

Literary Works of
CICA
Member States





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Since October 1992 the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) has been functioning as a uniting forum for a majority of Asian countries. It managed to create a platform not only for discussions of political issues, but also for cultural exchange among 24 Member States.

Within the framework of celebration of the 20th anniversary of CICA this year we have decided to publish a story book of selected poems, fairytales and stories of CICA Member States which would serve as one of the uniting tools for diverse cultures.

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MEREKE
KASPIY

Алматы
2012

TALES

TALES

THE CROCODILE AND THE CART- DRIVER

Once upon a time, there lived a crocodile in a certain pond. When the dry season came, the pond dried up and the crocodile could no longer live in his pond, so he crawled out of it, and began to wander eagerly hither and thither in search of water.

An old man, while driving his bullock cart along a lonely road, discovered the crocodile. The crocodile asked him for a ride.

"Where do you want to go?" asked the cart-driver.

"I have no place to live anymore," replied the crocodile. "My pond is drying up. I am looking for a pond, a stream, or a river where water is abundant. Would you mind carrying me to any such place and then dropping me down there?"

The cart-driver agreed. He freed his oxen from their yoke and helped the crocodile crawl up on to the cart. Afraid of falling down from the cart, the crocodile then requested the cart-driver to fasten him to the frame tightly. The cart-driver did that with a rope he had in hand. He then put the yoke on the oxen and moved on.

After discovering a pond full of water, the old

man stopped his oxen. "Now, this pond is full of water," said the old man after untying the crocodile, "so you can crawl to it and live there."

However, the crocodile was ungrateful. Moreover, he was very hungry. "I have to eat one of your oxen or I will eat you now instead."

"You should be grateful to me for bringing you here," said the cart-diver. "But now you want to eat me. Indeed, I am innocent, and I think you should not eat me. I will bring the case to a judge to rule on it."

"Find a judge if you please," said the crocodile. "I shall wait here."

The cart-driver carried bananas and searched around for a judge. Finally, he met a rabbit on a small hill.

The rabbit saw the bananas he was carrying. "Hey, old man," called the rabbit to him from a distance, "why do you look so piteous? Come here."

The cart-driver approached the rabbit and related what had happened to him. "The crocodile is ungrateful to you, therefore, I will be your judge," said the rabbit after listening to him. "Don't worry. But first, give me your bananas!"

The cart-driver gave the rabbit the bananas, which the rabbit ate until he was satisfied. Then the two started for the spot where the crocodile was waiting for them.

"Oh, crocodile!" said the rabbit. "I heard that you have been brought to this pond by this old man. Why then are you so ungrateful to him that you insist on eating him? How did he hurt you?"

"Certainly he brought me here," replied the crocodile. "But his kindness hurts me even now. He bound me so tightly that I nearly lost my breath. That is why I am furious with him. I therefore have to eat one of his oxen or I will eat him instead."

The rabbit pretended to agree with the crocodile. "Ah, good old man, you tied him so tightly," said the rabbit to the old man. "Why did you do that? He could not even move."

"No, I did not bind the crocodile as tightly as he described," replied the old man. "I tied him so he would not slide down."

The rabbit received very different answers. "The old man said he did not tie the crocodile tightly, and the crocodile said he certainly did; moreover, the two have no witnesses," said the rabbit. "Therefore you, crocodile, have to climb up on the cart and let the old man tie you again so we can see the tied you tightly or not. And then I can judge it."

The foolish crocodile and the old man did as they had told.

When this was well done, the rabbit asked the crocodile "Was it tight as this?"

"Oh no, it was not like this," answered the crocodile. "It was much tighter. I would not be satisfied if he tied me like this."

"Tighten the rope more to satisfy him!" said the rabbit to the cart-driver. The old man did as he had told.

"Was it as tight as this?" The rabbit asked the crocodile again. "Not yet," replied the crocodile.

"Move, old man, and look for a stick that can serve as a tourniquet to twist around his body as tightly as possible," said the rabbit to the cart-driver.

The old man did as he had told, and the crocodile nearly lost his breath.

"Yes, that is as tightly as he tied me. I hardly survived it," said the crocodile. "You are a witness, right now." He asked, "Who is right? And who is wrong?"

"Don't wait until it is too late!" said the rabbit to the old man while the crocodile could not move. "Take your big ax from the cart and cut his head off. Do not let him live. He is ungrateful."

The old man killed the crocodile by cutting him apart.

"Take his meat to cook," said the rabbit. "It is tasty."

Grateful to the rabbit for saving his life, the old man gave the rabbit bananas and cucumbers and left for home.

Translated from Cambodian fairy tale

Seventh Eve — Chinese Valentine's Day

The 7th evening of the 7th moon of the Lunar Calendar, which falls on the 31st of July in 2006, is a traditional Chinese festival called Qixi “Seventh Eve”. Why is the Seventh Eve considered Valentine’s Day for the Chinese? The answer leads us to a touching fairy tale of Niu Lang, the Cowherd and Zhi Nü, the Weaver Girl.

In the fairy tale the Cowherd was a young farmer who had once rescued a holy cow, and the Weaver Girl was one of the granddaughters of Wang Mu Niangniang, Queen Mother of Heaven.

One day, all the weaver girls in heaven descended on earth for a visit. While they were bathing in a river, the holy cow persuaded the Cowherd to take away the clothes of the seventh weaver girl. In the process of searching for her clothes, the Weaver Girl fell in love with the Cowherd and they became husband and wife. The Cowherd worked in the fields while the Weaver Girl weaved at home, and they led a happy life. When Queen Mother of Heaven learnt this, she was enraged and forced the Weaver Girl to go back to heaven. The Cowherd ran after them. Just as he was about to catch up with them, Queen Mother of Heaven, removed her silver hairpin and draw a line with it behind her. Immediately, a huge river appeared between the Cowherd and the

Weaver Girl. This river, which is created with a silver hairpin, is then called Yin He “the Silver River”, known in the West as the Milky Way. As a result the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl were ruthlessly separated. Eventually, their love moved the magpies. On the seventh eve of the seventh moon each year, all the magpies would flock together to form a bridge over the Silver River so that the couple were able to meet each other on the bridge.

On the basis of this fairy tale, people name two very bright stars opposite each other across the Milky Way the Cowherd (the Altair) and the Weaver Girl (the Vega). The two less bright stars flanking the Vega are regarded as the children of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl. To sit in the courtyard on Seventh Eve to watch the Cowherd and Weaver Girl stars has become a unique custom in the Chinese popular culture. On a clear late summer night, the two stars can be seen facing each other across the broad silvery Milky Way. On this night, girls will face the bright moon and pray to heaven for a lover that can satisfy her heart's desire.

Another Chinese custom on Seventh Eve is to release lotus lanterns on water. As darkness falls, surfaces of rivers, lakes, and ponds are dotted with the lanterns that young men and women have released. The lanterns move slowly on the water, carrying with them the longings of young men and women for a perfect marriage. Under these circumstances, the sparkling stars in the sky, the lotus lanterns in the water, and the lovers in the moonlight or in the light

of the lanterns together form the most beautiful and romantic scene on Earth!

The Weaver Girl was a beautiful, clever and handy fairy who was capable of weaving brocade as flowery and colorful as the sunset glow. Girls on earth who long to be as handy as the Weaver Girl will compete to thread a needle with a silk thread in the moonlight on Seventh Eve. Whoever gets the silk thread through the eye of the needle first will be acknowledged as the most handy girl. Some girls will look up at the Weaver Girl star and pray to Weaver Girl to give them wisdom and dexterity. For this reason, Seventh Eve festival is also known as “the Festival of Praying for Dexterity” and “Girls Festival”.

Today, Seventh Eve remains a romantic festival. Customs on this day vary across China and some of the traditional activities have gone out of fashion. Yet, the love story of the Cowherd and Weaver Girl is still being passed on from generation to generation.

The Jackal who saved the Lion

Once upon a time, there lived a lion in a forest. One day, when he went to drink water in a river, one of his feet got stuck into the damp mushy mud of the river. He tried a lot to get out of the mud, but to no avail. He had to lie without food for days because he didn't find any help. On one fortunate day, a kind jackal came to drink water from the river. When he saw the lion, he went closer to the lion and said, "What is the matter? Why are you resting here?"

The lion narrated him the pathetic story. The Jackal instantly made a way out from the sand but the lion was unable to move his feet. As he was set in the same posture for last several days, his body became stiff. The jackal understood the condition of the lion and helped him to get out of the mud with an extra effort. The Lion was really thankful to jackal for his kind help. He was very happy to get free after so many days.

The Lion appreciated the effort made by the jackal. He offered the jackal to live close to him and also promised to give food to him whenever he caught food. The jackal accepted the offer and started living with the lion. Thus, they lived happily sharing the food. With the passing time, they expanded their families. The lion had cubs and the

jackal had kid jackals. Both, the lion and the jackal were passing their days happily. They didn't have any idea that their friendship was not liked by their families.

One day after a long time, the lioness, lady of the lion's house, asked her cubs that she didn't like the amity between the jackal and her husband. The cubs conveyed the message to the kid jackals. The kids complained the matter to the lady jackal. The lady jackal conveyed the complaint to her husband.

The jackal went to the Lion and asked, "I helped you without any consideration in return. You had asked me to live with you, so I started living with you. Now, if you don't want me to live with you, you should have told me yourself. What did you involve your wife and cubs to convey this?" The Lion was shocked to hear such words. He said, "My dear friend, what are you saying? I don't find any problem with you or your friendship". He assured the jackal that he had no such ill-feelings for the friendship between them.

The Lion also assured that he would talk to the lioness and solve the whole matter. The jackal was intelligent and understood the situation. He said to the lion, "Dear friend, I know you are sincere, but our families could not exactly respond the same level of friendship. So, let us stay apart and meet often as friends. We could also hunt together. It would be better, if our families stay apart". The Lion agreed to the proposal with a heavy heart.

The two families parted from each other as

friends. The Jackal and the Lion continued to share the friendship. They often met each other and hunt together. Thus, the two friends shared a healthy friendship throughout their life.

When it's sufficient for the ant

Translated by A.Raiymbekova

Long time ago there lived a wise man. He was a very unique and not ordinary person. He knew the language of birds and animals.

Once this wise man decided to make a trip, put his staff together and left for the trip. On his way he made a stop to have a little bit of rest. He drank a bit of water, and ate a bit of food. Then he noticed a small ant that carried a small wheat seed. He kept on watching how the ant carried the seed, and got curious. He wanted to know – why does an ant need the seed? What is he going to do with it? Where is he carrying it? He took an ant, placed the small creature to its finger, and asked:

- Tell me, little ant, where do you carry this seed to?

- To my house, the anthill. – The ant replied.

- Why do you need it?

- I will store it.

- Have you stored many of them already? –

The wise man got interested.

- I am working for the whole summer, I am preparing for winter, and then I greet the winter with no worries. – The ant explained to the wise man.

The wise man looked at the ant from all sides, gave a little thought and asked:

- Why do you have such a large head?
- Because I speak little and think a lot.
- Why do you have such a thin belt?
- I do not over eat and I know when it's sufficient.

- How many seeds do you eat during a year?
- One seed.
- And is it enough for you? – The wise man asked in shock

- If I ate more, what would others eat?

That was a time when the wise man decided to give the ant a trial. He has put one seed in a box and placed an ant to that box. Then he put a box in a dry place and told the ant:

- I will come back in one year. You have enough food for the whole year, so lay down and don't you worry about anything.

The wise man knew how hard-working the ant was, but he had doubts in the tolerance and patience of the small creature. That's why the wise man wanted to make sure that what the ant told him was true. After he has hidden the box, he continued his way.

Exactly as year passed by, the wise man came back and found the box. He opened the box to see if the ant was alive. The ant was alive and he had one half of the seed left. The seed was there in the box, and was only half-eaten. The wise man was shocked.

- Hey, ant, - the wise man started – You told

me that you were eating one seed a year. Why have you left the half of the seed uneaten? What have you kept it for?

- That's right, I told you that I eat one seed a year. But you have locked me in this box. I was not able to get out of it. If you forgot about your promise to come back In a year, I would be locked in this box with no food left for myself. Thinking of this, I decreased my appetite and ate as much as I needed in order to stay alive.

The wise man was astonished with the patience and tolerance of the ant, and with his ability to appreciate what there was. He felt sorry that he was so cruel to the ant. He made such a wise creature suffer from hunger and held it shut up in the stupid box. He felt ashamed, that such a small creature was so much wiser and cleverer than he was.

- I've made a very bad action! I am sorry! Please forgive me!, – he told the ant and let him put.

From that time the wise man started to teach people tolerance and patience.

Folk – tales of Pakistan
Retold by SAYYID FAYYAZ MAHMUD
THERE WAS ONCE A KING

Prince Bahram and the Emerald mountain

(The hero of this folk-tale is Bahrain-i-Gor, a king of ancient Iran. He defeated the Epthalite Huns in 425 A.D. and drove them across the Oxus. A great warrior and hunter, he was lost on an expedition in the eastern marches of the Persian Empire which means modern Afghanistan and even north-west Pakistan. This tale appears to be a mixture of Persian and Hindu traditions. A version was collected by Mrs. F.A. Steel in Kashmir more than a century ago.)

There was once a king who had a son called Bahram. The prince was so handsome and his forehead shone so brightly that one could not bear to look at his face. When he grew up he became very fond of manly games especially of hunting. He collected round him a band of dashing young men, sons of his father's ministers and would often go to distant parts of his father's vast empire in search of game. So he came to be known as Bahram-i-Gor. Once he along with his both companions went into the mountain valleys in the north-east in search of mountain goats, or of stags. They went further and further and into more and more remote valleys, till they

came upon a herd of deer amidst which there was a stag with golden horns. The prince had never seen such a beautiful animal. His companions took out their bows and arrows but he asked his companions not to shoot. "Let us catch it if we can", he said and asked his friends and his huntsmen to make a circle and start narrowing it till they drove the stag near enough for him, so that he could catch it. Narrower and narrower grew the circle till the stag with the golden horns was surrounded by horsemen. Then it said; "Prince do not shoot. I will give you in return as much gold and silver as you want." The Prince laughed and said: "I have enough of gold and silver." The stag said: "But I can give you more than gold and silver." "What for instance?" asked Prince Bahram. "I can give you such a ride over hill and dale that you could not possibly imagine." "All right", said the sporting Prince, "Done". So the Prince got on his back and the stag rose in the air as if it had wings and took off over hill over mountain, over valley over river. It took him all over the world and then came down in a valley and just vanished. The Prince wandered here and there but though the valley was rich in flower and fruit with a clear stream running in its midst, he met no living being there. When he got tired of wandering aimlessly in this strange place he sat down beside the stream. Soon a little old man came up from nowhere and stood by him. He asked Prince Bahram: "How did you come to this valley my son?" The Prince told him of the stag with golden horns and the ride he has had. "Yes that must be my

son I found him lying in deep sleep after many days' absence. So you saved his life. Good. Very good" he muttered. He said: "Look Prince! my mischievous son has brought you into the land of jinns. I am the lord of this valley. My name is rather long but I am known as the Sabz (Green) Deo because of my evergreen valley. Here are the keys of my palace. It has a hundred rooms. Enjoy yourself with whatever you find in them. The Prince took the keys and opened one room. He found it full of precious stones of all kinds. The second was full of gold, the third of silver, the fourth of crystal, the fifth of silks, the "No trouble, no trouble at all, but you both may not like it." But the Prince insisted, so the friendly Deo said; "Here is a hair of my head. Keep it somewhere on you. I think you will need it. If you do, put it on the fire and you will find me where you want me. And now shut your eyes." When they opened their eyes, the Prince found himself outside his own palace. But what a change there was! The gate-keepers were different and there were no friends or nobles of his acquaintance any where around. He found that his father and mother were dead and the Wazir had usurped the throne. People believed that Prince Bahram had died, while on a hunt towards the east. Prince Bahram was cruelly disappointed. He looked around for a shelter and found none. At last he remembered his old hunting master. He went outside the town with the Princess and searched for the hunting lodge. He thanked his stars when he found the old huntsman, who recognized him and

made him welcome. He had now retired and lived on his meagre savings. He said: "Prince, you and your beautiful Princess are always welcome. You must live with me, and your highness can hunt with my help as he used to do."

-It was a great come-down for the Prince and the fairy princess but they decided to bear it as long as they could. So the Prince and the Princess began to live in the upper storey and the Princess cooked for both of them as the huntsman's old wife was blind. Prince Bahram hunted with the old huntsman now and then and brought in a little game. He cut wood and drew water. He helped in the vegetable garden and kept busy, but he was a saddened man. One day when he was out hunting, the Princess had a bath and shook out her long golden hair to dry. She sat in her window where the sun shone on her and her hair made a golden halo around her flower-like face. The Kotwal of the city was coming that way on his rounds and he saw the gleam of gold in a window. He rode near and got a glimpse of the fairy Princess. Dazed with her beauty and the rich gold of her hair, he could talk of nothing else the whole day. He talked so much and so long of the golden vision he had seen that someone went and reported it to the usurper King, who was a wicked man if ever there was one. The King sent for the Kotwal and after hearing from him at first hand of the ravishing beauty of the golden lady, he ordered the Kotwal to take a bunch of soldiers and bring the lady to the royal harem. The Kotwal said: "I hear and obey" and marched

gladly to seize the fairy princess. Finding no man at home, except the blind wife of the old huntsman, as both the old huntsman and the Prince were out hunting, the Kotwal broke forcibly into the house. The old wife of the huntsman cried at this outrage, but the Kotwal shouted: "King's orders. Where is the Golden Lady? The King wants to see her. Ask her to come down immediately." The old woman who, of course, had never seen the fairy Princess, being blind, said crossly: "There is no lady here golden or silvery. Go away." But of course the Kotwal stayed and searched the house. Princess Shahpasand heard the noise and the shouting. So she bolted the door of her room from inside and assuming the form of a pigeon flew away out of the window saying to the huntsman's wife "Old mother! Tell the Prince I have gone to my father's house in the Emerald Mountain." The Kotwal rushed up and broke down the door of Prince Bahram's room but found it empty. When the Prince returned and heard what the old woman had to tell her, he was at first stunned with the news, but when he heard about the Emerald Mountain, he picked up heart and being a resourceful man did not waste time moaning or groaning. He took out the Sabz Dev's hair at once and put it on the fire. Instantly his friend the kind old Deo appeared smiling and asked: "What can I do for you, my son?" The Prince told him about the disappearance of the Fairy Princess and asked to be taken to the Emerald Mountain. But the old Deo shook his head and said: "I can't take you there. It is beyond my powers but

I may be able to help you on your way. Mind you, it is a very difficult way. Take this wand of mine. It will take you to the Red Mountain valley where lives my brother the Lai (Red) Deo. Show him this wand and tell him your story. He is a good fellow and he will help you. But one word of warning. You will meet with many dangers on the way and so long as you keep hold of the wand you will be safe. Give my regards to my brother." And saying so he vanished. So Prince Bahram set out on his search. It took him into jungles and caves and marshes and he met all sorts of dreadful beasts but he did not let go his wand and passed safely through them. And then he arrived at the Lai (Red) Deo's Red fortress. The Lai Deo had just woke up from a twelve year's sleep and was hungry. He was at first pleased to see a dainty morsel in front of him, but the Prince waved his wand before him and the Lai Deo realized that it was his brother's wand. So he said in rather a surly tone, "What does that fellow, my younger brother want? Can't he do anything himself?" So the Prince told him his whole story and the heart of the old Deo melted. He said: "I can't take you to the Emerald Mountain but if you must go on, go to our eldest brother the Safaid (White) Deo. Take this Surma (antimony) with you. If you put it in your eye, anything you Look at will be as near or as far as you want it to be. Tell your story to my brother. He will help you."

So the Prince journeyed on. Again he met with many dangers but he was not daunted and he

struggled on till he reached the White Mountain and the Safaid Deo's Crystal Palace. He showed him the wand and the Surma and told him his story. The Safaid Deo tried like his brothers, to dissuade the Prince from going further, but the Prince said to him, what he had said to his brothers: "I have but one life and it is useless to me without the Princess. If I have to die, I would rather die seeking her." The wise old Deo nodded his head and said: "You are a brave man. I like you. I don't wonder my brothers like you too. Take this cap with you. If you are in danger put it on, it will make you invisible. Now go to the north and by and by you will see the Emerald Mountain. The Mountain is enchanted. If anyone comes near it, it rises and the higher you climb, the higher it grows till it touches the sky. But put the Surma in your eyes and you will find that the far will be near or the near as far as you desire. Then put on the cap and you will become invisible. The wand will save you from ogres or demons and such like guardians of the mountains." The Prince did as he was bidden but when he entered the Emerald City, he found that trees, houses and streets, even furniture and pots and pans were all made of emerald, but search as he would, he found the Princess no where. The fact was that the Princess had been locked up inside seven prisons. Actually the Fairy Monarch doted on his daughter and when she disappeared, he was heart broken and when she returned he was at first very angry because she had given him such a fright but when she told him her story and sang the praises of

the famous Prince Bahram-i-Gor, the King said: "All right! I will shut you up inside my seven prisons. If your husband is such a wonderful person as you say he is, he should find you. And if he does, I will make him my heir and will give you gladly to him." The poor Princess now languished inside her seventh prison, which though beautifully furnished in green brocades and green silk curtains and green marble pillars and emerald doors and windows and lit up with fairy lights, was still a prison and she longed for her husband.

The Prince roamed about freely with his cap on and poked into all sorts of corners and places, till he noticed a woman going twice every day in the same direction with a tray on her head. He became curious and followed her. He passed close behind her into a prison, from it to another and so on till he found himself in the seventh prison and there he found his beautiful fairy princess. He almost shouted with joy but restrained himself; especially as he remembered just in time that he was invisible to everybody. He found the maid servant setting the table for dinner and inviting the Princess most respectfully to take her meal. The maid went outside. The Princess sat at the table and began to eat but found to her surprise that whatever dish she took the food disappeared from the opposite side of the plate. If she took pillau, the rice diminished as quickly off the plate on the opposite side, and so on, till she cried: "Who is it that is eating the food from the same dish with me?" The Prince lifted the cap a little so that he became

partially visible like a blur. The Princess thought it was the Prince's ghost and calling on his name began to weep. So Bahram took off his cap entirely, put it in his pocket and stretched his hands to embrace her. The Princess finding her husband alive shouted for joy. The maid came rushing in and found a glorious prince clasping the Princess to his heart. Everybody knew the Fairy King's challenge to the Princess, so she rushed out shouting: "The Prince has come, the Prince has come!" Immediately fairy music was heard from all sides and there was a great noise all over the Emerald City. The King heard the news and came rushing to the prison. When he saw Bahram-i-Gor with his shining forehead and handsome face and princely bearing, he was immensely pleased. He kissed his daughter on the forehead and embraced his son-in-law and said: "Now we have a real heir to our Kingdom, and my daughter will not have to go into the world of men." So they lived happily in the Emerald Valley ever afterwards.

RUSSIAN FOLK TALES from
Alexander Afanasiev

Translated by K. M. Cook-Horujy,
Irina Zheleznova

The Apples of Youth and the Water of Life

A certain king grew very old and lost his sight. One day he heard that far, far away, at the ends of the earth, was a garden with apples of youth and a spring with the water of life. If an old man were to eat of the apples, he would grow young again, and if the water were rubbed on a blind man's eyes he would regain his sight. The king had three sons. So he sent his eldest son off on horseback to bring an apple and some water from the garden, for the king longed to regain his youth and sight. The son mounted his horse and set off for the distant land. On the way he saw a signpost pointing to three different paths. It said: take the first and your horse will be fed, but you will go hungry, take the second and you will die, take the third and your horse will go hungry, but you will be fed.

He thought hard and took the third path. On he rode until he saw a fine house standing on a plain. He rode up to it, unbolted the gate and galloped into the courtyard without doffing his cap or bowing

his head. The mistress of the house, a widow not advanced in years, called the young man to her: "Hail, dear guest!" She led him into the house, sat him down at the table and gave him food and mead in abundance. So the young man ate and drank his fill and lay him down to sleep on the bench. Then the mistress of the house said:

"What self-respecting young fellow will spend the night on his own. Get you to the bed of my daughter, the fair Dunya." He did so gladly.

"Snuggle up closer, my dear, and we will be warmer," Dunya said to him.

He moved towards her and fell through the bed into a place where he was made to thresh damp rye and could not escape. The king waited in vain for his eldest son to return and at last gave up hope.

Then the king sent his second son to bring him an apple and some water. He took the same path and shared the same fate as his elder brother. The king waited in vain for his second son to return and wept bitterly.

Then the youngest son begged his father to let him go to the garden. His father would not agree and said:

"It would be the end of you. Your elder brothers have perished, and you, a mere stripling, would perish in half the time."

But he beseeched his father, vowing to do better than his brothers. So after a while his father gave him his blessing and off he went. On the way to the widow's house everything happened just as it

had to his elder brothers. He rode up to the house, dismounted, knocked at the gate and asked if he could spend the night. The mistress of the house greeted him joyfully as before, saying:

"Hail, unexpected guest."

She sat him down at the table and served him all manner of food and drink. When he had eaten his fill and made to lie down on the bench, she said to him:

"No self-respecting young man sleeps alone. Get you to the bed of my fair Dunya."

But he said:

"No, mistress. That's not for a travelling man. He can kip down anywhere. How about heating up the bathhouse and letting me take your Dunya in there."

So the mistress heated up the bathhouse as hot as could be and sent him in with the fair Dunya. Now Dunya was as cunning as her mother. She sent him in first, then locked the door and stayed outside in the lobby. But the young man forced open the door and locked Dunya in there. He had three switches, one of iron, one of lead and one of copper. And he began to beat Dunya with them. She begged for mercy, but he said:

"Tell me, wicked Dunya, what have you done with my brothers?"

She told him that they were threshing damp rye in the cellar, so he let her go. Then he went into the house, tied some ladders together and brought up the brothers. He bade them go home, but they were ashamed to show their faces to the king, for they

had been in the fair Dunya's bed and were good for nothing. So off they went, wandering through field and forest.

But the young prince continued on his way until he came to a house where a fair maid sat weaving towels. He went inside and said to her:

"May the good Lord help you, fair maid!"

To which she replied:

"Thank you kindly, young man. Are you on an errand or just passing the time of day?"

"I am on an errand, fair maid," said the young man. "I must go far, far away to the end of the earth to fetch the apples of youth and the water of life for my blind and aged father from the garden there."

Then she said to him:

"You've bitten off more than you can chew, trying to get to that garden. Still, if go you must, my other sister lives on the way there, so drop in to see her. She knows more than I and will tell you what to do."

So off he went until he reached the other sister. As with the first, he greeted her and told her who he was and whither he was bound. She bade him leave his horse with her and ride off on her two-winged steed to her elder sister who would tell him what to do: how to reach the garden and get the apples and water. Then off he rode again until he came to the elder sister. She gave him her four-winged steed and bade him:

"Take care, for in that garden lives our aunt, a terrible witch. When you ride up to the garden do

not spare my horse. Drive him on and he will jump straight over the wall. But make sure he does not brush the wall, for on it there are strings of little bells. The strings will sound, the bells will ring, the witch will wake up and you will never escape her. She has a horse with six wings. Be sure to cut that horse's tendons, so she cannot chase you on it."

He did everything as she said. He jumped over the wall on his horse. The horse's tail brushed a string very lightly. The strings sounded and the little bells rang softly. The witch woke up, but could not hear the voices of the strings and bells properly, so she yawned and went back to sleep. And the valiant prince galloped away with the apple of youth and the water of life. On the way he dropped in to the sisters, changed horses and sped off home on his own. Early next morning the witch saw that someone had stolen the apple and water from the garden. She mounted her six-winged steed straightaway, rode to her first niece and asked her:

"Has anyone passed by here?"

Her niece replied:

"A valiant knight rode past, but that was long ago."

She galloped on and asked her second and third nieces, and they told her likewise. So on she rode and almost caught up the valiant prince, but he reached his land and no longer feared her. She dared not follow him there, and could only dart him an evil glance and cry in a voice hoarse with spite:

"No need to look so pleased with yourself, you

thieving rogue. You've managed to escape from me, but your brothers will get you, just wait and see!"

Having cast this spell on him, she rode off home.

Our fine fellow was riding along, when he saw his vagabond brothers sleeping in a field. Not wishing to wake them, he left his horse to graze, lay down beside them and fell asleep. They woke up, saw their brother had returned, stealthily removed the apple of youth from his jacket and threw him into an abyss. Down he fell for three days until he landed in a dark underworld. Wherever he went people were weeping bitterly. When he asked the cause of their sorrow, they told him that their king's only daughter, the beautiful princess Polvusha, was going to be taken to the dragon tomorrow to be eaten up. In their land they had to give a maid to the seven-headed dragon once a month, that was the law! And now it was the princess's turn. So the valiant prince found out all about it, then went to the king himself and said:

"I will save your daughter from the dragon, Sire, but you must do what I ask of you afterwards."

The king was overjoyed and promised to do anything he asked and to give him his daughter's hand in marriage.

Next day they took the beautiful princess Polvusha down to the sea, to the three-walled fortress, and the prince went with her. He took an iron rod weighing five poods. The two of them were left there to wait for the dragon. While they were waiting they chatted about this and that. He told her

about his adventure and that he had the water of life. Then he said to the beautiful princess Polyusha:

"Comb my hair. If I fall asleep and the dragon comes, hit me with my iron rod, otherwise you won't be able to wake me up!" And he put his head in her lap. She began to comb his hair and he fell asleep. The dragon flew up and hovered over the princess. She tried to wake the prince by shaking him. not wanting to hit him hard as he had bade her. When he did not wake, she began to weep, a tear fell upon his face and he started up. with a shout:

"Oh, you have burnt me with something!"

The dragon made a dive at them.

The prince picked up his five-pood rod and swung it round, knocking off five of the dragon's heads. With another blow he cut off the other two, then buried the heads under the wall and threw the body into the sea.

But a big burly fellow who had seen all this crept out from behind the wall, cut off the prince's head and threw him into the sea, bidding the Princess Polyusha tell her father, the king, that it was he who had saved her. If she did not say so, he would kill her. There was nothing for it. Polyusha wept bitterly, and off they went to her father. The king met them, and she told him that the big burly fellow had saved her. The king was overjoyed and ordered the wedding to take place. Guests came from far and wide, kings and princes, eating, drinking and making merry. Only the princess was sad. She hid in a corner by the barn, weeping bitter tears for her valiant prince.

Then she had the idea of asking her father to send fishermen down to the sea to fish, and she went with them. When they pulled in their net it was full of fish! She looked and said:

"No, my fish is not there!"

They pulled in another net and there was the head and body of the prince. Polyusha ran up quickly, found the flask with the water of life in his jacket, put the head on the body, sprinkled it with the water, and he came to life again. She told him how the hateful burly fellow wanted to marry her. The prince comforted her and told her to go home. He would take care of everything.

So the prince went to the king's palace where the drunken guests were dancing and singing. He said he could play all sorts of songs. They were pleased and bade him play. First he played a merry ditty. They liked it so much, that they praised him to the skies. Then he played such a sad song that they began to cry. Then the prince asked the king who had rescued his daughter. The king said it was the burly fellow.

"In that case let's go to the fortress with all the guests, Sire. If he can pull out the dragon's heads. I will believe he rescued Princess Polyusha."

So they all went down to the fortress. The burly fellow pulled and pulled, but he could not pull out a single head. He hadn't the strength. The prince pulled them out in a twinkling. Then the princess told the truth about who had rescued her. When they all realised that it was the prince who had rescued

the king's daughter, they tied the burly fellow to a horse's tail and dragged him over hill and dale.

The king wanted the prince to marry his daughter, but the prince said:

"No, Sire, I want nothing but to go up from the underworld. I have not yet finished my father's errand. He is waiting for me to bring the water of life to cure his blindness."

