



**The Tale of**  
*Chun Hyang*

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## **On the Traditional Story** ***The Tale of Chun Hyang***

*The Tale of Chun Hyang* is one of the most widely-read Korean stories from the Middle Ages.

The tale criticizes the social discriminations that existed in feudal times and upholds the freedom for people to love and marry despite differences in property and social status. The story occupies an important place in the history of Korean literature.

This story had been handed down as a folk tale for many years before being written as a novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It consists of two parts. Part One deals with the love between Chun Hyang, the heroine, and Ri Mong Ryong, and their parting; Part Two describes the appointment of a vicious bureaucrat Pyon Hak Do as county magistrate, Chun Hyang's resistance to his tyranny, the dismissal of Pyon Hak Do by Ri Mong Ryong who has been appointed a secret royal commissioner, and the touching reunion of Chun Hyang and her lover.

Dealing mainly with the love between Chun Hyang and Ri Mong Ryong, the story describes in depth the social and class contradictions that existed in those feudal days, while portraying various aspects of the life of the people.

The feudal society of the Joseon dynasty was based on deep-rooted class relationships. Such love as developed between Chun Hyang from a humble background and Ri Mong Ryong from an aristocratic family was absolutely untenable, even unimaginable, in that society.

So this story reflects the people's opposition to the social institutions which enforced class discrimination.

The story weaves its plot against the social background of the feudal rule of the Joseon dynasty at a time when the dynasty was gradually crumbling, and describes the people's unquenchable desire for genuine love and liberty and for the abolition once and for all of the feudal status system which trampled them underfoot.

The Editorial Board is publishing *The Tale of Chun Hyang*, one of the Korean ancestors' numerous literary achievements, in a number of languages.

In Korea a feature film *The Tale of Chun Hyang* (Parts One and Two) and a national opera with the same title have been produced on the basis of the original traditional story.

## 1

It was a most beautiful spring day, the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, Spring Festival.

All the inhabitants of the town of Namwon had left their homes in the morning; they were going to the wood, near the Kwangan Pavilion, to celebrate the festival.

Chun Hyang, too, had come out to play on the swing there; she was accompanied by Hyang Dan, her maid. Wearing violet satin shoes, embroidered and lined, she walked with a light and lithe step over a carpet of soft grass.

Her beautiful silken hair had been carefully combed and hung down her back in a long braid decorated with a ribbon of multi-coloured silk. She wore an elegant jacket of light yellow and a long red skirt which showed off her figure. A green veil like a light mist hid her features. She was a flower that had begun to bloom.

She had the clear complexion of a healthy young woman. Beneath delicately arched eyebrows, her eyes held a serene and deep look and her well-defined mouth opened from time to time in a chaste and friendly smile.

She came to the banks of a small, limpid stream and bent down, plunged her hands into the water and gathered some pebbles but then dropped them to pick some blades of grass which she tossed away absent-mindedly.

How fresh everything seemed to her! What happiness everything promised!

Secretly she gazed at her reflection in the water, as if fearing that

her appearance left something to be desired. She adjusted the collar of her dress. Then, suddenly, her face coloured, a secret thought occurring to her: would Heaven bring the joy for which she hoped?

She sighed.

*Didn't people say that there was more sorrow than joy in life?*

Being the daughter of a former *kisaeng* (a singer-dancer in feudal society–Tr), she had never known her father, and this was her deepest sorrow.

A well-known *kisaeng* named Wol Mae lived in the county of Namwon in Jolla Province. She had given birth to a daughter as a result of her liaison with a nobleman from Seoul, Song Cham Phan, at that time magistrate of the county.

Soon a new post called Song and he returned to Seoul. He promised his mistress that once he had taken up his new position he would send for her and their little daughter. He didn't keep his promise, however.

Time passed and Song died.

The young woman and her little daughter had no one to protect them.

The future looked bleak and the young woman wept. But she pulled herself together and determined that her daughter would be better educated than even noble young ladies. She taught the child her letters, music and painting, as well as to sew, weave and cook. She even taught her good manners with which, later, when she was married, she would be able to look after her household and serve her husband and parents-in-law satisfactorily.

The whole town admired her daughter, Chun Hyang, for her skill and culture.

As she gazed into the water and coloured at her thoughts, she made up some poetry.

*From where do you come, spring?  
The river carries along flower petals.*

*You, spring, in your chariot,*

*Where are you rushing to?*

She heard Hyang Dan laugh.

“You compose funny verses, miss.”

“O, but you don't understand.”

“Yes I do. It is obvious what you mean by ‘where are you rushing to?’”

“That's enough nonsense. Come on, let's hurry.”

They quickened their step in the balmy sunlight.

In one place girls were playing on a swing, in another young men were wrestling, trying to win an ox. In yet another place those who preferred the martial arts were matching their skills in an archery contest. Peasants exhausted from their work in the fields kept to the shadow of the trees, drinking and singing.

Ri Mong Ryong, son of the magistrate, was reading in his library. Unable to continue, he put down his book, raised the bead curtain and went out into the garden. Newly-opened flowers still wet with dew and sparkling with beauty welcomed him. White butterflies fluttered in the air.

He looked around in astonishment until his eyes had taken in the whole of his abode. He felt oppressed.

“Where on earth is my valet, the good-for-nothing?”

There was no one for him to talk to, and he felt lonely.

He was a handsome and open-minded yet studious young man. He was the son of a nobleman from Seoul, Ri Han Rim. He had come to Namwon when his father was appointed magistrate of the area.

As handsome as Prince Ho Dong, a born poet like the great Jong Chol, as great a calligrapher as Han Sok Bong, the gifted young man was the pride and joy of his father who hoped that he would pass the Imperial examination and become a minister. So he had always asked him to fulfil his obligations and to behave courteously.

He strongly believed in the three principles and five precepts of Confucianism. According to these, man is distinguished from animals because he observes the following rules: regard for the obligations between sovereign and vassal, love between parents and children, respect for one's marriage partner, politeness between the old and young, trust in friends.

He was a well-read man, but everything he taught his son was based on these five precepts. Being constantly told of the obligations of the nobility, the son became tired of it.

For him life was monotonous. In the morning, once out of bed, he would wash, comb his hair, dress and then, with a book in his hand, go to his father's room.

He would bow to his father who would be sitting on a silk cushion at the far end of the room, raise his hands together above his forehead and then bend his knees to touch the floor with his head. His father would cough gently in response. Then the son would place his book on the floor and begin to recite what he had learnt the day before.

Rarely would his father praise him; generally he would, with a severe look, admonish him at length.

How difficult it is to satisfy a demanding father!

He was pleased to see his valet finally appear on the doorstep. The young man, following his father's example, spoke to him in a severe tone.

"You good-for-nothing, where have you been? What are you dressed up for?"

"I'm sorry, young master. I have changed because today is a holiday."

The valet smiled as he gripped a tail of his overcoat of violet silk, recently washed and repaired.

Intrigued, the young man examined his manservant. He had heard that he was looked after by his grandmother who lived behind the Confucian school in the village.

He studied his manservant's appearance. His stockings were as white as snow and his sandals were of fine hemp.

His hair, which was tied into a long braid and taken up on his head, disappeared beneath his hat which he wore at a rakish angle; the feathers on his hat swayed with his slightest movement. Beneath his hat a headband of white fabric circled his forehead.

The rascal is dressed up to the nines.

*But for what?*

He began to laugh.

"Why are you laughing?"

"Do you want to look good for the girls? You confounded skirt-chaser."

"Spring is at work," the artful valet muttered. Then he went on. "Everything is green and blooming. In the wood the nightingales are singing, the butterflies are going from flower to flower, the girls are dressed in their finest, the weather is splendid. That must affect anyone who is not made of stone."

"Fine, fine. I, too, would like to take a short stroll. Where is the best scenery in Namwon?"

"Young master, do not even think of it. You must study."

"But you don't understand. Since ancient times great talents have sought out picturesque spots. They inspire them. It was at such places that they were able to write beautiful poetry, do you see? If Jong Song

Gang had never been to Mt Kumgang he would not have written his celebrated *Hymn to the Kwandong Region*; if Jong Ji Sang had never travelled up the Taedong River in Pyongyang he would not have composed his famous Ode to *Nampho*. Mt Paektu inspired General Nam I; Hansan Island inspired Admiral Ri Sun Sin. The *Guide to the Places of the East* says that for each picturesque spot there is a poem.”

“Well, here in Namwon, too, there are many places to inspire people; Mt Paekkong in the east reminds one of the austere beauty of Mt Jiri. To the west, far off, Mt Poryon disappears mysteriously into the mist. Beyond the North Gate the Kyoryong Mountain Wall is impressive for its fantastic shapes. Beyond the South Gate on the high bank of the Ryochon River the Kwanghan Pavilion with its elegantly-curved roof invites people to visit it.”

The young master tapped the palm of his hand with his fan.

“The Kwanghan Pavilion? I like the sound of it. Ah, now I remember. *Guide to the Places of the East* mentions it.”

He went briskly back into his library, searched his shelves and took out a book which he scanned rapidly.

“Here it is! The Kwanghan Pavilion. One Hwang Su Sin wrote: In the southern part of Namwon County a small pavilion called Kwanghan stands on a promontory. Once ramshackle, it was rebuilt and one Jong Rin Ji renamed it Kwanghan. There is also a verse:

*Of the many places of Honam  
This is the most picturesque county  
With the Kwanghan Pavilion,  
Marvel of marvels!*

The valet slapped his knee and assumed a knowledgeable air.

“That verse says exactly what the people of Namwon think.”

He went up to his master, looked over his shoulder at the book and asked if there were any other verses.

“Yes, there are many. Kang Hui Maeng, Ri Sok Hyong, Song Im and other prestigious writers have spoken of it. But seeing once is better than hearing a hundred times, as the saying goes. Lead me to the place. Harness my donkey.”

The valet was astonished.

“Without your father’s permission?”

“His visitor will have left by now. I will go and offer my morning greetings to my father and obtain his permission to leave. In the meantime, you can get my mount ready. Wait. Doesn’t the saying go that the scenery of Mt Kumgang isn’t worth a piece of bread when one has an empty belly?”

“You are right, master. When you have an empty stomach the scenery fades. Do not trouble yourself. I will take charge of the victuals. You need only obtain your father’s permission.”

The young master went off towards his father’s room, the book he had read the night before under his arm. He hesitated before his father’s office.

*Wouldn’t it be better to slip away, even at the risk of being punished later?* he wondered, before taking off his shoes and entering.

To his surprise he found his father talking with his mother. They seemed cheerful.

He bowed to his father and recited part of the text he had studied the night before.

Rocking backwards and forwards, his father listened and then congratulated him, something which was very unusual. He said that if he continued in the same way he would be able to master the seven classics and pass the examination.

His mother wore the smile of a happy woman.

The young man decided to make the most of his opportunity.

“Could I have your permission to go to see the Kwangan Pavilion?”

As today we are celebrating the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, I would like to view the scenery at the same time as studying the verses set down there by Kang Hui Maeng.”

“You have read *Guide to the Places of the East*?”

“Yes, father.”

“I don’t blame you for reading such works, but it is not good for a young noble to enjoy himself looking at the scenery before passing his examination,” his father said without raising his voice, but firmly.

His mother gently intervened.

“As today is a holiday you might let him have a walk and study his verses, too.”

Inwardly Ri Han Rim approved of his son’s wanting to practise his poetry rather than simply enjoying the excitement of spring. He acquiesced, but at the same time warning him severely:

“Good. You may go out today. But don’t forget that you are noble. Behave in a proper fashion. Don’t mingle with any lowly people and don’t approach a fair or a wrestling ring. Take care also not to talk to any strangers or to strike up a conversation with the first person you meet. Do not go any further than the Kwangan Pavilion.”

“You may rely on me.”

The young man saluted and left, happily excited. He went back to his room and hastily changed his clothes. He put on the outfit his mother had laid out for him: a pair of white trousers to which he attached his stockings, and violet leggings over the tops of his white stockings, a long-sleeved blue jacket and a cloak of blue silk. Round his waist he tied a wide violet belt and put on a new pair of lined shoes. His long, sleek hair had been washed in a mixture of oil and wax and carefully combed and tied with a violet silk ribbon covered

with precious stones into a long braid. He looked handsome, noble and virile.

His mother and the chambermaid admired him.

The young man left the room almost at a run.

His valet, who was waiting for him outside the library, was wide-eyed.

“My word! Are you getting married?”

“Come on, hurry up. My father has agreed. Where is my donkey?”

“I shall never understand this. It is as if the sun had risen in the west.”

“Shut up, you rascal. Hurry up.”

The valet led him to where he had tethered a donkey.

The bit of the animal was of gold, its muzzle was braided with threads of red and blue, its reins of leather were covered with violet silk, its saddle-girth was red and its stirrups were silver. The saddle was decorated with jade and covered by a tiger skin. The animal was further adorned with small bells and feathers.

“Please mount, master.”

The young man placed his foot in the stirrup, hoisted himself up and sat in the saddle.

At once the little bells began to tinkle gently and the donkey pawed the ground like a racehorse.

Escorted by his valet, he passed through the gate, then through the South Gate and out onto the main road of the town.

The young man shaded himself from the sun with his red, gold-speckled fan.

The passers-by would turn round, overcome with admiration. The young girls in the groves and on the banks of the river would look at him and whisper amongst themselves as they chastely lowered their veils. They found the son of the magistrate handsome, virile and

elegant; Ra Yong Soe, the valet, looked comical as he strutted along.

Hyang Dan, who was standing in the shade of a blossoming tree, saw them and blushed. Whenever she went to the village to obtain silk thread, she would visit a kind old lady who lived in the Mulberry Cottage behind the Confucian school. She was Ra Yong Soe's grandmother, and often Hyang Dan would see him there, too. And, if by chance they were to meet there, he would make jokes to her. She was afraid of this.

"Miss, Ra Yong Soe and his master are coming."

"But, what a dandy!"

"How handsome he is! His clothes suit him."

"His dress flatters him, that's all."

"No, he cuts a fine figure. And he is a talented poet and a remarkable calligrapher."

"How do you know?"

"His manservant told me."

Chun Hyang, standing in the shade of a tree, regarded the young man for a moment. The jingling of the small bells grew louder. Distracted, she urged Hyang Dan to leave the grove quickly and cross Ojak Bridge.

But the young lord arrived first. Having reached the bridge, he leapt to the ground and stood gazing at the clear water of the river.

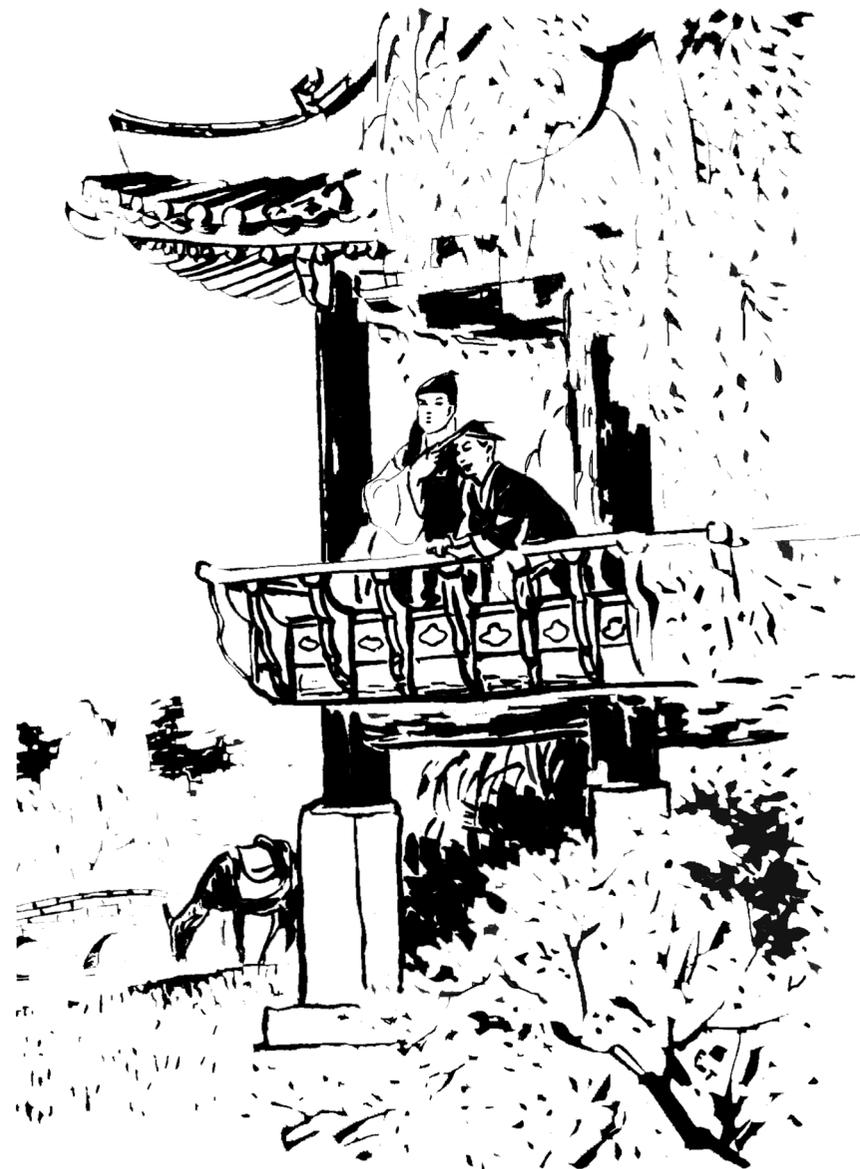
His valet explained:

"This is Ojak Bridge. And this is the Ryo Stream, a tributary of the Choksong. It is also known as the Milky Way. In olden times fairies would come down to bathe in it."

"The Milky Way and Ojak Bridge—they sound beautiful."

"And such scenery!" added his valet with a joyful laugh.

His young master also laughed. He was about to turn towards the Kwanghan Pavilion when he saw Chun Hyang standing hesitantly



under a tree. Her look, serene and deep, enchanted the young man.

Quickly the girl covered her face with her veil and slipped away, her scent lingering in the air. She disappeared into the wood beyond the bridge.

The young man stood motionless like a lost soul.

Such beauty; it's heavenly! They say that fairies once lived in the Jade Palace in the Heavenly Kingdom and in the Kwanghan Palace on the Moon. Has one of those fairies come down to Earth to walk on Ojak Bridge?

For a while the young man stood still, his eyes fixed on the girl who was hurrying away.

Meanwhile, his valet was making himself hoarse calling to his friend Hyang Dan, but she wouldn't look back as she disappeared with her mistress.

"Who's that?"

"Hyang Dan, an old friend of mine."

"Not her, the other."

"The other girl is Chun Hyang, the daughter of Wol Mae, a famed former *kisaeng*."

"Chun Hyang?" (*chun* means spring and *hyang*, fragrance—Tr.)

Enchanted by the beauty of the girl, the young man headed for the Kwanghan Pavilion, reciting the verse:

*Superb is springtime at the Kwanghan Pavilion  
And I am here to enjoy its charms and scents.  
But why do you disappear so quickly,  
Sweet fragrance of spring?*

He climbed up to the pavilion and looked around. Once again he marvelled at the splendour of the scenery.

Inside the pavilion he found several tablets on which were written verses by famous poets. He read a verse by Kang Hui Maeng.

*Here is the famous Kwanghan Pavilion.  
In the heat of June  
A fresh wind enters your bones;  
Is it a heavenly pavilion?  
Below its red-painted bannister  
I can see Kyonu passing.*

The young man turned round and his eyes came to rest on a poem by Ri Sok Hyong.

*At the edge of the clear river  
I feel as if I am in the Heavenly Kingdom.  
A fresh, scented wind  
Makes me think that I am on the moon.  
Everything here breathes peace and solitude.  
What need to seek a paradise  
Beyond this blessed world?*

All the verses exalted the beauty of the area and its heavenly splendour. The young man strode up and down the pavilion admiring the scenery. In the distance a light mist blurred the mountain peaks. In the middle of the plain a river, with green willows on its banks, sparkled.

Here, an old pine tree and a young oak trembled in the breeze; there a waterfall sparkled against a flourishing, verdant background. The sky, the verdure and the flowers were all reflected in the blue water of the stream. A girl, clearly elated by the charms of spring,

cut an azalea bloom and fixed in her hair, seized a magnolia bloom to pick at, lifted up her sleeves and, plunging her snow-white arms into the limpid water in which the green hills were reflected, washed her hands; then she seized a few pebbles playfully to surprise the cuckoos amid the willows. She picked a handful of willow leaves and tossed them into the water to be carried to the sea. For a moment she admired the butterflies with their white wings and the bees with their gold-striped abdomens laden with their spoils, and a smile of joy spread across her face.

*Who is she? She looks like Chun Hyang, whom I have just seen on Ojak Bridge.*

Ri would have liked to see more of her, but she had disappeared into the greenery.

He remained motionless, as if intoxicated by all he had seen.

Then his valet came up to him.

“What do you say, young master, about the Kwanghan Pavilion? Is it not the most picturesque place in the Honam area?”

“Everything here is beautiful. The Kwanghan Pavilion and Ojak Bridge, this spot is an inspiration to me.”

The young master recited a verse:

*By the Kwanghan Pavilion Ojak Bridge glitters  
in the spring sunlight.  
But where are Kyonu and Jiknyo, the lovers?  
If I am Kyonu, where is my beloved Jiknyo?*

A servant arrived, carrying provisions.

