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Salt

(Sogŭm, 1934)

KANG KYŎNG-AE

IN THE LATE Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1897), Korean farmers began migrating north in small numbers into the Kando region of Manchuria in search of land for cultivation.¹ After Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, the rate of migration grew substantially. While some went to Kando as political exiles to establish a base of operations for the independence movement, most migrants were farmers pushed off their land as a result of policies enabled by Japan's cadastral survey and the influx of Japanese farmers drawn to the Korean colony by the Oriental Development Company. Some were able to cultivate new land and build farms, but the majority became tenant farmers for Chinese landowners and barely managed to eke out a living. The Mitsuya Agreement in 1925 led to changes in relations between the Japanese and Chinese military in Manchuria, and the plight of Korean farmers reached a new level of complexity. They were subject at once to harassment by the Japanese and persecution by anti-Japanese forces on the Chinese side. They witnessed increased activity by the armed independence struggle against the Japanese and escalating efforts for self-government by the anti-Japanese movement. As the response of Chinese military cliques and the Japanese army grew ever more aggressive, living conditions for migrant Koreans only worsened.

¹ Sang-Kyung's Lee remarks here center on Kang's story "Salt." Please refer to Ruth Barraclough's introduction to Kang's "Darkness" for biographical information.

Kang Kyŏng-ae (1906–1944) was in Kando for the May Thirtieth Movement in 1930,² the Manchurian Incident in 1931, and the founding of Manchukuo in 1932. During her sojourn, Kang depicted the destitute lives of Koreans in the Kando region and provided testimony about the lives of activists struggling for liberation. She considered this her writerly obligation. She explored a number of ways to get past the strict Japanese censorship regime and reach readers in colonial Korea. "Salt" is a story about a woman called Pong-yŏm's mother, who occupies the bottom rung of the social ladder, even among Koreans in Kando. She harbors a deep resentment toward the communist guerrillas; it is not until the very end of the text that she begins to place her trust in them and understands how the dominant power completely misrepresents the nature of the communist forces engaged in the anti-Manchukuo struggle.

Pong-yŏm's mother's hatred of the communists stems from the fact that her husband was killed by them in place of the Chinese landowner P'angdung. When she hears from P'angdung that her son Pong-sik has been executed for being a communist, she thinks it is just a cheap trick from P'angdung to get rid of her after she has become pregnant with his child. Further, her son's death occurs as part of the massive crackdown carried out by the Japanese after the Manchurian Incident. This early section of the text demonstrates the extent to which the masses regarded communist guerrillas as no better than bandits at this time. But Pong-yŏm's mother finally comes to realize P'angdung's deception. While smuggling salt from Korea into Manchuria, she encounters communist guerrillas who, contrary to rumor-implanted fears, have no intention of stealing her goods and instead protect her and her group from harm. As a result, she comes to understand the nature of Pong-sik's death and begins to believe in the communist cause. The black brush mark of the censor covers the final scene of the last serialized installment of

² For a description of the May Thirtieth Movement, see the introduction to Kang's "Darkness."

"Salt," but by then, the reader is able to follow Pong-yŏm's mother's train of thought as she realizes the true intentions of the communist guerrillas, as well as which group is actually responsible for imposing such miserable conditions on the Korean people in Kando. We thus see how carefully Kang handled her subject matter, in a way that would get past the hand of the censor and present the reality of the anti-Manchukuo armed struggle to readers in Korea.

Introduction by Sang-Kyung Lee (trans. Jae Won Chung)

1. A FARM HOUSE

Upon hearing the news that P'angdung, their Chinese landlord, had arrived from Yongjŏng,³ her husband put on his dark Korean outer coat, saved for special occasions, and went out.⁴ She found herself suddenly overcome by a vague sense of anxiety as she watched her husband step hastily out the door. Did P'angdung really come back? Or maybe the Self-Defense Force⁵ is spreading false rumors that he's back, and they're luring my husband away so they can extort some money from us? Tears welled up in her eyes as these thoughts came over her. She felt sorry for her husband, who was constantly harassed by the SDF but had never once allowed himself to utter a word of complaint. He simply trudged along through life trying to do his best. Time after time he would sigh and declare, "The only means the poor have to get out of their misery is to die. That's the way it is for us, no exceptions. Death is the only out." She suddenly realized that her long fingernails had been scratching at the wall. She hadn't cut her nails in such a long time, and they'd grown ugly. It occurred to her that even though it seemed like you never knew when you might just drop dead one day, there was something about a human life that resisted an easy end.

