a shop here. Just when it happened to be empty, with neither master nor assistants in, a gentleman happens to pass by—suppose the gentleman to be a good man, who has property and fame enough. When he peeps into the shop, this sort of thought may cross his mind: 'The shop's quite empty, so a thief may break in; he could steal without anyone noticing. Why is the shop empty like this?' With these thoughts he may, what shall I say?, he may pick a tiny thing, something quite unimportant, which no one would covet, and put it in his pocket, because of some unexpected psychological abnormality in him, may he not?"

"Yes"

"Such a thing could happen, I am sure."

It was a summer afternoon. On the bank of a river on the outskirts of a city, two old gentlemen were having this conversation. The man who was insisting on the "theory of chance" was Mr. G., a famous music critic, and his listener was a social education advisor.

"Will such a thing happen?"

"It has, I think. But suppose a case like this. Who would be responsible for it?"

"Well, there is an Eastern proverb which says 'Do not fasten your shoes in a melon-field!'. Won't the gentleman be responsible?"

"If that is the way you think, there can be no question; but the gentleman was, I should say, a good man, and what would you think if there had not been such an odd chance, when he would never have dreamed of doing that?"

"Hm .. "

"In other words, crimes are created by chances. An invisible being, chance may not be brought to punishment, so the gentleman will be taken as an offender. Is that right?"

"Yes"

"One more example for you—a man's genius may conceivably never be revealed if no chance is offered to it. What, then, would you think of chance? Would you curse it, or be thankful for it, if it enabled a man to display his genius and his kleptomani at the same time?"

"Yes I see."

"Do you know a man called Bêg Sông-Su?"

"Bêg Sông-Su? No, I've never heard of him."

"A composer, who ... "

"Yes, I remember him. Do you mean the man who composed the famous Sonata?"

"That's right. Do you know where he is now?"

"I don't know. I've heard that he is mad, I think, but ... "

"Yes, he is now locked up in a lunatic asylum. I'll tell you his career. Please let me have your opinion on it, as an adviser on social education."

"The father of this Bêg Sông-Su, of whom I am going to tell you, was also a composer of great genius. He was a classmate of mine, and he had already shown enough genius while still at school. He was a student in the department of Musical Composition. He often composed tunes and played the piano alone late at night, which used to wake us up unexpectedly. We used to be shocked by the wild rhythms which were to be heard during the night. He was a wild man. When he was displeased, his fierce character often even made him strike his teachers. There were few public houses or their proprietors that were not attacked or whipped by him. This barbarism of his appeared in abundance in his music, and it made his art more splendid.

"But after his graduation from school, his wildness developed in a different direction. Wine and women! He was a terribly heavy drinker. From morning till night and from night till morning, the wine-cup never left his mouth. He misbehaved towards women when drunk, was detained by the police, and then, when released, did the same again.

"Composition of tunes? What should he care? After drinking wine, he often played improvised tunes at the piano, pleased with his drunkenness. I think now that there was a haunting attraction which would enchant this human being, and he was a treasure house of wildness, such as is not to be found among composers since Beethoven, but then we were all bound up in our own ways, so that we never even dreamed of copying down and preserving the improvised tunes of a drunken man as they came out.

"We often advised him to refrain from drinking, but what effect could the advice of friends have on such a wild man?"

"'Wine? Wine is music!', he would say with a loud laugh and rush off to the public house.

"After seven or eight years he was quite ruined. When offered wine he would tremble. When he drank wine and got drunk, he would display his wildness. He would take hold of anyone he met and pour wine down his mouth. He did not mind where he slept at all.

"He was a rare genius, indeed! We often sighed for him because of his genius, but the world never knew that such a horrible genius existed.

"Meanwhile he had made a girl of a good family pregnant, but unfortunately he died of a heart attack before the child was born.

"That posthumous child of his is Bêg Sông-Su himself.

"We had only heard rumours about his birth, and after his father's death, we heard nothing of the child or of his mother. Perhaps I should say, all thought of his family left my mind.

"Now thirty years passed by.

