

# TALES OF PYONGYANG

# Tales of Pyongyang



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## ***EDITOR'S NOTE***

*Pyongyang, the capital of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, is an old city with a history stretching back over 5,000 years. Pyongyang boasts many tales associated with the valorous life and struggle of the Korean people who are proud of their 5,000-year long history. Its earthen walls and mountain fortresses, the Taedong Gate and the Pothong Gate, the Ulmil Pavilion and the Ryongwang Pavilion, and other historic relics and sites which are the setting for these tales are now preserved in their original state.*

*This book contains 19 tales including a legend about the sheer Chongnyu Cliff on the shore of the Taedong River.*

*The editorial board translates and publishes Tales of Pyongyang in several foreign languages.*

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# The Tale of Chongryu Cliff

In Pyongyang there is a sheer cliff which rises above the Taedong River as it flows leisurely between verdant Moran Hill and Rungna Island fringed with weeping willows.

It is part of Moran Hill and is known as the Chongryu Cliff. It looks as if it was created by a single stroke of a gigantic sword.

There is a story about the Chongryu Cliff which has been handed down through tradition since the emergence of Pyongyang.

Once upon a time, a young peasant with the surname of Sol lived with his father outside the eastern wall of Pyongyang.

The boy was tenderhearted and diligent. From an early age he had assisted his father in farming. He was distressed that he was usually so poor that he could not serve so much as a bowl of boiled rice to his old father.

The crops he cultivated with the utmost care from spring were often washed away overnight by flood.

The sight of this distressed him. He could not support himself and his father by farming alone. So he gathered firewood going up the hill with an A-frame carrier on his back, and went to the Walled City of Pyongyang to sell it.

He had to roam about the hill in search of firewood all day long

tightening his belt to stay his hunger. But it was with the utmost delight and happiness that he returned to his waiting father bearing the rice he had received in exchange for his firewood.

When his firewood didn't sell, he felt reluctant to return home at the thought of his old father who would be working the poor soil.

The villagers called him a dutiful son. They appreciated his filial devotion.

One day he was going to the market to buy rice with the money he had earned selling firewood, when he saw a crowd of people by the Taedong River. He went over to see what was happening.

A fisherman was hawking a large carp which he had just caught. It was an exceptionally nice and big one with glistening reddish scales.

The fish was shedding tears and wriggling its body, as if appealing to the onlookers.

Its eyes and twitching mouth seemed to be begging for quarter.

The sight touched the boy's heart. So he offered to buy it.

"Pay two *ryang*."

"Two *ryang*?"

He had in his pocket two *ryang* which he had earned by selling firewood. Before his mind's eye loomed the emaciated face of his old father waiting for him at home.

"What shall I do? I haven't time to gather more firewood to sell," he thought.

The carp flounced, looking up at him with an entreating gaze.

"Take this," he said.

He took the carp in his arms and handed over two *ryang*. The big carp continued to wriggle in his arms.

"I'll save you, even if it means I cannot serve a meal to my father. I cannot pass by indifferent to you," he said to himself.

He went to the shore of the Taedong River with the carp in his arms and put it back into the blue water.

The carp dived deep and then rose to the surface and made several rounds as if expressing its gratitude.

Seeing the happy carp, the boy thought that he had done a good thing although he did not buy rice to prepare meals for his father. Dusk fell but he went up the hill again to pick a handful of red wild berries and returned home, carrying them wrapped in arrowroot leaves.

As he served his father with the wild berries as his evening meal, he



explained to him that he rescued a carp instead of buying rice.

“What you did was laudable. Your kind heart makes me feel as if I have eaten my fill.”

The father praised him with a pleased look.

That night the boy Sol received a visit from a young prince who was dressed in gorgeous clothes with a blue sash around his waist and a red-pearl crown on his head and was escorted on either side by pages in blue and red livery.

The prince bowed low to him and said:

“I am the son of the Dragon King of the West Sea.

“Today I swam up the Taedong River for sightseeing. I was careless and was caught in a net. But you saved my life. I don’t see how I can ever repay your kindness.”

This came as a considerable surprise to the boy Sol. He looked closely into his face.

His mouth was just like that of the carp which he helped. It was an extraordinary occurrence.

“Don’t mention it. Such a trifling matter does not deserve the trouble Your Highness took to come here.”

“Ingratitude runs counter to the ethics of our Dragon Palace. The Dragon King of the West Sea, my father, is waiting for you. So I have come to collect you. Please, let’s go.”

The prince of the Dragon Palace of the West Sea entreated him again with a courteous bow.

“But I am living in the terrestrial world. How can I possibly go to the Sea Palace?...” he said hesitatingly.

“No need to worry about that,” the prince said and made a signal by raising his hand.

Thereupon a large tortoise with a flat back appeared and halted before the boy.

The pages assisted him on to the back of the tortoise.

Carrying the boy on its back, the tortoise dived deeper and deeper into the blue water.

While he was gazing in fascination on the underwater scenes which he was seeing for the first time in his life, the tortoise brought him to the gate of the Dragon Palace.

A wonderful view presented itself before his eyes. The palace had imposing red coral columns mounted on amber plinths and roofs laid with gold and silver tiles, the edges of which were slightly raised like the wings



of a flushing crane. Strains of melodious music wafted from within.

Accompanied by the prince, the boy passed through twelve gates until at last he entered the palace of the king of the West Sea. The interior of the Sea Palace dazzled his eyes. The floor was inlaid with turtle shells. Pearl designs shone on the ceiling.

The walls were dazzling with inlaid mother-of-pearl decorations. A sweet aroma pervaded every corner of the palace.

Soon appeared the civil and military officials comprised of sharks, sea breams, mullets, hairtails, squids, rays, gilthead fishes, crabs and other fishes and conches, pearl oysters, brown seaweeds, kelps and the like, all clad in garments or in armour with coral and pearl decorations. They attended the boy Sol to the room of the Sea King.

The king of the West Sea was seated on his golden royal throne, his hand stroking his long beard, with guards on either side.

When the boy Sol entered the room, the king rose to his feet and came forward to welcome him, saying:

“This is a happy event for our Sea Palace to welcome the honored guest from the terrestrial world.”

The king led the boy by the hand and insisted he sit beside him although at first he declined. He expressed his deep gratitude to him for saving his son’s life. Then he told his men to arrange a pleasant feast in honor of the distinguished guest.

The feast lasted for three days. He was served rare delicacies and wines of the underwater kingdom unknown to the terrestrial world. The palace vibrated to the beautiful dances and exciting music performed by the fish and seaweed ladies of the court.

The Dragon King proposed a toast in praise of the boy’s selfless deed and the prince stood beside him and attended on him with due courtesy.

When the feast was drawing to a close, the Dragon King took the lad by the hand and said, “I want to repay your kindness of rescuing my son. Tell me, please, if there is anything you want.”

At these words, the boy was seized with anxiety about his father who must be waiting for him with impatience.

He wondered how his father had been spending the three days while he had been in the Palace of the Dragon King.

It was the rainy season now. He visualized the scene of the crops which had been tended with so much care and effort being washed away again by flood while his father stood on the edge of the field lamenting.

He could see the faces of the other villagers grieving over the flood

damage to their fields and pounding their chests in dismay.

“O my! Have I completely forgotten about my father and the villagers during these few days?” he reproached himself.

He was waken from his reverie when the Dragon King said, “If there is any treasure in this palace which caught your fancy, please name it. There is nothing I would not give you.”

At this, the boy Sol, adjusting his coat, said reverentially, “You have spoken very kindly to me. Thank you for your generous offer. There is a favour I should like to ask of you.”

“Speak out, please!”

All eyes turned towards him.

“I do not want gold or silver, pearls or gems. In front of my village flows a large river called the Taedong River. It often floods, washing away the crops from the fields. This is disastrous to our farmers.

“I should be very much obliged if Your Highness would employ your divine power to divert the stream of the Taedong River in the direction of Moran Hill.

“Then the farmers will not suffer from flood damage and I think that the Taedong River skirting Moran Hill will enhance its scenery.”

At these words, the king of the West Sea slapped his lap with admiration and said, “Indeed, you are a man of kind heart. I would not be the Dragon King, if I failed to grant your wish.”

The Dragon King told him to make the people take refuge in the mountains when he got back to the terrestrial world since there would be continuous heavy rain for three days.

Although he was asked to stay longer in the Palace of the Dragon King, the lad became homesick for his father and his village. So he bade the Dragon King farewell and left the palace for home, sitting astride the tortoise. The prince personally saw him off.

His father was glad to see him back. The boy told him about his visit to the palace.

His father was highly delighted to hear of it. Just as he had been told, heavy rain started that day.

The boy Sol urged the villagers to take to the hills. They all climbed the hill behind their houses taking their household goods with them. From past experience they knew he was honest and trustworthy.

But the landlord who had bled the villagers white made accusations against him, alleging that he was insane. He brought a charge of disturbing the public peace against him to the government office in Pyongyang and

had him imprisoned.

Rain fell in torrents day and night. He called out aloud to the people to take refuge and pounded the prison door. Most people did evacuate and the Walled City of Pyongyang was scarcely astir. Nevertheless, the governor indulged in a drinking bout every day, attended by professional entertainers, while having the boy flogged on a charge of sedition.

“The Taedong River will soon change its course. Let the people evacuate in haste,” the boy shouted anxiously, although he was beaten. The night of the third day fell.

His anxious call echoed through the night sky, mingling with the laughter and singing of the drunkards.

Lightning suddenly flashed in the sky, followed by the rumble of thunder.

There came a deafening roar as if heaven and earth had cracked asunder. In a flash of lightning an immense dragon appeared, cleaving the flank of Moran Hill before ascending to heaven. Water streamed into the gap with a dreadful brawl.

Frightened out of his wits by the horrendous thunderclap, the governor fell flat on his back, kicking the feast table.

“Set him free. Set him free,” he shouted.

The retainer who had been holding up the club to beat the boy took fright and ran away, throwing away the club as he did so.

At dawn the next day the people were astonished to see the great change that had been wrought at the foot of Moran Hill. The Taedong River which had been flowing in the direction of Sungho-ri, east of Pyongyang, had changed its course and was flowing in an angry torrent by Moran Hill. At its foot rose a sheer bluff overhanging the raging stream as if cut by a huge sword.

\* \* \*

Afterwards the people of Pyongyang built a small shrine in memory of the boy Sol and named it Solsu Shrine. They called its locale Solsudang valley and his village Solssi-ri, which later changed to Solsu-ri.



## *Fairy's Veil over the Taedong River*

Korea has been famous from time immemorial for its beautiful scenery.

Moran Hill is studded with hundreds of kinds of full-blown flowers. It is alive with flocks of cranes and wild geese flying over the pine woods and the merry chirps of various visiting birds and its foot, the Chongnyu Cliff, is skirted by the crystal-clear stream of the Taedong River. Its beauty was known to the Kingdom of Heaven and the fairies would visit it and enjoy themselves there to their heart's content.

In a sunny village on the shore of the Taedong River there lived in poverty an unmarried young man with his sick father.

They had a small boat and eked out a living by fishing on the Taedong River.

The young man was always out on the Taedong River even in pouring rain or howling wind. So people called him the lad of the Taedong River. As his father was confined to his sickbed and deteriorating daily, he had to go fishing alone. He supported his father with devotion.

When he was a motherless baby, his father had nursed him, feeding him with the milk he obtained from others. Therefore he was ready to do anything to pull his sick father round, but how to cure his father of his illness he did not know. Old neighbours sympathized with him, saying "The peach in the heaven would cure his illness, but..."

But, how can he obtain the heavenly peach on earth?

Moreover, the heavenly peach tree is said to bear fruit only once every three millenniums. How can he expect to get it?

The lad grew more and more anxious.

One summer day he was aboard his small boat fishing on the Taedong River, going up stream. There he saw fairies bathing in the crystal-clear stream of the Taedong River which mirrored the picturesque Chongnyu Cliff, their graceful flying veils hanging on the branches of the willows.

He halted his boat, unable to believe his eyes. He was fascinated by the sight of the fairies dipping their heads with flowing raven hair in the clear water which mirrored the fluffy clouds in the azure sky showing between the green pines on the Chongnyu Cliff and the willows of Rungna Island.

A gust of sudden wind rose and whirled a fairy's flying veil into the sky.

"Oh, my!" the lad uttered as he fretted in his boat in a state of breathless suspense. The fairy's veil which had been floating high in the air slowly descended and settled on the small rock in the yard of his house.

"Well?"

He stared at it with eyes wide-open. Then it occurred to him that he should fetch it and bring it back to the fairy. He feared that the wind might carry it off again. He hastily turned his boat around.

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True to tradition, the veil was beautiful, fragrant and flimsy.

The lad rowed his boat hastily back to where the fairies were, taking the flying veil with him. Then the wind rose again and the waves ran high, heaving the boat like a leaf on a wave. He rowed hard against the gale, cleaving the rough waves until he reached the Chongnyu Cliff. There he found that the fairies were flying up into the sky, spreading their veils, except for one poor fairy who was weeping and pounding her feet. She had no flying veil to put on.

The fairies floating in the sky were anxiously waving to her.

Seeing this, the lad rowed harder than ever towards her. When he reached her, he handed her flying veil and said: "I've brought this veil to you. It was wafted away on the wind to the yard of my house. Please put it on and ascend to heaven."

The fairy delightedly took her veil with both hands.

"Thank you. Thank you. People in the terrestrial world are very kind. I

don't see how I can ever repay your kindness. Next time I will bring you a flying veil. Wouldn't you like to come with us and see the heavenly kingdom?"

"Thanks. I heard that the heavenly kingdom is wonderful. But I can't go to the heavenly kingdom. My father is in a sickbed now."

"Is that so? Next time I'll bring you the heavenly peach. It cures all diseases. Once he takes it, he will pull round at once."

"It's very kind of you. I heard that the heavenly peach is a good cure. I was anxious to obtain one."

"Put your mind at rest. I'll come again tomorrow night when the full moon is up on the eastern sky. Please meet me here."

After thanking him again, she ascended to heaven, spreading her flying veil.

\* \* \*

The following night the lad rowed his boat to the Chongnyu Cliff when the moon was about to rise as the fairy had instructed.

When the full moon rose in the eastern sky, the sound of a flute wafted from the sky and then fairies descended riding a rainbow.

"O you've come!" With these words the fairy whom he had met the day before welcomed him gladly. A fairy, seemingly the eldest of them, said "It was very kind of you to help our youngest sister, Kum Wol." Other fairies came closer to the lad and bowed their thanks.

The fairy, Kum Wol, handed a beautifully wrapped bundle to the lad and said:

"Please give this to your father. This is the heavenly peach, a present from the heavenly kingdom to you for your kindness."

"Thank you, fairies!"

He was very pleased to receive it.

At that moment, sweet aroma wafted from the bundle.

The eldest fairy said, looking round at the other fairies:

"Sisters, how about entertaining this young man with our heavenly songs and dances on this splendid night?"

"Good idea!" assented all the fairies.

On the moonlit night the celestial fairies sang and danced on the sandy beach of the Taedong River. The fairy Kum Wol sang a song. It ran as follows:



*The limpid stream of the Taedong River flows  
Skirting beautiful Moran Hill  
He brought the flying veil to me braving wind and waves.  
He is so pure in heart.*

*The mountains and rivers are beautiful,  
People's hearts are warm.  
This land is unforgettable.  
As the Taedong River flows for ever  
Our friendship is eternal.*

While a flute sounded from the sky, a rainbow of dazzling colours appeared, stretching at one end into the Taedong River.

After a while the fairies rode away on the rainbow, waving farewell to him.

“Kindhearted boy of Pyongyang, good-bye! Be sure to cure your father with the peach.”

The fairies rose higher and higher, waving to him. The long flying veil of the fairy Kum Wol was seen fluttering in the sky for a long time as if hovering over the lad.

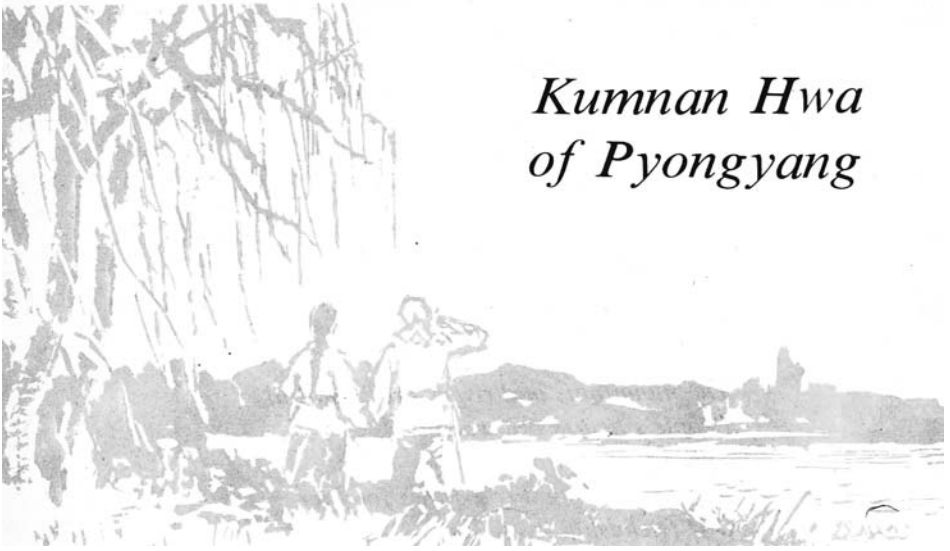
\* \* \*

His father was completely cured after eating the heavenly peach.

Since then his village has been called Uiam-ri (village with a rock on which once hung the fairy's veil).



## *Kumnan Hwa of Pyongyang*



There lived a beautiful girl named Kumnan Hwa (a bleeding heart) in the Walled City of Pyongyang (or Sogyong) in the Koryo period (918-1392).

She was born into a family of a poor lowly smith. She was kindhearted, noble in character and looked pretty like a bleeding heart, her favourite flower. People called her Kumnan Hwa of Pyongyang.

Next door to her home there lived a lad named Tol. They were playmates from childhood. As they grew up they fell in love with each other.

Their parents and neighbours considered them a well-matched couple. Their parents decided to marry them a month later.

Poor as they were, the two families, not to mention the lad and the girl, made busy preparing for the wedding.

Suddenly there came an order from the feudal government office to Tol that he should go to stand guard on the faraway frontier.

This was no coincidence. It was the product of the evil design of a magistrate. There was no way Tol could evade service.

Evasion of draft meant decapitation or exile on a charge of high treason.

That evening Kumnan Hwa and Tol went out to the shore of the Taedong River and recalled cherished memories of their early years until it was late. They promised to live faithful to each other until they meet again.

At dawn Tol had to leave for the frontier.

Tol put a ring with the design of a bleeding heart on one of her fingers,

a ring he had made with great care and said:

“I haven’t time to make a companion ring. I’ll make it when I return home.”

The next morning Tol set out for the distant frontier, carrying a big sword he had made himself.

The girl felt as if her heart was breaking as she saw him, with a small bundle and a sword, recede behind a bend at the foot of Moran Hill.

She wanted him to return home safe and healthy and was determined to wait for him.

She immersed herself in memories of the past; his broad smile with which he received the wadded coat she had made for him sewing into the small hours, and his sturdy warm hand with which he put the ring on her finger.

Kumnan Hwa cursed the merciless world as she trod the lane on which she had once romped with him in her early years. She considered it a bounden duty of a citizen to defend the country from foreign invasion. But she could not repress her resentment against the magistrate who had deliberately sent Tol away at this time out of an evil design to drive a wedge between them.