It was like setting out to cross a vast ocean to a certain death, the day they left their hometown carrying nothing but a few pots and pans. The agony welling up inside was beyond words. But they were lucky enough to find a piece of farmland to rent from a

³Longjing in Chinese.

⁴The translator would like to thank Sang-Kyung Lee for her generous and invaluable help with various aspects of the story, from archaic terms and dialect to relevant historical information.

⁵Self-Defense Force (SDF) refers to Chawidan 自衛團, organized by the Japanese authorities in Manchuria. The Self-Defense Force was a paramilitary group set up in key places where there had been armed anti-Japanese resistance. Chawidan drafted young men from peasant households, as pro-Japanese landlords and officials put pressure on the peasantry. See Lee Sang-Kyung, *Kang Kyŏng-ae chŏnjip* [Collected Works of Kang Kyŏng-ae] (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'ansa, 2002), 491.

Chinese landlord. Survival was a day-to-day struggle, though, due to the constant threat of incursion by the Chinese military's Protective Service Corps.⁶ Every morning was the same, a prayer to Heaven that they would survive to see another day.

The PSC would raid the village sporadically, stealing from peasants to supplement their meager salaries. At least that's how it began, but then it became routine—the PSC didn't hesitate to shake peasants down in broad daylight. Regardless of their own circumstances the peasants had to put aside money and rice to appease the PSC. Their lives would be in serious danger if they didn't. And then the communists made their way into the area. The result was the exodus of the PSC, along with the landlords, to the city; fear of the communists kept them from venturing into any area in the countryside that might be under communist influence. But then the communists themselves began to lose ground; that's when the SDF made its presence felt.

She was still staring at her nails. Considering how many times they had been threatened by the PSC, it was a miracle that they had been able to cling on to their lives. She looked outside in search of her husband, but he was already gone. She saw the flag painted on a mud wall in the distance and wondered if he had already reached the neighboring village. Her heart sank and she was once more overwhelmed with worry. Her husband had assured her that they had given all the SDF had asked for, every penny. But there was no way of knowing whether P'angdung was really here or not. Perhaps he had indeed come, given that it was time to start planting the rice. Or maybe he hadn't and there would be no way to get any fertilizer. As her thoughts wandered, she glanced again at the mud wall. It had taken her husband and the villagers over a year to build that wall. It reminded her of the fortress in her hometown. Every time her eyes rested upon it, she couldn't help thinking of that evening four or five years ago.

It was the middle of the night. There was a burst of gunshots

⁶ The Protective Service Corps (PSC) refers to Powidan 保衛團 in the original.

and people began screaming from all sides. They all scurried into a secret hideout they had dug under the kitchen floor. They emerged several days later to learn that P'angdung had fled and his family had been mercilessly slaughtered. P'angdung had since bought a new house in Yongjǒng and got a new wife, who bore him several sons and daughters. He was going on with his life as if nothing happened.

The SDF had taken over P'angdung's place after he fled to Yongjǒng. The house, flag flying high, was under constant guard. She shifted her gaze toward the front. The sun was shining brightly over the expanse of fields. A flock of birds was passing overhead, like millet chaff in the blue sky. A sigh escaped her as she thought of the possibility of owning some of that land. She looked over at the red mountain that they had come to call their own during the ten years they had lived in Kando. The terrain was rough but they had slashed and burned whenever they could find time and had finally turned it into a dry field. It was no good for growing any kind of cereal, though, so they cultivated potatoes every year.

"Maybe we should plant millet there this year. And on the side we could grow some sorghum as well . . ." That's when the thought of her hometown flashed in her mind. That dry field next to those saplings that used to graze her knees! How could she ever forget that piece of land? No matter what you planted, it grew well in that dry field! "That son of a bitch!" she muttered to herself, as the image of the old master who would come around to the field, sucking on his long pipe, rose before her. She suddenly felt nauseous and her limbs trembled faintly; she rubbed her eyes vigorously and straightened herself as if to chase the thoughts of her hometown away. She stood there blankly for a while, listening to the noisy chirping of the sparrows perched on the straw stacks in a corner of the yard. And then she turned around abruptly. The mess in the room and other chores seem to be calling out to her, "Take care of me first." She grabbed a broom and set herself to sweeping the floor. Reaching down and sliding her hands over the holes in the reed mats, she told herself, "We have to live better . . . that son of a

bitch landlord . . . we have to do better . . ." She felt like crying. No matter how hard they worked on their land, all they got for it was misfortune and poverty. "What kind of fate is this? The heavens have no mercy . . . who gave such riches to a chosen few while making the rest of us toil like this. . . ." These were her thoughts as she swept the room from corner to corner.

