Click here for a PDF file of this text

YI MUN-YOL

It is not an exaggeration to say that Yi Mun-yol (born in 1948) is the most successful Korean writer of the last quarter of the twentieth century. He is one of those lucky authors who consistently win both critical acclaim and enthusiastic popular following. Since his debut at age 30, he has been a commanding presence in the Korean literary scene, and in recent years he has also received acclaim and critical attention in Europe and elsewhere, as his works have been translated into major European and Asian languages. Yi, however, has not always been so lucky. In fact, he was intensely unhappy in his early years. Much as was the case with the protagonist of this story, his father's defection to the North forced his family to struggle not only against poverty but social stigma and police surveillance. So he repeatedly dropped out of school and experienced great turbulence of spirit. Throughout it all, however, he read omnivorously, which served him well in his later career, as did his early tribulations.

To date (1999) Yi has produced close to twenty novels (half of them multi-volume) and more than fifty novellas and short stories, besides two collections of political and social commentaries and two ten-volume translations of classical Chinese romances. Even more impressive than his productivity is the range and power of his stories. Some of them are serious explorations into man's existential condition; many delve into the implications of the Oriental and Western heritages, drawing from numerous classical texts from the East and the West; some grapple with the meaning of history and ideology; and some are satirical portrayals of contemporary social mores. As Yi is only in his early fifties, he is certain to continue to enrich Korean literature and delight and enlighten his enthusiastic readers worldwide.

"An Appointment with My Brother" is a story of the author's imagined meeting with his stepbrother, his father's son from his second marriage in North Korea after his defection during the Korean War. The narrator/protagonist of the story uses his connections and money to arrange his younger brother's visit to Yenji, in the Korean autonomous district in China, to have a meeting with him there. The protagonist had originally intended to arrange a meeting with his father, but after learning that his father passed away while the Korean-Chinese who had been commissioned with the task was trying to make it happen, decided to meet his brother in place of his father.

An Appointment with My Brother

YI MUN-YOL

Translated by Suh Ji-moon
Published in *Korean Literature Today* (Korean PEN) Volume 4 No. 4, Winter 1999

(The footnotes have not been saved in making this file)

It seemed that my brother's failure to take the trip was not so much due to a sudden change in his circumstances as to the indefiniteness of the agreement between him and Mr. Kim. Mr. Kim made profuse apologies for disappointing me for the second time, and stressed that it is because he is undertaking such a commission for the first time in his life. And his sallow and haggard face, the occasional flushes that spread over it, and his fidgeting uneasily like a guilty child made me willing to believe that he is not a professional go-between.

"I took it on, because it didn't look too hard, and I could use some money. But it's not as easy as it looked. Unexpected complications occur, and connections just disappear. I dumped quite a bit of money, just casting for possibilities. So, it was half a month after his funeral that I found out where your father lived. But this time, there's no mistake. Your brother will come, even if he is delayed a day or two."

Mr. Kim lingered on, after he told me all he had to say. I became bored. Perhaps sensing my boredom, Mr. Kim began talking about the state of affairs in North Korea. But he had very little to tell me that he hadn't told me before or that I hadn't gathered from other sources. It ran mainly on how wretched the North Korean economy is, and how pitifully people are suffering, with emphasis on the food shortage. Mr. Kim, like other Koreans in the Korean autonomous region in China, gave out information about the circumstances in North Korea as a way of showing friendliness or ingratiating himself to South Koreans. But, perhaps because it was not himself but his wife who made frequent trips to North Korea, he had only guesses or hearsay to relate on points I really wanted to know.

Is he tarrying because he wants me to pay him the last installment of his fee? I wondered to myself, when at last we had exhausted topics and just sat there looking at each other. But I had no intention of paying him the rest of his fee, even though that might look ungenerous. I had heard it remarked often enough that Koreans in China aren't naive and honest any more. But I distrusted not so much his honesty as his ability.

But he really wasn't trying to get the rest of his fee. As I was sitting there silently with a tired expression, trying to hide my boredom, he ventured, after much hesitation: "I know this is not your first time in Yenji,1) but have you been to all the places? I'd like to show you around, if there are places you'd like to see."

So, it was to offer his services to make up for my disappointment that he lingered on. But, much as I appreciated his kind offer, I was in no mood to take advantage of it. On my first trip to Yenji in the late 1980s I made a tour of the area for a whole day, visiting the Hairan River and the famous well in Yongjŏng.2) Moreover, I had no enthusiasm for sightseeing any more. On overseas trips these days, it is only on the first day that I feel any exoticism. I lose interest very quickly, and from the second day it is just as if I was in Korea.

After I drove him away with polite words of refusal, I checked my watch and saw it was already past eleven o'clock. Mr. Kim took two hours telling me what he could have done in a matter of a few minutes. I heard that he worked in the international cooperation section of a state-run business, but his duties

must be quite light, if he could waste so much time in a weekday morning.

I was introduced to Mr. Kim by Professor Liu of the University of Yenji. I met Prof. Liu at the seminar I attended the year before, a roughly put-together affair which was really a pretext for its Korean participants to tour Mt. Paekdu.3) Professor Liu read a paper on the history of the Northeastern region, especially Pohai.4) I was impressed with his modest and frank personality even more than with his scholarship, so I sought his acquaintance and we became friends.

When I told him, two days prior to my departure for Yentai en route to my return to Korea, that I wanted to see Tumen River,5) he offered at once to be my guide, and we went to Mt. Haishan together. When I beheld the land of North Korea across the Tumen River, I felt an urge to drink, and after getting drunk I became sentimental and made bows towards North Korea from the shore of the river, weeping. I had thus performed in effect a commemoration ceremony to my father who was still living--which would have been a profanation in normal circumstances. Professor Liu, having watched me in silence, said, when I recovered my calm:

"Why don't you get someone to arrange a meeting with your father for you? There are people who arrange such meetings for a fee. It should be possible to bring your father over here, and you can come for a visit at the appointed time."

I had heard of such things being arranged. As a matter of fact, it was exactly to cast for such possibilities that I went out of my way to attend the seminar, which wasn't of much interest to me in itself. But I was too timid to disregard the stern warning of the Security Planning Board. I was uneasy about venturing on something like that, so I asked some people to introduce me to an official of the SPB. The official cut me short as soon as I broached the possibility and told me in the most decisive tone:

"At this stage, as we still don't have diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, North Korea can do pretty much what it likes in Yenji. Even though our agents are accompanying your group on this trip, we cannot guarantee your safety in case you make such a clandestine contact. Suppose a few of their secret agents come with your father and kidnap you to North Korea. Do you think they'll let you claim you have been kidnapped? And what'd be the use, even if you could, of your insisting you're kidnapped? I suggest you give up the thought completely. Time's just not ripe, yet. We wouldn't be dissuading you so strongly if you were a person of no importance. We are asking you to exercise discretion, because if you plan something like that and it goes wrong, it will not only be a great misfortune for you and the members of your family, but it will be a serious blow to South Korea. We understand your urgent wish, as your father is in his eighties. It's only natural that you long to see your father before he passes away, if only for once, but this is just too risky for everyone concerned. We'll see if we can help you in this, so please just attend the seminar and come right back."

That was how my wish was foiled even before I could make any attempt to realize it. So, when the five days in Yenji passed with the uninteresting seminar and a trip to Mt. Paekdu, which I was already familiar with from photographs, my sense of futility and frustration was such that it exploded in tears that day.

I agreed to follow Professor Liu's suggestion like one assenting to a criminal proposal, and Professor Liu sent Mr. Han-jo Kim to my hotel the next day. I was told that Mr. Kim's wife's family was in North Korea, and that his wife was legally a north Korean residing in Yenji until she married him. Mr. Kim's father-and mother-in-law lived in Chŏngjin, but his wife had three uncles, who lived in Pyongyang, Ŭiju, and Hoeryŏng respectively. It was the fact that he had connections to both Chŏngjin and Pyongyang that made me decide to entrust the arrangement to him. The address on my father's letter which I received in the mid-eighties was Pyongyang, but a relative who is a Korean resident in Japan had told me recently that he met my father in Chŏngjin.

Well, I noted down all the facts I knew about my father and gave it to Mr. Kim, together with three thousand dollars. I had to borrow money from other participants at the seminar to make up that sum,

which was not Mr. Kim's fee but the prospective expenses. I promised him a minimum of twenty thousand yuan for commission, and assured him that if more expenses were to occur, on account of my father's rather prominent social position, I would compensate him for that without any question. Prof. Liu's guarantee for the honor of both parties also helped bring about the informal contract.

Perhaps because the fee was a bonanza to him, Mr. Kim paid me a visit with his wife on the morning of my departure from Yenji and made rosy promises. He told me that he might be able to bring about my reunion with my father as early as by that winter, which was only two moths away, and assured me that I would be able to meet my father by the following spring at the latest. The basis of his optimism is that corruption is widespread among north Korean officials, and that the almighty dollar can easily buy a mid-level official.

In spite of Mr. Kim's confidence, progress was extremely slow. I hadn't put full trust in his optimistic prospects, but the winter vacation passed without any word from him, and summer vacation arrived without any news of progress.

However, since I was plotting something that is forbidden by the current law of my country, I couldn't write to inquire about the progress or cast about for information through connections. Thus, a year went by amid my impatience. Then, diplomatic relations were established between the Republic of Korea and China, which increased my impatience acutely. It meant that the risk the Security Planning Board had warned me about was removed.

Then, Professor Liu, who visited Seoul in January of this year at the invitation of a relative of his, gave me unexpected news.

"I'm sorry. I heard that your father passed away last summer. Mr. Kim told me only recently. It seems that his wife was sick for a few months and delayed his looking into your affair, and then he felt so guilty that you lost the chance of meeting your father on account of his remissness that he has been avoiding me. And it looks like he spent all the money taking trips to North Korea and trying to establish connections and so on."

Then he brought out a new suggestion, which might be his own idea, or an idea suggested by Mr. Kim.

"Mr. Kim is so worried about returning your money, now that he can't bring about the meeting. But where could he find such a sum? So, I thought--how about if you met one of your brothers, instead of your father whom you can't meet any more? It seems like you have a few."

Frankly, Professor Liu's new suggestion was far from having any appeal to me at the time. It must have been because I was overcome by a feeling of emptiness, as it seemed at the moment that a half century of love and hate and yearning and resentment all went up in vapor. How can the object of my longing and resentment, who still appears before me in many guises, though not with such compelling power as in the days of my adolescence and youth, disappear like a breath of wind?

Of course, it was because of my father's advanced age that I was so anxious to meet him. But his death seemed unreal and unbelievable to me. I suppose it was because the image I harbored of my father was as a young man in his mid-thirties.

I kept thinking about my father's death after I came back home without responding to Professor Liu's suggestion either way. I had too many decisions to make in connection with Father's death, from whether to tell it to my mother to what rituals I should perform as a bereaved son.

Mother never mentioned Father again ever since she learned, in the mid-eighties, that Father had five children from his second marriage in the North. Such fertility of Father's must have felt like a betrayal to her who, after she was left behind at age thirty-three by Father's defection, preserved her chastity without a single blemish to her honor and devoted herself solely to raising us three children. What, then, would Father's death mean to her?

I was also uncertain about what ceremonies it would behove me to enact as Father's eldest son. Would I have to install a box for his spirit and wear mourning, though belatedly? How should I mark the

end of the mourning period for him, and would it be all right for me to observe the anniversaries of his death afterwards, and had I better have a prayer ceremony held for the peaceful rest of his soul at a Buddhist temple or Christian church? And what should I do about his domicile registration, which shows him as still living? Would my report of his death be accepted as valid? Should I tell the clan council, which is currently preparing a new genealogy book for my branch of the clan? Or should I wait until the elders would be liberalized enough to be receptive to the idea of including my siblings in the North in the genealogy?

But I couldn't come to a decision on any of these questions. Even Father's death itself was hearsay, and I couldn't be certain about even the fact of his death, having no information about the circumstances of his death nor even its exact date. In such a circumstance, who could I announce his death to, and what ceremony could I hold to mark it? It occurred to me that I should at least let Mother know, but I wasn't sure about that, either. Mother was showing marked symptoms of Alzheimer's disease from the beginning of winter, and there was no telling what strange behavior the shocking news would provoke from her.

I'll have to know the exact facts and circumstances before I can take any action, I decided, and it was only then that I felt the need to meet my brother, though I had disregarded the suggestion when it was first made. Until then, my siblings were vaguely people I'd meet if the country would become reunited some day, but now at least one of them would enter my life as a flesh-and-blood person.

So, I told Prof. Liu that I would meet my brother, and in less than two moths I received a message from Mr. Kim telling me to be in Yenji on a certain date. Of course, the message was not conveyed directly in explicit words, but the code word in his innocuous letter pointed unequivocally to this date.

I made haste to book a trip to Yenji, in spite of its being in the middle of the semester. But, even though diplomatic relations were established, it was not easy to obtain a visa for a personal trip. Moreover, meeting a North Korean was still a risky business, as hostilities between the two regimes could be aggravated and I could be charged with making clandestine contact with an enemy country. So, I decided against travelling by myself, and hit upon the idea of joining the seven nights-eight days tour which stopped over at Yenji en route to Mt. Paekdu. There happened to be a tour that exactly suited my schedule, so I left Seoul as a member of a tour group.