“The wine and food are here, young lord.”

“Good. Spring and good wine go perfectly together.”

The young man emptied a couple of cups poured by his valet

before having the table cleared.

The wine went to his head, and he began to pace up and down.

“I don’t know how splendid the Choksok Pavilion in Jinju and the Ryongnam Pavilion in Milyang are, but they will pale in comparison to this spot. Nature is in all its glory here. The pavilion is beautifully painted in red and blue. Golden-feathered nightingales sing in the willows and golden-striped bees and white butterflies travel in a scented atmosphere from flower to flower. I feel as if I were seeing Yongju, Pangjang and Mt Pongnae where they say gods live. The stream is exactly like the Milky Way, the heavenly scenery is just magnificent. In such a land there must be fairies.”

Meanwhile Chun Hyang, followed by Hyang Dan, had arrived in a grove where there was a swing. The air was heavy with the scent of fragrant plants, and velvet, green turf covered the ground; golden nightingales were flying in pairs.

The swing was suspended from the topmost branch, 30 metres above the ground, of a huge willow.

Chun Hyang removed her veil and placed it on the greensward, took off her shoes, raised the hem of her skirt and, taking the hemp ropes of the swing in her fine hands, eased herself nimbly onto the seat. She gathered herself and then, straightening her whole body, launched the swing into the air.

With her wasp waist and fine body she executed rhythmic movements. The long braid of her silky, jet-black hair decorated with a ribbon of golden silk danced on her back while over her breast floated her purple jacket strings. Little daggers with amber and jade hafts knocked playfully together at her waist.

“Hyang Dan, push me!”

Seated firmly on the swing she made an effort, then another, then a third, and her feet began to create a slight wind which raised

into the air some blades of grass. The swing moved faster and the willow leaves rustled with each of her movements. The hem of her crimson skirt floated on the wind above the greenery, like a flash across the calm sky and fleecy white clouds. She looked like a swallow pecking at falling flowers to catch them. She made one think also of a bright butterfly which, carried away on the wind, had lost its mate and was fluttering around looking for him. And she seemed like one of the fairies going to Mt Kumgang to bathe in one of the Eight Pools there.

Chun Hyang picked some leaves from the tree and munched them, plucked a flower and pinned it in her hair.

In the Kwanghan Pavilion the young man watched the red skirt appearing and disappearing against the blue sky. A strange emotion overcame him; he felt giddy.

“Pangja, come here!”

“Here I am, sir.”

The valet who, in one corner of the pavilion had been eating and drinking with the servant, presented himself in a hurry.

“What is that flickering over there in the willows?”

“I cannot see anything, master.”

“You rascal, look in the direction I’m indicating with my fan.”

“But still I cannot see anything.”

“Are you blind? Can’t you see something red flickering against the greenery?”

“You mean the person on the swing?”

“Yes. Is it a woman or a phantom?”

“A phantom, master, in this broad daylight? That’s Chun Hyang, the girl you have just passed on Ojak Bridge.”

“How beautiful she is!”

“You find her beautiful? Ha, ha, ha ... . Although she is the daughter

of a *kisaeng*, she is respectable. She has refused to follow in her mother’s footsteps. She is well-read, and her sewing and cooking are excellent. She is as well educated as the young ladies of high birth.”

The young master laughed.

“You make my desire to see her even stronger. Go and invite her here.”

His valet was startled.

“I’m sorry, but I cannot do so. She is famous for her beauty and nearly all the noblemen in the area, magistrates, deputy magistrates and county and sub-county mayors, have tried to seduce her, but in vain. She is gentle-hearted, true-natured, yet firm-willed. She is beautiful and irreproachable.”

His valet tried to dissuade his young master, but he insisted. Laughing aloud again, he said:

“You don’t understand one great principle of nature; everything has a master. The world is made in such a way that everything has its master, the jade hidden in the depths of the earth and the nugget of gold concealed in the riverbed. Go and tell her that her master Kyonu is awaiting his beloved Jiknyo at the Kwanghan Pavilion.”

Urged on by his master, the valet went to fetch the girl. The feathers on his slightly tilted hat waved and he beat the air with a willow branch as he headed towards the grove singing a lament.

Just then Chun Hyang succeeded in touching with her feet the bell hanging from the topmost branch of the willow and a pleasant jingling was heard.

Hyang Dan clapped her hands.

“You’ve done it! How grand, miss!”

Slowing down, Chun Hyang neared the ground. Breathless, she remained still for a while with her eyes closed to catch her breath before calling Hyang Dan.

“Hyang Dan, help me down. I can hardly breathe. I’m dizzy. Hold the swing.”

Hyang Dan endeavoured to hold the swing, but pulled along by its motion, she ran after it. Her antics amused them and they both laughed, open-mouthed, believing themselves to be out of sight of any men. Finally Hyang Dan managed to control the swing and Chun Hyang jumped to the ground.

At that moment the valet called out:

“Hey, Chun Hyang!”

Startled, the girls turned round quickly.

Hyang Dan spoke reproachfully:

“Why are you shouting? Does it amuse you to startle us?”

“Oh, no. But the worst has happened.”

“What is that?”

“The son of the magistrate saw Chun Hyang on the swing from the pavilion and asked me to take her to him.”

“You’re lying,” remonstrated Chun Hyang. “First, he doesn’t know me. And then, even if he did know me, he could not take the liberty of doing such a thing as to summon a young lady. It is against all decorum. You must have spoken to him about me with your loose tongue.”

“No, I haven’t said anything about you; it’s not me who is to blame, but you.”

“I’m to blame?”

“Let me tell you why. You are of marriageable age, so you should, according to custom, have been playing on the swing discreetly at home without being seen by anyone. But what do you do? You go for a walk to Ojak Bridge. Not only that, you play on the swing in the grove of green willows near the Kwanghan Pavilion so that you catch many eyes. The willows on the banks of the river are dancing

languidly with their green tenderness in the warmth of the breeze. Here in front of many people, what do you do? You are impertinent enough to play on the swing, to glide over the ground and to tease a willow branch with your pretty little feet so that the hem of your red skirt appears in the sky and my master finally notices you and commands me to fetch you. So, now you see that it is not for nothing that I am here. Come with me at once.”

Chun Hyang, finding his chatter ridiculous, decided to ignore him, but changed her mind so as not to hurt his feelings.

“What you say is true, but you must realize that, as today is the May Festival, all the girls of the town have come out to swing here. Anyway, I am not one of those *kisaeng* registered at the magistrate’s office. Your young master would not ask a virtuous young woman to come to him. Even if he did, she would never consent. Perhaps you misunderstood what he told you.”

“My, my! What a fuss you are making. It’s the son of the magistrate who has sent for you. You must obey him. You don’t understand how powerful his family is. An uncle on his mother’s side is the Second Deputy Prime Minister and his grandfather was the Minister of the Civil Service. If you don’t comply with the will of my master, tomorrow morning your mother will be sent to the magistrate’s office and flogged for disobedience. It’s for you to decide.”

Having thus spoken out, the valet pretended to leave.

Worried, Hyang Dan, in a tone that was now gentle, called him back.

“My friend, do you think that, by teasing us like that, the young lady will be frightened and will follow you meekly? I didn’t take you for such a man. I would never have expected such wickedness from you. With your presence of mind you will be able to dissuade your master somehow, won’t you, my friend?”

In saying this, the girl threw him a reproachful yet amiable look which completely disarmed the young valet.

He slapped his forehead.

“Oh, I almost forgot. Chun Hyang, my master said that he wanted to invite you because he knew you to be a gifted poet. He said: Kyonu is calling his beloved Jiknyo to the Kwanghan Pavilion.”

At this, an ironical smile came to Chun Hyang’s face.

“Tell him:

*The absence of the Milky Way  
Denies the presence of the legendary lovers.  
Their meeting being fixed for the seventh of July  
No other encounter is possible at this time.  
You must have been dreaming, lulled by the breeze  
And intoxicated by the spring fragrance.”*

For a moment the valet remained nonplussed; he feared displeasing beautiful Hyang Dan. He wanted to appear worthy of respect. Alone, he returned to the pavilion.

His young master could not contain himself.

“You rascal! I told you to fetch Chun Hyang, not to make her leave.”

“No, no, master. You are mistaken, I didn’t tell them to leave.”

“Well, look.”

Chun Hyang and Hyang Dan, having left the grove and crossed Ojak Bridge, were disappearing along an avenue of willows.

A feeling of intolerable emptiness filled his heart; the day seemed to have lost its brightness.

“Did you give her my message?”

“Yes, and I was called every manner of name.”

“What?”

“She called me a madman. A noble such as yourself, she said to me, contrary to custom and decorum, was asking a young lady whom he does not know to present herself before him. That’s impossible. Clearly it is you, she said, who have made it all up. Then she requested me to pass a message on to you.”

“What message?”

Pangja recited the lines that Chun Hyang had improvised for his master.

The young man listened and then repeated the verse a few times before saying:

“It’s beautiful. If of yore the famous Hwang Jin I of Songdo was considered charming for her beauty and talent, now Chun Hyang of Namwon has captivated me. I would truly like to see her write, since she is said to be a distinguished calligrapher. Without a doubt she is the pride of this region.

“ ‘Their meeting being fixed for the seventh of July, no other encounter ...’ so the verse says. What a deep meaning it has.”

“As deep as the sea?”

“She means that I can meet her on the seventh of July.”

This interpretation cheered the manservant up.

His master asked him:

“Do you know where she lives?”

“Yes, sir, she lives down yonder, at the foot of that eastern hill near the lake in whose blue waters fish are sporting, in the middle of the delightful grove made cheerful by the chirping of birds and the brightness of flowers. A huge pine tree stands bending over the rock before her home, its branches waving gently in the breeze, resembling a waking old dragon. Around it grow willows, blueberries, bamboos, pine-nut trees, fir trees, and ginkgo trees. A rattan hedge, jujube trees and ash trees line the walls which are covered with vines, currant

bushes and clematis. The roof of her home rises between a pine forest and a bamboo thicket.”

The enchanted young lord exclaimed:

“The eastern hill is bright and the bamboo thicket luxuriant. It evokes the nobleness and uprightness of that young lady.”

For a long time he remained gazing at Chun Hyang’s home.

His excursion had relieved him of any desire to read and write; he thought only of her. His bedroom was also his library. It was richly-furnished—a lacquered desk encrusted with mother-of-pearl, a beautiful writing-desk, a long stationary case on which stood a holder made of a precious stone with a set of writing brushes of various sizes, a square table, a paper holder fashioned from aromatic wood and painted violet containing rolls of fine-quality paper, a box of paulownia wood containing an ink stone from Wiwon, small sticks of the famous Songyon ink made by Hae Cho, a tortoise-shaped water bottle for diluting the ink, ...

But none of these interested the young man any longer.

On the wall hung paintings by such great artists as An Kyon and Ri Sang Jwa, as well as a work by the famous calligrapher Han Sok Bong. But even they had lost their attraction in his eyes. Only the image of the girl standing in the shade of the flowering tree would occupy him henceforth. He wanted to see her at her home that night, but he feared his father’s reaction. He would be dealt with harshly if ever his father were told of his amorous adventure.

He sighed, picked up a book and forced himself to read, but his restless eyes could see nothing but the girl. He summoned his valet.

“Go and see what the position of the sun is.”

“Just rising in the east.”

“Don’t try to make a fool of me, you oaf. The sun must be setting in the west now. How has it gone east already? Go and see again.”

“I am right. The sun has set in the west, and it is dusk, with the moon having just risen over the eastern mountains. It is time for dinner, sir.”

A young page brought his dinner—stewed beef ribs, stewed fish, a fairy pot already boiling, a salad of wild vegetables, kimchi, snow-white steamed rice cake sweetened with honey, rice cake cooked on a bed of pine needles impregnated with their aroma, and still other dishes, all delicious.

But the young man had the table cleared having hardly touched anything.

He lay down to rest, but in vain. He turned over and over before sitting up. He shook himself and determined to work.

He took out *Seven Confucian Classics* and began to read at random. But nothing could hold his attention. He picked up *Book of Changes*, the most difficult of the works. One chapter in it deals with the origin of everything under the sun, its form, its evolution and its maturity. He began to read out aloud:

“Everything under the sun obeys the laws of this world, of its origin, of its form and of its maturity. Chun Hyang’s nose is so fine and pretty.”

Seated on the edge of the veranda, his valet burst out laughing.

“Master, you read the syllable ‘nos’ too often.”

“But you don’t understand. In this world here below there is as much justice as injustice. Almost every word has the syllable ‘nos’.”

“I agree. How wise you are! You really have wide *nostrils*.”

Unable to concentrate on any book, he finally chose *One Thousand Chinese Characters*, and this work he began to peruse absent-mindedly.

His valet found this absurd.

“Reading a book for beginners hardly becomes such a sage as yourself.”

“*One Thousand Characters* serves as the basis of literature. Its author Ju Hong Sa, a wise man of olden times, drafted the text in a single night with such intense application of his mind that the following day his hair had turned completely white. This book is also known as *Characters of White Hair*. The more one reads it, the more one discovers its charm; every one of the characters is rich with meaning.”

“I know a little about those characters.”

“Really?”

“Why not?”

“Then, read a little.”

“Fine, listen. *Chon* for sky high, *ji* for earth deep, *hyon* for winding up as a rope does, *hwang* for yellow like burnt rice, *il* for day such as that of a wedding, *wol* for moon such as honeymoon ... .”

“You idiot! You really are a low fellow. You repeat the idiocies spouted by some minstrel. The characters should be read like this: Created in times immemorial, the sky is blue in all seasons, *chon*; the earth is the cradle of the five elements which make up the world—iron, wood, water, fire and soil, *ji*; the North Star is refreshingly beautiful, *hyon*; yellow is the primary colour, the colour of the earth, *hwang* ... .”

“Your interpretation is far too scholarly. It will amuse no one.”

“Listen again. At its zenith the sun lights up the world, *il*, day or sun; at night the moon lights the way for my darling, *wol*, moon or month; my heart is filled with love for her, *yong*, to fill; youth falls into ruin if it experiences unrequited love, *chaek*, to decline; Chun Hyang’s eyes are as beautiful and bright as stars, *jin*, constellation; I dream of a sight of her, thinking only of her, *suk*, to dream; soon it

will be midnight and the Great Bear will part, *ryol*, separation; I burn to run to her house to offer her my heart, *chang* to offer; I long to see beautiful Chun Hyang again, *chun*, spring.”

Having thus begun, the young man continued in a very loud voice.

“Master, lower your voice. Why are there so many Chun Hyangs in your reading?”

Just then a servant entered in haste.

“The master has just gone to bed, but he was woken by the noise from your room. He sent me to inquire into what is happening. What should I tell him, young master?”

“He has excellent hearing for his age; too bad. Tell him that I’ve been reading a chapter in a history book on the great General Ulji Mun Dok who drowned three hundred thousand aggressors in the waters of the Salsu River. Tell him I was so excited that I lost control of myself and raised my voice.”

The old man never doubted the truth of what he was told and congratulated himself on having such a studious son. He shouted to the servant.

“Fetch Mok, without making any noise.”

Mok was a slovenly man, with a feeble bearing and a constant air of worry; he was a junior official who was only concerned with minor matters.

“Are you bored, sir?” asked Mok.

“No, sit down. It’s not because of boredom that I’ve invited you, but for business. You and I were classmates and we must confess that we hated reading. Do you remember? But my son displays a surprising passion for reading; he reads all books, although a few would suffice. Isn’t that something over which his parents should rejoice?”

The old official nodded his head obsequiously, without even trying to understand what the magistrate was saying.

“Generally young people hate recitation; they fall asleep or are mischievous during lessons.”

“Yes, but once my son has a book he forgets everything else.”

“Yes, he’s an admirable young man.”

“He hasn’t studied a great deal, but he has a talent for writing.”

“Yes, he is talented. His writing is forceful and vigorous. The dot he produces with a stroke of his brush resembles a stone falling from a high cliff. The line he traces represents the rush of fluffy clouds across a blue sky. The accent he writes reminds one of the head of a chirping sparrow on the edge of a roof. His writing resembles waves on the sea or summer storms. His horizontal strokes are like pine trees on the edge of a precipice; his vertical strokes, arrows in flight. Even when he lacks in vigour, his strokes look like strokes all the same.”

“Listen to what happened when he was eight years old. In our garden in Seoul there was an old plum tree. One day I asked him to write a verse about that tree and he immediately composed an excellent one. He has a lively spirit and an unflinching memory. He could be of great service to the State. His age is of no account.”

“He may become Prime Minister, my lord.”

“That would be aiming too high, but I’m sure that he’ll pass the national examinations. Then he may, without much difficulty, obtain the post of mayor of a district or magistrate of a sub-county.”

“Oh, no, if he doesn’t become Prime Minister he will be a totem pole. (The two words are almost homophonic in Korean.)

“What do you mean, a totem pole?”

The magistrate got angry.

“Who told you that saying that you dare repeat it in front of me?”

“I do not know, but it means that a talented man must succeed or die. I’m afraid I was mistaken because of my poor memory, sir.”

“Enough of this. Get out of here!” shouted the magistrate, and Mok vanished in no time.

Meanwhile, young Ri was waiting impatiently for the curfew.

“Pangja, go and see what my father is doing.”

“There is still a light on in his window.”

“You good-for-nothing, you have a heart of stone.”

“Do you mean to go and see Chun Hyang?”

“Yes, and you must help me.”

At that moment a long clamour resounded in the night, the curfew signal. Lights were extinguished and servants retired, leaving the night watchmen to do their rounds.

The young man made ready.

“Bring a lantern.”

The valet brought a blue lantern and the two of them left the library stealthily.

“There is a light in my father’s room. Cover the lantern.”

The valet placed the lantern under his arm and, hugging the wall covered with climbing plants, the two silently passed the inner gate, then the front gate, before coming out onto the wide carriageway. They set out along a narrow path. The moon lit up their path.

The wood, lulled by the breeze, seemed to be lost in a drowsiness interrupted by dreams. Nothing broke the silence.

For a long time they walked along lanes until they arrived before the girl’s house.

Just as the valet had described it, a pine forest and a bamboo thicket flanked the pretty cottage which faced an avenue of gingko trees. It was a gentle night; the quiet moon was shining overhead. The smooth, silver surface of the clear lotus lake was broken from time to time by goldfish leaping out of the water. A crane was calling its mate somewhere in the wood.

Pangja gently pushed the gate. It was double bolted on the inside.  
A dog began to bark.

“Pangja!”

“Yes, master.”

“What should we do?”

“Let’s climb over the wall.”

“No, I can’t do that”

“Well, stay here a minute, master.”

The valet walked along the wall and disappeared into the night.

Wol Mae, the mother of Chun Hyang, was asleep, but she was woken by the barking of the dog. She opened her bedroom door and looked out into the yard, which was flooded with moonlight, and deserted.

The dog was still barking.

“Sh...sh... don’t bark, stupid animal! The proverb that says that as stupid as a dog barking at the moon is for you,” she muttered and came out into the yard.

She went to the back garden and gazed at the straw-roofed pavilion. Chun Hyang had just stopped playing her *kayagum* (a traditional Korean musical instrument) and was writing verses in praise of the night.

The mother sat on the edge of the floor and said to her daughter.

“What are you writing at this late hour of night? Yesterday you were weaving all day long. Today, after a stroll in the wood by the Kwanghan Pavilion, you spent several hours in the kitchen preparing holiday meals for your old mother. Go to bed, you’re doing too much.”

“I was only learning the culinary art, mother.”

“Unfortunately, a woman must know how to do everything. If you were a man, with your talent, how nice it would be!”

“Mother, you are beginning your lament again.”

“I’m saying this to you because I’ve had a strange dream.”

“What dream?”

“I was reading and feeling drowsy when suddenly I saw you in a dream; you were asleep, your head on a pillow, when all at once you were surrounded by a multi-coloured mist. Then a blue dragon appeared. It held you in its mouth and was taking you up to heaven. I seized the dragon and we struggled, rolling over each other, until I started from sleep as the dog began to bark. Wouldn’t that be a dream portending great happiness, a splendid career, if you were a man?”

“I am not a man, and I am not interested in a career, but I will remain devoted to you. Don’t worry, mother.”

“I was joking. I am only concerned about your welfare. Didn’t you tell me that the young lord sought you at the Kwanghan Pavilion today? Do you know how his name is written?”

Hyang Dan replied instead of her mistress:

“His name is written Mong (dream) Ryong (dragon).”

“What? Mong Ryong? His name means dream dragon?!”

At that moment she noticed a movement in the courtyard, near the flower bed and heard a slight noise. Surprised, she got up to look. A man was concealed in the shadow of a tree.

“Who’s there? Are there some rascals hidden in the night at the house of decent people? Am I seeing a ghost or is it a burglar? Hyang Dan, bring me the kitchen knife.”

Pangja came out of the shadow.

“Hush!”

“Who’s this? Why, you are Pangja! But who’s that other skunk?”

“Old woman, hold your tongue, it is my young master, the magistrate’s son.”

The old woman was stupefied.

“The young lord? You should have said so right away. What a

blunder I've committed! Hyang Dan!"

"Yes, madame."

"Light all the candles in the pavilion, lay a mat on the floor and bring some cushions."

The old woman busied herself to welcome the magistrate's son who meanwhile was hidden in the darkness, not daring to show himself. Finally, urged on by his valet, he came out.

"Young lord, welcome to my home. Please accept my humble greetings."

"I am delighted to meet you."