The king did not know how to send the prince up from the underworld. The princess would not be parted from her rescuer and wanted to go up with him. She told her father that they had a big bird who could carry them up, provided it had enough food for the journey.

So Polyusha bade them kill an ox for the bird. Then they bade the king farewell, climbed onto the bird's back and flew up to the sunlight. When they gave the bird a lot to eat, it carried them up more quickly. Soon it had gobbled up the whole ox. Now they were afraid it would carry them down again. There was nothing for it, so Polyusha cut off a piece of her thigh and gave it to the bird.

Then the bird flew up into the sunlight and said:

"You have fed me well all the way, but that last morsel was the sweetest I have ever tasted."

Polyusha showed her where the morsel was from and the bird gasped with amazement and coughed up the slice. Then the prince placed it back, sprinkled it with the water of life and the princess's thigh was whole again.

At last they arrived at the palace. The king met

them, overwhelmed with joy. The prince saw that his father had regained his youth from the apple but was still blind. So he straightaway rubbed his eyes with the water of life, and the king began to see again. He kissed the valiant prince and the beautiful princess from the dark underworld. Then the prince told him how his brothers had taken away the apple and cast him into the underworld. The brothers were so afraid that they jumped into the river. But the valiant prince married Polyusha and they had a fine wedding feast. I there did dine and drank mead wine with cabbage aplenty, but now my mouth's empty!

Sri Thanonchai

Sri Thanonchai was a very clever man. Some people thought he was too clever. Others thought he was just a fool. They all talked about him.

When the king heard about Sri Thanonchai, he was surprised. "I am a clever man myself," said the king. "Surely this fellow cannot be cleverer than I."

The king decided to visit Sri Thanonchai. He put on old clothes and called for elephant. He rode to Sri Thanonchai's house near the river. Sri Thanonchai was sitting on the step.

"That's a nice elephant you have, mister," he called out.

"Why, thank you," said the king. "In fact, it's a palace elephant. I work there."

"Then you must be very clever."

"Yes, I'm one of the king's ministers. I'm almost as clever as the king himself." "Oh, no one is as clever as the king," said Sri Thanonchai.

"Some people say you are," the king said, "So I have come to test you. If you are more clever than I, perhaps you are as clever as the king."

"What kind of test did you have in mind?"

"Well," said the king, "I don't suppose that you're clever enough to make me jump into the river."

Sri Thanonchai thought about this. He looked at the river, and he looked at the king. He scratched his head "No," he said. "I'm not that clever. I can't make you jump into the river."

“Then I win,” said the king.

Sri Thanonchai looked at the king. He looked at the river, and after a while said, “Of course I am not clever enough to make you jump into the river. It would be even more difficult to make you climb out. Only a very, very clever man could make you do that.”

Hearing this, the king jumped into the river. “Are you clever enough to make me climb out?” he shouted.

Sri Thanonchai laughed. “You can stay there for all I care,” he said. “I made you jump into the river. Surely you are clever enough to climb out.”

The king swam to the shore. He climbed out of the water. “Sri Thanonchai”, he said, “You are more clever than I am. You are the cleverest man in the kingdom”.

However, the king still felt embittered, thinking of the tricks Sri Thanonchai had played on him in the past.

One day the king planned to take a bath in the river which had long sandy beach jutting into the water. However, on this occasion, the king planned to call Sri Thanonchai in order to expose his trickery and then be able to punish him.

He ordered each courtier who was participating in this activity to prepare an egg and bury it in the sand on the beach. In addition, the king ordered his courtiers not to reveal the plan to Sri Thanonchai. Later, the courtiers told their servants to prepare the eggs early in the morning and then bury them on the beach.

At the appointed time, the king with his courtiers and Sri Thanonchai embarked on the river trip, taking the royal boat.

When the royal boat arrived at the beach, the king got off but remained on the royal pavilion. Later, he let everybody enjoy swimming in the river. Then he said "Listen now, each of you must dive into the water to find the eggs and you must shout Kra-tak (the cackling sound of hens) when you find one. If any of you can't find an egg, you will be punished."

In order to please the king, each courtier quickly dived into the river and tried to find an egg. Then, each of them emerged with an egg, shouting Kra-tak. Everyone of the courtiers emerged from the water with an egg in his hand, shouting Kra-tak.

When Sri Thanonchai saw what was happening, he dived into the water. While waiting for Sri Thanonchai to emerge, the king and his courtiers were eagerly awaiting the reaction of Sri Thanonchai when he failed to find an egg. The king himself was so anxious to have the opportunity of punishing Sri Thanonchai.

A short time later, everybody felt relieved when Sri Thanonchai suddenly emerged, shouting Kra-took (the cackling sound of cocks) and exclaiming "Cock has no egg!"

After that Sri Thanonchai acted exactly as a cock would do, chasing the hens (the courtiers) jumping on their backs and pressing them down under the water. Some of them began to choke as they were forced to crouch beneath the water. So they tried to

escape from Sri Thanonchai's grasp which presented a chaotic scene on the onlookers.

Although the king felt somewhat angry, he was amused by such a comic event.

Once again, the king found himself in a position where he was unable to punish Sri Thanonchai.

Consequently, he decided to return to the palace where he began to think of another plan to get his revenge Sri Thanonchai.

However, the next time, it was his turn to completely fool Sri Thanonchai in such a way that this troublesome character could not possibly save himself once again by his wit.

The origin of BANH GIAY and BANH CHUNG

Banh Giay and Banh Chung are two types of delicacies which are very popular with the Vietnamese people.

Banh Giay is served regularly at festivals and ceremonies. It is a rounded, convex cake of glutinous or nep rice, which resembles white dough, soft and sticky. Its cupola-shaped top is said to resemble the shape of the heavenly vault.

Banh Chung is served particularly at the Vietnamese New Year's festival, which occurs during the first three days of the first month of the lunar calendar. It is a square cake, wrapped in banana leaves and tied with lacings of flexible bamboo slivers. It is a very delicious and nutrient food it is filled with bean paste to which may be added small bits of pork meat, both fat and lean. This filling, which is amply seasoned, is pressed between layers of glutinous nep rice. Its square shape is considered a symbol of thankfulness of the Vietnamese people for the great abundance of the Earth, which supplies them with nutritious food throughout the four seasons of the year.

Here is the story about the origin of Banh Giay and Banh Chung.

King Hung the Sixth had already lived a long and useful life. When he had finally repelled the invaders and restored peace in his kingdom, he determined to relinquish the throne, with all its worldly responsibilities, in order to enjoy mental repose during his declining years.

The king was the father of twenty-two sons, all worthy princes. From among them he had to choose an heir and successor. It was a difficult task and the king was not certain how to determine the qualities of a future sovereign in his sons. He thought about it for a long time and finally arrived at a novel solution. Since there is much to be learned from travel, he decided to send his sons on a journey.

He called the twenty-two princes together and said: "Go forth, all of you, to the farthest corners of the earth and search out for me recipes and food-stuffs that I have not yet tasted, but which I would greatly enjoy. He who returns with the best dish will rule this kingdom."

The princes dispersed and made their preparations. Twenty-one of them set out on distant journeys to search for the dish that would most please the king. Some went north into cold and inhospitable areas, and others journeyed south, east and west.

But there was one prince who did not leave the royal palace. He was sixteenth in rank and his

name was Lang Lieu. His mother had died while he was still very young, and unlike his brothers he had never known the warmth of maternal love. He had only his old nurse to look after him.

Prince Lang Lieu was at a complete loss and had no idea about how he might set about procuring a new dish for the king. There was no one to advise him, so he remained in the palace, lost in gloomy meditation.

One night a genie appeared to the prince in a dream and said: "Prince, I know of your youthful loneliness and understand your anxieties. I have been sent here to help you, so that you will be able to please your royal father. Therefore, do not despair. It is a law of nature that man cannot live without rice; it is man's chief food. For that reason, you will first take a quantity of glutinous rice, some beans, some fat and lean pork meat, and spices. Pluck some banana leaves and from split bamboo cut flexible lacings. All these materials symbolize the abundance of the Earth.

"Soak the rice in clean water and boil part of it. When it is well-cooked, pound it into a cupola-shaped, plain cake.

"Now prepare a stuffing of bean paste and bits of pork. Place this between layers of nep (glutinous) rice. Wrap the whole in banana leaves and press it into a square shape. Then bind it with the flexible bamboo lacings. Cook it for a day and the cake will be ready for eating."

Then the genie disappeared and the prince

awakened to find himself lying in bed, looking at the ceiling with wide-open eyes and repeating the words that he had heard. Could he have been dreaming? In the morning he revealed the secret to his old nurse and together they collected the proper materials and prepared the cakes as directed.

After the apricot trees had bloomed once, the twenty-one princes returned from their quests. They were weary of their long travels but happy with anticipation. Each prepared his dish with his own hands, using the special foods and materials that he had brought back with him. Each seemed confident that his dish would win the prize.

On the appointed day the dishes were brought before the king. Twenty-one times the king tasted, and twenty-one times he shook his head in disapproval. Then Prince Lang Lieu modestly presented his two cakes - one, white and "round as the sky" and the other, steaming hot and "square as the earth," wrapped in banana leaves with flexible bamboo lacings. The prince untied the leaves and displayed a soft, sticky, green cake, which he cut with a bamboo knife. The inside was white and lemon-yellow and studded with opaline bits of fat and brown bits of lean pork meat.

The king accepted a piece of the square cake and tasted it. Then he picked up a second piece, and then a third, until he had eaten the cake completely. Then he ate the round cake also.

"Is there any more?" he asked, smacking his lips, his eyes dancing with pleasure.

“How did you make them?” he asked in wonder.

Prince Lang Lieu told the story of how the genie had appeared to him and had instructed him in the selection of foodstuffs and the manner of making the cakes. The Court listened in silence.

The king was greatly impressed with the revelation for it attested divine support. He surmised that in the handling of state affairs, divine inspiration would not be lacking for the young prince. He accordingly named Lang Lieu the winner and appointed him his heir and successor. He decided that the round loaf should be called *Banh Giay* and the square one, *Banh Chung*, and ordered his ministers to give the recipes to the Vietnamese people.

POEMS

POEMS

Rasul RZA

Translated from Azerbaijani into English by
Aynur Hajiyeva

COLORS

OVERTURE

White, black, yellow, green, red,
All of them are connected in some experiment.
One of them reminds us of our longing,
One of our trouble, another of our wish.
Each of them hides some meaning,
Each of them has some reason for its color.
Who knows who invented this?
Who told us for the first time that
Black means mourning,
red means holiday,
and yellow means hatred?
Who knows who branded the colors so
and distinguished them?
And who knows how his mood was
When doing this?
Red can mean blood as well as
A precious stone on a ring,
or a teardrop.
Black can be the symbol of mourning
as well as love,
or hatred.

White can blind our eyes,
And it can also decorate our table like flowers.
One sees leaves as green,
Another sees them as red.
But leaves keep their original colors.
They are green,
then they become red, and then yellow.
Colors pass through our hearts
Like warm and cool winds.
Songs, tunes and voices
Fill our hearts like different colors.
Colors arouse memories,
They give rise to feelings.
If we don't want to see more than we see,
Then colors seem just like paints to us.
And colors have harmony like music.
And pain, and joy and hope
have their own colors.
The more you think,
the more colorful pages open.
The colors of life, fighting,
the soul, hatred,
night, day
and human fate
Become alive in our eyes.

WHITE

The smile of a sleepy baby.
Hope.
Disinterested favor.
The moment that the words:
"It's not cancer!" are said.
Everything that creates
Happiness for humanity...
Even the lie
that has been told to console somebody.
And also the friendship between human beings.

WHITE: Tinge of joy

Granny's sash.
Motherland's soil.
A blossoming bough in spring.
Pigeon wings.
Snow of the North.
A baby's face messy with milk.
The delight that he gets
When dipping the spoon into the soup
and taking it out.
The day when doubts are dispelled.
A friend's hand.
A disentangled knot.
And virtues, virtues and virtues
That are worth the human name.

WHITE: TINGE OF LOVE

The meaning of life.
The mirror of the soul.
Wealth that has no price and no market to sell.
The key that opens only one soul,
And the human who perceives and feels.

CREAM COLOR

The grief of Africa.
The comb that my grandpa uses to comb his beard.
The news of easy income.
The fate of Negroes.
The tale of tales.
Your wishes coming true
in your dream.
Profit that is taken from death.
Prison bars.
Looped rope.
A cane whip with wires.
An excuse for an elephant's death.
The world of longing.
Seven years' toil
of seven-folded and patterned small spheres.
The Sakinas, Salmans and Ahmads
of the countries that are wailing with pain.

GRAY

Those who have melted into the majority.
Those who grow in any land.
Cigarette ash
That has gone out between dead fingers.
Wilted flowers - wrapped in plastic.
Meaningless days,
empty hearts.
People of various characteristics.
A reluctant smile out of habit.
Silver that is left in hair
after cold loneliness.
The orphan girl with no change of clothes.
The colorlessness of time.

SILVER

The uselessness of weapons.
A moustache that is out of fashion.
The face of the teacher
who taught us the alphabet for the first time,
that has been left behind for years.
Foamy waves.
The memory of grandparents.
Morning that plays in the mists.
Sheikh Shamil
and the dagger that hangs from his belt,
a prayer written on its handle.
The leaves of poplar,
which are playing hide-and-seek in the wind.
A bride's mirror.
The price of toil, tiredness and dreamless nights.
The cold surface of branches in the North.
The distant smoke that gives hope to a tired traveler.
The younger brother of gold.
An unlucky man.

PISTACHIO

The sea in spring.
Spring that has awakened without getting enough
sleep.
Lips that have opened with passion.
Ghazals,
beauties.
A human glance.
The pattern of the first leaves
on willow branches.
Sorrow in gray eyes.
Moments from the thoughts about youth.

BLUE

The sea without waves.
Love without pangs.
The depth of the heavens.
Degas' "Dancers".
The sun that has been painted by a young painter.
Relaxed eyes.
Human meditations.
Watery streets amidst ice islands.

BLUE: TINGE OF CONSOLATION

The most terrible of all diseases:
the feeling of justification to obedience.
Hope for the arrival of the camel
that has left its load in Tabriz.
The sweet poison of delusion.
The patterned shadow of a bush
in the hot desert.
The blueness of heavens
that is strained into the souls of those
whose roofs have holes.
And also those who say:
"So what!
Good thing it's not me!"
Which doesn't suit the name of human.

CHESTNUT

A camel caravan in the desert.
My grandpa's Koran with gilded patterns.
Colonies.
The inextinguishable fire of fighters.
Heat that burns the soil.
Inconsolable distress.
Faces that are shadowed
by the trees that are like elephants' trunks,
that grow as high as they can,
and hide their heavy branches with green leaves.
And eyes, eyes and eyes.

DARK BROWN

The Sun's wrath
which has fallen onto the sands of the desert,
memories of Balzac.
A burned heart.
Extinguished globes.
Gauguin's traces
in Tahiti.
Oceans of tears.
Millions of gravestones.
Man reproaches.
The department of Hell on Earth.
Smiling and crying,
human, human and human.

ORANGE

Tales from "Arabian Nights".

Snow at sunset.

A sheepskin coat from Khorasan.

Suffocating stuffiness.

The bleating of a cow
whose month-old calf
was killed.

The caprice of a Mastan cat.

The shadow of a beloved woman
who passes through memory.

The land of memories,
Which is impossible to visit.

REDDISH ORANGE

A stab in the back.

An expensive bracelet-shackle.

Green that has hid itself in dark blue:

Stepbrother of a young one.

Golden hair.

Trees from the South.

Straw that the drowning man tries to grab.

Very few people.

GOLDEN

The short dream of a convict sentenced to life imprisonment.

The edging of clouds on a moonlit night.

The generosity of the earth.

"Sunflowers" by Van Gogh'.

The mark of love that has been wound around fingers.

The master of a slave.

The adornment of a word.

A cow's dried manure
in grassless and treeless deserts.

A mountain of wheat.

Tassels of hair.

Tears of a hero.

The wanted head
of the one who has fled from death.

The age of wine.

Time.

An ottoman that sits in a museum.

The elder brother of silver.

The same age as crime.

YELLOW

A sea of wheat that is full of grain.
The face of a mother who has an invalid child.
Trees in autumn.
Hungry people whose portions have been eaten by
strong ones.
Jingling metal that has spoiled love.
The dream beyond life.

Mighty daffodils.
Debussy's "Golden Hair".
Ignorant bulls that enter the slaughterhouse.
A clever madman. A human deed.

DARK YELLOW

Longing for the bare walls of
the house where you were born.
Truth that sniffs out repentance.
Nazim Hikmat" who competes with
his wounded heart at sunset,
And his painful love.
The chaff from a threshing floor,
Not enough to feed a family.
A winter Sun.
The crescent Moon, seen in the sky
just for a moment.
The keepsake of bitter memories
of friends and humanity.

An invisible wound
that burns and burns
and won't be extinguished.
The string that won't be necessary
for cold fingers any more.
Ivy in shade.
Ashugs who have a lot of their tunes.
And dark yellow!
And also a great man's
last love,
and his last pain.

VIOLET

The scent of spring in winter.
Fear of frost.
Fear of parting.
The Sun's pinches on white snow.
Wrath in gray eyes.
Curled wire.
A miserable orphan.
A flock of cranes in the sky.
And also my granny's
tangled skein of yam.

DARK VIOLET

A drunkard's nose.
The first day of classes.
A stain that causes doleful tears,
And the pattern of a baby's hands.
Lilies under the Sun.
Mountains that have been hung from the sky
As if by a zigzag lace.

NAVY BLUE

The charm of a richly laid table.
Blue that has thickened
under hard pressure.
The wrath of the sea.
Patterns on the carpet.
The bitter memory of a passionate kiss.
Circles around the eyes.
Obedience to tyranny.
A snowy mountain peak
On a moonlit night.

PINK

Slander against the nightingale.
Cheap happiness.
A carefree village,
and the idiot who depicted it.
Beer that gives pleasure.
A new shallow friend.
A coverlet for a pair of beds.
Flying feathers of a wounded flamingo.
Omar Khayyam and his jug of wine
According to the imagination of ignorant people.
Wine that has spilled into the gap between day and
night.
The spectacles of a hypocrite.
The book that has many pages,
but little content.
Fragrant leaves -
Storm of roses.
Cheeks that are flushed
From work and love.
Modesty.
Color that saves life.

VERMILION

An unforgettable view:
Hardened steel.
Prometheus' gift
To humanity.
Tulip lakes in the mountains.
The Gadfly and his tragedy.
A belligerent child.
The killer with knife in hand.
Armed revolt on a rainy day.
The wrath of a nation in a decisive battle.
The official march of triumphant flags.
a mosque with a minaret
in a village of shacks and mud huts.
And also human charm.

RED: TINGE OF HOPE

A short path to distant starts.
Also a human:
honest,
his eyes filled with faith.

TURQUOISE

The pain of love left in memories.
The charm of the sea.
The light of the lamp with a green lampshade
that falls into a blue wall.
The longing of a poor girl's fingers.
Jafar Jabbarli's Baku.
Only two eyes
in the entire world.

RED: TINGE OF BELIEF

Endurance.

Grapes that have drunk the Sun's rays.

The path of hope.

A wide square filled with melodies.

The weakness of bullets and promises.

The first child of a nervous father.

The human name.

The taste of death.

Love for humanity.

Bare truth.

REDDISH BROWN

Two men strolled

around mountains and hills,

and couldn't find their way back.

Night had blocked all paths.

But when the sun rose from the horizon.

those two men found their way.

SCARLET

My granny's wedding shawl.

The smell of kebab.

Girat's horseshoes after battle.

The cover of night's coffin.

The wooden stump under the butcher's cleaver.

Lips and nails.

Tracks of a wounded prey in the snow.

RED AND BLACK

Hope was going to leave us before it came.

It delayed its departure after it came.

When the blood started running in the veins

of the sick man whose breath

couldn't even fog a mirror,

Hope came back.

It was seen in men's eyes,

In their looks, in their faces.

The shadow with icy breath

kept away from the door

slowly, disappointedly.

The man took a deep breath.

BLACK

A treacherous enemy.
Fear that has hid itself from consciousness.
The pain of eternal separation.
Many of those who grovel for a living.
(Invalids who crawl are exceptions).
An outrageous lie.
A sigh that burns lips.
The morning of an execution day.
Spiteful words.
The blaze of eyes.
Hair and eyebrows.
The meat of a breathless gazelle.
And also the intentions of some people.

BLACK: TINGE OF GRIEF

Longing eyes.
Tousled hair.
Trembling lips.
Cripples that lead on the racetrack.
Ears that can't hear even a word.
Broken branches that had just blossomed before
they were broken.
Mountains without turnes.
Waterless springs.
Gameless forests.
Flameless fires.

The dead that should be alive.
The alive that should be dead.
Fettered tribes and nations,
whose languages
have been driven out of the highest assemblies.

MIXED COLORS

Human life.
The caprices of face.
The rooms of a respected man of tradition.
Wishes and hopes.
Manuscripts that are resting
in the cages of archives.
Cloud patches in the heavens.
A black and white pig.
Or dutiful way
that has been left in the memories.
Day and night pages of eternity.
The stained human face.
Leather spoiled by moths.
Woolen matted skeins of stockings.
A variety of joy, grief,
belief and despair.
A zebra colt;
big or small, doesn't matter.
The joy of happy people,
The mourning of the unhappy.
The human world.

DON'T TOUCH - JUST PAINTED

A smile on one's lips. Chameleons.
Experienced monkeys.
Black yogurt.
White soot.
Edible sand.
A substitute for love.
Purposeful applause.
The moments when
The human soul is empty.
Fleas that seem like elephants.
Memories about Samad Mansur.
Lies that appear to be truth.
People with trousers, shirts,
skirts and gloves.
All kinds of paints.
Steps that hurry from wedding to funeral,
and vice versa.

OH! CHESS PIECES

BOT PEAK BRAMPI
(The seven poetic words rhyme)

I have seen some people like to think,
Playing a very happy game,
Some of them are completely absorbed in it,
Until loss, all kinds of property because of this
betting game.

That game is chess,
All Khmer people can talk about it,
Even though living in the city or countryside,
Everyone knows about it.

They said this game is very good to play easily,
However, it surely makes some people becoming
very lazy,
All players remarked that playing chess is happier
than playing card,
Therefore, they stop working every season.

The players use all pieces like bishop, queen, rook,
knight,
In addition, using all tricks to confuse or mislead,
To be winning each other,
They spend all their time, trick, and cleverness.

Looking at the 32 pieces,
Fighting in the field cruelly,
There the 64 checkerboards pattern,
That is the battlefield they fight to be a winner.

While playing, players make pieces to go up and
down,
Fighting back and force without worrying,
All players, young or old no matter but going,
They just only think how to win the game.

All the pawns keep moving only forward,
Not fear of being dying or changing position,
There is only laughing and crying during that time,
However, when there is nothing to eat, they ask for
help.

Why do the players of chess game think too much?
Before they make resolution to move a knight or a
rook,
They are all being worried before exchanging,
In addition, they are always thinking repeatedly.

When they need to change or to exchange the pawn,
It seems there is nothing important at all,
However, it is ok for exchanging two or three pawns,
They will do it quickly without worrying or thinking.

At the end of the playing chess game,
Both players have only four or five of pawns
remaining,

They have killed each other almost nothingness,
If we compare in subtraction, there are three-fours.

As for the bishop, rook and knight,
They might have left all completely,
They might sometimes left for both players,
However, not losses all like the pawns.

Looking at the play reflectively, I feel tired,
I have pity on pieces of chess game,
All of them have sacrificed their life for others,
Winning, losing, admiring or cursing is just for
their fun.

I do not want to see them making war,
All of them falling into destruction crazily,
Using blood and tear as music,
Just for laughing without caring each other.

Oh! The happy chess game,
Do they regret nothing?
Why they want them fighting each other without
compassion?
Losing almost all pawns, they are just only for the
king.

By KIM PICHPINUN

Folk love Song

POPPY BEAUTY

In the blue sky float white clouds;
On the earth grow numerous flowers.
Among millions of colorful blossoms,
The beautiful poppy is what I like most.
It stands straight and graceful,
And its stem is shapely and supple.
Its green leaves dance in the wind,
And its bright petals seem to have a soul.
Mauve, carmine, and pinkish red,
Its different hues are all pleasant to the eye,
Its bud half opens with dewdrops hidden
inside,
And it breathes with warm fragrance.
Its capsule is round and sweet,
Whose taste will refresh your heart.
What is most beautiful in the world?
It is the poppy beauty without doubt.

Shimon Adaf

REGRESSION

Clouds above Tel Aviv and over October,
a month's face aged before its time
dissolving in the rough tumult
like an old warehouse collapsing

at my back
because I'm heading south
I make the air younger.
Winds smoothed out like children, trees
less tangled in the anguish of growth

world under world
bellows of new lungs
breathing underground in a kind of darkness
light under light
leaf under leaf strikes the fences.

That which I thought shadow is the real body.

Translated from Hebrew by Becka McKay

EVENINGS OF WADI AL-YABIS*

Time, which I can not call my own,
Imprisons me behind stamps and fees.
It has changed my pleasures into anxieties,
And me into a clerk who babbles, "How much is
3x8?"
Look at my drinking buddies. They split up
When I left them. Dust covers my wine jugs and
cups.
And my poetry? It has become nonsense.
Eloquence eludes me.
I have been humiliated like a slave:
Beaten for each of my sweet desires.

The choking rule Hober has dug a chasm
Between my intentions and my words.
So dictate to Qawar a text from a magic amulet
Just to free my tongue for speech
And to support my poetic imagination

* Wadi al-Yabis. A broad valley beginning in the hills north of Ajlun and running westward down into the Jordan Valley. The tipper part of this valley is green and fertile due to the presence of major springs in the region. Many gypsies used to live there. Arar wrote this poem as a present to a young gypsy girl and chose her as Queen of Beauty among the gypsies of the northern region. He crowned her Miss Wadi al-Yabis and dedicated his book of collected poems to her for good luck. The title of this poem has traditionally been used as the title of Arar's collected works. Some critics maintain that the word "evenings" is actually intended as a girl's name.

"Which has a pair of every kind of fruit"^{**}
And which brings back cheerful dreams of youth
Like smiling flowers in the plains of Ma'an,
O Sister of the valley, I have called you by its name,
And I have named my diwan,^{***} for blessing, after it.
My people and yours, in servility and ignorance
Of the meaning of honor, are balanced in the scales.
Our people are different, but you and I are the same
In the opinion of Peake and his army.
So bring the cup nearer; our consolation
Is in it and In your slender figure,
And in the rhythm of the sighs in my breast
Which find their own deep echo in your songs.
O Sister of Salma,^{****} the sweetness in your singing
Evokes tears which drown my griefs.
As I detect the flash of desperation in its notes
I perceive my own melody in its heart rending strain.
I see my picture in the mirror of your misery
And read above its frame my own name.
I know my own disgrace from the troubles
And servility inflicted upon you.
Your people have made your beauty an object
To be sold, and my father's sons have sold my
homeland.
Yours have removed every possibility of honor;
Our guardians have become our jailors.

^{**} "A pair of every kind of fruit." Quoted from the Koran.

^{***} Diwan, Collected works.

^{****} Sister of Salma. Gypsies were called «Salma's sisters,»

Listen, girl! Every wink of your eye
Reveals the guilt of your intentions.
The peace of my heart has been disrupted
By two eyes. My God, how black they are!
Neither the district attorney nor Prince Talal
Could protect me from their attraction.

SPRING

By Abai Kunanbayev

Spring came and melted the snow and ice.
The earth was covered in soft velvet.
Freed from winter's hibernation and heartache
all that lives dings with its heart to warmth and light.

The birds fly in and spring entered the blossoming
garden,
and the youths made a racket like fledglings.
The old men rose again as from the grave
and are honestly happy to meet again their friends.

The families hurry to their kinsmen in the nearby
aul:
embraces, exclamations—a happy commotion.
Young laughter is carried on the air in triumph.
The people have shaken off the winter worries.

Sharp cries come from the she-camels and the lambs
bleat in the yard.
Butterflies and birds flutter in the ravines.
Powerful streams burble, wind and flow
under the fixed gaze of trees and flowers.

Swans and geese glide decorously past the banks.
The children rush about searching for birds' nests.
You gallop on your winged horse.
The hawk soars up, its plumage flashing,

you strap the prey to your saddle—
and the girls playfully block your way.

The young girls' costumes are wonderful.
The snowdrops flower and delight the soul.
The sparrows in the sky and the nightingales in the
ravines sing their songs
The cuckoo and thrush echo them from the
mountains.

The trading folk come with new goods.
The peasants get down to reaping.
Everyone is rewarded for their long work and sweat.
The flocks multiply with the new young.

What a wonderful world the Creator has given us!
He magnanimously and generously gave us his light.
When mother-earth fed us from her breast,
our Father in heaven thoughtfully inclined over us.

Your soul trusts in the mercy of Allah,
who has breathed life with spring into the earth.
The cattle have grown fat in the steppe, abundance
descends,
and man's spirits soar, he comes to from the time of
losses.
Everything, except for the black rocks, is warm and
pulses with life.
Everyone is so generous that the skinflints are angry.
You follow the rebirth of the world with rapture—
the soul finds its stronghold in the Creator.

Old women and men go out in the sun, the children
are uproarious.

The herds bask in the sun, glossy and well-fed.

The trill and chirruping of songbirds flows.

The calls of the geese and swans come from the river.

The sunset has faded. The moon and stars triumph.
How could the beams of the stars not pierce the
darkness.

But in anticipation of the return of the sun
they pale and lose their sparkle.

The sun now, like a bridegroom back from its travels,
arranges its bond with the bride-earth.

The stars and moon turn pale as they see
how light-bearing and immortal is this bond.

The warm wind brings the news to the moon and
stars

that the wedding is nigh—the feast is open to all,
that the earth has thrown off its snow-white covering
and beams with a happy smile.

The earth has waited all winter for its beloved sun,
and united with it and slaked its passion:

This is the result of that everlasting passion:
all is in blossom, radiant as the fire-bird.

No one dares to stare straight at the sun,
but they love it and are warmed by its soulful heat.

And I myself saw the sun going into
its gold and purple tent in the evening.

WIND BURIAL

When I leave this world
I'll take my two hands, two feet, and my mouth.
I'll take my dim eyes, too, carefully covering them
with my lids.
But I'd rather leave my ears,
Ears keen to catch the sound of late night rain
As it gives its arm to autumn's shoulder.
Ears that know which autumn tree stands in rain
Only by listening
Will be left.

SHARAVYN SURENJAV

People's Writer of Mongolia, State Prize Winner

1. - Oh heaven!

Why thou stare silently forever?

- It's that looking at fools no ward is available
- Oh stars, why thou blooms only at night?
- It's that girls and young ladies shine at night

2. Why leaves on tree swarm under feet?

Why fish swimming in water is fried on fire?

When occurring time every thing comes in hand

Even paper enlivens and becomes sentence of punishment

3. Today I taste my own share

From the world cup even late

The water nonpoisoned in the spring

Turns medicine in the autumn.

4. It is natural although anemone blooms early

But goes back soon

Though goat eats it

Never becomes anemone

5. So called roasted millet
That is put in the tea will outgrow
Where be placed
Will the heart for you be seen?
6. - Oh river and water, why thou always flows
hurriedly and noisily?
- Sometimes I stop my current and freeze
- Why?
- I intend to give people leisure to think of me
7. - Oh sky birds, where dost thou set
and look at me?
- Thence how is my figure seen like by thy eyes?
- If both of us would change our places
how would be thought by thou?
- Would the seat of human with two feet
suit in the sky cliff?
8. When you are alone you test yourself
And look for it not from outside but inside.
The God is due born in ventricle of your heart but
What will be happened if spider wakes up in the
drop of your blood?
9. Taking mouthfully the top of bush
camel nourishes itself

Comprehending the root of ward
poet is wounded off
The bush has been growing
though it doesn't know to nourish living creature
Man is being happy
though he knows that he made poet swallowed
poison

10. Two pommels of saddle look two directions
But when the owner sits between them they
endeavor for same cause.
Two horns of a goat project two directions
But when it callides with other by forehead they aim
for same thing.