When she returned home after having seen him off, she found an official waiting for her.

He told her to get dressed up and ready as she had been drafted as a *kisaeng* girl. So she should be prepared for a call, after making up and dressing herself well.

This was a bolt from the blue for her. A rumour spread a few days later that the enemy had raided the frontier area.

Everything went dark before her eyes.

“O what a hard and unfair world it is!”

Her parents and neighbours could find no words to console the poor girl. Her mother kept hugging her daughter in desperation.

Meanwhile, the army commander in Pyongyang intended to arrange a boating trip on the Taedong River for his birthday and summoned Kumnan Hwa to attend it.

People were astir at the news. They were indignant that the army commander who was responsible for national defence gave his mind to having a party on his birthday and summoned the fiancée of a soldier on frontier guard to it as an entertainer while the enemy were attacking the frontier.

The army commander of the northwestern front who stayed in Sogyong

(today's Pyongyang) was the son of a dignitary who had great influence in Kaegyong (the then capital of Koryo). The magistrate sought to obtain promotion by offering him Kumnan Hwa, the famed beauty of Pyongyang. The magistrate's pages came for Kumnan Hwa, carrying fine clothes and trinkets to dress her up.

"He has no right to do this," her parents and the villagers protested vehemently. The pages paid no heed to them, saying that it was the magistrate's order.

The news spread like wildfire and stirred her friends and the people of Pyongyang to anger.

That night the moon was unusually bright over Pyongyang. At midnight Kumnan Hwa sharpened a dagger in the yard, occasionally testing its blade against the pale moonlight.

When her mother, who had been unable to fall asleep for worrying about her daughter, saw this, she was taken aback and was going to dash out of the room when her husband firmly gripped her by the arm. He said calmly yet with determination:

"Leave her alone. She is setting her mind like a blade. We have a very fine daughter." Her father was an honest, upright and iron-willed man.

Her mother wept all night while the daughter kept whetting the dagger.

The next day Kumnan Hwa was taken to the boating party on the Taedong River. She appeared in her everyday wear in front of the officials.

"Why didn't you dress yourself up?" shouted the magistrate. He told his men to bring silk clothes and gold and silver ornaments for her to wear.

But Kumnan Hwa didn't even look at them. She was brought to the boat where the banquet was being held in honour of the army commander. The boat was adorned with a silk canopy and screens with pictures of landscapes. The commander was lounging on the tiger-skin carpet and drinking wine served by *kisaeng* girls from a white gem cup. He suddenly sat up and gazed in wonder at Kumnan Hwa. He drained his cup, exclaiming, "Indeed she is as pretty as a swallow."

"You're right. She is as pretty as a swallow skipping over the Taedong River." Those at the banquet table chimed in. "She is a matchless beauty the like of which has never been known within or without Pyongyang," the magistrate said to his own credit.

Then he turned to her and said: "Kumnan Hwa, please entertain him with dance and song."

She ignored him and addressed herself instead to the commander in a clear and steady voice: "I am a girl of humble birth. I have no education

nor experience. But I as a citizen have worries.

“I have heard that the enemy is overrunning the outlying areas. But you who are supposed to be responsible for the defence of the country are enjoying a boating party and making the daughter of respectable citizens attend on you instead of attending to your duty. I am afraid that you will earn the people’s wrath.”

“Ha, ha, ha.... She is not only a beauty but a fluent speaker,” laughed the commander.

An officer wearing a long sword stroked his beard and said:

“The frontier is over 400 kilometres away from here. We will see to it and settle it in due course. You need not concern yourself about it. You had better serve the commander with wine.”

“Refrain from such talk on this auspicious day. Serve wine to the commander,” the magistrate urged her.

At this Kumnan Hwa tossed her head and said:

“I am not a *kisaeng* girl who serves wine. I am the fiancée of a soldier who is defending the country. He journeyed hundreds of kilometres sword in hand to the fight across rivers and mountains while you dignitaries who hold responsible posts of state remain here enjoying a boating party and trying to turn a warrior’s wife into a courtesan. This is an indelible shame that will be remembered through the ages and a crime against the people of Koryo, I think.”

The commander turned pale as death and pounded the table with his fist, shouting:

“Behead the hussy in front of me and throw her body into the Taedong River!”

Soldiers rushed to her from both sides.

At that moment she produced a dagger from her bosom, which gleamed in the sunlight.

The commander flopped down from his seat with a scream and the party was thrown into confusion.

Kumnan Hwa said in an even voice, the dagger in her hand and her hair waving in the wind.

“If you want to make me a *kisaeng* girl to fill your cup with wine, I will show you the worth of a Pyongyang girl with this dagger. But I wonder what people will say about you, the commander who wanted to behead an innocent girl at a drinking table, far away from the foreign invaders you should be resisting.”

“Dispose of that bitch right away!” the commander shouted. A soldier



crept up behind and struck her hand on which she bore Tol's ring. The dagger clattered on the deck and was promptly kicked away into the Taedong River.

"Oh, how vexing!"

Staring into the distant sky over the mountains beyond which Tol had gone, she said: "Be valiant in the fight against the enemy, my dear. Excuse me, for I must depart this world before receiving a companion ring from you." With these words she threw herself into the turbulent blue water of the river before they could stop her.

The stream of the river whirled around in a large circle in her wake and flowed in surging waves.

"How infuriating that I failed to behead her," the commander roared. This chilled the drinking party on the boat.

"The drinking party should not be spoilt just because of that hussy's death. Nonsense! Come on, fill the cup," he said. He received the cup and after some thought said: "That wretch said something about the worth of Pyongyang girls, didn't she? Drag out all the girls of Pyongyang and bring them here." With these words he drained the cup of wine.

On his order all the girls in the Walled City of Pyongyang were herded out of the city and on to a boat. When they came in sight, the commander murmured: "I wonder how many of them would refuse to sit at the banquet table." And he yelled, "Hurl into the Taedong River any who dare to disobey my order."

When they heard this, the girls on the boat shouted:

"We won't disgrace the pure soul of Kumnan Hwa.

"We prefer to be food for the fish in the Taedong River than to become a plaything for the likes of you."

When the officers made for the boat, they heard them cry:

"Kumnan Hwa of Pyongyang, we are following you.

"Let all of us be reborn in a better world and have a pair of love rings on our fingers."

With these words the girls of Pyongyang all jumped into the Taedong River just like flower petals fluttering down from Moran Hill. Then all that was left to be seen was an empty boat on the river.

At the sight of this one of the *kisaeng* girls began to sing a song interrupted by sobs.

*The Kumnan Hwa of Pyongyang threw themselves into the Taedong River*

*Just like so many pure flowers.*

And then she, too, plunged herself into the river.

\* \* \*

Later on, when the tide was out on the Taedong River, small crabs the size of chestnuts were seen busily searching about for bleeding hearts, which are said to be the departed souls of the Pyongyang girls who jumped into the river following Kumnan Hwa's example.

Crabs are said to blow bubbles and sing:

*Dear Kumnan Hwa, where are you?*

*Dear Kumnan Hwa, where are you?*

*The ring Tol left to you*

*Is in our hole.*

*Dear Kumnan Hwa, where are you?*





## **Tale of Mt. Juam**

The term “Juam” means wine-gushing rock.

From olden times Mt. Juam and its surroundings were densely wooded and few houses were to be seen there.

After Koguryo (B.C. 277-A.D. 668) moved its capital to Pyongyang, people began to settle down around there and felled a large number of trees.

In the vicinity there lived a dutiful son with his father who was over 60 years old. Bereft of his mother at an early age, he supported his father and made his living by collecting firewood or hunting animals in the



mountains. Their livelihood became harder to maintain due to the deforestation of the mountains.

His father was fond of drink, so he always contrived somehow to serve a bowlful of wine to his father every day.

But their standard of living went from bad to worse as the days went by and often he could not afford a bowlful of wine for his father.

Whenever he returned home empty-handed, he would hang around outside the fence with a heavy heart reluctant to enter the brushwood gate.

Though his father said he didn't mind, it pained him to see the sad expression on his father's face.

One evening he was coming home with a load of firewood on the back. He halted beside a large rock to take a rest, putting down his A-frame carrier.

He heard the sound of water bubbling from under a high rock beside him. He had never heard such a sound before.

He could not contain the sigh that escaped from his lips and he said to himself:

"O! How nice it would be if it were wine! Then I could please my father at all times...."

At this instant something strange occurred. The aroma of wine wafted from the water.

What? His eyes bulged.

He hastily stripped a leaf from an arrowroot and, scooping up the water with it, drank.

There was no doubt about it. It was wine. It was wine with a fragrant aroma.

"It's wine," he cried.

He danced for joy. Then he took out a wine bottle as capacious as a bowl which he always took with him for his father, and filled it with the clear wine which gushed forth from beneath the rock.

"Thanks, rock. You lavish wine like this and please my father for me," he said.

Another strange thing happened. When he had filled his bottle with the wine, it abruptly ceased from gushing out. What a strange thing, he thought. He hastened home, the wine bottle in hand.

Back home, he poured wine into a bowl and offered it to his father. Thrilled to have wine again after many days, his father gazed at his son's face for a while. He thought of all the trouble to which his son had gone to get it.

The son watched his father who held the wine bowl in his hand, his eyes moist with tears of joy. He wished the wine to do good to his father's health.

Stroking his beard aside, his father emptied it at a draught. Slapping his knee, he exclaimed, "Dear son, where did you buy it? Never have I tasted such aromatic and refreshing wine in my life. Undoubtedly this is the wine that brings eternal youth to unworldly men, I think."

He was glad to hear what his father said. He told his father what had happened that day.

When he had heard his story, his father exclaimed excitedly, "Heaven surely sent this wine, moved by your dutiful devotion."

Next day, again, the rock welled forth wine, but only a bowlful of it.

From that time on, he went there for wine every day and offered it to his father. The wine restored his father's appearance and his grey hair turned black.

It became the talk of the village that the sick old farmer had become hale and hearty and his grey hair turned black after he drank the marvelous wine. Finally it reached the ears of the greedy landlord and eventually it became known to him where the rock that gave the marvelous wine was.

"The wine is mine, because the mountain is mine. From today you must not allow that farmer's son to go there," he bawled at his farmhand.

Then he made him bring a bowlful of the wine and drank it. It really tasted marvelous, just as he had heard.

"This is the wonderful wine which Heaven has sent to me," he said.

He did not want to share so much as a drop of it with others. So he instructed his farmhands not to allow anyone access to the rock.

From that day on the dutiful son again had to rove about with an A-frame loaded with firewood on his back to obtain wine for his father.

Meanwhile, the landlord was impatient to drink his fill, but only a bowlful of wine welled up each day.

In addition, he wanted to send some of the wine to the provincial governor and other important officials to further his future ambitions. Consequently one bowlful of wine was not enough for him.

One day the landlord went to the wine-welling rock, shouldering a long iron bar. Laughing heartily, he said, "It may be admissible for that poor lowly fellow, but how come I didn't hit upon such a bright idea before? If the crevice is made wider, more wine will well up, won't it?"

He thrust the iron bar into the crevice and gave it a wrench. Then wine



stopped issuing and instead stinking muddy water gushed from the widened crevice. “All right! That’s it. Though it’s stale water today, tomorrow wine will gush forth.”

The landlord returned home, perking up his shoulders.

Days went by, but no wine issued and stale water continued to gush out.

“I can’t believe this. Perhaps I didn’t strike the big vein of wine,” he said.

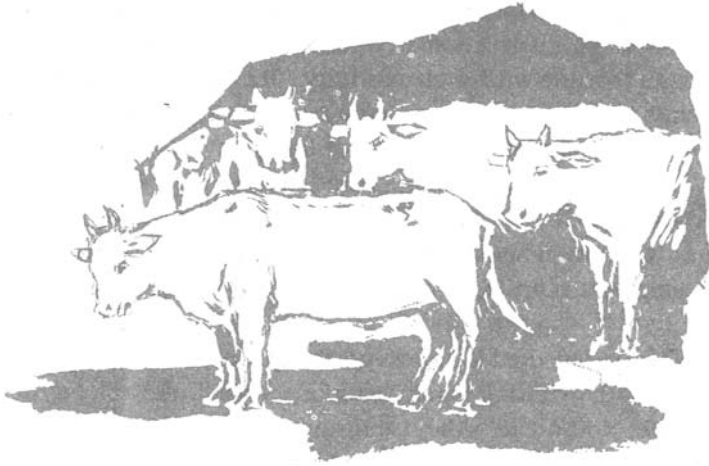
He went back to the rock, again carrying a larger iron bar on his shoulder this time. He pushed it into the crevice and gave a wild jerk.

The rock rumbled as if groaning. Nevertheless, the greedy landlord continued to jerk the iron bar up and down forcefully.

The next instant with a roar as if the whole mountain had collapsed, the rock tumbled down, catching the landlord beneath it. He only had time to let out a scream before he was crushed beneath the weight.

The son remained as dutiful to his father as ever, and since then the mountain has been known as Mt. Juam (wine giving rocky mountain) or Mt. Hyoja (dutiful son’s mountain).

## *Five Pygmy Bulls*



In times gone by there were many inns near Yongje Bridge in east Pyongyang. There ran the main thoroughfare along which travelled the provincial governor and other noblemen coming from Seoul to assume office in Pyongyang and those leaving Pyongyang for Seoul as well as many merchants and travellers.

There was one inn which was intended for the exclusive use of oxcart drivers.

The keeper of the inn became rich by squeezing money from the pockets of the poor, but he was exceedingly careful in money matters.

He kept the coins he earned in wrappers in a chest with a large lock so long that they gathered rust. He had many storerooms overflowing with grain and silk reels, but still he kept on amassing them.

He was now at sixty but never gave away a spoonful of boiled rice, a penny, or a piece of cloth for nothing. The same could be said about his wife. So people called them "misers" and shunned their company. People said: "What does he amass a fortune with such assiduity for? I wonder whether he intends to take it with him to the next world." and "I wonder

whether a secluded life devoid of company is worth living.”

But the innkeeper did not mind in the least what they said and continued to indulge in moneygrubbing. No one knew what went on in his mind, but on his 60th birthday he invited the neighbours to his birthday party for the first time in his life.

This unexpected kindness came as a surprise to every one. “Their 60th birthday tends to make people look back on their past life, doesn’t it?” they said.

They were most intrigued and speculated whether from that time on he would become a new man. So the neighbours all attended his 60th birthday party.

The feast table was set in a niggardly manner.

Nevertheless, it was such a novelty that people did not pick fault with it.

Towards sunset that day, a traveller in shabby attire came to the house that was alive with the 60th birthday feast and asked the innkeeper to put him up for the night.

The host flatly turned down his request.

“I am sorry. I can’t put you up today.”

“Why, isn’t this an inn?” the traveller retorted.

The innkeeper looked him up and down and said, “All right. Stay for the night, if you want to. But don’t expect to get any food from the birthday table.”

The traveller came in and squatted down without a word in a corner of the room where the feast was in progress.

One of the company said that this was not in keeping with the generosity of Pyongyang people and suggested serving him a cup of wine. At this the innkeeper became angry and said with a frown, “They say it is the most wishy-washy person who attempts to do honour to himself with the wine from another’s feast table. That is how you are behaving.”

This remark not only made the traveller sitting in the corner of the room feel awkward but all the guests as well and spoiled the birthday feast.

As they went home, the guests said, “How in the world can anyone be so unkind?” “He seems to regret that he shared a few cups of wine with his neighbours for the first time in his life” and “I expected as much. No flowers will bloom on withered twigs.”

One of them went up to the traveller and whispered to him, “This is no house for man to stay in. Let’s go to my home and share some gruel such as it is.”



“Thanks. Never mind me. Good night,” the traveller said, declining the offer.

After his neighbours had gone home, the innkeeper counted on a big abacus the costs of the wine, the food, the soy sauce and the powdered red pepper to which he had treated them. He went into the inner room and yelled at his wife:

“O my heart is bursting. Why did you send in such big cups to the table? Why did you send in one dish after another so thoughtlessly? O my aching heart!”

With these words, he pounded his chest with his clenched fist.

As the night advanced, the innkeeper fell asleep, the abacus in his arms, and those in the inner room were sound asleep.

The traveller who had been watching the innkeeper removed a small pouch from his waist and undid it. Then he said in an undertone: “You bulls, come out!”

At his bidding, five bulls, each the size of an acorn, emerged from the mouth of the pouch. The traveller lined them up on a wooden pillow and said: “First bull, you eat up all the grain in this house. Second bull, you eat up all the money in this house. Third bull, you eat up all the IOUs in this house. Fourth bull, you eat up all the silks in this house. Fifth bull, you go out to the fields and eat up the remaining stacks of grain there.”

The five tiny bulls went out of the room. No sooner had they gone outdoors than they became bigger and dispersed to do what they had been told.

About an hour later, the bulls gathered in the yard, their bellies bulging like balloons. Dwindling to the size of acorns again, they entered the room and lined up on the wooden pillow.

As the traveller opened the pouch, the pygmy bulls disappeared inside it.

He fastened up the pouch, bore it on his side and then lay down, resting his head on the wooden pillow.

\* \* \*

The next morning there was a fine to-do at the inn.

The innkeeper’s wife shrieked with consternation when she opened the lid of the rice jar, a rice measure in her hand, to prepare a meal; her husband grew angry on finding that the corn stacks in the front and back yards were gone.



The wife opened all the storerooms to find them empty.

The innkeeper hastily opened the money-box but nothing was left there. The IOU chest was also empty. The farmhands who had been out to the fields to cart in corn ricks came running to the village, crying:

“The miser’s corn stacks in the field have all gone.”

The innkeeper and his wife wailed bitterly, pounding the ground with their fists.

Leaving the inn, the traveller remarked:

“You need not cry. You didn’t help people, so they needn’t help you, need they?”

Then he went on his way.



A traditional East Asian ink wash painting. On the left, a large, gnarled pine tree with dense foliage dominates the foreground. In the middle ground, a small pavilion with a curved roof is nestled among rocks and smaller trees. The background is a misty, light grey wash, suggesting a distant landscape or sky. The overall style is minimalist and expressive, characteristic of traditional Chinese or Korean ink painting.

## A Self- Luminous Roof Tile of the Jangsu Pavilion

Koguryo built the magnificent Anhak Palace at the foot of the imposing Mt. Taesong, a place of scenic beauty overlooking the leisurely flowing Taedong River, and transferred its capital there.

On hearing this news the Dragon King of the West Sea sent a treasured tile to King Jangsu of Koguryo as a token of his congratulations. He had a big tortoise carry it there on its back.

When he had sent the tortoise back with due expressions of gratitude, King Jangsu called his ministers to his side and told them to find out what sort of a treasure the tile was.

They racked their brains over the tile which looked little different from an ordinary one, but they could make nothing of it.

The king decided to show it to Mi I Chon who had built a fortress on Mt. Taesong.

Mi I Chon was an experienced and talented person who designed and built a lot of fortresses and walls in the mountains and plains in different parts of the country during his lifetime.

He was upright and staunch and had a high sense of patriotism. This earned him great respect among the people.

He was a man of robust frame with grizzled hair and a gleam of wit in his eyes. Seeing the tile, he brightened and passed his hand over it again

and again.

“Tell me what is so wonderful about it,” the king impatiently urged him.

After careful considerations still holding the tile in arms, he bowed and said:

“May I humbly inform Your Highness that this is for your ears only.”

The king sensed what he was going to say and called him into another room.

“Now there is no one to overhear us, you may speak without anxiety.”

“Yes, I will. This is called a self-luminous tile. If a foreign enemy invades the country, it emits green light spontaneously to warn beacon fire sites all over the country. This is a unique treasure.”