"Forgive me, young lord, for having been so rude a moment before. With my eyes lowered, I did not recognize you."

"Do not concern yourself. In similar circumstances your remarks would not have been misplaced."

"You are too kind. If I had known you were such a great-hearted man, I would have addressed other coarse remarks to you," she said, laughing.

The young man, a little more at ease, laughed too.

While she led him to the pavilion, he admired her open character. He thought: There must be a reason why everyone praises her. And don't they say, "Like mother, like daughter"? Chun Hyang owes a lot to her mother.

As he followed the old woman, he examined the garden and the pavilion. He felt he had entered a fairyland; the pavilion was brightly lit, and the willow branches hung down like strings of pearls. To the right, a dew-covered paulownia was dripping, disturbing the peaceful sleep of the cranes, while to the left a pine tree was rustling in the wind as if to awaken the sleeping birds.

A variety of plants beneath the window of the pavilion were budding. At the other side of the garden was a pond of clear water

containing blooming lotuses covered with dew. From time to time goldfish would leap from the water, falling noisily back again to swim peacefully. The young lotus leaves were only half open; in the centre of the pond there was a mound of stones, from where a crane on her long feet fled, whooping and beating her wings at the human's approach. Two ducks, seemingly delighted at the nocturnal visit, approached.

The young man arrived before the pavilion just as Chun Hyang, who had been to change on the advice of her mother, came out of her room. Her figure was as enchanting as a clear, bright moon rising out of clouds.

She stepped down from the pavilion and greeted her visitor.

"Good evening, young lord."

Finding nothing to say in response, her visitor thought for a moment before saying "Forgive me, I am disturbing your sleep on this beautiful spring night."

Saying this, he discreetly examined the girl and was again struck by her beauty and the nobility of her bearing.

Her clear complexion was as fresh as a white crane swimming about on a blue river; her white teeth glittered like a star or a jade. Her red skirt, which charmingly betrayed the lines of her figure, carried the solemnity of a misty, twilit summer's evening, while the patterns embroidered on it resembled the waves of the Milky Way.

Chun Hyang's mother climbed up to the pavilion and invited the young man to take his place there.

Chun Hyang followed him and, her head lowered, sat down next to her mother, by the sliding door of her room.

Once again the young man looked at her; her modest, shy air delighted him. She reminded him of a swallow perched on a tree branch on the banks of a stream after bathing. Despite the slightest touch of makeup, her beauty seemed even more striking. Her white skin, her

red lips enlivened by a shy smile, her fine features, everything about her made him think a freshly-blooming lotus on the pond.

He had never seen a fairy, but he believed he was seeing one then. She had come from the Heavenly Kingdom, either as an exile to Earth or in search of a lost friend. She was so beautiful that she could not possibly be of this world.

For her part Chun Hyang raised her eyes and glanced surreptitiously at the young man. She found him handsome. His high forehead seemed to guarantee him a bright career, his noble features were regular and distinguished.

Her mother offered their visitor tea and a pipe. The young man declined the pipe but accepted the tea. He sipped the tea as he examined the room. Ignorant of affairs of the heart, he did not know what to do or what to say. Embarrassed and awkward, he coughed, drank some tea and considered the room.

It was neat. Along the wall were closets with dragons and phoenixes carved in relief on them; in a corner he could see a sandalwood writing desk on which stood books, a writing-brush holder, a paper-holder and an ink-stone case. The wall was decorated with tasteful paintings.

The girl could certainly not have the means to furnish herself with all this luxury. Her mother must have provided her daughter with it when she was a *kisaeng*. There was a work portraying a fairy of Mt Kumgang, the heroine of a legend according to which eight fairies came down from the Heavenly Kingdom to the mountain to bathe in the Eight Pools there; when it was time for them to go back to heaven, the youngest of them could not find her winged dress and remained on the Earth where she married a gentle-hearted young woodcutter and the couple lived happily with their numerous children. Another painting was of Kyonu and Jiknyo, who loved each other deeply but could meet only once a year, on the seventh of July, on Ojak Bridge.

All the paintings stimulated thought and bore witness to the refined taste of their owner. On another wall, above a desk, was hung a work of calligraphy by Chun Hyang, expressing her constancy and strength of spirit:

*Though the storm rages  
The cliff stands firm.  
Though the snow swirls  
The pine tree remains green.*

The young man exclaimed:

“That’s excellent. The idea it expresses is noble and the handwriting is beautiful.”

“My daughter wrote it,” said the mother, happy.

“You should congratulate yourself on having such a distinguished daughter.”

Happy to have at last found a topic of conversation, the young man began to laugh and to talk in a less embarrassed tone. He gazed at the girl, who again lowered her head, revealing the nape of her neck.

“Chun Hyang, offer the young lord some wine and a light meal.”

The girl got to her feet and quietly left.

“Your visit to us humble people living in a poor cottage is a great honour for us.”

“Don’t you say so. Today I happened to see your daughter at the Kwanghan Pavilion, but only briefly to my sorrow. Ever since I have had a heavy heart, just as a butterfly longs for a flower. So I have come to consult you. Will you give me your reply?”

“With pleasure, young lord. What about it?”

“I would like ... . If I were to ask for your daughter’s hand, would you give it to me?”

Chun Hyang's mother paled. After a moment she collected herself and said:

"I lived with Song Cham Phan, a nobleman from Seoul, when he was magistrate of Namwon, and had Chun Hyang by him. Before returning to Seoul he promised me that he would send for the child as soon as she no longer had any need for her mother's milk. His unexpected death prevented this and rendered Chun Hyang fatherless. What hardship I have had, what tears I have shed in bringing her up! But I have made her study since she was six years old. I have taught her everything a woman should know. Being intelligent and gifted, she has been good at her studies. She is modest and discreet. She has now reached marriageable age. But where should I find a suitable partner for her? Should she marry a nobleman? My being a former *kisaeng* prevents that. Should I give her to any low-class person to ask? That I could not do because of my appreciation for her qualities. By night and by day her marriage has worried me and now, here you are asking for her hand. I am grateful, but speak of it no more, young lord, I beg you."

The young man was abashed. After a silence he said:

"Do not be so unhappy! Chun Hyang must marry soon, and so must I. There is nothing to prevent our union. As a noble I shall not back out of my words. Believe me."

The young man was earnest and insistent, but Chun Hyang's mother seemed intractable.

"Young lord, you know nothing of life. There is an unbridgeable gulf between the nobility and the lowly people. One marries someone of the same social status. For the son of the magistrate to marry a girl from humble origin, that would fly in the face of custom. And what would your parents say? They would be shocked, and you would ..."

"Do not worry, I will manage everything. Only consent."

"Still young, you believe that you love her, but if you were to marry her the public scandal and the opposition of your parents would soon convince you. You would have to abandon her, compromising yourself and making my daughter miserable. No, think of it no longer. Just spend a few pleasant moments in my house; and then leave."

Chun Hyang brought wine and food. She wore a white apron over her skirt and in the eyes of the young man she seemed even more beautiful.

Chun Hyang's mother, being a former *kisaeng*, served the young man at the same time as trying to entertain him, but he remained gloomy.

"Can't you believe me? Think it over and consent."

The young man returned to his theme after emptying a couple of cups, emboldened by the effect of the wine. But Chun Hyang's mother would not yield.

"Young lord, one marries only once in life and one does not do so lightly. Be content this evening to enjoy my daughter's playing of the *kayagum*."

Thus he was obliged to leave after listening to Chun Hyang's music.

Her playing was irreproachable. She placed the *kayagum* at her knee, tuned it by adjusting the strings and played with virtuosity. The music flowed from beneath her fingers, powerful and yet gentle.

One moment she would surround herself with mystery, the next she would summon up a breeze in a pine wood, whispering gently amid wild roses. At times furious waves would pound against rocks. At times a stream of water would fall from the height of a precipice, losing its force and flowing peacefully between banks of white sand. The music conveyed the nobleness of the spirit of the girl who was playing it.

It kept pulling at the young man's heartstrings.

Back in his study he realized that he loved the girl and that he should not yield to her mother's reasoning. It was absurd to cite the difference in social position as a reason for refusing to allow two people who loved each other to marry. With an aching heart he wrote:

*I thought I would slumber  
Drunken with spring scent but in vain.  
You seem to possess  
All the spring fragrance.  
Send me a verse that will be a balm  
For my aching heart.*

He summoned his valet and had him take this verse to the girl.  
He received the following reply:

*You are wrong to blame me for your wakefulness.  
This night even the kayagum is wakeful and restless.  
Perhaps it is because the spring wind disturbs.*

This reply was like oil thrown onto a fire. He could not remain still; he decided to meet Chun Hyang's mother again.

A few days later, at midnight, he revisited the girl's house, accompanied by his valet.

The old woman greeted him more warmly than before, invited him up to the pavilion and urged Hyang Dan to bring wine quickly.

As on the previous occasion, he sat on an embroidered cushion.

Chun Hyang greeted him shyly. She was wearing a pink jacket with violet edging and a sky-blue skirt.

The old woman offered the young man the cup of tea her daughter

had brought on a saucer.

"I did not expect to see you again in my house."

"Yet I have come to see you, old one."

"That is not true, young lord. You are here to see my daughter, not a withered old woman such as me."

"But no. I have come to renew my request of the other day. I beg you to consent."

Chun Hyang's mother heaved a deep sigh, a sigh of joy mingled with grief.

"I believe I understand how you feel, young lord. But you should view things squarely. In olden days people said, 'The father knows his son, the mother, her daughter.' I know my daughter better than anybody else. She is honest and true. She will be a faithful wife. She will remain unchanged even if a mulberry field turned into a sea. She has a true spirit and is above mean passions and ambitions. Material goods, gold and fine clothes are of scant concern to her; she likes to lead her life as people in olden times instructed. And you believe you are ready to brave all to marry without the knowledge of your parents. But, when the flame of first passion is extinguished and you are threatened with scandal, you will abandon her. What will become of her then? No one will be as unhappy as she. I beg you, think again!"

Young Ri said impatiently:

"Do not concern yourself. I have thought this over a thousand times. My love for your daughter is true and deep; I assure you, I want to link my life with that of your daughter in spite of society. I will love her for my whole life; will marry her according to all proper custom and practice. You should be delighted. What does it matter if the ceremony is humble? You should not worry, either, because I am of the nobility or because of the possible objection of my parents, or because of my youth. I undertake to marry her and to

love her all my life. Please consent.”

Chun Hyang’s mother, moved by the young man’s sincerity, sighed, her eyes moist:

“The strange dream I had foretold this.”

She called her daughter who was in the kitchen preparing their visitor’s dinner.

With her sleeves rolled up, an apron over her skirt, beads of perspiration on her brow, she, with Hyang Dan, was preparing dishes, teaching the servant the recipes and the way to serve them. There were quite a few dishes to serve. She was setting the table when her mother called her; she rolled down her sleeves, removed her apron and went. Her mother told her to sit down beside her and said:

“Chun Hyang, the young lord has asked for your hand. What should be my reply to him?”

Chun Hyang blushed to the earlobes. She lowered her head, confused and nonplussed; her innocent heart beat wildly.

The valet who, crouching near the staircase, had been observing this scene, put in impatiently.

“You lack tact, old woman. You are asking her what she thinks while her heart has for a long time been with my master.”

“I am doing so because I am fearful. My confidence in the promise of a nobleman brought me to where I am today.”

“There are different nobles.”

“Chun Hyang’s father was no less solemn than your master when he promised to care for us before he left for Seoul. But, after he left, we received no tidings from him. Because I believed his promises, we are as you see us today.”

“That’s enough lamenting. I know my master and I will vouch his feelings. But that is enough talk. Have some wine brought to celebrate.”

Chun Hyang’s mother believed in fate, so she agreed.

She thought:

*It’s a law. A male phoenix summons a female. My daughter Chun Hyang is a blooming plum flower in a spring breeze, so it is natural that a young noble such as he should love her.*

“Young lord, do not be angry with me. I am an old woman and have taken a long time to make up my mind. Now I would ask you to leave me a few words as a sort of marriage contract,” said she, placing writing implements before him.

The young man took a weasel-tail hair brush, poured some water into the ink well, rubbed a small stick into it to thicken the ink, dipped the brush in the ink and wrote on a sheet of bright paper.

*Even if Mt Kumgang were reduced to dust,  
Even if the waters of the East Sea were to dry up,  
My engagement would remain valid  
Even for a thousand years.*

As the old woman read these words, her eyes filled with tears. She was happy. She had found an ideal match for the daughter she had gone to such pains to raise.

“Daughter, keep this paper with care and be a good wife for the young lord.”

She placed the sheet of paper before her daughter and left.

The young man considered the girl with a gaze that was full of love.

“Chun Hyang. Do you like what I have written?”

The girl raised her eyes and regarded the man to whom her mother had just promised her.

The night was filled with the scent of flowers, and the young

people were overcome with happiness.

Just then Hyang Dan entered with a small table on which were laid dishes displaying a refined culinary art: salads of wild aromatic vegetables, mullet cooked in its own juices, quail soup, a dish of large abalones from Ulsan and Tongnae, skewered meat, a dish of cold noodles, and kimchi with its colour enhanced by fine circles of red pepper.

Chun Hyang's mother poured into a silver kettle some Jaha wine which she had kept for a special occasion. She turned the kettle round and round in the water boiling in a double saucepan on the low fire of a bronze brazier and poured the warmed wine into a cup for the young man.

"What excellent dishes! How are such exquisite things made?"

"I have done everything in my power to educate my daughter so that, when she found a husband, she would live harmoniously with him; officers, men of letters, and childhood friends would be able to visit them and spend a pleasant time composing poetry and playing chess or *paduk*. Her husband would be able to ask his wife to offer them dinner or wine. A wife who had no good knowledge of the culinary art would be unable to do so satisfactorily. A poorly-educated wife damages her husband's reputation. I have done all I can to make my daughter irreproachable. When I had money, I never hesitated to buy her what she needed in learning the culinary art. A great deal of time and labour has been put into the dishes you are eating this evening and I invite you to serve yourself without reproaching us if they are not to your taste."

Chun Hyang's mother filled a cup and offered it to the young man who, having taken it, turned towards Chun Hyang. In a voice that was happy, though betraying a little sadness, he said:

"I wanted to celebrate our marriage with all due ceremony and to

hold a solemn wedding feast with, among other things, two roast wild geese: I wanted the two of us dressed in our finest, to exchange cups, pledging our loyalty. I am heavy-hearted to be marrying you in this way, but we must rejoice at our engagement. Let's drink to proclaim our union."

The young man emptied his glass, filled it again and said to Chun Hyang,

"The first cup I drank was a cup for the sake of etiquette. This second one we must drink together. The wine we shall share will be a symbol of our love. You and I have tied the nuptial knot that will never be broken. We will have many children, we will enjoy a quite old age and we will die on the same day, at the same hour, in each other's arms. We will love each other all our life."

The young man drank half the cup and handed it to Chun Hyang who drank from it and then placed it on the table. He took another cup, filled it and offered it to his future mother-in-law.

"Mother-in-law, I offer you this cup on this auspicious occasion."

The old woman took the cup and, in an emotional voice, tinged with both joy and sorrow, said,

"I am happy that the young lord will marry my daughter, but I cannot help thinking of the past. She has never known her father and, on this happy day, my memories of the past come back to me."

"You should forget the past and enjoy the present. Empty this cup, I bid you."

The young man tried to cheer up his future mother-in-law.

She recovered her calm, served her future son-in-law with wine and food, and, in her turn, drank a few cups.

In the kitchen, the valet was insisting that Hyang Dan serve him some wine. After the table was cleared, it would be appropriate to serve him with food and wine. But he was impatient.

“Hyang Dan, you must realize who is responsible for this happy marriage and not mistreat such a worthy man as me.”

The girl cast a sidelong glance at him.

“You’re talking about bad treatment even though I gave you three bowlfuls of wine the other day when you came with your master.”

“That day is in the past now. Today it is I who should have been served first, but I am the last. What injustice!”

“What have you done to distinguish yourself?”

“So, I’ll tell you, but before I start, give me something to wet my whistle.”

Hyang Dan, a kindly soul, placed some dishes, a bowl of wine and a plateful of rice cake cooked in steam and suffused with honey on a low table for him.

The valet emptied the bowl at one draught and said,

“This wine isn’t bad. Where is it from?”

“It’s Pakmun Liquor from Haeju.”

“Pakmun Liquor ... . Give me some more. I like the liquor you serve me. Now that my young master and Chun Hyang have fixed their marriage, do you know to whom they owe their happiness?”

“Isn’t it obvious? Firstly, it’s to Miss Chun Hyang, then it’s to your young lord and finally it’s to madame.”

“But no. I am responsible for their happiness. Don’t you believe me? Well, listen. I took my master to the wood at the Kwangan Pavilion on the fifth day of the fifth month. I told him about Chun Hyang. I also helped my master to visit her. And it was also I who carried their letters. Have I not done a lot? But now all that is forgotten. Such injustice! Such ingratitude! I’m devastated, yet for me there is even greater distress.”

“Are you so unhappy?”

“I know you. You have a kind and gentle heart. Yet you make me

unhappy because you listen to me with only one ear.”

“No, that’s not true. Haven’t I given you everything you asked of me? Rice, wine, and the other things ... .”

“No, a man does not live on only rice and wine. He needs love, tenderness and friendship. And you upset me because you don’t understand me at all.”

“Get on with you. You’re drunk.”

“Between us there is neither barrier nor gulf. We have no need to draw up a marriage contract. A single ‘yes’ from you will suffice to settle matters between us. We are not rich and we have no need to celebrate our marriage in style. What need have we of pomp? We will use what we have. Once married we will go to greet my grandmother, and she will cry with happiness. So, do you wish to become my wife?”

The valet seemed tipsy. Just then a voice from the pavilion called him. He jumped and stretched his neck and looked around, as if he were waking up.

Hyang Dan returned to the kitchen, followed by Chun Hyang’s mother, who shouted.

“The table’s yours, Pangja. Eat and drink as much as you like. You must be very hungry.”

Chun Hyang and the young lord were alone in the pavilion; there was an embarrassing silence between them.

The night was clear and silent. The air was filled with the scent of flowers. Only the night dew falling from the leaves of the trees in the garden could be heard.

Moved, young Ri drew closer to his fiancée and took her hands in his own, burning hands.

“This is the happiest moment of my life.”

“But the future will be happier still.”

“I could not feel happier even if I’d obtained a marvelous position after passing the Imperial examination. Oh, love! How magical is your power! But what is love? Tell me, my sweet.”

“How can I know? You yourself could find no answer ... ,” she stopped in mid-sentence, smiling and blushing slightly.

The young man found her irresistible, like a freshly blooming flower soaked with dew and tinged by the rays of the morning sun.

The love between Chun Hyang and Ri grew deeper as the days went by. They met every evening. Yet the spring nights were short and they could not open their hearts to each other. So they both awaited each evening impatiently and parted regretfully.

The days passed and their initial awkwardness was replaced by a gentle familiarity. Then the young couple would talk, laugh, joke and sing of love. Here are a few verses of their song:

*By what can we measure our great love?  
By the highest peak of Mt Kumgang  
By the depths of the blue waters of the East Sea  
By the gentle light of a full moon in autumn  
By the striking beauty of a wild rose on the beach  
By the purity of the dew on a flower petal  
By the shy smile of a fragile crescent moon  
O, love, you shall join us for ever.*

To which Chun Hyang replied:

*To what can our beautiful love be compared?  
To a flower petal soaked by the spring rain  
To the hanging branches of the willows on the river  
To the thousand stitches in a fishing net at Yonphyong.*



*To the close threads of cloth woven by Jiknyo  
on the Milky Way  
To the love between the woodcutter of Mt Kumgang  
and the heavenly fairy  
To the love between Ondal and Princess Phyeonggang  
O, you are my love, my treasure.*

Ri, fascinated by his fiancée's beauty, would often examine her face.

"Chun Hyang, go over there, I want to see your profile. Come here, I like seeing you smile slightly and tread lightly. Oh, you have the bearing of a fairy. You are beautiful from in front, from the side and from behind. You have stolen my heart and my soul. How I love you, how I cherish you; I wonder what you are that you can grip my heart so tightly. Are you made from gold?"

"No, I am not that. A king of Silla at the time of the Three Kingdoms had all the gold in his country seized to make his crown, so there is no more gold."

"Then you are jade?"

"No, I am not. For five centuries the kings of Koryo had all the jade in the country seized to have seals made, and not one of them remains."

"Then, you are amber?"

"No. The three first vice ministers, the six ministers and the prefects of the eight provinces had the strings of their horsehair hats decorated with amber, and the ladies of Seoul decorated their rings with it. None remains."

"So, what are you? A crescent moon? A full moon? Did your mother make of you a treasure to give you to me? O my love, you are my life, my star. What shall you eat, raw chestnuts or cooked

chestnuts? Or a watermelon that I will cleave in two with my knife and sweeten with the white honey from Kangnung?"

"No, thank you, I want nothing of that. I want only your heart that will remain unchanged."

"So be it. You speak truly. How I love you! Tell me something."

"I want to tell you what I feel. In joining my life with yours, I can't help feeling solemn, as if I were being given to one of the great souls who sacrificed themselves for the country, like Generals Ulji and Kang Kam Chan who were of such great service to their country in repulsing foreign invaders. I love you with all my heart. I want you to pass the Imperial examination, to obtain promotion and to become a high official."

"What you say is excellent. When I obtain my post, we will go on a honeymoon trip across the country."