11. Building will fall down one day
After it has been built.
Garment will be worn out one day
After it has been sewed.
Man will perish
After he has been born.
Blue sky stares at them
soundlessly.

12. Vodka drags further
when one thawed little.
As if it seems happy
but it turns torment.
The lion woke up in chest just yesterday but

In the morning it turns mouse
and dies in heart.

14. Is it sin to think of secretly
the lady agreeable in my heart?
Though the spring has passed away and
the autumn comes in
But what is to be done
When fragrance
from the foot of faded grass is smelt.

15. When mind is disappointed the ocean is fidgety.
When heart is flustered the sky is turbid.
When heart loses its norm the world loses its axle.
But the heart-birds sing only in a word.

16. There are snow white mountains in the very
blue sky
There is unexpected thought in empty chest
There are double mountains in rolling mirage
But the human world is such a very naive

18. There is man who thinks that lax livelihood is
right
It is thought that lax livelihood is a freedom
Effect of laxity will be ripened at the end that
The child grown up in laxity will spoil.

19. It is in vain to envy the golden sunlight
The sun shines upon the living world impartially.
It is in vain to pass over in clamping rim of cup
When it goes into mouth, it is the same for even
king and even commoner.

22. Like a flower
That attract butterflies to itself
Also there is a girl
Near by whom men spin round.

25. – It is thought sometimes to feel happiness.
– Did you ever think to feel hardship?
– Not yet.
– Yes it is so indeed
– Do you know how to open the door of happiness?
– Don't know.
– You have better know
– That is opened with the key of suffering.

28. If there are two fellows the one feels relief
 when the other has been fallen down.
Two wise men can't stay in a house.
Party mates tear off us to twenty directions.
I wonder such phenomenon prevails in the world
 or it's only in Mongolia.

29. Thinking of events of young age
I feel ashamed too much.
Judging the events of young age
I feel aversion too many.
But thou meditates them your inner world
Then it is that thou is darted by dawn light.

30. Oh flame inspiring aspiration,
Where dost thou shine?
In the hall of the Great Khural
or in the heart of patriot
No!
A word that restores enthusiasm
Excites ember of my glowing heart.

31. Eyes of a pretty girl and
Star of dark night
Shine in heart
Not been extinguished in blanket.

32. Ocean and ocean, thou billows
But thou rolls up at my heart-coast
Heart and heart, thou billows
But thou pacifies at the seacoast

33. Instead of being a horse with shackles
That hobbles before authority

I wish to be a banner
That was cut up by war bullets

34. Only my sweetheart
Stays beyond three hundred and sixty days
I want to come to her secretly
But I haven't any horse besides my heart

35. Eyes of water deities look at me
 from floor of spring water
When I was a child, seeing the floor of well
 I was afraid of
The mountain peak looks at me
 from deep of steppe
It has told me by its wind
 don't entangle with torney twig
 of little willow

37. It's said friendship is that cloths of same colour
Get together with its design.
It's said friendship is that trees having same roots
Greet each other with their branches.

38. Man who hasn't consciousness to reveal
What treasure hidden inside of the others
Has very weak sensitivity to reveal
What evils are hidden in his own inside

39. If you want to find out a girl from the globe
Who suits everybody's mind
First you will be registered with the claim that
 You shall be a bachelor in your lifetime
Then you would look for her

40. Fellows who put cup of wines
 on table with excitement
Make a noise as bees of golden autumn
When they think of their future
 It seems that
The porcelain of their age has been thrown
 on the stone of rocky road.

41. You can stroke brocade
 but not tear
You can taste wine
 but not be obtained
Beautiful girl can be infatuated
 but not be tested
Star in cosmos can be looked
 but not be grasped

42. Young lady been married with old riches
 has a dream of being widowed
Suffering lady been married with jealous man
 tasts beating
The limited place where goes to and fro
 gets shackles on feel as a yoke

Bed and pillow of the darling world
turns coffin and fence in body

43. When a cat is killed
thousand mice are saved
When the criminal is found out
victimized mass is exonerated
When chief of assault is knocked down
the others disperse and escape
When battlefield is deserted
death bodies retain there

44. Shadow falls on ground
from sky covered with clouds
Chilly waves are amassed in heart
from disturbed mass
When people are crowded
they are worse than animals
When people worship
they are more spacious than steppe

Mufti Jamiluddin Ahmad

OBLIVION

Waterless deserts of human life
Hardly offer anything,
To the travellers of the tribe,
Chained in the earthly ring.

Soul lies buried in conscience
Body is fool's ornament
Man behind a fatal fence
Around which he never went.

Sizeless fears, silent tombs
Of foolish desires, born
In death, of fruitless wombs
Of flowers gathered every morn.

Should I feel the lifeless pulse
Of love's pretensions?
When your hair only curls
To malingering tensions.

Spring has no deathless sway
Only, Autumn's child-play
Table-talk around hotel tray
All's over, as you pay.

Meanings have no meanings,
When dream ends in life
Ending some cherished leanings
Of unconscious strife

"No", neither you, nor I,
Ever knew who were we
Hills echo Shakespearean cry
"What fools these mortals be".

ALL FORECASTS OF TOMORROW

Rays of hope, glimmering sorrow
All forecasts of tomorrow
Indicate the impotency
Of that fruitless necromancy
Which tries to explain
Inexplicable in vain
Satisfying for the moment
As if only to foment
That which is woven in the flesh
ound, like cancer, always fresh.
Yet, man looks ahead of time
As if he could count the chime Rung by the eternal
bell
Which will never tell
What is progress ? What is life? Why at all this strife?
Use of the blunt knife?
Placed in moisture
And petrified.

YOU ASK ME I SHOULD NOT FEEL

You ask me, I should not feel.
Do I dare tell?
That feeling is not circumscribed by thought,
No thought-smith can mould it
In a socket of cold intellect.
It's eternal like the blue of ageless sky
And factual like your indifference.
Had I power to express my feeling
I would have made it headline of newspaper
Would have hurt the first look of the morning-
reader,
Made it the torment of an unexpected earthquake.
I would have made it an eternal object - the thing
in itself.
Would have changed the sensibilities of common
man,
Had shown colour as taste, taste as colour,
Touch as smell, solidity, fragrance of stones.
Would have changed the concept of order,
Coherence, form of an eternal disorder.
But as I cannot do so- now or in the hereafter.
So I'll wait for a waitless day
The moment you will understand me.
Till then I enjoy the joy of misunderstanding
On a floor of artificial roses
Scattered in the hum-drum of your drawing room

The paraphernalia of tasteless taste
Do you enjoy, or is it my hate?

UNKNOWN FACE IN THE DEPTHS OF TIME

Unknown face in the depths of time,
Frowns at smiling beams.
Rays are rendered powerless
In the sunbeam scattering on the window
But who can try to look through
The juggleries of nature.
Those who have kept
Their sojourn on earth
Can they look forward?
We hardly know
But in oblivion.
The answer:
The bee behind the ringing bell
And we are sure of its presence.
The silent sea muttering through
The silent sand at peace today. Even the air has
stopped
It has reached eternal sway
Curiosities of nature baffle us And our thoughts
today.
These are the symbols of human miseries, Symbols
of struggling peace. The curse is very much there
Right in earnest, right in earnest Right in.

COULDN'T CARE LESS

Tension never slept so peacefully
In artist's creation
And neither the brush was blood stained
As if, only a moment ago.
But the cycle revolves.
And eternity is not the problem.
Robots, automatons have nothing
Neither the flesh, nor the blood even
To strike the midnight hour
Or to meet their tryst with destiny.
The slumber vanished only a moment ago
Try if the desert finds fleeting ornament
That was so patiently preserved
In a brownish casket in your ward-robe.
But who cares for what is gone
The last nail in the coffin is important though
Experiment, you said.
In this empirical age, try
Everything once. May be none
Of these mistakes, feeling of a job
Well done. Perhaps falsified
And no more. Couldn't care less?
That is not the question
But something deep, deeper still.
Poetry ought to be personal, they say
And perhaps you have to believe when you lose the
meaning.

A FAINT HOPE

Sand and dust
And the brown crust
Levelling all that has gone
In the lifeless song
Of roaring tornadoes
And cyclones

The city is shattered and sprawling
And the shanty town in yellow smoke
Looks a blazing comet
From the far end is heard another song
To put to an end to all that is wrong.

PHRA JAISURIYA

a Kavya by Sunton Phu

Introduction to Phra Chaisuriya

Phra Chaisuriya, by the great Thai poet Sunton Phu, was composed during the reign of King Rama III at Devadhitaram Temple, where Sunton Phu lived as a monk (ca. 1839-1842 A.D.). The form of this narrative poem indicates that the poet intended it to be used as a primer. Thus, Sunton Phu displays his genius by using only one type of syllable in each section so that children could master one pattern at a time before attempting the next.

Moreover, Phra Chaisuriya is a fascinating narrative with strong moral overtones, an additional teaching device for young readers. However, one suspects that this poem is meant for adults as well : it holds society's ills up to ridicule, a scathing comment on Sunthon Phu's own period. For example, certain rabelaisian passages cannot have been intended for children.

Phra Chaisuriya is written in the traditional Thai versification called Kavya (pronounced "garb"). Three varieties of Kavya are used in various sections of the poem; Yani eleven (corresponding to the number of syllables per verse), Chabang sixteen, and Suranganang twenty-eight. Unfortunately, the original forms of these Kavyas cannot be retained in translation.

PHRA JAISURIYA

a Kavya by Suntorn Phu

I pay my respects to the Three Gems,*
My parents, preceptors, and all the gods
Of the Zodiac. I shall now begin
My poem with open syllables;**
Be it good or bad, withhold your criticism.
I shall tell an interesting story
To entice boys and girls to read and learn.
Once there was a good monarch on earth
Who ruled the fair City of Savathi;***
He was called Phra Jaisuriya,****
And his young queen was called Sumali.*****
His realm was free from adversity,
His nobles were all conscientious,
Merchants who came from faraway lands
Could sojourn safely in the City.
His subjects, laymen and monks alike,
Were quite happy and content in life.
The people cultivated their own land
And harvested abundant rice and wheat.
As time went by, a group of nobles began

* The Three Gems are Lord Buddha, His Dharma, and Sangha.

** Open syllables or Mae Koh Ka are the easiest to learn. A primer usually begins with open syllables which, unfortunately, do not appear in the translation

*** Pronounced sa wa-tee.

**** Pronounced pra hai-su-ree-ya

***** Pronounced su-ma lee.

To seek young and comely girls to play
Sweet melodies in their fine mansions.

Morning and evening they enjoyed Sor* music
And love making. They lavished their wealth
On their wives, and greed distorted their outlook:
They forgot the monks' moral teachings,
And turned to superstitious nonsense;
They were proud of owning many slaves,
Exploiting them and putting them in stocks.
Court cases were chicken and pork** to the judge:
Whoever offered him rice and fish
Would obtain his favour and win the case
Although he should have lost and been condemned
Respecting neither Buddha nor tradition.
Swindlers became prosperous and powerful
While the good were blamed and whipped like
criminals.

Those who were honest and pious were deemed
Blockheads, tortoises, crabs and fish***;
Elders and scholars were looked down upon
As worthless and demented derelicts;
Monks and novices left the holy path
To chant profane verses instead of prayers;
The elders' advice was unheeded,
And insolent bullies were rampant.

(I do not mean to attack the righteous.)

* Sor is one Thai stringed instrument.

** The Thai equivalent of «Bread and butter»

*** Turtles, crabs and fish would correspond to cattle or donkeys i.e stupid people.

In the City of Savathi no one
Showed any pity to anyone;
Harsh, opinionated and selfish,
They grabbed hold of everything they could get;
Those skilled in fighting used their might
To appropriate goods that should have been bought;
They snatched the clothes off one's back and worse.
Courtiers and noblemen were negligent,
They did not discipline their subordinates;
They took oaths of-allegiance but failed
To keep their bond and behave responsibly;
Since many acquired wealth by any means,
The people suffered from deprivation;
Officials beat and blamed them without mercy.
Finally, lorest spirits doomed the City,
They brought death to the inhabitants.»
A great flood inundated the dwellings,
Leaving people stranded and homeless.
Nobles and courtiers, monks and preceptors
Scattered and fled to distant kingdoms;
No one dared remain in the City.

Chabang 16

Phra Jaisuriya took his queen on a junk;
 Abundant food was put on board.
 Young girls, court ladies and noblemen
 Accompanied the king on the ship;
 Sounding the gong, they unfurled the sails
 After the tempest had subsided.
 Sailing along the rapid current,
 They felt isolated day and night
 In the vast expanse of endless water.
 Finding no land, the king and court ladies
 Looked out of the portholes to admire sea creatures:
 Giant carp, dolphin, hammerhead sharks,
 Horseshoe crabs and schools of mackerel.
 The king felt quite lonely and forlorn
 As the ship was blown by the strong wind
 Toward the emptiness of the open sea.
 No land could be sighted to please the eye;
 Finally, twilight passed into evening,
 And the king asked his nobles if they knew
 The length and breadth of the vast ocean.
 One explained the matter to the curious king:
 "This mighty expanse of water flows
 From the cow's throat* and extends far and wide.
 No one refutes this in Pali Scriptures,
 Thus I gather from the elders' account:
 'Once there was a bird as big as a mountain
 By the name of Phya Sambati**
 Who wished to discover the size of the sea.

* A mythical Oefel probably derived from Hinduism.

** Pronounced Sum-pae

He flew on until the sun was setting,
Still not sighting any land at all;
He felt quite discouraged and uncertain;
His precious life was hanging by a thread.
Seeing a fish, he lighted on its head;
Gazing into the distance, Sambati
Humbly begged his forgiveness and asked him
How wide was the sea which he hoped to cross.
The fish answered that he was too young
To journey across the vast ocean,
So he always stayed close to the shore.
The mighty bird, cherishing his life,
Bade the fish farewell and flew straight back
To his lofty abode, so the story goes.»
When the noble finished his narration,
The king understood and felt desolate.
The ship continued to wander aimlessly
Till a tempest tossed the anchor through the sails,
And the hapless junk was completely engulfed;
To make matters worse, sea spirits swarmed
Over the mast and sank the doomed vessel.
The King grasped his beloved queen by the hand,
And using her shawl, lashed themselves together.
The drowning court ladies and noblemen,
Choking and struggling about in the waves,
Were dragged down by crocodiles and sea monsters.*
Weeping, the unfortunate king and queen
Were finally swept by the current to land;
Finding a big banyan tree thick with leaves,
They fell asleep beneath it at nightfall.

* Called Hera, mythical creatures, half crocodile, half snake.

Suranganang 28

I begin new verses with closed syllables Ending with «n».* I shall also make use Of open syllables from time to time. Pity the king sleeping in the forest By the banyan tree in place of the palace.

Queen Sumali paid respect to her lord,
Served him and cared for him as before,
So that he might feel happy and content.
The king invited her to lie down to sleep,
And make do with a log for a pillow.
He taught her to say nightly prayers
To protect her from danger in the forest.
That night the moon was attended by stars,
Earth and sky could be seen distinctly.
In the forest and by the flowing stream,
Flowers bloomed among the branches and leaves.
Evening mists bathed the fragrant blossoms,
The wind carried their perfume far and wide;
Chan and In trees bore sweet-scented fruit,**
Bees swarmed at the (lowers to gather nectar,
When the moon finally descended,
Krawainprai birds*** and wild cockerels
Announced the morn. Forest spirits
Hailed one another from their glens,
The cascades splashed and echoed loudly.
The king awakened far away from the City,

* Closed syllables ending with an «n» sound (Mae Kon) do not appear in the translation.

** Two varieties of sweet smelling fruit

*** A kind of wild bird.

Above the mountain peak: the force of Karma'
Caused him to roam in the deep forest.

Chabang 16

I am using closed syllables ending
With «ng»,** mixed with those ending with «n»
To describe various kinds of trees and plants
In the forest: towering Krai, Krang, Yang.
Yoong trees, Talingpring, Pring, Prayong, Kansong,
Fragrant poppies and Fang, Mango, Pluong,
Plong, Chongnang; their fruit and flowers were
scattered

All over the ground. The king and queen ate
The fruit while walking in the valley.
They saw deer moving by gracefully
Like the lady-in-waiting who carried
The royal sceptre. They saw high mountains
Where flying swans descended side by side,
Loudly singing their melancholy songs.
Klangprai birds sang while cockerels crowed,
Sounding like the soothing palace lullaby,
Golden peacocks' loud cries, an orchestra
Of sounds : gongs, bells and drums, in harmony
With horns, conches, and delicate crescent bells.
There were Kaling, Kaiang, gulls and pheasants,
Swallows, blackbirds, Egong by Tongteng trees.
The golden woodpecker's haunting sound
And the barking deer's call filled the forest.

* Karma is the law that determines the consequences of one's past deeds

** Mae Kong

A throng of strong-jawed Lamangs buried
themselves
In mud, sunned themselves, or stood gazing big-
eyed.
A herd of elephants in the tall forest
Of Yoong and Yang trees trumpeted loudly.
Playing in the water, trunks intertwining.

Yam 11

Closed syllables ending with «k'» describe
How the king and queen suffered hardship
Far away from their kingdom : they ate
Baked sweet potatoes and taro daily
Along with fresh fruit to maintain their strength.
When the setting sun became bright crimson
Like Krang dye behind clouds and mountain peaks,
Monkeys and langurs shrieked while foxes howled.
Gibbons cried mournfully, and budgerigars
Glided back to their respective nests.
The chicks with flapping wings chirped loudly.
Mother birds opened their wings to protect them
And fed the young with food from their beaks.
The king lay on the slope beside the queen,
Caressing her affectionately.
Deprived of her wealth and retainers,
The queen looked weary and despondent;
Feeling sorry for her, the king said:
«Seeing your gentle face in time of need,
My grief has gradually melted away.
In the palace you looked fresh like the moon,
Now you look dejected and begrimed:

My friend in happiness and in sorrow.
I will cherish and protect you always.
Do not remain sad, light of my life,
Lest your lovely face should lose its lustre»
Gently, he roused her to sensual pleasure,
Kissed her sweet-scented body.
Fragrant as lingering perfume from flowers.
They fondled each other so tenderly
That their heavy hearts were comforted.

Yam 11

Now I use closed syllables ending with «t»^{*}
To describe the «miracle act»^{**} of love :
In response, great mountains thundered and echoed.
Birds turned upside-down and fell out of their nests.
All creatures were still drowsy with sleep.
The earth resounded like a roaring fire,
Cottages and houses swayed to and fro,
In dwellings on canals big and small.
Frightened people jumped into the water,
Some woke up friends and shouted warnings;
They leapt about, running into each other.
An orchestra of xylophones, gongs and drums
Played melodious songs all by themselves,
Brazen bells pealed eerily in deep tones;
Nobles got up and ran, with ladies clinging,
They entangled themselves and stumbled.
Monks emerged from their cells and ran away,

* Mae Kong

** Conventionally in Thai literature the sex act is described as having a sympathetic and nature and the community

Taking novices by the hand;
 The head nun fled from the head monk,
 Jumped into the mud and leapt out again,
 Temple dwellers found themselves in houses,
 Bald heads bumped into one another,
 Trees swayed back and forth in the wind,
 Monkeys and langurs jumped and somersaulted,
 Spirits that shaped the baby were busy
 Placing the nose and eyes on the baby's face,
 While the couple enjoyed their love making.
 Unable to make the baby fast enough,
 The spirits became greatly annoyed.
 The love making shook the four elements;
 By morning, they were so exhausted
 That they could hardly walk and felt sad.

Yam 11

Now I use close syllables ending with «p»,^{*}
 As I have finished those ending with «t».
 A holy man was contemplating the fire,
 Serenely sitting at the foot of a tree
 Seeking well-being and eternal truth;
 He closed his eyes and leaned against a rock
 As if he were in a long deep sleep.
 He maintained religious vows and attained
 The highest knowledge** and enlightenment.
 He meditated and saw the whole world,

* Mae Kong

** Apinna or the six forms of highest knowledge, means the attainment of extraordinary powers we performance of m-acies we ability to comprehend all sound, ail sight, the capacity to read thought, the remembrance of one 5 past ims. and denial of the senses.

The entire universe, the highest heaven,
He understood the nature of creation.
He meditated in a fixed posture
For months; he fasted and lived blissfully
On air alone through all the months and years.
After the earthquake and great commotion
He contemplated and recognized
The four deadly sins of Savathi.
The moral tradition was reversed
Good deeds were denounced while wicked men
Flourished and oppressed the honest and truthful,
Students rebelled against their teachers,
Children were ungrateful to their parents,
And people were at each other's throat;
Their unnatural cravings drove them
To exploitation and murder. Men and women
Were greedy for profit and sinned without shame;
They made false accusations out of spite.
These evils upset the centre of the earth,
And darkened the sky, causing all creatures
To suffer calamity as punishment;
The Traita Age* was coming to an end.

Chabang 16

Now I use closed syllables ending with «m»***
The holy man had pity on the king
Who once ruled the City of Savathi.
This honest king was misled by his nobles,

* Age or Kalpa according to the traditional belief derived from India, seems like eternity. At the end of each life will consume the world. The god Brahma will then create a new world.

*** Mae Kong

Who were deceitful and totally corrupt,
Thus his city sank under water.
Wishing to enlighten the monarch,
The holy man sat quite still and focused
On bestowing good will upon the king.
His words were melodious as Indra's lute:^{*}
«Death will surely come one day to those Who
exploit, defame and cheat others;
Their sinful deeds will cause them to suffer Eternally
through all ages to come.
Those who are kind and compassionate
Will attain heaven and bliss forever.
Worldly wealth of mortals and Garudas^{**}
Will eventually be dissipated,
Whereas heavenly riches will increase.
One finds great joy and bliss in paradise; Served by
lovely maidens, none feels hunger. Music from lute
and Sor^{***} accompany
Songs sung sweetly by heavenly damsels. The power
of your former good deeds
Will make each and every wish come true; Verily,
believers of the holy path,
If you pray and meditate daily,
You will attain heaven in you next life.» Finishing
his sermon, the holy man
Glided through the clouds beyond their sight.

* Indra is the chief god of early Hinduism (Brahmanism)

** A creature half bird half man. possessing great power, especially over Nagas (snakes) in Hindu mythology

*** Vishnu rides on a Garuda 30 S

Chabang 76

Now I use closed syllables ending with «y»*

Alter listening to the divine words.

The king and queen were convinced and inspired

They saw the harm of worldly attachment

And decide to sever the devils noose,

They attained bliss and spiritual love

The couple donned habits of tiger skin**

And wore the pleated hermit's headpiece.

And began a life of austerity.

Morning and evening they performed rituals,

They tended the perpetual sacred fire,

The ground became their bed, logs their pillow,

They swept their dwelling clean night and day;

Striving hard to learn and practice dharma.***

They attained the highest good on earth;

And alter death, they ascended to heaven

To live the life of bliss eternally

Throughout the endless age of Buddhahood.****

Sunthon Phu composes these fine verses

For teaching young children to learn to read

The pattern of open and closed syllables

Which little ones should try to master well.

Be careful, dear children; fear your teacher

Who may indeed punish you with the cane.

I had the experience of being whipped:

The cane made the skin smart, and the pinch

Made it black and blue, so don't play truant

* Mae Kong

** Tiger skin is the traditional garment for hermits

*** Religious precepts

**** The Age of Buddhahood is believed to be eternal

But heed my warning, given for your own good
So that you may perceive the difference
Between sin and merit from these lessons;
I offer this advice for your sake.
By the Good Grace of His Majesty,
Whoever sees merit in this work,
Please give me my due.

Orhan Veli Kanik

I AM LISTENING TO ISTANBUL

I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed:
At first there is a gentle breeze
And the leaves on the trees
Softly sway;
Out there, far away,
The bells of water-carriers unceasingly ring;
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed;
Then suddenly birds fly by,
Flocks or birds, high up, with a hue and cry,
While the nuts are drawn in the fishing grounds
And it woman's feet begin to dabble in the water,
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed..
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.
The Grand Bazaar's serene and cool,
An uproar at the hub of the Market,
Mosque yards are full of pigeons.
While hammers bang arid clang at the docks
Spring winds bear the smell of sweat;
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed;
Still giddy from the revelries of the past,
A seaside mansion with dingy boat houses is fast
asleep.

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I am Listening to Istanbul

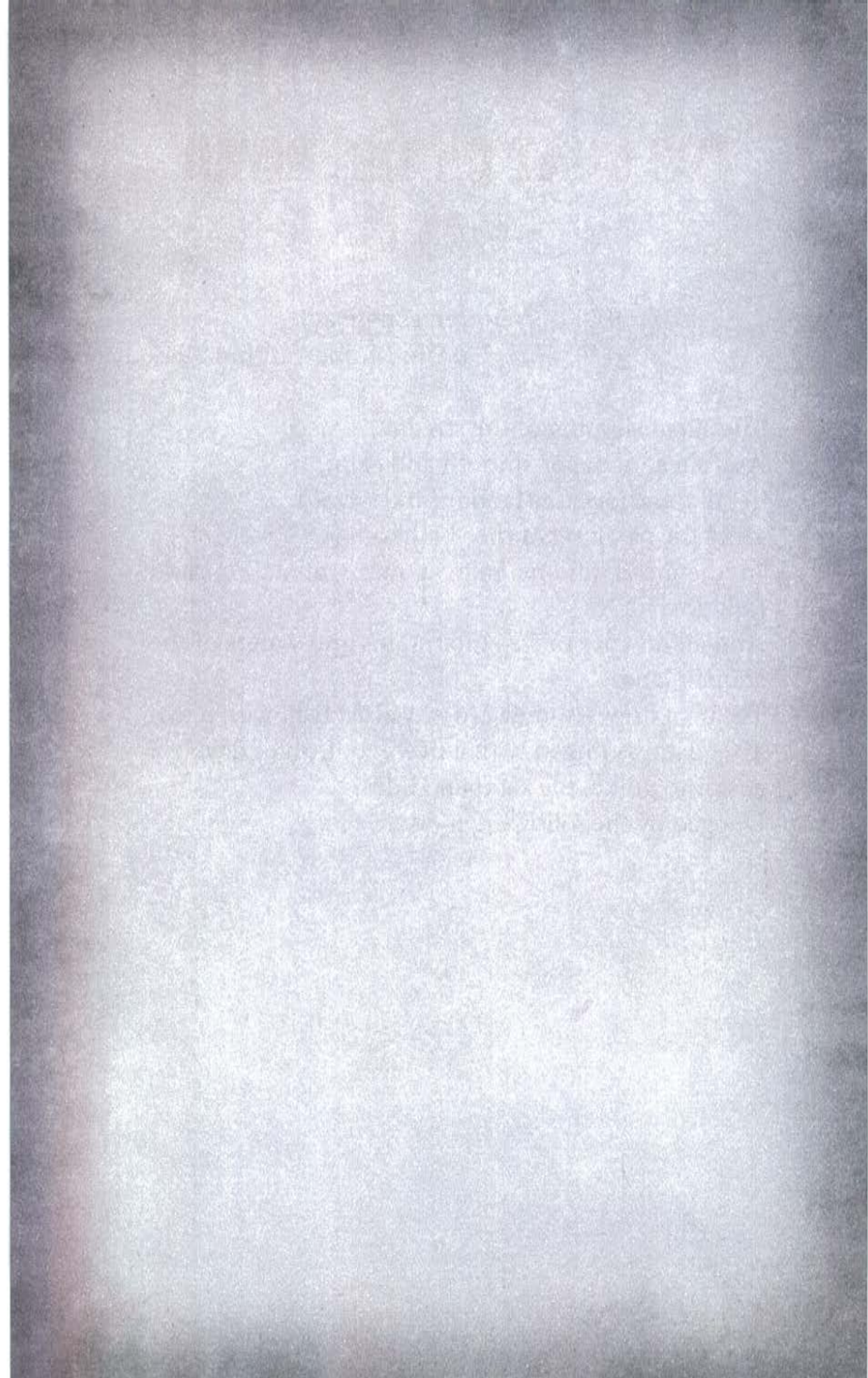
Amid the din and drone of southern winds, reposed,
I mi listening, to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.
A pretty girl walks by on the sidewalk:
Four-letter words, whistles and songs, rude remarks;
Something falls out of her hand-
It's a rose, I guess,
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.
A bird flutters round your skirt;
On your brow, is there sweat? Or not? I know:
Are your lips wet? Or not? I know:
A silver moon rises beyond the pine trees:
I can sense it all in your heart's throbbing.
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.

THE BOAT ON THE RIVER DAY

(Đi thuyền trên sông Đáy)

Ho Chi Minh, Autumn 1949

The silent slipping of the stream
As a sheet of paper smooth and calm,
To all four horizons land infinitely void.
Only the creaking of thee bamboo oar.
In the head of one man a maze of a thousand
thoughts
And all his care to free mountains and waters of the
ancient land.
The boat draws homeward, sky already lit with dawn
The vastness tinged with a new red flush of day.
A star to guide, the sampan glides.
Dogged by the following moon.



STORIES

STORIES

VEASNA AND AVORNG

According to my father, he had heard this short story from my grandfather when he was 10 years old. He often narrated this short story to the next generations. Afterwards, his grandson edited the story as follows:

Veasna was an eleven years old boy. His father was a teacher, and his mother worked in a textile factory. Veasna did not like studying, even though his father advised and reminded him all the time. In the class, Veasna received the lowest score out of all his classmates and in all subjects. His closest friends were a slingshot and gravel. Hunting and killing the birds were his favorite subjects, which did not exist in the school's program. Veasna created it for himself.

One day, Veasna climbed on a mango tree and took a baby sarikake* from its nest. He also killed the baby sarikakeo's mother, who was flying around in circles to protect its baby. Veasna's father learned of this event. He blamed and forced Veasna to release the baby sarikakeo. However, this was a futile order because Veasna's mother often spoiled him, so he did as he wished. Veasna begged his mother for money to buy a nice, small cage to put the baby sarikakeo. Everyday, Veasna fed his baby sarikakeo various foods, such as ripe peppers.

Soon after, the baby sarikakeo grew into a

* A kind of black bird with short yellow beak, that can repeat human's words

beautiful sarikakeo male. It had lovely shiny color, and furthermore, it could skillfully repeat after humans. Veasna named his sarikakeo, Avorng. When Veasna called his name, Avorng! Avorng! the sarikakeo often replied him: Veasna! Veasna!

Since she regularly overheard Veasna and Avorng chatting everyday about funny stories, Veasna's mother loved him more and more. So he became even more immodest and careless with his study. His father worried more and more, but he remained quiet because he was too busy and wanted to avoid any dispute in the family.

One evening, after he heard the sound of the bell, Veasna immediately left his class. He pulled a slingshot out from the bag and walked toward near a concrete house. Veasna saw a couple of doves, perched on the branch of coconut tree, which was bending toward the window of the house. Veasna walked slowly and noiselessly, grabbing gravel and putting it into a slingshot. He slowly took out the slingshot tightly, looking at and hunting the dove. Suddenly, there was sound, Phlsp! BrSv! Oy! Help! Burglar! Burglar! The gravel sliced through the air and crashed into the window, causing the pieces of glass to scatter all over the ground. Veasna was surprised. Through the broken window, Veasna saw a girl covering her mouth with her hands, crying as blood flowed from her hands. A person jumped rapidly down to the ground from the back door and ran quickly, crashing Veasna, who was stunned. Veasna fell backwards and rolled to the base of a

coconut tree. Without paying attention to Veasna, the person hurriedly jumped over a wire fence. At the same time, the parents, relatives and neighbors of the victim shouted alarmingly, "Burglar! Burglar! Surround! Surround!" Seeing hectic situation, Veasna rushed to stand up and escaped down the same road where the burglar ran across. Veasna tried to run quickly and speedily; unfortunately everybody clearly saw him. Two hours later, in the late evening, Veasna was arrested and sent to a small jail, waiting for interrogation.

