

THE FORMER SPORTS-MASTER

by Ham Dê-Hun

1.

“Well, I will ask the Managing Director, but I am afraid you will have to be satisfied with this job.”

Czôl-Gu walked out of the door of the R Trading Company, and thought over what the head of the Executive Department had said to him a few minutes previously. In truth, he was in no position to pick and choose, but he had been rather ashamed to call on one of his former colleagues to ask for the humble post of doorman. But if he did feel any reluctance, it was due to recollection of his past pride at being an intellectual. It had no bearing on the present reality of hunger.

“Well, please do what you can help me.” So he had spoken objectly, blushing furiously, and he had been happy to be told that he should wait a week. It was like a cup of water in a desert. But when he recalled his attitude when, bowing from the waist, he answered, “All right, then, I’ll go home and wait till I hear from you,” he felt such shame that he could have jeered at himself.

But when he pictured in his mind his wife and two children waiting miserably in their rented room, he felt rather anxious even about a job like this. At the thought that he would have to go home without even the money to buy a box of rice, or ten zôn for a bundle of firewood, his eyelids grew hot and his heart beat faster at the prospect of hard-ship that lay before him, to say nothing of the need to face his family.

“Shall I call on Mr. K.?” he thought. He was walking towards ZongNo, the main street, when the smell of boiling meat steaming from a sôlnông-tang or rice-beef-soup restaurant, excited his empty stomach.

“I haven’t even got ten zôn ... “

Though he was well aware that he had no money, he felt so hungry that he searched every pocket, but not a penny could he find.

“Well, of course not”, He rubbed his empty hands with a sigh. “I wonder if I’ll get the job.”

His mind returned to this problem of getting a job. He thought he probably would get it, but he could not be absolutely certain. He was a little anxious about it, for the W School where he had taught and the R Trading Company belonged to the same organisation. On the face of it, it was most unlikely that the company would employ someone who had been sacked by another concern of this organisation. Yet at the same time he felt rather hopeful since it had been through no fault of his own, and so he thought that it would not matter much. Still, he was not quite sure that he would get the job. He had been out of work for two years, and he had looked everywhere for another job. He felt restless and unsettled.

“A former sports master!” he murmured sadly, He crossed the tram lines and walked towards Angug-dong. It was now six years since he had come from the country to enroll at the physical training college after he had graduated from high school. He had been full of high hopes.

“A sound mind in a sound body.” He was a firm believer in this Latin proverb,

and his aim was to bring inspiration to his fellow countrymen by strengthening their minds and bodies. So when he graduated after two years at the college, he took a post at his old school, and there he trained the pupils by new methods and trained himself in body and mind.

He was full of enthusiasm, conscientious, and devoted to his work, and he earned the respect of all the pupils, and his colleagues too, apart from some who were jealous, held him in high esteem. He soon inspired the whole school with enthusiasm for sport. He at once raised the standard of the baseball, football, tennis and basket-ball teams, which had existed in little more than name alone, and introduced swimming, mountaineering, table tennis and gymnastics. This enthusiasm for sport grew from day to day to such an extent that the W School almost seemed to be a college of physical training, and the standard of performance was steadily raised,

One cold and windy autumn the National Football Competition was held at the Seoul Stadium. The semifinals were played on the first two days, and on the third day the W. and M. High schools met in the final. The W School had the bad luck to concede two goals in the first half. This was not because they played badly but was entirely due to the goalkeeper's carelessness. He twice missed the ball as it flew towards the net. Then there was noisy outburst of barracking from the spectators who were not supporters of the school. "Change the keeper!" they bellowed. "Send the silly keeper off!" But his team-mates were sorry for him and, came up and patted him on the back. "It's the fault of us backs," they said. "We didn't do as well as we should have." And they made up their minds to win the day, but when the whistle blew for half-time the score was two to one in their opponents' favour. Then the W team went into a huddle, shoulder to shoulder, and planned their strategy for the second half. They encouraged one another and pledged themselves to victory.