"We will admire the Eight Marvels of the East."

"And the Eight Places of the West."

"O, we will love each other for all our life."

"O, we will enjoy eternal love."

Thus they sang of their love, overcome with joy. They composed poetry, they painted and they never noticed the passage of time.

Autumn came and the leaves of the paulownia began to fall. In the garden, near the lake, chrysanthemums scented the air.

A fresh wind blew into the room through the bead curtain.

One day Ri and Chun Hyang were admiring the mastery of Sol Gok, painter of *An Apricot Tree in the Moonlight*, and were drawing together *A Flowering Apricot Tree* when the valet arrived, out of breath.

"Master, your father has asked for you."

"What has happened?"

"A courier came from Seoul and now the whole magistrate's office

is in an uproar. Your father is asking for you at once.”

Ri reassured his fiancée and then, following his valet went to the magistrate’s office, which was chaotic.

The magistrate had been recalled to the capital and preparations were being made for his departure. Orders had already been given to the farrier to prepare the horses, to the coachmaster to prepare the coaches, to the chief of the guard to form an escort, to the chiefs of the six departments to wind up their work-in-progress, and to the head of the civil service to put the public record office in order. A courier was looking for the magistrate’s son.

When Ri arrived, his father shouted in anger.

“Where have you been?”

“I was at the Kwanghan Pavilion, father.”

“At the Kwanghan Pavilion again? There is a strange rumour abroad about you. What have you got to say about that?”

“What do you mean? I am only studying.”

“Haven’t you heard our happy news?”

“I have been wondering what it is.”

“I’ve been recalled to the capital to take up a higher post. I have been appointed under-secretary to the king. I’ll be leaving as soon as I’ve put county affairs in order. You shall leave with your mother ahead of me.”

This came as a great shock to the young man. He rejoiced at his father’s promotion, but the thought of parting with his fiancée struck a chill in his heart. He thought he was going to faint. He could not stop tears coming to his eyes. With his head lowered, he declared:

“Father, you may leave before us. I will watch over the rest of the work.”

“No, prepare your things quickly and leave tomorrow morning.”

The young man acquiesced and went to his room, stunned by

his misery, and bewildered.

A servant was packing his books, and when he saw this, he was beside himself.

“Stop, you scoundrel! Who gave you permission to touch my things?”

“Madame, your mother.”

At that moment his mother appeared and took him aside to a room at the back of the house.

“Sit down, Mong Ryong. We should be delighted by your father’s promotion, but why are you not? Why so angry and unhappy? You’ve been going out every evening. What are you doing? Tell me, truthfully.”

“Mother ... .”

The young man was on the point of telling his mother, but he was choked in his tears. He seemed confused. Young or old, a son is always open with his mother. Our young man, in tears, began to speak about his relationship with Chun Hyang. He implored his mother,

“Mother, she has given herself body and soul and I have promised her my eternal love. I cannot abandon her. I cannot leave alone. It would be shameful.”

But his mother countered in a firm voice.

“You are the son of an official. You have tied yourself to the daughter of a *kisaeng*?”

“But what is there to prevent me?”

“If your liaison with that girl becomes known before you marry, your future will be permanently compromised, as will the honour of our house.”

He tried hard to defend himself by citing the beauty and qualities of the girl.

But he was reprimanded even more sternly.

Everything turned black before his eyes. He awaited nightfall and left home for his rendezvous with his fiancée. He was racked with grief, and tears were in his eyes.

*What should I do? I cannot possibly leave her; but how can I take her with me? My parents would not permit it. If I abandon that true and noble soul, it will give itself up to death.*

He could see no escape. With death in his soul, he wandered like a sleepwalker as night fell.

Meanwhile Chun Hyang, in her pavilion, was weaving silk. Each movement of the shuttle made a clear, dry sound in the silence of the night.

A thread broke.

Chun Hyang mended it, thinking she would weave some fine silk and make a suit for him. She knew his mother and the tailors at his house would make beautiful clothes for him from rich cloths, but she thought it her duty to dress him.

The leaves were falling from the trees and it was already as cool in the evening as it was in the morning.

It seemed that their first meeting at the Kwanghan Pavilion had taken place only the day before, but it was already autumn.

*I must make some clothes for him before it becomes cold.*

At this thought, she worked more quickly and the shuttle travelled at an ever-increasing speed.

Hyang Dan was surprised.

“You’re still working! You must not do too much! You will become ill.”

“Don’t worry, I’m fine. Come and see my silk. What do you say?”

Hyang Dan felt the silk with her fingers.

“How fine and beautiful, miss. Just as fine and beautiful as your paintings. The young lord will be delighted with his silk clothes.”

“For now, don’t say a word to anyone. But what is happening? They say that a courier came from Seoul. If the magistrate goes back to the capital, his son will have to go with him.”

“You needn’t worry, miss. If the young lord leaves, he shall not leave you here!”

“Go and find out.”

Hyang Dan left and Chun Hyang remained in thought.

*If the young lord takes me with him, we will set up house together. Life in the capital will be better than in the provinces. Such joy! I will be able to broaden my horizons and help the young lord to prepare for his examination. And on the day that he passes, I shall be able to see his imposing procession when he returns with a flower in his hat, pinned there by His Majesty the King! How happy and proud I will be to see the people of the capital admiring and envying him.*

As she pictured her dependable and dignified fiancée on that day, she was overcome with joy and her heart began to beat wildly.

A little later Hyang Dan returned.

She hesitated for a moment, as if she had something to say, but disappeared inside the house. Then Chun Hyang saw Ri entering the courtyard through the main gate.

He hurried towards her, but then stopped, leaning against one of the columns of the pavilion, sobbing convulsively.

Surprised, she descended the steps and helped her fiancée up to the pavilion.

“What is the matter? Is there some problem with your parents? Have you been abused on your way here? Did the courier from Seoul bring news of the death of one of your relatives? Why these tears? Why these sobs? You are normally so dignified and in command of yourself.”

Chun Hyang tried to soothe him as she wiped away his tears with the hem of her skirt.

“Calm yourself, I beg you.”

Heartbroken, Ri sobbed even more heavily.

Distressed, Chun Hyang comforted him.

“Control yourself, I beg you. What has happened?”

“My father has been promoted to a new post in the capital.”

“You should be rejoicing at such an event. Why are you weeping?”

“My heart is broken because I must leave without you.”

“You thought you would live in Namwon all your life? We cannot leave together. Leave in peace with your parents. I will join you as soon as I have put my affairs in order. In our situation, we must not compromise ourselves.”

Ri did not say a word.

“Once we are in the capital, we shall need a small house for my mother. If you rent one for her not far from ours, she will be grateful.”

“I could hope for nothing better, but I’ve spoken about you to my mother, not daring to do so to my father. She scolded me, saying that it was a scandal for a nobleman’s son to take a *kisaeng*’s daughter along even before his marriage. If it were to become known, my career would be compromised for ever.”

“What do you mean? You want to leave me because I am the daughter of a former *kisaeng*?”

She fell to the floor near the dressing table and burst into tears.

“My love has been betrayed, what is there to live for? For whom should I keep my beauty? It’s all over. Oh! Fate is cruel.”

Ri could find nothing to say, and he remained painfully silent. Chun Hyang gathered herself with great difficulty and asked,

“Young lord, is this also your opinion? When we became engaged this spring, was it not with the approval of your father and mother?”

“You saw me in the wood at the Kwangan Pavilion, on Ojak Bridge, and you came to my house at night. You sat there and I here—and

declared your love for me, a love that was deep and eternal. I pledged myself to you willingly and with confidence in the engagement, but now you are asking me to forget you. Oh! such cruelty, such cowardice! Forsaken in this house, racked with grief, must I shed tears during the long autumn nights? Oh, no, I cannot, I will not.”

Ri, his head lowered, wept silently as Chun Hyang lamented.

“Oh, how harsh you are! Conjugal love is the purest and tenderest of human feelings. But you are rejecting love and abandoning me.”

Chun Hyang’s mother, who had just woken up, thought that her daughter’s weeping was the result of a household dispute.

It’s a sign of love, she thought, yet still she listened, and realized that something serious had happened. She got up, dressed and went silently to the pavilion. She stood by the sliding door of her daughter’s room and listened; there would be a separation! A courier had come from Seoul, and this was the result.

“There will be two deaths here tonight!”

Brusquely, she opened the door.

“Why are you crying at this time of night?”

“The young lord is leaving for Seoul.”

“Is that all you’re crying about? You must go with him.”

“He says he cannot take me with him.”

“What? Is this true, young lord?”

“I am in a very delicate position. There is nothing I can do.”

“Are you refusing to take my daughter with you? Is that what you are saying? How stupid I am! I deserve the worst of punishments. Instead of learning a lesson from my own broken life, I’ve allowed my daughter to make the same mistake!”

She was spluttering with rage, overcome by a powerless indignation.

She clasped her hands together and cried:

“Oh, you hussy! Kill yourself right here in front of him. What is there for you to live for now? He must take your corpse if he won’t take you living. I could die of grief seeing you here so unhappy and dishonoured. Didn’t I tell you to find a partner from the same background to avoid unhappiness? If you had married a man from a humble background without a fortune or pretensions, you could have lived happily and I could have enjoyed a peaceful old age. But you wanted to better yourself, and see what that has brought you. Look at the mess you’re in now! It’s a fine ... .”

The old woman beat her breast as she lamented.

“Such anguish! I knew how fragile this marriage between a nobleman and a humble girl would be. Yet I never imagined that we would be victims of such flagrant injustice.”

She went up to the young man.

“Tell me, young lord, what is your reason for rejecting my daughter? In what way is she unworthy of you? Does her demeanour leave something to be desired, or her serving of you? In what does she fall short of others? Why must she suffer such injustice, such humiliation? Are you aware that one can only cast off one’s wife if she commits one of the Seven Faults?”

“Mother-in-law, do not say such things. You are twisting a knife in my wound.”

“Think of my daughter’s situation. When you wanted her, you made wonderful promises, but now that your passion is spent, you are abandoning her without turning a hair. Such vile, base behaviour! She is lost. One cannot prevent spring from passing. A butterfly no longer wants a withered flower. My daughter, so beautiful, so fresh, will be old in the bloom of her youth, and with her hair white, she will never know the vigour of youth again. What fault has she committed to be condemned to such terrible misery and solitude?”

With you gone, she will not be able to sleep at night; she will wander like a sleepwalker in the garden in the moonlight; tears will stream down her cheeks and drench her skirt as she sighs for you. She will even throw herself onto her bed without undressing and will cry the night away, facing the wall. No, I cannot stand the thought of it. It is too harsh. But who is to blame? It is because I was once *kisaeng* that my daughter’s life is in tatters. Why this discrimination? Why? Why? If my daughter pines away without my being able to save her, if I lose both a daughter and a son-in-law, how will I be able to live alone in this cruel world? No, it would be better to die now. Oh, Heaven, how unjust you are!”

“Mother-in-law, control yourself.”

The young man attempted to calm her, fearful that her lamentations would create a scandal which would reach the ears of his father. Moreover, he had no intention of leaving his fiancée.

“Mother-in-law, you love your daughter, I know. Perhaps I love her more than you do. Do not weep. I will take her with me.”

“So you should.”

“Mother-in-law, if I take her on a horse or in a carriage, there will be a scandal. However, I have an idea. If she is discovered, that will damage not only my own honour but also that of my ancestors.”

“These are grand words. What is your idea?”

“The convoy will leave tomorrow morning. My mother’s carriage will be followed by that carrying our family’s ancestral stone, and it is I who must guard that.”

“So?”

“You may guess what I have in mind.”

“No, I have no idea.”

“I will hide the stone in the sleeve of my coat and place Chun Hyang in the carriage. That will solve everything.”

At this, Chun Hyang looked blankly at her fiance before turning to her mother.

“Mother, leave us alone, please. It is because he is so unhappy that he has thought of this shameful scheme. Do not blame him. I have something to say to him; our life depends on him from now on. This time, we must be separated. We have no choice. So why torment him? Hyang Dan, take my mother to her room.”

“Ill luck has driven me into this nasty mess,” lamented the old woman.

She sighed deeply and left them, leaning on the arm of her servant.

Left alone, the two young people felt even more keenly the drama of their situation.

“Young lord!”

“Chun Hyang!”

“Will you really leave?”

Chun Hyang turned up the lamp and the two young people sat facing each other, their cheeks wet with tears.

They looked at each other, mixing their sighs and tears.

The young man caressed his fiancée’s face, while Chun Hyang took his hand in hers.

“This may be the last time that we shall see each other. How terrible for my old mother. A widow without parents or relations, she raised me at great cost to herself. She was so happy to marry me to you. She had faith in our happiness. But ill-fortune never ceases to dog us.”

Chun Hyang threw herself into her fiance’s arms and burst into tears.

“Chun Hyang, don’t cry.”

“How shall I live without you? I will never forget you and shall die of grief. In spring a thousand flowers will tear open my lonely heart;

in autumn the chrysanthemums and the red leaves of the maple will make me weep. At night I shall be unable to sleep as I sigh for you. The melancholy cry of a night-bird in the moonlight, the sad cry of a wild goose wandering in the cold autumn sky, will bring tears to my eyes. The marvels of the four seasons will only make me weep and sigh. How shall I be able to live in such a way?”

The young man took the sobbing girl into his arms and tried to comfort her.

“Chun Hyang, don’t cry. I’m leaving, but you know that I love you. Years ago Sol Rang Ja waited for three years while her husband served on the borders. Another woman, a lotus-fruit picker, waited for her husband for many lonely nights, never giving up hope. You mustn’t be sad, not even in the moonlight. My heart will remain here with you. Wait for me with confidence. Be brave and await my return.”

“In the capital life will be good, the streets bright, the women beautiful. Everywhere there will be music and beautiful scenery. With your poetic nature, you will enjoy life in the capital and forget a provincial girl such as me.”

“Chun Hyang, don’t worry, I promise you. There are many beautiful women in Seoul, but it is you alone that I love. I’m not inconstant.”

The two unhappy people, more in love than ever, were caressing each other, dreading the moment of their separation, when a manservant from the escort rushed up, breathless.

“Young lord, you must return quickly. There is an uproar at your home. Your father is beside himself. I told him that you had gone out to say goodbye to your friends.”

“Do you have a horse ready?”

“Yes, everything is prepared, young lord.”

A neigh was heard outside the gate.

“So, goodbye, Chun Hyang.”

In great haste she had Hyang Dan bring a bottle of wine and a lunch box.

“Young lord, I will serve you a last cup. You may eat this lunch at the inn where you stop.”

She filled the cup to the brim and offered it to him, her face covered with tears.

“If you see greenery along your route, think of my mortified heart. If the rain lashes the panes of the window of your hotel room, think of my tears. I hope you do not fall ill on your long journey. If, in the evening, you feel sad, go to bed early. If, in the morning, it is raining, or windy, delay your departure. I beg you to look after yourself on your journey and to take care. Write to me from time to time. Finally, I bid you have a safe and happy journey.”

The young man emptied the cup at one draught and said,

“I will write to you. According to a tale, in ancient times a man used a blue bird to carry his letters. Even if I can’t find such a bird, I will find some messenger to carry news of me to you. Don’t be aggrieved. Farewell.”

The young man took a small mirror from his pocket and handed it to Chun Hyang.

“This mirror reflects my heart. Keep it at your breast and always have confidence in me.”

Chun Hyang took the mirror, hid it inside her jacket, drew out a jade ring and held it out to her fiance.

“Take this ring. The jade is symbolic of my soul, the ring of my love.”

Ri took it and remained motionless with his eyes fixed on his fiancée’s face.

At that moment Pangja hurried up.



“You have been so long in taking your leave that your mother is now waiting to depart.”

Finally the young man made ready to leave.

“Mother-in-law, farewell. Hyang Dan, farewell.”

He mounted his horse.

Chun Hyang grasped the bridle.

“Once more, young lord, have a safe and happy journey.”

“Thank you, Chun Hyang. Take good care of yourself. Remain for ever as beautiful and young as you are now. Until we meet again!”

The manservant whipped the horse and it galloped away.

As he ran after his master, Pangja cried,

“Hyang Dan, bring your mistress to the Ori Pavilion.”

Hyang Dan urged Chun Hyang to go to the place.

Chun Hyang covered herself with her green veil and followed Hyang Dan across the wood, golden in the autumn light. Briskly she walked up the slope, entered the pavilion and looked downwards at the Seoul road.

The convoy was receding into the distance.

Chun Hyang caught sight of a rider in a blue cloak behind the carriage of the magistrate’s wife and recognized her fiance.

Just then he turned round to look behind him.

Chun Hyang’s vision was blurred by tears.

“He has left. It’s all over.”

Her eyes were so swollen by tears that she could hardly see; her beloved had gone.

“Hyang Dan, can you still see him?”

“No, nothing but a cloud of dust.”

Chun Hyang clasped the Ori Pavilion’s red pillar and sobbed. The hills, rivers and forests all seemed to sway in grief.

“Even clouds can travel freely. Why can I not go with my fiance?”

Chun Hyang sobbed, hot tears streaming down her cheeks, but her fiance could no longer see or hear her.

“Miss, control yourself.”

The eyes of Hyang Dan, too, were bathed in tears. Separation was a kind of death. The difference between the rich and the poor, the gulf between the nobility and the ordinary people, was unsurmountable.

The nobleman’s son had become betrothed, but had left like a cloud in the autumn sky.

2

After her fiancé's departure, Chun Hyang tried not to think about him. She would weave, she would sew and she would read. Why think about a man who would be away for so long? Nevertheless, she did think about him.

Everything caused her grief; the floor on which he had sat, the room in which they had composed poetry, drawn and chatted; when she saw the young man's works of calligraphy, her eyes would become misty, and involuntary tears would come to her eyes every time she looked at herself in the hand mirror he had given her.

One day, as she looked at her reflection in it, she again burst into tears.

Hyang Dan, herself weeping, said to console her:

"Miss, the young lord, when he left you, begged you to take care of your health, and not to cry because that would make you ill. Do you remember?"

"How could I forget? But my memories are tormenting me. My dear, it's late. Go to bed."

Once alone Chun Hyang went to bed, hoping to see her beloved in her dreams.

Since olden times people have said that visions are deceiving. But alas! What can I do? The only way for me to see my beloved again is in a dream.

*I have laid my head on my pillow.  
But my anguish eats away at my fatigue.*

*There is nothing sadder for a human being than  
to be left alone.*

*Who can understand the feelings of a woman  
curled up against the wall, weeping?*

Chun Hyang became even more lovesick.

*Day or night, awake or asleep,  
His absence makes my heart heavy.  
I can vividly see his dear face  
And in my ears still sounds his gentle voice.*

*By what chastising will of Heaven  
Were we two born to meet  
And to betroth ourselves,  
With no thought of luxury or money,  
Only to have to live apart for a hundred years?*

*Our desire formed a river  
Which ran and ran without end,  
Our love formed a mountain  
Which soared to conquer the sky.  
The river seemed inexhaustible,  
The mountain seemed so solid!  
Despite all this, Heaven was jealous.  
One dried up, the other collapsed.*

*My beloved took his leave of me so suddenly,  
And I don't know when we shall meet again.  
A thousand sad thoughts plague me,*

*A thousand regrets assail me.  
Unhappiness marks my face and my silken hair  
Which will fade as I languish.  
Alas, the year is drawing to a close,  
The months have passed!*

*In this season the trees lose their leaves,  
And in the moonlight  
My pillow is covered with tears,  
But time moves at a snail's pace.  
The sun, hidden behind the thicket by the river,  
Languishes, indifferent to my life.  
My darling, if you knew how troubled I was,  
You would surely think of me.  
But alas! Even though I have waited,  
Still I have no news of you.*

*I am wasting away and my tears pour out  
Ready to form a sea that will be beaten  
By the wind of my sighs. Must I take ship to go  
In search of my beloved?  
But, alas, I cannot do so.*

*The moon has appeared after the rain  
And is lighting my window,  
And I am sadder than when the world is frozen.  
The crescent moon and the Great Bear  
must be shining*

*On my far-off fiance.  
But alone, I must bear my grief.*

*The moon sheds its blue glimmer  
Pervaded by the light of fireflies,  
Just like my anguished soul  
As it wanders the greenery.  
The night advances,  
Drowning my room in sadness.  
In vain I stand waiting for my fiance,  
In vain I lie waiting for sleep.*

*Spring has passed while I have waited,  
And autumn has been fruitless, too.  
When shall there be joy and happiness?  
Who other than my beloved can ease  
The pain and sadness in my heart?  
To rid myself of my affliction,  
I spend the night on the verandah  
Weaving on my loom.  
But alas! How strange it is!  
The spindle sympathises with me and sobs.*

*Oh, Heaven, take pity on me!  
Allow me to see him  
Whom I love so dearly!  
Allow us to share our affection,  
To live to a grand old age without ever again  
Having cause to lament our separation.*

As for young Ri, as he travelled to Seoul he thought of her and, wherever they stopped, he could not sleep a wink.  
When will I see again that beautiful, charming girl who only

yesterday was laughing and crying at my side? he said to himself, and took his jade ring from his baggage. As he gazed at it, he thought of his beloved.