The teacher, who was Veasna's father, heard of this distasteful happening from Veasna's mother. As she sobbed, she told him: "Veasna was arrested; he was accused of robbing a gold necklace. He also injured the girl's head by crashing her into the window". Unlike his wife, who was frightened, Veasna's father was smiling perplexingly.

Five days later, the justice was found. The interrogation was finished because the real burglar was found and arrested. Veasna, whose only fault was breaking a window and fleeing at the same direction as the real burglar, was released to return home. Because they missed each other so much and were overjoyed at the sight of each other, Veasna and his mother embraced each other, sobbing.

After having dinner, the sun's rays were of an attractive golden color. The gently blowing winds made it seem as though all living beings, including birds and animals, lived in harmony. The three members, Veasna and his parents, were sitting

and chatting at the veranda in front of their house, including Avorng. Veasna, crying, described his frightening experience to his parents. As he spoke, he grew teary-eyed and looked pitiful. Avorng, who was listening carefully and hearing all the words, started speaking to its owner:

Veasna! Veasna! You were just in jail for five days and you claimed that it was difficult. How about me, I have been in that cage for months and years, how miserable I am? Veasna! I have lived in here without freedom; I am eager for freedom like other birds. This cage is not different from jail, where you spent your last five days. Please pity me and release me! I will live around here and near you forever.

After hearing Avorng's speech, Veasna became suddenly aware of his plight and quickly opened the cage's door. Soon, after the door opened, Avorng flew toward in the high sky. Flapping his wings happily, he flew around the house many times. It sounded and laughed happily.

In our world, there are many words to express happiness. However, at that moment, Avorng was unable to find any words to show its joy of being free of his cage, as his owner, Veasna, was also free. Both experienced the joy of finding something they once thought lost. The sarikakeo flew and savored his freedom with a boundless bliss, which we could not describe. Then, it flew down to his owner.

Three days later, a female sarikakeo has seen, flying with Avorng. That female sarikakeo hesitated to fly into the Avorng's house; it stayed, perched

on the branch of the tree near the window. Veasna understood and asked Avorng,

- Why do not you invite her to come down?
 - Because she is afraid, that human beings will harm her (Avorng answered)
 - No problem, invite her! I will not threat you!
- (Veasna replied)

Hearing the boy's words, his father, who was checking students' assignments, was excited and unconsciously stood up. He secretly smiled again, but at this time, his smile was full of optimism. He talked to his son:

"Veasna, My dear son, From now on, study harder, stop playing too much, stop hunting birds... Parents love a good student and a good child"

Immediately, after hearing his dad, Veasna ran and tightly embraced his mother with a strong feeling of contentment and admitted his past faults.

By KIM PICHPINUN

Short Story by Rabindranath Tagore

Cabuliwallah [The Fruitseller from Cabul]

My five years' old daughter Mini cannot live without chattering. I really believe that in all her life she has not wasted a minute in silence. Her mother is often vexed at this, and would stop her prattle, but I would not. To see Mini quiet is unnatural, and I cannot bear it long. And so my own talk with her is always lively.

One morning, for instance, when I was in the midst of the seventeenth chapter of my new novel, my little Mini stole into the room, and putting her hand into mine, said: "Father! Ramdayal the door-keeper calls a crow a krow! He doesn't know anything, does he?"

Before I could explain to her the differences of language in this world, she was embarked on the full tide of another subject. "What do you think, Father? Bhola says there is an elephant in the clouds, blowing water out of his trunk, and that is why it rains!"

And then, darting off anew, while I sat still making ready some reply to this last saying, "Father! what relation is Mother to you?"

"My dear little sister in the law!" I murmured involuntarily to myself, but with a grave face contrived to answer: "Go and play with Bhola, Mini! I am busy!"

The window of my room overlooks the road. The child had seated herself at my feet near my table, and was playing softly, drumming on her knees. I was hard at work on my seventeenth chapter, where Protrap Singh, the hero, had just caught Kanchanlata, the heroine, in his arms, and was about to escape with her by the third story window of the castle, when all of a sudden Mini left her play, and ran to the window, crying, "A Cabuliwallah! a Cabuliwallah!" Sure enough in the street below was a Cabuliwallah, passing slowly along. He wore the loose soiled clothing of his people, with a tall turban; there was a bag on his back, and he carried boxes of grapes in his hand.

I cannot tell what were my daughter's feelings at the sight of this man, but she began to call him loudly. "Ah!" I thought, "he will come in, and my seventeenth chapter will never be finished!" At which exact moment the Cabuliwallah turned, and looked up at the child. When she saw this, overcome by terror, she fled to her mother's protection, and disappeared. She had a blind belief that inside the bag, which the big man carried, there were perhaps two or three other children like herself. The pedlar meanwhile entered my doorway, and greeted me with a smiling face.

So precarious was the position of my hero and my heroine, that my first impulse was to stop and buy something, since the man had been called. I made some small purchases, and a conversation began about Abdurrahman, the Russians, the English, and the Frontier Policy.

As he was about to leave, he asked: "And where is the little girl, sir?"

And I, thinking that Mini must get rid of her false fear, had her brought out.

She stood by my chair, and looked at the Cabuliwallah and his bag. He offered her nuts and raisins, but she would not be tempted, and only clung the closer to me, with all her doubts increased.

This was their first meeting.

One morning, however, not many days later, as I was leaving the house, I was startled to find Mini, seated on a bench near the door, laughing and talking, with the great Cabuliwallah at her feet. In all her life, it appeared; my small daughter had never found so patient a listener, save her father. And already the corner of her little sari was stuffed with almonds and raisins, the gift of her visitor, "Why did you give her those?" I said, and taking out an eight-anna bit, I handed it to him. The man accepted the money without demur, and slipped it into his pocket.

Alas, on my return an hour later, I found the unfortunate coin had made twice its own worth of trouble! For the Cabuliwallah had given it to Mini, and her mother catching sight of the bright round object, had pounced on the child with: "Where did you get that eight-anna bit?"

"The Cabuliwallah gave it me," said Mini cheerfully.

"The Cabuliwallah gave it you!" cried her mother much shocked. "Oh, Mini! how could you take it from him?"

I, entering at the moment, saved her from impending disaster, and proceeded to make my own inquiries.

It was not the first or second time, I found, that the two had met. The Cabuliwallah had overcome the child's first terror by a judicious bribery of nuts and almonds, and the two were now great friends.

They had many quaint jokes, which afforded them much amusement. Seated in front of him, looking down on his gigantic frame in all her tiny dignity, Mini would ripple her face with laughter, and begin: "O Cabuliwallah, Cabuliwallah, what have you got in your bag?"

And he would reply, in the nasal accents of the mountaineer: "An elephant!" Not much cause for merriment, perhaps; but how they both enjoyed the witticism! And for me, this child's talk with a grown-up man had always in it something strangely fascinating.

Then the Cabuliwallah, not to be behindhand, would take his turn: "Well, little one, and when are you going to the father-in-law's house?"

Now most small Bengali maidens have heard long ago about the father-in-law's house; but we, being a little new-fangled, had kept these things from our child, and Mini at this question must have been a trifle bewildered. But she would not show it, and with ready tact replied: "Are you going there?"

Amongst men of the Cabuliwallah's class, however, it is well known that the words father-in-law's house have a double meaning. It is a euphemism

for jail, the place where we are well cared for, at no expense to ourselves. In this sense would the sturdy pedlar take my daughter's question. "Ah," he would say, shaking his fist at an invisible policeman, "I will thrash my father-in-law!" Hearing this, and picturing the poor discomfited relative, Mini would go off into peals of laughter, in which her formidable friend would join.

These were autumn mornings, the very time of year when kings of old went forth to conquest; and I, never stirring from my little corner in Calcutta, would let my mind wander over the whole world. At the very name of another country, my heart would go out to it, and at the sight of a foreigner in the streets, I would fall to weaving a network of dreams, --the mountains, the glens, and the forests of his distant home, with his cottage in its setting, and the free and independent life of far-away wilds. Perhaps the scenes of travel conjure themselves up before me, and pass and repass in my imagination all the more vividly, because I lead such a vegetable existence, that a call to travel would fall upon me like a thunderbolt. In the presence of this Cabuliwallah, I was immediately transported to the foot of arid mountain peaks, with narrow little defiles twisting in and out amongst their towering heights. I could see the string of camels bearing the merchandise, and the company of turbaned merchants, carrying some of their queer old firearms, and some of their spears, journeying downward towards the plains. I could see--but at some such point Mini's mother

would intervene, imploring me to "beware of that man."

Mini's mother is unfortunately a very timid lady. Whenever she hears a noise in the street, or sees people coming towards the house, she always jumps to the conclusion that they are either thieves, or drunkards, or snakes, or tigers, or malaria or cockroaches, or caterpillars, or an English sailor. Even after all these years of experience, she is not able to overcome her terror. So she was full of doubts about the Cabuliwallah, and used to beg me to keep a watchful eye on him.

I tried to laugh her fear gently away, but then she would turn round on me seriously, and ask me solemn questions.

Were children never kidnapped?

Was it, then, not true that there was slavery in Cabul?

Was it so very absurd that this big man should be able to carry off a tiny child?

I urged that, though not impossible, it was highly improbable. But this was not enough, and her dread persisted. As it was indefinite, however, it did not seem right to forbid the man the house, and the intimacy went on unchecked.

Once a year in the middle of January Rahmun, the Cabuliwallah, was in the habit of returning to his country, and as the time approached he would be very busy, going from house to house collecting his debts. This year, however, he could always find time to come and see Mini. It would have seemed to

an outsider that there was some conspiracy between the two, for when he could not come in the morning, he would appear in the evening.

Even to me it was a little startling now and then, in the corner of a dark room, suddenly to surprise this tall, loose-garmented, much bebagged man; but when Mini would run in smiling, with her, "O! Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!" and the two friends, so far apart in age, would subside into their old laughter and their old jokes, I felt reassured.

One morning, a few days before he had made up his mind to go, I was correcting my proof sheets in my study. It was chilly weather. Through the window the rays of the sun touched my feet, and the slight warmth was very welcome. It was almost eight o'clock, and the early pedestrians were returning home, with their heads covered. All at once, I heard an uproar in the street, and, looking out, saw Rahmun being led away bound between two policemen, and behind them a crowd of curious boys. There were blood-stains on the clothes of the Cabuliwallah, and one of the policemen carried a knife. Hurrying out, I stopped them, and enquired what it all meant. Partly from one, partly from another, I gathered that a certain neighbour had owed the pedlar something for a Rampuri shawl, but had falsely denied having bought it, and that in the course of the quarrel, Rahmun had struck him. Now in the heat of his excitement, the prisoner began calling his enemy all sorts of names, when suddenly in a verandah of my house appeared my little Mini, with her usual

exclamation: "O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!" Rahmun's face lighted up as he turned to her. He had no bag under his arm today, so she could not discuss the elephant with him. She at once therefore proceeded to the next question: "Are you going to the father-in-law's house?" Rahmun laughed and said: "Just where I am going, little one!" Then seeing that the reply did not amuse the child, he held up his fettered hands. "Ali," he said, "I would have thrashed that old father-in-law, but my hands are bound!"

On a charge of murderous assault, Rahmun was sentenced to some years' imprisonment.

Time passed away, and he was not remembered. The accustomed work in the accustomed place was ours, and the thought of the once-free mountaineer spending his years in prison seldom or never occurred to us. Even my light-hearted Mini, I am ashamed to say, forgot her old friend. New companions filled her life. As she grew older, she spent more of her time with girls. So much time indeed did she spend with them that she came no more, as she used to do, to her father's room. I was scarcely on speaking terms with her.

Years had passed away. It was once more autumn and we had made arrangements for our Mini's marriage. It was to take place during the Puja Holidays. With Durga returning to Kailas, the light of our home also was to depart to her husband's house, and leave her father's in the shadow.

The morning was bright. After the rains, there

was a sense of ablution in the air, and the sun-rays looked like pure gold. So bright were they that they gave a beautiful radiance even to the sordid brick walls of our Calcutta lanes. Since early dawn to-day the wedding-pipes had been sounding, and at each beat my own heart throbbed. The wail of the tune, Bhairavi, seemed to intensify my pain at the approaching separation. My Mini was to be married to-night.

From early morning noise and bustle had pervaded the house. In the courtyard the canopy had to be slung on its bamboo poles; the chandeliers with their tinkling sound must be hung in each room and verandah. There was no end of hurry and excitement. I was sitting in my study, looking through the accounts, when some one entered, saluting respectfully, and stood before me. It was Rahmun the Cabuliwallah. At first I did not recognise him. He had no bag, nor the long hair, nor the same vigour that he used to have. But he smiled, and I knew him again.

"When did you come, Rahmun?" I asked him.

"Last evening," he said, "I was released from jail."

The words struck harsh upon my ears. I had never before talked with one who had wounded his fellow, and my heart shrank within itself, when I realised this, for I felt that the day would have been better-omened had he not turned up.

"There are ceremonies going on," I said, "and I am busy. Could you perhaps come another day?"

At once he turned to go; but as he reached the

door he hesitated, and said: "May I not see the little one, sir, for a moment?" It was his belief that Mini was still the same. He had pictured her running to him as she used, calling "O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!" He had imagined too that they would laugh and talk together, just as of old. In fact, in memory of former days he had brought, carefully wrapped up in paper, a few almonds and raisins and grapes, obtained somehow from a countryman, for his own little fund was dispersed.

I said again: "There is a ceremony in the house, and you will not be able to see any one to-day."

The man's face fell. He looked wistfully at me for a moment, said "Good morning," and went out. I felt a little sorry, and would have called him back, but I found he was returning of his own accord. He came close up to me holding out his offerings and said: "I brought these few things, sir, for the little one. Will you give them to her?"

I took them and was going to pay him, but he caught my hand and said: "You are very kind, sir! Keep me in your recollection. Do not offer me money!--You have a little girl, I too have one like her in my own home. I think of her, and bring fruits to your child, not to make a profit for myself."

Saying this, he put his hand inside his big loose robe, and brought out a small and dirty piece of paper. With great care he unfolded this, and smoothed it out with both hands on my table. It bore the impression of a little band. Not a photograph. Not a drawing. The impression of an ink-smear

hand laid flat on the paper. This touch of his own little daughter had been always on his heart, as he had come year after year to Calcutta, to sell his wares in the streets.

Tears came to my eyes. I forgot that he was a poor Cabuli fruit-seller, while I was--but no, what was I more than he? He also was a father. That impression of the hand of his little Parbati in her distant mountain home reminded me of my own little Mini.

I sent for Mini immediately from the inner apartment. Many difficulties were raised, but I would not listen. Clad in the red silk of her wedding-day, with the sandal paste on her forehead, and adorned as a young bride, Mini came, and stood bashfully before me.

The Cabuliwallah looked a little staggered at the apparition. He could not revive their old friendship. At last he smiled and said: "Little one, are you going to your father-in-law's house?"

But Mini now understood the meaning of the word "father-in-law," and she could not reply to him as of old. She flushed up at the question, and stood before him with her bride-like face turned down.

I remembered the day when the Cabuliwallah and my Mini had first met, and I felt sad. When she had gone, Rahmun heaved a deep sigh, and sat down on the floor. The idea had suddenly come to him that his daughter too must have grown in this long time, and that he would have to make friends with her anew. Assuredly he would not find her, as

he used to know her. And besides, what might not have happened to her in these eight years?

The marriage-pipes sounded, and the mild autumn sun streamed round us. But Rahmun sat in the little Calcutta lane, and saw before him the barren mountains of Afghanistan.

I took out a bank-note, and gave it to him, saying: "Go back to your own daughter, Rahmun, in your own country, and may the happiness of your meeting bring good fortune to my child!"

Having made this present, I had to curtail some of the festivities. I could not have the electric lights I had intended, nor the military band, and the ladies of the house were despondent at it. But to me the wedding feast was all the brighter for the thought that in a distant land a long-lost father met again with his only child.

-THE END-

A Tale by Mowlana

Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi, also known as Mowlavi, Molana or Rumi, was a 13th-century Persian poet, theologian, and mystic. He was born in Balkh, which is a city in today's Afghanistan. After migrating to Konya in present day Turkey, he lived most of his life there. Mowlana's birthplace and native language are indications suggesting the existence of a strong Persian heritage. His works are written in Farsi.

Masnavi-e-Manavi is one of Mowlana's major books and a significant work of Persian Literature. It is a symbol for the literature and cultural heritage of the Middle East and the Central and South Asia. Comprising six volumes of poems that amount to more than 60,000 lines, Masnavi-e-Manavi sails through 424 stories charishing that emphasize human virtue and spiritual insight. The following is a tale abridged from a poem in Masnavi-e-Manavi.

The Merchant and the Parrot

A merchant had a beautiful parrot. Once, he intended to travel to India, "what souvenir would you like me to bring back for you" asked the merchant. The parrot replied, "When you see the parrots there, give them my greetings and ask them if it is fair that they live freely and happily among trees while I am exiled to a cage here."

The merchant promised to take this message to the parrots and set out on his journey. Arriving in India, he saw some parrots there. He told them what his parrot had asked. Suddenly, one of the parrots fell trembling to the ground and died. The man regretted what he had done to the poor bird and told himself that he should have given it a thought before telling them his parrot's message.

When the merchant returned home, his parrot asked what he had seen and heard there. The merchant sadly revealed what had happened. Once the parrot heard the story, she also trembled and fell to the ground, looking stiff as a rock. The merchant screamed out of agony and sorrow for having caused the death of his beautiful bird. He mourned for a while. Later, hopeless of detecting any sign of life in the parrot, he removed the dead bird from the cage. In an instant, the parrot flew up to a tree.

Astonished and speechless, he exclaimed, "O bird! Explain yourself so that I can understand what happened. What did you learn to deceive and hurt me?" "By pretending to be dead, the bird in India sent me the message that if I want to be rescued from the cage, I have to do the same!" replied the parrot.

"It was my voice and feather which kept me a prisoner. When I gave up people's admiration and died, I was finally able to be free from the cage. As long as your soul is attached to your worldly body, it is caged. If you want to set yourself free from the prison of material life, you need to break your false

sense of yourself. If you trust god in this journey, he will support you.”

The merchant learned an important lesson from the parrot. He bade her a fond farewell and as she flew away, he thought to himself that his soul was not less capable than the little bird.

The Arrival

Author: Hasan Musa

Translated from Arabic by: Riyadh Lafta

Long time ago, the birds increased considerably in number that confusion and conflicts prevailed. The weak birds and their kids became preys to the strongest birds.

There was no chief for the birds to regulate their affairs and to solve their problems and there was no (Marja') reference who could work as a judge or as an arbitrator.

The conditions of the birds got worse and worse that they could no longer bear, therefore the need for a chief was so intense that it couldn't be postponed. Consequently, they met to discuss that issue.

The meeting was so big. True, the sounds of cawing, croaking, hooting, chirping and other sounds were so loud. True, the period of the meeting was very long and some skirmishes occurred among the birds of the nibbed beaks and the wide beaks.

All that was fearful, but the most fearful was that the meeting would end without finding a solution to their formidable problem. Of course, the ravenous birds were not satisfied with such a meeting, as they were aware that the existence of a powerful chief would deprive them of devouring the weak birds. So they never agreed to the idea of appointing a chief for the birds. But in such a huge meeting, they couldn't declare that openly.

The sounds of croaking, chirping and other sounds were heard after night. The other creatures, that were not birds, came to watch the big meeting.

The birds assembled on the coast of a big ocean. Some of them were agilely swimming in the periods of break and some others trying to catch fish. The sea gull rode the blue water, the ducks, the swans and other birds were swimming calmly, while the hens and the birds that couldn't swim were standing to watch and cackle.

This offered no solution to the problem. In fact, no one knew how to solve the problem of selecting a chief for the birds that eat each other. Finally, a sound was heard, a sound whose source can't be determined.

"The one who crosses the ocean will be the chief" The birds turned, searching for the source of the sound. "The one who crosses the ocean will be the chief". Soon, grumbling, whispering and mumbling prevailed. "The ocean is wide, wide, wide".

The sounds became audible. The issue was debatable. The birds were divided into two groups, agreeing and disagreeing, till a sound said:

"What if more than one crossed the ocean?"

Another sound answered:

"Who crosses first, will be the chief"

The birds discussed the idea

"Who crosses first ...?"

All the birds wonder. It is another problem, indeed. What about the birds that couldn't fly as hens and the birds with strong wings like falcons

and eagles. It's a fearful issue, what if a carnivorous bird crossed the ocean before the others? The wise man said: "They who betray can not confront the others".

The carnivorous birds are betrayers. They can't cross the ocean. The ocean is large and wide, the ocean is confrontation.

The birds were silent for a long time, It was a very long time, indeed. Then all of them without exception advanced, to the water till stopping at the divisive line between water and land. They looked at the blue ocean. It was an extended sea. Some of the birds wondered:

"Has such a wide ocean another coast like this one?"

Most birds were aware that this wide blue water had a coast in the other side.

A group of birds said:

"The ocean is long and wide, we can't cross it"

Another group said:

"Let the bird who can fly, cross the ocean, and who arrives first, we will accept him as our chief" While the birds were busy talking about who can fly and who can't, a loud laugh was heard from the non-bird creatures.

"Ha .. Ha .. Ha.., you are mad, the birds are community of the mad".

All birds turned to the source of the sound. Who dared to accuse the birds of madness?

The birds were amazed when they saw a grey rabbit sitting under a thorny bush, the falcon would

not let this golden opportunity to use his nibbed, crooked and sharp beak and his claw go. He tried to attack and devour the small, grey rabbit who chose not to leave the thorny bush. The wise duck came between them and said to the falcon:

“Wait”

Then she turned to the rabbit saying:

“Did you say we are mad?”

The rabbit said:

“Yes, mad, without brains”

The falcon became frenzy, again the duck made a sign to the falcon to wait and calmly asked the rabbit:

“O rabbit, why did you accuse the birds of madness?”

The rabbit answered:

“You want to cross the ocean, ha..., ha..., ha...,

“What is laughable in that?”

The rabbit said:

“Yes, give me quantity of carrot and I will say to you”

The birds flew in all directions, after moments they came back with quantity of carrot, accumulating it near the thorny bush saying:

“Here is the carrot, now tell us why did you laugh?”

The rabbit said:

“Yea, yea, great, carrot, sweet, yes, I will tell you”

The birds were silent awaiting what would the rabbit say ...

This small grey rabbit that sits under the thorny

bush might say things that the birds never thought of.

The rabbit said to the birds:

“Can you see the remote coast of the ocean?”

The birds said: “No”

The rabbit said:

“Then, how will you know which bird will arrive there first?”

Again, the birds found themselves facing a new problem.

Who will tell them about the bird that will arrive first?

They thought of the creatures that can convey the news to them, but they find no one that was able to perform such a task.

Even the air can't convey the news, as it moves towards the south, so it can't come back to convey the news, unless changing its direction. But only the king of wind can take such a decision.

Poor birds! Again they looked perplexed, painful. They kept chirping, hooting, cackling or producing other sounds, till a sound came:

“The ocean is the arbitrator”

The birds rose their heads as they heard another sound:

“Yes, it is the ocean that conveys the news to us”.

The ocean was listening to the chat of birds. When he knows that they want to cross him, he wanted to laugh, but he was afraid that his foam would sink the coast wherein the birds assembled:

Now, as he heard that the birds had selected him

as an arbitrator, he decided to cooperate with them. He was sure that they were serious in their attempt to cross. But as he wants to be frank wit them, he decided to tell them something. In a roaring voice, thus he spoke:

“O birrrrds ...”

Thus, the ocean began his speech. In the beginning the birds were horrified, but they showed great composure and listened carefully, as the ocean resumed his speech:

Leeeet me, warn you of the attempt of crossing ... I am wiiiide and deep ...”

The birds said:

“But, we will cross”

The ocean said:

“Crosssss, but crosss is not easy. That who falls in my water will be delicious food for my fish ...”

A large number of birds were gripped with fear, but many of them rose their heads answering:

“But, we will cross the ocean...”

The ocean said:

“Well, crosssss, I only want to warn you”

A colored swan advanced and stood at the edge of the ocean. Calmly and politely she said:

“Thank you, O ocean for your warning, and we request you ...”

The ocean interrupted her saying:

“ I seee, I seee, o brave swan ... you want to ask me to be the arbitrator in the race of the birds”.

The swan said:

“yes, o the great ocean, we want you to tell the

name of the winner to the perching birds and other creatures here”

The ocean accepted to be the arbitrator among the birds. Then flying started ...

It was magnificent flying, a magnificent crossing of a big ocean.

At the beginning of the flying, the birds covered the sun, the sunbeam couldn't reach the earth and water. The birds were numerous of various colors: white, black, green, red, one-colored birds, scanty colored birds, many-colored birds, birds of different, bright and dark colors, and of wide, narrow, small, big, slow and quick wings. There were big sized, small sized birds that can't fill a small baby's palm, birds with nibbed beaks, wide beaks, short and long beaks, cruel and rapacious birds, meek and peaceful birds.

Only the birds that can't fly and the birds that are unwilling to risk and venture remained on the coast. These birds kept on wandering on the coast. They were poor, afraid and horrified birds. But the magnificent big flying diminished in stature, as some birds chose safety and came back home to wait with the other birds after traveling for a short distance.

The other birds that traveled for a longer distance thought of the futility of their attempt to cross the ocean which was so horrible and wide so they came back shyly in bodies or as individuals lazily and weakly they fly home trying to avoid looking directly in the eyes of the waiting and perching birds and the other creatures that came to witness

this great day of the birds. Some groups of birds rushed with all their power since the first moments of flying. Bravely and impetuously they rush but without previous planning. They didn't think of the long distance or the deep water. Having strong or weak wings they rush so they spent their power in crossing only different parts of the wide ocean. Some of these parts were short, some were long. In the end, these birds fell on the water fighting death.

Soon the sky became free and clear except for a colored swan. She was the same a beautiful colored swan, that asked the ocean to become the arbitrator in the bird race. A nice swan with colored feathers and colored bosom. She kept flying alone in a sky free of birds. Angry and horrible, the ocean extended under her. Her challenge enrages him as she flies above him enterprisingly and prudently.

The color of the ocean that extended under her was peerless. Above, she was flying with wings extending and hitting the air with unprecedented confidence. The ocean was as magnificent as the swan's flying. The ocean was extravagant in his extension and the swan was swift in her flying. The ocean wanted to be limitless and the swan wanted to put an end to him. It was a bitter struggle between a swan and an ocean.

The birds that stayed on the coast were waiting.

The birds, that failed and came back, were waiting too.

So were the creatures, that came to witness the race.

It was a worried waiting, as all were watching the great challenge between the swan and the ocean.

The ocean ordered one of his big fish to convey the news of the race. The fish was active first in covering the news of the race and second in conveying the news of the struggle between the swan and the ocean.

All birds were enthusiastic and excited, each bird had its way to express that. Above, the swan went on flying with all its power and vitality till she was about to arrive.

As soon as she saw the first features of the remote coast, she fell and was about to fall down as she lost her balance. She moved towards the water and she was about to be swallowed by the deep waters.

The fish shouted:

“The swan fell”

The birds and creatures shouted in unison:

“Oh ... no”

But the swan regained her composure in the last moment. As soon as she regained her balance and straighten herself up in the air, the fish shouted:

“The swan adjusted and straighten herself up in the air”

The birds shouted:

“What a wonderful and great swan”

Suddenly, the fish said to the birds:

“A wagtail perched on the remote bank of the coast”

Silence regained supreme among the birds. It was an unexpected surprise, the wagtail!!

Who believes that? How did he perch?

From where did he come?

But the birds forgot their questions as soon as the fish said:

“The wagtail is jumping of happiness there on the other remote bank of the ocean”

Here, the birds praised the wagtail and applauded him:

“Bravo, hurrah, long live the wagtail, our chief”

As soon as the swan adjusted and made herself upright in the air, and came near the shore, she saw a small sparrow called the wagtail standing on the remote shore of the ocean.

He was intoxicated ruffling his feathers. He was all smiles. He was not tired, he clapped his wings happily and concededly and raised his small head to a height that didn't exceed the hight of the mud of the coast. Indeed the mud dune was higher than him.

He looked at the swan proudly and arrogantly. He was about to explode as he became insufferably. But conceited the increase in his size never exceeded the size of a fly's head. He remained smaller than an infant's palm.

The birds were at the bank of the shore at the starting point of the race, shouting:

“Viva the wagtail, the new chief of the birds”

Their applause was so loud that it is echoed all over the world as the breeze carried it. The ocean roared and foamed, his waves became so high that they covered the coasts.

No one knows the reasons of the ocean's rage. Why is the ocean hitting the coast with his waves? He was calm before a short time ago, why is he angry now? Many questions were raised in the minds of more than one bird.

The wise duck shouted:

"Calm down ... calm down ... stop applauding"

When the birds stopped applauding, the duck advanced to the ocean, with her swaying gait as usual; and she asked:

"You are angry, o great ocean, what made you angry?"

The ocean answered so violently that the foams got out in the air saying:

"You"

"We? What did we do to make you angry?"

"You applaud anyone without making sure of the facts"

"But we exclaim for our chief, the chief of the birds, the one who crosses the blue ocean, the sparrow, the wagtail".

The ocean shouted:

"The wagtail didn't cross the ocean ..."

The birds were amazed:

"What do you say?"

The ocean said:

"The swan is the only bird that crossed the ocean"

The birds said:

"How was that?"

In that moment, the ocean released a loud shout

that his water raised and changed into arrogant waves that sank the coast. He said:

“Don’t you know that the wagtail perched on the swan’s shoulder. It stuck to the swan when she was crossing to the remote coast”

When the birds know that, they glorified the swan. Indeed, she deserved such glory, the glory of beauty and the glory of bravery.

Since that time, the swan crosses the oceans whenever it wants to travel or whenever it wants to fly for long distances.

Pipelines

by

Etgar Keret

Translated from the Hebrew by Miriam Shlesinger

When I got to seventh grade, they had a psychologist come to school and put us through a bunch of adjustment tests. He showed me twenty different flashcards, one by one, and asked me what was wrong with the pictures. They all seemed fine to me, but he insisted and showed me the first picture again – the one with the kid in it. “What’s wrong with this picture?” he asked in a tired voice. I told him the picture seemed fine. He got really mad and said, “Can’t you see the boy in the picture doesn’t have any ears?” The truth is that when I looked at the picture again, I did see that the kid had no ears. But the picture still seemed fine to me. The psychologist classed me as “suffering from severe perceptual disorders,” and had me transferred to carpentry school. When I got there, it turned out I was allergic to sawdust, so they transferred me to metalworking class. I was pretty good at it, but I didn’t really enjoy it. To tell the truth, I didn’t really enjoy anything in particular. When I finished school, I started working in a factory that made pipes. My boss was an engineer with a diploma from a top technical

college. A brilliant guy. If you showed him a picture of a kid without ears or something like that, he'd figure it out in no time.

After work I'd stay on at the factory and make myself odd-shaped pipes, winding ones that looked like curled-up snakes, and I'd roll marbles through them. I know it sounds like a dumb thing to do, and I didn't even enjoy it, but I went on doing it anyway.