The king was very pleased to hear this, and said: “The Dragon King of the West Sea has sent me a very fine present. This matter is known to you and I alone. You mustn’t breathe a word about it to anyone.”

“It needs no repetition. The problem is to keep the treasure safe. In my humble opinion, the secret can be kept if a pavilion is built on Mt. Taesong, and roofed with similar tiles along with the self-luminous tile. In case of emergency it will warn the whole country with expedition.”

“That is a good idea. Build the magnificent Anhak Palace, and set a new pavilion on Mt. Taesong in honor of the transfer of the capital of the country, and name it Jangsu Pavilion,” the king ordered.

Thus the lovely Jangsu Pavilion was erected atop Mt. Taesong with the four edges of its roof raised slightly, and the self-luminous tile was laid hidden among other tiles.

Then, an unlooked-for event occurred. A rumor spread that Mi I Chon handed to an enemy country the self-luminous tile, the treasure sent by the Dragon King of the West Sea as a gift, in exchange for a huge bribe.

Mi I Chon was arrested on the false charge and brought to the king’s palace. This came as quite a surprise to him.

No one but the king and he knew of it. What could be the matter? The king himself interrogated him.

“Tell the truth. How could you dare to commit the perfidious act of selling out this national treasure for gold?”

“I stand wrongly accused. I think there must be some misunderstanding. I implore Your sagacious Highness to look into the matter.”

“You rascal! What are you saying? Only you and I know of this matter. Do you mean to suggest that it was I who let out the secret?” His words gave Mi I Chon some inkling. The king might not have let out the secret intentionally as he said, but...

By nature he was fond of bragging. If there was a good thing, he was always eager to boast of it.

Some time ago, for instance, the king received a valuable roll of picture from a neighbouring country as a gift. He called a few close ministers to his side in turn and told them, "I show this to you alone. Don't say anything about it to the others. This certainly implies that they wish to have good neighbourly relations with us." In this way what he said became known to the whole court that day. That is certainly how matters stood, Mi I Chon thought.

The king shouted at him, "Look at this carefully."

Lifting up his eyes, he saw gold, silver and other treasures in the seven-treasure box and a letter spread before the king.

It was a letter from the king of the enemy country. It said that he received the self-luminous tile and sent gold, silver and other valuables in return for it, and urged him to come over to his side, given a chance.

Mi I Chon felt as if his heart was going to burst and his hair stood on end. His blood was boiling in his heart.

This is, no doubt, the work of an enemy agent lurking in our court to discover the whereabouts of the self-luminous tile and make away with it, he thought.

But the king was too stupid to see this while villainous sycophants poured oil on the fire.

Mi I Chon appealed to the king in a passionate voice once more: "This is certainly a trap laid by the sycophants. The self-luminous tile is in its place as ever. I beseech Your Highness not to worry about it and to get to the bottom of this matter."

At this a government official said aloud, the veins on his neck bulging:

"The rascal is trying to cloud Your Highness' intelligent judgement and impair Your Highness' eminent authority in an attempt to whitewash his crime. I suggest Your Highness behead him and show the people how stringent the law of the country is." Several others followed his example and urged the king.

"Put him on the rack and beat him mercilessly until he confesses his crime."

The king rapped out an instruction:

"If it is in its place as you have said, show it to me."

As soon as the king gave the direction, the executioners who stood on both sides rained blows on him. In spite of this, he collected his wits and thought to himself: If I show the self-luminous tile which was stowed away

in the Jangsu Pavilion, I will evade the punishment; then the national treasure will eventually fall into the hands of the cunning sycophants. Whatever the king may say, I won't show it; the king has no claim on it; it belongs to the entire Koguryo people; I will never give it up even at peril of my life. At this thought, he lost all fear of flogging and death. He pleaded: "The treasure is in a safe place. I deeply regret that Your Highness does not understand me."

His flesh was torn to shreds in the rain of blows and a puddle of blood was formed under the rack.

Mi I Chon did not fear the physical pains he suffered or death. He was pained by the thought that the future of the country was endangered by the stupidity of the king and the dignitaries who played into the hands of the enemy spy. No punishment was heavy enough to make Mi I Chon open his mouth.

This further aroused the king's suspicion and he gave directions for him to be punished severely.

They seared Mi I Chon's body with hot iron tongs. The smell of burnt flesh was so offensive that those present averted their faces. He was beaten again.

Mi I Chon broke his silence and shouted: "I am a man of Koguryo. The self-luminous tile is in the land of Koguryo."

His ardent cries echoed through the Anhak Palace. He was whipped so harshly that his bones were broken. Nevertheless, he cried louder, "I am a man of Koguryo."

His appeal found its way to people's hearts, and some tilted their heads to one side, doubtful as to whether he committed such a crime.

The patriotic appeal he made at the risk of his life moved people.

Some ministers said to the king: "He makes such an ardent appeal. He may be not guilty. We suggest that Your Highness relent towards him and give him quarter for the time being and make further inquiry into this case." The king thought there was something in what they said. He feared that he might be rated as a foolish king by the people, should the roofing tile reveal itself in an emergency as Mi I Chon said. So, before withdrawing nonchalantly to the inner quarters of the palace, the king asked Mi I Chon for the last time if he had anything to say.

"I don't fear death. There is a hireling of the enemy lurking in the court, I'm sure. I hope that Your Highness will see to it that great Koguryo does not suffer an eclipse," Mi I Chon cried out, pounding the ground with his



fist.

He was sent on a stretcher into exile on a solitary island on the East Sea, but regrettably he breathed his last on the way there.

On his death-bed he said, "Self-luminous roofing tile, please guard my country." He asked people to turn his head toward Mt. Taesong and took his last breath.

But his eyes were not closed as if he were keeping watch over the self-luminous tile for ever.

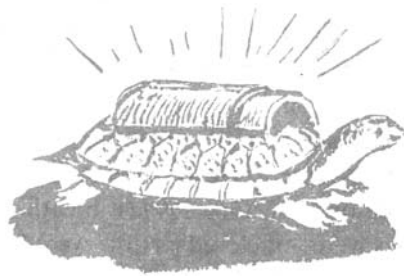
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After a few years the enemy who had an eye to the priceless tile invaded the territory of Koguryo.

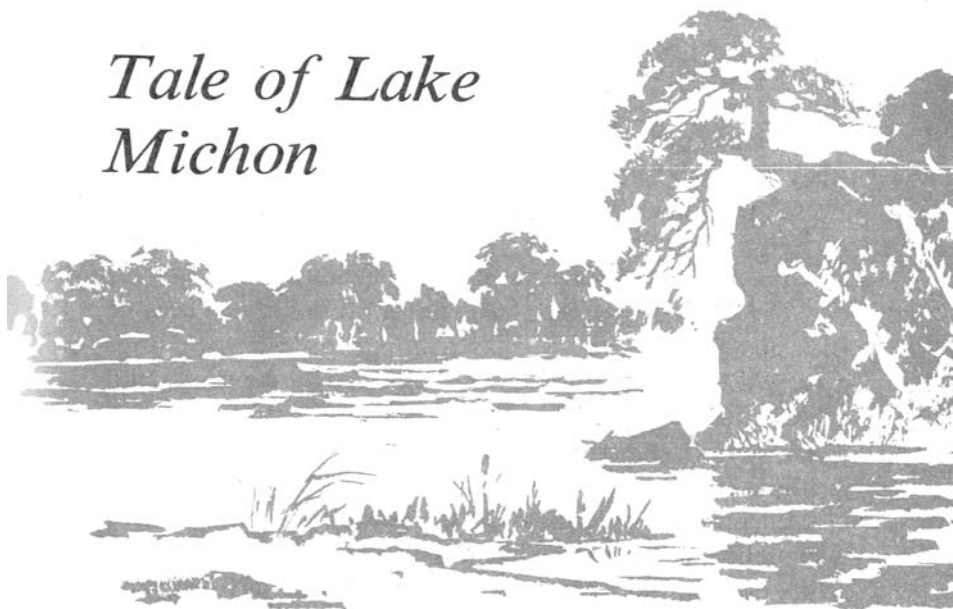
That night a greenish beacon fire suddenly rose from the roof of the Jangsu Pavilion on Mt. Taesong.

The light was visible from afar, but not to the people who, alarmed, rushed to the Jangsu Pavilion.

Alerted by it, all the signal-fire sites all over Koguryo lit a fire simultaneously to warn the country of the invasion. Warned of enemy incursions in time the troops of Koguryo beat back the invaders and successfully defended the country. The king felt remorse at the thought of Mi I Chon, but he was gone. However, thanks to his burning patriotism, the Koguryo people were able to stoutly defend the country against foreign incursions.



## *Tale of Lake Michon*



Mi I Chon, who kept to himself the secret of the self-luminous tile hidden in the roof of the Jangsu Pavilion to the last was tortured to death. He had four sons.

Before his departure for exile Mi I Chon summoned his four sons to his side and expressed his dying wish: "I am leaving without accomplishing everything I intended. I hope you will fulfil my wishes."

He said to them that it was necessary to build up defences and fortresses to protect the country from the enemy's invasion.

He had buried a treasure essential to building fortresses beneath the square rock under a solitary pine tree, he said. He told them to dig it up and carry out his will.

His four sons complied with his instructions and combed every cliff and tree stock and crevice of rock on Mt. Taesong for the treasure. Taking up their quarters in the office room from which their father had directed the building of the wall, they searched for the treasure day and night. Three months were spent, digging in first one place, then another, but always in vain.

The four brothers were tired and exhausted.

The eldest encouraged his younger brothers, who became dejected.



“We are sons of the man who displayed the constancy and wisdom of the Koguryo people. I am sure that being such a man, he left something to teach us. We must find it out without fail.”

Encouraged by the eldest, the younger brothers braced themselves once more. That day they dug about the sheer cliffs deep in the recesses of Mt. Taesong all day long and struck a big spring.

Is this the place where the treasure is buried? they asked themselves. No. He said it was beneath the square stone under a solitary pine, didn't he?

They dug all over the mountain. Still they could not find the treasure their father had buried. Tired out, they returned to the quarters where their father had worked and sank to the verandah floor in exhaustion.

The eldest brother was sitting with his back against a pillar when he felt something sticky on his back. It was pine resin which had oozed over the post. In an instant his father's last words flashed through his mind. “The solitary pine on the square rock,” he repeated to himself. That's it, he thought. The eldest brother rose abruptly and examined the pillar carefully.

It was a solitary pine post placed on the cornerstone on the earthen floor. It struck him that that was the one his father had meant.

The four brothers dug beneath the cornerstone.

After some digging they discovered a small box wrapped in cloth.

“Here it is. This is the treasure our father buried.” They cried for joy.

“What will we find in the box? the elder brother wondered. A lump of gold? No. He said it was an indispensable treasure for building fortifications.”

They opened the box and took out a book wrapped in sheets of oilpaper. They turned the leaves. It was their father's records of fortification building written in the form of a diary. It contained the experiences he had gained in constructing a large number of fortifications in mountains and lowlands across the country.

It also contained sketches of fortifications and details on the date of their construction, the materials used in building them and the technical problems that were encountered.

It was an invaluable record of fortification techniques with particular emphasis on those suited to the terrain of our country. It gave a detailed analysis of the fort on Mt. Taesong including its size, scale, and technical characteristics, and pointed out that it was a perfect mountain fort in respect of its location and that the lack of water resources was its only weak point.



It further noted: there were several wells within the wall but the amount of water would be insufficient in the event of an emergency; therefore water sources needed to be discovered and reservoirs needed to be built by damming streams. In addition, it pointed to the need to dig four wells below the dam and fill the joints in their wall with clay so that the water seeping through the dam and the wall could be filtrated and flow into the wells to be saved for the people.

As they leafed through their father's book, tears rolled down their cheeks. They bowed before their father's ardent love of the country and his profound wisdom.

They resolved to build a fine reservoir for the country, true to their father's will.

They set to work immediately to build a large reservoir by damming a stream and making springs flow into it. In addition, they dug four wells below the reservoir. The wells were full of clear water, which was used as drinking water for the soldiers when they fought the enemy. Mi I Chon's idea was very astute. This alone shows the wisdom and cultured life of the Koguryo people.

The reservoir was named Lake Mi I Chon and, later on, Lake Michon in honour of their father.



# General On Dal



In the reign of King Pyonggang of Koguryo, there lived a lad called On Dal with his blind mother near the Walled City of Pyongyang.

They were very poor. He had to peel bark off elm trees and dig for arrowroots in the mountains to support his mother.

So he was always in rags and tatters and his shoes were down at heels.

He was over eight feet tall, and had a round face and sparkling eyes. He could carry on his back a load of firewood two or three times heavy as others could manage.

He was a man of gigantic stature but presented a miserable sight. So people, particularly the rich, looked down on him and made fun of him.

Rich families sometimes treated him to a big bowl of chilled rice to engage his services as he was strong.

But each time On Dal went away without glancing at it, even if he had to go hungry.

Seeing this, wealthy people sneered at him, saying:

“He looks smart. That is the way with him as he is lowborn. He had better take it, instead of going hungry. Have-nots want to be served with sumptuous food, they say. He behaves just like them. Ha, ha....”

When a procession headed by dignitaries advanced with harbingers crying “Clear the way....,” every one used to kneel down on the roadside except On Dal who remained standing. Because of this, he was often given a good dressing-down. But later he passed for a blockhead.

He was usually taciturn. Some went so far as to say that he was dumb.

Hence the wealthy people and public officials began to call him On Dal the Fool.

“How powerfully built he is, though lowborn!”

“How haughty he is, though shabby!”

The rumours about On Dal the Fool went from mouth to mouth, quickly spread all over the country and eventually reached the ears of the king.

“On Dal the Fool... Ha, Ha... He is a very silly fellow, I’m sure.”

The king, too, jeered at him.

The king had a daughter. He loved her very much. She was a restless crybaby.

He often used to joke as he pacified the crybaby:

“You’re a miserable blubberer. You are no match for a dignitary. I’ll marry you to On Dal the Fool.”

Year by year she grew up to be a bright, honest and upright girl. She gained the affection of the whole court.

She grew old enough to marry.



She became known all over the country for her wisdom, and received marriage proposals from many noble families.

The king made up his mind to marry her to a high-ranking official whose family name was Ko.

On the day when the marriage was arranged, the princess knelt down before the king her father and said:

“Father, I ought to marry On Dal the Fool, oughtn’t I?”

“What? On Dal the Fool? What silly things you say!”

“Father, you used to cuddle me as a child and say to me that you would marry me to On Dal the Fool when I grow up.”

“Nonsense! That was a joke.”

“No. The words of the king of a country are law. If his words are disobeyed, the national laws will be ineffective. If I disobey your words, ministers will not obey your words. The principle should be abided by in governing the country and the nation, I think.”

“What insolence! You dare to impair my dignity taking advantage of my joke before me. It is unpardonable. Away with you at once.

“How can I, the king of a country, marry my daughter to On Dal the widely-known Fool, a man of low birth?”

So the princess was ordered to leave Court. The queen besought the king to show mercy to their daughter time and again, but it was of no avail.

The queen sent her daughter off in tears. She was accompanied by her servants and followed by horses carrying chests of gold and silk on their backs.

\* \* \*

The princess and her party arrived at On Dal’s hut deep in the recess of a secluded valley in late afternoon when the sun was setting on the western hill.

The clatter of horses’ hoofs and the sound of human voices sounded abruptly over the valley. On Dal’s mother was alarmed by this and strained her sightless eyes as if to see what the matter was. So the princess’s maidservant explained to her why they had come. She said:

“From today on the princess will live with On Dal in this house. Where is he?”

“O my! Why do you joke?”

“You should not say such thoughtless things. Have mercy on us and leave us alone.”

On Dal's mother groped her way across the doorsill and knelt down on the verandah floor of the hut.

At this moment On Dal returned home, carrying a heavy load of firewood on his back. He put it down in the yard when his astonished gaze took in the scene that confronted him.

He stared at the women in fine dresses the like of which he had never seen before and the chests of valuables on horseback and wondered at the intoxicating fragrance that wafted from the hut.

Finding his mother hunching up before them, he leaped to the verandah floor and helped her up, saying: "Mother, what's all this? What offence have you caused them?"

"Well, they say the princess has come to live with us. That will never do."

"What?"

On Dal stood up straight. Although he was in tatters and his face was wet with perspiration, his unyielding spirit asserted itself in his demeanour.

The princess blushed, her eyes glistening when her eyes met with his bright eyes.

The maidservant told On Dal the story about the princess with civility.

When he had heard her out, On Dal remained in silence for a good while holding his mother. At last he shook his head:

"It just won't do. We are no match for each other. One is high-born and the other, low-born."

With this he helped his mother into the room.

The princess changed her court dress for plain clothes and went into the kitchen. Rolling up her sleeves she started washing the cooking pots.

The maidservant, sympathizing with her, went to the spring in front of the house, carrying a water jar on her head. The male servant took down the luggage from the horses' backs and stacked it on the verandah floor.

"My dear, what's all this about?" asked On Dal's mother, holding on to his arm. "My heart is pounding like a drum. I don't think I can stand it."

He pondered in silence. Then he collected their worn-out clothes and packed them along with gourd dippers and other household items and said:

"Mother, we had better move to another place."

At this moment the princess entered the room quietly. She placed her hand on the bundle and said:

"People are not necessarily fated to be gentry or commoners by birth. If a man cultivates his strength, wisdom and willpower with a firm determination, he can become great and famous. If you do not want to



understand how I feel and leave me, that is not the way a man should behave, in my opinion.”

On Dal remained speechless.

“I hope you will learn how to read and write and train yourself in the military arts and make your fame spread throughout the country. I will help you as much as I can,” she said earnestly.

At this On Dal said:

“I’m On Dal the Fool. Do you think that nevertheless I could become such a person?”

From the way he talked, she perceived that he was not such a fool as she had heard people say, and she smiled quietly to herself.

“Jades are said to be found buried in the dirt. Isn’t he a talent buried because of poverty and maltreatment?” She decided she was very lucky, and made up her mind to do all she could to help him. After some thought he said: “Princess, you place great faith in me. If I did not acquiesce in your wishes, I would be a fool indeed.

“To fulfil your wish, I’ll go into the mountains for three years to master fencing, archery and horse riding.

“Only then will I be a worthy match for you. My one and only worry is about my blind mother.”

“Don’t worry about her. I will live with her and take care of her,” she replied.

The princess was glad to learn that he was bright, firm and resolute.

That was what she wanted him to be. She made arrangements for him to go into the mountains.

She procured a training suit for him to wear and purchased a good horse for him with a quantity of gold.

In addition to helmet and armor she equipped him with sword, spear, shield, arrows, and quiver which he would need in time of emergency.

She advised him to go to a great master of the military arts whose attainments were known to her.

On the day of his departure to the mountain, she said to him earnestly, as she accompanied him on the first stage of his journey, “I hope you become a great man who will bring glory to Koguryo and find fame for yourself. Please keep my advice in mind.”

Her sincere words moved him and he left home in a resolute frame of mind.

\* \* \*

For three years On Dal put his heart and soul into acquiring the military arts.

His master found that On Dal had unusual ability and willpower. He initiated him into the mysteries of martial arts and was highly exacting of him.

In the evening the master taught him how to read and write by candlelight.

He was not accustomed to such a life and at first it was very hard for him.

He experienced for the first time how trying it was to fence, shoot arrows and ride a horse.

He motivated himself to redoubled efforts by telling himself there was no reason why he could not acquire military art and learning and make himself useful to the country if other people could do it. Consequently, he made such rapid progress that even his teacher was amazed.