*What is the nobility?  
What is the people?  
Is it the difference in our social position  
That has separated us?*

*You must have been crying,  
My dear, since my departure.  
That thought makes my eyes fill with tears  
And my heart bleed.  
If I had wings, I could fly, I would fly  
To see you tonight.*

*The sound of the leaves  
Falling in the wind  
Must make you tremble  
In the hope of seeing me again.  
The song of the crickets  
Must provoke in you  
A sad memory of me.*

*How much I would like  
To caress your hand and say  
I can't live without you.  
But what a pity!  
So many mountains, so many rivers separate us  
And my route to you is barred.*

*Impatience has created  
A fire in my heart.*

*Spring brings a thaw to the rivers.  
Trees which appeared dead in winter  
Are adorned with leaves and they flower.  
In the same way, the day will come  
When our dream will come true.  
Wait, my beloved.*

In Seoul, Ri strengthened his resolve to pass the Imperial examination and obtain a post in local government. He applied himself to his studies.

After the transfer of his father, Ri Han Rim, from Namwon to Seoul, he was replaced by another nobleman who before long was transferred to become the magistrate of Raju. Then came Pyon Hak Do, who at the time was residing in the Jaha district of Seoul.

Rumour had it that he was ignorant despite the qualifications he was supposed to have obtained. His social success was attributed to the flattery he paid to the powerful. Some people considered him to have a large intellect because he had some knowledge of literature and the arts, but in fact he was of a capricious temperament and given to alcohol and women. He was grasping, and was even guilty of corruption and of neglecting public affairs.

That was why those who were abreast of matters refused to tie themselves to him.

Everywhere he made an appearance misery would follow.

In order to welcome their new magistrate, the officials of Namwon, particularly those from the civil service, went to Seoul.

“The head of the civil service is here, my lord.”

“Now the commander of the local defence bureau is here.”

The new magistrate wore an air of confidence as he regarded the people greeting him.

“The head of the civil service!”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’d like to know if there is anything of interest happening in your region.”

“No, sir. Nothing in particular.”

“I’ve heard that the countryside and the women in your county are beautiful.”

“You are correct. In that regard, we are very fortunate.”

“And you have Chun Hyang, the most beautiful woman in the country, don’t you?”

“That is right, sir.”

“How is she?”

“Fine, I believe.”

“How many *ri* is it to Namwon?”

“It is six hundred and thirty *ri*.”

The new magistrate had decided to leave for Namwon at once.

“Go and prepare for our departure.”

“Yes, sir.”

His subordinates retired and began to whisper among themselves, expressing their fears about the misery that was about to befall their region.

Their new magistrate started out for Namwon in great haste.

His retinue was impressive. His huge carriage was covered on both sides with blue curtains which fluttered in the wind. His officials, dressed in uniforms of bright colours, marched in two files, escorting his horse-drawn carriage.

“Hoy, get out of the way!”

The guide of the retinue shouted in a menacing voice to keep the route clear.

Servants and the coachman followed the vehicle, displaying vigilance that did not relax for a single moment.

After passing through the South Gate, the retinue travelled a good distance, crossed the Nodul River, passed over Namthae Hill and continued south.

At the provincial capital of Jonju a ceremony was held to hand over the royal order appointing the magistrate. Then the troupe passed through Imsil and stopped at Osuyok, where they had lunch. Then they passed over Paksokthi Hill and arrived at Namwon, the county seat.

The staffs of the six public offices of Namwon and the soldiers attached to the administration were lined up on both sides of the immaculately clean road to welcome the new regional head.

Nearby, flags of twenty-eight colours fluttered in pairs at the four points of the compass. Twenty-four beautiful *kisaeng* had been called together by the local government and, dressed in their finest and mounted, two each, on horseback, were straddling the road. Music resounded to the rhythm of the retinue and shook the air, with trumpets, drums and horns. The population, men and women, young and old, ran out to see the spectacle.

The magnificence of the retinue caused excitement in Namwon.

However, the people were not rejoicing; it seemed to them that their burden was to become heavier.

Everyone wondered: What sort of man is he, this new magistrate? He looks just the type to make life hard for us.

The people did not dare to raise their heads before the retinue. So full of resentment were they that they kept their heads lowered.

Pyon Hak Do went up to the Kwangan Pavilion where he changed

his clothes. Then, rolling his eyes to add to his own importance, he went to the magistrate's palace and entered.

He accepted the banquet traditionally offered to a magistrate on being installed in office and then received the respects of the local military commander and, in turn, those of the staffs of the six public offices.

He wanted to have the heads of the six public offices summoned at once, as well as the registered *kisaeng* for a roll call, a ceremony which would normally have been held three days later. However, for fear of stirring up gossip, he refrained.

He was burning to see Chun Hyang, whom he had already heard about in the capital. Since his entry into the town he had been peering over the fan hiding his face to look at the lines of *kisaeng* and judge their beauty.

The sight of them had revived his need for sensual pleasure. With his eyes half closed, he smiled with satisfaction.

On the third day he wanted to make the summons but still he refrained, anxious to preserve his dignity. He made rough inquiries into which matters required his urgent attention.

He asked:

"Who is head of the census and tax office?"

"I am, sir," a man replied.

"Have you collected all the grain taxes?"

"Last year the harvest was poor in many places. Many households do not have a morsel to eat and so cannot pay the tax."

"I don't care whether the harvest was good or bad. Taxes must be paid. Arrest and beat anyone who hasn't paid his tax and throw anyone who still refuses to pay into prison."

"I will see to it, sir, but the peasants are now asking for rice."

"Is there any rice?"

"A little, sir."

"It should be distributed, then, but carefully. Don't forget that in autumn you must collect two-and-a-half measures in exchange for each measure you lend."

"Two-and-a-half measures?"

"Why, is it too little? If so, you should collect three."

In the eyes of the official this nobleman from Jaha seemed both headstrong and, moreover, grasping.

The official had previously served several magistrates, so he knew what he should do.

"Your command shall be carried out, sir," he said.

"Fine. Fulfil your duty."

"I understand," he said and left.

The magistrate then summoned the head of the civil service.

"Is the summons ready?"

"Yes, sir," he replied.

He opened "Book of *Kisaeng*" in which were noted names, ages and places of origin, announced the first name in a clear voice and went on:

"A boatman raises a mast in the moonlight at Nampho, and his charge is named Ran Ju (Orchid Jade), the name of the beautiful head of our list."

The name was pleasing to the ears of the nobleman.

Over his fan he spied Ran Ju as she presented herself.

She stepped lightly up to him, pressing the skirts of her dress to her slender figure.

"I am Ran Ju, sir," she said, bowing with the movement of a bird about to fly away, and moved aside.

The nobleman did not find her worthy of her name.

In summoning the dozens of *kisaeng*, the head of the civil service

chose the most seductive words and a variety of tones in praising their beauty. Each one, in turn, bowed and then retired.

The magistrate grimaced and demanded in a testy voice,

“Are these the most beautiful women in the area?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Truly?”

Some of them were pretty, but the new magistrate, his judgement clouded by the reputation of Chun Hyang, wanted to see her. So he summoned the senior *kisaeng* and demanded,

“Why was Chun Hyang not called? Is she no longer a *kisaeng*?”

“Her mother was a *kisaeng*, but she never has been, sir.”

“What are you saying? How do you explain her renown, then?”

“Although she is the daughter of a *kisaeng*, her beauty and conduct are irreproachable. Nobles, military officers, artists and high officials have sought her company, but she and her mother have always refused. She never speaks to nobles or to their relations. She became engaged to the son of a previous magistrate. When he had to go to Seoul with his father, he promised Chun Hyang that he would return for her after passing the Imperial examination. She has been waiting for him ever since.”

The nobleman’s face went red with anger.

“You lowly ignoramus! Do you mean to tell me that the son of that strict nobleman had already found a concubine even before marrying? Say that again, but only if you want to be punished. I want to see Chun Hyang. Have her brought to me.

The head of the civil service summoned up his courage and remarked.

“The reputation of two noble families is in question. I am afraid that your command to fetch Chun Hyang might compromise you, sir.”

He shouted in a rage.

“Stop this nonsense! If Chun Hyang doesn’t come quickly, every official concerned shall be beaten. So hurry and bring her to me.”

This order created a wave of panic in the six public offices and the officials were mortified.

The head of the justice department summoned his men.

“Who is on duty today?”

“It is I, Kim.”

“And I, Ri.”

“Go and arrest Chun Hyang immediately.”

“Alas! She has been caught in the net! There’s no hope of escape for her!” lamented Kim, the taller of the two soldiers, as he adjusted his fur hat, which was lined with violet silk and carried the legend “speed”.

“She has finally been caught in a terrible net, you should say. Poor Chun Hyang will be so unhappy,” added Ri, the fatter of the two soldiers, as he adjusted the red belt of his uniform.

The head of the civil service intervened, saying in a menacing tone,

“The lord said people who are too soft earn themselves a flogging.”

“Yes. Since it’s an order from the magistrate we must obey. Let’s get going quickly.”

“Go on! Only a fool would feel sorry for Chun Hyang!”

Joking to each other, the two men hurried to her house.

Meanwhile Chun Hyang, never imagining what was in store for her, was thinking of Mong Ryong as she played her *kayagum*; it was a sad song that she was playing.

Because of her melancholy she had lost her appetite and could not sleep. Every day she seemed to fade a little more. Nevertheless, the faithful girl tried hard to conceal her tears from her mother so as not to cause her distress. She would weave, sew and do other tasks.

Before Mong Ryong’s departure she had begun to weave silk to

make into a suit for him, but she had given this up because of her heartbreak at their parting. But later she changed her mind and took up her task again. After finishing the suit she made a belt and a pair of silk leggings.

The previous night Wol Mae had gone to her daughter and said to her, keeping back her tears,

“I understand what you are doing. You are trying to appear unmoved in front of others, and so you are working. But, look at yourself in a looking-glass, and see what you have become! If you become ill to the point of death, do you think that you will be pitied? Mong Ryong has been away for three years and we have never received news from him. Don’t you think that he has abandoned you? I tell you, my child, you should forget him. I’ve told you that you must be naive to believe a noble. You know that your mother waited for your father for many years. Can you imagine what I was thinking when I was living with you, waiting for your father? For many years there was no sign of him; can you imagine what were my feelings when I learnt of his death? The idea came to me even of giving up life. But I was afraid to leave you alone. I decided to overcome my bitterness. I regained my appetite and my ability to sleep. Chun Hyang, you must not allow yourself to die for a man who gives no thought to you.”

Chun Hyang was too affected to reply immediately. A while later, choking on her tears, she spoke tremulously.

“Do not worry about me, mother, I will not die.”

“What will become of us? Oh, my aching heart!”

Wol Mae returned to her room.

Chun Hyang spent the night in tears, clasping her future husband’s new suit.

Finally, later that night, she became ill and went to bed.

This illness was one that no remedy was likely to cure.

Still, Hyang Dan prepared medicine for Chun Hyang and took it to her.

“Miss, take this medicine. You must recover your health so that your mother can recover hers. And you should recover your beauty to please your fiance when he returns.”

“Your words are an encouragement to me, but when will he return? When horses wear horns and flowers bloom on stones? It is stupid for me to wait for a man from whom I have received no news.”

“Miss, he shall return, I am certain. He promised you that he would.”

Chun Hyang allowed Hyang Dan to feed her the medicine. More cheerful, she got up, thinking that her weakness would be causing her mother to suffer.

She washed, and then summoned up her courage to play the *kayagum*, but the sound she produced from it made her sad again.

She opened the window and heard the cry of a passing cuckoo.

Her sadness brought tears to her eyes.

Weeping, she began to sing, accompanying herself on the *kayagum*.

*I am ready to cover thousands of ri.*

*I am ready to cross Mt Tongson that is so high*

*That even rains and winds cannot go further,*

*That even wild geese cannot cross.*

*I am ready to overcome anything when he calls me*

*And, in a single breath, I will go to be with him again.*

*In Seoul do you dream of me as I dream of you?*

*Have you forgotten me, waiting here in Namwon?*

*Have you forgotten my ardent love?*

The sound of the *kayagum* reverberated beyond the house, over

the bushes and the pine-grove, and touched the heart of those who heard it.

The two soldiers, Kim and Ri, who were approaching Chun Hyang's house, stopped, affected by the music.

"Such sadness," said one. "Ri Mong Ryong is a scoundrel if he betrays that girl."

Then, gathering themselves, and realizing that they had to execute the magistrate's command, they knocked at the gate.

"Is Chun Hyang here?" they cried.

Chun Hyang looked out at the gate and was surprised to find the magistrate's soldiers there.

"What's the matter?" she wondered. "The new magistrate arrived three days ago and now it seems that we are to be called to him. It seems that some new worry has befallen us."

She got up, went out to the visitors and greeted them.

"Welcome, sirs! What happy wind brings you here? I understand that you escorted the new magistrate from Seoul to this district. How are you? Is the magistrate well?"

"Thank you. We are in good health, the magistrate, too."

"You have been in Seoul, so you probably had cause to visit the previous magistrate, Ri Han Rim. Are you not bearing a letter from Mong Ryong?"

"No, we were in great haste and had no time to call on him. But we understand that you are ill. How is your health?"

"Oh, it is exasperating to be confined to bed. But now I have recovered. It is a long time since my mother saw you, so I will take you to see her."

Just then Wol Mae appeared.

"So, you oafs! What brings you here? Do you think that I, who once served the Lord Song, have become a fallen woman? You should

have come to see me earlier, particularly if you think of the former magistrate."

"Hold on, old woman, unless you want to quarrel."

The visitors burst out laughing.

"Bah!" she said in resignation. "You may pass a while at my home but, I regret to say, I cannot entertain you."

"Ha, ha, ha! Do you think we have come to be entertained at such a poor house as this? In fact ... ."

The lanky Kim prodded the fat Ri in the ribs and winked at him.

"What are you doing out there? Come on in quickly!"

Wol Mae invited them into the living room.

Hyang Dan prepared a light meal for them.

Wol Mae poured them a cup of liquor each, then a second.

The alcohol began to go to their heads.

Then Chun Hyang entered, offered them five *ryang* she had taken from her savings, and said,

"Sirs, I give you this small sum so that you may enjoy a drink on your return journey."

The two men, now drunk, politely refused her offer.

"Oh, no. Do you think we came here to ask for money?" said one.

"We are not so corrupt that we accept bribes. Say no more," added the other.

Wol Mae intervened,

"Take it, please. Take it so that there will be no scandal about my daughter."

She placed the money in Ri's hand.

"Kim, I'll give it to you, you take it," he said, addressing his companion.

"I feel guilty, but ... ," said the other, confused, slipping it into his pocket.

Finally they left Chun Hyang's house and went back, reeling.

The head of the justice department had them put into gaol to sober up. Then he sent the senior *kisaeng* to Chun Hyang.

Jealous of Chun Hyang's chaste life, she arrived at her house and knocked loudly at the gate.

Chun Hyang opened the gate and appeared, a friendly smile on her face.

"Good day, sister," she greeted her. "Please come in."

"Listen, Chun Hyang!" cried the senior *kisaeng*, beside herself. "Since when have you been so arrogant as to refuse to obey the order of the magistrate? Do you think that you are the only one to remain chaste? What good does it do you to remain faithful to your lover? You believe that you can remain pure, but because of you the magistrate's palace is in chaos and various department heads shall die. You must come with me!"

Unperturbed, Chun Hyang replied:

"Don't be so insulting! Don't you know that I'm ill? Do you think that you'll remain forever as you are and I as I am? We are all at the mercy of fate."

At that moment some soldiers arrived with an order from the magistrate.

Chun Hyang, dressed in a calico dress similar to a night dress, arranged her hair and stepped out through the gate, when Wol Mae came out and begged the soldiers not to take her ailing daughter.

But in vain. The magistrate's order was explicit.

Chun Hyang, walking with a faltering step, arrived at the magistrate's palace.

The magistrate watched her as she knelt before the dais, and thought that she was the most beautiful woman in the country.

"Your name is Chun Hyang? Come up to the dais."

Unable to refuse, she went up and knelt before him.

Visibly satisfied, he ordered one of his men:

"Go and fetch the intendant!"

The intendant soon appeared, shaking his head continuously. He was an even more malicious man than Mok, his predecessor.

"You seem happy, sir."

"Look! This is Chun Hyang."

"How beautiful and charming she is! So, this is the girl about whom you spoke so often when you were in Seoul!"

The magistrate asked him, laughing,

"Would you be able to serve as an intermediary for a marriage?"

The other appeared to think for a while, shaking his head, but then, after coughing a couple of times, he said,

"You have acted a little hastily; you should have sent me to her house to arrange the marriage. However, what is done is done."

The magistrate smiled broadly. Turning to Chun Hyang, he said in a dignified and polite tone.

"Listen, Chun Hyang! I'd heard so much about you that I refused more important posts to come here as magistrate. I've heard that you've given your hand to the son of a former magistrate. But he has left, and you cannot live alone. Please tell me what you think. Nobleman or common person, it doesn't matter."

Chun Hyang felt humiliated, and she declared, scarcely concealing her anger

"I am the daughter of a *kisaeng*, but I decided I would not register as *kisaeng* at the government office and passed my childhood in a respectable home. The son of the former magistrate visited my house one day and asked for my hand. My mother agreed and we became engaged. So I cannot agree to your request."

The magistrate, trying to appear generous, laughed amicably and

heaped praise on her.

“You also have a heart of gold. Often the behaviour of beautiful women is disappointing, but you are deserving of admiration. Yet you should realize that Ri Mong Ryong, the son of a noble family, shall sit the examination for entry into the administration and shall live a life of pleasure. He shall forget you. He shall remember you only as a former love. You believe you wish to remain chaste. But, when your looks fade and your hair turns white, you will weep for your lost youth, and no one will pity you. So think again, tidy yourself up and serve me from today.”

“I do not agree with you, sir. They say that a devoted minister does not serve two emperors. A virtuous woman cannot have two husbands. How can I accept your advice? If my fiance were to cast me aside, I would follow the example of other virtuous women and embrace death. I will not relent. Punish me if you like.”

The intendant took a pace forward and remonstrated:

“You foolish girl, the magistrate would like to be served by a beautiful woman such as you. You are wrong to refuse him. He loves you, even though you are from a humble background. What good will it do you to remain chaste? Besides, courtesy requires that the new magistrate should be served, but you dare to have designs that run counter to propriety. How dare you, a lowly woman, speak of devoted ministers and virtuous women?”

Indignant, Chun Hyang raised her head, a defiant look in her eyes, and replied,

“Can a lowly person not devote himself to his country and remain faithful to his love? Listen. When you talk about lowly women you seem to mean *kisaeng*. However, among them there have been some who were devoted to their country or proved themselves virtuous. Ryong Son, from Hwanghae Province, killed herself on Mt Tongson



to avoid having to submit; a young *kisaeng* from Sochon was as well-bred as any married women. Kye Wol Hyang, from Pyongyang, sacrificed herself in killing a Japanese commander; Ron Kae, from Jinju, gave her life for her country. The name Hwa Wol is inscribed on the monument to the Three Faithful Women. Il Ji Hung, from Andong, in her lifetime saw a stele erected in her honour and was known to be faithful to her country and virtuous. Do not mock *kisaeng*..”

The face of the magistrate became contorted with anger.

“Shall you refuse to obey me even if it means going to the scaffold?”

“Nothing shall make me break the promise I made to my lord, no honeyed words shall change my mind. I do not see any difference between a woman who betrays her husband to marry another man and an official who serves another country’s king. If you wish to punish me, you are free to do so.”

The magistrate lost control of himself and flew into a rage.

“You witch! A traitor to his country must be torn to pieces and he who rebels against an officer, sent into exile. You shall die, and don’t regret it!”

Chun Hyang retorted unafraid:

“So, I would like you to tell me how a man who violates a married woman should be punished.”

The magistrate, now pale with fury, brought his fist down on the table before him with such forces that his horsehair hat leapt into the air and fell to the ground, that its headband was broken and that his topknot became undone. In a hoarse voice he commanded.

“Take her away!”

At this order an official rushed at Chun Hyang and seized her by the hair. He called a guard and ordered him to take her down to the courtyard.

Chun Hyang freed herself and descended the steps of the dais alone; at this the guard came up to her, shouting,

“You hussy, how dare you mock the magistrate? You deserve to die!”

Chun Hyang was scarcely at the gallows before assistants rushed up to her and took her by her beautiful hair, which they twisted like a washing-line. Then they threw her to the ground.

To the left and the right of the gallows were lines of men, some holding cudgels, others clubs, others whips, and yet others sticks.

The executioner was summoned. He presented himself to the magistrate.

The magistrate, still trembling with rage, shouted,

“I want that woman to write a confession before she dies.”

“Listen Chun Hyang,” said the executioner. “You mock the magistrate when you talk about faithfulness and chastity, coming as you do from a poor family. You must pay for your crime with your life. Your death shall serve as an example.”

He went up to Chun Hyang, handed her a piece of paper and ordered her to write.

She sat up and, not the least disconcerted, took the brush and wrote, *Forever Faithful*, before returning the brush.

The executioner handed the document to the magistrate, who all but exploded with fury. His jaw was trembling.

“Forever Faithful”? What an arrogant bitch! Make her mount the scaffold, and break her legs before strangling her.”

The soldiers led her to the scaffold while the executioner fetched a whole range of implements, which he threw down with a clatter before the gallows.

The great noise made by the implements terrified Chun Hyang.

The executioner selected a cudgel which he thought would be

easily broken and awaited further orders.

The infuriated nobleman's roaring voice could be heard.

"I command you to beat her without mercy. If you take pity on her and merely pretend to beat her, you shall be beheaded."

Raising his voice, the executioner replied,

"How can I pity her? Witch, don't move your legs. If you try to resist, I'll break your bones."