"It is said that even mountains and rivers will change in ten years, so how can I relate all the changes of thirty years? Anyway, during those thirty years, I settled down completely. As you know, I am now known as G.—the leading music critic, am I not? They call me the leading authority among music critics, one whose word is supposed to be the final judgement in the appreciation of musicians. Many musical artists were brought up by me, and many got their reputations by being my pupils.

"It was one day in the early spring the year before last. I had made a habit of visiting a church at night and passing some important hours of the night in meditation there. The church stood alone on a hill, and while I was sitting quietly there, no sound was to be heard except of the wings of a dove which often woke up in surprise under the beams or of a tapping on the pillars. In other words, it was a gloomy building, which no-one would enter, even if paid to, except those with a queer temperament like mine. But it was a building where everything was provided, as nowhere else, for those like me, who like meditation. It was a solitary, gloomy room, where even some unknown, mysterious sounds could often be heard, and from time to time the whistling of a train could be heard. These were quite enough for me, and, furthermore, there was a piano in the church. Few churches had pianos, though organs were common, but it was rather interesting to play a piece whenever the feeling came upon me.

"It might have been after two o'clock that night. I was enjoying myself quietly in meditation, alone in the church, when suddenly I heard a noise down below. When I opened my eyes in surprise, flames of fire were leaping to the sky. I looked out and found a house down the hill on fire and people rushing about in a great tumult.

"I don't know how this sounds, but I must say that it was rather interesting to watch the fire from a spot not far from the scene. The rising flames, the spreading smoke, the flying ashes, the blackish pillars among them, the corpse of a house, and the noisy crowd of people—in a sense it was a poem or a piece of music. An artist may perhaps not blame Nero of Rome in olden times for playing his harp to himself while watching the fire.

"I also gradually became amused as I watched the fire. I thought vaguely that I would rather like to play an improvised tune in imitation of Nero while gazing unconsciously at the fire.

"At this moment the door of the church suddenly rattled open, and a young man rushed in as if he had been torn up by the roots. After staring around timidly, as if he had been startled by something, he went to the window on the opposite side, and, hiding himself there, looked out at the fire, so that he did not notice me.

"I couldn't move at all. He seemed to be an unusual person—an incendiary or a thief. So I kept myself motionless. He stood vacantly for a while and sighed out a long sigh. Then he dropped his two arms weakly and tried to step out, but when he saw a piano placed near him, he dragged up a chair and sat at the piano, do you see? Then I felt a professional interest and watched him to find out what he might do. He opened the lid of the piano and tested one note. After a minute he tested a few more.

"Then his breath began to come more quickly. He trembled, as if much excited with rough breathing, and suddenly covered the keys with his hands. He started the Allegro in C sharp minor.

"At first, I had watched him with slight interest, but from the moment when that Allegro was started, right till the end, my heart was quite excited.

"It was really a wild tune. It was too energetic, or too lacking in technique to be

called music. It was a sound which would make a man feel as gloomy as the bell at midnight, but at the same tune it was an expression of a horrible emotion, enough to cause the flesh to creep, like the howling of a fierce animal. O, the wild force, and the manly shouting, the suffering pain and hunger hidden under them, and the naive expression, without the petty tricks of technique.

"I sat down abruptly where I was, and, from the instinct of a composer, brought out the five-lined paper and a pencil from my pocket. My pencil jumped on the page of the music note-book to the tune of the piano as it was being played.

"Adversity suddenly started, hunger followed immediately, life like a dying ember, the feeling of oppression in the slow melody, the sudden madness, the following light tunes, outrageous laughter—thus it ended with the main theme. It was especially the feeling of oppression in it, hunger, and the impression of wildness from the furious flames of the fire, that made me imagine a barbarian who had never been influenced by civilisation.

"When the music ended. I was sitting there, my mind completely lost. A man who had had no discipline in music might think that the Sonata was nothing but an improvised piece, played by the genius of a man who had not received any orthodox instruction. In reality, it was a mixture of two contradictory rules, with no solution, even including some forbidden rules, and it lacked any plan of the scale, and so a bold, ignorant, free Sonata was created.