Until Mr. Kim left me, almost turned away by my hints, I had thought that I wanted to be freed of his boring solicitude. But when left alone, I realized that I badly needed a rest. I was rather tired from the sightseeing of a few days, which was of little interest to me, but the greater fatigue came from the stress of mentally preparing for my encounter with my brother.

After deciding to travel to Yenji for my first meeting with my younger stepbrother who was a total stranger to me and who grew up to manhood in a totally different culture and milieu from mine, I prepared a detailed and moving scenario about how I would manage it.

But, somehow, as time passed and the hour approached, the awkwardness and unnaturalness of the situation occupied my mind, and I grew less and less confident of managing a moving union. So much so that the previous night I tossed and turned, polishing up my scenario which seemed full of gaps and holes. Then my mind went blank that morning. I suppose it was owing to accumulated mental fatigue. So, I felt in a way relieved to hear that my brother had not arrived, and yearned for nothing so much as a good rest.

I closed the curtains and lay down on the bed, thinking I'd get a couple of hours' profound sleep first of all. Prof. Liu had said he'd come over at three o'clock, so there was enough time for a good nap. He rang me up early that morning and was very apologetic about not being able to come over at once, saying that he had to organize something with a group of people from Korea.

But I couldn't get the sleep I needed. I fell into a light slumber but was awakened by an insignificant noise and couldn't go back to sleep no matter how hard I tried. And as I was taking an expensive tour, it

seemed like a terrible waste to sleep in a hotel room in broad daylight.

Unable to sleep or rest, I left my room and headed for the coffee shop downstairs for a cup of coffee. I thought that afterwards I'd walk around the city to see how much it has changed, and have lunch at a Korean restaurant.

The coffee shop was doing brisk business, unlike in the other cities we passed by. Being a hotel that catered mainly to tourists from South Korea, it seemed that most patrons were South Koreans and their relatives and friends in the area who came to meet them. I sat down at an empty table and ordered a cup of coffee. But before my coffee arrived, a man who just got up after conversing with a guest spotted me and came over to my table.

"Oh, so you didn't go to the lake,6) either? I suppose you saw it before? Well, I don't think there's anybody who's anybody who hasn't seen it already," he rattled off and sat opposite me without even asking for my permission. He was a member of the tour group. I had noticed him on account of his talkativeness. I was surprised that he hadn't joined the tour to the lake.

"Yes, I saw it in the spring of last year."

"Then, you must have come on business. Why did you join a tour, when commercial visas aren't hard to get these days?" he asked, assuming that I was a businessman. I had no wish to undeceive him, so I said:

"Oh, my business is nothing much to speak of. I thought I'd see some sights and look into some business while we're here. Well, what makes you join the tour?" I asked, not out of earnest curiosity but to avoid talking about the purpose of my trip. It seemed, however, that the man was as reluctant to reveal his reasons for not going to the lake as I was.

"It's pretty much the same with me. I have some business, it's true, but not something worth talking about. And there's no direct flight from Seoul to Yenji, either. And I haven't seen Jilin and Xian that are on the itinerary," the man hurriedly explained. He was quite careful for a talkative man. That aroused my curiosity. What made him detach himself from the group? But he changed the subject, to avoid more questions from me.

"Well, that makes three of us. I thought only myself and the unification man were staying behind."

I knew who he meant by "the unification man." He earned his nickname by constantly talking about unification. He made himself conspicuous in the group by another kind of talkativeness from this man with a questionable business. The other man's talk mainly ran along lamentations on the lost glory of our country and nation. Whenever he found an opportunity to hold anyone's attention, he tried to enlighten and inspire them.

"See, this land you're standing on is an ancient territory of Paekje.7) This belonged to Chinp'yŏng colony when Paekche had Yosŏ and Chinp'yŏng colonies in present day China. In fact, the whole of the central plain of China used to be ours, before the Han race moved in," were his first words on getting off the plane in Beijing. At the Forbidden City, too, he intoned: "Yi Sŏngkye8) should have pushed on into mainland China instead of withdrawing with his army. Then, this Forbidden City would have been ours. Do you think the Manchus conquered China because they were strong? Nurhachi conquered Ming with only 30,000 men. Yi Sŏngkye could easily have conquered China with his 50,000 men two hundred years before that."

I suppose the man would be thoroughly conversant with the books of ancient history such as "Hwandan Kogi," and such theories concerning ancient Korea as "Piryu Paekche," and the "Imna Taemado" that hold that the ancestors of Koreans ruled a great part of Northeast Asia. He earned his nickname of "Unification Man" by breaking out in long harangues enumerating the past glory of ancient Korea and ending by stressing the importance of achieving unification as the first step toward recovering the nation's past glory. His tirade grew even more vehement from when the group arrived in Yenji.

"Look at this landscape. Isn't it just like our own? I say this land must belong to us, not just because so many of our people live here, but because it is totally unlike China in all respects. This piece of land

would just blend in with any part of Kyŏngsang-do or Ch'ungchŏng-do."9)

"There is no end to the crimes the Japanese committed against us. They not only swallowed up our land, but gave away Kando10) to China through the so-called Kando Agreement. We could have easily made this land ours by enough us living here long enough."

Thus went his tirade during the bus ride from Yenji airport to the hotel. Then, at the dinner table last night, he declared, just as if he had been an important political exile:

"I'm not going to the lake tomorrow. The lake will be there when I come back after unification. I'm going to spend the two days here with the Korean residents in this area who know North Korea well, and see what I can do to expedite unification."

It must have sounded impossibly naive to the others in the group. But I took a more charitable view of him. It is true that naivete is often perceived as stupidity and immaturity, but naivete can sometimes be moving for the pure passion in it. From time to time my university invites lecturers to give talks on unification during student festivals and seminars, and quite a few of them are as naive as their freshmen and sophomore audiences.

So, if this unification man hadn't been haranguing a mostly middle-aged worldly tour group but speaking to a nationalistic student circle at a college festival, he could have deeply stirred his audience. I was therefore inclined to think that he had studied unification problems for a long time and that he had some definite activities scheduled in Yenji.

And the unification man was the reason I was paying extra for a single room during our stay in Yenji. The tour company was sure to have made me share a room with this unification man, to cut costs. I didn't want that. I didn't want him to get wind of my reason for staying behind, and I had no desire to be a witness of his activities which might infringe on the current South Korean law. It could even happen that he and I could become implicated in each other's illegal activities, with disastrous consequences for both. Well, it seemed that this businessman was made to share a room with the unification man.

"I'd have asked to be put in the same room with you if I knew you were staying behind, too. That unification operation is so noisy!" the businessman said, screwing up his face. Having it related to me at second hand, I became curious to know how the unification man went about his work. I have always wondered about the kind of men for whom unification is not an abstract possibility but an urgent and realistic necessity and who knew what has to be done in what order to bring about unification.

"Well, what is he doing for unification, anyway?"

"Just talk, talk, talk. What else? Two groups visited him this morning, and both sessions were like political rallies. They were declaring that both sides should transcend the wall of ideology through realizing the homogeneity of nationhood and the commonality of blood."

"What kind of people were in the groups?"

"Well, they seemed to be people of some note here in Yenji, like professors and writers. They were meeting our unification man for the first time, but had met others in this organization he's associated with. It sure was funny to see our friend talking excitedly, just as if he were talking to representatives of some government-in-exile. He said things similar to what you hear on North Korean broadcasts, such as that you should smash neo-colonialists to recover true independence and wipe out the national traitors to accelerate unification. I'm scared I'll be made to report his activities before the court, thanks to having shared a room with him for a couple of days."

The businessman was a lively talker. I egged him on, while trying not to betray too much interest.

"Well, I suppose those things are necessary for unification, considering the way the U. S. is behaving since the fall of Russia."

"No, our friend might as well have talked into the void. His guests were not really interested in unification. They just seemed to be casting for a connection to South Korea, so that they could get invited to South Korea or set up joint ventures with South Korean companies, and were pretending to agree with our friend just to please him. Our friend's good nature makes me worried."

"In what way?"

"He promised to procure invitations for two of his new acquaintances already, and to donate a significant number of books to an organization. And he also as good as promised that he'll secure the funds to build a library for a school. I don't think he has that kind of capability. I'm afraid he's going to disappoint a lot of innocent, trusting people."

If the businessman kept on talking about the unification man to deflect my interest from his own business, he didn't manage it very cleverly. Pretty soon, he was revealing his own thoughts.

"Isn't it strange," he pursued, "that most people, when they think about unification, think only about nationhood and ideology?. Are you like that, too, sir?"

Even though I was careful to hide my occupation, he must have scented bookishness from me. Anyway, here he was, addressing me "sir" even though I'd said I was a businessman.

"Well, what then do you think of in connection with 'unification'?"

"The first thing I think of is how we can feed the twenty million hungry people, and how we can make North Korea even superficially resemble the South."

"I suppose the big businesses will have to manage somehow. They'll be gaining a lot of cheap labor and will have access to many valuable resources close at hand."

"That won't be a guaranteed advantage by any means. A client of mine is a CEO of a big business, and he is really worried about what might happen after unification. He said that he could use guest workers from Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Philippines dirt cheap but he couldn't do that with the North Koreans. That's sure to trigger regional conflicts, a much greater one than the East-West conflict11) which has been so troublesome. Also, he was sceptical about the quality of labor North Koreans would provide. They are sure to have the inefficiencies common to the socialist proletariat, and their outworn ideas of "doing things our way" just won't do in the structure of modern business. He thought it would take

years to retrain the North Korean labor force to suit the needs of our society. As of now, the North Koreans are inferior even to the Philippinos as a labor force, and if they expect the same level of pay as South Korean workers just because they're of the same blood, then there won't be many places that would want them, he said. If they can be used only in primary industries, then the North Korean labor force would simply be a liability, rather than an asset, to our economy. And he was also negative about North Korean underground resources. He said it is true that North Korea has more in the way of natural resources than we do, but only a handful of them are of superior grade according to international standards. He said it could happen that our industries will be forced to buy natural resources from North Korea even though they are more expensive and of lower quality, just because they come from our land. In a word, even the North Korean natural resources could be a liability to our industrialists."

"Well, I suppose all of that would come under the category of 'unification expenses.' I understand there are people who are preparing for unification and figuring out the cost of unification. So, we must provide against those factors. I mean in economic terms. But I'm sure political preparation, such as our friend is engaging in, is also necessary. Unless we sort out the ideological and political differences between the North and South before unification, we could well be heading for a bloody civil war."

"A friend of mine came up with this theory. He said that the greatest risk point of the unified Korea becoming communized is three years after unification. By that time, many South Koreans would fall below the poverty line, as the South Korean economy would have been depleted on account of unification expenses. And the North Koreans would be suffering from a sense of relative deprivation. Which means that there will be more people who want the existing social order overturned than those who want it preserved, so that the population make-up will be one most susceptible to a socialist revolution. Anyway, maybe because I'm a businessman, I think economic preparation is the most essential. As you no doubt saw in the collapse of the Soviet Union, ideology is determined by economic

conditions. I think that their contention that the base structure determines superstructure makes sense."

His calling himself a "businessman" aroused my curiosity once more. The more I talked with him the more it seemed to me that he was not an ordinary businessman.

"You said you have a CEO of a big industry for your client. And you seem to know a great deal that folks like us are ignorant of. May I ask what kind of business you run?" I ventured, even though I was sure it was a topic he was at pains to avoid. A shadow of hesitation flitted over his face, but he continued to be evasive.

"Oh, it's only a modest venture. I do just about anything that will fetch a little money." Then, spotting a man who was entering the coffee shop with a bulky plastic bag, he sprang up and waved to him, like one hailing a rescuer.

When I first visited Yenji in 1988, the year the Seoul Olympics were held, Yenji had the distinct appearance of a socialist country. That is, one felt like one was looking at an old electronic appliance that is sturdily built but ran on outdated software. But when I revisited it the year before last, after the lapse of four years, it had changed greatly. The outward appearance had not changed much, but change was perceptible everywhere. Whether for better or for worse, the changes indicated the region's approach to capitalistic market economy.

And another year and a half had elapsed since then. I turned towards Friendship Avenue, to check what changes took place in that time, with the air of a serious inspector. Not only was Friendship Avenue a main street where changes would be most visible but it was also a street dotted with Korean restaurants, so I was going to take a look at the street and then eat lunch somewhere.

But the changes of a city is not something you can gauge on a scale. And I was already over fifty and was not so alive to the beat of a city any more. So, I soon felt tired, after looking, without personal interest, at the buildings and shops which seemed the same and yet different. That made me turn into this cafe named "The Han River" after walking merely a couple of blocks. The signboard was written in big letters in Korean, for the benefit of tourists from South Korea, and on it was written in a semicircle in English, cafe/restaurant. The signboard somehow looked familiar. Perhaps it was because it was the kind often seen in the streets of Seoul.

The interior of the place also resembled a second-class cafe in Seoul. And there were no patrons. Judging from the paucity of customers at an hour approaching lunch time, it seemed that the place was more a cafe than a restaurant. And I had no intention of eating my lunch there, either.