Taking advantage of the confusion at the execution site, he went up to the gallows and whispered some words into Chun Hyang's ear.

"Endure just a couple of beatings. I cannot help it. Put that leg over here and the other over there."

"Beat her mercilessly," repeated the nobleman.

"Yes, of course."

The executioner twirled his cudgel and beat Chun Hyang on the front of her leg.

The cudgel was smashed, and pieces of it flew into the air.

The prisoner moaned.

"Why this punishment?"

In a whipping, a manservant counted the number of blows, but in a cudgelling, since it was an ordeal imposed by law, two clerks stood opposite each other registering the number of blows.

Chun Hyang endured the pain. She shouted,

"There is only one man I will ever marry and I will remain faithful to him even if I must die. One blow from a cudgel will not make me change."

The people of Namwon, men and women, young and old, began to gather around the scaffold. The young people whispered.

"Such punishment, what a tyrant! Why make her a martyr? Look at that executioner and remember his face. As soon as he is outside the government building, he must be punished."

No one could remain unmoved by that dreadful scene.

Again the magistrate's voice could be heard ringing out, demanding that the beating be severe.

After being dealt a second blow, the victim shouted,

"I am young. Could I accept two men? Even if I must die, I will not forget Lord Ri."

After the third blow,

"I first learnt the three rules of obedience at three years of age. I will not change my mind, even if I must die."

After the fourth blow,

"The magistrate pays no attention to the affairs of the forty-eight subcounties of Namwon; he thinks only of abusing betrothed women."

After the fifth blow,

"I will remain faithful to our love however strong may be the force that tries to destroy it. I am awaiting the day when the man I love shall return."

The groans of Chun Hyang wrung the hearts of the people watching.

Even the tough executioner felt compassion for his victim. He said to himself, *No other woman is as beautiful or virtuous as she. Alas that I must beat her with this terrible cudgel. Must I do this dreadful job?*

Thinking thus, he hesitated and did his best to pretend to beat her severely.

With each blow, Chun Hyang's black hair swung across her shoulders and tears streamed down her cheeks. So tightly were her teeth clenched that blood ran between her lips.

The tyrant ordered,

"Beat her harder!"

After the sixth blow Chun Hyang declared,

“Even if I must die a thousand times I will remain faithful to my oath.”

After the seventh blow,

“I do not deserve this seventh blow because I have not committed seven crimes.”

After the eighth blow,

“Unfortunately, I have encountered the most wicked magistrate, the most cruel of the magistrates of the eight provinces of this country. You, sir, have been called to serve the people and not to torture innocents.”

After the ninth blow,

“My tears will create floods for nine years. When my fiance comes to embrace me, my misery shall be dispelled.”

After the tenth blow,

“Even if you kill me ten thousand times, you shall have nothing from me.”

However cruel he was, ten cudgel blows should have satisfied the magistrate. But the cry “Beat her harder” continued to ring out.

Twenty-five cudgels were shattered.

Blood and tears drenched Chun Hyang’s jacket and skirt and stained the ground, but she did not yield.

“Don’t torture me! Kill me! Then my soul shall become a cuckoo and cry continually with melancholy in the moonlight. Then I will wake my sleeping husband.”

She could not finish her sentence. She fainted.

The two men kneeling to register the blows were weeping, while the executioner turned away, wiping his eyes.

“How dreadful!”

All those present, both watching and carrying out the sentence, had tears in their eyes.

“No man could imagine such torment. It is enough to make a person shudder. Truly Chun Hyang is a virtuous woman. Her virtue must come from Heaven.”

While everyone wept over the fate of Chun Hyang, the magistrate was raging.

“Chun Hyang, you’ve rebelled against me. You deserved that punishment. Do you still wish to mock me?”

Chun Hyang regained consciousness, raised her head and replied, “Sir, do you not know that women are inflexible? You may destroy my body, but never my soul.”

Again she lost consciousness.

The magistrate was trembling with fury.

“Such a hopeless bitch!”

He ordered that she be sent to prison, her neck enclosed in a huge pillory.

Servants removed her from the gallows, placed her neck in a huge pillory they sealed, and carried her away on their backs.

The *kisaeng* and ladies followed, pouring out compassionate words.

Some of them rubbed her arms and legs and one of them made her drink some medicine she had prepared.

Then Rak Chun, an ungainly lad, joined the crowd and exclaimed, “Now we in Namwon have a woman who is worthy of appearing on the list of virtuous women.”

She went up to Chun Hyang and bewailed her misfortune.

At that moment Wol Mae ran up, accompanied by Hyang Dan, having heard the news about her daughter. Aghast, she embraced the neck of her daughter, deprived of her freedom, and began to wail.

“Poor child! What crime have you committed? Do you merit the cudgel? I ask you officers and officials, of what crime is my daughter

guilty? Your cruelty has brought my daughter to the state in which you see her. Oh! A poor old woman without support, I am lost! My only child studied carefully and learnt good manners. She was devoted to her mother, and told me that my lack of a son was not serious because she would always help me. I love her just as she loves me. Such heartbreak! To see her so bloody! Men of justice, you dared to beat her so cruelly? Aren't you fearful of being punished that you carried out such an order from the magistrate? Look at her snow-white legs spattered with blood. Childless noblewomen would be happy even with a blind child. Oh, Chun Hyang, are you persecuted because you are the daughter of a woman from a lowly background? Chun Hyang, wake up!"

Hyang Dan, too, wept and rubbed Chun Hyang's bruised body.

"Who has caused such dreadful injuries to your beautiful body? How it will distress and anger your fiance to see you so terribly harmed?"

Wol Mae stopped crying and said,

"Hyang Dan, go and find two carriers."

"What for?"

"I wish to send news of Chun Hyang to Mong Ryong."

Chun Hyang, who had not come completely to her senses, vaguely heard her mother and muttered,

"What are you talking about, mother? If he is appraised of this news, it will pierce his heart and he will not know what to do. He must obey his parents. I fear that he might fall ill as a result of thinking about what has happened here today. I beg you, mother, to change your mind and to let me go to prison."

Hyang Dan carried Chun Hyang on her back, while her mother supported her pillory. They were preceded by a gaoler and followed by a torturer.

Old widows and girls alike followed them with their tearful eyes.

"The whole world will pity her!"

"Such misery!"

"She is our pride."

"I did not know Namwon had such a virtuous woman."

They wept and they praised her. Some of them went up to the procession and helped to support the condemned girl's pillory.

Upon their arrival at the prison, a light drizzle began and the wind blew.

The head gaoler opened the prison gate, threw Chun Hyang inside and locked it again.

Wol Mae fell in a faint before the gate and Hyang Dan broke out in sobs.

"God save my lady!"

The women who had come with them shared their misery.

"What a pity!"

"What a shame!"

"Surely she will die in that cold, dark cell."

They surrounded Wol Mae and, weeping with her, tried to console her.

The prison was a dismal place. Weeds grew within, and trees threw such a dark shadow over it that, even in broad daylight, ghosts seemed to appear. Chun Hyang, lying on the cold earth, felt dreadful pains all over her body. She picked herself up, using her hands to raise the pillory which weighed on her shoulders.

She looked around. A freezing wind was coming in through the bars. The walls were dilapidated, an old mat covered the earth. Fleas and bugs bit her.

Abandoning herself to grief, she was weeping silently when she saw her mother and Hyang Dan in the courtyard. Unknown to his

chief, the gaoler had opened the gate.

The two women came to the cell. Seizing one of the bars in the window, her mother said in a voice choked with tears:

“Chun Hyang, you, an innocent, locked up in that dark cell!”

“Mother, why have you come?” asked Chun Hyang.

“I can’t live without you. I want to share your punishment. If you die, I will die, too.”

“Mother, do not be sad, but go, I beg you. I am guilty of no crime and I will not die whatever the danger that may threaten me. Do not worry, but leave. If you do not go but keep on weeping, I will kill myself here. So, please go home.”

The gaoler came and urged the visitors to depart.

The mother, her heart bleeding, tore herself from her daughter and staggered away.

Chun Hyang called Hyang Dan to ask her to look after her mother.

“Hyang Dan!”

“Miss!”

“Do not fear for me, but return home quickly. If my mother should weep, invite our neighbours to come and console her. And prepare gruel for her often. In my wooden chest you will find some *insam* roots. You must have them boiled and see that my mother takes them morning and evening.”

“Miss, do not concern yourself.”

“Hyang Dan, cheer up. If you take good care of my mother, I will not die and will repay you. Do not cry. Return home with my mother.”

“Miss, I wish you good health.”

Hyang Dan left with Wol Mae, crying like a baby.

The silence was deathly. She wept no more. The sighing of the wind increased the melancholy. Chun Hyang was alone in her prison. Only silence and misery reigned there.

She would have to spend interminable days there, weeping, sighing. But when her tears stopped, her dream would disappear into thin air.

What crime have I committed? she would say to herself. I am not a thief, yet I have been beaten. I have committed no murder, yet I have been locked up in prison with a huge pillory around my neck. Would I be acquitted if I were to write my sad story down and send it to Heaven?

Oh, I could die for want of seeing my beloved lord again. This lonely chrysanthemum is proud of its beauty, and that pine tree in the courtyard, of its integrity. The green tree is like me and the yellow chrysanthemum, like my darling.

I weep and I sigh as I think of my fate. If only my sighs would become a wind and my tears, rain, and the wind would bring the rain which would beat on my fiance’s window and wake him. Kyonu and Jiknyo meet on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month even though they are separated by the Milky Way. What is there separating us, you and me? It is better to die than to live in suffering. I want to die so that my body will be transformed into a cuckoo that will cry in sadness at midnight, in the moonlight, on a deserted hill covered with white pear blossom, for my fiance to hear. I wish that one spring day the butterfly that I will become will go and alight on him, carrying my scent. How happy I would be if I were the moon and if, at nightfall, I could shed my light on his face.

I am a young woman threatened by death because I want to remain chaste. Like buried pearls or aromatic plants hidden among weeds, or like the mythical birds in a paulownia grove which fell into the thorny undergrowth there have, since ancient times, been saints sent into exile or thrown into prison. Later, their names have been handed down to posterity. I hope that I, an innocent girl, shall one day be free.

But alas! Who will save me? My beloved Mong Ryong living in the capital, could he come here on official business and snatch me from the jaws of death? Are there high mountains or deep rivers barring his route? Would he come only if Mt Kungang were to disappear or the cock drawn on my folding screen were to tell him when? Oh, what is to become of me?

She opened the window. The moonlight entered her prison. She continued to think, saying,

“Moon, do you see my beloved? Shed your light on him! I, too, am gazing towards him. Only tell me if he is sleeping.”

Weeping, she fell asleep, her abundance of hair in her arms. She dreamed.

Transformed into a butterfly, she flies like a cloud to a strange land where earth and sky reach to infinity. The mountains are green and the rivers, clear. A pavilion covered with beautiful paintings is hidden in a bamboo grove where a spring breeze plays. Marvelling, she lingers for a while until suddenly she discovers some beautiful flowers in full bloom.

As she breathes in their sweet scent, a pretty girl dressed in white comes up to her and greets her politely, saying,

“Where are you from, madam?”

“From Namwon in Korea.”

Delighted, the girl welcomes her, and says,

“I have been waiting for you.”

She leads her to a magnificent palace. Above the gate is a sign on which is written in large golden letters, *Eternal Purity*. A bell is hanging from one end of the front gable; it rings as it swings in the wind.

Led by the girl she climbs a staircase of precious stones, at the top of which she sees opening before her a red door, allowing a pleasant smell to flood out. Beyond she can see a wooden platform. Slightly

worried, she glances inside and finds some beautiful women on the platform, one of whom signals to her to enter.

Chun Hyang refuses, saying,

“I am the daughter of a *kisaeng*, so I cannot enter this sacred place.”

The woman, apparently pleased by her good manners, steps down from the platform and comes up to Chun Hyang. She takes her by the hand and leads her up onto the platform.

Chun Hyang takes her place among the women.

The woman asks her, “Are you Chun Hyang? We must praise you. When we heard about you, we desired to see you. That is why you have been invited here. Forgive us!”

“Your words fill me with awe.”

“You say that, as the daughter of a *kisaeng*, your condition is lowly, but there is no one with a more noble spirit than you. You see here women from lowly origins who sacrificed themselves for their country and were accepted into the Palace of Faithful Women, as well as women who remained faithful to their husbands and were accepted into the Palace of Virtuous Women.”

With this, she presents the women to her.

They are all women whom she respects.

Chun Hyang gets to her feet and salutes them again.

She says, “I am ignorant of the world but, in learning the rules of proper behaviour, I have always felt respect for those women who have died in order to maintain their loyalty to their country or their virtue. Today I have been honoured to meet such women. Now I can die with no regrets.”

“We thank you for the respect you have shown us. We wept when we heard of your plight. How are you now, after your beating by the cruel lord and your suffering in prison?”

They surround Chun Hyang and, their eyes full of tears, caress her

legs, her neck, her shoulders, her back and her arms.

Chun Hyang, moved by their overwhelming attention, has tears streaming down her face.

One of the women, who came to the Palace of Virtuous Women while still alive, says to console her,

“Since ancient times Korea has been known for the morality of her people. When the enemy has attacked their country, her women have never hesitated to sacrifice themselves to kill the commander of the invaders. Her women have put up with all the grief in the world in order to remain faithful to their husbands. I, too, had to dredge the depths of misery to serve my only husband and live a worthy life. Chun Hyang, do not despair! If you remain faithful to your fiance, you shall enjoy a happy life.”

Each of the women now tells of her past misfortune and insists that a woman must maintain her will like iron which does not melt even in the hottest of fires. They propose to preserve their laudable spirits and beautiful names in the shrine of Eternal Purity.

Now, music sounds and the door opens. Fairies are seen dancing on a multicoloured cloud, while flocks of cranes appear and beat their wings as if they are dancing; it is a marvellous sight.

One of the women explains to Chun Hyang that these are children who found a tragic death when their virtuous mothers were punished and killed.

Chun Hyang feels pity for them and tries to go and embrace them, but her legs refuse to obey her.

The woman takes her by the hand and declares,

“It seems it is now time for us to part. I beg you not to forget what we have said to you.”

Having bid the women farewell, Chun Hyang is going slowly down the staircase when she hears the sound of a bell and sees a pair

of butterflies fluttering in front of her.

Startled, she woke up and broke free of her illusions.

She got up and opened the window again; she heard the crowing of the cock in the nearby village, then the forlorn sound of the bell announcing dawn.

On the heavenly canopy the crescent moon was bearing towards the horizon and wild geese were flying North, crying sadly.

Chun Hyang exclaimed, “Wild geese, you have taken messages from women to their lovers in the North. So, why are you crying so sadly? How happy I would be if you were to carry news of me to my beloved!”

She seemed to have been somewhat comforted by her dream. Dreams do not come true, but she had met a group of kind women who had endeavoured to console her with some words of affection. She had told them of her suffering. But for her, condemned to die, when would her day of glory come?

The wild geese had already disappeared, and the moon, too. The sky was covered with grey clouds. Rain was beginning to fall. A wind was blowing and the door-paper was making an unpleasant noise.

Chun Hyang closed the window and sat down to await the arrival of a new day.

The rain fell harder. The door groaned, the ceiling trembled, and the outer walls crashed as they fell. All this sounded like the voices of evil spirits.

Frightened, Chun Hyang fainted.

Time thus passed in the prison.

Meanwhile, by virtue of hard work, Ri Mong Ryong had learnt by heart the Confucianist classics and the works of great scholars. As masters he had had the writer Choe Ko Un and the calligrapher Kim Saeng.

On one national holiday an examination was being held and Ri Mong Ryong, wishing to sit, presented himself at the examination hall. When he entered, he saw several dignitaries bowing before a red curtain. Then *Parrot Dance* began to the rhythm of solemn music.

The king ordered that the chairman of the examination jury be brought to him to deliver to him the scroll bearing the theme of the composition. Then the king's personal servant hung the scroll on a screen.

The subject was:

“The unchangeable splendours of spring on the shores of a lake.”

Ri found this to be within his capability. He considered his composition as he prepared his ink. Then he took up a writing brush, which he dipped into the ink, and began to write with animation. He completed his composition quickly and was the first to hand a finished script to the examiner.

The examiner read through it but, unable to believe his eyes, handed it to the chairman of the jury who judged it to be as stylish a piece of writing as one by Kim Saeng and as good a work of calligraphy as one by Han Sok Bong.

“Such beautiful handwriting! Such refined style! All the characters are elegant and all the sentences are rich in meaning. This composition reveals a gifted and lively spirit. It evokes a dragon leaping to the depths of the sky, a gull pecking at the waves on the sea. What a rare talent!”

Ri passed the examination with flying colours and his name was posted in letters of gold on the board of honour.

At the Jangwon Pavilion, near a lake, where the successful candidates were being registered, his name was being passed from mouth to mouth.

“Ri Mong Ryong, son of the under-secretary to the king.”

Ri washed, adjusted his clothing and hurried to the pavilion.

An officer introduced him and he was offered three cups of wine in the name of His Royal Majesty.

His composition, judged the best in the examination, was attached to the wall.

His return home was a great event.

With the royal flower pinned in his hair, wearing the golden cloak traditionally presented to the first in the examination, and with his waist encircled by a wide belt embroidered with cranes, he looked dignified and prosperous. He returned on horseback, preceded by servants carrying his gold medal and blue parasols and followed by a troupe of young artists dressed in multicoloured silk who played lively music.

The crowd pressed forward to see him. Everyone admired him; the young scholars envied him.

In compliance with custom Ri spent the next three days visiting his former teachers, his parents and his relatives. He bowed before the pavilion containing his family's ancestral stone and before the tombs of his ancestors.

Then he went to the royal court.

The king named him governor of Jolla Province and handed over to him the governor's apparel. He also gave him the seal of identity of a secret royal commissioner and a bronze vernier for inspecting local weights and measures.

Having achieved his ambition, Ri shed tears of joy as he thought of Chun Hyang.

Now that he had been invested with special powers, and sure of himself, he was like a fearless tiger coming down from his mountain.

Immediately, he bid farewell to his parents and left for Jolla Province with his adjutant, his many lieutenants and a considerable

escort. He arrived at Chongpha where he took a mail-coach, crossed the Chilphae and Phalphae rivers, took lunch at Kwachon and spent the night at Suwon.

The next day he reached Kongju via Jinwi and Chonan, crossed the Kum River and, on the third day, arrived at Ryosan, on the border of the province.

He lined his men up and declared,

“We have now arrived on the border of Jolla Province. I warn you that whoever does not show complete devotion to the state, does not work loyally and reveals the secret of the royal commissioner shall be punished severely.”

This caution made them all think.

He called his adjutant and ordered him.

“You shall go to the eastern part of Jolla Province and visit Iksan, Thaein and all other areas there, starting with Kumsan and Muju. Look at everything, listen to everything and meet me again in the town of Namwon, at the Kwanghan Pavilion, on the agreed date.”

“I understand, sir.”

To the officers and soldiers he gave the order.

“You shall go to the western part of Jolla Province and visit Ryongan, Hamyol and all other areas there, before meeting me at the place specified.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Listen: As the proverb says, seeing once is better than hearing ten times. Visit everywhere. Verify the situation for yourselves. Then join up at the Kwanghan Pavilion at dawn on the fifteenth.”

“Understood, sir.”

Having dispatched all his men, Ri made ready to depart. He changed, and the transformation was remarkable; he wore an old staved-in horsehair hat, which was patched and furnished which ran

through buttons of horn worn by the lowest civil service official, a worn-out cloak and a used cotton belt. He sheltered from the sun behind a dirty, broken fan as he set out on the road with a shuffling gait.

Upon his arrival at Jonju, he passed through the West Gate, climbed up to the pavilion at the South Gate and looked around.

The scenery was magnificent.

The town had previously been called Wansan.

Ri made inquiries into what was being said about the city administration, and he enjoyed the charms of the area. Then, taking a thousand precautions to avoid discovery, he headed south.

There was already a rumour abroad that a royal commissioner was secretly inspecting the region.

Horrified, the local officials made a great fuss about putting their work in order, re-examining matters they had dismissed long before.

Their subordinates were also worried; treasurers reviewed accounts, and judicial officials packed their bags, ready to be off at the first sign of danger.

Thus a whole host of officials were floundering in utter panic.

Meanwhile Ri reached Namwon, having passed through Imsil. It was sowing time and everywhere he went he heard the music and songs of peasants. In one place he saw near a tree a banner fluttering in the wind which bore the legend, *Everything Is Based on Agriculture*. A group of young peasants, musicians for this occasion, were turning in a circle, leaping to the sounds of cymbals and drums. In the centre of the group stood a cymbal-player in a tricolour cloak, a fur hat, and a violet belt around his waist. He was their leader. He led the fun by clashing his cymbals, at times creating a rapid rhythm, at other times, a slow, calm one. The long white ribbon attached to his hat twirled in the air in time with his playing, while the others beat their drums with spirit, and danced.

The peasants' work was drudgery. With great difficulty they were irrigating their rice fields and harrowing them with emaciated oxen; they were working themselves to death to transplant their rice plants. Overwhelmed by their work, they were exhausted. But the music gave them heart for their labour and restored their joy in living.

Women arrived, bringing their husbands' lunch. They set a table at the foot of a tree.

The musicians played with even greater spirit. The cymbal-player pirouetted in the air, the small drum was beaten by the drummer as he spun around.

For a moment the music stopped, but then it started up again with the slow, gentle melody of *The Peasants Song*.