His efforts bore fruit at last.

Once on horseback, he could fly over a cliff dozens of feet high. He could mow down trees right and left with a sword in each hand to clear a path through a forest. He could shoot down two or three wild geese with a single arrow.

When On Dal was in the final stage of his military training, a national hunting contest was held in the Rangnang Plain.

This was a national event held in March each year in the presence of the king and dignitaries from the country's five prefectures.

The master advised On Dal to take part in the contest.

He put on his helmet and armor and mounted the white horse he had broken in.

"There is nothing special about the king or his feudal lords and generals," his mentor observed with a hearty laugh as he saw him off.

At the venue for the hunting contest fine tents had been pitched with bunting hung.

Assembled there were the king and many dignitaries and generals seated in rows, flanked on both sides by renowned archers and swordsmen. A crowd of people had gathered to see the spectacle.

The sons of dignitaries in gold helmet and silver armor were mounted on fine horses which were said to cover one thousand *ri* (One *ri* is 400 metres) a day. They threw their weight about, throwing out their chests as if offering a challenge.

That day a robust, stately-looking young man in simple attire arrived at the venue, riding with agility on a silver-white horse.

This was On Dal but none recognized him.

At a given signal, the clarion call of a bugle ringing out over the Rangnang Plain, the outstanding archers and swordsmen from all parts of the country darted out towards the lush woods of the hunting ground.

The hunting contest was held as a demonstration of Koguryo's military strength and as a military exercise.

At the same time a national memorial service was held to offer to Heaven the animals hunted on the first day.

Drum beating, bugle calls and the loud cries of hunters filled the Rangnang Plain. The spectators were in suspense wondering who would win the premier honors.

Before long a mounted warrior emerged from the wood, laden with two big deers.

Thunderous cheers broke from the crowd of spectators.

"Bravo! Who is he? Bring him to me," said the king. The warrior came to the king and saluted him in military fashion.

"Excellent! What is your name? Whose son are you?"

"I am a poor farmer living outside the Walled City of Pyongyang. My name is On Dal."

"What? On Dal?"

The king half-rose from his seat.

At this moment the back drapery was raised noiselessly and the princess appeared, accompanied by the queen, and bowed to the king.

"I pay my respects to you, father king, after three years' absence," said she in tears.

"What is this all about?"

The queen quietly told him what had happened in the meantime.

"Well..."

The king nodded and ran his eyes over the powerfully built On Dal once again.

The princess, too, was seeing On Dal for the first time after an absence of three years. At the sight of the changed figure of On Dal who yielded to none, her eyes filled with tears.

She had believed that this happy day would surely come and did not doubt that he would take part in the hunting contest.

"My dear daughter, wonderful!" said the king.

The king's eyes shone with a thousand emotions.



“On Dal, come nearer to me.”

On Dal walked up to him as he was told to.

His imposing air, dignified manners and his military accomplishments....

The king wondered whether this could be the very same man who had been known as On Dal the Fool.

Suddenly the king clasped his hands. At the sight of this the princess threw On Dal an affectionate smile, her eyes brimming with tears of joy.

\* \* \*

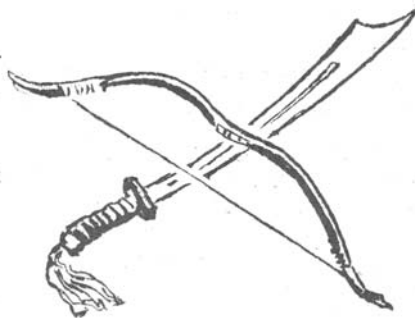
Later when the enemy invaded the country General On Dal took the lead in beating them back, demonstrating Koguryo’s might.

The image of General On Dal who defended Koguryo from enemy invasion until his hair turned grey was etched deep in the hearts of the people of Koguryo. He rendered many meritorious services to the country in his lifetime. On the day of his funeral his coffin could not be raised from the floor. It was as if he was reluctant to leave his beloved country behind.

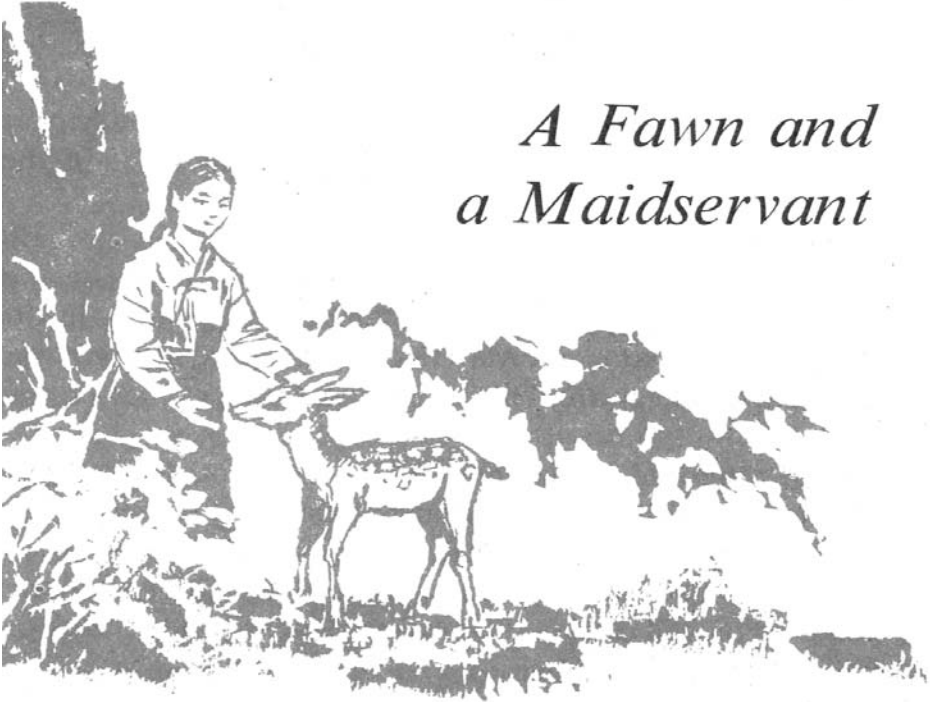
At this the grey-haired princess said, passing her hand over the coffin:

“You have given brilliant services glorifying Koguryo. May your soul rest in peace!”

Then the coffin could be lifted, it is said.



## *A Fawn and a Maidservant*



From olden times Changgwang Hill has enjoyed the love of the people of Pyongyang.

It attracts people all the more because its thick woods along with those covering Mt. Taesong which is far beyond, and Moran Hill, are the habitat for bears, deer, hare and other beasts and are visited by various kinds of birds.

One May Festival two nicely dressed girls—one in a yellow jacket and pink skirt and the other in a crimson jacket and blue skirt—were riding on a twin-swing, swinging it high into the sky under the weeping willow at the foot of Changgwang Hill.

They were swinging upward like a pair of swallows, their red-ribboned long pigtails of hair fluttering in the air, to tinkle the ringlet hung at the end of one of the willow tree's boughs. They attracted a crowd of women who gathered to watch and cheered and clapped their hands.

Every year, from the fourth to the sixth of the lunar May, the people of Pyongyang celebrated the May Festival here at the foot of Changgwang Hill, on the hill in front of the Kyongsang Valley or on Moran Hill.

People would enjoy themselves measuring their strength and skill

against each other, women at the swinging site and men at the wrestling site and on the archery ground. In the meantime, on that merry May Festival, a ragged little girl was climbing Changgwang Hill with an A-frame carrier on her back.

She appeared to be about 14 or 15. Though in ragged clothes, she seemed tender-hearted. Her face looked bright like a full moon and her clear eyes shone.

One would wonder why a mere slip of a girl, not a boy was going up the hill carrying the A-frame carrier on her back on the day of the festival.

She was wearing a jacket and skirt which were all covered with patches and worn-out straw sandals. The girl was looking down enviously at the swinging site as she made her way up the hill when she was suddenly transfixed, finding her mistress swaggering there.

Her mistress was in silks, a decorated band round her waist, glistening gold and silver trinkets attached to it. She was stepping lightly in her silk shoes, throwing her weight about.

The girl was the little maidservant of this mistress. On the May Festival day she was told by her mistress to fill three big jars with water and go and fetch two loads of firewood.

Suddenly overcome by sorrow, she quietly sobbed, her shoulder heaving. She turned round and hurried on to the woods.

Her name was Man Ok. She was born at the foot of Changgwang Hill. She was orphaned as a little baby and suffered from dire poverty.

On her deathbed her mother was pained to leave her little daughter behind alone and asked her neighbours to look after her. Things were hard with them, but they took turns to nurse her. When she was eight, a certain official, Hong, who was influential in the village, took her to his house. He said that he would bring her up with care and marry her.

At Hong's she did all sorts of chores—nursing a baby, cooking and carrying firewood—and suffered maltreatment.

As the days went by, she badly missed her mother. She hoped that one day she would be able to live without being humiliated and ill-used as her mother had wished.

But this was but a daydream.

Man Ok busied herself collecting firewood, nursing her aching heart and her sorrows. She had gathered nearly enough firewood for a full load for her A-frame carrier when suddenly she heard bustling steps from the bushes behind her. Then a fat fawn shot out from the bush.

“Please help me!”

At once she realized that it was being chased by hunters. A bitter hatred against those who would hunt such a fawn came over her. She at once let it hide in the pile of firewood. After a while two hunters rushed up to her, shouting: "Where has the fawn gone?"

She saw at a glance that they were feudal officials. Even on May Festival they did not go to watch the peasants' wrestling match but came to the hunting ground in hunting attires.

"It went that way, sir," said Man Ok, pointing in the other direction. But she was uneasy at heart.

She feared that they might rummage through the pile of firewood.

Luckily, the hunters hurried off in the direction she had indicated. Then the pile of firewood shook and the fawn jumped out of it.

"I am very grateful to you. I don't see how I can ever repay your kindness."

Shaking dry grass and leaves from its body, she said:

"Don't mention it. They might come back. Go to your mamma quick."

But the fawn seemed reluctant to leave her, offering its thanks at her.

"Please come along with me," it said.

Puzzled at this, she followed in the footsteps of the lovely fawn.

After quite a long walk they came to a rippling limpid brook skirting tree-capped cliffs.

She wondered whether there was any finer scenery on Changgwang Hill.

Man Ok was admiring the fine scenery when the fawn appeared together with its mother, brothers and sisters. Its mother bowed to her and said: "Today you have saved my son's life. I don't know how to repay you for your kindness."

In the meanwhile, the fawn brought a piece of a plant in its mouth.

It was a wild insam (ginseng). It had pretty red flowers and three branches, each having five green leaves.

Man Ok knew that it was insam, for she saw her master often drink the infusion from it.

Looking round at her sons and daughters, the mother deer said:

"My darlings, let us take this kind girl to the patch of wild insam."

Accompanying her, they came to a flat patch of land in front of the cliff, where they danced.

It was studded with red flowers of wild insam.

\* \* \*





Man Ok was a tenderhearted girl who loved her birthplace and people and even animals. She dug up a lot of wild insam and returned to the village carrying them instead of firewood.

She gave some of them to poor people. Thanks to the wild insam she escaped from maltreatment and ill-use and lived a happy life.

There goes another mysterious story about her master, Hong, and his wife. Hearing that their maidservant had discovered wild insam, he said, "Even our maidservant has found it. We can gather lots of it." They went up the hill in search of wild insam patches taking a large basket with them. But they never returned.

People later found in the crevices of the cliff Hong's horsehair skullcap and the trinkets his wife wore on the festival day, but their owners were never seen again.

"It is hardly likely that such an evil-minded couple have ascended to Heaven as immortals. They must have been taken by a tiger to its den in a recess of Mt. Taesong," people said.





## Lady Rok Jok (Deer Hoof) and Her Two Sons

This story dates as far back as the days of Koguryo (B.C. 277–A.D. 668).

There lived U Gyong who followed the plough at the foot of Mt. Sokda in Jungsan on the west coast. He was learned and a master of military art. He trained promising young volunteers to be pillars of the country.

Among them was Ulji Mun Dok who later became a famous general of Koguryo.

U Gyong's wife was virtuous, bright, magnanimous and patriotic. As far as she could she helped her two sons to learn how to read and fight in battles from their father in their childhood. Strange to say, she had feet shaped like a deer's.

So she was named Lady Rok Jok (Deer Hoof). Her sons, too, had similar feet.

To their regret, U Gyong died.

His wife, sons and disciples were much agrieved at his death.

In accordance with her husband's will Lady Rok Jok did all she could to teach her two sons, while farming at the foot of Mt. Sokda.

They were unusually bright and courageous as boys. When they played at soldiers, they were always cocks of the walk.

One day, when they were playing at soldiers, one of the boys disobeyed their orders and was punished. He accidentally fell over the cliff and died.

He was the son of an influential person in that locality. Afraid of reprisal, Lady Rok Jok fled the village with her children that very night to the shore of the West Sea.

Finding a boat there, she took her two sons aboard it. She was in such a hurry that she forgot to bring food with them for the voyage.

Telling the boys to wait on the boat until she came back, she returned to

the village for food.

Suddenly a strong wind rose and tossed the boat like a leaf on the raging wave.

When she hurried back with food, she found that the boat was drifting farther and farther away from the shore.

She anxiously called to her children but the boat was already far away.

She shouted them at the top of her voice:

“My dear, don’t forget your country, Koguryo, wherever you may go.”

The boat drifted away carrying the two boys who were anxiously crying for their mother.

She felt a painful wrench at the thought of her sons roving adrift at the mercy of the waves of the boundless raging sea.

It is not certain whether they heard their mother’s ardent appeal.

\* \* \*

The woman settled down on Mt. Taesong. She bred deer to console herself.

Twenty years flew by before the enemy invaded the country in swarms. It was General Ulji Mun Dok of Koguryo who countered the invaders.

There is a story about General Ulji Mun Dok. One day, on her way back from weeding her plot, a kindhearted woman in the village of Joksongol at the foot of Mt. Sokda saw a bird brooding a large egg which she took home and hatched. This was how General Ulji Mun Dok was born of it.

Here is another story. When as a boy he was on a night trip, carrying a load of salt on his back, he was pestered by a beast that stood in his path. So he beat it to death with a stick. It turned out to be a large tiger.

The marauders far outnumbered Koguryo’s troops. Koguryo had to fight a hard battle.

One day a grey-haired person paid a visit to General Ulji Mun Dok at his camp and asked him to allow him to take the field, joining his troops, though he was old.

It was Lady Rok Jok in male attire.

The general was moved by the patriotism of his respected master’s aged wife who volunteered to take up arms in defence of the country.

He was undecided whether to send her to the field of decisive battle when Lady Rok Jok said in high spirits:

“As a Koguryo woman, I, though old, cannot sit idle when the fate of the nation is at stake. Moreover, as you, General, are well aware, my two

sons are missing and cannot carry out their father's will. So, how can I sit idle?"

General Ulji felt a constriction in his chest. Placing his hand in Lady Rok Jok's, he said that they should fight for the country sharing life or death.

One day while mapping out tactics, General Ulji decided he had to have a clear idea of the enemy situation.

He rode to the enemy camp unescorted and obtained vital information while holding negotiations with them on the pretext of entering into peace talks. Now the general was hurrying back alone on his horse.



The enemy discovered belatedly that they had been tricked. They sent a number of sturdy men in pursuit of him with instructions to behead him as soon as they captured him.

The enemy soldiers set off in pursuit of the general, raising the dust behind them. "Stop!" they shouted. "We have something to say to you."

But the general did not stop, knowing their ulterior motive.

“The talk is over, what do you want me for? I have an urgent matter to attend to.”

And he spurred on his horse.

Before long the moon rose in the eastern sky.

Soon a large river loomed in front of him. At this critical moment a boat glided toward him.

The general made haste to get on board and the boat left the shore.

Aboard the boat was Lady Rok Jok who was dressed like a fairy.

“Madam! What is all this?”

She did not reply but, looking at the enemy commanders who had arrived on the farther bank of the river, she shouted:

“General Ulji of Koguryo is a man from Heaven. I have a divine order to ferry him across the river. You had better give up your futile chase and go back.”

The enemy commanders gazed in bewilderment at the finely dressed woman guarding the general, for she really did look like a fairy in the moonlight.

General Ulji, aboard the boat, looked up at the sky, his hand on his sword, and said excitedly: “People have such ardent love for the country and display such loyalty that our Koguryo will prosper for ever.”

The enemy commanders muttered among themselves on the bank: “This is beyond human power. Nothing doing. Heaven is in favour of Koguryo.

Let’s go back.”

Thus, the enemy withdrew.

\* \* \*

Drawing on the information about the enemy situation that he had obtained, General Ulji lured and harassed the enemy and cut off their food supplies. When the enemy fled, he hit hard at them from the rear and destroyed them, plunging them into the sea. Applying these wise tactics, he rescued the country from difficulty.

At this juncture the volunteers of Koguryo operated briskly in the enemy’s rear and dealt hard blows to them.

A rumour spread that the volunteers were commanded by two Rok Jok Generals.

Around this time Lady Rok Jok met General Ulji and asked him to send her to them.

Indisposed to send such an old woman across the front, the general suggested dispatching someone else to get information about them.

But Lady Rok Jok was insistent.

“The generals may be my sons, so I must go.

“ A mother knows her sons best, doesn’t she?”

Thus, Lady Rok Jok set out on the journey.

They must be my sons. How could there be another Rok Jok man? she thought.

Inspired by the desire to meet her gallant sons who were fighting for the country, the woman crossed the dangerous battlefields and reached one of the volunteer’s units and met the Rok Jok Generals.

She recognized her sons at first glance.

The woman told them that she was a soldier of General Ulji Mun Dok and that she had been looking for her sons for more than 20 years. And then she took off her shoes to show her feet and asked the generals to do the same.

The two generals recognized their mother at once and took off their shoes.

When all of them were barefooted, they found that all their feet were deer-hoofed.

“Mother....”

“O my dear sons!”

After 20 years of strange vicissitudes the mother and her sons reunited themselves on the battlefield to defend the country.

They threw themselves into each other’s arms.

\* \* \*

Twenty years before the two sons had been caught in a storm off the shore and carried away to a distant land where they had been rescued by a kind person. Under the care of a renowned teacher they had learned how to read and write and acquired the art of war and became generals.

Even in those days they kept in their heart the spirit of the Koguryo people as their mother had wished them to on the day of their parting on the beach.

At the news that Koguryo, their motherland, was in danger, they took to arms. And thus they were reunited with their beloved old mother who was hale and hearty, burning with love for her country.

The two Rok Jok Generals attacked the enemy both from the front and





the rear in close cooperation with General Ulji and brought a great victory to Kogury.

Later Lady Rok Jok is said to have settled again on Mt. Taesong and spent the remaining years of her life, breeding deer around the pond she dug for them.



## *The Rungna Island Floated Down*



This happened several hundred years ago.

One early morning, when the Taedong River was swollen after heavy rain, the people of Pyongyang were surprised to see an extraordinary sight.

A large island suddenly emerged just across from the Chongnyu Cliff of Moran Hill.

“What on earth is that?”

“Such a large island could not have floated down the river or shot up from beneath the ground....”

This news instantly reached the ears of the governor of P'yongyang.

He did not believe it at first, but, as it became the topic of all the city, he sent officials to ascertain whether it was true. Arriving at the scene, they found that, just as they had heard, a large island had appeared that was not there before.

House sites and crop fields on the island were silted.

In the middle of the island there was a grove of thriving willows in which cicadas were shrilling carelessly.

This enigmatic story soon spread far and wide and the shore opposite the island was crowded with people.