After an interval of ten minutes the whistle blew for the game to be resumed. Both teams fought more stubbornly than in the first half. They fought as fiercely as wild animals. Then suddenly another mistake by the W goalkeeper conceded another goal. The spirits of M's supporters rose, and they cheered their team on with shouts and clapping and music. Their team was in high spirits. With only fifteen minutes left for play, they were exultant and confident of victory.

The W team were not in the least dismayed, they fought with determination from first to last. With only twelve minutes left they wrested victory from defeat and scored a goal, and a few minutes later another goal. All the spectators cheered the W team, and the roar of clapping rose to the sky. "He who laughs last laughs longest," someone shouted. Their play was now truly inspired. No longer did the ball fly through the air but was kept near their feet by well controlled passing. As they watched this thrilling struggle between the tiger and the dragon, the spectator's hands grew wet with sweat.

Now the M team conceded another goal, and with the score three all, the excitement rose to fever pitch. The M team's spirit wavered slightly, and they began to quarrel among themselves, complaining to one another of the keeper, or the halves, the backs or the wings. But the W team was more faithful to the game, such was their well disciplined teamwork. So when the final whistle sounded, victory was theirs.

The triumphant spirit of the W team overwhelmed the stadium and thundered to the sky.

"We are proud to have fought loyally to the end and not merely to have aimed

at victory. It is our basic principle that we play the game with true sportsmanship and not just for the sake of winning,” Czôl-Gu proclaimed with feeling, and all the heroes of the team bowed their heads in gratitude. It was true indeed that their success owed far more to the character training they had received from Czôl-Gu than to their technical skill. Unlike the other team, they had not vied in individual prowess, but they had all worked together for victory as a united team, which Czôl-Gu had taught them was real sportsmanship. So they strove loyally with mutual encouragement till the very end, even after victory was clearly theirs. And it was this ideal alone that brought them success. It was a spirit they understood very well, so much did they respect the training in sportsmanship they received from Czôl-Gu. And so sport at W School earned the reputation of being character training and not merely technical exercises for the sole purpose of winning games.

2.

Enthusiasm for sport at W School grew daily more intense, not only among the boys but the staff as well. And it proved to be an effective medium for organising the school as a unit and not for mere physical exercises. The teachers formed their own tennis and football teams, and in other sports as well. After school they would run to the athletic field to relax their minds wearied by the toil of the day, and afterwards they would sit resting and talk of the culture of Korea.

United in this way by the true spirit of sportsmanship, they seized the opportunities thus afforded to discuss their own ideas for the development of the culture of Korea. They played matches against the teachers of other schools and were thus able to meet on friendly terms and frequently discuss with them general social problems.

Unfortunately this sporting spirit, which might have inspired the pupils of every high school in the land with lofty ideals of character and might have brought all the teachers together on intimate terms and might have encouraged the exchange of ideas, foundered on the rocks because of the jealousy of one man. It was clearly a very big plot. So the pupils of the first, second, third and fourth year classes, all, in fact, except the fifth, went on strike in protest against it. They issued an ultimatum to the principal in the following terms:

(a) We refuse to attend the classes of Mr. R.

(b) We refuse to accept limitations on the periods allocated to sports and the cut in the sports budget.

Mr. R was the dean of the W School. He had taught there for more than ten years and was considered to be a model teacher. Moreover he was the type of an office clerk as he was related to the principal. He was also a very obstinate man, and it was a peculiarity of his temperament that he would stubbornly oppose anything that he did not agree with. So not only was he a model teacher but a cunning plotter who could start something and then overthrow it.

It was the disclosure of his plot that led to this strike in the school.

He felt bitter hatred for the sports master Czôl-Gu. It all sprang from his envy and jealousy. In all the fifteen years of his career as a teacher there had never been a time when his existence was so ignored as it had been since Czôl-Gu joined the staff. That was how he felt. Just two years previously, before Czôl-Gu came to the school, the owner of the school and the principal agreed that he was an indispensable member of the staff and, besides that, the boys all had complete confidence in him.