A peasant led the song with a soft voice. All the rest joined in.

*Let's plant our bales on top of our hats,  
Let's dance the dance of the bales.*

*The drops of sweat on our brows are cereal grains,  
The earth on our hands, nuggets of gold.  
The harvest in August and September will allow us  
To support our old parents and raise our grandchildren.  
Some are wallowing in abundance,  
Others are bled white and die of hunger.*

*Namwon has become a hell with a devilish magistrate,  
A tyrannical magistrate, greedy officials  
and black misery.*

Mong Ryong listened to their song and their chatter, and as he approached, still watching them play, a voice cried,

"Stop, my fellows, it's time for lunch!"

They all sat down in groups in the shade of trees or on grassy lots and began to eat, laughing and talking noisily.

One word was passed from mouth to mouth.

One woman of uncertain age, still maintaining traces of her youthful beauty, demanded in a high voice,

"Who are you talking about?"

A young peasant with rugged features replied in a low voice,  
"Chun Hyang."

Suddenly the company became agitated.

"I've heard about her."

"The magistrate wants to have her executed on his birthday."

"That's true."

"She is a virtuous girl. The magistrate is furious because she refused to obey him and sleep with him."

"Heavens. The devil!"

The women pitied Chun Hyang for her fate.

Some of them had tears in their eyes.

The young peasant shouted, waving his fists,

"If he executes her, the young men of the forty-eight sub-counties of Namwon will not remain with their arms folded, I can assure you."

"We must be rid of the evil raging in this region! It is sucking us dry blood and marrow, and indulging in wine and women!"

"Sh! Take care. There is a noble," said an old man glancing towards Ri, who was sitting smoking a little way behind them.

"A fallen noble, it seems."

"It is better to be careful. There is a rumour that a secret commissioner is travelling the province."

"A royal commissioner? Pah! A crab and a shrimp are still both shellfish."

“Exactly. They’re just like the tadpole and the frog.”

Ri had thought of asking the peasants for something to eat but, stunned by what he had just heard, he left in haste.

*Chun Hyang in prison? She will be executed on the magistrate’s birthday? How shameful of me to have left her for three years without contacting her! When I finished top in the examination, it was so that I could make my dream come true and return to her. But now she is threatened with death. How shall I be able to set foot in Namwon?*

At the thought of Chun Hyang, Ri’s heart was torn to shreds.

But were those peasants not mistaken? he wondered, trying to master his feelings.

He noticed some elderly peasants wearing reed-straw hats, who were using hatchet to turn over the soil. They were singing a lament.

*We pray the good God that the old never die  
And that the young never grow old.  
Oh! Old age, you are our enemy.  
Let’s fight with our hatchet, with greying hair.  
Let’s restrain our youth with a thousand ropes.  
Alas, youth is going, and old age is knocking  
at the door.*

*Our temples grey. Our hair grows white.  
What was black at the dawn of life is now grey.  
Oh, everything is ephemeral. Our love,  
where did you go?  
Like the leaves in autumn, like the stars at dawn,  
We shall disappear. Where shall we go?  
Ah, Time! How intractable you are!*

One of them stepped forward and, planting the blade of his spade into the soil, cried,

“That’s enough misery! Let’s get to work.”

The other old peasants followed him, picking up the ropes attached to their spades.

“Dying of hunger is worse than dying of old age. Put your backs into it!”

For a while they worked without another word.

Then a little old man, shriveled and bent, stopped work, saying that he had to smoke his pipe, and went to sit on a low bank at the edge of the field. He took a pipe and a pouch from his belt, stuffed tobacco into his pipe, pressed it down with his thumb, lit up and drew deeply. The pipe sputtered and the smoker’s cheeks became hollow. A fine stream of smoke flowed out of his nostrils.

Ri went up to him, seated himself at his side and asked him brusquely,

“Tell me, old man, you must know.”

The old peasant surveyed him with an unhappy look.

“What do you want?”

“You must know how many families are short of food in this village.”

“What do you want me to tell you? We are dying of hunger. Last year in the village of Nam over the hill, there alone many families died of hunger after a poor harvest.”

“Poor harvest?”

“The man with the beard over there lost his son. He was beaten to death in the magistrate’s office for a debt of three and a half bushels of rice. Another, the toothless one over there, had his cow taken away from him in exchange for the four bushels of rice he borrowed last year. After that he became an absent-minded man.”

“What happened to the cow?”

“They say it will be slaughtered for the magistrate’s birthday party.”

The old peasant, although annoyed by the young man, still continued to reply to his questions as he drew on his pipe.

Ri drew nearer to him, lit his own pipe and said,

“I hear that the magistrate loves Chun Hyang very much. He has been overwhelmed by her charms and she did not have to be asked for long before she gave in to him. Now, she is living in luxury. Is it true?”

The old man removed his pipe from his mouth and stared at the intruder.

Behind him, the women cried,

“It’s not true!”

“It’s a pure lie!”

“She is as pure as a white jade!”

“Who is the devil who dares to incriminate her?”

Angered, the old man exclaimed,

“Where are you from?”

“From nowhere.”

“From nowhere? Are you blind or are you deaf not to know that Chun Hyang has been thrown into prison and tortured for refusing him? How dare you utter such filth about her? The devil take you! That scoundrel Ri in Seoul has abandoned her. What a villain! Such a man should be denied his future!”

“How dare you talk that way?”

“Why, you don’t like the way I talk?”

“Well, I have nothing to do with that guy, but you talk too ill of him.”

“Because you’ve talked such nonsense.”

Ri laughed and said,

“Excuse me, and farewell, good people.”

Ri took leave of them hastily and departed. He could control himself no longer. What he had just heard confirmed the rumour. He thought he would faint. His legs were trembling.

If only he had taken her with him to Seoul, no misfortune would have befallen her. He pictured her on the day of his departure and her sobbing sounded again in his ears.

*Alas! The flower has been thrown into the fire, not into the mire,* Ri exclaimed to himself.

The sun set behind the western hills. The birds nested in the trees. The blooming red flowers at the edge of the route became violet, as if they, too, were bemoaning Chun Hyang’s misfortune, and the cries of the birds were sad in tone, full of reproach.

Ri hurried along.

As he turned a bend, he noticed a young man armed with a stick coming towards him, humming.

“Seoul is a thousand leagues away. In how many days can I reach it? If only I could fly like a bird! Oh, poor Chun Hyang! Even while she is in prison she thinks of Ri in Seoul. But she will soon be executed. Who will save her? That scoundrel Ri does not contact her. Is that how a noble behaves?”

Ri stepped off the path and went to stand beneath a tree. He examined the man as he passed him and recognized his former manservant. He felt like jumping for joy, but restrained himself; he had no right to show himself. He covered his face with his fan and asked,

“Young man, where are you from?”

“I am from Namwon.”

“And where are you going?”

“To Seoul.”

“For what reason?”

“To take a letter from Chun Hyang to the family of a high official.”

“Let me see the letter.”

“What a strange fellow, and not polite at that!”

“What?”

“Is it proper to read other people’s letters, above all a letter from a lady? Out of my way, I’m in a hurry!”

Then Ri called him by his name.

“Give it to me, Pangja.”

Confused, he turned around.

“Do I know you?”

Ri folded up his fan and went up to him.

The manservant recognized his former master, although he could scarcely believe his eyes.

“You? Your former valet offers you his humble greeting.”

He fell prostrate and broke into tears.

“How are you?” said Ri.

“After your departure, I was chased out of the magistrate’s palace and Chun Hyang was thrown into prison. She will soon be executed. You must save her, master. You must!”

Ri opened the letter his former manservant was carrying and recognized his fiancée’s handwriting. As quickly as he could he read it and understood that her heart would stop beating, that her blood would freeze in her veins.

A sharp pain pierced his heart. Tears blurred his vision. Who had made her so unhappy? Seized by violent indignation, he choked for a moment, but immediately he lowered his head, overwhelmed with remorse. He felt as if his heart were being torn to shreds. Was it not he who had placed her in such a tragic situation? With the letter in his hand, he wept silently.

The letter read:

“Greetings, young lord, how are you? Since our parting, you have sent me no news and I am worried about what might have happened to you. The birds may fly freely over the country, but your blue bird has not yet come. Anxiously I watch the northern sky, but all I see there are white clouds and my heart bleeds.

“I weep frequently, thinking of you, when the rain tattoos on my window and whips the leaves of the paulownia in my garden, and when the birds sing among the rosebushes along the river. I cry over you even in my dreams. How I have waited for you.

“One day, the new magistrate summoned me; he wanted me to serve him. As I refused, he threw me into prison and had me tortured, but I did not submit like a pine in the snow, like a bamboo in the ice. Soon I shall be executed, but I have no fear. The world is vast. The sun and the moon will always light it, but I shall leave it, with a bitter heart.

“This is the last time I shall write to you. Do not grieve over my death. But remain happy for the rest of your life. Only, take care of my poor, unhappy mother.”

At the end of the letter she had written, with the blood of one finger, “Your devoted Song Chun Hyang.”

Ri wept as he read this.

Finally Pangja noticed his clothes, worn to shreds.

He gasped.

“How ragged you are! What has become of you? We thought that you would have passed the examination and found a marvellous position by now. Heavens! Who will save Chun Hyang now? She is lost, lost!”

He collapsed at the side of the road and lamented, beating the ground.

Ri folded the letter, and leapt over him.

“I must declare myself the king’s secret commissioner!”

“Secret commissioner?”

He had let these words slip in the throes of his violent indignation; now he was placed in a delicate situation.

His former manservant loved to gossip and frequently spoke thoughtlessly.

“You good-for-nothing, am I not in rags? I hoped to be, if I were ...”

But his manservant, crafty and with several years of experience of service in the administration, would not allow him to delude him.

“Young master, it is useless to try to mislead me. Take me with you. The day on which you declare yourself as a royal commissioner, I shall be armed with a bludgeon and shall fall upon that devil Pyon Hak Do and break his skull.”

“You good-for-nothing, your tongue is wagging. Don’t you believe me?”

“Young master, I see everything.”

Pangja drew near to him, took hold of him roughly, moved his hand under the hem of his cloak and felt the beggar’s wallet hanging at his waist. Then, having touched something hard and round, like a small plate, he leapt backwards with a shout of triumph.

“What is that then, master, that is cold and hard? Is it not the seal of identity of a royal commissioner?”

“Quiet! If you tell anyone of this secret, you shall pay with your life, do you understand?”

“Master, you may rely on me. But the new magistrate will have Chun Hyang executed on his birthday.”

“When is that?”

“On the fifteenth of this month.”

“Are you sure?”

“The whole of Namwon knows it.”

Ri scribbled something on a piece of paper, sealed it and handed it to the valet.

“I’m going to Namwon, but there is something I must do on the way. You must take this missive to the barracks at Unbong and bring back to me whatever you’re given. Meet me at the Kwangan Pavilion on the morning of the fifteenth.”

“I understand, master.”

Pangja ran with a light step towards Unbong. He was off to find the commandant there, and was expecting a warm welcome. The commandant was astounded. The letter, written in an elegant manner, mentioned a state secret. He called a gaoler.

“Place this man under arrest. Feed him well and await my order.”

No sooner said than done! Pangja found himself behind bars.

Meanwhile, Ri was hurrying towards Namwon.

He arrived at the top of Paksokthi Pass, not far from the town of Namwon. He looked around.

The hills, the valleys, the rivers, nothing had changed. In the distance a road twisted and disappeared; it was the road he had taken for Seoul in tears.

Beyond the South Gate he could see the world with the Kwangan Pavilion, and Ojak Bridge, and the willow grove near the tavern where he used to tether his mount before going for a stroll. On the banks of that clear river reflecting the azure sky and the white clouds, he had often walked with her. How many times had they taken that path, he could not say.

He could see women and girls washing linen on Ojak Bridge, gossiping.

“Listen, girls.”

“What?”

“I pity her, Chun Hyang.”

“They say our new magistrate is really evil.”

“He wanted to take advantage of her, but she wouldn’t let him. What a proud spirit she has!”

“Does her fiance in Seoul suspect what is happening here?”

“He’s a stony-hearted scoundrel!”

This chatter was interrupted by their beating of their linen with their washerwoman’s beetles, but it was clear that they sympathized with Chun Hyang’s fate and were critical of her fiance.

Ri went up to the Kwanghan Pavilion and looked around.

The sun was about to set behind the mountains in the west and the birds were going into the wood for the night.

The willow grove on the other side of the river brought back memories for him. Chun Hyang had played on the swing there, her scarlet skirt floating in the azure sky. To the east, Chun Hyang’s house, with its garden, its pond and its flower-bed, was hidden in a leafy wood. Everything was how it had been except that Chun Hyang, his fiancee, was wasting away in prison. Everything awoke memories in him.

The sun had set and it was dark in the wood when Ri arrived in front of Chun Hyang’s house. The outhouse was in ruins and the house’s thatched roof had been blown away by the wind. The paulownia in the garden was hidden by tall grass, its thin branches waving sadly. In the courtyard a white crane was limping around, her feathers ruffled, as if she had been attacked by a dog.

A starving dog with a mangy coat was dozing in front of the window. With his approach it fled, barking spitefully. It did not recognize its old friend.

“Don’t bark, dog. I’m a friend. But where is your mistress for whom you are waiting alone?”

With this he examined the gate. Of the characters they had cut out together from paper and stuck to the gate to form the word *fidelity*, only *ity* remained, the other characters having been torn down. The sheet of paper bearing her handwriting which Chun Hyang had attached to the gate on the Spring Festival was in shreds. He entered the courtyard, concealed himself beneath a tree and observed the house’s interior.

He saw his fiancee’s mother squatting in front of the hearth and placing wood on the fire to boil rice, lamenting.

“Oh, cruel Fate! How I hate him; he has clean forgotten my daughter, he has sent her no news! Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do? Hyang Dan, come and watch the fire.”

She left the kitchen, went to a small stream in one corner of the garden, washed, combed her hair, put some water into a jar, which she carried to a stone altar, lit a candle, prostrated herself and prayed:

“Heaven, my daughter, my only child, will die soon. I wanted to make life happy for her, but alas! She has been imprisoned and is being tortured even though she has done nothing wrong! Tomorrow is the magistrate’s birthday. She will be executed at the end of the banquet! I beg all the Gods of Heaven and Earth to take pity on her and on me and to send Ri Mong Ryong back to us from Seoul now on a cloud to save my daughter.”

Touched by the distress of his fiancee’s mother, Ri thought,

*I believed my rapid accession proceeded from the magical power of the place where my ancestors are buried. But it is due to the purity of soul of my fiancee’s mother.*

He repented his failure to have taken proper care of her.

She prayed, and then burst into sobs, grasping some soil in her hands.

“Oh, my daughter, you are my life! I brought you up, only to see you driven into a bad fix! Oh, it is all my fault, I am to blame.”

Hyang Dan ran up to her and raised her to her feet.

“Madame, control yourself. If you let yourself go, your daughter in prison will be even more unhappy.”

The servant, even while trying to console the old woman, was crying just as bitterly as she.

Finally the old woman wiped away her tears:

“Hyang Dan, light a pipe for me.”

Hyang Dan passed her a pipe and the old woman drew on it for a long time, released a sigh and went up to the pavilion. Ri went up to the inner gate and shouted,

“May I come in?”

“Who is there?”

“Mister Ri.”

“Mister Ri? The son of Mr. Ri Phung Hun from across the road?”

“Mother-in-law, do you not recognize me?”

“Mother-in-law? Hyang Dan, go and see who it is.”

The servant went.

“Who should I announce, sir?”

“It is I.”

She wiped away her tears and stared at the visitor.

“You!”

The servant rushed up to him in a welter of tears.

The old woman, believing there to be a dispute, shouted,

“What scoundrel is making an innocent girl cry?”

She rushed into the courtyard.

“Madame, the young lord has arrived from Seoul!”

“The young lord?!”

Overjoyed, she hurried up and threw herself into the arms of her daughter’s fiance.

“My goodness! You’re back at last! How have you come here?”

On a wind or on a cloud? Have you heard the news of my daughter’s misery? Come in.”

The old woman led him into the room, sat him down by the lamp and stared at him. But in the dim light and with her weak eyesight she had difficulty in distinguishing his features. She opened a cupboard, took out some candles and lit them all. The room was flooded with light. She examined her daughter’s fiance, whom she had missed so much.

Yes, it’s him in the flesh. His clear complexion, his regular features, but his clothes are threadbare and tattered.

The old woman was dismayed.

“What has happened to you? Why are you looking so destitute?”

“No one is more destitute than a fallen noble. I have failed the examination and abandoned my career. We have squandered the family fortune. With nothing left, my father became a schoolmaster. My mother went back to her parents and I have come here in the hope of obtaining a few pennies from you, but I see that your situation is not good, either.”

Chun Hyang’s mother was dumfounded and could hardly breathe.

“How heartless you are! How could you be so cruel? You should have sent us news from time to time. And now you turn up out of the blue, and in such a state! I had always maintained some hope, but we’re done for now! Who is to blame? What are you going to do with Chun Hyang?”

Unable to repress her anger and bitterness, the old woman rushed to her son-in-law and grabbed his chest and shook it violently.

“Mother-in-law, you underestimate me. Heaven, whom you accuse, has extraordinary power; it commands the wind and the clouds, the thunder and the lightning,” he said casually.

Chun Hyang’s mother was outraged.

“So this is what a fallen noble comes to. You’ve even become a good joker now.”

The young man then said,

“I am dying of hunger. Give me something to eat!”

In a fury, the old woman retorted,

“There’s nothing to eat here.”

Hyang Dan, who had been waiting anxiously, came cautiously forward and greeted the young man.

“Young lord, I offer you my humble greetings. And your father and your mother, are they in good health? And yourself?”

“Yes, thank you, and are you well?”

“Young lord, please do not be offended by what my mistress says. She is so unhappy!”

“I understand.”

“I beg you, madame, please do not offend the young man. Has he not come a long way to see your daughter? If your daughter knew how you were treating him, she would be grieved. Don’t be too harsh to him, madame.”

She went to the kitchen and placed on a table a bowl of rice, a plate of salted green peppers, a bowl of kimchi, some spicy soya sauce and a bowl of drinking water. She placed this before Ri.

“I will prepare dinner for you, but while you are waiting, appease your hunger with these few things from the kitchen.”

Ri exclaimed, delighted,

“It’s a good while since I’ve tasted such good rice.”

He mixed rice, peppers and kimchi in a bowl and began to eat greedily.

Chun Hyang’s mother sighed deeply and muttered,

“Such cheek! He is not too ashamed to ask for charity.”

Hyang Dan, who was thinking of Chun Hyang, stifled her sobs.

“Young lord, at all costs Miss Chun Hyang must be saved.”

“Hyang Dan, calm down. No more tears! Your mistress shall not die, let’s hope. With courage, anything can happen.”

At these words Chun Hyang’s mother flew into a passion.

“He still thinks he’s noble and still loves to boast. Just look at the state you’re in!”

Hyang Dan intervened.

“Do not take everything my mistress says too seriously. She has grown old and her nerves have grown weak under an avalanche of misery. She has frequent nervous attacks. Help yourself and I will prepare some hot rice for you.”

“Fine, fine. Bring it here.”

The servant had prepared rice and some dishes for the young man.

Ri, sitting at the table, trembled with indignation. He had no desire to eat. He had the table cleared having scarcely touched anything and lit his pipe.

*What a state of affairs!* It was to describe such a drastic change that the saying goes: Mulberry groves become seas. Honest people groan in prison, while criminals feast.

Ri knocked the ashes from his pipe and controlled his anger, saying,

“Mother-in-law, I must go and see Chun Hyang.”

She replied nonchalantly,

“Perhaps you should. It is normal for fiances to see each other.”

Hyang Dan forestalled him.

“The gates of the palace are locked now. You should go at dawn, at the first drumbeat.”

The drumbeats were still echoing when Ri, following Chun Hyang’s mother and Hyang Dan, who carried on her head a basket containing a bowl of rice porridge and some other dishes and in her

arms a lantern, headed for the prison.

There was not a soul in sight.

In her dream Chun Hyang sees her fiance approach and sit at her side. He is wearing coronet and a scarlet cloak. She huddles up to him, puts her arms around him and cries for joy. She pours forth her inmost thoughts.

She did not hear her mother calling to her from the other side of the bars.

Worried, Ri insisted,

“Mother-in-law, call her more loudly.”

“No, you do not understand. The magistrate’s residence is not far from here and if we make a lot of noise we may be heard.”

“Damn the magistrate! Let me. Chun Hyang!”

In her cell Chun Hyang awoke with a start and opened her eyes.

How strange. The voice was familiar. She raised the iron collar around her neck and turned her head towards the barred window of her cell.

Choking, Ri begged his fiancée’s mother.

“Tell her that I am here.”

“Wait! If I tell her that, she will faint.”

Chun Hyang recognized her mother’s voice.

“Is that you, mother?”

“Yes, I’m here.”

“Is Hyang Dan there, too?”

Hyang Dan grasped the bars.

“Yes, I am here.”

The old woman passed the bowl of rice porridge through the bars.

“Here is some porridge for you.”

The prisoner took the bowl, placed it on the ground and said in a sad voice,



“Mother, you are taxing yourself too much on my account. Do not come here again. You are old, and you may fall and break your leg on your way here.”

“Don’t worry about me. Look, he is here at last.”

“Who?”

“He.”