One night I made a pipe that was really complicated, with lots of twists and turns in it, and when I rolled a marble in, it didn't come out at the other end. At first I thought it was just stuck in the middle, but after I tried it with about twenty more marbles, I realized they were simply disappearing. I know that everything I say sounds kind of stupid. I mean everyone knows that marbles don't just disappear, but when I saw the marbles go in at one end of the pipe and not come out at the other end, it didn't even strike me as strange. It seemed perfectly ok actually. That was when I decided to make myself a bigger pipe, in the same shape, and to crawl into it until I disappeared. When the idea came to me, I was so happy that I started laughing out loud. I think it was the first time in my entire life that I laughed.

From that day on, I worked on my giant pipe. Every evening I'd work on it, and in the morning I'd hide the parts in the storeroom. It took me twenty days to finish making it. On the last night it took me five hours to assemble it, and it took up about half the shop floor.

When I saw it all in one piece, waiting for me,

I remembered my social studies teacher who said once that the first human being to use a club wasn't the strongest person in his tribe or the smartest. It's just that the others didn't need club, while he did. He needed a club more than anyone, to survive and to make up for being weak. I don't think there was another human being in the whole world who wanted to disappear more than I did, and that's why it was me that invented the pipe. Me, and not that brilliant engineer with his technical college degree who runs the factory.

I started crawling inside the pipe, with no idea about what to expect at the other end. Maybe there would be kids there without ears, sitting on mounds of marbles. Could be. I don't know exactly what happened after I passed a certain point in the pipe. All I know is that I'm here.

I think I'm an angel now. I mean, I've got wings, and this circle over my head and there are hundreds more here like me. When I got here they were sitting around playing with the marbles I'd rolled through the pipe a few weeks earlier.

I always used to think that Heaven is a place for people who've spent their whole life being good, but it isn't. God is too merciful and kind to make a decision like that. Heaven is simply a place for people who were genuinely unable to be happy on earth. They told me here that people who kill themselves return to live their life all over again, because the fact that they didn't like it the first time doesn't mean they won't fit in the second time. But the ones who

really don't fit in the world wind up here. They each have their own way of getting to Heaven.

There are pilots who got here by performing a loop at one precise point in the Bermuda Triangle. There are housewives who went through the back of their kitchen cabinets to get here, and mathematicians who found topological distortions in space and had to squeeze through them to get here. So if you're really unhappy down there, and if all kinds of people are telling you that you're suffering from severe perceptual disorders, look for your own way of getting here, and when you find it, could you please bring some cards, cause we're getting pretty tired of the marbles.

Aldar Kose and the boastful bai

The great fame won by Aldar-Kose disturbed one bai's peace of mind. He even could not sleep out of envy. So, the bai began boasting in front of the aul-dwellers:

«You admire your Aldar-Kose all the time, but who is he in comparison with myself? Let me come across the man and I will show him! Oh, I will teach him! You will see what I am made of!»

Hearing these boastful words, the aul-dwellers, the old and the young, the hungry and the full, told the bai:

«Do not put on airs, honourable bai. Nobody on earth has ever managed to fool this cunning man. You will get into his trap and will not even notice it. You will only make a laughing stock of yourself.»

«Nothing of the kind! Stop praising him! I will disgrace him in the eye of the whole world.

I am cleverer than he is! And I am more cunning than he is! I will cheat him, I will make him knuckle under. You will see! If I cannot outwit him I will slaughter a fat horse and invite all of you to a feast. Oh, I wish I could meet him! If only he caught my eye!...»

One day the boastful bai went into the steppe riding his light-legged camel. There he ran into a stranger. The stranger seemed to be looking for

something. He was walking and walking around, now to the right, now to the left.

«Hey, you blockhead!» the bai shouted to him. «Why are you hanging about like a blind ram? Have you lost something?»

«I have not lost anything, but I am looking for something, that is true.»

«And what are you looking for?»

«I know it for sure that the earth's beginning or end is somewhere near here. But I cannot find it. The place is overgrown with grass all over. If I could have a look from above I would find it in no time. But you see, there is neither knoll nor hill around here.»

«Could you see it from a camel?»

«You bet! But I have no camel, not even a donkey.»

«Then mount my camel. But keep in mind, if you find the earth's end we will share the fame and respect between ourselves. You will tell everybody that we found it together. Agreed?»

«Sure, make no doubt about that,» the stranger answered with a grin.

The bai got down and helped the stranger mount the camel.

«So,» the bai asked with impatience, «do you see the earth's end?»

«Not yet,» the stranger answered winding the rein around his hand tighter and tighter. «I see neither beginning nor end of the earth. What I see clearly is someone's foolishness. From now on you

can tell everybody how you were looking for the earth's end together with Aldar-Kose.»

«You stop talking rubbish! What Aldar-Kose? Give the camel back, you rogue!»

«I will, if you catch me. If you do not, I cannot help it.» And Aldar-Kose set off the camel at a brisk trot. The fooled bai stood stock-still with his mouth open wide.

It was already in the evening dusk that the humiliated bai dragged himself to his aul. Seeing her luckless husband, the bai's wife got terrified.

«What happened?» she demanded. «Where is the camel?»

«It is lost, lost altogether!» The bai was on the verge of tears. «Aldar-Kose took it away. He disgraced me.» Now the bai's wife burst out crying, fell to the ground, and began to tear her hair. In a moment the curious people gathered around.

«How did he take away the camel? By force or by cunning?»

«By cunning, by trickery.»

The young burst into laughter, the old chuckled. The whole aul laughed at the boastful bai.

«That serves you right! You will not be boasting any more. Now, slaughter your horse and gather the people for a feast.»

Once the whole aul had gathered for the feast, all of a sudden there appeared Aldar-Kose.

«Hey, honourable bai, take your camel back. But remember: the clever will always find a way out while the foolish can be cheated by anyone. From now on keep away from Aldar-Kose.»

And all the people who had gathered for the
feast broke into laughter.

Translated by: S.Golikov

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Aldar Kose and the boastful bai

Thus Spake Hwang Man-gŭn

Author: Sŏng Sŏk-je

Sŏng Sŏk-je was born in Sangju, North Kyŏngsang Province, in 1960. He made his debut as a poet in 1986, before transforming into a novelist in 1994 with the publication of his collection of short stories entitled "Öchögunis Live There (Kŭ Kos-enŭn Öchöguni-tŭri Sanda)". His fiction not only actively invokes traditional Korean prose forms such as the chŏn (biography or chronicle), but confronts the accepted notion of fiction as a made-up narrative centered on the written word, introducing his own idiosyncratic reconstitution or narration of the spoken word as a device that has become a new asset of Korean fiction. Starring good-for-nothings, prostitutes, idiots and criminals, his fiction emphasizes the primeval types that have disappeared from modern society, and an aura of somewhat realistic values.

Thus Spake Hwang Man-gŭn (Hwang Man-gŭn-ŭn Irök'e Marhaetta)

translated by Ben Jackson

Hwang Man-gŭn was gone. He left at dawn, alone, on his cultivator and did not come back at dusk when he always came back from working in the fields. Even when he got drunk, he would come back in the middle of the night, around twelve, but not this time. And even in the morning, when the rooster had stopped crowing, at the time he had returned after the only night away of his life, he did not come back. People gathered in front of the village hall, under the wisteria that Hwang Man-gŭn had planted and on the wooden bench he had made. The head of the village spoke first.

“That idiot Man-gŭn or Pan-gŭn or whatever his name is, is stopping me from feeding my cows, for God’s sake. What’s more important, twenty cows going hungry or one idiot going off and getting drunk and not coming home, damnit?”

Hwang Chae-sök, the village elder who drafted the written prayer at the village’s annual ritual to the Water God* as he was the most learned among them, responded.

“Still, if somebody is here and then goes missing, there’s surely a reason for it. A person’s not a needle or a grain of sand. He doesn’t disappear just like that. Whatever you say, he’s from our village. Pan-

gŭn, I mean Man-gŭn, has never once spent a night outside the village since the day he was born.”

“That’s not true, sir, there was one time when he said he was going off on some business to do with military service and he spent the whole night fighting with some kind of fox or rabbit.”

The joker was Hwang Tong-su, who played a supervisory role at the Water God ritual. Mr. Min, who had found himself in the role of calling everyone in the village together in the confusion of the moment after Hwang Man-gŭn’s son had come to see him before breakfast time to say that Hwang Man-gŭn had not come back, thought the mood was turning odd and broke in.

“Who went to the rally yesterday? Did anybody go with Mr. Hwang? Didn’t anybody see him during the rally?”

The five or six Hwangs gathered there all looked at one another, then shook their heads.

“How many people d’you think there were? The whole county was supposed to come but barely a hundred people turned up and I still didn’t see Pan-gŭn, maybe because he’s about the size of a half a pound of pork.”

The head of the village continued sarcastically. Mr. Min remembered seeing the head of the village calling Hwang Man-gŭn aside, the day before the rally, and saying something to him.

“The night before last, when everyone gathered to talk about the rally the next day, you said something to Mr. Hwang, didn’t you? After the meeting.”

The head of the village looked daggers at Mr. Min.

“What, I told a farmer to make sure he went to a farmers’ rally – something wrong with that?”

Mr. Min found himself unwittingly taking an accusatory tone.

“So you say even if the whole county got together there were no more than a few people? Why is it so essential that Mr. Hwang go to such a gathering? I mean, is there a reason that only Mr. Hwang should go? So much that you have to make a special request to him, separately?”

“Just listen to this man. What’s wrong with the head of the village telling the villagers that there’s a national protest rally to demand cancellation of farmers’ debts and asking them to be sure to take part in it and make our views heard?”

“I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with it. I’m just asking why Mr. Hwang has not come back when everyone else has.”

“How would I know? I saw it was market day in town. No doubt he’s sprawled out somewhere drinking like a fish. And since he drove all the way there on his cultivator it’ll be taking him a long time.”

The others were silent, and the scene deteriorated into tit-for-tat exchange between Mr. Min and the head of the village.

“Well, what I still want to know is why Mr. Hwang definitely had to be the only one to go to the rally on his cultivator. And on a cultivator that doesn’t even work.”

“Was it my idea to drive there on cultivators? That was the agreed plan. And as for the cultivator, what do you mean, doesn’t work? Man-gŭn has been driving that thing for years. It’s only other people that can’t drive it.”

“Then why did you go by truck, not on a cultivator? Surely it’s up to the head of the village to set an example for the other villagers to follow, but now it’s the other way round.”

“I had to take a roll call at the myŏn* office and discuss things with other village heads – you think someone as busy as me has the time to mess around riding a cultivator? The other village heads gathered in front of the myŏn office and took a truck as well. If I’d really gone on a cultivator to the county rally I’d have been more than late. When we got to the county hall it was raining, and only a few people were there. We just shouted a bit, then came home. Could anyone even drive a cultivator as far as the county hall? The cars whiz by like mad, what if you got hit by one? Lots of people from other villages went there by car.”

“So isn’t that why you said several people should get on several cultivators and drive along the A-road together? So they could protest, and show their will? Honestly, where’s the sense in that?”

“First you call everyone together first thing in the morning, then you don’t understand what they say and you talk rubbish. Are you a half-wit as well?” “Who’s the half-wit? If village heads or any other leaders get together and decide on a plan, they

should stick to it. What kind of situation is it when those who went by car, wearing suits, have come back but the only one who stuck to the plan and drove his cultivator hasn't?"

"Who the hell do you think you are, staring me down and shouting like this? If you screwed up in the city and came to live in the countryside, you should know your place and keep your head down, and even then we might not accept you as one of us! Am I Man-gŭn's mother, or father? He's pushing fifty years old, it's up to him where he comes or goes, you want me to put him in a harness?"

If Hwang Man-gŭn's mother hadn't appeared just then, the fight might have turned physical. Mr. Min, his veins bulging, was about to retort when a woman of fair and delicate appearance, not in the least like a country sexagenarian, trotted over and began to wail, taking hold of her grandson as he stood hovering self-consciously by the bench before the adults.

"This would never have happened if I hadn't said I wanted mackerel. If only I hadn't said I wanted mackerel, this would never have happened. I said I wanted mackerel, for no good reason, and my Man-gŭn... Man-gŭn went to buy mackerel and now he hasn't come back!"

That's how they found out. In the morning on the day Hwang Man-gŭn had gone out on his cultivator, his mother had told him as he prepared her breakfast that she would not eat it unless there was salted mackerel. The head of the village, as if to

say, I told you so, sat up straight and stuck his chest out. "That half-wit Pan-gŭn went to buy mackerel, not to the rally. What a devoted son, a real devoted son." Hwang Chae-sŏk, too, stroked his beard and spoke. "It's true he's served his widowed mother with utmost devotion, all his life, morning and evening, without missing a single meal. Whatever you call him, he is truly a faithful son. A faithful son by nature, indeed." Hwang Man-gŭn's son Yŏng-ho continued suit, wailing.

"No. I met Father on his cultivator this morning as I was going home. I told him to go and wash at the bathhouse. I think he would have gone to the bathhouse. But I contacted the local bathhouse and they said no one like that had been there... It looks as if he's gone to a hot spring. I don't know, but something bad may have happened to him on his way there."

They learned something else. The previous night, for the first time ever, Hwang Man-gŭn had slept in his son's room. His son had stayed up all night at a friend's house, studying for an exam, and was on his way home in the morning. When he met his father on the road, Hwang Man-gŭn's son had noticed straight away that his father had slept in his room. Because Hwang Man-gŭn was wearing his son's jacket. So his son shouted at him to take it off and give it back right away, and not to go into his room again, adding a plea that he go and wash at the bathhouse. Hwang Man-gŭn may have gone to the bathhouse right away. Or he may have taken the road

to the hot spring that lay in the opposite direction to the town where the rally was taking place.

“I’ve never in my life seen Man-gŭn wash once. Even when he went down to the edge of the stream, or the spring, it never occurred to him to go in. He wouldn’t even know how to get to the bathhouse, how would he know which way the hot spring was from here?”

Hwang Kyu-su twisted his mouth into a grin. Mr. Min wondered whether or not to speak about what he knew, but was unable to in the end. It was true that he himself had also urged Hwang Man-gŭn to go to the rally. Perhaps under the influence of the alcohol, he had got carried away and told Hwang that many people had to know his opinion; that he should go there and speak.

In the meantime, everyone learned that Hwang Man-gŭn had not come home. Anybody from the village could leave home for a day or two, even a month or two, without people knowing about it. But everyone learned of Hwang Man-gŭn’s absence before even a day had gone by. Nonetheless, nobody really took the trouble to go and look for him. When he was there, nobody really noticed him, and when he was not there – as he now was not – they noticed that he was indispensable. The villagers called him an idiot. Only Mr. Min, who came to Sindae-1-ri* just a couple of years ago and had not seen Hwang Man-gŭn’s birth, growth and life right from the beginning, did not think of him this way.

Hwang Yŏng-sŏk, who, at forty-five, still counted as a youngster of the village, learned of Hwang Man-gŭn's absence as he scooped out human waste from the village hall toilet that Hwang Man-gŭn had built by casting the bricks and digging the ground.

"If that Man-gŭn were here I wouldn't do this even for a million won. This damned smell of shit is so strong – maybe it's because so many people have shat here. I don't know if it'll fertilize my crops or poison them."

This was something Hwang Man-gŭn would have done without so much as a grumble if he had been there. Beaming happily, as always.

"If Man-gŭn were here that manure would be on my field. Where on earth's he gone?"

Old Mrs. Yŏ, who grew her own vegetables in a small field beside the village hall, also learned of Hwang Man-gŭn's absence. Hwang Man-gŭn, after taking the communal waste of the village and leaving it to ripen sufficiently in the communal manure pit that he had also dug, would share it out fairly. He did not, like Hwang Yŏng-sŏk, claim what he had scooped up as his and take it to spread on his own field. When it came to solitary old people, like Mrs. Yŏ who had been widowed early, he brought manure more often, though it's not clear whether he did so consciously or not.

"Let's ask Man-gŭn."

Children playing at housekeeping learned of Hwang Man-gŭn's absence. Hwang Man-gŭn had acted fairly and openly his whole life. Though it

seemed he had no sense of judgment, when you went to him – every time you went to him – to ask who was right and who was wrong, you were always reminded of the fair, unbiased laws of nature and the dispute ceased.

And even when it came to unquestionable matters, as clear as day, Hwang Man-gŭn's name would come up.

“Even Man-gŭn would know that.”

People also realized that Hwang Man-gŭn was not there when they found themselves murmuring the song that had been sung in the village for many years: “Hwang Man-gŭn's Song,” if we must give it a title.

This is how you sing Hwang Man-gŭn's Song, or the song about Hwang Man-gŭn. After drawing people's attention by first resolutely calling out “Hwang”, you pause for one beat, then slowly sing “Ma-an-gŭ-ŭn” over two beats. You then quickly count, “Hundred dimes (times), Den won (ten won), Dek bound (ten pounds), Eight parts (eighty percent), Two bed (head)”. Finally, you end with a leisurely “Yeah, Ba-an-gŭ-ŭn.” This song reflects the whole life of Hwang Man-gun and, as with all songs, is infused with the general experiences and sentiments of the villagers that sang it.

Hwang refers to his surname. Sindae-1-ri was dominated by one surname, and more than fifty Hwang households lived there. People with different surnames, like Mr. Min who had left the city two years ago for the countryside, accounted for no

more than two households, the other being that of Mr. No, who had been brought in as a son-in-law to one of the Hwang families. Sindae, or “new site”, as the name suggests, was a new village. Hwang Man-gŭn’s father had died in the war. His mother was already pregnant with him at the time, and since she gave birth to Hwang after losing her husband there was nobody to check the clan register and give him an appropriate name. So he was named after Mount Man-gŭn – or “ten thousand roots” – the mountain that rose up by his home. The flanks of Mt. Man-gŭn surround Chŏn’gok-ji, the lake that wraps around the village of Sindae from 1-ri to 3-ri, like a belt, and serve to lock in the water and guarantee its supply all year round. When they blocked a valley of Mt. Man’gŭn, called Chŏn’gok, made a reservoir and gathered the people that had lived scattered along the valley into one place, Sindae-ri was that place. Just this much is enough to tell us that the name Hwang Man-gŭn symbolizes the roots of the village.

What does “a hundred times” mean? It tells us that the number of times that Hwang Man-gŭn fell over was a hundred. Hwang Man-gŭn had fallen over unusually often ever since he was a small child, and this may have been because what the villagers called his “brains”, or, as Hwang Hak-su, the purported know-it-all from the upper village, put it, his cerebellum, which controls the sense of balance, was underdeveloped. Whenever a thud was heard in the village, the villagers assumed it was either the sound of a persimmon dropping from a tree or that of

Hwang Man-gŭn falling over. Somebody suggested Hwang Man-gŭn try counting exactly how many times he fell over in one day. He was probably just advising him to take advantage of his falls and use them for arithmetic practice. If you asked Hwang Man-gŭn in the evening how many times he had fallen over that day, he would count on his fingers, twist his toes, even try to use his hips and his knees, putting all his effort into it. But from a certain time onwards, he would answer the question confidently by saying “hundred dimes”. A hundred times a day, a hundred times a month, a hundred times a year, a hundred times in a lifetime. A hundred was the largest denomination Hwang Man-gŭn knew.

“Den won” was a nickname that had been added by the owner of the noodle shop at Bongdae market, where the myŏn office was. One day, when he was thirteen or fourteen, his hair in a mess, Hwang Man-gŭn had come to buy noodles, and this is what he said from the doorway of the shop: “Den won word of doodles please”. The noodle seller asked him what he was talking about. Hwang Man-gŭn had carefully counted his fingers, then said “doodles” again, pointing to the strands of white noodles hung out to dry, giving a bright glow to the whole area around the noodle shop. Then he said “den won”, and the shopkeeper only just understood when he saw the ten won note in his hands. When he was young, Hwang Man-gŭn had a short tongue.

Ever since Hwang Man-gŭn was born, he had been living in the outermost corner, that is, right

at the entrance to Sindae-1-ri, itself the outermost village of "Waterside" ("Waterside" was what local people called Ch'ongok reservoir, the fifth deepest in the country. Ever since he had first come to the village, Mr. Min had not understood why people that wanted to boast about the reservoir cited its depth, rather than its size or the quantity of water it held. To call it the fifth deepest meant that the depth of at least five reservoirs in the country had been measured, but did that mean the depth in the dry season, or in the monsoon, or the average depth, or the depth at the time it had been measured, or the depth at the deepest point, or the depth at the center? Who on earth had set this standard, where variables kept endlessly emerging the more one thought about it? Mr. Min did not know. Neither did he know how coming no more than fifth, according to this standard, rather than first, was something worth advertising. In any case, it was the people of Sindae-ri that gave this reservoir the quintessential name "water" and boldly called the villages that had been built like a belt along its perimeter, "Waterside").

If we compare the village to a house, Hwang Man-gün's house corresponds to the servants' quarters by the front gate. Like servants' quarters, Hwang Man-gün's house was smaller and shabbier than the other houses. Since they blocked the entrance to the valley and completed the reservoir after the Korean War, most of the houses dated from just after the war. At the time, Hwang Man-gün was a suckling baby and his father was not there, having died in the war.

Each of the neighbors was busy building his own house and did not have the time to build a house for a widow's mother-in-law, a widow and her suckling, posthumous child. The house, which they built up little by little with wood and mud as circumstances allowed, after making walls from maize stalks and a floor from straw mats, was as slipshod as a constantly touched up painting. Though it started to take the form of a house as time went by, all the things that could be considered constituent elements of a house – roof, rooms, doors, and yard – always had to be worked on so that it kept its shape. If it rained they had to fix the leak, and if the wind blew they had to worry that the roof might blow off. When it snowed they worried that it would collapse, and when they lit the fire for the underfloor heating they had to cry because of the smoke coming up through the floor. The House looked as if it was barely held in one place by this variety of patching up and sticking on and propping up and tying down; it seemed it would collapse completely, all at once, if you happened to touch any part of it the wrong way. Still, it was rectangular shaped, with two rooms and a long wooden plank in front, imitating the veranda that should have been there; when Hwang Man-gŭn was at home it was on this plank that he always sat. For several decades, without variation, he looked out onto the road above the house and shouted loud greetings over to the passing villagers. At mealtimes, the wooden floor became a table and Hwang Man-gŭn would go down into the yard, crouch down and

eat from it. In summer he would lay out and sleep on a tatty old duvet cover and in winter he would put up a piece of plastic sheeting and rely on the warmth from the flue beneath the floor. The reason he never slept indoors and always sat on a wooden floor that was too narrow even for a single buttock, never using more than a tatty old quilt cover for bedding, was that there were people indoors. Those people, just like the villagers, treated Hwang Man-gŭn as a “half-wit” or “dud” and hated it when he came inside.

“Go and dust yourself down and have a bath if you want to come in!”

Because going indoors to sleep was unfamiliar to Hwang Man-gŭn, too, he hardly ever did so. Perhaps because he had already slept outside for several decades and was used to it, whenever he slept inside he had a habit of flinging all his clothes off. Who knows what kind of bugs took the opportunity to crawl out from his stripped body, they said, but when Hwang Man-gŭn had slept in a room, some of them still survived even after you sprayed a whole can of insecticide. The people occupying the two rooms in Hwang Man-gŭn’s house were his young mother and his son, a high school student. One day, a passing postman asked Hwang Man-gŭn if there was anyone at home. Hwang Man-gŭn stuck his chest out and said proudly, “two bed”. “Bed” was the local Sindae-ri pronunciation for “head”, the unit for counting livestock or wild beasts or insects. The postman, to no particular end, spread what Hwang

Man-gŭn had said throughout the neighborhood and made a fool of him once again. It's not as if anyone asked him to. The postman probably didn't do it through any malice towards Hwang Man-gŭn. At a time when nobody read the newspaper, a time when the closest thing to news was a letter from a son away on military service, people wanted to create some drama, even among themselves, and to laugh. Hwang Man-gŭn was the most suitable subject and character they had. People also blamed mistakes or stupid things done by others on Hwang Man-gŭn, making ever more of a fool of him.

Hwang Man-gŭn's own mother, who gave birth to him, occupies the inner room of the house. Though she is his mother, she is young. And very pretty. When the two of them are next to each other, though such a thing is so rare as to happen barely once a year as one of them stays inside come rain or shine and the other stays outside come rain or snow or wind, you would think they were brother and sister, not mother and son. Hwang Man-gŭn looks like her older brother, of course. It is difficult to guess Hwang Man-gŭn's age at first glance. With his one unchanging expression, an open-mouthed, broad smile, and the thick wrinkles that mark the length and breadth of his forehead and his cheeks, he is certainly over forty, but he could pass for as much as thirty years older than that. Since Hwang Man-gŭn became sufficiently grown up, his mother has never once got her hands wet with the housework, which may be why she looks six or seven years younger than other villagers of the same age.

The reason they look so close in age is that Hwang Man-gŭn's mother was bought for money and gave birth to Hwang Man-gŭn when she was fifteen or so years old. Nowadays, Sindae-ri has grown civilized enough that the bus comes four times a day, but before the war it was so out of the way that you hardly ever saw a stranger except when somebody came to get married. Girls that were born and grew up in Sindae-ri would rather be beaten to death than get married to someone from Sindae-ri. So the young men would get married by going and standing in the market in the center of Bongdae-myŏn in Nagyang county, five miles away, with a signboard round their necks saying "WANTED: BRIDE" then snatching any mindless girl that fell for them and coming back to Sindae-ri; or by going via a middleman and buying a girl from somebody trying to survive in hard times, even if it meant selling his daughter. Of course, in the majority of cases the latter of these applied, and some people called this matchmaking, and some people called girls that came to the village this way "future daughters-in-law", but whatever you called them, the young women that came to Sindae-ri along such a path would be sure to give birth before a year had passed.

In Sindae-ri, there is a legend that finding a girl to marry is the only difficult part, but that once she is married, the Water God unfailingly comes every night from the deep part of the "Water" to visit her, and blesses her with a son. Perhaps because of

this, no family in Sindae-ri was without a son, and when these sons grew up, they underwent the same difficulties that their fathers had finding a bride. They said that at the deepest part of the "Water", before the reservoir was there, was a swamp of unfathomable depth, and that in it was a path leading to the palace of the Water God, and that the path was so long you could unravel three bundles of thread along it and still not reach the end. Of course, all the Water God did was give the blessing; it was actually the men of Sindae-ri that made the women pregnant with sons. If the Water God had gone beyond a blessing and done something else, something scandalous, the people of Sindae-ri would hardly have gone out on the first full moon of each year, broken the meter-thick ice and sacrificed a whole pig, dressed in rainbow-colored clothing, to him. At any rate, Hwang Man-gŭn's mother came to Sindae-ri at a tender young age, having practically been bought, and as soon as she showed the signs of having become a woman she too became pregnant with a son by the blessing of the Water God. And then war broke out, and Sindae-ri happened to become the site of a battle so fierce as to go down in the history of the war. Hwang Man-gŭn's father, on his way out to watch the spectacle of the lights and sounds of the shells and bullets crossing Chŏn'gok valley from side to side, ended up being hit by a stray bullet and abandoning this world. At the time, Hwang Man-gŭn was beginning his eighth month in his mother's womb, and they say that because his mother, when

she heard the news, shot to her feet and simply dropped him out, his head acquired a long “north-south bulge” and he became “eight parts”, meaning some time short of a full nine months. After that, her mother-in-law, that is to say Hwang Man-gŭn’s grandmother, brought up both Hwang Man-gŭn and his young mother together. From the year Hwang Man-gŭn turned fourteen, when his grandmother also left this world, he started supporting his mother. The young widow, barely thirty years old, still did not know even how to cook rice, and from then on, as long as Hwang Man-gŭn was there, did not need to know. It was Hwang Man-gŭn who brought rice home, be it by farming or by begging; Hwang Man-gŭn who washed the rice and put it in the pot and built the fire; Hwang Man-gŭn who set the table with the cooked rice and side dishes and brought it to her to eat; and Hwang Man-gŭn who took the table back and did the washing up after she had eaten her fill. While Hwang Man-gŭn did the cooking and the housework, his pretty young mother would simply fill her mother-in-law’s old pipe with tobacco and stare blankly over at what Hwang Man-gŭn was doing, puffing out smoke through her nose.

Here is another thing that came to pass. When Hwang Man-gŭn reached the right age, he received his call-up papers for military service. Known, as he was, as a fool, not only in his village but throughout the local myŏn, it was obvious that Hwang Man-gŭn would be exempted, but first he had to go to the town where the county hall was to undergo a

medical examination and the procedures necessary for exemption. He cooked a pot of rice, seasoned it with soy sauce and salt, then added sesame oil for extra taste and made rice balls. He wrapped a few balls in a cloth and fastened it to his waist, then left the rest on the table and spoke to his mother.

“Eat these if you get hungry. I’ll be back soon.”

His mother just watched what he was doing, without a word of dissent or approval. The physical examination did not finish as quickly as Hwang Man-gŭn had expected. At that time he, like his friends of the same age, looked like a healthy, handsome youth just past twenty years old, but for a dribble of saliva at the corner of his mouth. It seems the men that had come to recruit spent a long time trying to measure him and questioning him and threatening him and intimidating him. Hwang Man-gŭn was only released from the physical tests that evening, when the morning star was climbing in the sky. Walking back, under cover of darkness, the twenty-five miles to the house where his mother waited for him alone, Hwang Man-gŭn had an extraordinary experience that was to influence his whole life. At that time there was no bus from the town with the county hall to Sindae-ri, and even if there had been, he would have missed the last one that day, so the quickest way home was along the path through the mountains, but he had to go around or over four ridges. The fourth of these was a pass called Rabbit Hill. Just when he thought he had almost reached it, he found himself somehow, no matter how much he

walked, not getting to the top of the hill. He seemed only to be going round and round on the spot. Then suddenly, from out of the darkness, a rabbit with dazzlingly white fur, whiskers spread like spear blades and eyes red as rubies, came charging over. That day was the last of the lunar month, and people always ask him what the hell he means by “dazzlingly white,” since there was not even any moonlight. Hwang Man-gŭn has told the story of what had happened that day more than a hundred times, but never once differently from the first. At any rate, the rabbit was huge. So much that its ears towered higher than Hwang Man-gŭn’s head. What’s more, the rabbit moved its mouth and spoke like a person.

“You can’t go home. You can’t go home. You can’t go home. You will die here.”

Between the rabbit’s parted lips sparkled sharp teeth as big as Hwang Man-gŭn’s thumbs. Sparkling in what light, they ask. It was early spring, so the snow on Rabbit Hill was not yet melting. And there was starlight.

“What are you talking about? I’m walking to my own home on my own two feet, and who are you to tell me I can’t? If you’re a ghost, go away right now, and if you’re a rabbit just lie back down. I’m going home, even if I have to ride you there.”

The giant rabbit, giving off a fishy smell that Hwang Man-gŭn had never smelt before, spoke again in a slow, thick voice.

“You will die here. You will die here. You will die here. You cannot go home.”

Hwang Man-gŭn's whole body broke out in goose pimples, and every hair he had to speak of stood on end. Nonetheless, he shoved at the rabbit with all his strength, shouting "out the way!" But the arm that pushed the rabbit, just when Hwang thought it was buried in the rabbit's fur, got sucked right in like a fly sucked into a vacuum cleaner (this is not what Hwang Man-gŭn said, but an expression used by Mr. Min who had heard what he said). Clutching the tree beside him with his other arm, he tried as hard as he could to pull out the one that had been sucked in. The space that was trying to suck him in was too wide and empty for him to find anything to hold onto, and so horrifyingly cold as to give him goose pimples. The rabbit, for its part, was doing its best to pull Hwang Man-gŭn right in as he resisted; it steadfastly kept pulling at his arm, with its back feet off the ground and its body shaking.