Meanwhile, the whole of Songchon County was astir because an island in the middle of the Piryu River, tributary of the Taedong River, had suddenly disappeared.

“I wonder where such a large island could have gone.”

“It isn't likely that such a big island was washed away.”

The magistrate of Songchon County shouted angrily: “Find out what

has happened to the island at once.”

The officials and people of the county turned out to find it, but in vain.

The magistrate feared that he might be called to account by the court for the island’s disappearance after several days of heavy rain as it was under his jurisdiction. Moreover, he was angry because he could not exact tribute from the farmers and fishermen on the island any more.

At first they thought it was waterlogged by flooding but for all their searching, the island was nowhere to be seen.

People could only marvelled at the extraordinary occurrence.

The islanders who had been visiting the county seat on business were left homeless.

They went up and down along the river in search of the island, crying for their families, for several days but only to hear the loud splash of the swollen stream.

Among them was a young man. He left home for the county seat in heavy rain to get medicine for his sick mother and was caught up in the trouble.

The lad, spurred on by the thought of his mother, continued his search along the river, staggering from hunger.

He walked for several days until he arrived in front of the Chongnyu Cliff.

The roll of furious thunder ceased and the sky cleared up.

He found the riverside was crowded with people.

He went up to one of them and asked what was going on.

Pointing to the middle of the river, the person replied that an island has emerged in mid-stream after the river was swollen from a spell of torrential rain.

He attributed it to the work of the dragon in the Taedong River done in a fit of anger.

Turning his eyes to the river, the lad saw a large island floating in mid-stream.

He swam across to the island, cherishing a faint hope.

All the houses and fields on the island were washed away.

Nevertheless, the lad identified the cherished quarters where he had lived.

He absent-mindedly roamed the whole island in search of his house. But he could not find his beloved mother or her body. All he could find were some of his chattels covered with silt.

His tears dried up. In distress, he stared blankly into the sky, pounding his



chest with his fist.

People were amazed to learn that the island on the Piryu River had drifted from Songchon down the Taedong River as far as Moran Hill.

Even after the island moved down the Taedong River, the greedy magistrate of Songchon County continued to collect tribute from the islanders, claiming that it belonged to his county.

After reclaiming the island, people built houses, laid out fields and raised good crops. So it was natural that he would not give up the island.

But this caused the islanders a lot of trouble. Whether the island belonged to Pyongyang or Songchon County, it was all the same to them as far as paying taxes was concerned. But it was a great burden to them to have to carry the tribute all the way to Songchon County to pay it. So they requested the governor of Pyongyang to transfer jurisdiction over the island to Pyongyang.

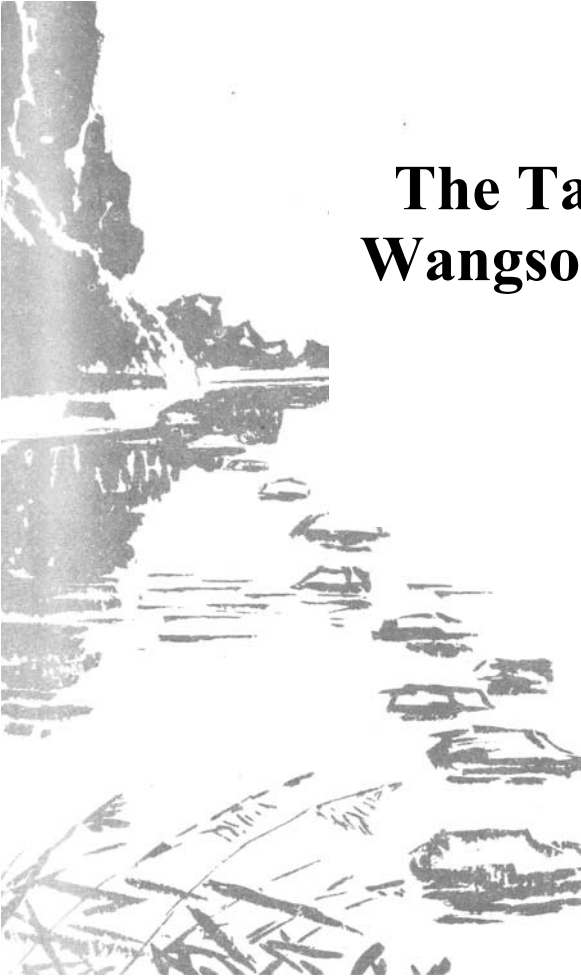
The governor instructed the magistrate of Songchon County to transfer it to Pyongyang, but he did not comply.

Originally the governor's instructions were binding upon the county magistrate. In those days the officials of the court were engrossed in feathering their own nest, bleeding people white instead of attending to the affairs of state. As a result, the legal order of the state was extremely lax. At the time the posts of governor or county magistrate were bought or sold for money without compunction, so it was not surprising that the magistrate of Songchon County scoffed at the governor's instructions.

This angered the governor of Pyongyang who demanded that the island be moved right away from the area under his control to Songchon.

The magistrate of Songchon County was pretty shrewd when it came to squeezing the people but he was unable to move the island back to its original location. Eventually the management of the island was transferred to Pyongyang and came to be known as Rungna (Silk) Island because its beautiful scenery was reminiscent of a silk scroll.

# The Tale of the Wangsong Shoals



Once at the time of the reign of Koguryo the aggressors were encamped in the vast plain across the Taedong River, watching for a chance to attack the Walled City of Pyongyang.

The people of Koguryo put up a valiant resistance relying on their strong walls and taking advantage of the Taedong River. The enemy pinned their faith on their numerical superiority and sought to capture the Walled City of Pyongyang through a long siege.

In the meantime the Taedong River abruptly flooded. The flood was a handicap to the enemy who had to cross the river as well. So, they revelled in drinking day in and day out, their weapons stacked, waiting for the water level to sink.



Availing themselves of this opportunity, the troops of Koguryo trained themselves hard and did their best to acquire more weapons.

They intended to attack the enemy, catching them off their guard. But they could not cross the Taedong River until the water subsided. So the soldiers of Koguryo were burning with impatience.

Among the Koguryo soldiers was a young man called Wang Song.

He had a mother, a father and a beloved wife. He was a patriotic soldier who always fought bravely.

“If we carry on like this, the enemy may forestall us in action or a long siege may undermine the morale of our soldiers. Then we cannot cross the Taedong River and annihilate the enemy,” he thought.

He made up his mind to swim first across the river.

“I may be drowned, but the morale of the Koguryo soldiers will rise. This will encourage them to cross the river and beat the enemy,” he thought.

Wang Song said aloud to the Koguryo soldiers: “We cannot wait for the water to subside. Follow me.”

He plunged himself into the rapid stream of the river and swam ahead. But he failed to cross the wide flooded river. Wang Song, who was cleaving his way through the raging stream under the anxious eyes of his companions, was buffeted continually and eventually sank into the water.

“His noble death shall never go in vain.”

These shouts burst out from the camp of the Koguryo soldiers.

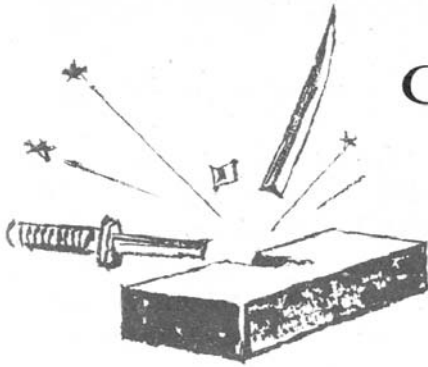
Strangely enough, the following morning, the level of the Taedong River had gone down, revealing stepping stones in the wake of Wang Song’s swimming.

“Wang Song’s patriotism built a bridge.”

The warriors of Koguryo all took to arms at once. They crossed the stepping stones. Then they hurled themselves into the Tongdaewon Plain and mowed down the enemy soldiers mercilessly with their swords. The enemy fled in all directions.

The place where Wang Song drowned came to be known as the Wangsong Shoals in memory of the meritorious service of Wang Song who sacrificed his life to arouse the warriors to action.





## Coralline Bricks of the Anhak Palace

This is a tale related to the time of the reign of Koguryo.

After the transfer of its capital to Pyongyang, Koguryo started to build the Anhak Palace at the foot of Mt. Taesong.

Noted masons, carpenters, plasterers and brickmakers were drafted from different parts of the country for the purpose.

The building of the new palace took Koguryo many years.

Each tile and each pillar of this royal palace cost people blood and sweat. Sad stories are associated with it.

There is an anecdote related to the brownish bricks laid on the central corridor of the royal palace surrounded by the walls.

Civil dignitaries in gorgeous official attire and expensive silk shoes and generals of Koguryo in hobnailed boots came and went treading these bricks. They were burned by brickmaker Isa Dal.

He acquired excellent skill and valuable experience from his father, a servant in the palace.

It had originally been intended to pave the main corridors leading to the palaces, observation platforms and pavilions with coral but because coral was in short supply, it was decided to burn coralline bricks and pave the corridors with these.

Assigning Isa Dal this task, the chief inspector in charge of the royal palace project said:

“You ensure that the coral-colored bricks are laid in the corridors of the royal palace on its completion. If you fail, don’t expect your life to be spared. If you succeed, however, your greatest desire shall be satisfied.”

At that time Isa Dal was 30 years old and unmarried.

His cherished desire was to shake off the caste of slave along with Noul

Agi, a court maid.

Formerly Isa Dal lived next door to Noul Agi not far from the royal palace by the Taedong River.

When they grew up, Isa Dal became a brickmaker, taking up his father's occupation, and Noul Agi was drafted as a court maid.

Both of them served in the same royal palace but they were not able to meet each other.

Even if they noticed each other from a distance, they had to ignore each other, otherwise it would cost their life.

The royal palace was a real comfort to the king but a prison to Noul Agi, a court maid. Isa Dal was a slave chained to hard labour.

The glorious music in the royal palace sounded less melodious to Noul Agi than the chirping of cicadas which Isa Dal and she heard playing under the willow by the Taedong River. To Isa Dal, the splendid pavilions looked less attractive than the old huts which Noul Agi and he frequented in the morning and in the evening.

Coral-coloured brick! His spirits sank when he was told to bake bricks which were hued like the corals growing in the depth of the sea and pave the long corridors of the palace with them.

But, should he succeed, he had the promise of being allowed to meet his beloved Noul Agi and cast off the yoke of slavery. He visited different parts of the country for different kinds of clay and baked bricks with them. He tried charcoals made of hundreds of kinds of trees and varied pigments, but all no avail. He tried everything. He used various iron ores, powdered jades, and other materials at varying temperature. But the bricks he made from them did not take on the coral-like colour he was hoping for.

More than once impatience drove him out to the sea and he would contemplate the beautiful color of the corals he had picked.

Ten years had passed since he had started his task. He had baked bricks on more than 1,500 occasions but had met with no success. He pounded his chest and turned his eyes towards the heavens.

His hair turned grey and he looked prematurely old.

Meanwhile, Noul Agi struggled on within the palace for ten years, living in tears, her heart torn with grief. She was oblivious to the beauty of the full-blown flowers in the courtyard of the palace, the call of orioles on the boughs of thriving trees and the mass of maple foliage aflame with autumnal tints, and took no delight in these things.

When snowflakes fell silently on her, she rubbed her hot cheeks with them, reminded of the fluttering petals of apricot blossoms she had caught

with her palms as she strolled together with Isa Dal along the Taedong River beyond the walls of the royal palace.

Neither fine silk dresses nor gold and silver ornaments could make her happy. The delicacies of the table were a bitter pill to her.

When she heard that Isa Dal had failed to bake the required bricks although he had tried on more than 1,500 occasions, she pictured the mountains and rivers he might have crossed and secretly prayed for his success every night.

But the bricks Isa Dal baked were not tinged like coral.

The colour of the bricks he was turning out after ten years' persistent effort was brownish red, but not coralline.

Isa Dal pounded his chest with them.

Then it occurred to him that the production of coral tinted bricks was not only a matter of his own concern but meant a demonstration of the talent of the Koguryo people.

This increased his sense of frustration.

Those who had helped him for ten years were heartbroken too.

In the meantime, the main building of the Anhak Palace was completed. At last the day came when the floor of the central corridor was to be laid with bricks.

"Bring your bricks before me," said the chief inspector. Isa Dal brought brownish red bricks.

"Are these coral-tinted bricks? Mine are not empty words. Are you ready to lay down your life?"

The chief inspector roared at him angrily.

"I did my best. I tried 1,500 times for 10 years to bake these bricks. I attempted to make coral-tinted bricks. In this process my hair turned grey," he said without compunctions, pointing to the bricks he had produced with great effort.

"Take him out and behead him at once."

The heartless chief inspector would not listen to him any more. Isa Dal was taken to the execution ground.

The chief inspector saw that all the servants and court maids within and without the court were assembled there. He wanted to make Isa Dal an example of what would happen to any one who disobeyed his instruction.

Nobody dared to stop him as he was inflated with the backing of an important minister.

Brickmakers, masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, silversmiths and goldsmiths, court maids and servants were herded out to the execution

ground. Among them was Noul Agi. At the sight of her beloved standing unperturbed in front of the executioners who held their swords in their hands, she fainted and sank to the ground.

The overhanging Sonnyo Rock, before which Noul Agi prayed so earnestly, remained indifferent to her unconscious collapse.

The executioners with glittering swords drew up to Isa Dal.

Isa Dal turned his eyes towards the court maids but did not see Noul Agi there.

“Oh, am I to part like this?”

Isa Dal thought and slowly closed his eyes.

“Haven’t you anything to say before you die?”

The chief inspector’s voice rang out.

Holding up the brick in his hand, Isa Dal shouted:

“Brothers and sisters! Look at my hair. It has turned grey like this over the ten years, while this brick has tinted red, like my heart’s blood.”

At this Noul Agi opened her eyes. She stood up and, staggering, pushed her way through the crowd.

At this juncture a brickmaker who had helped Isa Dal came forward and stood by him. He said:

“Kill me too. If you kill Isa Dal, it will fall upon us to bake coral-tinted bricks. But none of us is as skilled as Isa Dal. I would rather die now together with Isa Dal than in the future.”

At this his fellow brickmakers rushed forward and stood around Isa Dal, shouting “Kill us all!”

They were followed by the masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, silversmiths and goldsmiths, who cried: “Kill us too.”

The chief inspector was alarmed by this. He flinched and shouted: “Take them away and behead Isa Dal at once.”

The soldiers rushed to tear them away from Isa Dal.

This caused pandemonium.

Meanwhile, lifting his glittering sword, an executioner brought it down, aiming for Isa Dal’s neck.

With people screaming the executioner’s broken sword fell on the ground with a clang.

Isa Dal had parried the blow with the brick.

Another executioner’s sword also broke with a clang as it hit the brick that Isa Dal held up to check its downward stroke.

But the swords had not produced the slightest dent in the brick.

There arose a commotion among the crowd.



At this time the court maids were surprised to see Noul Agi's hair suddenly turn grey like the green onion's root when she screamed as she saw the sword held over Isa Dal's head descending on him.

The crowd became more and more agitated and seemed to have reached bursting point.

The deputy chief inspector whispered in the ear of the chief: "If you kill Isa Dal, a revolt is likely to break out. I think we had better dismiss him at once."

The chief inspector spat out angrily, "Do as you like", and left the scene.

Thus Isa Dal shook off his horrible slavery. At the same time Noul Agi, now grey-haired and useless, was also dismissed from the court.

Noul Agi met Isa Dal in their home village on the shore of the Taedong River and called to him "Isa Dal..."

Noul Agi sank to the ground beside Isa Dal.

"Dear me!"

He recognized Noul Agi and enclosed her in his arms.

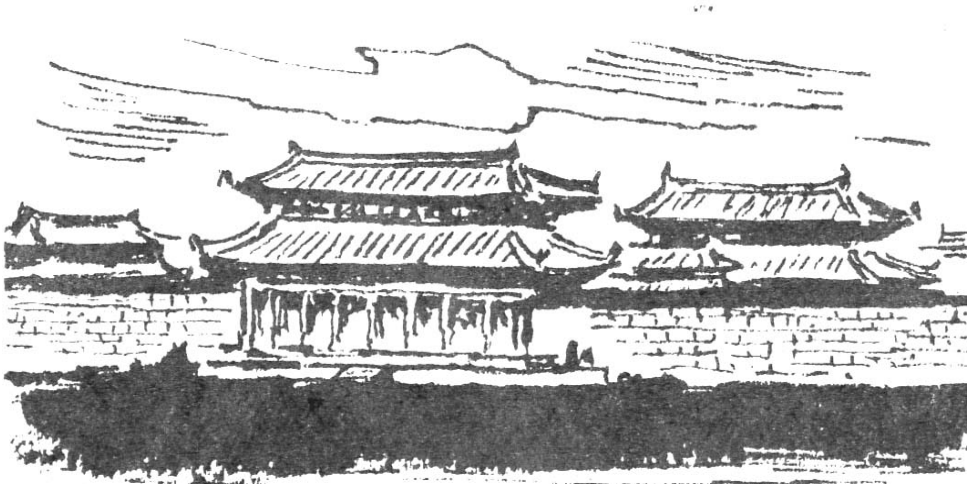
The two lovers had not been able to meet even once although they sometimes found themselves within calling distance within the palace because they belonged to the caste of court servants. Reunited, they burst into sobs, which seemed never to end.

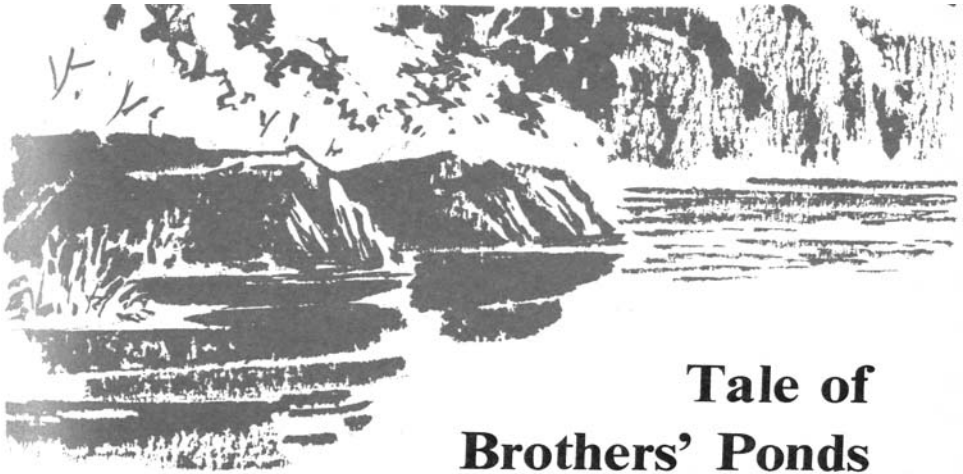
After over ten years spent in sorrow, Isa Dal and Noul Agi, now grey-haired, were strolling side by side along the shore of the Taedong River where they had spent their childhood.

Although they were downtrodden in the prime of their youth and their hair turned hoary prematurely, they were now free from the abominable shackles of slavery. They strolled, hand in hand enjoying the spring they had belatedly regained.

\* \* \*

Over 1,500 years have passed since then, but the red bricks found at the site of the Anhak Palace are just as they were, without the slightest scar.





## Tale of Brothers' Ponds

The peasant army which rose in revolt in the Pyongyang area against the despotic feudal rulers of the Ri dynasty (1392-1910) dealt telling blows to the vile government officials and local landed gentry. Mt. Taesong was their stronghold.