"Hello," a woman's voice greeted me from behind a counter in a dark corner. Although she had said just one word, I thought she didn't sound like a native of Yenji. The woman who came to stand in front of me as I sat down at a table was a woman of about thirty.

"What would you like to have?" she asked, proffering the menu, again in accents very close to that of Seoul Dialect. I examined her, and thought she looked like proprietresses of such places in Seoul. For a moment I wondered if she could have come from Seoul, but that was quite unlikely. Even though I knew that many people from Seoul was running various businesses in Yenji, I didn't think any South Korean would take the trouble to open a second-class cafe in Yenji. And it was even more unlikely that a woman from Seoul would be working as a hired hostess.

"Well, bring me a glass of some fruit juice. And bring one for yourself, too, if you like," I said, by way of inviting her to a conversation, in the way I used to invite proprietresses of provincial cafes in Korea to a silly chat. The proprietress seemed to be quite used to such overtures, and brought two glasses of juice and sat down opposite me, without waiting for my invitation. It could be because she was bored herself and wanted to chat with someone, the business being so slow, but her complete lack of bashfulness seemed to indicate to me that she was not from those parts.

"You don't look like a native of this region. Where do you come from?" she asked me, with exaggerated interest. It was exactly the question I wanted to ask her, but I suppressed my curiosity and

answered her question first.
"I'm from Seoul."
"Did you come alone?"
"No, I came with a group. But I detached myself from the group for a couple of days to take care of some business."
"Are you a businessman?"
"Not really. I just had to meet someone."
"Where are the rest of your group?"
"They've gone to see Chŏnji Lake. It's just a tour group."
"When are they coming back?"
"Tomorrow night," I answered truthfully, feeling no need to lie to her. She nodded in satisfaction.
"Then bring your party here tomorrow night. I'll entertain all of you well. We have karaoke facilities, too. And beautiful girls. They all speak just like South Koreans."
"I'll pass on the information. Anyway, are you from this part?" I asked, as casually as I could. She answered, without hesitation.
"Yes, not from this city, but I grew up close to here. Why do you ask? Do I look as if I'm from somewhere else?"
"Yes, you don't sound like a native of this region. You've lived in Seoul, haven't you?"
"Oh, my accent. Yes, I lived in Seoul for a couple of years. People gave me such looks to hear my accent, and there were practical disadvantages, too. So I tried hard to learn to speak the Seoul dialect. Does it sound close?"
"What kind of practical disadvantages?"
"As soon as people found out I was from Yenji, they looked down on me and tried to cheat me. They tried to take sexual advantage of me, too."
She must have gone to Seoul to make money. I couldn't help wondering how she managed to stay for two years in Seoul and what she did during those two years, but I didn't ask, having heard about the harsh lives of the Koreans from China in South Korea. So, there was a pause in our conversation.
"Well, how's business?" I asked. The woman stopped sipping her juice and answered, with a deep sigh.
"I thought I'd make bales of money if only I could start a business like this, but it's hard. This kind of place is too expensive for indigenous people, and there aren't enough tourists to keep it going. At this rate, all the capital my husband and I saved doing all kinds of dirty work for two years will go up in smoke."
The woman cast her eyes towards the kitchen as she said this. Just then, a man who looked prematurely old pushed open the door leading to the kitchen and looked out. He must have been her husband. Looking at his tired and spiritless face I could imagine what their lives in Seoul must have been like. The man must have done manual labor every day without any holiday, and the woman must have done any work that came by as long as it paid well.
The thought recalled the businessman's remark of a while ago in the hotel coffee shop concerning the North Korean workers. Perhaps after unification North Korean workers would have experiences similar to what this couple experienced in South Korea.
"So, did they pay you fair wages?" I blurted out. The woman blinked her eyes, but understanding my question, twisted her lips.
"Fair wages!Hell, no. Everyone just wanted to work us to death if they got wind that we were from Yenji. The only place that paid us normal wages were the so-called 3-D workplaces, where no South Korean would work. My husband got cheated out of his wages in his day-labor jobs, too. They always took away part of his pay on one pretext or other."
"But weren't you paid roughly the same as South Koreans? I heard that the guest workers from the

Philippines and Bangladesh don't even get half of what South Korean workers get."

A ray of blue light flashed from her eyes for a second.

"How can you compare us with them? We're of the same blood, though we may have lived apart for a few decades," she said in an aggravated tone and then, casting her eyes toward the kitchen, said rapidly in a low voice: "I'm sure you heard these stories in Seoul. Do you know how I made the money to buy this place? I did the maid's work for prostitutes and endured sexual molestation of drunkards. Why should a married woman put up with that, if not for money? Look, I'm among the better-educated around here. But in South Korea, I couldn't even apply for any kind of office work, and at the factories they said they'll pay me the same as the Philippinoes. Why should I be paid the same as those lazy girls who don't even understand the instructions? How can they say that to a fellow national?"

The woman bit her lip, evidently re-living her humiliation. I was witnessing, inside of an hour, a live case of what the businessman had predicted during our chat. I made haste to offer my consolation, feeling guilty for having revived her painful memories.

"I'm sorry. They shouldn't have done that to you."

"Seoul may be worth staying a few years for making money, but nothing would tempt me to live there all my life."

With that declaration, her fury subsided a little. She added, in polite response to my expression of sympathy: "Well, it isn't as if all South Koreans are thieves and exploiters. There were actually quite a few people who have been kind and generous."

It seemed to me I'd sat there too long. But I was embarrassed to just stand up and leave.

"I'm terribly sorry. I saw the sign saying that this is a restaurant, too, but frankly, I've been craving Korean food for a few days now."

When I gave my honest excuse, the woman responded kindly.

"Oh, never mind. We're not much of a restaurant, anyway. And we can offer only light Western meals. Well, is there a particular dish you're craving?"

"I'd like rice in hot and spicy soup, and some kimchi."

"Well, I'll tell you. Turn right as you go out the door, and you'll see the sign for Seoul Restaurant before you walk two blocks. It's not only called Seoul Restaurant, but I heard they brought their chef over from Seoul. I think it will suit the taste of people from Seoul."

Thanks to her kind advice, I could have a proper Korean dish for lunch. In fact, their dish of rice in hot and spicy soup with strips of beef and kimchi had too much MSG and sugar, perhaps in an attempt to suit the palate of tourists from Seoul, but having eaten greasy Chinese food for every meal for a few days, I was grateful for even that much taste of Korea.

I had another confirmation of the businessman's prediction for post-Unification problems that same day. Professor Liu, who came to see me around three o'clock that afternoon, said, with an expression of bewilderment and frustration:

"Professor Lee, I just don't understand the South Korean society, even though I met a few South Koreans and have been to Seoul."

"Why, what happened?"

"This is not the first time. I just don't understand. South Koreans often ask me to help make cultural exchange, so I help them as best as I can, and then when everything is pretty nearly set up, they put me in the most awkward position by making strange and unreasonable demands. This time, too, this organization called "Association of Writers for National Unification" asked me to help organize a meeting with North Korean writers. So, I asked my colleague Professor Chang who has many friends among North Korean writers to help, and between the two of us we worked hard to organize a meeting of writers. We made our selection thoughtfully. Because the South Korean writers seemed to be radicals, we chose less radical and less political North Korean writers to balance out. But look at what the South Koreans say. They say that the North Korean writers should be core members of the North Korean

literary establishment, including if possible officially decorated national writers. So, I told them that such writers are not writers any more but politicians, and that they can expect to hear nothing from them except political propaganda. And do you know what they said? They said that those are exactly the writers they want to meet. I understand that they want to meet top-notch writers. But the problem is that the reason South Korean writers want to meet them is not just their eminence. It's that they think they'll have the best rapport with those writers. And they emphasized their own Communist sympathies. I was flabbergasted. They went on and on about the myth of Kim Il-sung and enumerated statistics that show the superiority of the North Korean system, which are long outdated figures. It seemed as if they'd be just as enthusiastic propagandists for the Chuche ideology12) as any nationally decorated writer. Well, how can that be 'cultural exchange' in any sense? It can't be anything more than a political rally of fellow Communists. And the conservative writers aren't much better, either. They are the ones who should meet the core Communists, but they're only after writers of popular romance or youthful advocates of 'openness. 'That's another kind of banding together. Why call such things 'cultural exchange? 'Shouldn't an exchange aim at listening to the other side and finding a point of mutual understanding? But both sides are seeking only to strengthen their own position by drawing support from sympathizers. How can that be a preparation for the day of unification? For such people there can only be unification by force, not unification by negotiation and agreement. Is that liberal democratic thinking?They made me so furious that I left my colleague to be harassed by them and left."

That was an example of politicized 'cultural exchange,' and I thought such would be the consequence of seeking unification solely through political means.

"Well, I suppose we can't expect practical fruit from the first. An exchange route has to be opened up first, somehow. It could even be that if extremely heterogeneous people meet, only hostility and conflict would result," I said, trying to soothe my friend's fury, but my heart was heavy. The thought that my younger brother, whom I would be meeting not long before, might represent such a heterogeneous culture oppressed me.

Mr. Kim's telephone message that evening deepened my anxiety.

"He's here. Your younger brother. He just arrived. He's going to sleep over in his maternal uncle's and will come to see you at your hotel tomorrow morning."

It was true that my brother was visiting Yenji ostensibly at the invitation of his maternal uncle, but his going straight to his uncle's instead of coming to me seemed to tell me that he wasn't eager to see me.

The next day, my brother came earlier than I had expected. No hour had been fixed for his coming, but I had assumed that he would come around ten o'clock. That was why I washed my face only around nine o'clock even though I got up at eight. I was about to go down to the dining room for breakfast when my brother, accompanied by Mr. Kim, knocked on my door.

As I said earlier, I was quiet uncertain about how I should act toward my brother on my first encounter with him. I was meeting my stepbrother for the first time in my life, and between us there was the inborn antagonism that exists between half-brothers. I was not sure what I should say to him. I wasn't even sure if I could use the plain form of address to him.

But, when I beheld my bother's face as he followed Mr. Kim into my room with obvious self-consciousness, I realized that my worries had been unnecessary. My brother looked all too familiar. His face was almost a replica of my father's, which was growing dim in my memory but which I remembered with the help of a few old photographs, and that of my younger brother who was born after my father's defection and who had unfortunately died in his late thirties. And his figure exactly resembled my eldest son's, with a slightly backward-curving spine and a slender waist which were the peculiar physical characteristics of the men of my clan. The only thing that felt alien about him was his apparel, which looked like a fashionable formal suit from the '70s.

My brother, who was walking in with a stiff face, also looked startled on beholding me. He must have had a similar recognition, judging from the marked softening of his face.

"Your brother is more than ten years your senior, so I think you should make a bow," Mr. Kim said to my brother, who still looked uncertain about what to do or say. It was a great relief to me and helped make my first words to my brother much easier to bring out. I returned my brother's full bow with a half bow, and could use the plain form of speech without any hesitation or uneasiness.

"How do you write your name?" I asked, meaning what Chinese character he used for his name. I had guessed, when I heard his name, that my father had given him a character marking the male children of my clan of my generation, so I thought I'd ask my brother if I had a chance to meet him. I had not expected that to be my first question to my brother, but here it was. But my brother must have thought I was asking what he was called.

"I'm Hyok. Hyok Lee."

"I didn't ask what you were called, but what character you used for your name. And you should not use the family name in telling your name to your elder brother. Is it the character for 'red'? The character made up of two 'chŏk' characters beside the fire radical?"

"Yes."

"Do your brothers and sisters all have one-syllable given names?"

"No. My elder sister and the youngest have two-syllable names."

"Then they must have either 'hi' or 'sŏp' in their names."

"That's right. My sister's Munhi, and my youngest brother is Musŏp." A faint thrill passed through my heart. A radical Communist who could leave his young wife and three young children in a burning city has not, after all, disregarded the tradition of his clan in naming his children!

"Is the use of generational markers in names a common practice in North Korea?"

My brother seemed to think it odd that I should show so much interest in names, and looked at me without comprehension. I in turn looked at him, bewildered by his silence. Mr. Kim, understanding the cause of mutual incomprehension, came to our aid.

"You know, that common character in siblings' names. They used to use it in North Korea, too, but it seems nobody uses it any more."

"Oh, that. That's not used any more. And our names don't have that, either," my brother answered, comprehending at last. Controlling a heightening emotional thrill, I explained the custom of naming children with generational markers embedded in the names.

"Use of the generational marker doesn't necessarily involve using a common character in all the children's names. The markers follow the order of the five elements from one generation to the next. Each clan has its own order in lining up the five elements. We in our clan use the order of earth, metal, water, wood, and fire. So, in recent generations the markers have been Kyu for the earth generation, Hyŏn for the metal generation, Ho for the water generation, Pyŏng for the wood generation, and Sŏp or Hi for the fire generation. But the elements can be incorporated without the use of those characters. For example, members of our clan of my generation usually have "sŏp" or "hi" in their names, but in case we're given one syllable names, fire radical, or four dots in the Chinese character, serves to indicate the "fire" generation. So, you and your siblings all have the mark of our generation in the clan in your names. And I daresay that if Father gave names to your children, they all have "kyu" as one of the syllables, or have one syllable names using the earth radical in the Chinese character."