An endless amount of time passed this way. Then, all of a sudden, the eastern sky acquired a hazy glow. At this moment, the rabbit spoke to Hwang Man-gŭn: "You have survived now. You have survived now. You have survived now, so let me go". Hwang Man-gŭn flew into a reckless fit of temper and shouted, "Stop talking rubbish. I'll boil you in a soup and mother and I will eat you together, sitting opposite each other. I'll peel off your skin and make a scarf for mother and wristlets for me, and a pair of gloves. You're dead now, you bastard." The rabbit asked him, urgently, "What can I do to make you take your arm out then?" Hwang Man-gŭn was not

pushing his arm into the rabbit's fur; he was simply unable to take it out, and when the rabbit asked him this he was lost for words. So without thinking about it he said: "You're not going anywhere until you grant me three wishes, you little pest".

"What are your wishes?"

"That my mother live as long and old as Granny P'atjuk*."

(Granny P'atjuk would seem to be an old lady that sells p'atjuk, or else an old lady that frequently makes p'atjuk, but who she is, or why she is supposed to have lived for a long time, Mr. Min does not know.)

The rabbit leaned its head towards the west, where the village lay, then gave a frightful shudder and said in an exhausted voice,

"Granted it. Next?"

"I want a wife as clever as a fox."

"If you eat Thanksgiving rice cakes three times she'll come to your house. What's the next one?"

"A strong, cocky little boy."

"When you get married the Water God will come and do that for you. Now let me go."

"I never caught you in the first place. All you need do is get lost, silly bastard."

Then the rabbit, perhaps realising it had been fooled, puffed up its face scarily and blew hot, fiery breath in Hwang Man-gün's face. He grew flustered and was unable to open his eyes; then, when he had barely managed to open them, he saw that his arm had come back. Countless strands of rabbit fur had

fallen around him and were glinting like needles. Hwang Man-gŭn ran home, without so much as taking the time to breathe. Cocks here and there in the neighborhood were crowing on their perches. Hwang Man-gŭn shouted from outside, "Mother, mother", and ran into the yard, but there was no sign of life from inside the house. He went into the room to find his mother just as she was when he had left: sitting there, her face turned white as a sheet.

"Mother, mother!"

When he shook her shoulders, his young mother collapsed sideways. At the same time, she made a gagging noise and coughed up a rice ball. Hwang Man-gŭn embraced his mother, wailing wildly, then massaged her hands and feet and stroked her all over her body, whereupon she opened her eyes.

"What took you so long?"

"I spent the whole night wrestling with a ghost-rabbit. Are you all right?"

"I waited for you all night, then, when the cock crowed at sunrise, I ate a ball of rice, but it got stuck in my throat and I almost died. If I moved, it seemed my throat would get blocked even more, so I waited like this for you to come back, without moving a finger. Son of a leper, why did you make just rice and not fetch any water?"

Hwang Man-gŭn cried, then laughed, then danced for joy. Then, having been kicked in the behind by his mother, he went to fetch water from the village well. That day, by the well, Hwang Man-gŭn's extraordinary experience was repeated many

times, through the mouths of various people, until finally Hwang Man-gŭn was called to the well and had to talk away, telling the same story, until his mouth hurt.

After as much time as it took to make three lots of Thanksgiving rice cakes, namely three years, a young woman came to his house, just as the rabbit had said, and people started regarding Hwang Man-gŭn in a different light. The woman was the adopted daughter of a farm machinery merchant from a neighboring county, and for some reason had gone into the "Water" to kill herself. If you are going to jump into the water at all, you might as well do it somewhere where there are no people around, but she was in a hurry to die so she threw herself in as soon as she had passed the entrance to the village. But she did not know about the pair of eyes that looked out from the veranda of the little house at the water's edge below the road at the entrance to the village, waiting to greet the people that passed by. The owner of these eyes, as the woman's waist was entering the water, shouted "Waid, waid!" from behind and came running over. Then he said something in his short-tongued voice, but the young woman couldn't understand. After he brought her out, Hwang Man-gŭn whispered over and over, "Fyouwussindhewaterlikeanewbornbabytsdanjrus nurclothsgedwed", The gist of this being "if you go bathing in the reservoir like a small child you might die and ruin your clothes". Having been dragged back to Hwang Man-gŭn's house, the young woman

changed into some clothes that Hwang Man-gŭn's mother got out for her and spent the night with his mother, wide awake. Then, whatever it was she had decided, she stayed on in Hwang Man-gŭn's house. This time was perhaps the most brilliant of Hwang Man-gŭn's life.

The young woman, as might be expected of a farm machinery merchant's daughter taught Hwang Man-gŭn how to drive a cultivator – indeed, it may have been because she made him the first person in the village to have one that word got around that she was the daughter of a farm machinery merchant. It was thanks to this that Hwang Man-gŭn no longer had to fall over in the street. For seven months, Hwang Man-gŭn learned about the operation, simple repairs and structure of the cultivator, and came to know more about cultivators than anyone else in the village. Indeed, this was only natural, since for those seven months nobody in the village but Hwang Man-gŭn had a cultivator. Thanks to his cultivator, Hwang Man-gŭn started being treated as a human being and even became a popular figure in the village. He neither refused requests from anybody, nor minded doing any kind of work.

Before Hwang Man-gŭn started driving his cultivator, he grew rice on three majigi* of Hwang clan sacrificial crop fields, as well as doing all kinds of dirty jobs as the village farmhand. When it came to traditional exchange of work, his labor was treated as only half that of a strong young man, like a child or a woman, and in order to get what he was entitled

to he had to work for twice as long. But from the time he got the cultivator he lived happily, being treated as a fully-fledged farmer; indeed, until the other families got cultivators, he was valued even more highly than the average person.

Just as the legend goes, "The hard part is getting the girl to come to Chŏn'gok, the swamp where the Water God lives; once she has come, the Water God never fails to bless her with a child in the shortest possible time", the young woman bore a child before even seven months had passed. Naturally, it was a strong, cocky little boy. From that time onwards, a strange rumor started going around the village. Hwang Man-gŭn, let alone his mother, never spoke of the reason the young woman came to marry him, and there was no way anyone from the young woman's family, which had as good as disowned her, would have come to visit. Somehow, though, as well as the villagers getting to know every tiny detail of the circumstances under which the young woman left home, things that never happened got added on to the story, and this was the only thing they seemed to talk about whenever Hwang Man-gŭn was somewhere else. The young woman, who had been the adopted daughter of a farm machinery merchant in a bustling town in the neighboring country, was deflowered by a relative; that relative was the third only son in three generations of his family, and had self-destructively joined the army and been killed in an explosion while laying land mines. The young woman, having been cursed and

told by her whole family to go away and die, had left home, been saved by Hwang Man-gŭn and come to live with him, meaning that the child was from the seed of her dead relative. Perhaps this talk reached the ears of the woman: three weeks after giving birth to the baby, she disappeared without so much as a word. Since the marriage had not been registered, the young woman was still an unmarried young woman. Hwang Man-gŭn, now a bachelor, wrapped the baby in swaddling clothes and walked every day from Sindae-1-ri to Sindae-3-ri begging for breast feeds. Every time he did this, the children of the neighborhood would tag along behind him, teasing him.

“Man-gŭn, Man-gŭn, what’s that on your back?”

“It’s my son.”

“Whose son?”

“I said my son.”

“The rabbit give it to you?”

“No, id mide. (this can be interpreted in two ways: either as “it’s mine”, or, spoken by a short tongue, “I made it”).”

“How many pounds does it weigh?”

“Dek bound” (ten pounds, or, six pounds)

Even when the child’s weight passed ten pounds, he would go around on his father’s back or cultivator, getting breastfed by people and cows. The child’s grandmother, at home, did not know how to raise a child, and even if she had known she would hardly have lifted a finger. Everything was the responsibility and the work of Hwang Man-gŭn. Having grown

up this way, perhaps because he wanted for breast milk when he was a baby, the boy was uncommonly greedy and very stubborn. Though he had no friends, he had more toys to play with than any other boy in the village, and these were all carved and finished for him by Hwang Man-gŭn's own hands.

Hwang Man-gŭn's mother and son were both fussy eaters; if one of them refused to eat without a fishy side-dish, the other would turn away as soon as it was put on the table. It was common practice for him to lay the table twice over at every mealtime. There was one laying for his mother and one for his son, while he himself ate without a table. When he had finished his day's work, Hwang Man-gŭn would be sure to come home with some meat tied to his cultivator. While working, he would thread the carp, catfish, mudfish, even grasshoppers or locusts that he had caught at the edge of the paddy fields onto pieces of straw and bring them home. Hwang Man-gŭn was indispensable when it came to performing the work of an untouchable: when, from time to time, a cow, pig, dog, chicken, duck or rabbit was slaughtered in the village, he would take care of everything from killing it to sorting out its innards to taking the meat off the bones. Having done it many a time over the years to meet his own needs, he had now become an expert. He also became good at slicing and roasting and steaming and boiling and parboiling the meat he received for doing this work. Anyone that happened to take a spoonful of food that he had made was sure to be awestruck by

it. Nobody, male or female, young or old, forgot to add afterwards, "he's one of a kind, this idiot". He did not know about artificial seasoning, but he knew how to bring out every last bit of natural flavor in the ingredients, and how to harmonize them.

Though Hwang Man-gŭn did not know the customs and practices found in books, he took the lead when it came to jobs like dressing the dead and building tombs, which other people avoided, and the villagers did not hesitate to give such jobs to him. Hwang Man-gŭn also dug more manure pits and built more animal pens and cast more bricks than anybody else. Cutting the grass in the village streets, cleaning out the drains, cleaning the village well... catching a live pig for the Water God ritual, tying it up, dressing it in colored clothing as it jerked around in protest – he was the greatest of experts when it came to the ritual jobs that are almost non-existent in any other world. He was always there to do the work of the village, the work of others, the dirty work. The payment he received for this was nothing (in the case of work for the village), or half-pay (for doing others' farming work); when he got what he was entitled to (for work done with his cultivator) payment always came with words of self-praise and patronization on the part of the payer.

"Pan-gŭn, if you left our village and went to some cold-hearted urban town you'd be dead by now, probably starved to death. No matter how much of an idiot you are, you're only human if you know how to be grateful. You should be grateful to

everyone, child or adult, so make sure you never pull a face but greet them cheerfully wherever you go, all right?"

Hwang Man-gŭn was all smiles, even when listening to this kind of long-winded ranting by Hwang Jae-sŏk. When he had finished working he would give a series of deep bows. Delightedly, as if dancing.

At his home, the tools he had handled for several decades were thoroughly arranged in an order that nobody but he could understand. The tools, just like his house or his mother or his son, shone brightly thanks to the daily care he gave them. He quite clearly knew everything in his house very well, and he fixed most things himself when they broke down. His cultivator, especially, was an early model, an antique among antiques for which not even replacement parts could now be found, but it was only the frequently conking out trailer that he replaced many times over; the front part, with the engine, he kept on fixing himself. Because his cultivator was an old-fashioned one and had been repaired so many times, nobody but he could even start it up, let alone drive it.

Hwang Man-gŭn did like a drink though, but because he was poor he could not get drunk very often. When, occasionally, there was a wedding or a funeral or party in the village and the opportunity arose to drink for free, he was sure to drink himself stupid. Because nobody would put him over his shoulder, take him home and lie him down when he

collapsed, he would lie down and sleep, uncovered, in a yard or at the roadside – the villagers were loathe to pick him up themselves, not because they were cold-hearted and unfeeling but because this was something that he often did, and it was reputed that the strange and unique smell of his body, which had not once been properly washed since he was born, was hard to get rid of once it made its way into other people's clothes, even if you boiled them. If there was a party in winter they did not invite him at all, in case he freeze to death in the street. But he never failed to turn up to such drinking sessions – though nobody knew how he found out about them – and, defying all coercion and persuasion, was sure to drink himself stupid before collapsing in the yard. So from the moment he was old enough, it became the work of Hwang Man-gün's son, in the winter, to take his drunken father home, propping him up by the arms. Perhaps the frequency with which this occurred made it good training for him: by the time he was at middle school he could already carry his father on his back, and once he reached high school he was able to kick him all the way home.

One day in winter, Mr. Min went to a hwan'gap* party in Sindae-2-ri in the daytime, got drunk and went home early. He fell asleep for a while, then woke up to find that the evening dusk had come to settle wistfully like the sprinkling of silvery frost on the hair of a middle-aged man. His strength sapped by this unexpected visit from such rueful pathos, Mr. Min stayed lying down with his eyes closed.

At that moment, the sound of voices reached him from beyond the single wall that separated his room from the street outside, and Mr. Min found himself listening to them.

“Father, you rascal, get up right now.”

The voice was that of a pubescent boy.

“Let’s sit here just a bit more. I told you, I was dreaming about your mum, then I woke up.”

This seemed to be a man of more than forty, playing the baby.

“How can you worry me like this, getting drunk every day? I can’t get any school work done because of you, I’m fed up with life, I’ve even lost my appetite.”

“Oh, my son, Mr. Son, I’ve done wrong. Please let me off for once.”

“It’s because you keep being such a coward like this that not even the kids even the village respect you. Please, try to save some face. A beard isn’t enough to make you an adult. I’m so ashamed of you.”

What’s with saving face? It’s enough if a man works and farms with his own hands and keeps the rice coming into his mouth. Why should I care how I look to others? Oh, why do my eyes keep shutting?”

“If you keep on like this I’ll tell Granny. Want me to call Granny?”

“No, sir, I am greatly at fault. I’ll get up, Mr. Son. But please just don’t call Mother.”

Then there was the sound of a head thudding against a wall, and the father and son seemed to be tottering home in a kind of three-legged

arrangement. Because Mr. Min had at that time not been in the village for very long, he was unable to stop himself bursting out with laughter as he wondered if this father and son were of some kind of strange breed that did not know the basics of Confucian relationships, or if they were hobgoblins messing around. Later on, when Mr. Min happened to meet the boy, he remembered what had happened that day and asked him various questions, but the boy was just a shy, normal country middle-school kid. In any case, after that Mr. Min started observing this father and son carefully.

Hwang Man-gŭn could indeed take a lot of alcohol. He always went around with a barrel of drink tied down with rope in the trailer of his cultivator. Just as he lovingly prepared his mother's and his son's meals, he always filled the flask with the same devotion. Before each meal he would pour makköllli* up to the brim of a nickel bowl as wide as his face and drink half of it; after eating, he would drink the other half, with audible enjoyment, down to the last drop. When he went out to work in the fields he would take a packet of instant noodles for lunch. Before opening the packet he would drink half a bowlful of makköllli; after opening it, adding cold water, shaking it and swallowing the noodles down raw he would drink another half bowlful. In the evenings, while his family was eating, he would sit on the veranda and drink one bowlful. That was his dinner. When his family had eaten their fill and he had done the washing up he would go around

the village, starting with the village hall, searching carefully with his huge nose and ears to find out where the menfolk of the village were holding a drinking session. If he found such a gathering, he would drink immeasurable amounts of alcohol until he collapsed. But at dawn the next morning he never failed to bring out into the inner room a table of food prepared with utmost devotion, after which he sat on the veranda and followed his usual breakfast order of half a bowlful of makkölli, his food, and another half bowlful.

One day, the head of the village broadcast the message that there was to be a “national farmers’ rally for the settlement of farmers’ debts,” so the villagers gathered in the village hall that evening. Hwang Man-gŭn appeared before anybody else and went to get makkölli from the village co-operative, as ordered by the head of the village. They had only a couple of stainless steel cups, so the drinking session ran in such a way that one person drank and then passed the cup on to the next. Hwang Man-gŭn, when it was his turn, picked up the cup and drank as fast as lightning, then gazed at it, eyes flickering, as it made its way round. All Hwang Man-gŭn was interested in was when the cup would come around again. Still, it was going round too slowly. Although it seemed a little fast to Mr. Min.

“So what I’m saying is that everyone from our village, too, must take part in the rally in front of the county hall. Your instructions are to go home, clean up your cultivators, and drive them to the myŏn

office tomorrow morning, where we will assemble. Then we will make a long procession of cultivators on the A-road to the county hall, and show our determination through action.”

“What about people without cultivators?” asked Mr. Min.

“Anyone that farms but doesn’t have a cultivator is not a farmer. So you’re not a farmer, Mr. Min. How can you call yourself a farmer when all you’ve done is sow a few flowering plants in a vinyl house?”

“Isn’t there a broken down cultivator anywhere? Do we have to have cultivators?” asked Mr. Min ashamedly, looking round. Hwang Chöl-sök, the New Community Movement officer,* answered him.

“He was just saying that – you can go as far as the myön office, be it on a cultivator or by bus, then ride on someone’s cultivator, what’re you fussing about? But you’re not actually a farmer, so why are you so eager to go the farmers’ rally?”

“Ah, I have as much debt as the next man.”

Hwang Hak-su, the same age as Mr. Min, spoke next.

“Debt if you farm, debt even if you don’t farm. We should put all our debts together into one giant pile of debt.”

The mood that day was not too heavy. Having said that, neither was it light enough to be ended with this kind of idle chatter. Even among those gathered there, two or three had been summoned to court for not repaying loans from the agricultural co-operative. Their own debts were enough of a

problem, but since they had accepted joint liability for each other, it was not uncommon, when one family went bankrupt, for the person who was liable to go bankrupt in turn. There were even rumors that, in one case, a whole village had fled by night.

“What will noblemen in high places ever hear of it if we do this? We’ll still end up losing everything and living out in the street.”

“If they kick us out they’ll have nothing left either. No matter how slow the chicken, if you wring its neck you don’t get a single egg any more. Everyone loses.”

“Not everyone. They can import eggs if they need to, so they won’t bat an eyelid whether we die and get made into chicken soup or not.”

After listening to the head of the village’s announcement and exchanging gloomy jokes, they passed around the cup in silence for some time before the gathering ended. There was none of the usual clamoring for karaoke ballads that took place after drinking sessions in the village hall. The mood was not right for that. In the confusion, Hwang Man-gŭn got smacked on the back of the hand and rebuked several times after snatching the cup from other people.

Mr. Min, urinating in the darkness outside the village hall, happened to see the head of the village seize Hwang Man-gŭn and speak to him.

“Even my saying all this is useless. No doubt the only people that turn up tomorrow will be a few phoney farmers like Hak-su, who just take out loans

and spend the money flirting with women in coffee shops. No honest farmers like you will go, Man-gŭn. You must take the lead. You must go there with a banner on your knackered old cultivator, protesting about how they're killing all the farmers..."

When Mr. Min gave a hollow cough, the head of the village's talk stopped there. Hwang Man-gŭn walked slightly ahead of Mr. Min, who followed him for a while. The stars in the sky were beautifully clear that night, and the spring wind, still cold, soon washed the heat from their drink-flushed faces. Mr. Min wavered, wondering whether to speak or not. This was partly because until now he had only ever met Hwang Man-gŭn in the presence of other people; the two of them had never talked properly alone. But Hwang Man-gŭn spoke first.

"They're so smart, the way they go round like that."

"Who you mean?" Mr. Min answered carefully.

"Those stirs (stars). Like clockwork, they go on and off, on and off, every single day, tick-tock tick-tock, don't they?"

Mr. Min, who knew no more about Hwang Man-gŭn than that he was an industrious binge drinker, was puzzled. Then he found a question that he thought appropriate.

"How long would it take to get to the county hall? If one went by cultivator?"

"It'd take half a day."

"I've heard you're good at driving cultivators."

"Because I've been doing it longer than anyone

in the village. My cultivator's very old. It's very stubborn so only I can start it up. I know every inch of it down to its bumhole so it listens to me."

"... are you going to the rally tomorrow?"

"I have to cook for Mother... I don't know. The village head said real farmers like me definitely have to go..."

"How old is your mother?"

"This year is her hwan'gap."

Only then did Mr. Min look at him again. He suddenly grew interested in his wrinkly face, like that of a city dweller in his sixties; his beaming expression; his overgrown tangle of silver hair; his big, rough hands, his stooped shoulders.

"If you need some more to drink, would you like to go to my house? I have some leftover soju*. And no side dishes."

Hwang Man-gün, as if he already knew this, lightly turned his behind and went off in the direction of Mr. Min's house.

At dawn the next morning, Mr. Min heard for a moment the clattering of a cultivator at the entrance to the village. Bang, bang, bang... it did not seem to be starting up. Ba-bang, bang, ba-bang, bang, bang, brang, brang, brang, brrrrrrr... He He expected the whole village would soon be filled with the noise of every family going to the rally on its cultivator, but for some reason he heard no more engines. As he listened to the first cultivator grow fainter into the distance, Mr. Min dozed back off again.

Last night - it definitely not been a dream - Mr.

Min had heard Hwang Man-gŭn say the following:

“A farmer mustn’t get into debt.”

(Once one gets into debt, one starts getting out of his depth with attempts to pay it back. Look at the empty cowsheds around the village, the stalls with nothing but dried shit tumbling around, the vinyl houses luxuriant with nothing but weeds. Farmers’ and Fishermen’s Welfare, Income Increases, Lifestyle Improvement? That’s all fine. But one has to do them with one’s own money. If one doesn’t do them with one’s own money, it’s no different from gambling. The debt keeps growing, like a snowball on Mt. Man-gŭn or an icicle hanging from the eaves).

“They talk about “mechanized agriculture”; now every house has so many machines on wheels. Cultivators, tractors, rice planting machines, threshers, drying machines... all bought with debt. No matter how hard you work on the farm, you’re always scrambling to pay back the debt.”

(If one family gets a rice planting machine, to be used once a year, it’s not as if the thing is constantly in operation. When they’re not working, they can lend it to another family. That’s how they used cows in the old days. But they don’t do that now. Helping each other with the farming is the stuff of yesterday. If one family isn’t using its machine but doesn’t lend it out, the neighbors buy one too, be it simply through rancor. In any case, they’re buying it with debt, so it’s easy. The machines run on tax-exempt oil. It’s difficult to run all the machines on tax-exempt oil. My neighbor has two cultivators but

receives only one batch of tax-exempt oil. Why does he need two cultivators? It's not as if one person can ride two of them at once).

"All this gets pud ondo (added onto) the price of rice. It should be pud on, but when the government buys it they only give you barely enough money to feed your family. They give you loans, and funding, but it'd be better if they did neither. Both things make farmers into stupid blockheads."

(Consequently, genuine farmers are gradually disappearing.)

"Would a person that grows the fud (food) and grain that goes into his own mouth mess around with that fud and grain he's so grateful for? Spraying chemicals that harm him and everyone else, putting down expensive, bad fertiliser and taking back fruit and veg and grain that are only good for looking at – can a farmer get away with that?"

(Everyone does this, in order to pay back his debts. So the people and organizations that hand out debt as if handing a son spending money from their pockets do nothing but produce bad farmers. When they give loans from policy funds, or bounty funds, or farming and fishing village structural improvement funds, or home improvement funds, or such and such funds, they pretend to be lending out of benevolence, and now these funds are driving people that are not capable of repaying them to bankruptcy.)

"Why don't I get into debt? Because nobody will lend me anything. And nobody asked me to be

his surety, because they say I'm a fool. I'll live to a hundred years old, doing my farming as I like, and not going to ruin."

One week later, Hwang Man-gŭn returned. His son came back, holding him in his arms. Carrying a single jar that contained all his bones and ashes. The cultivator came back too. The trailer had been taken off, and only the front came back, on a truck. The front, which no one but Hwang Man-gŭn could operate, looked foolish, returning without its owner on its back.

Hwang Man-gŭn – Mr. Hwang – may have been born simple, but as the years went by he gradually acquired a divine wisdom. Heaven kept the man warm, and the earth kindly used its beak to hatch open the shell of his egg. Then, in his later years, he became wiser than anybody. Just as he never harmed anyone, he left no tiresome, thoughtless teachings in his wisdom. He saw himself as offspring of the land, and always worked with diligence. People said that farming brought only debt and worked one to the bone, but he minded not what they said. He was always at the side of those going through hard times, and amazed those who observed him by always giving the credit to others. As a dutiful son, sent from heaven, he looked after his mother with devotion throughout his life. To his son, he was a warm, considerate father and when administering discipline he made it easy to understand, so that his son was moved by the generosity of his father's heart.

A love of alcohol was part of Mr. Hwang's nature, and it was to this that people ascribed his poverty. Mr. Hwang worked harder than any other farmer and was experienced in his work. He farmed on clan land, and on land borrowed from those who had grown old and no longer had the strength to work it. When he farmed, he took nothing forcibly from the land; what remained, he used to brew wine, offering the lighter parts to the heavens and returning the heavier parts to the ground. So he was not ruined by drink, but painted his life in its colors. The makkölli he drank was at once his meal and an offering to the gods of land and grain. It was the root of his strength and the bones of his optimism.

A few days ago, Mr. Hwang drove his cultivator to the myön but nobody else had come by cultivator, so there was nobody to accompany him. He got back on his cultivator and drove the thirty miles to the meeting point at the county hall. Several times, on his way, he was almost hit by a car. The dust carried by the spring wind tormented his eyes. The day was gray and cold. Soon, rain began to fall. There was nothing on his cultivator to shelter him from the rain, so Mr. Hwang shook in the cold as it reached right down into his bones. When he got to the county hall the rally had already finished and there was nobody there. After buying fish for his mother and warming himself up, Mr. Hwang got on his cultivator and headed home, not noticing that it was getting dark. There was nothing on his cultivator to catch the attention of faster vehicles,

and Mr. Hwang almost had an accident several times. Each time this happened, he would stop and then start off again, thus becoming later and later. In the growing darkness, his cultivator fell down off the road into a paddy field and the trailer broke. Eventually, Mr. Hwang realised that he could not get home that night. He got drunk on the milk of the earth that he kept in his cultivator and sat next to it, guarding it. But the cultivator did not guard Mr. Hwang. It could not guard him from the cold and from his drowsiness. Alas, if Mr. Hwang had lived longer he would surely have become a big tree, spreading his merciful shade wide against the harsh heat of troubled times.

His was a life understood or admired by no one, but Mr. Hwang attained a state of depth, of profound tranquillity. See how, living amid the scorn of others, he became not base, but accomplished alone that which he believed he had to do, remaining consistent and faithful to his original beliefs – he must truly have been sent from heaven. This man must surely have been sent from heaven and raised by the earth.

May the twentieth of the 4330th year of Tan'gun.

The above could have stood as an epitaph or something, but what use could it be for Mr. Hwang, whose great soul made all the earth and the heavens its home? Written by a prostrate Min Sun-jöng of Namhae, who once returned to a life of farming in

the new village of Sindae-ri and is now drifting back to the city, having achieved nothing.

Baast ZOLBAYAR

FATHER

I have twice been frightened in my life.

During the month when they were gelding the colts, my father, together with my grandpa and my uncle, went hunting. They went out at dawn but, when the sun set, they had still not come back. I waited for my father. It was late at night. I had yet to hear the sound of saddles and the horses shaking themselves from the road which would sound my father's arrival. My longing permitted me no sleep, nor could I sleep because of the blanket of fear which enveloped me.. That day, when the men went off hunting, my aunt had been talking to me, they said, "Before your father went off this morning, he ate the meat from the back of a sheep's neck. Certainly, it had met with the enemy. And in eating the meat, he had met with the enemy." From among the images in my memory of that tender time of my life, a time when I couldn't even tether a goat, the form of a wrathful Buddha becomes clear, the idea of this inevitable enemy of which they were speaking freezes over. My aunt slept peacefully, unaware of how much fear she had caused me. I think about how fearful I was that my father might have come into contact with the enemy, but there in the darkness, I wanted to search for my father, whom I loved more than anyone else. Now I am trying to calm myself, for he had gone and

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FATHER

he came back. That time, in any case, was for me of unbending length and hardness.

More than a thousand times I have gone over how my father came in to me. They had met a wolf. My father had shot at it. My grandfather was gloating, he said, "It was such a good gun, and he missed. Your father is no good." But, at this time, although my father had failed to shoot this divine animal, this wolf, I was boundlessly happy in this single, incomparably better, situation. I had seen my father, I was free from the fear.

Deep in the night, I climbed, silently sobbing, into my father's lap. "Did my son wait long for his father?" he said, lying there stretched out beneath the stars, and from where had these salty tears come? And so it was that, sometime before five o'clock, the new morning saw the joyful reuniting of myself and my father.

The very last time that I experienced fear was during the year following these events. We knew that my father had fallen foul of a disease from which he might not recover. My father, whose legs were not affected by his illness, waited around in bed. His body was wracked by the pain. His mind and his eyes, brushing against the threshold of his fiftieth year, would not bend the knee before all this sickness. On the evening of the fiftieth day of his suffering, straining to stay alive, he called to me. There was nothing left in my father's gentle black eyes.

He spoke to me, he asked me not to cry. "Your

father has lived for fifty years. Half a century, my son. It's been a good life. It's how it is with humans, it's time for your father to go. You must look out for your mother, and for your younger brothers and sisters." In the dawn of the morning sun, father was sleeping. Slept his eternal sleep. Not once during these days of suffering had he complained and, as I stood beside his body, holding his forehead, I finally abandoned my fear. I did not lose my father, and my fear of doing so split completely apart. He showed the stability of someone who was resolved to transcend suffering. My father did not bend the knee before suffering, he didn't let his own pain get twisted among the pain of other people. So he remained alive, with my mother and my brothers and sisters. Now, then, I have no reason for fear, no pain of worry. I trust that, holding fast to such resolve, a single and wonderful life was waiting for me.

When I spoke at the beginning about "my life", I was in truth a child then, an infant. But it appears that, before life and before fear, there can be no adequate excuses. My father went from me, and, during the second autumn after I had farewelled him into eternal life, hoarfrost had settled on the ridge of the Altai. And this second autumn, the rains of life's wisdom had fallen across the days which were born to me. Perhaps I was nurturing, encouraging my mind to wait for what I knew would never come, to see my father in my dreams. And once my father, having lived in the world, had returned home to

Heaven, it was to us that the destiny to watch over our dreams fell. Kiss your father when he is alive, receive his kisses. And please remember this one beautiful picture of us all together. For it is gone. And check if you have a picture with your father. As for me I didn't have.

Shifa Khalid

Life's meaning

"Life is like a play, it is not the length, but the performance that counts."

(ANON)

CHAPTER One

"It has been a long time since I have been living on this earth. A long time indeed. Fourteen years ago, I was sent to this planet. I was born.

Today, it has been 14 years, 4 months, 26 days, 3 hours and 5 minutes as I write down these words. My accuracy of the calculations may strike funny to some. But the past has taught me to measure every thing accurately. Life's like that. Deep thoughts we later understand, thoughts we think are best forgotten.

I know, I've thought. I often think as to the reason why I was born. What does the future have in store for me?

Through different stages of life I have passed, thinking deep thoughts. I thought before, now I write:

I write what comes to me. And it just does. I

write poetry. It is my dream that some day, even after my death, people will remember me. Not only for my poetry, but also for what I was, what I am. I have often thought of telling the story of my life so that after I leave people know that I had my reasons to do whatever I did and thought. But I never came around to actually doing it. I guess that now my muse has finally forced me in to doing so. My muse, my spiritual guide, is in myself. Laugh if you may. By now you may think of me as a lunatic. But it is true, I do believe that my inspiration comes from some where beyond. So here goes... my story... my search for life's meanings, its reasons.

Words, people say are the strongest weapon, the best choice, the best alternative, the best solution to any problem. Even though I am a writer, someone who puts these words in the best sequence, I don't see the importance of these words. Obviously to me my words are important, but tomorrow, someone else will come and write the same words in a different, better sequence than mine... and my words will be forgotten, buried deep down for someone to come along and discover them. Like gold. Yet for me these words are written on sand... the wind, the waves, they keep erasing them. But these very words will now tell my story, my understanding of life...it's meanings... it's reasons.

I am an ordinary person. A normal human being. Yet one must wonder... isn't every human different. And each person has two strands of encoded information in their DNA, yet the information

stored in each is different. It is a big mystery.

I am a teenager, going through what others call my Golden Years. But what after the next five years ...can't I make them golden too? I have many friends; some say a very irresistible personality. I have a great family, one anyone would be proud to have. But there is something I feel is incomplete. Maybe it is a sensation you get when you are not satisfied, or maybe it's just that... a sensation... it's hard to decipher.