"It was at that moment that I recalled to my mind Mr. Bêg who had died of the heart attack some thirty years ago. If his music had been robbed of its orthodox elements and a barbarous wildness put in their place, it would have been the same as that of the musician who had just been playing in front of me. Such haunting energy and wild expression are hardly to be found among modern composers.

"I sat a while, absorbed in the Sonata, before I was able to stand up quietly; I went to the piano, and placed my hand on the pianist's shoulder. He had been sitting vacantly, as if had been tired by playing the piano, and now stood up in surprise and looked at me.

"'How old are you', was my first question. I was quite shocked to find that I could only ask him such a strange, vague question. He looked for a moment at my face, which was lit by the moonlight which shone through the high window, and turned his face away from me.

"'Are you not hungry?', was the second question which my mouth uttered. He stood up as if displeased, and then, after gazing straight into my face, said,

"'O, you're Mr. G., aren't you?'

"He took tight hold of me, and when I agreed with him, he continued, "I have often seen photographs of you."

"Then he weakly turned his face away from me.

"At that moment, as he turned his head, I saw his face for the first time in the moonlight, just for a second. I found there the countenance of Mr. Bêg, who had died thirty years ago.

"'What is your surname?'

" 'Bêg Sông-Su is . . . '

"'Bêg Sông-Su? Aren't you Mr. Bêg's son? Your father, who died before you were born. . . . '

" 'What? How do you know that?'

"'Ah! You are indeed the son of Mr. Bêg! You look just like him.

Your father and I were classmates. Ah! Like father, like son!'

"He gave a deep sigh, and dropped his head onto his chest.

"I took Bêg Sông-Su to my home that night. Though the music had broken all the rules, I could not let go what was so full of energy, passion, and wildness, and I asked him to play the tune on the piano again. The music which I had noted in the church a little while ago had only started when the Allegro was almost over, so I wished to copy the notes which had gone before.

"He sat at the piano and looked down. He tried to strike the keys, but, after recalling a few of the notes, he dropped his head. He tried five or six times, but the melody I heard was nothing but noise without regularity, wildness, energy, and that haunting quality were no more heard. There was only the ashes of emotion.

"I cannot do it properly', he said, dropping his head in shame.

"You have forgotten after only two hours?"

"I moved him aside, and sat at the piano in his place. I opened the notes which I had copied a while ago, and started to play from where I had begun to transcribe.

"Flames! Flames! Poverty! Hunger! Wildness! Energy! Oppression!

I myself became quite excited while playing them. To tell the truth, my eyes may have been shining at that time like those of a crazy man, and my face flushed with excitement.

"Instantly he rushed at me, pushed me aside, and sat himself at the piano.

"I fell from the chair, and looked at him from where I was. Having pushed me aside, he started reading the musical notes. Ah, his face! His breathing gradually became rough, and his eyes began to glow like those of a madman. Then, suddenly he threw the paper away, and his hands flashed to the keys like lightning.

"The scales of C sharp started again into a fierce Sonata. The power which would suffocate a man, like a storm or terrible waves. It was a fierce wildness, rarely to be found amongst modern musicians since Beethoven.

"Horrible and dreary starvation, suppressed emotion, the fierce flame springing out of this, terror, outrageous laughter—O! It was too suffocating, and I threw my hands into the air.

"That night he told me all his past in great excitement. This was his story.

"When his mother was pregnant with him, she was soon kicked out of her house. That was how her poverty started. But his cultured and clever mother was even willing to work for others, in order to bring Song-Su up without any trouble. She bought an organ, though not a good one, and played the lullaby of Schubert as he was going to sleep and gave him energy to pass the day, by playing the Second Waltz of Durante when he woke up in the morning.

"He tried, for interest, to play the organ, held to his mother's breast, when he was two years of age. His mother, when she saw him playing the organ, saved some money with difficulty and bought a piano with it when he was five years old.