“But who? Tell me quickly. I have just had a dream in which I saw my fiance and talked and talked to him. Is there news from Seoul? Has a courier come to take me to him? Or has he sent a messenger?”

“Your fiance is here. And in such a state! Such a tramp!”

“Where is he? I have only just seen him in my dream and now I shall see him in the flesh. Where is my fiance?”

Ri hurried up to the bars.

“Chun Hyang!”

And she, dragging her iron collar, hurried up and pressed herself against the bars.

“Young lord.”

She stretched out her arms, seized her fiance’s hands and gasped, unable to utter a word. After a long while she said,

“Is it you? Is this not a dream? How I have waited for you. Here you are at last. How happy I am! Now I can die in peace.”

“What trials you have undergone to change so much!”

“You have been hard. My mother and I have waited day and night for news of you, waited throughout your obstinate silence. I have been falsely accused and am awaiting execution. Did you know about this?”

Confused and happy at the arrival of her fiance, she was delirious, but gradually she became aware of his wretched appearance. She paled.

“I do not grieve over my own fate but you, who were once so distinguished and so noble, how did you fall so low?”

“A fallen noble is not worth a hairless dog. But don’t worry about me. It is Heaven who gives us life, so it is not so easy to die. There is still hope.”

Chun Hyang wept, and then called to her mother.

“Mother, we have waited for him for three years, and now here he is in this pitiable state! What shall we do? It is as if a tree one has planted and tended were uprooted in a storm, as if a building erected with a great deal of effort had collapsed. I, condemned to die, can do nothing to change matters. I beg you, mother, to carry out my last wishes so that I can leave this world in peace.

“I have arranged my silk dresses in my wardrobe, and I want you to sell them to buy him a cloak, a horsehair hat and a pair of shoes. I have placed in my jewel-box my jade ring and other trinkets. Sell them also and buy him some linen. I am to be executed, so why keep my things?”

“Also sell my wardrobe, my clothes chest and my chest of drawers and buy some food to serve him with good meals. Serve him as if I were still there, I beg you.”

Her mother, believing this to be their last meeting, sobbed and wrung her hands.

Chun Hyang turned to her fiance.

“Young lord, tomorrow I shall be executed at the end of the magistrate’s birthday banquet. I beg you to be near the palace tomorrow and, when my body is thrown out, to collect it and bury it near the pavilion where we first met. I beg you to wrap my body in a shroud and to bury it yourself so that my soul might rest in peace.

“And when you have passed the examination, you shall return to see my grave, you shall exhume my corpse, you shall wrap it in a hemp sheet and you shall bury it on a mountain slope near to the graves of your ancestors. You shall set up an epitaph reading: Here lies

Chun Hyang who preferred death to dishonour.

“Once I have departed this world I shall be unable to return to see you. Oh, Fate! Such anguish! Heaven, take pity on me!

“My poor mother will lose me very soon, and then all our family’s belongings. Alone, she will only be able to go begging from door to door. Finally, she will collapse, exhausted, at the foot of a hill and will expire. Then ravens from Mt Jiri will pounce upon her corpse. There will be no one there to chase them away. I ask you not to abandon my mother, but to take care of her. I entreat you, oh ... .”

Chun Hyang sobbed miserably, her hands on the pillory.

Ri tried to console her

“Don’t cry, my dear. You must have hope even when everything seems lost. Have confidence in me.”

Chun Hyang stopped crying and called Hyang Dan.

“Hyang Dan!”

“Yes, miss.”

“You and I, we understand each other well, and you know what you must do for me. I would like, before I die, to ask just one thing of you. In my wardrobe you will find the new silk clothes I have made for my fiance; give them to him. Let him wear them today. You must help him, in my place, to devote himself to his studies so that he passes the examination with the best marks. Be good and console my poor, lonely mother so that she lives for many more years. My spirit shall acknowledge your kindness. These are my last wishes of you.”

Hyang Dan grasped the bars of the prison. She was racked with sobs.

“Miss, I will try to do all you ask of me, but you should realize that it will be difficult. I shall be unable to live in a house where you are not.”

“Calm down, Hyang Dan. You must take my mother and my fiance

back to the house.”

Before leaving Chun Hyang, Ri said a few final words to her.

“My little Chun Hyang, if you wish to see me again, take heart and don’t do anything foolish.”

“My dear!”

Chun Hyang called through her tears as she looked through the barred window.

He left followed by the grief-stricken mother and Hyang Dan.

Chun Hyang could only hear the song of the night birds, which added to her misery.

Finding herself alone again after the short meeting, she was beset by memories, as if she were dreaming.

Heaven created mankind with impartiality. So, what sin have I committed to deserve imprisonment and death while still in my youth? Why has my fiance fallen into poverty? From where has our unhappiness come? How can I close my eyes and abandon my fiance, leaving him alone?

Chun Hyang wept and finally collapsed with weariness.

How could that fragile flower survive the white frost of the night?

Having visited the prison, Ri travelled in and around the whole town to appraise himself of the situation.

At the seat of the administration he heard a bureau chief whisper to his lieutenants.

“A secret royal commissioner is in the area, they say, and his family name is Ri. I have just seen a man in rags with an old hat following Chun Hyang’s mother to the prison with a lantern in his hand. It’s suspicious. Tomorrow there will be a banquet for the magistrate’s birthday, so we should be careful.”

Ri was surprised.

*How well-informed these sly devils are!*

Then he went to the officers' quarters and heard the commanding officer say in a low voice

"Listen, I've seen a beggar prowling around the prison. It's suspicious. It may be a secret royal commissioner. We should consult the personnel file."

The young man thought.

*They have the devil's own cunning!*

At the door of the civil service office he heard the same sort of comments.

Having visited the six public offices he returned to Chun Hyang's house, where he spent the night.

Pyon Hak Do's birthday arrived.

Ri went up to the Kwangan Pavilion, which was hidden in a mist. He paced up and down, considering what he should do. From time to time people disguised as peasants going to the market appeared on the forest paths. They were his officers and men, who were coming to transmit to him the intelligence they had gathered.

"Everywhere complaints about the magistrate can be heard. The people call him *Hook* because the scoundrel gives an egg to the people in spring and demands a chicken in return in autumn."

"To celebrate his birthday he has collected from each home three measures of rice, three eggs, a sum of three *ryang* and three feet of hemp cloth. The magistrate's storehouses are full to bursting-point."

Ri considered their reports and ordered them to await the signal for action at the Sam Gate. Then he saw his valet returning from Unbong.

"Of what am I guilty, that you have me imprisoned in Unbong?"

"I realize how much you must have suffered. But do not complain; you cannot stop your tongue wagging. Take yourself off to the gate of the magistrate's office and await my signal. Try, above all else, to keep your eye on Pyon so that he does not escape."

"At your command, sir!"

Skipping with joy, Pangja was swallowed up in the forest.

Having assigned all the tasks, Ri himself went to the gate, from where he examined the situation.

All the employees of the administration had already presented themselves at the palace and it was the turn of the noblemen and magistrates from other regions.

"The magistrate of Imsil has arrived."

"And that's the magistrate of Koksong who is presenting himself."

"Hey, make room!"

No sooner had the coachman cried this than the magistrates of Tamyang and Sunchang, as well as other nobles, appeared. They were greeted by a clarion call.

The commandant of the Unbong garrison entered. His appearance in his uniform was striking and in his hand he held a rattan switch. His fan-shaped moustache and his slant eyes emphasized his military bearing.

Pyon Hak Do, the master of the house, had summoned the heads of the various public offices and given explicit orders to the servants to pitch tall, snow-white pavilions, to fetch musicians and comedians, to slaughter well-fattened cows, to set the tables carefully and to forbid access to the common people.

In the courtyard there was every manner of weapon shining in the sun, and flags of every colour floating on the wind. To the rhythm of music played on the three strings—*komungo*, *kayagum* and *pipha*—and the six percussion instruments—drum, *janggo*, *haegum*, a pair of *taephyongso*, and *phiri-kisaeng*, dressed brightly in green jackets with multicoloured sleeves and red skirts, were dancing, their pale hands raised.

"O joy, o happiness!"

Their chorus gratified Pyon Hak Do.

The guests took their places according to ranks either at upper or lower tables.

The tables were groaning beneath dainties of all the lands and seas.

Pyon began to speak and, for the first glass, asked the musicians to strike up the *Invitation to Drink*.

“Empty your glasses, please, empty your glasses!”

The song rang out, mixed with laughter and accompanied by the music; this was the beginning of the general merrymaking.

Just then Ri entered the courtyard. He shouted,

“You guard! Go and tell your master that a passer-by would like to take a cup of wine at his feast.”

The guard came out to him.

“Are you noble? Our lord has forbidden beggars to enter. Go on your way.”

He pushed the young man away.

“The nobleman who gave that order is not worthy of his position,” he protested. “He who wants to send me away is a scoundrel, and I will not let him do it. Tell your master that!”

The guard and the beggar began to argue.

The commandant of Unbong, seated high up in the palace, witnessed the scene and said to Pyon,

“Despite his clothes, that young man would seem to be from a noble background. Let him come in and drink at the bottom end of the room.”

This suggestion clearly displeased the nobleman, who frowned and glared spitefully at the beggar. However, honour required him to answer.

“So be it. But ... .”

The garrison commandant ordered, “Hey! Invite that young man in!”

A boy went down the staircase and conveyed the summons.

Ri smiled and muttered,

“He understands, the commandant.”

He went up into the palace and took a seat at the foot of the upper table.

The magistrate could not rid himself of his spite, and shook his head.

“You are mistaken today, Mr. Garrison Commandant. Such idlers will take advantage of the occasion to steal our pipes and our fans. And you want him to be served!”

*Precisely. I will steal and you shall be caught*, thought Ri.

He looked around; the guests at the upper table were being entertained by the slow rhythm of the song *Jinyangjo*, sung by the *kisaeng*. He was offered a small table, the appearance of which shocked him; one corner of it was damaged, and on it were only a pair of chopsticks, a plate of bean sprouts, a plate of crumbs of rice cakes and bowl of cheap wine. He felt like upending it, but he restrained himself. He went up to the garrison commandant and said to him:

“Let me have a rib.”

“You may ask for one, but without poking me in the ribs,” grumbled the commandant who, however, assessed him secretly. He said to the boy: “Give him a plate of ribs.”

“Don’t bother,” the young man intervened. “I will serve myself.”

He took a plate from the upper table, placed it on his own table, and then helped himself to a little of all the good things. A murmur went around the room.

“Such impudence!”

“How impolite!”

“He has no respect for his elders.”

“There’s someone who would take the food from your mouth!”

Ignoring their curses, the beggar continued to load his table.

“Little by little a bird makes its nest,” he exclaimed.

He began to bite hungrily into a rib but then he suddenly asked the commandant,

“That’s the senior *kisaeng* over there, I believe. I would like to be served with wine by her beautiful hand. I would like her to sing *Invitation to Drink* to me.”

The officer, loath to refuse, said to the woman,

“Pour him a cup and sing!”

The guests were astonished at this, while Pyon called the commandant a fool.

The *kisaeng* turned away and remained motionless.

The officer stared her up and down with his eyes wide open, and reprimanded her.

“What? What’s with you, you capricious woman? Obey me!”

The commandant’s tone was severe.

She went up to the young beggar and offered him a cup.

With the cup in his hand, he waited for the woman to sing.

She refused, complaining of a sore throat.

There was a quarrel, in the course of which the wine was spilt.

“What a shame, the drink was so refreshing!” said the beggar, shaking the wet skirts of his robe.

Some drops spattered Pyon’s hat.

Once again there was a stir in the room.

Cries could be heard.

“How terrible!”

“He’s a madman!”

“Out with him!”

Many of the guests remained silent, thinking that he might be the

secret royal commissioner. They merely watched.

The magistrate of Sunchang, who had suggested throwing the troublemaker out, went up to Pyon to whisper something in his ear.

Pyon addressed the room.

“This is an important gathering today. I propose that everyone here compose a verse to display his talent.”

“Excellent.”

Everyone was in agreement.

The magistrate of Sunchang added, “Anyone who fails shall be punished.”

“Another good idea! I will choose two rhyming characters for the verse,” said Pyon.

He proposed. “*Ko* for sweat and *ko* for high.”

Everyone agreed, and murmured as he considered his verse.

Then the beggar intervened.

“Thanks to my parents, I had the opportunity to learn to read and write. I will try myself.”

The commandant of Unbong was pleased, and handed a writing-brush and ink-well to him.

While everyone else was racking his brains, Ri finished writing his poem:

*The good brandy filling the golden flagon*

*is the blood of thousands.*

*The fine dishes on the jade table come from*

*the sweat of the multitude.*

*When drops fall from the candle,*

*tears fall from the people’s eyes.*

*While some sing, others raise their voices high*

*in complaint.*



Ri placed his poem at the commandant's side.

"Listen, guard!" he said. "Go and tell Lord Pyon that I have been able to drink and appease my hunger at his feast, and that I will never forget his generosity."

He descended the staircase and left quickly.

Pyon and the magistrate of Sunchang muttered together.

"An uneducated rascal!"

"So, good riddance!"

"Let's take up our cups again and admire Chun Hyang!"

This invitation improved the humour of the guests.

Meanwhile, the garrison commandant was reading the beggar's poem.

"How strange!" he exclaimed.

The handwriting and the composition of the verse were identical to those of a letter he had received from a young man a few days previously. And what was even more serious, the poem made him think of a sword ready to fall on the corrupt.

The sheet of paper passed from the Lord of Imsil to that of Kurye. Their hands trembled as they read it.

"Heavens above, the end of the world has come!" wailed the latter.

The garrison commandant was the first to get to his feet.

"Sir, I have work to do, and must leave."

The magistrate of Imsil followed him, claiming,

"Today I must distribute rice to the people, and ... ."

Pyon opened wide his eyes that were already dilated by the wine.

"But, what are you doing?"

The Lord of Kurye also got to his feet.

"My mother has had an accident and I must go and take care of her," he stammered.

"What's the matter with you? We are going to have beautiful Chun

Hyang brought and see her executed. Hey! You over there, have Chun Hyang brought at once!”

“Guards, fetch Chun Hyang immediately!”

“At once.”

The guards hurried off to the prison.

Meanwhile, Ri left the palace and stood at the front gate, where he gave the signal to his senior and junior lieutenants to begin the planned operation.

His command was conveyed to the men of his troop. Each man had covered his head with a silk cloth and wore a bamboo hat and *hansan* clothes, had wrapped his feet in hemp, wore new straw sandals, and carried in his hand a stick attached to which was a leather strap. One of them raised above his head a medallion on which a horse was engraved, and cried,

“The secret royal commissioner has arrived!”

The same dreadful cry resounded at almost the same time at all the four gates of the city. Heaven and Earth seemed to be crumbling; grass, trees, wild animals, insects—everything seemed to be trembling.

The troop rushed to the magistrate’s palace. There they overturned and smashed the banquet tables.

“Fetch the head of the judiciary!”

The heads of the six public offices were trembling, horror-stricken.

“I am the head of the judiciary.”

A soldier raised his stick and brought it down on the official.

“Oh, I’m finished,” he shrieked, collapsing.

“Next, the head of the public works department!”

He presented himself immediately.

“I never wanted to be appointed head of the department, yet now I’m paying dearly for it!” he lamented.

The stick fell on him, too.

“Oh, my skull is broken!” he cried as he fell.

They were followed by the other heads of the public offices. The officials and guards scurried about for their lives.

The noblemen from the different regions, only a moment before singing, exhilarated by wine and the charms of the women, sat with their heads buried between their legs.

One had a piece of rice cake in his signet case, another had lost his horsehair hat and had a drinking bowl on his head instead, while yet another had covered his head with a small table.

*Komungo* and drums were lying around, broken.

Flabbergasted, Pyon took refuge in a side room, crying: “Such cold! The wind has swept in through the door! How can I quench my thirst?”

The servants also tried to save themselves, overcome with panic; some took refuge under a broken door when whips began to descend on them. “Oh, I’m lost!”

Then an imposing voice was heard.

“The royal commissioner is here.”

Suddenly silence fell on the whole palace. Flags of every colour entered the courtyard, followed by a placard bearing the word *Silence*.

The former heads of the six public offices stood on the two lowest steps of the staircase. They were trembling.

Finally the royal commissioner appeared in his official robes and took his place in the magistrate’s seat. His presence was commanding. The emissary ordered that the former officials be interrogated, that their affairs then be examined, that Pyon be dismissed and that all the administration’s offices and storehouses be closed.

A notice was attached to all the four gates of the town announcing the dismissal of Pyon.

Bound up in an old straw sack, he was thrown out of Namwon.

The royal commissioner summoned the head gaoler and commanded him,

“Bring all the detainees!”

The prisoners were brought immediately.

The emissary enquired into the reasons for their imprisonment. According to each case, he had some freed and others reincarcerated.

The last detainee brought was Chun Hyang. She arrived, tottering. After paying her respects to the emissary, she fell down unconscious.

She had never stopped searching for her beloved’s face among the crowd gathered along the route.

*He will have the same woeful appearance of yesterday evening. Where is he? Has he no courage? Shall I not see him again before I go under the executioner’s sword? Or is he reluctant to appear before people and has he preferred not to come?*

With each pace a flood of tears poured down her face; the ground seemed to disappear from beneath her feet and she fainted.

The interrogation began.

“Of what is that woman guilty?” asked the commissioner.

The gaoler bowed low and said in a trembling voice,

“She is Chun Hyang, the daughter of a local *kisaeng*, Wol Mae. She resisted the advances of the magistrate.”

“What did he ask of her?”

“That she keep him company and serve him. But, in the palace courtyard, she refused vehemently, speaking of chastity and marital fidelity.”

“To resist the advances of the head man of the area and speak out against him in his own courtyard is an unpardonable crime. What is your last wish, Chun Hyang?”

Chun Hyang came to her senses and replied.

“I see that you are no different from your predecessors. The death

to which I am condemned is too unjust for me to think of some last wish. However, I would hope to see, for one last time, my fiance whom I saw for a moment last night and who shall be waiting at the front gate of this palace in the hope of recovering my body.”

After saying this, she collapsed again, bursting into tears.

At that moment the women of Namwon arrived in a rush. They cried,

“We have a favour to ask of the commissioner.”

“Something to request.”

The soldiers attempted to bar their way, but the commissioner, heedful of what was happening, ordered that they be allowed to enter.

The women begged him.

“A pardon, sir, a pardon for Chun Hyang! If there be chastity and fidelity, Chun Hyang is the model. She is a pearl in the mud, a flower among thorns. Her unequalled constancy is like a solid rock which the wind cannot damage, like the green shadow of a pine which remains in spite of the snow. Be generous and let her live.”

“I understand,” responded the emissary, taking from his pocket a jade ring which he handed to his page.

“Take this to Chun Hyang.”

The boy did so.

Chun Hyang immediately stopped weeping and gazed at the object in astonishment.

“This is the ring that I gave to my fiance. How has he come by it?”

The young woman, in the hope of discovering her fiance nearby, looked around the courtyard towards the gate. But her beloved in rags was nowhere to be seen.

“Has this ring fallen from Heaven, or has it risen up out of the ground? Where is my fiance?”

Again she wept.



Then she heard the voice of the emissary:

“Chun Hyang, raise your head and look at me!”

Chun Hyang looked at the nobleman, and such a surprise! Her fiance, a beggar the previous evening, was sitting in the magistrate’s seat.

“My dear, my dear!” she cried, her voice a mixture of laughter and tears. “My fiance has become a royal commissioner! Spring has saved a flower threatened with death. Am I dreaming?”

The emissary hurried down to her and took her by the hands to the dais and seated her.

Chun Hyang’s mother, accompanied by Hyang Dan and Ri’s former valet, arrived.

“My son-in-law is the royal commissioner,” said the mother. “And you, the chiefs of the six public offices, who were so full of your pride and power, just dare to scorn me again! It’s true, I’ve criticized my son-in-law, but that was because I was unaware of his duties. After the rain there is sunshine, as the saying goes. Today I have been rewarded for my efforts to bring up my daughter. How splendid!”

The mother was irrepressible.

The constancy of Chun Hyang had triumphed, and this was the happiest thing of all!

After completing his mission in Namwon, Ri returned to Seoul. He took with him his wife Chun Hyang, his mother-in-law, Hyang Dan and Pangja, his former manservant. Their magnificent procession was admired by all the inhabitants.

Chun Hyang would lead a better life, but her joy was tinged with regret at leaving a place of which she had such fond memories.

“Goodbye, Puyong Pavilion, the cradle of my childhood! Goodbye, Kwangan Pavilion and Ojak Bridge, witnesses to our love! The greenery returns with spring, but someone dear, when he leaves,

returns only seldom, so the proverb says. I know that.”

Then Chun Hyang said her farewells to the inhabitants of Namwon.

“Good health and long life. I hope to see you again.”

Chun Hyang and the inhabitants of Namwon were overcome with emotion, and tears streamed down their faces.

Thus Chun Hyang became the glory of the district.

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## Principal Characters in the Story

Song Chun Hyang:

The heroine, fiancée of Ri Mong Ryong

Ri Mong Ryong (or young Ri):

Son of Ri Han Rim

Ri Han Rim:

Nobleman, initially magistrate of Namwon,  
then under-secretary to the king in Seoul

Wol Mae:

Former *kisaeng*, mother of Song Chun Hyang

Hyang Dan:

Wol Mae's servant

Ra Yong Soe (or Pangja):

Ri Mong Ryong's valet

Pyon Hak Do:

New magistrate of Namwon

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