It was true that, but for the Dean, contact with the government authorities and the control of the teachers and the boys would have been difficult. But when the sports master came to the school, circumstances changed at once. The owner of the school, the principal, and all but a few of the staff and the boys were more interested in him. His vigorous personality, his methods of instruction, firm, yet pleasant, earned him popularity and the confidence of the whole school. He was devoted to the school. It was his honour and glory that he had developed the school, encouraged the teachers to be more friendly to one another and trained the boys so that they should become men of character imbued with this new spirit of co-operation, so that the whole community might live under one flag for this concentrated ideal. It was his aim to use the sporting spirit to bring all the people of Korea together, torn asunder as they were by partisan conflicts. To tell the truth, his ideals had already made progress among the boys and had even been communicated to the teachers. But now the Dean's plot lowered like a dark cloud over their sportsmanship.

To undermine the sports master's influence, which grew stronger every day, the Dean persuaded the owner and the Principal to reduce the sport budget and to limit the hours of physical training. He maintained that the pupils were too obsessed with sport to the detriment of their academic work, so that the percentage of passes in the University entrance examinations had suffered.

When this proposal was brought up at the teachers' meeting, Czôl-Gu insisted that it was not at all in accordance with the facts. He proved that the figures for University entrance the previous spring were rather higher than for earlier years. But he failed to convince the meeting. Those of his colleagues, too, who had agreed with his idea did not support him now, despite his being in the right. There were others who favored the Dean's proposal, and so he was obliged to bite his tongue and say nothing. "Traitors! Wretched materialists!" he cursed silently. What automatons, sitting there in silence, seeking safety in numbers and afraid to speak out for the principle they believed to be right! The worst were those cunning persons who supported the Dean, pretending that the principle that they thought right was wrong. It seemed to him that here he beheld in miniature the politics of Korea for so many years past, and this thought filled him with hatred and resentment. Tears streamed from his eyes. "So people can't do what is right!" he thought.

He went out of the school, beating his breast with his hand. He was angry that he should have lost when his ideas were right. There was no question of his losing his job, and so he went immediately to see the owner of the school and the Principal. He told them that sport did not interfere in the boys' studies as much as some people thought, and insisted that growing boys should not be kept at their books all the time but needed physical training too. They would not listen to him, however, and insisted that the Dean was right in his opinions.

He passed a few days thinking that this opinion could not be justified. Though it was the best season for sport, when the sky was clear and the wind fresh, the athletic field was deserted and the members of the teams scattered and nowhere to be seen. There was no way open to them to express their prowess. So the boys came to hate Dean R. They realised that the crafty Dean's cunning plot was responsible, and a few days before the examinations at the end of the second term, they went on strike.

The crafty Dean did not let this pass without comment. He announced that the strike had been contrived by the sports master and that it was directed against himself. He urged the owner and the Principle to dismiss Czôl-Gu. So by his sly

scheming, Czôl-Gu incurred the blame quite unjustifiably, and in the end he was obliged to resign his post.

He bade farewell to the boys and went home in tears and fuming with indignation. He shut himself in his house behind closed doors. From that moment he was faced with the problem of earning a living. It was indisputable that he was faced with destitution from the time his salary stopped, inadequate as it was, for he had no property or his own. The rice shop and the grocer where he did his shopping would allow no credit. Before long all his creditors came thronging to his house. Rent, his tailor, to whom he owed monthly payments for the clothes he had bought, his shoemaker, the water-rates, his newspapers—to pay all these bills he had to sell most of his furniture. Thus he managed to settle most of his debts.

Then he went to Gando in South-east Manchuria, with new ideas in his mind but he could not find much opportunity. He took a post in a school, but it was economically most unsound, and the staff were torn by partisan strife, and so he was unhappy there too. "Where there are Koreans, there is partisan strife," he sighed.

When he returned to Seoul, he had no money even to rent a room.

3.

A week passed, but he still heard nothing from the R Trading Company, as he had been promised. Every minute of that week he waited for the news, but he did not go to the office because he feared that if he went there too often he would only antagonise them. So he waited patiently till the 25th of March, which made just one week. He had still heard nothing from the company, so early next morning he went to the office. He waited outside the entrance for the head of the Executive Department to arrive, for he was afraid that if he went in and asked for him they might say he was out even if he was not.