"In the mornings, he heard the songs of the birds and of the leaves in the wind. His mother's love and the sound of soup boiling in the kitchen—all these seemed to him mysterious and dear, and sitting at the piano, he used to stroke the keys as he wished.

"In these circumstances, he went through the primary and middle schools, and his heart's desire for music was born. When he graduated from middle school, he was obliged to give up his further schooling for his mother's sake. He was employed in a factory. But as he was brought up under such a wise mother, he was able to avoid the corruptions that might be involved in an ordinary worker's life, and

he grew into a good man. The persistence of his hopes in music never decreased. Though he was not educated in a regular music school because of their poverty, he used to stand in front of gramophone records which were being played for passers-by in the streets, and his young heart soared up at the sound of the choirs in churches on Sundays. He never left the piano while at home. He often tried, out of his unusual emotions, to compose some music on the staff, but, unexpectedly, such high passion and hot excitement, when copied onto the paper, became dull and uninteresting melodies.

"Why? You will ask me why such as he, with such genius and passion, could produce only music as cold as ashes. I will answer that later.

"Ten years passed by—ten years of inspiration and disappointment, of hot passions and cold ashes, of extraordinary excitement and unexpected failure.

"His mother was soon attacked by a vicious illness. The money which he had saved with much difficulty soon vanished on private treatment and hospital expenses. The fund which he had built up for a regular higher grade education when he could get around to it was all spent on his mother. But her illness never seemed to get better.

"One day, the summer before he met me in the church, his mother's condition became grave with no hope of recovery. But by this time he had no money left.

"On that morning, leaving his mother in a critical state alone at home, he went to earn his money at the factory. But he felt uneasy while at work, and so he returned home during the day. By then, his mother had already begun to lose her reason. He was greatly shocked and rushed out of the house. But where? For what? He ran out of the house without purpose, and, after a little hesitation, decided that he should call a doctor, and so directed himself in the appropriate direction.

"Then it happened. The so-called 'chance' to which I referred a while ago, appeared before him. It was a tobacconist's. The door between the shop and the room inside was closed, and there was no shop-keeper, and, fortunately no one in the street. There were some silver coins of 50 zôn, and some copper coins—two or three wôn altogether—on the box of cigarettes.

He did not know what he was doing. With a vague idea that he should have with him a sum of money at least for a taxi to fetch a doctor, he picked up the money at once, after a look around, and ran away.

"But he was caught by the owner of the shop who chased after him before he had got sixty steps. He made every sort of apology, and he appealed to him to excuse him for a time so that he could call a doctor for his mother who was in a critical condition. But it was all in vain, and he was taken to the police station, at last.

"From the police station to the prison—he was fuming, grinding his teeth for six months in which he had no freedom. And what was happening to his mother? In his extreme anxiety over her, he stamped his feet into the ground. If she died, how much she might blame him and call upon him as she lay dying. She had no-one who might bring even a spoonful of water to her mouth on her death-bed. When he thought of his mother, who would be waiting for him and thirsty, he was distraught, and himself panted for water.

"After half a year, he was released into the bright world and visited his thatched cottage, but he found another man occupying it. They said that his mother had died half a year ago on the day when he had stolen the money. As she breathed her last, she crawled out into the street, calling her son's name, and breathed her last outside in the street, they said. He visited the village graves on the hill, but he

could not tell which was which.

"Thus he wandered on, aimlessly, and, on that day he rushed into the church, looking for a place where he might sleep."

Mr. G., who had been telling this story, suddenly stopped what he was saying, and, pulling out a Madras pipe from his pocket, began to smoke. He went on:

"Could you find anything unreasonable in the story which I have told so far?"

"Mm!"

"Then I shall ask you first, Bêg Sông-Su was such a genius; then why was the Sonata Apassionata—I named the Sonata of that night, the Sonata Appassionata—so exciting and moving before when it was played, yet why did it become so very weak a melody when once it was reproduced in musical notation?"

"Well, perhaps the excitement of the latter occasion was less than that of the time of playing."

"Is that your interpretation? It is a possible one, but I do not interpret it like that."