Noting the surprise and bewilderment on Mr. Kim's face at my lengthy harangue on names, I changed the subject quickly.

"Oh, I should have asked this first. What did Father die of?"

"Colon cancer. He died in the People's Hospital of Kimchaek City."

As he said this, my brother's eyes grew red and humid. My nose bridge smarted, too, for the first time since I heard of Father's death.

"Did he die . . . peacefully?"

"Yes. A cousin of ours is a doctor at the hospital. Uncle Kyŏngho, who defected from the South with Father, did everything he could for Father. Father was unconscious for a couple of days, but he didn't suffer like most people . . ."

My brother's voice grew tearful. But I could not feel real sorrow, even though my nosebridge smarted and my sight became blurred. I wondered that my brother could feel such acute sorrow at the mere mention of our father almost a year after his death, and felt desolate that I could not feel such sorrow even though I, too, was a son. I was so far from being overwhelmed with sorrow that I even had the presence of mind to wonder that Uncle Kyŏngho, whom I remembered as a relative who graduated from a commercial high school and worked at a bank before defecting to the North, could be a doctor.

"Well, I'm relieved to hear that. But when is the anniversary? I have to know the exact date, if I'm to discharge my duties as the first son."

"Your brother wants to know when to offer commemoration services," Mr. Kim put in, as if he were a dutiful interpreter.

"They are August 21 and March 18," my brother answered, understanding my question at last.

There couldn't be two dates of Father's death, but I understood. The eighteenth of March was Father's birthday. It seemed that commemoration services were offered on the deceased's birthdays, too, in the North. A similar confusion arose when we began to talk about the formalities of commemoration ceremonies. My brother had no idea of what the spirit box, the spirit tablet, and the end of mourning period were. It seemed that commemoration ceremonies observed in the North were more like Christian commemorative observances than traditional Confucian ceremonies. My talk of commemoration ceremonies aroused the first fierce antagonism in my brother.

"Well, since you don't make spirit niches and tablets over there, I suppose it'd be all right if I took care of commemoration services. I'll observe his anniversaries and the services on the first and the fifteenth days of each month," I said decisively.

My brother's eyes blazed ominously, betraying emotional turbulence.

"You mean, you want to take away the commemoration services from us?"There was animosity in his voice.

"It's not that I'll take away the services from you. But since your services are just family gatherings in remembrance of the dead without any ritual, I'll offer commemoration services according to tradition. In our family, rituals are not meaningless formalities. Our clan is a respected clan in the Yŏngnam area,13) and I am descended from a line of first sons for twelve generations. If our clan was an insignificant clan with a short history, I'd have been the clan heir and mine the head family. So, how can I leave out services to my own father, when I offer services to ancestors for eleven generations? Even if I wanted to omit him, the clan wouldn't let me."

Then I went on to brag about our splendid ancestors, who had ministerial posts bequeathed on them posthumously and who held such posts in their lifetimes as the magistrate of Andong and prefect of Ŭiryong. Then I looked at Mr. Kim. But Mr. Kim seemed to find it very hard to explain the significance of such achievements of my ancestors' to my brother. He just tried to make my brother understand that commemoration services are very important in yangban14) families and that they are always offered by the eldest son. But my brother's eyes did not grow soft. I wondered at his continuing hostility.

"But I heard you don't believe in ghosts and spirits?" I offered.

"Neither do you, from what I hear. I heard that you in the South have all become half Yankees and have given up traditional beliefs."

I had to soothe his rebellious feelings at all costs.

"It varies from people to people. But I believe in the soul and the spirit, not in the superstitious sense but as scientific fact. I'm sure you know about such scientific theories as the laws of conservation of mass, momentum, and energy? I believe that our soul is our spirit when we are physically alive, and the

activity of our spirit is our motion and energy. Well, if the matter constituting our body remains after death in changed form, how could our spirit disappear with our death? The only question to my mind is whether our spirits retain their memories and identity. But I don't think it matters either way. If, as many religions believe, our spirits live on retaining their identity, then what God would be as anxious to for our welfare as the spirits of our ancestors? But even if they disintegrate and are recombined as do our bodies, I don't think there is anything absurd in honoring the spirits of our ancestors, who brought about our being. Therefore, I perform ancestor worship ceremonies not simply in the spirit of commemoration but with true religious piety."

Not realizing how fantastic my theory on the continuation of the human spirit would sound, I gave a summary view of my convictions concerning the meaning of ancestor worship. My brother's face became somewhat relaxed but he didn't seem won over to my theory. Feeling defensive, I asked:

"But what are you so unhappy about? You seem to dislike the idea of my offering commemoration services to Father's spirit."

Only then did my brother speak his mind.

"It seems to me like you're claiming to be the only legitimate son."

My brother was suffering from the same antagonism that I felt when thinking about my father's children from his second marriage, an antagonism that inevitably exists between stepbrothers. But my brother's frankness made his protest inoffensive. It on the contrary made me feel that I had the position of advantage as Father's eldest son and the son from his original marriage.

I suppose it was from the consciousness of my superior position that I asked for the names and dates of birth of not only my siblings but those of their mother, offering to enter them in our clan's book of genealogy. My brother seemed to wonder at the existence of such a record, but wrote out all the information I requested. His manner betrayed that he was far from feeling the need for such a validation of his membership in our clan, but he continued to write the names and dates in my pocket diary.

It was my turn to be disturbed. Kang Myŏngsun, of Chinju Kang15) clan, born June 2, 1930. Munhi, female, born August 17, 1955. . . The notes read. I thought I could guess what kind of marriage my father's second marriage was.

If their first child was born in 1955, then my father's second marriage probably took place in 1954. Kang Myŏngsun would have been twenty-four. Then, it was most likely her first marriage. My father, who defected to the North at age thirty-five, did not remarry for four years, until he was almost forty. So he observed at least minimum courtesy to the wife he left behind in the South. If it was the first marriage for his second wife, she probably was a virgin, as free love and prostitution were strictly forbidden in the North. Then, even in case she came from a low social class and had not had much education, she fully deserved to be a legitimate wife. What's more, she had been Father's wife for almost forty years, which is more than three times the length of Father's marriage to my mother.

Who could accuse my father of betrayal, for marrying again in that circumstance, and of immorality, for the fertility of his second marriage? Who can insult his second wife and her children with the names of concubine and bastards? It could even have been that the twelve years of his first marriage with my mother in the South was no more than a painful memory of a sweet dream, and the three children he had by my mother were simply Father's ineradicable blemishes to his new family in the North.

"Do you have a photograph of your family? I'd like to see what you all look like," I said, taking my pocket diary my brother held out to me. My brother hesitated for a moment but took out his wallet and extracted a photograph. It showed everyone in that family, except my brother--probably because my brother took the photo. All six people were smiling from ear to ear, against the background of a sandy beach. Father looked quite advanced in years, but except for a woman in her mid-twenties who reminded me of my elder sister in her twenties, the other children were all young.

I studied the photograph closely, feeling envy rising in me, recalling myself and my siblings in my childhood and adolescence when my Mother eked out a living by taking in sewing. Father's and the

children's faces all looked faintly familiar, but Father's second wife, Kang Myŏngsun, was an irreconcilably alien presence to me. Her face was noticeably dark and ruddy, her physique sturdy, her expression strong-willed. She didn't look like the natural spouse of a man like my Father, who in my memory was an elegant intellectual. Her face drew out my next question.

"Have you heard about how your parents got married?"

My brother observed me for a while and then answered, without emotion:

"My mother was Father's student while he taught at the Agricultural College of Wŏnsan. It was after she came back from the South where she had fought brilliantly as a woman warrior in the People's Army. They got married after they met again in the Field of Yŏldu Three Thousand ri in Mundŏk."

"Field of Yŏldu Three Thousand ri in Mundŏk? What was Father doing there?"

"He was ordered by the Party in 1954 to work on the irrigation project in the Field of Yŏldu Three Thousand ri. I was born in Mundŏk, too."

"Why did they order a college professor to work on a construction site? Father's major was agricultural economy, not irrigation. Did you hear why?"

Then I thought I could figure out what remained a mystery to me about Father's career after his defection to the North. Nineteen fifty-four was the year of the big purge of the Southern Labor Party members. Father must have been deprived of his professorship and sent away to work on an irrigation project. That explains the discrepancy between the report of my relative who was dispatched to the South shortly after the armistice and arrested for espionage and that of another relative who was sent South in the sixties and turned himself in. Whereas the former had said that Father was a professor at the Agricultural College of Wŏnsan, the latter insisted that Father was an engineer working on a construction project in a remote place. But my brother seemed to have no knowledge of the fluctuations in Father's fortune.

"There was no 'reason. 'It was the Party's order."

"He told me in his letter of 1980 that he was working for the Science Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture. Wasn't that true?"

"Father was an official of the Institute until his death."

"Then why did he live in Chŏngjin?"

"We've been living in Chŏngjin from when I entered middle school. We lived in Mundŏk while Father was the chief engineer on the irrigation project, and then we lived for three years in Pyongyang while he underwent re-education in the Political and Economic College of Sŏngdo, and then we moved to Chŏngjin."

I thought that if I questioned him more closely I would be able to trace the vicissitudes of my father's fortune subsequent to his defection, but I changed the topic there. I didn't want to provoke my brother's defensiveness. But it was an unfortunate move.

"So how are you all faring?"

I asked the question to show my concern for their welfare, but my brother's eyes grew perceptibly hostile. They seemed to be saying, I've been expecting this insult from the first.

"How do you mean? Do you want to hear we're starving?"

"How could I? It's just that we're siblings who'll have to be each other's support come Unification. How are you all doing?"

"My elder sister has married a diplomat and is living abroad, and my younger sister married the party supervisor of the Light Industries Committee last year. One of my younger brothers is a teacher, and the youngest one is a freshman in the Pyongyang College of Foreign Languages. And I'm working in the Organization Committee at Kimchaek Industries Consortium. We may not look like much to you, but we can hold our own against anybody."

"I'm so glad. So, it's true that you have received more from the country than you gave it, as Father said in his letter. I'd been worried, even though I didn't believe all I've heard about the North."

Because my brother's tone was so sarcastic, mine also was ironic. My brother provoked me once again.

"We'd been thinking you were having a hard life in the South, so we were awfully surprised when the National Security Ministry told us about you. Father even said once that you might all have been slaughtered. I wonder what made the running dogs of the American imperialists so generous to you."

It sounded as if he was asking me, how did I come to be such cronies with the running dogs of the Americans? To be honest, I had till then never felt the need to defend the system of government I was living under. But my brother's implied accusation suddenly made me a champion of the form of my own government, just as if I had been a delegate in a South-North conference.

"It's true we barely escaped death. There'd be no end if I were to tell you all our tribulations. I often had to go hungry in my childhood and teens, and there were countless humiliations. To this day I have a tendency to overeat, which is a habit I picked up in my hungry days. Because I wasn't sure when I'll have the next meal, I ate as much as I could when I could. And, boy, were we

watched!While I was a college student, there was a policeman in charge of me, who checked up on me regularly, so I often had to give up my home tutoring job. And it went on for two more decades, until I became a full-time instructor at my University. It ended in 1982, with the special decree of the military regime. And I'm just getting by even now. My apartment is only about one hundred and twenty square meters in area, and I'd been driving a small car until I became a full professor last year. This ten-day trip costs me half my monthly salary. The rich in the South live in palatial mansions and drive luxury foreign limousines. Some of them fly to Hawaii or Australia to play golf. I had to be awfully careful and humble just to achieve this much success. I could never take part in any anti-government demonstration while I was a college student, and I was branded a conservative reactionary all through the eighties, when anybody with intellectual pretensions were nationalists and progressives."

I recounted my tribulations and the meagerness of my success with malicious honesty. I said I was poor, like one who boasted of his wealth by saying I am poor, and so is my housekeeper, my gardener, and my chauffeur. But while recalling the humiliations and misery of my childhood as a defector's son I became emotional and my voice shook violently as I went on. So, instead of my malice producing the intended effect, it stirred my brother's pity.

"I see. You have suffered. While I was a child I saw Father silently weeping from time to time. Now I understand why."

I felt very stupid, hearing my brother commiserating me so wholeheartedly, but I went on with my malicious self-display.

"It's only recently that I could buy a small piece of land in our hometown. Of course it's nothing, compared with what we used to own. And I built a villa on a plot of land I bought on the East Coast. But it's no more than a cottage."

"I heard that the traitorous plutocrats have millions of square meters of land, and that all the scenic places are taken up by their deluxe villas where they cavort with young whores."

There simply was no way. My approach was too sophisticated for my naive younger brother. It was then that Mr. Kim, sensing my brother's incomprehension, put in:

"I understood, from what Professor Liu told me, that you are quite a rich man, to our standards. He said that your fortune is worth more than a million American dollars, and that professors in the South enjoy much better income and higher social status than in the North."