Being a teenager I go to school, enjoying every moment of it. That is the place that makes up about 85 % of my life. My friends... I love them all and treasure their friendship. Yet I am searching for one, special friend with whom I can share my deepest, darkest secrets. Often it has happened that I think I have found that special friend, but the reality was yet to be found. Then it's just that, an ever-going-on, fruitless search. Although it is a fact that many people share their deep, dark secrets with me and ask for my advice and through the past have given me the reputation of a "wise friend". So they say I'm trustworthy.

That was me, not my life. My life is what? Fourteen years. Worthless? No. Demanding? Yes. But that's a common opinion. So what's special about it? Frankly speaking.... I don't know. These fourteen years, may seem long in number, but pass through my mind's eye like fourteen moments. Yet that too is a common sensation. But in these moments, I have accomplished so much, felt so much, gained so

much that if God asked me to die, I certainly would. But again... my main quest will remain unfinished... my search for life's meanings... it's reasons."

CHAPTER Two

"Melissa come on, the food is getting cold." "Coming mom!" I shouted back. "Hey Mel, come on, mom's made your favorite, chicken casseroles!" said my elder brother Kevin, He called me Mel for short, I called him Kev. And right now he was literally bombarding on my bedroom door, "I said I'm coming," I shouted. Quickly putting away my journal, I rushed downstairs to greet the casseroles, and what do I find... spaghetti! But I didn't mind. As long as it was something I liked. Besides, I was used to Kevin's pranks. And I was grateful to him for that. After all, he was the only one who treated me like a normal human being....

... I used to have headaches, just mild ones. Then in summer they became more frequent. Everyone said that it was a migraine and told me not to worry and just stay out of the sun. I did as I was told. Then they suddenly became more severe than ever. They became a nuisance. I had them even when I was standing in the halls at school or near my bedroom window at night. Then one day, I was standing at my locker with my best friend, Judy, when I had an attack. And I mean attack. Without a warning, I fainted.

... Darkness. All black. When I regained consciousness, I found myself lying in a hospital bed

in a white gown. With my mother crying by my side and Kevin unsuccessfully trying to comfort her, and my father talking to a doctor, who I later found out to be Dr. Patterson. Dr. Pat for short. He was talking loud enough for everyone to hear "Mr. Cornfield, your daughter has been suffering from headaches, hasn't she?" He asked my dad." Yes. Ever since she was a little girl, maybe six " my father replied. "But we thought they were just migraines." "Well," the doctor started "according to her friend, Judy Jameson, she has been having really severe attacks, and did you know that it was a headache which made her faint? It was so strong." "What are you trying to say here doctor?" my mother asked in a wavering and weak voice, it didn't resemble my mom's strong, chirpy voice at all, "Mrs. Cornfield, What I am saying is that the headaches which you so cleverly categorized, as migraines were actually indications of brain cancer. And now it is mature. In short, I'm afraid it's irrecoverable." "What?" came a cry from the other side of the room. It was Kevin. "Melissa has cancer. I'm sorry." And with that the doctor left the room for my family to absorb the shock. Mom started crying, dad took her to the couch and tried to calm her, but ended up with wet eyes. All this time, Kevin had been quiet. Still absorbing the shock I guess. He came near my bed. No one had realized that I had wakened and heard the whole story. And I guess the shock still had Kevin blinded. But it hadn't blinded me. I could see. I could see tears in his eyes. Tears in my big brother's eyes. You won't know how it feels.

No one would know. No one would know how it feels to see tears in someone's eyes, knowing you're the cause and realizing that that person had never cried before but had always been the strong one. "Kevin," I said, sounding surprisingly weak to my own ears. "Kev, I..." I had wanted to tell him that I was sorry, sorry to make him sad, sorry to make him cry, but before I could continue he said, "Mell, hey Mell, don't you worry, every thing's gonna be fine." Mom and dad also came to the bed and we all cried openly. All four of us. As if this were a chance of a lifetime. Later I found out... it was.

CHAPTER Three

From that day till now. My life changed drastically. Cancer. Just that one word changed my entire world. Darkened it. It made me leave my friends, my school, my hobbies and in other words, my life. I had to start all over again with no one to guide me in this strange new dreary and cold world, strange new life. And I tell you, it has never been the same. It just couldn't be.

Everyone changed. Everyone started keeping his or her distance from me. As if I was contaminated. And well, I guess, I was. They even looked at me differently. Instead of the friendly look, all I could see or feel in their eyes was sympathy, pity and compassion. Their friendly, encouraging smiles changed into sympathetic, pitiful gestures. These smiles, these looks, they drilled holes in my heart, in my mind. Besides Judy I had other friends, friends

whom I had helped and done so much for, thinking of them as close as family. Yet they too turned away from me. They didn't even come to see me in the hospital before the word that I had cancer leaked out. And even after I came home, I secretly still expected them to come to me with a sensible excuse. Silly me.

I myself drastically changed. Instead of complimenting myself on how great I looked, I would look in the mirror and rate the reflection very critically. Instead of saying "I look great!" I would say, "Why should I care how I look? It won't change reality. It won't change the fact that I have cancer, that I have no friends." And then I would burst in to tears. Though I hate to admit it, I became very sensitive.

Even my parents changed. Especially mom. She started acting as if I was a highly sensitive and fragile glass artifact. She would literally interrogate me about my day at school, whether I had any headaches? Did I take my medicine on time? Was I having trouble in my studies? Was there any problem? And I would simply answer in terms of "yes" or "no". It would go on in a specified manner. Like in a routine. I was sick of it. But I never told her directly, thinking it would break her heart. I did tell Kevin though. And I guess he talked to mom and she tried to loosen up a bit.

Between all this two people never changed. Well maybe they did in the beginning but they had control over themselves. They were, my best

friend Judy and my brother Kevin. No matter what happened or what I felt like I could always count on them. I could always trust them about everything. I told them everything. Things I didn't even tell my parents because I didn't want them to worry. And the best part is that they too treated me like a normal brother treats his younger sister and a friend treats her best friend. Just like they did before we found out that I had Cancer. I say it so easily now, as if it is something casual. And sorry to say, for me it is. I must admit that Judy was hesitant at the beginning but we had a heart-to-heart talk and revived our friendship.

Gradually, it so happened that I had to leave school. In a way, I was relieved. I no longer had to cope with the smiles, the looks and sometimes the crazy remarks. From that day on, I started studying privately. That is at home. Tutors came for all the well-reputed schools to teach all that was taught at the schools with an addition of some more subjects. So, in a way it was good for me. But I guess my parents just couldn't accept the fact that I was going to die soon, after all, for someone who's dying, an "A" in English won't take him/her straight to Heaven. Still, through all this mess we struggled together. Me, my family and my true best friend... Judy. But who was I to know that life too had become treacherous in the worst way and had its own lesson to teach. It was a lesson it could only let time teach. Teach me that is. I guess that whoever said that "life's but a walking shadow" was right, for the shadow can vanish at

daytime (under a shade) and appear in the night (in a light)

CHAPTER Four

Even though I had Judy and Kev to talk to, sometimes, there were things, that I felt just, couldn't be talked. Or rather, couldn't be spoken out loud. So, for some things I had to consult my one true pal who I knew for sure will never give away my secrets or leave me. And that true pal was my journal.

"I know I sound crazy that I have a quest, to look for life's meanings... it's reasons. But it is true. Something happened in my life that made me realize that I don't have much time left. I have realized something. Something each person does realize for him/herself at sometime in life. That in this world time itself is our true wealth. Time, which has started for us since we were born, and it is going on, and soon it will finish and we will go back to where we came from. It is this very time, which we are quickly running short of and we have to utilize this very scarce time in the best way that we can, to benefit us... later. And because everyone has to discover this fact for one's own self, even if I wanted to, I can't tell the others about it, partly because this is where individuality comes in and partly because I'm scared. Scared of the reaction of people to this fact... they might laugh at me.

I am a coward. So I write it down. With hopes that someday, someone will read and understand it.

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And live a better, more worthwhile life.

For it is just this life that is our test. The earth and sky are witnesses. We realize what is wrong, we know, still...

As days then years go passing by,
Under the same constant sky,
The leaves on the treetops begin to dry,
Portraying a heart broken by a lie.

The earth and the sky,
They 'll never die, So now I wonder why oh why,
Why are mortals meant to die?

Witness to many a tragic events, The skies are gateways to the heaven.

And the earth constantly making comments,
Watching us mortals going through torments.

Is it true what they say?
That the world will end,
Is it true what they say?

That we can make amends. Then why isn't life a bed of roses, And why aren't we as lucky as Moses?

Why don't we see the light? At the end of a tunnel, burning bright. "

"Hey Mell, I guess it's time for your checkup," Kev cried.

"I know. I'll be right there," I cried. Quickly, putting away my journal and grabbing my jacket before going out to the car. This was a routine now. Even though I sometimes still felt surprised. This 'visit' to the doctor... the same old Dr. Pat came twice a week, and once more a bit privately. So that means thrice a week for me and twice a week for my family.

I know, this must sound confusing to you, so I'll explain...

...After the first two months of living with the enemy, I had this sudden urge to do something for my family. I had a couple of options:

I could kill myself and save my family the trouble of waiting for my death.

Or I could make a deal with the doctor.

I chose the second option because I came to the conclusion that suicide would mean that I gave up or surrendered to the cancer. Even though I was, I didn't want to die as a coward in the eyes of the world. And it would give my family more grief to think that their beloved killed herself of depression and they couldn't do anything to prevent it. So, the next week I paid an unexpected visit to dear old Dr. Pat. He really was surprised to see me. Then I made him make a promise. He made it so willingly that from that day on I saw him in a new light. I asked him for a favor. I asked him to check me up on the day before the first appointment with my family and tell all the bad news to me and when I come with my family the next day, he would just say that I was 'stable' and had a very small chance to survive. At first he was reluctant, saying it was against the rules and all that jazz. But then I said, "please doctor, do it as a last favor to a dying girl," after saying that and seeing the expression on his face I knew that I had hit right on the mark.

And so it kept on going as it did. I went on Mondays and he would tell me how many more day

were left and when I went with my family he would say, "Very good, you might just have a chance." And then he would wink at me with a broad smile but a pitiful expression in his eyes and I would return it with a forced smile but a dreaded expression in my eyes. My sessions with him alone were most scary. They scared me to death.

Such are the things, which I can only share with my journal...

"... I don't have much time left. For soon I shall leave this world and go away from all it has to offer. My loved ones... my enemies, my hobbies... my fears. Everything is to be left behind, so they say. Yet I wonder, they who? It is a scary thought. They are some one or maybe... some thing. It is such a terrible sensation that I'm going through. It is scary, lonesome, horrible and terribly frightening when it comes over. That is to know that you'll soon die, there's fear of the unknown, of what'll be there, who'll be there to welcome me, and will I go to heaven...or hell? Will I become an angel? Is there any such thing as rebirth? And then there is the fear of silence, of not being able to talk to anyone. Like the one which comes with solitude. And then of course the fear of not being able to complete my quest to search for life's meanings... its reasons."

CHAPTER Five

After the checkup, I went to visit Judy. She lived near by, so I often walked to her place. The day was chilly and the sun was setting so you can imagine the

scene, an orangish, pinkish sky and a silhouette of a girl walking away in the cold chilly breeze. Sigh, I wish it were that simple, that I could just walk away, far away from this mess. Oh how I wish...

When I reached her place, her mother told me that she had to go hurriedly to visit her aunt at the hospital and she was just going there herself. So I walked back home, all alone. Just as I was meant to in life... Walk alone.

I looked up at the sky. It was a starry night. One of the stars was the brightest, "it's yours" I remembered my mother saying so, when I was a little girl. "Starlight," I whispered in a shaky voice, "star bright. First star I see tonight." And suddenly I realized I couldn't see clearly, everything was a blur, scared stiff, with shaky, hesitant hands, as if scared of what they might find, I touched my face, to find it completely washed in tears.

Quickly, I wiped my face and headed home. A lonely silhouette walking away. Away from reality... I never really got to make the wish.

The next day turned out to be a reflection of my mood the previous night. A rainy day with a cold and damp feeling for free. Yet strangely enough it was soothing for me. It had been in my nature that I used to prefer winter to summer. Because it was all so quiet and calm in winter, and so soft to look at. Everything so lazy, covered under a white blanket. The blanket of love, of peace. In winter every thing is so calm and sorted out. Just like I wanted life to be. Hah. I laugh at myself. Who am I to "want"? I have

just been given a path and all I have to do is follow it. It's all so simple for me. Yet I wish...

I have many wishes. But as one may guess, not most of them have come true. Someone once said, "A wish is a desire without an attempt." How true. But for me... I'm afraid the saying isn't true in my case. For me, making a wish is a very, very painful attempt. And fruitless as well.

CHAPTER Six

"Now- a-days I feel oh so lonesome. I feel very secluded. I try to think of things to do which will make me wanted. But what am I supposed to do?

Then again, I think that it's good for others to ignore me, so that after I'm gone, they won't miss me so much. They'll be used to it. In a way it's good for me too. I will be used to listening to silence, talking silently. To no one. A no one like me.

Earlier, I mentioned a muse. Now I myself wonder who it is. Only God knows. Maybe I'll find out.

You know life is the canvas on which Cod throws the colors from His palette. He has colors of all shades. Bright shades like yellow, red, blue, pink and dull shades like gray, brown, etc. Black depicts mystery. The mystery in our lives, our future, our fate and our destiny. Yet the basic color of life, the color of the canvas before painting, the basic maestro of all the colors, the color of peace, the color of beginning and the end... is, white."

All through the rainy day, I got bored. Didn't

do much. But as evening came, the dread in the atmosphere became a part of what I was feeling. At 5:00 pm I walked out the door into the cold world, heading to my most favorite place. That's right, off to doctor Pat's clinic. Once there, Doctor Pat told me something that was all I needed to make my day.

He started, "Melissa, I'm afraid I don't have any good news." "Why should you? I wasn't expecting any either." I interrupted. "Well, according to the reports and my experience, you have almost another week. That could mean the next four or five days even." There. He said it. Even though I said that I didn't expect much (which was a lie, I was still foolishly hoping for a miracle to occur, not a wish by the way, because my wishes seldom come true). The news came to me as quite a shock. "I'm sorry," he said. "No. You shouldn't be," I told him. In a voice even I barely heard. A mere whisper. With my penalty given, I walked off from my last visit to the doctor... off and into the night - my sanctuary.

CHAPTER Seven

Now I am living a dead life. I cry. But in vain. No one will know that I ever existed. That there was someone called Melissa. And my main quest would remain unfinished, incomplete. Just like the others. And I had so hoped that I could accomplish it. But I guess there's no use hoping... "You can say experience is talking here. Ever since I was a small girl I have been hoping, wishing, dreaming, fantasizing, and God knows how many other words

you can put in it. Anyway. Like every other person, I had hopes for the future. High hopes. But none of them were fulfilled. Ever. I guess it is my fate. But that too is a guess. Living this life I have learnt that Shakespeare's words are true:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.

How true. We each live an individual life. Yet the way we live it has already been decided by our Lord. We are actors, mere puppets who act according to His script. It's a drama. This whole process is a production. For some a comedy, for others a tragedy. But for me, it is but a 'Comedy of Errors'. My life is a joke which when told will bring tears to the listener's eyes... A sad joke." The night after the 'last' visit to the doctor, I was in bed. Asleep for my family, but in reality had spent two hours tossing and turning. There was a knock at my door. In the past, I would have been scared. But now, I thought otherwise. The huge grandfather clock down in the hall struck twelve times. It wasn't everyday that I got a midnight visitor. Intrigued, I went to the door and pulled it open before I had any second thoughts.

"Hi!" It was Kevin. That's right. My big bro. "Hi!" I replied in the most cheerful tone I could muster. Before I could ask him what the problem was, he walked into my room and told me to sit on the bed. Then he asked me to close my eyes and keep them that way. After a few minutes he told me to open them.

The sight I then saw brought tears to my eyes.

Its memory is still afresh. My big brother held in his hands a birthday cake which he had made himself and had sixteen candles on it (one for good luck). Then he started singing the birthday song. I was very happy. I had momentarily forgotten reality. But then it all came crashing through my brain, my heart.

This was my last birthday.

Now I understood why people said "birthdays are celebrated because we enter a new year in our life. But side by side, one year of our life is also lost." I had become such a pessimist. There was a time when I used to take pride in being an optimist. Suddenly all my happiness turned into sadness. I realized I was slightly shaking. I was afraid. Though I hated to admit it, I was afraid. Afraid to die. Die alone. I guess my fear and shock showed on my face for soon Kevin was right next to me. Without a word I started crying. My brother gave me a big brotherly bear hug. Which I later found to be the last. Then quietly, without a word, my big brother and me celebrated my last birthday. The cake... was great!

That night I slept at two in the morning, courtesy of the big grandfather clock. After my brother tucked me in and went off to his own room, I said a little thanksgiving prayer and wished myself good luck. I was hesitant to go to sleep afraid I wouldn't wake up. Finally I drifted off into a peculiar dream. 'I was in a new world. It was daytime. The birds were chirping and I was well, along with me were Kevin, mom and dad. Judy and my other friends were also

there. We were all so happy...' But deep down, my heart was still wondering whether I would wake up the next day, whether there'll be a new morning... for me that is.

CHAPTER Eight

The next day was, a normal routine. I spent most of the day writing my journal.

"... I read my latest entry. It is quite saddening. Yet true. I have noticed that with very little time left, I have a lot to do. And I also very well know that my story is now no longer than the next chapter.

Time is like tide,
It doesn't wait,
It doesn't hide,
It keeps on moving,
Swiftly forward,
As history has proven,
It isn't a coward.

Time, when it wants can move so quickly. It can be the enemy or the best friend. It is true. I know I have very little time left and that it won't stop just for me. I can feel my pulse quickening. Yet that too, is another figment of time. I now think that I had better finish my story now. For time is very short. Too short indeed. I don't want to leave my story or my quest incomplete, so I am forced to make it short and sweet. I know that the end is near. That my end is near is but a fact." After writing a few lines in my journal, I started feeling very weak and had an unbearable headache. I started sweating and

when I went to the kitchen, my mom shrieked at my sight. She was instantly at my side and claimed that I was burning. I was quickly put to bed without a moment's delay. Dear old Dr. Pat was called and when he arrived he saw that my time was up at a glance. It was over. When he entered the living room (where I had been quickly laid down), he found the same scene he had seen at the hospital room nearly a year ago. My mom was crying and my dad was trying unsuccessfully to comfort her. Both with wet eyes. And Kevin. He was sitting on the edge of the sofa. Quiet as a grave. As soon as he entered, I gave Dr. Pat a look, which he understood. That simple look had conveyed so much. With a nod, he responded that he had understood. I smiled. I wanted to die with a smile on my face. Suddenly, the pain in my head increased. It felt as if it would burst. A gasp escaped my throat. Then, silence. And strangely enough, a feeling of calm swept over me. Everything was quiet, my headache gone, I felt very relaxed and comfortable. I had never felt this good in my entire life. I died.

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CHAPTER Nine

... As soon as the doctor had arrived, a few minutes later, Melissa had gasped and then, nothing. There had been a vacuum of silence. Everything was quiet. The air stung of silence. The silence, everyone had dreaded. Melissa's face was pale. And when Kevin rubbed his hand on her cheek, he quickly drew it back as if he had just got an electric shock. The

doctor quickly came to his side and confirmed the fact. "Melissa is dead." A tragedy befell. The family was given some time to console each other. Mrs. Cornfield started crying. So did Melissa's father. Kevin just ran up to his room and stayed locked up there till it was time for his sister's funeral. Melissa's funeral was attended by all of Melissa's friends with their 'excuses', Judy and Melissa's family. Dr. Pat also came.

After The Funeral...

Mr. and Mrs. Cornfield went home. But Kevin stayed back. He had said that he would come later. He wanted to say goodbye to his sister one last time. ... At last, thought Kevin. He had wanted to have some time alone with his sister. Now at long last he was finally alone with her. While she rested, he talked to her. Knowing she was listening. He spoke, "Hi Mell!" Silence. "I am lost," he began, "Lost for words that is. I don't know what to do. At first I didn't even know how to react. It's so different now that you're not there. Everything seems so empty, so different now. In whatever I do, I seem to miss you. Going for dinner, I look back, as if to make sure whether you're coming. But you're ... just not there." With a big sigh, he asked a question to which he didn't know the answer and wasn't expecting any either. "Where are you?" after a moment of silence, he continued, "I am so lonely now. I didn't even get to give you your birthday present... I'll miss you." And with that Kevin burst into tears, The tears he'd

been pushing back for so long, his fear, his dread, his welled up feelings, all came out with those tears. After a moment of silence, Kevin left the cemetery. ... As for Judy, she hadn't met her friend for a long time. But when she came to the funeral, her face showed the shock she had received. After the funeral she had gone home too. When she went home she received a letter mailed by Melissa the day before she died. Surprised at the unexpected mail, she quickly took it to her room and tore it open. It said:

'Dear Judy, SURPRISE!!!

When I realized that I was going to go soon, I thought of you and how much I'd miss you. Considering the fact that I hadn't been able to see you much lately, I decided to write down some last minute advice for you.

Judy, you are a great girl with a BIG heart. The way you supported me and my family through this ordeal, is amazing. I will always be grateful to you. I never told you, but I always thought you had a light. It shone on your face, and sparkled in your eyes. Your dream to become a teacher will surely come true and you will help many people throughout your life, which is a long one. So you needn't worry. You will touch the hearts of many people, just the way you touched my family's and mine. Whenever you feel lonely, or miss me or feel like you need my advice, just close your eyes and think about our happiest moment together. Then ask yourself what you would've asked me. Then answer yourself, just as I would've answered you. Remember, I will

always be with you. Deep inside that drum beating within your chest. I will be in your every beat. You will never be alone or lonely. Talk to me. You know how I love to talk.

One last favor, if you could Judy, please. Go visit Kevin for me. Tell him what I told you about me and how to search for me... within himself. If you feel welled up... talk to him. He is as much of a big brother to you as he is to me. Tell him to do the same. Tell him I told you. Show him the letter...if he doesn't believe. Take care of him for me Judy. Tell him I couldn't write to him because it was too much of heartache. Tell him I'm sorry if he minds.

Remember me Judy. And tell him to, as well. Tell him, that I am in a wondrous place.

Thank you,
Your friend forever,
Melissa.

P.S. You two, will always be with me. Always.' As soon as she read the letter, Judy felt elated, and quickly picked up the phone to check whether Kevin was at home. ... Dr. Pat was also present at the funeral and after everyone had left, he had silently told Melissa that her promise would be kept and her secret would die with him. He said, "You had a strange light Melissa. You had an aura of peace within you. And it was that peace which helped making your ordeal seem gentler than it was. You were a light, a peculiar, eternal flame."

EPILOGUE

I don't know where I am now. Or what I am. Even if I did, I don't think it would be wise to tell you.

All my life I searched for its meanings. Its reasons and explanations And I died plagued with the thought that I had not completed my search. I was wrong. I was just not aware that I had stumbled upon my answer. The truth of the matter is that to search for the meaning is the meaning itself. I know I sound stupid. But what I mean is that the correct meaning of life for me was to search. Search for the mysteries, for the hidden facts, for the truth, etc. But why I say for me is because I have learned that the meaning of life for each one of us is different. We all are different. We all are individuals. We all have different points of view, different thoughts. Therefore our understanding and conceptualizing of life and its meanings is also different. We look at life in different ways. And another thing I discovered. That in reality, we humans never die. What we call death is but a transition from this world to the next. Take me for example. I may be dead for those who are alive. But for those who are dead, and for those who love me and seek my kind, I am still alive. My existence is there. It just doesn't have a name... yet. But that doesn't mean it's not there, I'm not there. I am I had always thought of my life, as a lonely one. But no! Life with all its many colors is never lonely. Now I

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know what loneliness really is. Or what solitude is. There is no definition in any dictionary that defines the words as such in a satisfying way. None of them is as true as the words and their experience itself is. Loneliness is nothing but a mere existence of empty space, of vacuum. In the beginning of my story, I mentioned that I was a poet. I always wanted to be known and be popular as one. But life never gave me a chance. Thank God, it gave me the privilege to at least write my story.

No one is talking,
There's no one there,
Nothing but silence,
"Nothing but darkness,
Yet I can't swear,
Silence, that is my world,
Silence, that is my language.
Through thick or thin,
I live by myself,
In darkness or light,
Through this fog I fight,
The fog that follows me,
Wherever I go, The fog that tells me,
I am alone.

Being alone, this I've learnt,
May seem like a sweet cake,
Yet it is burnt.
It's the sound of silence,

Which I hear,
It's the language of silence,
Which I speak,
The sound that's developed,
Through the years,
The sound that often,
Surrounds our fears,
It chills me to the bone,
The sound is saying. ..
I am alone.

Do not stand at my grave and weep, I am not
there, I do not sleep,

I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glint on snow,
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the autumn rain,
When you awake in the morning hush,
I am the swift uplifting rush,
Of birds circling uplifting,
I am the stars that shine at night,
(Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there,
I do not sleep.

(Author unknown)
Shifa Khalid

Supajaree Wichairoj

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN BOY

Translated by Pawarin Poonkul

Paleutu wiped the teardrops off his smudgy little face and finally had to loosen his grips from the pick-up truck that a few minutes ago he vowed not to let go off. With what was happening, he felt so defeated that he kept looking at the ground with his head bowed, surrendering to his fate.

At only 7 years old, he experienced the first big defeat in his life.

Paleutu was born a Karen boy with dark brown eyes that were shining like stars in moonless nights, with cheer laughter that was usually loud enough to be heard across his village, which was located in a valley amidst the mountains and big trees. Paleutu thought this was the most beautiful place on earth.

Almost every morning the little boy woke up with the sound of the roosters in the barn, then sneaked out of the house to walk footed into the nearby woods. Sometimes, he treaded along the streams in the muddy soil, because he loved to feel the mud in between his toes. He softly pressed soaky clay through his toes. Despite his mother's dislike for him returning home with mud and dirt all over his clothes, Paleutu liked to feel things with his bare hands and feet. He enjoyed sitting on his heels on

a moss-covered rock by the stream, with his eyes wide open and his little hands moving furiously, attempting to catch lovely butterflies and insects. Sometimes, he fell down the shallow stream trying to catch a butterfly along the water. He sometimes tumbled techlessly and, missed a butterfly, but he never cried. He just laughed at his own stupidity, then got up, and with his clothes soaking wet, he moved on with his plan. When tired, he always ran back to the village to see his big pal, a young elephant.

Paleutu and the elephant were born on the same month and year. The elephant belonged to one of neighbours. Paleutu remembered people always teased them by calling them siblings. When he was much younger, his mother often took him to visit the elephant. At first the mother elephant was very protective of her baby, but after while, she let the little boy touch her baby. Paleutu thought the baby elephant looked very funny, also had one of its ears twisted. He usually called it 'Twisty Ear' although its owner gave it a fancy name after the famous folk singer. He insisted that 'Twisty Ear' was a more appropriate name for the baby elephant. Besides, the elephant had nothing in common with the singer.

"You know why I called you 'Paleutu'?" asked his father, Paleubo, one day when he was still very young. Paleutu shook his head and looked up to his father, expecting an answer. Paleubo picked up a piece of stone, studied it momentarily, and handed it to his son. He said, "Golden Stone. I gave you

this name just to remind you of the value of our father land." Paleutu saw his father looked out to a distance and sighed, then said something like what he would say in his sleep, "In the years ahead, people will despise this land. The earth and stones in this village will no longer be as valuable as gold as they are now."

Paleutu looked at the stone in his hand, did not understand what his father said. He only knew that this stone was as valuable as gold, therefore it must have been very important. With this thought, he put the stone in his pant pocket, intending to give it to someone he always thought of first.

Chamroen was the only brother Paleutu had. They were the two sons in the family with quite some years apart. Chamroen become a teenager, wearing jeans and T-shirt like people in town. Although the village they were living was a big developed community with a school and connected by roads, Chamroen dreamed of life in big city where skyscrapers were everywhere and nights were full of lights.

Chamroen used to have a Karen name like Paleutu's. But his teachers at school helped him find a Thai name, about which he was very pleased. Their father did not allow his younger brother, Paleutu, to change his name. The boy did not seem to be bothered at all. Quite opposite, he grew to like his Karen name and its meaning; "golden stone".

Chamroen remembered the day Paleutu ran to him and handed a little piece of stone, his eyes reflecting his happiness.

"A golden stone," said Paleutu.

Chamroen nodded and smiled. He took the stone, thanked his brother, and put it in his pocket. He understood without any explanation. He knew his brother wanted him to keep this stone. He also knew that probably their father had given Paleutu the first prayer about their beloved father land.

Chamroen had had enough of the subject on father land his father tried to inflict upon him, during day work in the rice fields or before bed time. Neither that he was not grateful for the fertility the fatherland provided, nor that he despised his own root. It was just that he had had his own secret dream. The thought of being stuck here for the rest of his life made him feel so weak as if all his blood was drained out of his body. He could not bear the thought of following the path of his ancestors who worked in the fields and farms and took interest in nothing else but the world as small as their village and the surrounding mountains.

For he had a bigger dream.

He dreamed of living in the city, and the chance to experience in meeting people in all walks of life. He was so much interested in what was happening in the world outside that he was usually the first to get hold of the late papers delivered to the village library now and then. He liked talking to teachers at school, community development workers in the village, monks, missionaries and passing-by tourists. The outside world described by these people was so colourful and despite its confusing nature, so very alluring!

Chamroen knew well that his father was somehow suspicious of his son's secret desire. Although he never mentioned anything, Chamroen could sense his father's strong wish to keep his sons from leaving their fatherland.

He appreciated his father's love and protective arms, but his soul was pleading to fly free.

Chamroen remembered a poem from a book he once read in the library.

"..A bird, a wild bird
Flying from farther land,
With freedom in his heart.
Nesting in strange land.
Searching all these years,
In the wide world, no man's land.
The bird, the lost bird,
Flying over many lands
Missing those loving arms?..."

He worried about his younger brother more than anybody else. If he was gone, what would happen to Paleutu?

His brother liked following him everywhere. Since Paleutu was a toddler, he would always come around his elder brother, then looked up and smiled. Chamroen always felt weakened by the boy's smile and as a result took him along everywhere he went.

Chamroen used to take Paleutu to the streams, pointing to him the strong current and taught him how to identify rocks which could be stepped on to cross the stream to the other side. Sometimes they just played molding with mud.

Paleutu learned all about the colourful world of trees, and leaves, and flowers and butterflies from his big brother. Chamroen remembered the expression of his brother's little face when he first saw a butterfly. Maybe it was like an elephant having the taste of the sweet of his first sugarcane.

If he decided to leave for the city together with his friends, Paleutu would miss him a great deal.

But little boy like Paleutu would not have his mind on something for long. Because the world had lots of other things for him to see. He now attended school. He always came home with a few stories to tell. He also liked to go wandering around alone in the early morning, not waiting for his brother's company like before. Maybe he was just worrying too much, thought Chamroen, maybe the world out there was waiting for him and Paleutu to explore.

In the middle of the night, Paleutu was awoken by the cry of his mother. He heard his father consoling her. "Chamroen will not be going for long." But his voice sounded unnatural and not with confidence like it used to be.

Paleutu got up immediately. Where could Chamroen be? When would he come back?

The boy was wide awake in the dark and his mind was occupied with anxiety which had never happened to him before. From now on, he wondered, who would keep talking to his younger brother when he was lonely? Who would pick him the lovely flowers and leaves? Who would check on his blanket when he was fast asleep in the cold

night? Who would hold his brother's hand leading him into the vast forest?