"Then how do you interpret it?"

"Rather than explain my point of view, I will show you a letter I have had from Bêg Sông-Su. Are you not too busy to-day?"

"No, I am not."

"Then, will you just come home with me?"

"Yes, I will."

The two old men stood up.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they got to Mr. G's house, which was situated just between the city and the suburb.

The two of them sat in Mr. G's study.

"This is the letter, which reached me from Bêg Sông-Su a few days ago. Please read it for yourself!"

Mr. G. took out a long bundle of letters from the drawer and offered it to the other, who took it.

"Now, start reading here. The lines before are meaningless greetings."

"... and I was going around on that day too, to find a house where I might pass the night. I happened to come in front of the shop where I had stolen the money. It was quiet all about in the dead of night, and, as I was trying to find some place to sleep around there, I suddenly thought of a terrible revenge on that place. But for this shop or if I had been given four or five hours only, I would not have had my poor mother crawl out into the street and die there outside. It was because of that house that I could not even find her grave and was so unfilial that I had not even once presented flowers. So, unable to contain these feelings, I set fire to the straw stack, which was piled up in front of the house. I stayed there until I saw the fire move to the house, and then I suddenly ran away in fear.

"After a little while, I turned back and saw that people had already begun to gather there. At the time my mind was full of an exultation and the idea of running away. I ran to the church which was in front of me and rushed into it to hide myself. I watched the scene until the fire died down, and, as I thought of coming out, I happened to see the piano.

"You see!", said Mr. G. to other who was reading the letter, "Though he had extraordinary passion and excitement, they were not fully expressed. The reason for this is that his mother was an honest woman and had devoted herself to his education since his childhood. She brought him up to be as good as possible.

Because of this good education, the furiousness and wildness bestowed on him by Nature could not find any outward expression. This only is reason why his burning wildness, passion, and power, when recorded in musical notation, became very weak, like beer which has gone flat, is it not? The gentle and good education had hindered his genius from developing, I think."

"Mm!"

"This man, Song-Su, was denied all that while in prison, but the teaching of a man is never completely eradicated. Meanwhile, his wildness and fury returned to him unexpectedly in front of that hateful house, so he committed arson and hid in the church, where he gave full rein to his wild violence, and that Sonata Appassionata sprang from out of it. Soaring flames, horror-stricken cries of the people, the power of the fire, spreading over everything, having no regard for anything, these are the basic elements of wild exultation. Do you understand? Then start reading the letter again here!"

"... I recollect the day vividly now in my mind. I feel tears in my eyes now when I remember the scene, when you played my Sonata Appassionata yourself, in spite of your old age, before all those musicians whom you had invited in order, to introduce me to the world.

"Some of the women guests lost their heads at that time, and who will deny that this was due more to your excellent playing than to the Sonata itself? Then you led me in front of them and introduced me as the composer of the Sonata Appassionata and the posthumous child of that rare genius, Mr. Bêg, who had left us thirty years ago. How can I forget the exultation which ran through me when you introduced me like that?

"After that, you fixed a room for me, and I liked it very much. In a large room facing North, were a strong bed, made of oak, in the South-East corner, a plain oak desk, a chair, and a piano in the North-West corner, and a big mirror on the South-West wall, the only decoration. The big, wide room was so terrible that its haunted atmosphere would make one's flesh creep when one sat alone under the lamplight at night. The room was all painted in black, and there was an old pagoda tree standing in the room, which gave it its haunted quality. You tried to make me produce some free, reckless music.

"How I tried to produce such music under those circumstances! One day, when I asked you for some systematic training for musical composition, you answered.

"You don't need such instruction. Express yourself as you wish! If any regular training were to influence you, your music would be mechanical, and the result would be bad. So you had better compose as your mind dictates, without all rules and regulations."

"I could not understand clearly what you meant by this, but I had a vague idea of your purpose. So I tried to develop my music, giving it free scope, as best I could. But the pieces I produced at that time were the same as those I produced while my mother was still living, and they were nothing but "playing at music", with no power at all. How nervous I used to be! You sometimes chased me up and made me more nervous! The more nervous I was, the weaker the music I produced.