For a while no one took any notice of him as he stood there by the door, but as he did not move, the doorman came and asked him, with an odd expression on his face, who he was waiting for. He answered that he was waiting for the General Manager, whereupon, the doorman murmured that he was away in the country, and he went inside again. Czôl-Gu was taken aback and was afraid that his quest might be hopeless, but he asked the doorman, when he was expected back He answered in a dull voice that he was expected in four or five days time.

There was nothing for it but to put up with the doorman's unsympathetic attitude, and he went home again with tears in his eyes, dragging his weary feet. His hopes were shattered, but he still went on waiting, for he thought that it was the only chance that remained to him of earning a living. So the next day and the next, and every day thereafter, he went to the office to see if the manager had come back, but he was always told that he was not in.

He went on like this until April, when the thick snow and ice melted, and the grass grew green, and the flowers bloomed. Sometimes he rang the office, and sometimes he went to the manager's house, but they always told him he was out and that he could not meet him yet.

With the coming of Spring, Czôl-Gu felt more desperate. The days passed as in a dream, and when he saw the carefree crowds of spring, and especially country parents taking their children through the streets to enter them at high schools, he grew more and more agitated. He felt very uncomfortable at going to the company. At the same time he could not bear to see his wife so pale and hungry and to hear his child asking for food in their tiny room of one gan. They had had nothing to eat for

three days. They had habitually gone without one of the three meals before, but now they could not have even one meal a day, for they had no way of getting food. Czôl-Gu could not bear to sit in the gloomy room, and he often walked the streets the whole day long,

One day he came home a little earlier than usual, and he was surprised to find his wife sitting with her hair neatly combed, and her face made up with powder and rouge, and dressed in bright silk. He stood in the doorway amazed at what he saw.

"Do come in," his wife called to him in more cheerful tones than he had heard before. But he could not reply, and still stood there.

"Why don't you come in? Don't you think I'm pretty today?" she said, but he still gazed at her dumbly. Even now he could not understand why she had done it, and he stared at his wife and the sudden change that had come over her.

"Why don't you come in? I've something special to ask you. Do come in."

Sun-Za his wife stood up and came over to him. She continued quietly, "Please forgive me. I would rather go out to work than starve like this. It would be better for us to have some food, and so I thought . . ."

Sun-Za told him that she had decided to take a job as a waitress in a bar. At her words Czôl-Gu fell down as if he had been struck by a thunderbolt. It was a tragedy indeed. However hungry they might be he would never send his wife to such degradation as working in a bar. At the very idea of it he felt himself lost as if his whole body had been wrapped in thick mist, and his feelings could not be expressed in words.

"A healthy mind in a healthy body" was his motto, and he had always lived up to it, and here he was sending his wife to the utter degradation and immorality of a waitress's life. In his wildest dreams he had never thought of such a thing. But since he could not earn a penny and his wife and child were starving, he could not stand in her way. He just sat there without uttering a word.

"I'll only be there in the evenings. I've nothing to do at home. At least we must earn our living, mustn't we? Please don't get wrong ideas about me. I promised I'd start today, so I must go now."

Sun-Za forced a cheerful expression. She opened the door and walked a few steps. Then she turned back and said, "Give Gab-Nyong his supper if he wakes up. I've left it ready."

She was wearing high heeled shoes he did not know she possessed, and she tripped lightly away from the house.

Czôl-Gu felt himself in the grip of a strange emotion and stared vacantly at Gab-Nyong's sleeping face.

His wife came back late, at about two in the morning. The first night she came home without a penny because she had been learning what to do. But the second day she brought one wôn, and two or three wôn a day thereafter.