She picked up the potatoes that rolled up against the broom and placed them in a basket. There was another basket that needed mending, which she did. As there was no strict division between kitchen and living space in most of the farmhouses in this region, the pots were hung in the corner of the room. People would hang baskets next to the pots. When she first got to Kando, it was this more than anything else that she could not get used to—the way the living quarters were set up, as if they were a pigsty or a cowshed. Every once in a while a male guest would visit her husband and there would be no place for her to go. All she could do was sit there facing them. But as time passed it grew less and less awkward, finally reaching the point where it was, in fact, tolerable. And then they dug that hideout next to the stone stove in the kitchen. Whenever they heard gunshots or dogs barking loudly, the whole family would spend several days underground. She kept the hideout stocked with grain and clothes, doing all she could to avoid making use of what she had put there. Needless to say, all of this was done out of fear of the PSC.

She began to sort beans in the newly mended basket. The sound of the beans sliding between her hands was all that disturbed the quiet of the room. Her eyes grew increasingly tired as they moved from one bean to another. She could hear the chirping of the sparrows more clearly. A welter of thoughts came over her, a cacophony every bit as loud as the birds outside: they would have to have several cups of rice if they were to get through the next three meals; maybe they would start sowing the seeds tomorrow; they wouldn't get any food because her husband wouldn't really meet P'angdung; perhaps her husband would bring home some ingredients for side dishes, using the money he got from sell-

ing firewood. Her mind gradually clouded and she began dozing off. Rubbing her eyes, she got up and stepped outside. A basket of soybeans was hanging on the wall. "I had better put the soybeans out," she thought. She arranged the beans neatly, dusting them off with a brush. Picking up a handful, she considered, "To make three or four quarts of soy sauce out of these, to make a jar of red bean paste . . . to do that I am going to need at least a couple of quarts of salt. Salt . . ." She heaved a deep sigh. And again thoughts of home came over her. "We used salt to clean our teeth there, but in this place . . . if only I had a handful."

Maybe when she was back home other needs had been more pressing and salt had just been something she took for granted. Whatever the reason, ever since she came to Kando, the mere thought of salt would send her into tears. Two *wŏn* and twenty *chŏn* a pound. No peasant household could afford such an amount. She could only buy a quarter or at most half a pound. And so she had no chance of making any quantity of sauce or paste, only a little bit here and there whenever she could get her hands on some salt. Sometimes they would make soy sauce out of nothing but rotting beans. This sauce had no taste at all, adding no flavor to any of the dishes she made.

She would watch her husband at every meal, somehow feeling apologetic. He never said much, but occasionally he would grimace and slow down eating his food. Then, listlessly, he would put his spoon down altogether. It made her think that the grains of rice were suddenly turning into gravel. She would set her own spoon down furtively and turn her back. She was unable to set a hot bowl of soup—one that would warm him up, sending droplets of sweat down his back—in front of this man who had to work in the fields all day long! How could she call herself a wife?

Sometimes her husband would add a spoonful of red pepper powder to whet his appetite. His eyes would redden and beads of sweat would form on his forehead. She would open her mouth to ask, "Why are you putting so much red pepper in?" But then she would suddenly feel as if something was bearing down upon her,

and her lips would purse tightly. "I am the one responsible for cooking," she would remind herself. What should she do?

Mulling over all of these things, she heaved another big sigh. "What are we going to eat this evening?" She glanced again at the soybeans and then raised her head at the sound of approaching steps. Pong-yöm was already back from school and had brought her book bag with her.

"Why did you bring your school bag with you, Pong-yöm?" she asked.

"Today is only a half day. You put the soybeans out," Pong-yöm said, smiling sweetly as she held one of the beans to her nose and smelled it.

"Did you see your father?"

"Yes, Mother. And P'angdung is back."

"Really? P'angdung did come?" She realized how anxious she had been all day and let out a light sigh. "Where did you see him?"

"At P'angdung's house . . . I don't know what Father and the SDF people were doing there, sitting around together."

The little frown on Pong-yöm's brow made her anxious. "Was P'angdung with them?" she asked.

Pong-yöm nodded her head and then smiled again as if something else had occurred to her. She took a bunch of radishes from her book bag. "There were so many of these growing behind the school."

"That's enough for a whole meal," her mother replied. As if proud of her daughter, she held the radishes up and selected one of the larger ones; she cut off its roots, peeled off the outer layer and started to eat it. Pong-yöm had some as well.

"Mother, I wish I had a pair of sneakers . . ." she suddenly blurted out, lowering her eyes to the radishes in anticipation of her mother's reproach. She seemed to see sneakers appearing between the roots. And there was the image of Yong-ae with her sneakers on flitting about like a sparrow.