"I often recalled to mind the scene of that burning fire, and tried to repeat the exultation which I had experienced at that time, but it was all in vain. After putting down the musical notes inspired by my unusual passion, I read them again a few hours later and found them to be only feeble conceptions.

"My heart gradually became gloomy, and I felt sorry for you, who had had such expectations of me.

"Music is not a handicraft; it cannot be produced every time you may wish to make it. So relax, and try again, when you get the inspiration!"

"This advice with which you soothed me sounded sharp enough to cut my flesh. But it seemed that I would never again have the chance to produce a powerful piece of music.

"So three months in which I did nothing in particular, passed by.

"One night, at midnight, my head felt too heavy and full of something which gave me great pain, so I went out to take a walk. I was wandering about aimlessly, my head, heart, and legs heavy, when I happened to find a stack of straw somewhere.

"I do not know how I can explain how my mind worked at that moment. I was strained and excited, as if I had met some enemy. I looked around once, and then, rushing to the pile of straw, I set fire to it. Then I was suddenly horrified and ran away. When I looked back from a distance, the flames had already spread. I heard the noise of people shouting. I went back to the place again and amused myself as a sightseer of the scene of the straws being hurled up by the terrible flames and the other houses near the straw pile being broken down. I was suddenly excited and returned home.

"The Angry Waves' was composed that night.

"Since then, several unexplained fires which have broken out in the city, had been made by me. Every night a fire broke out, I composed a piece of music. I felt very gloomy for several days together, and then things would suddenly go worse—it felt like indigestion, making me uneasy—and I would have to walk out in the streets. On such nights, arson was committed, and music was produced.

"But as this was repeated again and again, my interest in fire was gradually reduced in inverse ratio to the number of fires. The cruel flames of the fires, forgiving nothing, could not stimulate my mind as much as before.

"It is gradually becoming weaker."

"It was at that time that you criticised my music. But I could do no better, and so was obliged to leave music alone."

When the other had read the letter thus far, Mr. G. interrupted. "Fires did break out between spring and autumn last year, without anyone knowing the causes, didn't they? They were all started by Song-Su."

"And didn't you do anything about it, Mr. G?"

"I? I didn't realize what was happening. Almost three months had already passed by since he had come to my house, and to my surprise, he had never produced even one piece of a powerful tune, so, one night, as I was considering how I might give him something to make him excited, yonder, over there ...", Mr. G. pointed to the South window with his hand, "Over there, quite a way off, I saw that a fire had broken out. I thought that, if I showed it to Song-Su, he might recapture the same emotion as before (I did not know at that time that it was Song-Su who had set fire to the tobacco shop), and I was just going to his room, when I heard the sound of the piano being played there. I halted my steps and stood as if nailed to the spot. It was the same C sharp minor, omitting the first tune, and starting from the Adagio. There was the quiet, smooth sea, and the evening sun setting above the horizon, then these turned gradually into showers, rough waves, lightning, terrible winds, claps of thunder, ships capsizing, seagulls falling exhausted into the water—now a

change, villages being overwhelmed by the sea-flood, people shouting—from one excitement to another, from one exultation to another, from one wildness to another, all was terror and violence, floating before my eyes. So, old man that I was, I could bear it no longer, and shouted, without knowing it, 'Stop it, Please!' You can imagine the scene, can't you? Them. I went up to his room, and found him leaning against the piano, tired out after finishing his playing. The tune he had just played had already been noted down under the title of 'A:gry Waves'."

"Then do you mean that Song-Su got the inspiration for two pieces of music from two acts of arson?"

"Yes. Since then, he produced one piece every ten days, and now I realize that they were composed whenever the mysterious fires broke out. But, as he writes in his letter, the power and wildness soon decreased, so ... "

"Wait a moment! Didn't he produce 'Rythm of Blood', and many other famous pieces after that?"

"Yes, that's right. You may read more of the letter for the account of that. Please start reading again here."