Paleutu heard his mother lamenting and mourning about the hardship and danger in big cities which, for him, sounded like a big monster waiting to swallow his elder brother. All the roads and cars and people, are like mysterious jungle where lost people would be too exhausted to find their way out.

Paleutu decided at once. Somebody must accompany Chamroen and be with him in that unfamiliar land.

That night he could not sleep any more and was up before the rooster. His nap-sack was fully stuffed with his clothes. He did not forget to bring the shirt his mother made for him. Paleutu looked at the shirt while recalling the moment when his mother gave it to him as New Year gift this year.

"You have grown up. Soon you will have to carry me instead," said his mother.

Paleutu felt empty inside with the thought of not having his mother's lap to sleep on and the warmth of her arms to embrace him.

He felt water in his eyes. One day when his mother was old and in need of the help of a good strong hand, he would be back here to lend that hand.

He heard the rooster crow and, thus, decided. His mother still had his father and all the relatives and friends and neighbours here to help. But his elder brother! He was out there alone amidst all the scary things.

Paleutu never blamed his brother for leaving. The different things he learned from mother nature taught him to accept those who were different from him. The boy only knew that he had to protect his loved ones like protecting his golden fatherland his father always told him to. The fatherland that never asked for anything in return, just being there to provide crops and fruits for the villagers to live on.

That was why Paleutu got on to this pick-up truck, both hands firmly grabbing the rail in the back of the truck. He held his back straight in a position of a confident soldier ready for a battle.

His brother was leaving with this truck together with three other young men from the village. Paleutu had quietly followed Chamroen to the truck and quickly got into the truck even before Chamroen.

Chamroen never felt so scared before. Just meeting his eyes, he knew exactly what his brother wanted to do. Paleutu possessed in his eyes a deep determined look that was as clear and still as water in a deep well.

Paleutu smiled at him. But now he could only turn his face away. His father and mother ran to the truck, asking Paleutu to get off.

Mum and dad came after him to ask Paleutu to get off the van.

"You cannot go with your brother. He's going a long way. We don't know when he will be back," said his father.

"Please come down, my dear boy," cried his mother.

All those words passed through Paleutu ineffectively, like wind. As morning broke, other villagers began to gather around the truck. Followed by the school teachers and Por Luang (village head). All tried to persuade Paleutu to get off the truck. The sunlight was brighter now but the boy still held on his base like statue of a brave warrior.

In Karen tradition, children would not be forced to do things that were not their desire. It was believed that their "Kwan " (soul) rested on the care and kindness, not on force.

Finally Chamroen turned to meet his brother's eyes and sat beside him and said, "Please don't do this. You cannot come with me. Or else I cannot leave." His voice made Paleutu loosen his grip from the truck rail. If he did not get off the truck, his brother might decide not to leave the village.

But if Chamroen did not leave, Paleutu was afraid that his brother would become like the wild bird belonged to his friend No Mhoe Po.

No Mhoe Po's father caught a wild bird and put it in a cage for his little daughter to play with. Only a few days later the bird died. Paleubo told his son that the bird desired its freedom in the wilderness. When denied, the soul was gone leaving the body behind.

He did not want this to happen to Chamroen.

Paleutu wiped tears from his face, failing hard to hold them inside. He grabbed his nap-sack and got off the truck, face down ignoring his mother and Por Luang, both reaching out to console him,

ignoring those villagers closing in to comfort him.

This was the day when the boy experienced disappointment and parting for the first time.

Since that day, Paleutu stopped getting up in the early morning to wander in the woods or strolling along the streams. Little birds and butterflies that flew near the windows no longer caught his attention or caused a gleam in his eyes like before. It was as if he was too tired to even reach out to catch or touch anything. He often laid on his back with his eyes wide open until his mother called him out when it was time to go to school. When he returned home from school, he would just keep to himself. No more tall-tales from school. No more teasing his elephant friend Twisty Ear. This caused the animal to roar with disappointment for being ignored.

Some time at night when there was full moon, the boy would lie there crying quietly, thinking of those nights when his father put him and his brother in bed and told bedtime stories. In those nights, Paleutu and Chamroen were just little boys travelling into a world of fantasy and adventure. With a clear voice, his father delivered his stories in a fluctuate tones, sometime slow, sometime fast to add excitement. Not to mention the imitations his father made of the characters in his stories which produced constant giggles from both of the boys. To Paleutu, those things were still recent memories.

He remembered one of his father's stories about a man who possessed the magic to turn himself into a big bird, and a pretty girl who fell for him.

The girl later died of passion and love for the man. When Paleutu first heard the story, he wondered if anyone could die of passion or love. But now he knew. Now he understood that better than anyone could imagine.

Chamroen woke up in the middle of the night, thinking he heard a bird singing in the distance. In this big city, there were still birds patiently waiting for the city to sleep so they could call out for their friends.

Looking around him, he saw all his friends who were fast asleep, breathing quietly. The smell of sweat filled the aura in the room. The mosquito net they packed in had small holes on the top. Through a hole in the zinc roof, Chamroen could see a lone star shining.

Amidst the darkness of the night and the exhaustion from the day, at least there was still a star shining, he told himself.

He had been here for almost six months. Chamroen still could feel the moment he first saw this big city. Bangkok was so full of life as he had imagined. The young man's heart was pounding with eagerness and enthusiasm, thinking that this was where his ambition could get fulfilled.

But the days and nights in Bangkok only made his heart rotten, little by little.

He and his friends could only find job as labourers in a rice silo. Everyday, they carried on their shoulders big sacks of rice from the trucks to put in the silo which was stuffy and full of

mosquitoes and dusty spider webs hanging from the ceiling. The silo was surrounded by old small shop-houses and filthy factories buildings. Workers had to bear the heat. Some had to work with the sewing machines over 12 hours a day. Some flipped their knives cutting pork meat, with smell of blood all over in the air. At dusk, the night shift began. Those working during the day would retire to their shelters to rest, with the sound of non-stop machinery and the noise of husbands and wives fighting next door. Soon they were fast asleep, resting with their tiring mind and fading hope.

Chamroen and his friends were paid only a small daily wage. Worse, the silo owner deducted the cost of their food and accommodation from their wage. Then there was that bottled energizer drink stalled in the refrigerator by the landlady for them to buy. The drink that everyone said would help them to work longer hours. He became to like it after the first time he tried it. Now he had to drink it everyday, sometimes 3-4 bottles a day. He ended up having a deficit in his account. Now he and all his friends worked for the silo's owner just to repay the debt that got bigger day after day.

As days had gone by, Chamroen began to ask himself if he still had hope to continue his plight in this world. Trying to live in the midst of hardship and poor environment prevented him from the chance to get to know the world the way he had wished to. What he was facing everyday was just distress and a self question of whether he wanted to live his life like this.

"...My dear eagle, please lead me home, and you'll be fed, with seven poultry..."

That night deep in his dream, Chamroen felt he heard the old Karen folk song sung in his village, in saddening melody of a man who was far away from home. In his dream, he saw his parents and Paleutu all standing on a peak. An eagle flew by. He reached out hoping to get hold of the eagle's legs that would take him up through the sky to the peak. Suddenly he saw the veins of his both hands, popping up and bleeding. He did not have the seven poultry to feed the eagle, not even one. Chamroen only stood there looking up to his family, with his eyes blurring with water, while the eagle flew away.

Chamroen woke up to find himself in tears and sorrow. He could not yet leave this place when there was still debt to repay.

If he stayed on, he wondered, would he become like others who were here before. They were much older than him and, when evening came, gathered to drink. Some became addicted to alcohol and gambling that only contributed to more debts. They got stuck with the labour job to earn only enough to survive.

It was late at night and Chamroen searched the sky for that same old star. He caught it shining as bright as before, keeping him company in this lonely night.

Chamroen blinked frequently as the mountain winds blew through his hair and at his face, causing his eyes red. He and one of his friends were riding a

pick-up truck racing up to the high mountain.

"We are going home." He heard himself and his friend said the sentence again and again in their heads. Maybe it was not the wind that caused their red eyes.

He thought of what happened a few days ago when the police and people from the authorities and nongovernment organization went to visit the silo's owner. They talked about the low wages the labourers were paid, the outrageous working hours, and the debt problem. After that all Karen boys were set free.

Chamroen looked at the clear blue sky, inhaled the fresh air. He thought of the dark night with that bright shining star, and the hope, though fading, he hung on to.

That was the night Chamroen decided he would not end up a drunkard or dying hopelessly. He wrote letters to his teacher at the old school, to the community volunteer in his Karen village, telling all about the place and things, and asked for help. Soon after it all worked out.

In his life if there was anything he was so proud of, Chamroen would think this was it. The fight for his friends' and his own survival, and the freedom he regained.

Now Chamroen was considering his options. Two of his friends decided to stay on in Bangkok and to work in a factory the officials recommended. He and the other friend wanted to go back home first to see his family. Maybe Chamroen would find

a job in Chiangmai Province, a big city near his own family, and at the same time supported himself to enroll in a night school. He wanted to venture the world again, but next time with more caution and confidence.

Paleutu came to visit the young elephant early in the early morning. The elephant raised its trunk for him to touch, and then turned its head to push the mother elephant as if to ask her for a walk into the forest.

The mother elephant glanced at Paleutu, probably surprised to see him after a long time, or to see he grew much bigger in a few months time. Paleutu thought the same of the baby elephant.

'Twisty Ear' no longer hid under the belly of its mother, interested only in sucking milk from her. It raised its trunk high up in the air as if to catch the smell of nature blowing through with the wind. Sometimes it seemed impatient and wanted to set off to the wood on its own, ignoring the company of the mother elephant.

Paleutu also felt that he himself had changed too.

Although he missed Chamroen, there were other things coming into his mind.

At school, he learned to read and write. There were books with pictures about big cities. His teacher read to him and told him stories about city life. Some of them he did not like at all. For example, air pollution and the polluted water in canals. But there were also things that astonished

him. For examples the picture of big airplane that could transport hundreds of people, the picture of the fascinating Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the picture of cities in western countries with big strange-looking houses.

He was glad that his brother had the opportunity to see all these things. Maybe it was because Paleutu began to understand that there were different places in this world. This village might be the greatest place for him, but it must have been interesting to see a real airplane flying in the sky above him.

Chamroen felt the streams were much smaller than before, especially when Paleutu walked into the shallow water. His little brother pointed him to see trees and plants that grew in the season, and then smiled at him, like he used to do. For Chamroen, Paleutu had really grown up in the past half year.

Maybe it was the same with him.

Since his return, Paleutu often asked him about the big city, airplane, cities in western countries, and the polluted canals.

It seemed that if he had to leave this village again, Paleutu would not be surprised and would not get on the pick-up truck with him as it happened last time.

While Paleutu was playing along the streams, picking up stones of different sizes and examining them with interest, Chamroen could not help thinking that one day maybe he would be the one to stand there waving Paleutu off from this village.

The Golden Stone of this village might be shining

bright in a far away place, or maybe eventually be back to the fatherland for all important things in life.

Anything could happen to a free spirit like Paleutu's.

Chamroen only hoped that if that day came and he had to cry, these would be his happy tears to know that his little brother were marching would march into the outside world with the confidence of a man who knew which rocks he could step on so that he would not fall over.

He also prayed for the eagle to take his little brother safely home one day when Paleutu would wish to do so.

Sait Faik Abasiyanik

A DOT ON THE MAP

Translated by Talat Sait Halman

Since early childhood, whenever I look at a map, my eyes seek out an island and veer away from the names of cities, provinces, and regions to the blue shores. For the life of me I can't recall for sure, but I must have read Robinson Crusoe, Yet I doubt if it's because of Robinson that I drift into daydreams when I glimpse at a map and read the names of strange islands. Nor do I think that my love for islands comes from some other novels I once read—but this might well be the reason. One glance at an island on a map, and off I go: loves and friendships start twittering in my heart . . . and then a dog that stares right into my eyes ... a taciturn fisherman, dressed in sackcloth, with his quick hands and his slow way of moving around . . . reeking of tattered tarpaulin, a coarsely built, heavy row boat whose paint has faded and bulwarks turned black . . . then a that, never leaves the boat's wake and the nets and the fish with their scales. Exquisite children on the beach, honest-looking bungalows, boiled galley and John Dory, the smell of celery, a beaming black pot, the foggy sea with narrow horizons. Nature is mostly friendly. Even when it seems like an adversary, it acts like the stern father who gives his son a chance to test his strength. Nature teaches man to swim

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when it sinks his boat in a storm. When its winds blow the roof off his hut, nature instructs him to be more ingenious and to build a sturdier roof. When it confronts him with its dragons, it is certainly testing man's prowess. I imagine how the winds, storms, and sea-monsters force the People of that little spot surrounded by water to huddle together in all the honesty of their days and nights and to come to each other's aid with solid friendships and firm muscles, and how a good-hearted, wonderful mother teaches or perhaps doesn't even have to teach—that the waves which buffet the rocks for days and weeks on end can only live according to the dictates of nature, that strong taut muscles are there in order to help out the meek and the sharp minds to keep company with the duller and softer, the subdued or slower brains or even with the downright stupid, and that the soup which has such a hearty smell is to be shared with those who cannot afford soup. With such evocations, I stare at the islands sprinkled over the vast seas near the sprawling continents in the middle of all that blue on the maps and I immerse myself in fantasy.

I have a map hanging on my bedroom wall. If I am bored with the book I read before going to sleep or if I find it not believable, I look up from the book to catch sight of the map: I am instantly reminded of an island the size of a dot. I visualize the island itself with its storms, winds, tumultuous whining, and sharks and its honest people. With the ingenuity or intuition of an old sorceress who performs the ritual

melting of lead into bizarre shapes over the head of someone desperately in love to cure the person of love-sickness, I reach into the map and come up with many things from those islands with haphazard or contorted forms. Still, it is the shapeless, dot-like islands that arouse the greatest curiosity in my head.

Suddenly one night, a motorboat lands at the tarred wharf, and I set foot on that dot of an island whose lights glow red as blood oranges. Right away, a middle-aged man comes over. His white stubble, unshaven for three days, glitters; his face is buried in the raised lapels of his sheepskin coat. Smiling, he asks: "You're back, brother?"

"I'm back all right," I say.

"You won't go away again?"

"Ah," I say. "Never again. Never."

"There's no better place than our island."

"That's what I found out."

"Father is dead. ..."

Our eyes are bleary. We go through the garden into the house which is invisible behind the wooden fence. We walk under a vine trellis.

I say, "I'd better wash up." I suddenly remember the fountain on the right, before entering the house. I walk up to the fountain; trembling with emotion, sadness, and shame, I keep splashing water on my face. Some people come over and hug me. I hear neighbors calling out and frightened hens cackling. My mother cries, my brother slices the bread, my sister fills my glass, and I start staring at the nets on the walls.

«Brother,» I say. «Was the wind southwesterly today».

"It started out that way. The west wind came up in the late afternoon. It's now coming from the west-northwest, but it's going to change. It's going to be northwesterly."

"Does that mean it's going to snow?"

«It's going to snow where you came from, but it isn't likely here. Well, how're you feeling? Knock on wood, you look healthy enough».

"Thank God, I'm fine. How're things in the village?"

"Same as ever, brother. Nothing new. The kids spend too much time playing cards. There's nothing else I'd complain about."

"Why, do they play for money?"

"Hell no! Where would they find the money to gamble? They play for fish, for fishing lines or hooks. If I catch them playing for money ..."

It's as if I am the prodigal son. In bed, I feel as though I have returned from a life of excess and madness and profligacy. A sunny morning, the boats, and all the people of this fishing village crowd into that brief span from the moment I turn the light off to when I fall asleep. The double-oared boats with floral decorations painted on their protruding prows and sterns suddenly drift away.

Today the sea is like a permissive mother. She's overdoing it. She should not be so indulgent. Nor should she be so full of light and calm so shiny like leather boots. After all, there is always tomorrow

The time will come when the waves will strike like cutting and cold shards, and that monstrous water will go through the prow and go out the stern.

Well the islands on the maps of my childhood and youth left me at last quite by chance, on an island I used to long for. I had already-reached middle age, but finally I was back home. It was as if I had split when I was still a blond boy of fourteen and a motorboat took me away to the big cities. I had really lived. My pockets were no longer empty. I had many women, and enjoyed sex. Gambled. Stole. Spent time in jail.. Had friends among pickpockets and burglars.. There were those who tried to make out with me. I had tried to make out with some. At times I had gone to bed hungry. Mugged. Raped. Loved and was loved. And now, spent and exhausted, having lost everything, I returned on the same motorboat I had left on.

Now with my head bowed among these honest people, without laughter or fun, full of tolerance, yet projecting the image of a man who would strike like a demon of courage upon sensing evil from the blink of an eye, I shall be going fishing routinely and helplessly, at the mercy of any brute who might want to walk all over me, quiet and sedate, always longing for kindness and good deeds: I shall live out the rest of my days, short of breath, but happy at this place.

It was a long and lovely autumn. The leaves of the grapevine kept quivering for a long time as they turned red bit by bit, caught in the color-play of red toward the ultimate crimson, until they finally fell off.

By and by, I was trying to get together with people. Our family house was buzzing thanks to Mother. As for me, at first, I was like the ostrich that buries its head in the sand. I was going to spend all my days and nights in there. I kept watching all the people around me with the spirit of the prodigal son who comes home, finding them to be finer and more honest than him self. I wasn't even planning to write. I only hoped to go fishing, drink the least expensive coffee and smoke the cheapest cigarettes, and try to find once again everything I had lost: kindness, courage, health, sincerity, friendship, honest work, and tranquillity. Chances are I won't become a new person, I said to myself, but, leading a clean life, I shall wait for death in wonder, in despair, in humility. If I were to come upon my old ambition, rather the bad habit, of writing which occasionally pops up in my head, I would without thinking of success and fame, and resolved to say, "May God damn me if I do"—run up the hills or go fishing without paper and pencil. I was never going to write again. I knew that people wouldn't like me: they don't care for anyone who isn't like them. If I went fishing, they would probably say: "He's got a huge house. What is all this shit—his going out fishing? Is he crazy or something? The guy won't even take his share of the catch." Or they would say: "His dad's mills keep grinding, so the idiot doesn't have to work. Good thing his mother is still around or else he would squander every damn thing he has, and become a pauper." None of them would ever

know that, sensing the passing moments drop by drop, bored all the time, clutched by the love of the wind and the fish and the nets, I would be waiting for death.

No matter. I would still be fond of them in my timid way, measuring them in my imagination with the island residents and finding out that their worst fault is their lack of tolerance. Ending the windy day with a cigarette, a cup of tea, and a game of cards, I would go to bed as sinless as a newborn baby. Chasing the memories away, I would begin to wallow in the pleasure of having watched the good honest people the heroic people who refuse to usurp the rights of others, toil against harsh nature to earn their bread with the sweat of their brows, remain friendly although they struggle and make sacrifices for each other. Then, I would plunge into a deep sleep without dreams. In the morning, I would be up with the rain. Then, I would spend another day at a coffeehouse, where the windowpanes are foggy, among people whose hands are calloused and whose faces are lined by the sun and the wind. For a whole day, I would commit no sin or do anything bad.

So long as I happened to be mingling with them as an observer, I was happy, I didn't even leave the island to go to the city. Everything was exactly as I had imagined. Except I sometimes heard that there were some ugly incidents over the sharing of the catch, and I did my best to ignore them.

One morning, the boat returned from fishing just the way I had always imagined. Baskets full

offish were loaded on the ferryboat. Fishermen were now washing the nets, rhythmically hitting them against the sea.

Ten or fifteen John Dories—they are considered so worthless that they aren't even priced at the fish market—still quivered with their lively, flimsy fins on the gunwale. Soon, the men will finish what they are doing, tie John Dories to their index fingers, and go home. Their houses will be filled with the steam and the smell of fish soup.

Eight men were cleaning the boat. Seven of them were from this island. I had never seen the eighth—a slim, pale, sickly man. He was working with such sincere, friendly enthusiasm.

When word got out that there was a lot of fish, people from outside the island would come and join the crews. But these outsiders would not be entitled to any share of the catch although they did the work. If the fishing crew and the chief felt like giving them something, they would get a bit of the catch.

The thin man kept working in order to be worthy of just one John Dory,

They finished their work. The captain threw two John Dories on the stern, and said to one of the fishermen: "Take those to my house, and split the others equally."

Some of the fishermen got three. The outsider kept waiting. He was hoping to get one. He had a gentle smile on his lips. His face was ruddy from all that work, and stayed like that until there was only one fish left in the hands of the man who distributed

the shares. Then, suddenly, that ruddiness vanished. His smile first froze in a frightening way-I was afraid this icy smile might stay with him for the rest of his life. He looked around, and caught sight of someone looking at him. And now the smile quickly rotted like a fruit. His eyes grew in amazement and disbelief. The fisherman on the boat dumped the last fish on the pier. The man's face again looked almost like before with its expression of ingenuous cheerfulness and its likeness of fresh fruit. He took two steps and bent down to pick up the fish. But one of the other fishermen, who had on huge boots and a big John Dory tied to his thumb, put his foot down on the fish lying there.

"What's going on here, brother?" he said. "Take it easy, huh. A Johnny-come-iatelly shouldn't grab what belongs to the old-timers." The man pulled his hand back. He said nothing. He couldn't have, He was in no position to speak. He walked toward the coffeehouse by the pier. Someone who was watching the goings-on in front of the coffeehouse hollered: "Be a good sport. The guy worked with all of you. Give him a fish. After all, the poor guy came all the way here." "See if I care. They shouldn't come. We didn't invite them with letters bearing an official seal, did we? That fish over there is worth a couple of bucks. When there is no catch these guys are never around to give us a hand with the nets that we have to clean up. I'm not gonna let them get away with it, fella."

No one in the boat said anything like "Have pity, give it to the poor man."

A couple of them whom I would have expected to speak seemed about, to say something. I watched. I was waiting for one of the men I had faith in to throw one of the fish, perhaps the smallest, in his share to the poor fellow standing there. The captain was puffing on his pipe in front of the coffeehouse and cheerfully watching his crew."

"It's shameful," a bystander butted in, "a damn shame." This time, one of those I thought would speak up or even throw the man one of the small fish retorted: "You better stay out of this, old man! You talk too much these days. What do you mean 'shame'? Shame is what happens under bedcovers." "Why, you think the sea belongs to you?" "It doesn't belong to him either, does it?"

"OK, it doesn't. But, after all, he came here and worked in that boat of yours."

"And who told him to do that? He didn't have to come." The man who wasn't given a fish had sunk into a chair at the coffeehouse. The owner towered over him now. The man said: "OK, OK, I'll get going."

He rose to his feet, and said to the man who was bawled out, because of what he had said: "It doesn't matter, brother. So what? I don't care. I don't want one."

He walked toward the ferryboat that was coming in to the landing place. Strutting and twitching like Charlie Chaplin, he walked away

I had promised myself never to write again. What is writing but blind ambition? Here, among

honest people, I was going to wait for death in tranquillity. What use were greed and fury to me'. But I couldn't do it. I ran to the tobacconist and bought a pencil and paper. I sat down. I took out the pocketknife with which I sometimes whittle little sticks when I get bored walking along the lonely roads of the island. I sharpened the pencil. Then, I held it and kissed it. If I hadn't written, I would have gone out of my mind.

LÊ VĂN THẢO

A short-story writer, he draws his subjects from the anti-American resistance in South Vietnam.

NIGHT ON THE PLAIN OF REEDS

(Đêm Tháp Mười)

1972

The Plain of Reeds, a vast, marshy stretch of Central Nam Bo (South Vietnam), was an important resistance base, first against the French, then against the American imperialists.

One night during the struggle against American aggression, a cadre carrying an important message gets lost in the bush. Luckily, he falls upon the cabin of a courageous peasant. After offering him some food, the peasant tells him the story of his life.

“... My family has been settled in the region for four generations. Now we’re only two, my wife and I, but we persist in staying here on this land cleared and improved by my ancestors. When my great-grandfather first came to dig up the land to plant rice, cobras swarmed everywhere. His clothing consisted of one tunic and his riches of one canoe hollowed out from the trunk of a coconut palm.

While waiting for the best time to sow the rice field he had made by his own hands, he gathered the

wild rice that grew around. At night he slept curled up in his canoe. The mosquitoes were so thick you'd have thought they could carry off a buffalo! My great-grandfather slept submerged in his canoe with only his nose about water to breathe. That lasted three, four years.

He succeeded in building a hut and in clearing a rice field as big as a sheet of newspaper! Then he returned to his village to get married. My great-grandmother used to say that at that time he was more brown than a water-chestnut, and seemed to have forgotten human speech form having lived so many years alone in the middle of a wild and deserted plain. He went to her house and contented himself with just looking at her, without saying a word. She said she married him out of compassion.

The couple lived in perfect understanding.

A year later, my great-grandmother gave birth to a boy. That was my grandfather. The happy father, pointing a finger at his son, cried out:

"When you're big, if you're good for nothing, watch out! Look at your father's hands!"

Hands roughened from having worked the land. So that's how my great-grandfather lived...

"Continue, I beg of you."

"I'd like to. Unfortunately, I don't know how to tell things, so be indulgent. So my grandfather already had a rice field and a shelter, but the trouble was that storms and floods came without stopping, one after another. One time the water rose five or six meters. The Plain of Reeds became a surging sea. The

whole family took refuge in a boat and waited for the water to recede. But all it did was rise higher and higher. Then my grandfather gave everyone orders. "If you are thirsty, just drink. If you are hungry, try to bear it! Useless to complain and whimper! And if fate calls one of us to our ancestors, we will recite a prayer and slip him into the water so he will return to earth."

Everyone obeyed without a murmur. My mother told me that I, myself, only few months old at that time, was so impressed that I didn't dare wriggle or cry. That was one of the most formidable floods of all!

As for my father, I remember him very well. I was quite big then. He was the pillar of the family and knew how to educate his children. He was a man of small stature, thin, close set hair of a bronze tint. How hard life was through those years when the French and the Japanese* stripped us of everything. The rice fields of Nam Bo were immense, but the inhabitants lacked rice. My father's entire wardrobe consisted of a pair of trousers of thick, unbleached linen, stiff as cardboard. My sisters weren't better dressed. At the time of their menstruation, they had to take the canoe and hide themselves in the brush. But I never saw my father fall prey to discouragement.

My father was killed by a French bomb.

A year later, I married. My wife wasn't a native of the Plain of Reeds. She came from Sa Dec, looking

* From 1940 to 1945

for work. I met her one day out in the fields. She was cutting rushes and I was trapping birds. We were together with a number of other young people. After work, they rested, chatting or exchanging jokes and funny stories. It began with serious talk about work in the fields, about the rain and the weather, and then they would tease me about my deformity. (As you see, I have a hump on my back). It wasn't spiteful, I knew that very well and I wasn't angry with them. But I noticed a young girl who wasn't laughing and who was looking sympathetically at me. I noticed that more than once and I ended up by falling in love with her.

After the wedding, she told me how the people downstream, in her native country, earned their living. I learned then that poverty existed everywhere, not just in this Plain of Reeds of acid soils and frequent floods. She was even more miserable than I. An orphan since early childhood, she had been a domestic servant or day labourer all her life. In our household, I took over all the hard tasks, but even so, her hands were more callous than mine for a long time afterwards.

The years passed. My mother died of old age. My brothers went off to live elsewhere. Even we lived apart, in a hut build on some land won from the swamp by our own labours. Soon we had our first child. That filled us with joy, we lived only for him. We felt less and less solitary. Rain or shine, he was always healthy as a charm...

But one day they killed him. That was in the

years following the re-establishment of peace.’

The French left, the Americans arrived.

And to think with what trouble we brought up our child! We fed him like the birds feed their young. Lacking rice, often we went out in the marshes to search for lotus or water-lily seeds to make into flour. The cock and the hen feed their young even if the sparrow-hawk soars above their heads. One day a cloud of US helicopters came and carried off all the inhabitants of the area. I escaped that round-up, having gone fishing far away. On returning, I found the village completely deserted. I was utterly crushed and had a foreboding of terrible misfortune...

They shut my wife and hundreds of others up in a camp surrounded with barbed wire. At fixed times; they distributed to them a ration of rice and water. But the rest of the time, the detainees were seated in rows and forced to listen to their political explanations about “strategic hamlets”^{*}, or their denunciations of the Communists. It was forbidden to make the least sound, even to cough slightly. Even the children were forbidden to move. My son, who had lived like a bird free on the open plain, was now caged. How could he endure it? Each time he cried or squirmed, the brutes pitched into my wife. Or they took my boy away, ‘to let the authorities work on him’ they said.

‘Why doesn’t your husband come here?’ they asked my wife. ‘He shirks his duties to the nation

* The war of resistance against the French lasted five years (1945-1954)

** To pen up the population and hive it off from the resistance

and you, you bring your brat here to cause trouble, isn't that so?

After that, they sent her to tell me to come myself if she wanted her child back again. We spent a whole night, my wife and I, trying to find a way to get our boy back without letting ourselves fall into their trap. But what could we do? The next day, I said to my wife,

“Boil a pot of rice. I'm going to offer my life for my child.”

We had no other solution. It was like going to a burial. I walked ahead, completely dejected. My wife followed me, her face bathed in tears.

As soon as we arrived at the camp, I was seized. Without saying a word, they threw a gun at me and drafted me into the civil guard. That's how I became one of their troops. Having become a soldier, I acquired all their vices. I drank, played cards... It was contrary to my nature, but it was a way as good as any to drown my grief.

During that time, my boy wasted away at home. He had been sick ever since his return from the camp and the best healers of the Plain of Reeds couldn't cure him. He scarcely touched his food. I learnt of the death of my son one day when we had been sent to ransack the brush in search of I don't know what. I let my gun drop and said to the fellow commanding me.

“Enough! I don't want to be a soldier any more! My son is dead; I don't want to be a soldier any more!”

In answer, he gave me a blow with his rifle butt. I shouted, "My son is dead! If you don't believe me, go to my place and see!"

They shut me up in a cave and treated me in the worst possible way. Not being able to bear it any longer, I decided to escape. With my own fingers I dug a tunnel that was a good five or six meters long, hoping to escape at the changing of the guard. But I failed to bring it off. They caught me again and beat me on my hump with a stick.

"Who knows, maybe your hump will disappear! Then you'll be grateful to President Ngo Dinh Diem and you'll follow him!"

For them, it was fun, but for me, every evening I spat blood.

In the end, I'm sure they decided to kill me. They tied me under a helicopter that flew over my village in all directions and, with the help of a megaphone, they threatened the inhabitants. Never before had I suffered such torture! My entrails were torn open, the wind blew in my ears like a raging storm, I suffocated. I would rather have died on the spot. But the hatred of my torturers sustained me. Each time I felt myself fainting, I forced myself to struggle on. I told myself I had to survive, that a blood debt should be paid with blood. I wriggled as much as I could to loosen my ties and I curled myself up to resist the wind that cut into me. Flying over a swamp, the pilot brought his helicopter down very low. Obviously he wanted to kill me. I got myself out of my bindings and fell into the slime. When the helicopter gained altitude, the soldiers noticed that

I had disappeared and returned to the spot to fish me out again. They fired on me. Luckily, I was only wounded in the calf of the leg. In the end, they went away and I remained there unconscious. When I came to, I began to crawl. One day and night later, I found myself in a village. Again I lost consciousness. I didn't know who rescued me and took me to my home. I was like that for almost six months without being able to get up. That was towards the end of 1959. A few months later was the insurrection.*

The peasant stopped talking. He went out into the courtyard and brought back an armful of dry grass which he threw on the charcoals. The fire revived. I looked at my host and round him transfigured. His hair was standing up like a horse's mane, his eyes were damp, his forehead and cheeks moist with sweat. The smell of dry grasses and grilled corn mixed with cajeput flowers mingled with the alkaline odours from the rice fields.

Quite upset by his tale, I looked a long time at my host. It seemed to me suddenly that there was something great and bold about him...

* The armed uprising led by the National Liberation Front

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