Among them were two brothers—the elder called Tae Gap and the younger, Tae Ul. They were strong, they led the vanguard into battle, and they helped and cared for their fellow rebels as their brothers. Consequently, they were popular among the rebels who cherished them like their own brothers.

They were born into a poor peasant family.

As boys they helped their father and farmed diligently, cultivating idle land.

The elder brother Tae Gap was so strong he could lift an ox. Tae Ul, the younger, was agile and good at fencing. Both were well known in the neighbourhood as good wrestlers. Their father, falsely charged to be a rebel, was deprived of his land and cattle and executed at the hands of the rulers on no grounds whatsoever.

As for the ox, it was the first prize which Tae Gap had carried away from the wrestling tournaments at the May Festival.

When the father and the two sons reclaimed an idle stony patch of land, removing stones, and turned it into a fertile land by working hard day and night and tightening their belt, their father was deprived of it and suffered death under a false charge.



When Tae Gap returned home leading the ox, the prize he had won at the May Festival, his father was delighted to see it. He kept passing his hand over its back and tied a jingling ring around its neck. He ploughed the field with the help of the ox, his giddap resounding in the air.

The wrinkles on their father's face seemed to have been smoothed. The two sons could never forget the affectionate glance with which their father gazed in satisfaction at their dignified and stalwart figures, while discussing with them how to improve their living.

They grieved over their father's death, pounding their chests with clenched fists. They were the first to join the rebel army at the news of the revolt.

"Please stand us in the van, we'll go and attack the magisterial office in Pyongyang right away," they appealed to the leader of the rebel army.

He reasoned with them, clapping them on their shoulders.

"Anyone of our army here harbors just as bitter a grudge in his heart as you do. But the great undertaking cannot be carried out, swayed by personal feelings or by uncontrolled indignation. We must do a lot of training to fight the enemy, concert our efforts and build up our strength and wisdom to smash those who harass the people."

From that day on, Tae Gap and Tae Ul practised fencing and trained hard.

They were strong, good at fencing and talented. The elder brother's *tanso* and the younger brother's flute, played in the breaks, inspired the rebel troops to battle.

"When did you learn to play your instrument?" they asked.

The elder brother Tae Gap did not reply. He drooped his head silently, the *tanso* in his hand. The younger brother, Tae Ul, beside him said in tears: "After our father was killed for no good reason, we began to play them, trying to find solace through them."

They found that the brothers' mood was exactly the same as theirs. Listening to them play the *tanso* and flute, they renewed their determination to revenge themselves upon the enemy.

The heart-stirring melodies which they played on the *tanso* and flute on the bright moon-lit night drifted over the Jujak Peak, Mt. Taesong's valleys and further over the sky, carrying the rebels' resentment against the exploiters and their resolve to take revenge.

The brothers were kind, upright and sympathetic. If anybody fell ill they would attend on him as if he was their brother. They gave their clothes to younger fellows without hesitation on a cold day.

One day the headquarters of the insurgent troops received an urgent report that scores of rebels who had been out on a raid had been captured and taken to Pyongyang prison.

An emergency meeting was called at once at the headquarters to discuss how to get them back. It was decided to break into Pyongyang prison and rescue them and that a scout should be sent into the Walled City of Pyongyang.

Tae Ul volunteered to go on the scouting mission.

Disguising himself as a firewood vendor, he entered the Walled City of Pyongyang. He observed the enemy's movements and obtained information about the captured rebels. In addition, he obtained the unexpected information that at the forthcoming May Festival the wrestling tournament would be held in the presence of the magistrate in front of the Ryongwang Pavilion and that it would be followed by the execution of the captured rebels.

In the light of the information that Tae Ul had brought, the headquarters again discussed how to rescue them. They worked out a plan. On the forthcoming May Festival Tae Gap would attend the wrestling match and Tae Ul hang around the Ryongwang Pavilion; when Tae Gap takes part in the wrestling tournament, his younger brother would kill the magistrate; meanwhile troops of insurgents would attack the magistrate's office, break into the prison, and rescue the prisoners.

However, things did not work out as expected. The magistrate of Pyongyang was unexpectedly recalled to Seoul and a new magistrate was to arrive, so the wrestling tournament was cancelled.

The situation became pressing. The two brothers came forward and said:

"We must rescue our imprisoned brothers without delay. Please assign the task to us. If we are afraid of death at this moment, how can we class ourselves as insurgent soldiers who set the highest store by fidelity?"

But the commander said: "Your determination and courage is praiseworthy. But the task is beyond the capability of one or two persons."

"It is easier for two of us to climb over the wall stealthily tonight than for several men to go. It is said that a farewell party is to be held for the magistrate this evening. We must not miss this chance."

Tae Gap and his younger brother clambered over the city wall. They got rid of a prison warder at a single stroke and rescued more than ten rebel prisoners. The prisoners could hardly walk due to the injuries they had received from tortures. They embraced the two brothers. They were



speechless with gratitude.

Carrying the weakest on their backs, the two brothers led the prisoners to the city wall and handed them over to the rebel soldiers waiting there. At that moment the approach of government troops was heard followed by the shout, “You scoundrels, stop there.”

While the elder brother was helping the rest of the rescued men over the city wall, the younger brother slashed down five or six soldiers of the magistrate’s guard.

When he had assisted the last person over the wall, the elder brother joined his younger brother in the fight. They had cut down more than 20 of the magistrate’s soldiers when they heard the singing voices and coquettish laughter of *kisaeng* girls emanating from the Sonhwa Pavilion, the magisterial office. It was apparent that the farewell party for the magistrate was in progress.

Enraged, Tae Ul said to his brother, “Brother, finish off the rest. I’ll go and cut off the magistrate’s head.” He ran to the Sonhwa Pavilion, sword in hand, only to find that the magistrate had run away.

As it turned out later, of the soldiers who had been sent to catch the two brothers, one soldier who had narrowly escaped death returned, his body covered in wounds, and reported that the two Herculeses who showed up at the prison would soon descend on the Sonhwa Pavilion. At this the magistrate is said to have fled for his life.

After the futile pursuit of the magistrate, Tae Ul rushed back to his brother. He found a crowd of soldiers there.

“You scoundrels, have a taste of my sword.” With this shout Tae Ul mowed down seven or eight men, brandishing his sword. The enemy soldiers held back for a while and then came on again, drawing inspiration from their strength of numbers.

“Brother, get over the wall quick. I’ll hold them back.”

“That won’t do. You must go and inform the commander that the Pyongyang magisterial office is nothing and tell him to bring the troops tonight.”

But it was too late now. Tae Gap had received sword cuts and been hit by arrows. Tae Ul, too, had received many wounds. The two brothers were surrounded by enemy troops whose number had swelled into several hundred. But the two courageous brothers fought on undaunted.

“You scoundrels, this is revenge for our father!”

“You bastards, this is revenge for our people!”

Each time the brother’s swords of revenge and resentment flashed, more

enemy soldiers fell to the ground, headless.

However, the two brothers incurred many wounds and shed much blood fighting against insurmountable odds.

Thus the two brothers, Tae Gap and Tae Ul, the valiant soldiers of the peasant rebel army on Mt. Taesong died a heroic death. The news inspired the rebel troops to new heights of fervour.

The rebel troops intensified military training and consolidated their ranks, renewing their determination to crush the enemy. At night in their spare time they would gather in the place where the two brothers used to play the *tanso* and flute, recall with tears their unforgettable memory, and renew their pledge of revenge.

Though the two brothers who were faithful and kind and as fierce in battle as tigers were gone, the insurgents felt as if they were with them at all times.

The tears they shed gathered and formed two ponds, one large and one small.

Afterwards people called them the Brothers' Ponds. It is said that the water in the ponds was too salty for fish to live in.

# Tale of the Kamagwi (Crow) Ford



This tale goes back to the years of the Imjin Patriotic War (1592-1598).

The Japanese troops which intruded into our country encamped in east Pyongyang opposite to the Yanggak Island in an attempt to cross the Taedong River.

The enemies were impatient to attack the Walled City of Pyongyang without delay, but first they feared its defenders and next they did not know how deep the river was and where to cross.

One day hundreds of crows settled on the shoal above the Yanggak Island and croaked.

“Damn it! That is an ill omen.”

“Now that they can see where it is shallow on the Taedong River, no doubt they will advance tonight,” someone said. People were set astir.

As expected, the Japanese soldiers were driving markers into the shore opposite the shoal, jabbering something to the effect that they intended to cross the river there.

“They will certainly cross the ford, so we must be fully prepared.”

While the soldiers and people were astir, another strange thing took place on the shoal.

As the evening glow set over the Taedong River, a bonze wearing a robe as black as a crow’s feather was wading across the ford where the crows had settled, his trouser legs rolled up.

“What’s that, eh?”

“That bonze is a traitor, isn’t he? Capture him!”

But the bonze in his dark robe continued wading the shoal, paying no



heed to the shouts of the enraged people.

When the bonze had nearly reached the middle of the river, a strong gale suddenly rose and brought rain clouds and fog over the Taedong River.

Soon night fell.

Anticipating that the Japanese would attack at night, the people in Pyongyang prepared for combat. But the night was so dark that the enemy showed no sign of movement.

With the dawn, the dark clouds and fog began lifting slowly, vaguely revealing the Taesong River.

But the veil of fog still hovered over the river. Choosing this opportune moment, the Japanese troops hurled themselves into the river.

Strange to say, however, they jumped into deep water instead of crossing the ford the bonze had waded on the previous night. Getting lost in the mist, they struggled in the water.

At the sight of this, our soldiers showered a salvo of arrows over them and annihilated them. The enemies who attempted to cross the river fled for their lives, leaving many bodies and weapons in the Taedong River.

What a strange event! People wondered why the enemy plunged themselves into the deep stream, instead of the shallow places in which the crows had alighted and which they had marked with poles.

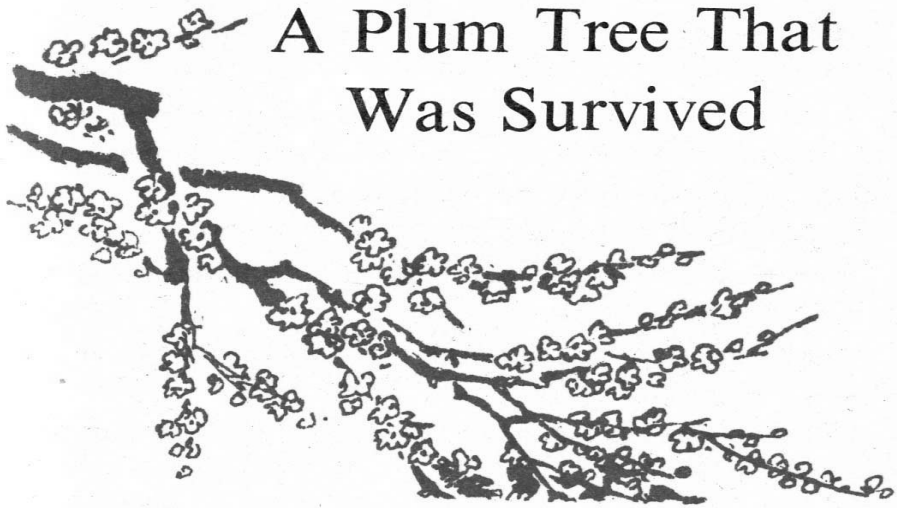
According to the Japanese captives, the Japanese troops jumped into the stream, orienting themselves by the markers of the shallow they had driven but, curiously, the markers had been stealthily moved towards the deep water, so they suffered wholesale slaughter.

Then people realised that it was the bonze in the black robe who had removed the markers towards deep water under cover of the fog. But no one could tell who he was or where he had come from.

In those days many bonzes joined the Righteous Volunteers' Army to fight the Japanese in different parts of the country. He was probably one of them, they said.

Since then the shallow where the crows settled on that occasion have been called the Othan or Crows' Ford.





## A Plum Tree That Was Survived

Once upon a time a girl named Ryo Ok lived together with her father in the Walled City of Pyongyang.

From her childhood she loved flowers, especially plum blossoms.

Her father admired her love of flowers and took good care of a plum tree that grew in the backyard of the house.

Old as it was, it bloomed first in the early spring to infuse the house with a sweet aroma. She was entranced with it and could hardly leave its side.

However, there issued an Imperial ordinance that because plum blossom was identical with the floral pattern of the royal household all plum trees tended by private houses should be felled without exception.

Government officials were dispatched throughout the country and cut down all plum trees. It presented a truly distressing spectacle.

The plum trees in the Walled City of Pyongyang were no exception.

When he was told of this, the father said to his daughter with a sigh:

“My dear Ryo Ok, it seems to me that our plum tree, too, must fall.

“They say that quite a few people have opposed the felling of their plum trees only to be exiled or beheaded on the charge of disregarding the Imperial ordinance.”

At this Ryo Ok gripped her father’s hand and said:

“Father, why does the government fell the trees that put out such beautiful flowers?”

“Why does it want to see the land become desolate and devoid of plum blossom?”

Although young, she was quite right. There was nothing else he could say.

“Father, I’d rather die than let them chop down our plum tree.”

With moist eyes Ryo Ok rushed to the plum tree in the backyard whose branches were laden with snow and hugged it, whimpering:

“You have grown up together with me. I have loved you, and you have made me happy with your lovely blossoms and aroma.

“Dear plum tree, I’ll protect you at the risk of my life.”

As though it were moved by her kind heart, the tree dropped in flakes the snow lying on its branches on her hair like flowers.

Her father was filled with admiration at her sincerity. He made up his mind to save the plum tree even if he was put to death. He carefully covered it so as not to attract attention.

Before long government officials appeared in Ryo Ok’s neighbourhood and searched from door to door asking which house had the plum tree. Although their own plum trees had been cut down, out of consideration for the kindhearted Ryo Ok who had always had so much affection for the plum tree, the villagers said to the government officials who were about to enter Ryo Ok’s house: “In this house an old man and his daughter live in poverty and they cannot afford to raise even a flower, let alone a plum tree.”

In this way Ryo Ok’s plum tree was able to remain intact.

It was the only one in the Walled City of Pyongyang that was left alive throughout the country. It was protected by Ryo Ok and her father, who risked their lives, and saved by the villagers.

But there is no secret which does not leak out.

Officials from Seoul came again to Pyongyang and barged their way into Ryo Ok’s house.

When they found the plum tree in the backyard, they threatened:

“You’ll have to pay dearly for disregarding the Imperial order and swindling the government.”

After much hard thought as to how to get out of this predicament, Ryo Ok’s father said:

“It’s not plum but apricot.”

In fact the old plum tree did look like an apricot tree and since its flower buds were still covered with snow it was difficult to distinguish it from an apricot tree.



Going round the tree, the officials said;

“We know that plum blossoms are white. We’ll stay here and wait at the governor’s office until it blooms.

“If it produces white flowers, both of you, father and daughter, don’t think you can escape death.” With this they went away.

They had escaped danger by a hair’s breadth. But how can white plum blossom be turned to red apricot blossom?

Both father and daughter were most uneasy. The father thought that he would meet a great mishap and was prepared for it.

He made up his mind to see for the last time the white, lovely and sweet plum blossoms as was told by his daughter.

Their neighbours shared their sorrow with them. They said: “Ryo Ok’s father will meet with a great disaster” and “Alas, one cannot afford to even love a flower in this world!”

Once the plum tree blossoms, all its beautiful flowers and Ryo Ok who is as pretty as a flower will be done for.

In complete indifference to the anxiety of people, spring made its entry even under the snow. The buds on the plum tree grew fat day by day. Even in a single night they plumped.

“When they burst, white plum flowers will be out. They must be the last ones that I will ever enjoy before I die. It doesn’t matter about my death but I fear plum trees will disappear in our country for ever.”

That is what Ryo Ok said to herself on the night when spring snow fell in silent flakes as she cuddled the plum tree.

She warmed the flower buds with her breath and earnestly entreated:

“Dear plum! The only beautiful plum in the country!

“I beg you to put forth pinkish apricot flowers for this one spring alone.”

Before long the swollen flower buds began to burst.

“Oh, you plum!”

Ryo Ok quietly closed her eyes, too anxious to look at its colour.

The flower which had peeped out came into full bloom and brought to Ryo Ok an exceptionally sweet fragrance.

The strong sweet smell thrilled her. She opened her eyes instinctively and then she had a big surprise.

“Oh dear! It’s pink. Apricot blossom... Father....”

Ryo Ok cried, running to her father who had given up everything and was lying in his bed.

“Father, our plum flower has turned into an apricot flower.”

“What?”

The father went to the plum tree with his gray hair in disarray and put his cheek to the pink flowers, sobbing: “Thanks, dear plum.”

At the news that Ryo Ok’s tree had flowers, the waiting officials came and saw the old plum tree bearing full-blown pinkish apricot blossoms.

“We’ve wasted our time.” Grumbling, the officials went away.

“Thank you, dear plum!”

Ryo Ok sobbed hugging the plum tree hard, the plum tree which was the last sole survivor of its kind throughout the country, and the plum sent out a sweeter fragrance as if giving its thanks to her who had saved it at the risk of her life without yielding to power.



## General Soe Me

At the time of Koguryo (B.C. 277-A.D. 668), there lived a young blacksmith called Soe Me in the village of Solgunul a short distance from the Walled City of Pyongyang.

At the age of 16 he was conscripted to guard the frontier at a faraway place.

On the day of his departure he looked with deep emotion round the smithy where from a tender age he had made with his hammer picks, axes, hoes, sickles, ploughs and even swords and spears, and then he passed his hand over the hammer once again.

He had lost his parents in early childhood. He recalled how he had been brought up by a blacksmith, who had been a friend of his father, and how the blacksmith had treated him like a real son, and the unforgettable days he had spent with Pong Son, the blacksmith's daughter. All these

memories came flooding back to him so that he was reluctant to leave.

But he was well aware how important it was to enter the service in defence of the country so he bowed low to Pong Son's parents and started out.

The blacksmith always had a strong sense of duty and offered to him and his daughter Pong Son the opportunity of learning for some time. He advised him that he should do his best for his country.

That day Pong Son told him that each day she would spin a spool of thread. She would do this for three years and three months until he had completed his military service. She would weave cloth and make a suit of clothes for him while she waited for him to come back.

Soe Me was happy at this and set out on his long journey. From childhood he and Pong Son had been taught by her father that decency required man to maintain a sense of obligation, and so they never broke their words.

From that day Pong Son spun thread every day.

A year had gone by when one day an official procession halted under the zelkova tree at the entrance to the village.

In charge of the procession was a man of considerable wealth named Kom Tok Gu, who lived 12 km from the Walled City of Pyongyang.

At that time, with the backing of a high official in Pyongyang, he was in the habit of bleeding the people white.

He kept many servants at home and even in places several hundred *ri* away. He was intolerant of anyone who stood in his way and avenged himself harshly on any one who did so. Passing the village that day, he happened to see Pong Son entering her house carrying a water jar on her head. He immediately drew up his horse.

He called out Pong Son's father and peremptorily demanded that Pong Son be sent to his house.

He said to him coaxingly that as she was good-looking, he would like to bring her to his house and bring her up properly and make her a noble man's concubine.

But in fact he meant to offer her to the high official as his concubine and so fish in troubled waters.

The father said he could not send her to him, but turned a deaf ear to his answer.

After he had gone away with the parting words that he would be sending for Pong Son, her family was thrown into great anguish. Her mother became bedridden in an excess of anxiety for the fate of her only

daughter while her father could not eat his meals all day long.

Presently, Kom Tok Gu's servants came. They said menacingly that the instructions of the government office were that they should act with prudence and understand that if they were obedient they would be given land and rice but if not, they would have to pay the consequences.