This income of two or three wôn a day was untold wealth to them after the depths of poverty. When they had fat to put in their hungry stomachs and their dirty-clothes were changed for clean ones, their countenances brightened considerably. But Czôl-Gu's heart ached even more than it had done when he was hungry. He thought of his motto, 'A healthy mind in a healthy body' and the idea of possible immorality in his wife's job was quite unbearable. He felt the tears streaming from his eyes when he saw his child happily eating the meat and pure rice oblivious of its origin. There were times when he wanted to throw that rice away and that meat and those bowls. But he put up with them, biting his tongue and wiping his tears away

with his hands. They could now get rice by the bagful, charcoal by the sack and firewood by the cartload, so that they were really quite well off. But they still did not have enough money to buy a house, and the three of them had to live in one small room in a detached house belonging to another family, which made Sun-Za sigh, "Oh, for a hundred and fifty wôn ... " She had heard that this sum was needed as a deposit before one could rent a house. So she strove her utmost to save it up, for the detached house where they were living had no kitchen, and when the rain was driven by the wind, cooking was impossible. Moreover when she came home late, Czôl-Gu had to get the breakfast, and he felt very diffident about being seen by the neighbours washing rice, lighting the fire, and doing the cooking. But their income of only three wôn a day was not enough to meet all the demands of a family of three and at the same time provide Sun-Za with all the dresses, stockings and shoes demanded by her work. Moreover when summer came, there were fewer customers, and Sun-Za's earnings decreased accordingly, so that their income was still inadequate.

Sun-Za often wondered how she might increase her earnings. Considering the kind of job she had taken, then there was nothing to stop her receiving guests as the other waitresses did. She felt she was more attractive and beautiful than many, and so if she took this on, she could not fail to do as well as the rest. Even as it was, indeed, whenever she filled the customers' cups with wine or talked with them, or if she served some other table out of turn, they would say to her, "Let's hold hands. And afterwards, let's go home together, eh?" When they said this, they were usually pretty drunk, and they would press tips of two or five wôn into her hand. So she was sure that, if she gave them her body, she could get many times as much. She had heard that Eiggo, who was not very attractive or beautiful, could get a tip of ten wôn and be offered a pearl ring after only one night with a man. Thus her mind gradually strayed to a dark road.

Whenever such fancies crossed her mind she heard the firm voice of Czôl-Gu ringing in her ears:- "A healthy mind in a healthy body." She tried to put such ideas out of her mind, trembling all over as if she had awakened from a bad dream, and she served the customers with wine, singing her songs in her untrained voice. Then the customers, who did not know her situation, would try to put their arms around her waist and kiss her instead of taking the cup.

"Sun-Za is more beautiful today "

"Just take the cup, please."

And she would elude their grasp, shaking her head winningly like a child.

"I like Sun-Za best, she is so innocent."

Sometimes they would hold her hand and clumsily press their hot lips on the back of her hand. At first she had felt indignant and insulted by such behaviour on the part of the customers, but now she did not mind so much. She felt it was just their little joke, and she would push their heads away gently.

"You are naughty, aren't you?"

"Ha, ha "

The customers withdrew as gentle as lambs and drank their wine, singing happily.

Though men will fight as fiercely as animals if you oppose them, they become as gentle as lambs if you are clever enough to make them happy as if they were children. When men drink wine and quarrel noisily and any one oversteps the mark, he will fall asleep like a baby if you speak to him gently and do not repulse him

outright. Sun-Za had much experience of this sort of thing at the bar and at the hotels she was taken to, and by employing such methods, she could usually deal with such situations. That was the way for a waitress to conduct herself modestly and yet not lose popularity with the patrons. And so she steadily grew more popular, and at the same time succeeded in preserving her chastity.

Summer came to an end and Autumn arrived with its chilly winds, and the cafe was very crowded. The tide of Sun-Za's popularity was rising high. Now she was queen of the bar, and her income increased considerably. But she still did not have enough to rent a house as well as support her family. So she became rather nervous.

Now the Autumn festival came on the fifteenth of the eighth month.

She went to the bar as usual. Late that night all the crowd of customers had come home except for a few in two or three boxes. In Sun-Za's box there were two who appeared to be about forty years old. They did not drink much wine, but talked each other.

"Come on! It's the Autumn Festival today. Won't you come out for the moon-viewing?"