The mention of one million dollars seemed to stagger my younger brother. A look of confusion replaced the compassionate look on his face. The next moment his face grew red and he asked, breathing roughly:

"Then, you've been bragging about your wealth all this time?"

"Oh, no. I just told you how I'm living. And, as Mr. Kim said, it's nothing remarkable in the South."

I defended myself hastily, but I was blushing red. To hide my shame and embarrassment, I hastily took out from my suitcase the liquor and nuts I had brought along. Before leaving Seoul I went to my hometown and supplied myself with the liquor from Andong and the chestnuts and dates from nearby hills, as well as the persimmons peeled and dried there. I had brought them to give to my brother to be offered to my Father's spirit, but I was also hoping that they would bring me and my brother closer. I was going to use them to soothe the embarrassment or antagonism that might be felt between us, so I hastily took them out. Pretending calm, I first took out of my suitcase the porcelain jar containing the Andong soju.16)

"This is soju from Andong. Offer some to Father for me."

I held out the jar, emphasizing the word Andong, but my brother didn't respond in the way I had hoped. He took the jar with reluctance, and said gruffly:"We have excellent spirits in the North, too. You didn't have to bring it all the way here."

Then, seeing the nuts and dates and the dried persimmons, he snubbed me: "Why did you bother to bring those? Do you think we don't even have nuts to put on commemoration tables?"

My brother's gruffness gave me a good opening. I began soothingly:

"This soju was brewed with the water from our Father's hometown. I'd have liked to bring the rice wine from our local brewery, but I brought soju instead because rice wine might change. I know you have excellent spirits, but how could they be as delectable to his ghost as this soju from his hometown? It's the same with these nuts and dates. The chestnuts are from the backhill of our hometown, and the dates come from our ancestral hills near the market area. The persimmons are dried in the Pine Valley, on the other side of the mountain from our hometown. So, they're all from the land of Father's childhood. He visited our hometown regularly to look around the hills and creeks even in his busy youth. How he must have yearned to be there for more than forty years!"

I could not go on. My brother was listening in grave silence.

"Since you don't have a spirit niche, please offer them before his grave. It is a great impiety for me not to do it myself."

"I will, Brother," my brother said, without any hostility or reserve in his voice. We were brothers again.

After that, my brother made ready to leave, taking the soju and the fruits and nuts from me, saying that he had another business to look after. And he didn't even say he would come to see me again, even though he knew quite well that I was leaving Yenji by the eleven o'clock plane the next morning.

As there was no telling when I would be meeting him again, I was loath to let him go like that. My brother also seemed reluctant to leave, even though he was making haste. So, I suggested having lunch together. My brother consented, and we went to a nearby restaurant. Afraid of offending my brother again by a display of my affluence, I asked Mr. Kim to choose a restaurant, and we went to a modest Korean restaurant.

The beer we drank with the lunch produced the unexpected effect of removing the awkwardness between me and my brother, and made our exchange much more familiar and natural. Looking at my brother tossing down glass after glass of beer as I poured it out for him, I was thinking that he is a true member of my family, when my brother said with a flushed face:

"You know, you remind me so strongly of Father when you drink. Father used to drink beer without screwing up his face in the least, just as if he were drinking plain water, and his laughter rang loud when he got drunk. It can't be a conscious imitation, as you were still young when he defected."

"I think I faintly recall Father's laughter that used to ring out from the men's study. Is mine so very like his?"

Father left us when I was seven. But it must have been a year or two prior to that that I heard his laughter. The year before the outbreak of the war he stayed underground to avoid capture, so he couldn't have laughed and drank, and after the war broke out he was just too busy to have had time to

make merry. So, I couldn't have been old enough to note the quality of Father's laughter. The most I could have thought must have been, Father's drinking with his pals.

But the shared memory of Father's drinking brought us close, and brought down my inhibitions. I felt that I couldn't let my brother go without apologizing for the spitefulness I showed him in the hotel room. So, I began to explain myself.

"I'm sorry about what I said this morning. I hope I haven't hurt your feelings. I didn't mean to brag about my affluence. Just take that as my assurance that you don't have to worry about me, even if I had to suffer acutely after Father's defection. Don't think that all South Koreans are money-mad."

It was an excuse and self-justification, but not without an element of truth. Uneasy thoughts about how my father's family was faring crossed my mind from time to time before I met my brother, so it didn't seem preposterous that they would have worried about how we were doing.

But my excuses brought on new shame. Even though I was a passive participant in the speculative schemes managed by my wife, I was innocent of few of the financial malpractices that was written up in the papers since the cleaning-up drive of the Kim Young Sam government began last year. My wife bought the apartment I currently live in in her widowed sister's name to avoid taxes,17) and my villa on the East Coast, which is quite an expensive resort villa now, is built on the site of a farm house at the tip of a deserted bay my wife bought dirt cheap ten years ago. And the three thousand pyŏng plot of farmland in my hometown is not only deeded in somebody else's name but was paid for by an irregular bank loan. And that was not the only time I got an irregular loan, either. My friend who is a branch manager of a bank repeatedly approved my loan applications though he knew they were going to be used for purposes other than stated on the application. That is how I became a millionaire, which I couldn't have become if I just saved up my salary and made investments permitted by law. But my brother accepted my explanation without question.

"Oh, don't worry. It was small-minded of me to get cross like that. I'm really glad you're doing so well."

Then, after much hesitation, he took out of his small handbag a silk pouch the size of a pocket diary. My brother's face seemed to be saying, "now it's time I show you my truth." Mr. Kim, sensing what was in the pouch, became tense.

"Why did you bring that here?" he asked my brother.

"Father told me to give this to him."

Then he opened the pouch. A well-polished medal came out. From the way my brother handled it, it must be a very precious medal, but to me it didn't look like anything very important, even though it was shiny from careful polish. I was in Berlin in 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down, and they were selling East German medals. I bought one for twenty marks. My brother's medal looked similar to that one.

"This is our national first-class medal of merit. This is the highest recognition Father received in return for his lifelong service to the Republic. He received it for his ten years of devoted work on the irrigation of the Field of Yŏldu Three Thousand ri, at the height of the struggle for agricultural development in the '60s. I heard that the great leader himself conferred the medal on Father," my brother said, looking straight into my eyes. I was moved. I wasn't comparing the relative status of the college professor and an irrigation engineer any more. Nor did I reflect on the misery of having to change one's field of specialization in one's forties. I was overwhelmed with the thought that Father was giving us--his family in the South--the highest reward that he earned in his life. I thought I could understand what he meant. Father was telling us that he was sending us the highest honor he earned in his life, as a small consolation for all the ordeals that we suffered on account of him. My brother's next words moved me as much as my father's thoughtfulness.

"My family objected to my bringing this to you. They said it shouldn't be given to a crony of the running dogs of the American imperialists. But I held out. First of all, it was Father's wish. And I also said we couldn't know what you were like until I saw you."

"So, what am I like?" I asked, with trepidation.

"I feel that you're my brother. Or rather, that you're worthy to be Father's eldest son. I don't know how you have lived, but I feel that you won't disgrace this medal."So saying, my brother offered the medal to me with both hands, like one performing a solemn ritual of conferment. It was at that moment that I recalled Mt. Haishan. So I asked Mr. Kim, without consulting my brother first:

"Do you remember the hill by the Tumen River we went to with Professor Liu last year?"

"You mean Haishan?"

"Yes. How long does it take to get there from here?"

"I think an hour would be enough for a round trip."

I looked at my brother.

"This business you have to look into this afternoon. Do you have to do it this afternoon?"

"Why do you ask?"

"No one knows when we can meet again after this. Can you spare two more hours for me?"

My brother checked his watch. It seemed that both his inclination and the time he could spare were very uncertain. He frowned a little but asked me calmly:

"What are you thinking of doing in those two hours?"

"I want you to take a trip with me to Haishan, by the Tumen River."

"What're you going to do on the mountain?"

"We have a traditional ritual called "offering from afar." That is, we make offerings to our ancestors from a distance, when we cannot visit their graves due to war or acts of Nature. We go as close as we can get to the grave, and make offerings there. Since you have to pay your respects at Father's grave anyway, how about us two making the offering together, from the bank of the Tumen River? I would like to offer a cup of liquor and make a bow to Father's ghost."

By the time I finished explaining, my brother's mind was made up.

"All right. I'll go with you."

So, we went to Haishan together. Sensing our desire to be alone together, Mr. Kim didn't offer to accompany us. He just helped us purchase in a nearby market the fish and fruit to offer to our father's ghost, and putting us in a cab driven by a driver of Korean descent, left us. Since he didn't say anything about the rest of his fee, I guessed that he was intending to collect it at my hotel that night.

Unlike in the streets of Yenji city, there was no change noticeable along the Tumen River. Under the sky dimmed by dusty wind from Chinese mainland, North Korean mountains across the river lay gloomily prostrate, and there were the huge billboards proclaiming "Chollima18) Movement" and "Speedy Operation" standing on mid-slope, just as two years before. The Tumen River was also the same, its meager volume of water showing signs of pollution.

Since we didn't have a rush mat to spread, we spread a piece of newspaper on a plot of level lawn. Even though I knew that such things could be of no use to my brother, I explained to him the rules pertaining to the preparation of offering tables for ancestor commemoration. I also told him our clan's special method of laying out nuts and fruits on an offering table.

"I am the consecrator today. I would have liked to offer cooked rice and three cups of spirits, but since this is only a makeshift offering, we'll just offer one cup. You pour out the soju, and I'll offer it.

Even though we were making the offering from a foreign land, we were not deficient in piety. The fact that I didn't feel in the least awkward or self-conscious, even though the taxi driver who drove us there kept eyeing us with curiosity from the river's shore and passers-by also cast glances at us, indicates that I must have been driven by an almost religious fervor transcending mere filial piety. Perhaps infected by my fervor, my brother assisted me without a single mistake, even though my instructions must have contained much terminology that was unfamiliar to him.

The real sorrow of a bereaved son overcame me after the offering of spirits was over and I wrapped up the ceremony with a half bow. The landscape of North Korea, my Father's Republic which looked as if it was hunkering desolately and gloomily under a veil of dust, came into my eyes as I dropped my head

to bow. It seemed to me an image of my Father's life in North Korea, and seared my heart.

Born as the only son of an ambitious mother who was widowed young, Father's childhood and youth was filled with legendary episodes half based on fact but heavily embellished and fictionalized. Then he began his career as a young ideologue. Even though it had some setbacks and hazards, his thirty-five years in the southern half of the peninsula presaged no failure.

But how would he have reviewed his forty years in the North at his deathbed? Of course, Father was guided by the light of his luminous ideology. I heard that Father had once said to Mother that he'd be content to be a janitor of a primary school or a factory worker if only the republic in his heart becomes a reality. But could he have been content? The family he'd left behind would have been a bleeding wound to him for a long time. He had to change his line of specialization at nearly forty years of age, and then spend ten years struggling to stay alive. From a professor of economics he was degraded to a civil engineer which was as good as being a blue collar worker, and then chief civil engineer. Then he had to turn himself into an irrigation expert. Even if he may have found it good in his last moment, I have the right to determine his life a failure and mourn, I said to myself, while trying to contain my flowing tears. In my childhood, whenever there was news of unrest along the armistice line, I imagined my Father leading an army into the south, mounted high on a white horse. When we began to have more detailed information about the North Korean society and the newspapers disclosed the names of North Korean power elites, I simply believed that the reason my Father's name was absent from the top 100 North Korean politicians was the unreliability of the news source and nothing else. When, during my graduate student assistant years I obtained documents on the history of the Communist movement in South Korea and did not find Father's name listed in any of the executive committees of not only the core Southern Labor Party but any of the peripheral committees, I was confident it was because Father disguised his identity, as many of the Communist bigwigs did in those days. My belief sprang from one fact, and one fact only: without believing that he was a giant, there was no way of explaining or justifying the sufferings and pains of my mother, myself, and my siblings. Now, those sufferings and pains gave me the right to mourn Father's failure.

I thought I was weeping for my Father's failure, but I realized by and by that I was crying for myself. I cried for the miseries and pains of my past, for which no possibility of compensation of any kind remained, and I wept for my spirit which became distorted in the process of my struggle for survival, while I vowed to stay alive until "that day." As I became more and more emotional, I shuddered to think of the accusations levelled at me by the "grassroots" and "nationalist" historians, accusations which I countered with confidence in the 1980s. I mistook the neo-imperialist army for liberators, and neo-colonialists for a blood ally, and am a reactionary historian greedily sucking the fruit of economic development implemented by military dictators, which made the Korean economy a hanger-on on the advanced countries'.

My bow became prolonged while I was controlling my emotion. But my brother stood immobile beside me with head solemnly lowered, until I coughed a couple of false coughs as a sign that we should end our bow. As I was collecting the offerings after wiping my tears, I saw that my brother's cheeks were wet, too. My sorrow must have infected him. Feeling even greater fraternal affection, I flopped down on the spread newspaper. Raising the cup that still held wine, I said,

"Do you know that wine offered to the spirits of the dead are to be drunk by the descendants? That's called 'drinking blessed cups.' Come, let's drink this cup blessed by our Father."

What my brother said, taking the cup from me, surprised me. "Is this Chebiwŏn brand soju?"