It was usual with Kom Tok Gu that, with the backing of the government authorities, he either covertly disposed of anyone who opposed his wishes or threw him into prison after beating him to a pulp.

Pong Son's parents protested:

"No, We cannot send away our daughter. She is our only hope. If you take away this girl who is betrothed to become the wife of a soldier, how can people rely on the government office?"

The father was given a drubbing on a charge of being insubordinate to the government office and collapsed in a pool of blood. The mother grabbed hold of one of the poles of the sedan chair into which her daughter had been forced, only to be kicked until she let go and sank to the ground.

As she was being carried away by force leaving her parents behind, Pong Son gritted her teeth: "I would rather die than become a plaything of the beastly rogues. O my dear Soe Me must be unaware of this, defending a mountain or a river on the frontier."

Full of rancor Pong Son was fetched like a chicken caught by an eagle. She was locked up in an isolated room in the backyard of Kom Tok Gu's house.

Kom Tok Gu let an old maid live together with her to keep her under guard, and he flattered her, saying that because she was still young she should stay in his house and, later, if she settled down in a high official's home she would enjoy a life of undreamed-of luxury.

But he could not shake her resolution. Her eyes blazed with fury that deterred anyone from violating her and her bearing was imposing.

"I still have two years and three months to wait until Soe Me comes back. Even when he does return, how am I to meet him? I will do my best to survive till then and tell him of my grudge." In spite of her deep grief and anguish she span thread each day as she had promised to Soe Me.

She would not look at silk dresses, treasures, gold earrings, bracelets and other expensive luxuries which were sent to her by Kom Tok Gu in his attempt to make her change her ways.

Fortunately, the old maid was kindhearted: she understood what Pong Son was going through and took a loving care of her when backs were turned.



She encouraged her by telling her that she should strengthen her resolve and that rascals were doomed to ruin. She saw off another one year in the hellish room. Her spools of thread now numbered 720. The days dragged on.

Pong Son started to weave cloth.

The warmhearted old maid secured a handloom for her and gave her information she had obtained about her family. But she could hardly tell her about her mother who, deprived of her daughter, had become insane to all appearances or about her father who had assaulted Kom Tok Gu's with an iron hammer only to be killed and his body thrown away on the roadside secretly.

Tick, tick, tick... Pong Son worked the handloom day and night. Kom Tok Gu was pleased to hear the sound of the handloom with which Pong Son was weaving cloth with all her heart. He said that now she had changed her mind and was preparing materials for her marriage.

Each time he said this, the old maid told him not to disturb her, and he nodded.

Before long she had finished weaving and cut out the clothes of Soe Me. While making his suit of clothes she had an earnest desire. She wished that the clothes would become armor which was impervious to fire or sword. Also, she hoped that attired in them Soe Me would become an unrivalled great general in the world and do away with all evildoers.

Three years and three months had now passed. Soe Me came back on the day when Pong Son stitched up the strings of his coat.

Soe Me had been able to cope with his arduous military service in an unfamiliar land by living for the day when he would meet Pong Son again. The news he received on his return to his hometown about Pong Son's imprisonment in the house of the enemy, his benefactor's cruel death at their hands, and her mother's distraction came to him like a bolt from the blue.

Soe Me clenched his fist. He hurried to Kom Tok Gu's house in the middle of the night with the iron hammer which he had used from childhood on his shoulder. But its gate and wall were too high for him to scale.

Luckily he met the old maid and heard from her how things had fared with Pong Son while he was away.

Soe Me gnashed his teeth. The old maid asked him to wait a while. She rushed to Pong Son and fetched the clothes she had made for him. As she handed them over to him, she said:

“You should not forget the feelings of Pong Son who is unable to meet the man for whom she had been waiting eagerly for three years and three months, though he is outside the gate. I, too, have a son and a daughter....

“I wish you to become a man proof against fire or sword, and retrieve her. I’m told that O Hak who lives in the recesses of Mt. Taesong knows the art of war and possesses deep learning.

“Please go and learn from him how to develop Herculean strength. There are no born generals, I say. Pong Son, too, wishes it.

“There is something she has written among the clothes. Read it. Pray never forget her.”

They had to break off their conversation as they could hear somebody approaching.

\* \* \*

O Hak had grey eyebrows, a reddish face, and a long beard. He read over and over again the lines Pong Son had written which had been brought to him by Soe Me.

*With the end of thread in hand which I spun with a single heart  
I’ve run to you a thousand or tens of thousand times in my mind.  
Clad in this armor woven with grudge and bloody tears,  
Raise high your Herculean hammer for the good of the people.*

O Hak sank into deep meditation, his eyes closed as if he were unaware of the presence of Soe Me who was entreating him to show him the way to avenge the wrongs of Pong Son’s family.

“Why don’t you say something? I’m prepared to give life to take revenge on the enemy. It’s a human duty, isn’t it?”

Soe Me said loudly once again. But O Hak made no reply. At midnight he asked unexpectedly:

“How are the people of the border area where you have been on garrison duty getting along?”

“They are in fear of the enemy’s invasion at any moment.”

“Were the people in this land which you have travelled happy?”

“No. Under the tyranny of the officials and rich men, the people are drowned in tears and bear them a bitter grudge.”

“What do you think of what Pong Son has written?”

Master O Hak handed the girl’s note to Soe Me.

...

*Clad in this armor woven with grudge and bloody tears,  
Raise high your Herculean hammer for the good of the people.*

“What is her wish and what clothes are you wearing?”

These words brought Soe Me back to his senses.

“I see. Pong Son asks me to raise the iron hammer to revenge the entire people. And this coat of war was made by her in bloody tears.”

Soe Me’s eyes gleamed with hatred for the enemy.

“You’re right. Now I see the ethos and wisdom of Koguryo in you. There is nothing I would begrudge giving you. Listen carefully. If it is your wish to raise the iron hammer high to defend the country and the people, you must overcome a thousand and one adversities to acquire strength, courage and willpower. Are you mentally prepared for this?”

“Yes, I’ll go through fire and water to learn courage and wisdom. Just tell me what I have to do.”

From that day on Soe Me was put through a tough and difficult training course. The first task was to go to Mt. Taesong every day, lift the huge square stone lid under the thousand-year-old tree and drink three gourdfuls of the rust-coloured water beneath it.

The stone lid stood for the accursed enemy’s oppression of the people and the rust-coloured water signified the people’s blood and sweat squeezed out by the enemy. He had to build up his strength until he could shift the stone lid that weighed a thousand *kun* (One *kun* is 600 grams) with his little finger, and drink the nauseating blood-tinged water until it tastes sweet.

Then he had to bathe in the icy water of Lake Michon on Mt. Taesong every day by jumping over the hundred-fathom high precipice and covering the distance of 12 km. In the evening he had to apply himself to reading.

The soaring precipice symbolized the hardships of the people and bathing in the freezing water of Lake Michon was to purify his spirit. This was the daily training routine he had to follow all the year round without skipping a single day.

\* \* \*

The training was extremely hard from the outset.

The square stone lid beneath the old tree on Mt. Taesong was so heavy that he could barely shift one of its corners with the aid of a lever.

Will I ever be able to move this with my little finger? He wavered. But when he thought that this was the enemy's accursed yoke of oppression on the people, he burned with hatred and clenched his fists. Then he braced himself and, groaning with the effort, moved the lid aside.

Beneath it was a well brimming with dark red water. It had a rusty smell and made him feel sick. But he drank it three times a day without fail.

And the precipice which he had to cross was so high that even the birds were said to take a breather halfway when flying over it. But recalling the words of Master O Hak that this was the pass of hardships and tears for the people, he crossed it, clutching at the edges of rocks and arrowroot and other bines.

The water of Lake Michon was icy cold. It chilled and numbed his limbs, but he swam in it with set teeth and kept up his spirits.

Soe Me came staggering back to present himself before Master O Hak exactly at the set time after completing his first day's training schedule.

The master nodded and handed him the iron hammer he had brought and told him to strike the big rock in the yard with it.

He struck it with all his force and a lump of rock the size of a chestnut broke loose.

"Strike it harder!"

This time a lump of rock as big as an egg fell off.

"Strike it still harder!"

The master's command was sterner. This time he broke off a lump the size of a man's fist. "That is enough martial training for today."

Now Master O Hak opened a book before Soe Me.

The young man felt giddy with exhaustion.

"Will I manage to stand up to all this training?"

But he braced himself up and followed the master's lead in reading. The voices of the old teacher and the young disciple reverberated through the valley of Mt. Taesong as they read late into the night when the birds were deep in slumber.

Rain or snow, Soe Me's training continued relentlessly. After he had started on his training programme with a firm resolve, he improved noticeably every day under the strict yet kind guidance of Master O Hak.

Now Soe Me was able to remove the square stone with ease; the rusty water now tasted refreshing; he crossed the high precipice at a dash; he swam round the icy water of Lake Michon ten times a day. His spirits rose

and his courage became indomitable. At one stroke of his hammer, a lump of rock the size of a large drum would fall off.

Nevertheless, Soe Me exerted himself even harder to reach the goal set in the beginning.

At last the day came when he had to stand before Master O Hak for his final test.

The master took Soe Me to the stone lid.

“Remove it.”

“Yes.”

He deftly removed it with his little finger. A smile flickered through the teacher’s eyes.

“Drink the water.”

“Yes.”

Soe Me drank three gourdfuls of rust-coloured water.

The teacher took the gourd from him and drank three gourdfuls of the water himself and put the stone lid back on the well with his little finger.

Then they headed for the precipice.

“Fly over it.”

“Yes, sir.”

Soe Me flew over it at a leap. He was followed by the master who was standing beside his disciple smiling joyously at him.

After bathing in the water of Lake Michon with Soe Me, the master handed him the iron hammer.

A swing of the hammer cleaved the huge rock in half.

“Well done,” said the master cheerfully.

Then he dipped a large broom in Korean ink and said: “When I sprinkle Korean ink from this broom, you try to ward it off with your iron hammer.”

A shake of the broom sent a shower of black ink in Soe Me’s direction but the whirling hammer did not allow a single drop to mark his clothes.

Now while a thousand emotions crowded his mind, Soe Me ran his hand over his clothes that had been patched and repatched in the past days of hard training, the clothes associated with the desire of Pong Son. Master O Hak spoke to him in a grave tone that also expressed trust and affection:

“Congratulations to you, General Soe Me of Koguryo! Let me ask you in all seriousness today to rid the country of all vices and defend the people with your iron hammer, resisting all temptations of personal gain and power.”

Meanwhile, a rumour was going around that a man of Herculean

strength had appeared on Mt. Taesong.

This made Kom Tok Gu uneasy, and so he pressed Pong Son hard to comply with his immoral demand.

“You’re still stiff-necked, aren’t you? Hum, you seem to have got wind of the appearance of a Herculean man on Mt. Taesong. But that’s a lie. Don’t be obstinate. Do as I tell you.

“You are behaving like this because you don’t know yet what a gay life it is to live as the mistress of a high-ranking official and be the envy of all the girls.”

Staring at him with hatred and contempt, Pong Son said:

“If it suits your fancy, why don’t you give away your daughter to him instead of pressing me to become his mistress against my wish?”

Kom Tok Gu flew into a rage and shouted:

“You thankless bitch! I’ve fed you for two years and three months.”

Now prepared to meet her death, she condemned him sternly:

“Is it some sort of benefaction on the part of a noble and rich man to kidnap and lock up a young woman who is betrothed to a soldier guarding the country or to kill my father secretly and drive my mother insane? I may be killed today, but the Koguryo people will never forget your beastly crimes even after a thousand years.”

“Tie her up and beat her. Let us see how many floggings will bring her to her senses!”

At this, his underlings fell upon her and tied her up and started to flog her. The court of the large house echoed with the sound of the merciless whipping of the weak girl’s delicate body. People shivered to hear it.

But Pong Son did not utter a sound. The thought that she would be beaten to death by these villains before avenging them and before seeing her beloved Soe Me pained her more than the flogging itself.

She did not doubt that the Herculean man on Mt. Taesong was Soe Me. She was sure that even after she was killed, they would be crushed at the hand of Soe Me.

Collecting her fainting senses under the merciless rain of lashes, Pong Son recited in her mind the words of the song she had sent to Soe Me.

*Clad in this armor woven with grudge and bloody tears,  
Raise high your Herculean hammer for the good of the people.*

Then she lost consciousness. Just at this moment, a thunderous, angry voice roared outside:

“Open the gate!”

The men stole a glance at their master. They sensed something unusual in that voice.

“Keep the gate locked tight and don’t admit any outsider,” Kom Tok Gu was shouting as the roof tiles of the gate house cascaded to the ground and the gate house collapsed with a deafening roar. Then Soe Me strode into the court with a towel of hemp cloth bound around his head and the iron hammer in his hand.

“He’s General Soe Me from Mt. Taesong.”

The whole house was thrown into confusion.

Kom Tok Gu was so scared that he could not look the angry Soe Me in the face. He yelled, “Capture this rogue who has broken into the court of our house in broad daylight and tie him up.”

Now his underlings who had a reputation for strength pounced on Soe Me. He grabbed two of them by the leg and swung them round. Seeing this, the others fell back.

Soe Me picked them up and hurled them violently like so many packages to the base of the wall and then went up to the wooden-floored main hall and grabbed Kom Tok Gu by the throat.

“Is there nobody to help me?” Kom Tok Gu gasped out in a choked voice. Without a word, Soe Me hurled him onto the zelkova tree beyond the wall. Kom Tok Gu with his waist caught on a branch was hanging from the tree, wriggling like a doomed man. His big horsehair cap was rolling on the ground.

“General Soe Me!” cried the old cook who rushed up to Soe Me. “Pong Son is over there.”

Soe Me dashed towards the place pointed out by the old woman. There he found Pong Son lying unconscious and covered in blood. He took her up in his arms.

“Pong Son, I’ve come. Soe Me has come. Open your eyes.”

Her eyes opened slowly.

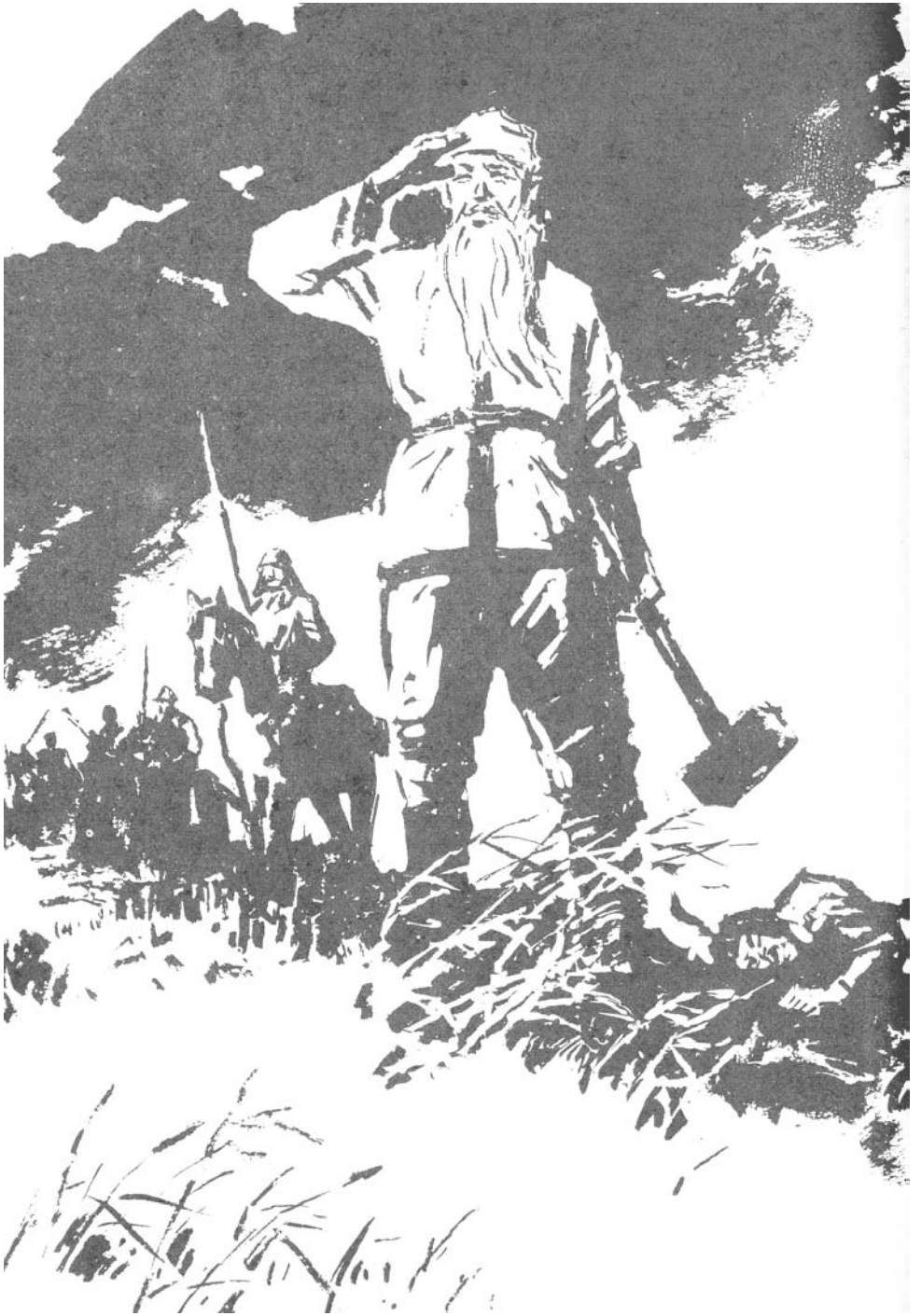
“You’ve come. I believed you would.”

A faint smile shone on the face of Pong son as she lay on Soe Me’s arms.

Tears gushed from her eyes.

The news caused a great stir in the Walled City of Pyongyang. Loud arguments raged in the government offices and even in the royal palace itself.

“The scoundrel intruded into the court of an illustrious house in broad





daylight and broke the dignitary's back. If he is left unpunished, he will surely turn traitor."

"We must catch him and cut the muscles of both his thighs." Blue with fear, the corrupt officials of the court raved in fury.

But nobody dared to offer to capture Soe Me. If it had not been for Master O Hak's admonition, Soe Me would have broken all their backs.

At this time foreign invaders numbering hundreds of thousands were descending on the country.

A succession of reports of lost battles reached the court. The royal palace and the whole country were panic-stricken.

"No one but General Soe Me is capable of coping with the present difficult situation" was what they suggested to the king. As a result, General Soe Me was required to go to the front as the commander of the advance force.

As she saw him off, Pong Son earnestly wished Soe Me success in battle and stroked his iron hammer.

On the battlefield General Soe Me mowed down the enemy forces with his iron hammer, killing five or six men at a swing, and the arrows that came flying were broken to pieces by the hammer. General Soe Me swept through the enemy positions with irresistible force. The terrified enemy took to their heels.

In this critical situation, his patriotic valour and heroic feats defended the country against the foreign invaders. After the war ended, however, General Soe Me and Pong Son disappeared.

Decades passed and foreign invaders descended upon the country again.

Many fortresses fell into the hands of the enemy and the enemy forces surged into the depths of the country.

One day a general with grey hair carrying a big iron hammer appeared before the enemy.

"You swines, take the blows of the iron hammer of an old man of Koguryo."

Though he was grey-haired, his heart burned with patriotic ardour, which exploded like thunderbolts on the enemy, whose forces crumbled like a water-soaked mud wall under the blows of his iron hammer.