"Sometimes you say the craziest things!" Her mother scolded, rubbing her nose.

The greens kept turning into sneakers even as Pong-yöm felt the sting of her mother's words deep inside. "Sometimes you say the craziest things!" she repeated, murmuring to herself. She couldn't rid herself of an intense envy. She wanted so badly to touch Yong-ae's sneakers. A sense of resentment followed that made her want to complain.

Her mother was watching her closely. "Yes, isn't what you say crazy? We can barely afford to have you go to school and here you are going on about sneakers. The only reason you can even go to school is because you were lucky enough to be born in this modern age, you know. Let me tell you, when I was growing up, we had to fetch water from the well and spend all day weaving. In the summer we would weed the rice paddies. We didn't even have straw sandals that were halfway decent. Your father and I spend each and every day bent over in the fields doing what we can to earn a living and here you are whining about sneakers? You're just lucky that you don't have to skip meals. If you're going to start playing little games like this, you can quit that school right now."

"Well, you are not the one sending me to school anyway, are you?" Pong-yöm felt a tinge of fear as she said this, but she found herself resisting her mother regardless, almost to the point of being coldhearted. She blinked her eyes and her face began to get hot.

"So you think that since your father is the one sending you to school, I can't stop you from going? Why are you like that, girl? Talking back to your mother. As if you know anything. You stupid little girl. Shouldn't you keep your trap shut and listen to your mother? But instead you just run off at the mouth. Is that the right thing to do? We don't have a cent. . . . And if I did have the money to buy you a pair of sneakers, I'd use it to keep Pong-sik in school for a few more years."

Mortified, Pong-yöm kept chewing on her radish, tasting its spicy hotness. Her eyes moistened with tears. "Why don't you have any money? Why can't you send Pong-sik to school?" Suddenly her teacher's words flashed in her mind. She realized that she shouldn't be pouring out her complaints to her mother. She began to feel

sorry for her mother, who did not know any better and could only blame her daughter for the predicament they were in.

For her part, Pong-yöm's mother just sat there staring vacantly at her, not knowing what more she could say. When you are poor, you have to take insults from everyone, even your own children. The thought made her angry. She felt the grief that came from years of poverty rising up from within, warming her eyelids. How should I know why we don't have any money? How should I know why you were born to beggars like us? You should have been born into a rich family. A daughter! What kind of daughter is this?

As Pong-yöm watched her mother get more and more upset, last year's harvest came to mind. That's when her mother and father had lost every last bit of the rice that they had cultivated all summer long to P'angdung! The expression now on her mother's face was the same one she had seen then. Mother and father, both of them, don't know how to stand up for themselves! They weren't to be pitied. They were cowardly.

"Mother, how is it that you can't understand why we don't have money? Why can't you buy me some sneakers? Why can't you keep Pong-sik in school?" she asked, realizing as she spoke that her desire for the sneakers wasn't what was wrong. She hadn't paid too much attention to her teacher's words before, but they again came back to her.

"You stupid girl. Why don't we have any money? It's because we don't have any capital and we have to rent someone else's land to farm. If only we had our own land . . ." She could feel the hot tears flowing as she thought of the dry field that they used to own next to the pine forest. The image of the field appeared vividly before her, right there through her teary eyes.

They heard the sound of gunshots faintly in the distance. They both jumped up, eyes widened in surprise. Their dog Blackie burrowed his way out from underneath a straw bundle where he had been dozing and began to bark.

2. WANDERING

Mother and daughter kept their eyes peeled in the direction of the neighboring village, thinking of both the communists and the various militias. They could hear dogs barking all around them in the nearby villages, and this made them feel even more anxious. A cool, refreshing breeze had been blowing that evening; it now brought nothing but fear as it brushed lightly against the edge of their clothes.

"Oh dear, I wish your father would come back soon . . . What is he doing? It looks like something has happened, and what should we do?"

Pong-yöm's mother, on the verge of tears, could not stand still. There were more gunshots. Without thinking, they ran inside the room. Pong-yöm's mother was certain that whatever it was that had happened in the next village, it couldn't be good. Several men must have been shot already. By the time her thoughts got that far she felt like flames were burning inside her stomach. It was unbearable. It was like something was running this way, headed right at her. "What are we going to do? What to do? I wish Pong-sik were here," she mumbled to herself, shaking like a leaf. She couldn't help but think that her husband was in harm's way. Her throat was getting dry and her chest felt choked up.

"Dear, did you really see your father with P'angdung?"