"When I was walking across the bridge, my foot kicked something. I lit a match, and found that it was the corpse of an old man. I tried to run away in horror, but I turned back, and

"Will you understand the confession which I am about to make now? It was so strange that I could not believe it myself. I rode about on the corpse. I tore all the clothes off it and threw them away. Then I lifted the naked corpse up high, with a terrible force, which I could not believe to be mine, and threw it across the way. I rushed over to it, lifted it up again, and threw it back, like a cat playing with an egg. I did this a score or more times, until its head was crushed, and it was broken at the waist—the corpse became miserable to look at. When there was no spot left on it to touch, I felt very tired, and wanted to rest there a while, but suddenly I became excited, and rushed back home.

"The piece I produced that night, was 'Rythm of Blood'."

"Can you understand how his mind was working?"

"Hm!"

"Perhaps you may not. But it is a working of the mind at which an artist may nod. Read here, please!"

"It was a great shock to me when she died.

"I visited her grave that night secretly. I dug out the coffin which had been buried seven or eight years ago and took out the corpse.

"Her beautiful face, as she lay in the silver light of the moon, looked like that of an angel. The pale face, with tightly closed eyes, straight nose, and uncombed hair, the calm face, without any expression, was so dreary. While I was looking at this sight, I suddenly became excited—O! Please forgive me for not being brave enough to describe what followed! You will understand well enough if you read the court's protocol.

"The piece produced that night was 'The Dead Seoul' "

"How about that?", asked Mr. G.

"Hm!"

"How about it,"

"Hm!"

"Is it too absurd? It may seem so to you. Please read this as well!"

"So, finally, I reached the stage of murder. One piece of music was produced

every time a death occurred. So the few pieces produced since then each represent the life of one victim "

"Now you need not read any more. What you have read so far will have given you a general idea of Song-Su. I would like to have your opinion on it."

"Well "

"Come on! Your opinion!"

"My opinion on what?"

"If some chance led a certain person to commit crimes as well as discover his genius, should one curse that chance or be thankful for it? This Bêg Sông-Su committed all sorts of crimes—arson, insulting of a corpse, raping a corpse, murder and others. Our Artists' Association made all possible petitions to the Government and the Court on the grounds of lunacy, and he was put in the lunatic asylum, otherwise he should have been hanged ten times over, should he not? You will have seen from the letter that he was a gentle, clever, and modest young man in normal circumstances. But when he, what shall I say? became blind because of his bouts of excitement, he committed terrible crimes, and then produced splendid works of art, one after the other. In this case, should we condemn the crimes, or forgive them for the sake of the works of art they produced?"

"Well, isn't it better to create works of art without committing crimes?"

"Of course! But here we have someone like Bêg Sông-Su. How shall we decide the question in a case like this?"

"The crimes shall be punished! The increase in crime cannot be ignored."

"It may be so", Mr. G. nodded.

"But one may look at it this way, too, from an artist's point of view. Since Beethoven, music has gradually degenerated, and musicians can only admire flowers or women, or praise love, so that no strong melodies are to be found. In addition to this, there are strict rules of composition, which limit all the atmosphere of freedom in musical composition, just like the equations in mathematics. Under such restrictions, artistic creation will lose its meaning. Then human music will be purely a technique and cannot be art, unless a new development is introduced. It is sad for artists. Powerful art, strong art, art full of wildness—we waited for these for a long time. This was where Bêg Sông-Su appeared. To tell the truth, the works of art which have been produced by him during these years are the precious jewels which will light up human culture for ever. Arson, murder, some petty houses, and unworthy creatures—these would not be useless sacrifices for the creating of his art. Wouldn't it be a more serious crime to spoil a great genius, such as may not appear once in a thousand years or ten thousand years, on account of some crimes he may have committed, or to leave him under conditions, under which he could not create his art? That seemed to be the opinion of our artists."

Mr. G. took back the letter from the old man who was sitting before him, and put it in the drawer. Lit by the red evening sun, the tears in his old eyes were shining too.