"How do you know Chebiwŏn soju?"

"I remember Father talking about it."

Then, picking up a chestnut to snack on, he asked, with a light smile:

"Are there still many chestnut trees in the back hills of Father's hometown?"

"Yes, they were replaced with improved breeds, but the hills are still chestnut hills. How do you know

about those hills?"

"Oh, I know the pine valley, and the quarry creek, and the red screen mountain, and the rock for watching fish frolic."

My brother enumerated the names of places in my hometown like one who had been there many times. I felt Father's strong nostalgia from the fact that he talked about his hometown to his children who had never seen our hometown. Wanting to repay my brother in kind, I asked:

"Is Chŏngjin still so cold and windy? With the sandy wind that cuts into your marrows? And is there still the three-mile long pebble field? And is the Kimchaek iron refinery still spewing out smoke and dust?"

"How do you know about them?"

"How could I be indifferent to the place my Father and my siblings live? I know about the Double Swallow Mountain and the Camel Mountain and the Susŏngchŏn Creek."

My innocent younger brother looked visibly moved. I felt conscience-stricken when I saw how easily my brother took all my professed concern at face value. I felt as if I was cheating him for some purpose. That made me more and more sparing of words.

Now that I had bowed to Father and wept for him together with my younger brother, I felt more at home with the latter. Till then, I was obsessed with the thought that I must clinch my fraternal hold on my younger brother. The fact that he was only my half brother made that seem a difficult task. That must be why I was saying things for deliberate effect and was more talkative than usual. But I felt I didn't have to be impatient or anxious any more. As I became more silent, my brother began to talk more. It seemed that my brother is not naturally gregarious, either, but having drunk some beer and soju and being assured of brotherhood, he seemed in a mood to find out what had long been questions with him.

"What is South Korea really like?"

"Well, many ugly things happen there, it is true, but people live there."

"How is life over there? I hear such contradictory reports about it. According to the "Facts about South Korea" issued by the government, it must be wretchedly poor. But from what some of the people who have been overseas say, it seems like it's rather the reverse. And what I heard here last night also . . ."

"Yes, it's true that South Korea is quite well-off at this moment. But there's no guarantee that the affluence will last. Some compare the affluence of South Korea to the affluence enjoyed by estate stewards of rich men. You know, those who collect rent from tenant farmers on behalf of landowners. Cynics compare it to a concubine's menagerie. You know, the kind of women who spend all their money to eat and dress well for the moment, and even borrow money to do that, instead of planning and saving for the future."

When I told him my thoughts frankly, my brother told me his thoughts frankly, too.

"Yes, I heard those criticisms, too, but it seems to me that we mustn't look at it completely negatively. If we are heading towards a market-oriented economy of private ownership, isn't it better to be a landowner than a tenant farmer? And isn't a steward in a better position to become a landowner than is a tenant farmer? One shouldn't fall so low as to be a concubine, to be sure, but I think we can regard a steward as a moderate success in the capitalistic world. I mean, he is in a position of advantage in the structure of international exploitation."

"It's so strange to hear such words from your lips. Are there many in North Korea who hold such views?" I could not help asking. Then, my brother looked a little flustered and said,

"Well, in fact I was just quoting my friend who is in the International Economic Relations Bureau. He served abroad for a few years as a second secretary in charge of trade. When I first heard it I thought it was such a reactionary thought. But hearing your words, it occurred to me that he might be right. But I wasn't sounding you out or anything."

"It seems to me that he looked only on the good side of the South Korean economy. I suppose that's

what South Korea is aiming at--joining the circle of advanced countries, globalization, and development through technology. Those are all slogans of those struggling to become a landlord in the structure of international exploitation, aren't they? But attaining those goals aren't as easy as mouthing those slogans."

"But you've been doing well so far, haven't you? Especially if you think only of the economy."

"We've been managing quite successfully, but the stress is becoming evident. The advanced countries are trying to restrain us, and we are becoming more and more dependant the bigger our economy grows."

"You mean on the U. S. A. ? Do you have to be in such harsh servitude to them?"

That put me on guard, but I was not in a mood to be guarded in talking with my brother. So, I just exaggerated my worries concerning the matter, based on what I heard others say.

"We have a serous problem of political dependence, too, but economic dependence is really serious. The political sanctions are not so terrible compared with the economic threat of the U. S. , backed by the vast U. S. market."

"Then why don't you break with the U. S. and become self-sufficient?"

"That would be like an independent farmer with a few hillside patches of land to just live on the oats and barley of his own growth, in his own hut. That's what you've been doing until recently, isn't it? How did you like it?"

"We can manage. If only we are spiritually armed."But my brother's voice as he said this was not as spirited as that of the announcers on North Korean TV making similar declarations.

"Oh, I'm not sure. Even Japan, whose economy is maybe ten times stronger than ours, took a hard beating when it rebelled against the U. S. some time ago and had to beg for forgiveness on bent knees."

Our taxi driver, who had been pacing the river bank impatiently waiting for us to get back in, coughed loudly to remind us. I made haste to get up, as we had drunk up all the soju and as we were skating on dangerous ice in our conversation, too.

"I hope it's not too late for you?" I asked my brother. He checked his watch and grew tense.

"Oh, I'd better go back. I didn't know it was getting so late."

Then he gathered together the remainder of the offerings. The offerings consisted of only fruit with sliced-off bottom and top, dates and nuts and some dried fish, but somehow the bundle looked bigger than when we'd brought it. My brother's left shoulder sagged as he lifted it.

"Here. Give it to me. I'll carry it."

"No. I ought to carry it," he said, and transferred the bundle to his right hand. Perhaps because of the liquor consumed, I had the momentary illusion that we were coming down from the hill of our ancestral graves in our hometown after making seasonal offerings.

"We're not supposed to take back home what we had offered before ancestral graves. We have to give away what's left of the offerings to the grave keeper or to relatives living near the graves, in the spirit of spreading the blessings of the deceased. Do you have a relative to give them to? If you don't, then just give them to the driver."

We continued our conversation in the taxi on our way back. But, even though considerably drunk, my brother was very cautious in what he said. He defended his regime in this fashion:

"Why are the South Korean rulers such fools? I mean, about the nuclear weapons. Now, if we develop nuclear weapons, come unification, which is bound to happen some day, South Korea will be a nuclear nation for free. Why do the South Korean politicians have to try to stop us desperately, just like the Americans are doing? Are they afraid we'd attack the South with the missiles?"

And then, when I demurred to his immovable faith in his regime, he resorted to the standard North Korean rhetoric:

"You know, we in the North live in perfect union with the land. In Chŏngjin, where I live, everywhere I

go there are traces of my labor and devotion. I helped build the Susŏng river bank and the bomb shelter in the Camel Mountain as a high school student, and as students we also helped plant seedlings in the Lanam Field, so that I can say I trod on every inch of the field. I can truly boast that every street, dock, and railroad in that city has received my labor and care. The same goes with everyone and their hometowns. They have cared for every blade of grass and every tree growing on their homes."

I was thankful that my brother didn't irritate me by singing praises of "the Great Leader" and "the Dear Leader." I had no wish to shake his firm faith in the virtues of the system he lives under. Whether he believed in them from the heart, or whether it is a faith drilled into him by repetition, I deemed it fortunate that my brother was able to keep his faith in and affection for his regime. And I expressed my sympathy.

When the taxi turned into the city of Yenji I recalled that that may be my last as well as my first meeting with my brother, and grew impatient, like one who had forgotten to perform an obligatory ritual.

"I leave here tomorrow morning. Can we meet again?" I could bring out the question only when my hotel came in sight at the end of the street, when my brother ceased talking for a moment. My brother, who had been engrossed in his talk, suddenly became alert and turned to face me, but said without confidence:

"I don't know. I'll try to come by to your hotel tonight or early tomorrow morning."

"Well, if you can't make it, this is good-bye. And we don't know when we can meet again."

Then I became regretful, feeling that we had wasted our precious time together with inessential talk. My brother seemed to be feeling similar regrets.

"I'm sure it won't be too long. I'm sure we'll be reunited before long." But his voice lacked confidence. An internal conflict that went on in my mind during the whole time since meeting my brother but was pushed aside for a while by the emotional turmoil following the commemorative offering revived.

I had brought with me from Seoul a little sum in US dollars to give to my brother. I didn't think my brother would be in dire straits, considering his family background and education, even amid the economic stress that North Korea is under, but it was possible that my brother might get into difficulties if his meeting with me became known. But, after I met him, I wasn't sure if I should offer it to him or not. Because he seemed so sensitive about North Korea's poverty in comparison to South Korean prosperity, I had been putting it off. Now, the decision became an urgent necessity.

But while I was trying to decide, the car was already entering the hotel driveway. I stole glances at my brother's profile, like one fishing for a clue. But my brother quickly checked his watch again and hurriedly got off. Nowhere on his face could I find any hint of expecting financial assistance from me. I thought of asking whether he'd accept a gift of money from me, but there was no time for it now.

Getting off the taxi after him, I gave up the thought of thrusting the envelope of dollar bills into his hand and just grasped his hand. My brother, who seemed about to say something, winced and closed his mouth.

"Then, is this going to be the last?"

"I'll try . . . to come again."

"Don't try too hard. As you say, our country will be reunified before long. Then, we can meet whenever we want."

I don't know what he did at the Organization Committee at the Industries Consortium, but my brother's hand was rougher than I expected. I stroked his hand with my other hand and bade him good-bye.

"Good-bye and keep well. I'm sure Father's spirit watches you all. Be careful about everything and take good care of yourself."

I felt really sorry to part with him, like one letting go without any assurance of future reunion a brother he has lived with for a long time. My brother's eyes also seemed to grow moist.

"You take good care of yourself, too, Brother."

"Please give my love to my other brothers and sisters." Then, I added, like one who has made a

grave decision. "And to our mother, too."

One of my anxious uncertainties after I decided to meet my brother was how to call my brother's mother. Should I call her "mother in the North?" Or "my stepmother?" But none of them seemed appropriate. So, I had been making do with "your mother." But she became "our mother" in my mind at the moment of parting from my brother.

In ancient Oriental law, there were exceptional cases where a second legal wife was authorized by law. In the modern rational sensibility, too, my brother's mother was fully entitled to be regarded as my mother. But I was surprised that "our mother" rolled out of my mouth so naturally, and winced. My brother was visibly affected, too. His alcohol-clouded face sobering up at once, he gazed at me for a moment and bowed.

"Please give my love to my sister and my nephews and nieces. And to our mother, too."

"Our mother" seemed to roll out of his mouth quite naturally, too.

The hotel lobby was bustling with the arrival of a new tour group. It seemed like a large group, and a score or so of men and women were checking to see that their suitcases had arrived. From the accent of their loud exclamations I could see that they were from the provinces.

There was a time when I was glad to meet Korean tourists while travelling abroad. I used to go up to them, even though they were total strangers, and asked them where they were from, and, if I had been in that city for a few days, offered advice on places worth seeing. But from some time ago I began to feel embarrassment when I met them, felt the meeting awkward, and ended up trying to avoid talking to them altogether.

It was the same that day. I disliked them from the moment I set eyes on them. All the men were wearing safari jackets, as if they were going to Mt. Paekdu to hunt tigers, and every one of them had cameras hanging from their necks. More than half of the cameras were Japanese-made video cameras. All of them, whether young or old, were wearing denim jeans or shorts, and famous maker tennis shoes. In both color and design their apparels were displaying crude Western leisure and sports fashion, as if they were under the illusion that when you're sightseeing you have to leave behind your dignity at home.

Most of them seemed to be married couples, so most of the women were probably housewives, but none of the women were wearing proper skirts. Young and old, they were wearing either tight-fitting slacks that revealed their less-than-elegant figures, or culottes that didn't even properly cover their knees. Even when dressing for convenience of travelling, it should be possible to dress neatly and soberly.

And they were carrying on as if they had bought the hotel. The men were standing in threes and fours talking excitedly, not caring to see if they were becoming nuisances to other guests of the hotel, and the women seemed to be imitating the postures of loose women in Western movies, sitting cross-legged on the sofas exposing their thighs or with their legs propped on suitcases, just as if they were in their own living rooms. They were no doubt displaying their self-assurance based on national prosperity, but their impudence and lack of manners disgusted me.

But I didn't have to let them know my disgust, so I walked past the lobby with as casual a face as I could feign, and was heading toward the elevator when somebody greeted me with "How are you?"

I looked back, thinking it was a North Korean accent often heard in Yenji, to find that it was our "unification man" who was staying behind in the hotel, like myself, but whom I hadn't seen for the past two days. I suppose he sounded like a North Korean because he pronounced the greeting with extreme courtesy. His attire presented a sharp contrast to that of the tourists', consisting of grey formal suit and brown necktie and black leather shoes. It seemed as if he was underlining his dignity by his choice of colors.

"Oh, fine, thank you. I heard you were staying behind. How's your work going?" I replied, and noted something strange as he came closer. On his suit jacket and shirts were stains of many colors, as if he had food poured over him and hastily towelled off. When he stood beside me I thought I could smell

food.

"Oh, these stains? The waiter spilled the dish on me at lunch . . ."