Sun-Za used to decline any invitation to go out, but these customers seemed quite harmless, and their conversation was unexceptionable. She remembered things she had been told about them, and so she answered hesitantly, "Well, let me see."

"What's this 'Let me see?' Do come along with us, won't you?" They handed her a ten wôn note as a tip, and called a taxi. That shocked her, but she put it under her coat with the idea of 'renting a house' in her mind. She had had a few cups of wine, and was a little drunk, and she got in the car with them. It took them down Zong-No and ran swiftly through the quiet streets. The River Han! They crossed the Indo-gyo Bridge and gazed at the moonlight on the blue waves of the river, and then the taxi stopped gently at the entrance of the hotel, Yongbong-Zong.

It wasn't late at night, it was four in the morning when Sun-Za got home. Gab-Nyong was asleep, but Czôl-Gu was sitting up alone with a book. Sun-Za could taste wine in her mouth, and she felt suddenly ashamed to see her husband, who had waited all night for her without sleeping. She could normally walk in without the slightest hesitation, but tonight she trembled and her heart beat fast as if she had run into a storm.

"You're very late today," said Czôl-Gu and looked up at her face.

He closed the book he had been reading. Her flushed face surely indicated that she was drunk or very excited. Her husband's staring eyes horrified her. They seemed to see all her secrets, and glared at her, "You accursed woman!" they seemed to say.

She felt her heart consumed with fire. She could deceive him no longer. She went over to her husband, who still looked up at her, and fell sobbing on his breast.

"I am a guilty woman!" she cried.

She had had no evil intentions, but now the thing was done, she felt herself to blame. The man's grim face, she cursed the man bitterly, without lifting up her head.

Czôl-Gu could not utter a word. He looked down at his wife whose shoulders shook with violent spasms. For all his inexperience, he realised clearly what her sobbing meant. But he could say nothing. Indignation and jealousy seethed up in his heart like the explosion of a volcano. He hastily turned his eyes away. It was the struggle to support her family that had led her astray, and he could not bring himself

to say anything. Though she had committed a heinous sin which could not be forgiven from the moral standpoint of the relation of husband and wife, yet he could not conscientiously blame her, when it was his fault that she had taken such a job.

“Come now, why are you weeping like this?” he said and he shook her shoulders as if he had realised nothing.

“I have sinned.”

“Calm yourself, please. You must be tired, I’m sure. Do go to bed.” Czôl-Gu fondled his wife and led her to bed. She lay down without taking off her dress. Her dress and her body exerted a strange fascination on his eyes. It seemed that they had known all the secrets of her relations with this man. The dying embers of his indignation flared up again. He could not sit still. He glared at his wife, who had turned on her side, as if she had been a filthy worm. Her neck, back, waist, arms and legs—they must have been touched by the hands, arms, mouth and body of a man. At this thought his righteous indignation was too much to bear. His hair stood on end, and his arms and legs trembled violently.

“Filthy woman!” he fumed to himself. Then he flung the door open and went out. The full moon shone in the western sky, colder than the heart of a sad man.

He wandered aimlessly alone through the dark streets. Many times he passed the bar. Everyone must have gone home, only the name shone red in neon lights.

“This is the filthy brothel!” he shouted, and cursed the place. It was the place that had ruined him. Whenever he had passed it in the past, the popular songs that came from it had displeased him greatly, and now, when he thought of his wife who had come home besmirched by a man, he could have burnt it to the ground. He gazed vacantly at the neon sign.

“This is the place where a wife’s chastity was sullied, a husband betrayed, and a nail driven through a man’s heart.”

It seemed to him that modern “civilisation” destroyed homes and threw society into disorder. The flowery city seemed to be a very hell.

“O Devil, that destroyest humanity, despoiling homes and human society, thy name is civilisation!”

He shouted once again, “A healthy mind in a healthy body!” He cursed the modern city and its civilization of physical and spiritual degeneracy. His heart was filled with bitterness.

“An ex-sports-master!” he muttered and gave a cynical laugh. He walked away. The neon lights of the bar darkened his mind more than ever.