"General Soe Me of Koguryo is still alive." This news unnerved the enemy. The invaders were discouraged to hold on further and again took to flight. As soon as the war ended, however, General Soe Me disappeared again.

At the time a song spread among the people, which ran:

*Is it the large iron hammer that made Soe Me a general?  
His love for the country made him a general?  
The iron hammer he held up high with his white hair streaming in the  
wind  
Demonstrates the spirit of the Koguryo men.*

\* \* \*

A rumour spread later that an old couple lived happily in a deep mountain recess of Yangdok, tilling and sowing, and that they were General Soe Me and Pong Son.

There was a pair of graves near their hut; these were believed to be the graves of Pong Son's unhappy parents.

Mindful of the admonition of Master O Hak, General Soe Me did not choose an official career in spite of his great services or seek to make money.

However, when the fate of the country and the people was at stake, he volunteered to bear the brunt of the hard trials although he was old. Consequently he enjoyed warm love and respect from the entire people of the country.





## The “Queen” in the Leather Sack

Once upon a time there was a king’s mistress called Gwan Na in the royal palace of Pyongyang. She was nine feet tall and her long black hair flowed down to the floor.

After Gwan Na came to court, the king revelled in drinking parties and hunting almost every day; he paid no heed to the administration of the country.

Gwan Na’s coquetry became more glaring with the passage of time, and the king became so pliant with her that he would grant all her requests. Such being the situation, an increasing number of courtiers ingratiated themselves with her so as to secure the king’s favour.

This made her so arrogant that she went so far as to dream of deposing the queen and taking her place.

Gwan Na became more and more coquettish to humor the king, she made it her business to trump up false charges against the queen and tell them to the king.

The king had become her slave. He gave ear only to her and was unkind to the queen. He was swayed by Gwan Na’s opinion in dealing with affairs of state and even in the appointment or dismissal of ministers.

In this state of affairs, persons of upright principle and integrity remonstrated with the king, but they were exiled or even beheaded. Many courtiers therefore resigned their official posts and went away.

The king gave feasts in the royal palace day after day, wasting time gazing at the slender Gwan Na dancing around waving her dark hair.

One day the king went hunting on the Ranganang Plain. Gwan Na, who usually used to go with him on such occasions, excused herself on the plea of illness and so was left behind in the palace.

The king spent three days in hunting which he loved very much. The officers and soldiers made a big catch. On the third day the game was brought before the king. There were all kinds of beasts and birds including big tigers, bears, deer, gorals, foxes, hares and pheasants.

The king was inspecting the beasts and birds with pleasure when he stopped before a long-tailed fox and said admiringly, "What a long tail it has!"

At this, an old minister who was standing beside him with his hands together, chimed in:

"The fox habitually bewitches others with that long tail."

"What do you mean?" the king asked.

In reply to the king, the old minister explained:

"By nature the fox is the most cunning of all animals. In front of big animals like the tiger, it wags its long tail softly to humor him, and even entices him into following at its heels. When it lures the tiger out and saunters about with him saying that it will show him where to find his prey, all other beasts tremble with fear.

"Then the fox comes forward and throws its weight around before the other animals. In other words, it twists the tiger round its little finger."

"Hum," the king was amused to hear this.

"So the fox makes little of the meek animals such as gorals and deer, and becomes pompous cocking up its long tail before them, and when it meets small animals, it thrashes them with the tail."

"It certainly is a cunning animal," the king laughed loudly with amusement.

"This is the case not only with long-tailed foxes but with long-haired human beings," said the old minister.

He had Gwan Na in mind when he said this. It was a hint to the king. He knew that by giving it, he risked losing his life. Nevertheless, the old minister was prepared to take the risk because he could no longer bear to see the confusion and disorder sown by Gwan Na in the court and across the country as the king behaved like the tiger before the fox.

The king turned pale. He seemed to catch the meaning of his words. A chill passed down the spines of the courtiers who were standing around the

king.

At this moment the old minister went down on his knees before the king and said:

“Your Majesty, please understand the meaning of my impudent and obtrusive admonition correctly. You were sagacious and determined before, but recently your sagacity has become blurred, so that at present the court and the country....”

“Shut up!” the king shouted. Then he abruptly turned round and gave an order:

“Get ready to return to the palace.”

The lieges were almost too scared to steal a glance at the king, whose face was as white as a sheet of paper.

“Now the minister is a dead man.”

“If his faithful advice went home to the king’s heart, how nice it would be!”

People’s thoughts varied.

In fact, the king felt hurt. He was very angry with the old minister. But from the moment he had seen the fox’s long tail while hearing the minister’s words, his mind had been troubled and he seemed to see the long tresses of Gwan Na’s hair before his eyes in place of the long tail of the fox.

The king remained silent on the way back, doubting in his mind that a vicious foxy nature could be hidden beneath the surface of her pretty face and figure.

Meanwhile, Gwan Na had been racking her brains since the king’s departure on his hunting expedition. The queen is chickenhearted and a shout from the king is enough to frighten her out of her wits, she conjectured. If she was to be removed, I should undoubtedly become queen. What shall I do then? After much thought, she called her maid that night and told her to make a large leather sack. The maid asked no questions but made the leather sack the same night.

“There’s no time to lose,” Gwan Na thought to herself. “I must act swiftly at a time like the present.”

When the king returned to the royal palace, she welcomed him home, playing the coquette more than ever. At the same time, she told the court maids to lay the table for the feast which had been prepared for the occasion. However, the king, sitting at the banquet table, looked gloomy somehow. This made her uneasy.

The king glanced at the long tresses of her hair once again, and thought

of the long tail of the fox he had seen earlier that day.

Meanwhile, the old minister, expecting a severe punishment from the king, awaited his judgement, sitting on a straw mat like a culprit in the courtyard of his house. As the king was in low spirits, the banquet was of necessity subdued.

After the banquet the king retired to his bedroom. Then Gwan Na came and knelt down before the king, bringing a large leather sack with her. As the king was puzzled at her behaviour, she sobbed out:

“I believed that though a lowborn woman, I should enjoy happiness to the end of my life thanks to Your Majesty’s warm love. But I am awfully sorry to say that I must leave the royal palace because Her Majesty the Queen hates me so bitterly.”

Her voice sounded pathetic and earnest. At that moment the king felt as if he were a tiger sitting before a fox.

“Well, now the behaviour of this wench is just like that of a fox,” he thought to himself.

“How does she hate you?”

The king remembered afresh that not once had the queen spoken ill of Gwan Na while the latter had vilified the former hundreds of times.

Before his mind’s eye rose images of meek deer and goral and the grave glance of the old minister. As for the minister who had tried to open his eyes by telling him the fable-like story at the risk of his life, he was highly thought of among both state ministers and the people for his probity unstained by flattery and hypocrisy.

Gwan Na had no idea what was going on in the king’s mind. She went on with her chattering, feigning grief at being wronged.

“Her Majesty the Queen called me a bumpkin and said that there was no room for me in the royal palace. She said that if I did not quit voluntarily, she would have me put into a leather sack and thrown into the Taedong River.”

“Well?”

“I prefer to die in the leather sack that I have made myself than to be killed like that. So I have made one as you see.”

“Really? Ha, ha, ha.... Then you try and get into the sack.”

The king’s voice sounded hollow, but she took his laughter as a sign in her favour.

“All right. The king who has been so affectionate to me says that he would like to see me in the sack. It must be a joke he has made out of love for me. Now it’s a matter of course that I shall become ‘queen’.”



With this thought she got into the leather sack, dreaming of the day when as queen she would hold sway in the royal palace and do just as she pleased.

“I will first dismiss that old minister who used to cast hateful glances at me and banish the queen as far away as Jeju Island and let her die there.”

At this moment the king’s stern voice rang out:

“I want someone here!”

Court maids came.

“Fasten the rope of the sack tightly.”

The court maids fastened the sack as they were told, without knowing the reason. Seeing strands of Gwan Na’s long hair sticking out of the mouth of the sack, the court maids tried to tuck them inside.

“Leave it as it is” said the king, feeling as if it were the tail of a fox. He felt even more bitterness towards the woman because that day, too, she had slandered the queen with a downright lie.

“Indeed, I am no better than a tiger bewitched by a fox,” he thought.

A strict order was given by the king, “Summon soldiers. Tell them to take the leather sack and hurl it into the Taedong River.”

As soon as the order was given, the soldiers took the leather sack to the Taedong River. But Gwan Na inside the sack giggled. “Oh, the king is so fond of playing a joke!” She chuckled to herself, dreaming of tomorrow when she would appear in the “queen’s” attire.

But then she sensed something odd. She strained her ears and heard the sound of the flowing water of the Taedong River.

Seized with terror, she opened her eyes wide as the soldiers lifting the sack at both ends remarked:

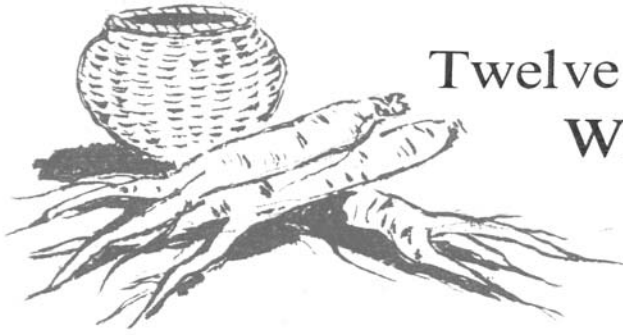
“Things have turned out right now. After whisking her long tail so much, she is now doomed to a watery grave. The old minister is a genuine minister.”

Shouting “yo-ho”, they threw the sack down into the river.

“Oh, I’m dying in the sack I have made for myself,” Gwan Na struggled in the sack, but it was no use.

After Gwan Na was thrown into the Taedong River, the long dark hair of a woman was seen floating on the water for a month and it was rumoured that the voice of a fox could be heard from beneath the water, “Oh, I’m dying in the sack I have made for myself.”





## Twelve Roots of Wild Insam

Once upon a time there lived a dutiful son with his mother outside the northern gate of the Walled City of Pyongyang.

Although he was poor, he did all he could for his mother.

He was an honest and diligent farmer. People affectionately referred to him as Mun Hyo Song (dutiful Mun).

His old mother had been widowed when young and had to place all her hopes on her only son. Weeding, spinning and growing pumpkins—everything she did was solely for her son.

A misfortune befell this hardworking and purehearted family. His mother, who had toiled and suffered all kinds of hardship all her life, fell seriously ill. The dutiful son did his utmost for the recovery of his sick mother day and night. He did all he could to obtain efficacious medicine, even travelling distances of a hundred or a thousand *ri*. But his mother's illness grew worse and worse.

“Why is this world so unfair? What has this world ever given my mother and me, and why does it prevent my lonely mother from spending her remaining years in comfort? Am I lacking in devotion to my mother?” he asked himself.

This thought wrenched his heart.

He felt a lump in his throat when he thought of all the affection his mother had given him, how she had always seen he had good food which she obtained somehow while seldom eating it herself.

Meanwhile his mother was pained by the thought that in her lifetime she had never once been able to make her son take his fill of food. At the sight of his emaciated mother he was tormented with anxiety as to whether he could save her life.

He picked hundreds and hundreds of different kinds of medicinal herbs and hunted beasts and birds for her, but in spite of all his efforts, his

mother's illness deteriorated daily.

Tears trickled from her hollow eyes as she gazed at her son and thought that soon she should have to leave him alone in this rough world.

"Wild insam (ginseng) would certainly pull your mother through....," the women in the neighbourhood said with a sigh. "But wild insam is a heavenly herb, it will not be easy to get it."

"Wild insam—why didn't I think of it before? It certainly grows on this earth.... I'll find it, come what may, even if it means searching through every cluster of grass in the whole world," he thought.

He started combing the hills and mountains, far and near, day in and day out, but without success.

"Is wild insam really a heavenly herb? I wonder if it is true that it is visible only to the predestined. Why doesn't it catch my eye, as I am eager to see my mother get well again quickly? It's because I am still lacking in filial devotion, I suppose."

That day he left his house with renewed resolve. On his way he met two friends who had been playmates in his childhood.

They said: "We hear you have been having a lot of trouble because of your mother's illness. Excuse us for having not helped you before.

"Your mother's health should be as important to us as that of our own mother. Let us go together today."

"Tradition has it that wild insam is to be found deep in the recesses of Mt. Taesong. Let us go there."

Mun Hyo Song was grateful to them.

"Thank you," he said and grasped them firmly by their hands, moved by their warm expression of friendship.

They had grown up in the same village, and as boys they had always helped each other out if ever any of them had landed in any difficulties. Mun Hyo Song especially never spared himself for his friends' parents.

However, as they grew up, his two friends grew stingy and they became distant towards each other for no good reason. But today they offered him their help. This made him feel grateful to them.

In the company of his two friends Mun Hyo Song trod the rugged, steep path into the recesses of Mt. Taesong. He had forgotten what it was like to feel tired. He felt as if three brothers were going to fetch the medicine for their mother. He felt reassured and encouraged.

"They are not so poor as I and have not tasted the bitter experiences of life as I have, but they understood what I was going through. This is why friends have always been prized," he thought.

It seemed to him that that day the autumnal sky looked unusually serene as if reflecting their mood and that the birds and brooks in the ravine murmured out of envy of him for having such good friends.

Treading on the edge of the precipice in high spirits, Mun Hyo Song looked up at the overhanging rock and gave a cry of joy and surprise.

“What is that?”

He had spotted small red flowers studding the sheer cliff halfway up.

“They are wild insam flowers!” one of his friends shouted for joy. He had seen insam before when his father had bought it from an insam dealer.

“Oh, wild insam!”

Encouraged, the three young men made a detour and reached the top of the cliff.

Looking down from the top, they saw beautiful insam flowers on the ledge halfway up the dizzy height of the sheer cliff.

“One, two, three... ten... twelve....”

“Twelve in all.”

“Let’s climb down quick and dig them up.”

They wondered how to reach it.

Taking out a coil of rope from his basket, Mun Hyo Song said:

“I will climb down this rope to dig them. You hold on tightly to this rope.”

“Good idea. Be careful.” The two friends stayed on top holding the rope, while Mun Hyo Song made his way down to the ledge hanging on to the rope and carrying his basket with him. The thought of the wild insam for his mother vanquished his fear of the precipice.

When he reached the ledge, he said, stroking the red wild insam flowers:

“Thank you, wild insam. Please help my mother get well.” A pair of butterflies were fluttering around the flowers on the giddy height, as if they were entering into his feelings.

“Dig them up quickly.”

“Dig them up carefully. Try not to damage the flowers and leaves.”

The two friends on the top shouted to him cupping their hands around their mouths.

Mun Hyo Song began to dig up the wild insam flowers one by one.

The wild insam roots shaped like the human body seemed to greet him with a smile. Before his eyes there floated the image of his mother who would be so pleased to receive this insam, and who, after taking this insam, would leave her bed, the wrinkles on her face smoothed out and her hair

turning black again.

Mun Hyo Song, who ordinarily had little inclination to singing, sang a song as he dug up the roots of wild insam:

*Taking this one root will recover your health.  
Taking these two roots will bring you youth.  
Relieved of worries about your life and your son,  
My dear mother, lead your life with a smile.*

When he had dug up all the wild insam roots and carefully put them into his basket, he tied the basket to the rope and shouted to his friends on top:

“The wild insam is ready to go up. Haul up the rope. When you have taken out the wild insam, pay out the rope again for me to climb back up.”

The basket of wild insam ascended merrily as if it was dancing in the air.

“Oh, wild insam!”

The roots of the wild insam in the basket were thick and long like a big radish.

At the sight of the twelve roots of wild insam, a rare treasure in the world, the two fellows stared in wonder, their hearts thumping rapidly.

“O wild insam!”

As they touched the wild insam, a terrible greed raised its ugly head in their hearts.

“Twelve roots in all... divided by three makes four but by two makes six...” The same thought struck the two fellows.

Before the eyes of one of them, six roots of wild insam was transformed into a pile of money, which, in its turn, transformed into fields of rice and other crops and a tile-roofed house.

The other fellow pictured the smiling face of the magistrate of Pyongyang who would be pleased to receive six roots of wild insam and himself in the uniform of a government official which was his ambition.

“Let’s go,” said one of them, rising to his feet.

“All right,” the other said as if he had been expecting him to say this and divided the roots of wild insam into two.

The two fellows hastily made off with six roots of insam each along the path leading away from the cliff. They did not look back.

Mun Hyo Song kept shouting, waiting for the rope to be paid out, but there was no response from the top of the cliff.

“What?”

His heart suddenly sank.

“How can this be? How can they leave me here to die?” he wondered.

He waited and waited but the rope did not come down.

“Can such a thing be possible in the world? I don’t mind if I die, but my mother...?”

Before his mind’s eye floated the haggard face of his mother who might be waiting for him with the door open.

Now it seemed to him that he was standing on the brink of an unfathomable abyss and that the brook in the valley took the form of the opened mouth of a hideous monster.

Mun Hyo Song was distraught at what they had done. He recalled the days of his childhood when he had played with them. The faces of his two friends who were so kind to him this morning flashed across his mind.

“I suppose they had a change of heart because of a few roots of wild insam. Evidently their friendship does not count for as much as a few roots of wild insam.”

Mun Hyo Song clenched his fist. It was impossible for him to climb up the cliff, nor was there any hope of him surviving in the recesses of the mountain. He shouted and pounded the cliff: “You bastards, don’t you have any parents?”

Murky clouds spread across the clear sky and frowned down upon him.

Before long a heavy rain lashed at the precipice.

During the night wild beasts roared nearby. Then came the dawn.

“My poor mother will be frantic with worry wondering where I have got to,” he thought. Greedy as they were, he hoped they would at least give one root of wild insam to his mother out of pity.

“Maybe they will tell my mother that I fell down dead from the cliff. Then she will throw away the wild insam, calling for me and cry herself to death.”

He pounded the cliff again.

Thus, three days passed.

He picked clumps of grass roots and mosses from the cliff face for food.

He felt giddy and utterly exhausted, so his eyes were half closed when he heard a rustle from below. Opening his eyes, he was surprised to see a big serpent stealing toward him, wagging its tongue.

“Now I will be bitten to death. I would rather die by throwing myself from the cliff,” he thought.

Having made up his mind, he cried “Mother!” for the last time in his life. His shout resounded over the mountains and sky to the Walled City of



Pyongyang.

At this juncture the serpent wound its long tail around Mun Hyo Song and lifted him to the top of the precipice. It seemed to him like a dream. But it was reality. He heard the merry warble of various birds and the familiar murmur of the streams of Mt. Taesong. The sky cleared up as if all evils had been swept away.

Calling out "Mother!" he came down from the cliff.

"... Even an animal helps man, but those scoundrels, human only in shape..." he thought.

He was coming down with clenched fists, detouring the precipice, when a fairy in splendid and neat attire, riding a fluffy cloud, came into view between some pine trees. She was coming towards him carrying a basket.

Mun Hyo Song halted. He could not believe his eyes. It was the basket in which he had put the roots of wild insam which he had dug.

The fairy came up and bowed to him and presented him with the basket, saying:

"Please take this wild insam and cure your sick mother."

The basket contained all twelve roots of wild insam.

He wondered what was happening. In the meantime, the fairy ascended to heaven on her flying veil, with these parting words:

"Look over there, in front of that huge rock. That is how life ended for those who cast aside fidelity for greed."

Rushing to the scene, Mun Hyo Song found the two men who had deserted him lying dead, each grabbing the other by the throat.

They had apparently come to blows with one another, each wanting all the roots of wild insam for himself when they had been struck by lightning.