The man explained, noting my expression. But it wasn't very convincing. Why did the waiter hoist the dish up to this man's head? I couldn't help wondering. The stains were on the collar of his shirts, too. But, hiding my thoughts, I said:

"I think you'd better ask the hotel to clean your shirts and suit at once, if you don't have a spare set. I'm sure they can have them ready for you by tomorrow morning. Since we're going to stop over in Beijing for a night, there might be an occasion for dressing formally."

"It's all right. In Beijing I'll go sightseeing to Yihuayuen and the thirteen tombs of the Ming emperors like everyone else, so I'll dress informally."

While the man was saying this with a feigned nonchalant expression, the elevator door opened. I pressed the button for the eighth floor, and he also pressed the number of his floor. Then, he turned toward me and asked, "Are you expecting someone?"

I recalled that Mr. Kim was coming to see me, but as he had said he'll come after dinner, I said, "No, not right now."

"Then, how about going up to the lounge and having a chat, instead of just sitting in your room by yourself? Our group will come back only after dark. You seem to have had several glasses already. I'll buy you some beer. How about it, professor?"

I looked at him in surprise at his identifying me by my profession. He smiled and said, "I knew from the first. I'm a nobody, but my special interest is history, so--You're professor Hyŏnu Lee of Taehan University, aren't you?"

Before I recovered from my confusion, the elevator stopped on the eighth floor and the door opened. The man pressed the door close button without consulting me and pressed the button for the sky lounge floor.

The lounge was almost deserted, compared to the coffee shop downstairs. I sat down beside a window with a good view, feeling like the man's prisoner. Of course, it is quite likely that even if I hadn't run into this man I'd have come up to the lounge for a drink, to soothe my desolation after parting from my brother like that.

The unification man ordered three bottles of beer and some dry snacks with barely a glance at me for approval, and then muttered, with a sullen grin,

"The thief must be plotting something big at this moment. I should have gone back to the room and disrupted that."

"How do you mean?"

"That thief who's staying behind with us. He said you and he had a talk in the coffee shop yesterday."

"Oh, you mean that businessman. Yes, I had a talk with him briefly."

"Businessman? He's a thief. Do you know why he's here? He's here to smuggle out cultural treasures. His shop in Insa-dong is a veneer for his tomb digging and treasure smuggling."

Only then did I recover from the shock of the unification man's having known me from the first but having given no hint of it till then. I suppose the historian in me took alarm at the thought of a tomb digger and smuggler of cultural treasures.

"Is that so? But I don't think it will be that easy to smuggle out cultural treasures from here. I mean, Chinese customs officials must be experts at detecting cultural treasures. They've had to fight drainage of cultural assets for a long time, you know"

"Yes, their own treasures. But people like this thief are not dealing in Chinese cultural treasures. So, the Chinese customs don't know them."

"Don't the Chinese regard the remnants of Koguryŏ19) and Pohai20) as their cultural property?" I said, thinking that the antique dealer must have come there to find the treasures of the ancient Korean kingdoms that had been in the Manchurian region.

"Oh, the thief is collecting Yi Dynasty potteries and paintings and calligraphy."

"Could there be enough such things in Yenji to make his trip worthwhile? I mean, most people here are descendants of thosewho drifted to this area during the Japanese occupation period because they were absolutely destitute. I don't think those people could have brought valuable potteries and paintings, when they had to walk more than a thousand kilometers, begging."

"He and his kind collect them not from this region, but from North Korea. I was shocked. And apparently he's done it many times already."

Then I understood. Well, since there are ways of sneaking in people from North Korea, like Mr. Kim did my brother, there must be ways of sneaking in things, but I couldn't help being curious about the methods.

"How do they do it?"

"This is what I gathered over the last two days. First, you get hold of someone who has relatives in North Korea or who goes in and out of North Korea on legitimate business, and give him a lot of money. Then, that man buys up anything old he comes across in North Korea, which he can do with just a few dollars. Then he brings them here, disguising them as household items. Like, one could put hot paste in a Yi Dynasty pottery, or sesame oil in a Koryo celadon. It seems that because of the excellent quality of North Korean mud, there were a number of good kilns in North Korea. Some of them produced celadon of a unique character, like the kiln in Mt. Kyeryong in the South. Let's see . . . I heard there was one somewhere in Hamkyŏng Province. And there seems to be a great many paintings, calligraphies and old books owned by ordinary civilians that are not designated as protected cultural properties by the North Korean government but which will fetch a handsome pile of money in the South. The thief said that they can easily get a painting by Kyŏmje or Tanwŏn for a thousand dollars and sell it for half a billion won in Seoul, and that he once swapped a scripture printed in gold type with an electric rice cooker and sold it for a quarter billion."

"But how can they sneak them out of North Korea?"

"There doesn't seem to be much customs inspection on the North Korea-China border. They don't seem to care much about antiques other than designated national cultural properties, and the almighty dollar can blindfold customs officials, too."

There was no need to hear any more. I couldn't help but marvel at the spirit of capitalistic enterprise that can open routes for any and every operation that yields big profit. The unification man twisted the corners of his mouth and offered another information as well:

"Well, our friend is not deficient in other talents as well. He even has a local wife."

That seemed to be what the unification man really wanted to talk about.

"A local wife?"

"He has a Korean-Chinese young woman acting as a liaison person. I don't know how much money he gives her, but she doesn't even try to hide the fact that she is his mistress. He said that he had originally hired her on his first trip here as a personal interpreter and secretary. I wouldn't blame him so much if she had been a Chinese girl. But to make a plaything of a young Korean girl like that! He went out with her last night and stayed out, and I saw her in the room again today."

I shuddered at the power of money, which can turn everything under the sun, including human beings, into a commodity. But, since my professorial status was known to my companion, I was reluctant to dwell on sexual gossip. By that time we had emptied three bottles of Qingtao beer between us, and I had drunk a considerable amount of beer and soju previously, but I still had that much discretion. So, even though my companion seemed to be in a mood for some more salacious gossip, I changed the subject by asking, "Well, how is your unification project going?"

I had unthinkingly repeated the term the antique dealer had used concerning my companion's activities, but my companion became defensive at once, suspecting sarcasm.

"Oh, the thief must have given you wrong ideas about me. How can an ignorant and insignificant man

like me work on a unification project? What did the thief say exactly?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cast a slur on your activities at all. And I just used a word that came handy. But . . . isn't that what you're engaged in?"

My companion didn't take issue with the term any more. It seemed that it was not so much the term I used as something the words reminded him of that made him vehement.

"Oh, you needn't apologize. I'm just meeting this and that person in the hope of helping to bring it along, but I have no tangible results yet. I think it'd have been better to go see the lake."

"But I don't think you had any intention of going to the lake from the first," I observed casually. But he looked startled. Hastily feigning calm, he said:

"I thought you might not notice, being an academic person. But you have sharp eyes. Well, I've got nothing to hide. As a matter of fact, the organization I've been working for for many years disbanded, in order to form an international body of people from many countries and all strata of society eager to hasten the day of unification. Because this city is geopolitically so important, I was dispatched here to persuade important people of Korean descent to join the new body. My mission is to meet those important people of this region who have been in close contact with us from before, and also look for new people who could work with us. I joined the tour group to make myself and my mission inconspicuous. Our emissary to the United States went there by himself, but our envoy to Russia also joined a tour group going to Moscow and the Tashkent area. But, even though I met and talked to a number of people yesterday and today, not many people understand our objectives and approaches."

"Could it possibly be that your approach has its priorities reversed? I mean, could it be you're approaching the problem from a purely political perspective?"

I must have been drunk. The subject was not one that could be discussed in such simple terms, but I recalled what the antique dealer had said the day before and more or less repeated it. My companion must have been quite drunk, too. His reaction was fierce.

"Oh, you mean that economic problems must be considered first in thinking about unification? That talk of unification without serious consideration of the economic implications is nothing but sentimentalism, and so on? Are you of that opinion, too? But you'd better keep this clearly in mind. Every one of those who say that economic considerations should come first is a swindler or a far rightist who insists that South Korea should simply absorb North Korea."

Then, he calmed down a little and became more logically argumentative.

"The unification of the two halves of Korea is a return to Nature and restoration of justice, as our nation was originally one and our lands were originally one. So, those who label the effort to return to our natural original state a political approach and argue that economic preparations and achievement of cultural homogeneity should precede unification are those who really don't want unification. They pretend that they are being rational and prudent, but they have other motives. Those especially who insist that economic preparations must come first are evil-minded imperialists who would like to wait until North Korea gives in to the South, so that they will gain a colony the size of North Korea, which will double the size of their markets and bring them twenty million more consumers. If not, why are the economic conditions in North Korea and our economic capabilities so important? If we regard North Koreans as our true brethren, then how can we talk about unification expenses and so forth? Isn't it our duty to share everything we have with our brothers?"

"Well, nowadays even siblings of the same parents don't share everything equally. Even Germany, which was much better prepared than us, suffered from so many problems after unification. And Yemen, which united politically first, seems to be having a civil war."

Unlike when I was talking to the businessman the day before, I argued in favor of economic preparedness. I suppose it was easy for me to switch sides and perspectives because I hadn't thought seriously about unification. My companion flared up again.

"That, I say, is nonsense. Look. Do you think the day will ever come when the two sides reach

economic parity and cultural homogeneity, so that there will be no problem whatever after unification but profit and pleasure to everybody? Do those who hold economy-first theory really believe such a day will come? They know better than us that such a day will never come. That's exactly why they insist on it. So, isn't it a nobler argument that we must unify first, whatever problems we may have to deal with as a consequence? At least it's more honest, isn't it, Professor?"

But what if a situation like the ideological conflict following our liberation from Japan and the Korean War and its aftermath result? I could have asked, but I felt tired. To tell the truth, I have always felt that I am not qualified to offer opinions concerning unification and join ideological debates. This consciousness, which is something resembling an inferiority complex, may have its root in my self-consciousness as the son of a Communist defector, or the conviction of sin inculcated by the rigorous anti-Communist education we all received as children. Anyway, I always felt tired whenever I had to be present at an ideological debate. So, I tried to change the drift of the talk, but unintentionally aggravated his fury.

"Well, it's not that I'm really opposed to the political approach. I just repeated what I heard from other people. In the hope that it might be worth your consideration."

I wasn't necessarily thinking of the antique dealer when I said "other people." But my companion immediately decided that I meant the antique dealer. He flushed scarlet, and he raised his voice.

"It's what that thief said, isn't it? He mouthed sarcasm all day yesterday to me, and I guess he badmouthed me to you. Guys like him are exactly the sort I'm talking about. It's his sort that go around with a wise air, confusing good citizens by saying that we have to be careful and prudent about approaching unification. Why is it that the bad guys are always best at taking advantage of any new development? As soon as the South began to have contact with Yenji, the likes of that thief came here and corrupted our innocent brethren. The likes of him gave Korean residents here pocket money in return for robbing and swindling them, so Koreans here are only after money, and don't care about their fatherland and nation. Now, thieves like him are penetrating into North Korea. At the moment, the most they can do is to sneak out antiques, but just imagine what would happen when the North collapses and the South absorbs the North. Within just three months, South Korean thieves like him will buy up all the real estate in North Korea, taking advantage of the imperfect sense of real estate ownership of North Koreans. Not only that, but they will practice usury, traffick in human bodies, and they will lord over their North Korean brethren as if they were their feudal lords. Why, they'll far outdo the Japanese in cruelty and exploitation. We accuse North Koreans with defacing Nature because they carved the names of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-Il on boulders, but you just wait and see. As soon as South Koreans are let in North Korea, all the beautiful mountains and scenic places will be covered with tourist hotels and private villas. We must eliminate those thieves before the day of reunification."

It seemed to me that the unification man and the antique smuggler were fated to be antagonists. There are such pairs in the world. Two men who have keen insight into each other's vices and faults and cannot stand them. As far as I can see, these two didn't know each other until they met on the trip, and they shared a room for just two days, but the unification man seemed to regard the antique smuggler as a mortal enemy.

In any case, it is never very comfortable to hear someone talk about another with so much animosity. I tried my best to invent excuses and apologies for both sides, without speaking my real mind, and I could extricate myself from my companion only when it was almost eight o'clock.

I felt like going to a bar, get dead drunk, and just collapse on the bed, but I suppressed my urge and went back to my room. Mr. Kim would be coming for the final payment, and it was possible that my brother would come again. And a hangover wouldn't be a good thing to have on the flight to Beijing the next day.

It was good that I exercised self-control. Mr. Kim knocked on my door within half an hour of my return

to my room. The reckoning was concluded without any difficulty. Mr. Kim, perhaps because he was new to the kind of work, did not inflate expenses or exaggerate the difficulties he had to cope with. I ended up paying him much less than I had expected to.

So, having more US dollars left in my pocket than I had expected, I thought of my brother again. I thought up pretexts that would make my giving the money and my brother's accepting it less embarrassing. You paid Father's funeral expenses that I, the first son, would have had to pay had I been living with him, so please take it as a reimbursement. . . . If by ill luck it becomes known that you met me here, you might need some fund to iron out matters. . . . But Mr. Kim's parting remark disappointed me severely.

"I don't think your brother can come here again. These days Korean residents here watch out for North Koreans and report their activities for rewards. And special North Korean Security agents are vigilant in their surveillance, too. He really took a big risk spending so much time with you today. He should have just met you briefly, spent most of his time with his maternal uncle, and returned home carrying the usual things North Koreans buy here."

But . . . my brother came again. Our party came back from Mt. Paekdu past eight o'clock, and I returned to my room after having a late dinner with them. About an hour later I was taking a shower trying to wash out the alcohol I drank during the day when someone pounded on my door. I hastily dried myself and opened the door to behold my brother standing outside, noticeably drunk.

"It's me, brother. There's something I had to tell you."

I let him in hurriedly and closed the window which had been opened for ventilation. Seeing me check the door again to make sure it was properly closed, my brother said, "Don't worry. It's all right. It'll be all right even if a National Security Ministry agent sees me. Won't you give me a drink, if you have some?"

I made him sit down and opened the refrigerator. Unlike in the hotel I had stayed in two years before, there were several kinds of drinks in the refrigerator. Because my brother wanted strong liquor, I took out a small bottle of whisky and a packet of dried beef jerky.

"Well, what is it?" I asked my brother, who was tossing down the whisky without bothering to put in any ice.

"I've got lots to say. How I hated you and envied you and . . ." My brother snuffled and went on.

"Do you know what you were to me all this time? Father talked about you only from shortly before his death, but I was conscious of you all along. I used to have queer feelings in the middle of Father's fond gaze. It was as if Father was looking not at me but at someone behind me. I didn't know who it was when I was a small kid, but I could guess from when I went to middle school. It was you. And I always felt Father was comparing me with someone. Father praised me when I proudly handed him my report card, but Father's eyes went blank for short seconds. Maybe someone else's report card loomed before his eyes. I sensed it even when I was in grade school."

I recalled the exam sheets and report cards of my long-ago childhood, which I dimly remembered. Yes. My school record of that year while we lived in a village near Seoul where Father was making himself inconspicuous was splendid. Once, when I handed him my exam paper which earned the perfect score for the tenth time, Father rubbed his stubbly jaw on my cheek and made me scream. The five concentric circles21) that invariably decorated all my assignment sheets. . . . But, afterwards, my school record never recaptured the glory of that year. As the eldest son of a virtual widow with three children moving from place to place eking out a difficult living and changing school every other year with gaps of several months in between, I had great difficulty staying in the top ten per cent.

"And that's not all. I don't know anyone who worked as hard as Father did all his life. Except during his last illness, I don't remember seeing Father in bed. When I was a child, Father was already away at work when I woke up in the morning, and when I went to bed he was always reading something as if he was going to read all night. And I've never seen anyone as knowledgeable as Father. Whatever I asked

him about, whether it was science, mathematics, or history, he always told me, right up to my last year in college. Because Father studied and worked so hard, we never went hungry, but I came to wonder as I grew older. Why weren't we living better, even though Father worked so hard? Father was so smart and handsome that my mother chose him for her husband even though he was much older than her and had been married. Mother was a college graduate and had the best background, so she could have married whomever she wanted. But my smart and handsome Father had to defer to the party executives all his life. But I understood early on. I knew the reason why none of us could apply for admission to the political science or foreign relations department in the Kim Il-sung University, could never become an official in the army, and couldn't even dream of becoming a party executive or an official of the National Security Ministry. Why, we couldn't even apply for a post in the Social Security Ministry. I understood, too, why my brother-in-law, who is able and comes from a first-rate background, can't get on since he married my sister. It was because of the blood relations Father had in the South. Father could have overcome through hard work and loyalty the Party's distrust of educated defectors from the South. So, you and your family were to us not so much human beings as an invisible curse."

For a moment I felt dazed. It was such a curious reversal. What I stood for to my brother was exactly what my father stood for to me in the days of my unfortunate youth. So I was a curse and a hurdle to them, just as Father was to me. Father had chosen to defect to the North of his own will, but I had to bear the consequences of his defection, which was no choice of mine. Even though I was old enough to know that few people have any choice in the current of history, my brother's words gave me a sense of absurdity. But I could understand his resentments only too well.

"Do you know why I came to see you? Frankly, it wasn't to carry out Father's last wish. His dying wish only inflamed my rivalry. Why should Father want to bequeath on you the most precious reward of his whole life? Then, what are we to him? I came to see what you're like. To see what our old curse and stumbling block looked like. No, to be perfectly frank, I set out for an encounter with a lifelong enemy. But . . . the moment I saw you, I couldn't think of you as an enemy. I can't explain, but you were . . . my brother. I wanted to hug you and cry, not to abuse and curse you. And, as I got to know you, I grew ashamed of my enmity. It even seemed as if I've been longing to meet you all my life. But where does that leave us? Who's going to make up for your hurt? And what solace is there for what we suffered? Isn't this just all wrong? Do you know what's wrong? Do you?"

I don't know either, dear brother. It was because I felt exactly as you're feeling now, that we have innocently been the cause of each other's suffering, that I shed tears on the shore of the Tumen River. All I know is that an era has passed, and that I have to take a radically different view of my life. I feel vaguely that one cannot blame anyone else for one's sufferings, however little one deserved them.

"I lied to you. I'm not on the organization committee of the Kimchaek Industries Consortium. The committee's just where I want to be. I'm merely an engineer sorting rocks and minerals there. It's true that my younger sister married the party supervisor of the Light Industries Committee. But he was a widower much older than her, and had two children from his previous marriage, too. She couldn't have married him if he hadn't been a widower, bright and proper maid though she was. And the youngest, who is a student at the Pyongyang College of Foreign Languages. He's a brilliant lad. He wanted to enter the Political Science department of Kim Il-sung University, but couldn't. And Father's life was harsh, doing research or civil engineering work just as the party ordered, without security and comfort. 'A man who received more from the country than he gave to it'--that's just a platitude, not worth more than a popular song lyric. And his last was not so peaceful, either. We spent all our money to buy pain killers for him, but in the last few days we couldn't get any, so we had to watch him writhe with pain."

My dear brother, please stop. You have to live under that system for some time yet. If you can't get shoes that fit you, you have to make your feet fit your shoes. Of course it's best to find shoes that fit your feet, but that is not always possible for everyone. The shoe shops of history are always run by unskilled shoemakers. The progressives of the South criticize such a historical nihilism of mine, but I urge you,

with all my heart, because you are my own flesh and blood, that you won't be too impatient about the future, just as you shouldn't regard the present as the ideal made real. You must not be lured into a revolution that has no hope of success. You must wait. There will be a future.

"And I lied about my elder sister, too. My friend who's a second secretary at the International Economic Relations Bureau I told you about. He's not my friend but my brother-in-law. He fell in love with my sister while he was a student and they got married in spite of many obstacles, but my brother-in-law had to suffer many disadvantages on account of his marriage. He's a graduate of the International Relations Department of Kim Il-sung University, but he's only a second secretary in his forties. And that in the economic bureau. My sister's in Beijing now. The family conference decided that I shouldn't tell you about her being in Beijing. If you were to look her up, it might have evil consequences for her and her husband. But here. This is her phone number. Look her up in Beijing, if you can spare the time. How much harm can a meeting between a brother and sister do?"

My brother handed me a piece of paper with a telephone number on it and then fell asleep. I carried him to one of the twin beds in the room. As I was taking off his clothes, his brand-new suit jacket gave me a nameless sorrow.

I had difficulty falling asleep, having so much to think about and sort out, but woke up early the next morning. My brother was sleeping curled up like a foetus, the blanket which I had carefully tucked around him pushed to a corner. I approached silently and covered him again with the blanket. Then I adjusted the pillow for him, but he woke up.

Unlike when he rambled on drunk, my brother acted very shy. He hastily put his clothes back on and prepared to leave. Thinking that maybe it'd be best for him to leave before it was completely light, I did not try to detain him and instead held out the envelope I had prepared during the night.

"Here. Take this. It contains twenty-six hundred dollars. It might be useful to you some day."

I didn't think I had to invent a pretext for offering the money. My brother stopped still and looked at me. Then he seemed about to say something but changed his mind and took the envelope with both hands.

"Thank you, brother. Good-bye," my brother said, bowing to me like a schoolboy, and left the room.

Well, this may be just a cumbersome addenda, but I feel that before I end this story I have to relate what took place in Beijing. My attempt to meet my sister, which was not in my plan at all, grew out of my meeting with my brother. My becoming a witness to the conflict between the unification man and the antique smuggler also grew out of my taking this trip to meet my brother, so it could be that unification is nothing other than reunion of brothers who had been strangers taking place on a massive scale all at once.

It was one o'clock in the afternoon when our tour group landed in Beijing the next day. As soon as we checked into the hotel I called up the number my brother had given me. A young woman answered the phone and, when I asked for my sister, told me succinctly that she was out. She sounded so cold and decisive that I hesitated a little, but I gave her my name and the room number of my hotel and asked her to tell my sister I'd like her to call me.

But, even though I waited beside the phone all afternoon, my sister didn't call. Growing tired of waiting, I dialed the number again towards evening. The same young woman answered again and said the same thing. I repeated the attempt again that night and the next morning, but each time, the young woman picked up the receiver immediately, as if she had been waiting beside the phone, and returned the same response.

It was drawing near check-out time. The rest of the group had already checked out of their rooms before going to see the tombs of Ming emperors. I couldn't linger in the room any more. I hurriedly dialed the number again for the last time. Just then, it flashed through my mind that the young woman's voice

had a familiar ring. It resembled the voice of my sister's in her younger days. The young woman's voice came through the receiver. Listened to attentively, her voice really resembled my sister's. Oh, it was you. I had expected a more middle-aged voice, because you were forty years old. That prevented my recognizing your voice as my younger sister's.

But I could also detect in my sister's voice a definite refusal, or evasion. Perhaps my brother had called her and warned her that I'd call. It could be that meeting me was just too risky for her. It could be that that's why she couldn't meet me, and so she anxiously waited beside the phone to cut me off. The thought made me hesitate. If she had reasons to avoid me, should I insist on meeting her? After all, I have done nothing for her as her elder brother, so I shouldn't be doing her any harm now. But I just felt so sad to leave without seeing her. So, I compromised.

"Please tell Mrs. Mun-hi Lee when she comes back that her brother from the South called her because he wanted to see her. He is leaving for Seoul by the four o'clock plane, and he is sorry to leave without seeing her because he doesn't know when he can come to Beijing again. And of course there's no telling if Mrs. Lee will be here if and when he can come again. So, would you please tell her that her brother will be in the lobby of this hotel until one o'clock, and will be in the airport from two o'clock?"

Convinced that the woman was my sister Mun-hi, I conveyed my affection and yearning for her in that half direct, half indirect way. There was a short silence, and then the woman's answer came.

"Yes. I will certainly tell her when she comes back. Well, good-bye." I thought I heard a slight tremor in the woman's voice as she said good-bye.

I waited for two hours in the hotel lobby and an hour in the airport, but Mun-hi didn't appear. So, her good-bye over the telephone was a parting greeting.

"Er, could I ask a favor of you?" the antique dealer, who had been hovering around me for quite some time, cautiously approached me and said, just as I was on the point of giving up waiting for my sister and was turning my eyes from the entrance of the airport to my tour group. My mind still in turmoil, I silently turned on him a questioning glance. The antique dealer held out two long cardboard tubes.

"I see you don't have much in the way of luggage. So, won't you please carry these two to Seoul for me?"

They were the kind of cardboard tubes that hold scrolls of Oriental paintings, the kind almost everyone buys one or two of during their trip to China. So, I looked at him, as much as to say why should he ask me to carry such commonplace items? Then he said, with an embarrassed smile,

"I'll be honest with you. The tubes are just commonplace tourist things, but what's inside are by Yosuje. Have you heard of the sobriquet?"

"Yosuje? I don't think I have." "He's a late Yi Dynasty landscape painter. Some of his pieces are quite exquisite. Two of his landscapes are in them."

The antique dealer winked at me, as if to cement complicity. I took the tubes from him reluctantly. Then, I looked around the airport lounge absently when a figure arrested my eyes. It was the unification man, sitting in a corner by himself, even though all the others in the group were talking and laughing merrily, as if the airport belonged to them. He seemed despondent, or oblivious of everything from grief.

"It's no wonder. He carried on, making empty promises and boasting about what he can do. Then a Korean resident, who had given big treats to a guy like him before but didn't even hear a word from the guy after he went back to Seoul, to say nothing of receiving the promised invitation, upset the food table on our friend while he was making a speech. I guess it was unfair to him, but in a way he deserved it, too, going around spewing empty rhetoric. Hasn't he learned anything from the collapse of Eastern Europe? I knew he'd get it some time," the antique dealer whispered in my ear, noting the direction of my eyes. I recalled the stains and smell on his clothes of the day before. But I didn't feel amused. On the contrary, I was disgusted by the antique dealer's malicious glee and looked away. Just at that moment, our tour guide rushed toward us, wiping the sweat on his forehead.

"The boarding will begin in five minutes. Pick up your passports, ladies and gentlemen!"