Unable to speak, Pong-yöm answered her mother with her eyes. They heard footsteps coming their way and ran to the kitchen hideout, crouching close to each other behind the potato sacks. Someone was coming to kill them. After a long while, they heard Pong-sik calling "Mother!" Mother and daughter yelled in response, but even then they found themselves unable to crawl out of their sanctuary. Finally, though, they did emerge, but only to stop dead in their tracks. Pong-sik was covered in blood and his father was sprawled next to him on the floor with blood gushing out of his neck.

Pong-yöm's mother let out an inarticulate scream and immediately collapsed to the floor. All she could do was stare at them vacantly like an idiot.

"What are you doing, Mother? Come over here," implored Pong-sik.

Pong-yöm seized her mother's arm and tried to stand her up, but she fell back down in a heap.

"Your father, your father . . ." she mumbled.

It was only when the night had almost completely passed that she came to.

"Where did you meet up with your father? Was he alive then? What did he say?" she bawled.

Pong-sik just stood there for a moment.

"By God, no, he wasn't!" he finally shouted, feeling terrible that he was making his mother wait for an answer. And then he sighed.

Pong-sik had always thought that his father's attempt to ingratiate himself with P'angdung and the SDF was fraught with danger. And this was how it had ended. He had frequently argued with his father about this very issue, but his father had always stuck to his assessment of the situation. Or rather it was his father's circumstances that compelled him to adhere to this view, leaving him without any other choice. Pong-sik had always thought that his father was wrong, but when he heard from Yong-ae's father that his own father was shot and rushed to the scene, he couldn't help but feel shocked at how it had turned out. He was angry and couldn't fully grasp what had happened. He couldn't figure out the proper thing to do, and this made him feel faint. A funeral was hastily arranged for the next day; when it was over, Pong-sik went away, saying he needed to clear his head.

Every day mother and daughter anxiously waited for Pong-sik's return. They began to despair when spring had almost passed and there was still no sign of him. They simply couldn't wait any more and set out to look for him. They wandered around for over a month without any success. Finally they made it all the way to

Yongjöng. They remembered all the times Pong-sik had complained whenever he visited Yongjöng that he would like to continue his studies even if he had to work his way through. They figured Pong-sik might have enrolled in a school there. Mother and daughter visited every school, but they were unable to find anyone even remotely resembling Pong-sik. As they were returning from TH school,⁷ the last one that gave them any hope, they felt a shared resentment at Pong-sik for having disappeared without a word. The uneasy thought that he might have died made them wonder what might lie ahead. Where should they go? Where would they sleep tonight? Such were the worries and concerns that beset them.

It was almost dusk when they found themselves at P'angdung's house. Pong-yöm's mother had been thinking of P'angdung as they headed toward Yongjöng. If they could not find Pong-sik, she had thought of pleading with P'angdung to search for him. P'angdung came out to greet them after they had passed through two large gates in his compound.

"You are here. When did you arrive?" He seemed glad to see them.

Feeling she had accomplished already half of what she had come for, Pong-yöm's mother secretly heaved a sigh of relief.

P'angdung stroked Pong-yöm's hair. "Where have you been? I went to see you and was sorry I couldn't find you."

"We left to look for Pong-sik. Where could he be?" Heart pounding, Pong-yöm's mother searched his face.

"I haven't seen him. I don't know," he replied.

Pong-yöm's mother was watching his lips move with every word, thinking that perhaps he might know something. Her head dropped.

P'angdung took the two of them inside. A young woman, who seemed to be P'angdung's wife, was sitting on a raised platform, and she kept shifting her glance from the mother, to the daughter

⁷ The TH School may refer to Tonghŭng Middle School in Yongjöng. It functioned as a hotbed of socialist activism in Manchuria. Kang Kyöng-ae's husband, Chang Ha-il, worked as a teacher at the school.

and then to P'angdung. She seemed suspicious of them. When P'angdung introduced them to her at length, only then could she bring herself to say, "Come sit up here, please."

P'angdung offered them some tea. As the room filled with a light tea aroma, they looked around furtively. The room was large and there were two raised areas. Shiny stones were laid beneath the platforms. In front of the window, she saw a marble table. A pair of black vases with colorful inlays stood at its center. Weighing down the table around them were clocks of various sizes, gold fish swimming around in a glass bowl, and many other unknown things. Pictures of P'angdung and other family members were hanging on the wall above the window; arranged beside them in disorderly fashion were artificial flowers whose colors had faded a bit. A portrait of Buddha drawn with large brush strokes adorned the opposite wall. A massive, full-length mirror took up a considerable portion of another wall. Outside the window, Pong-yŏm's mother could see a garden that was green enough to make your eyes feel its shade. It was as if they had entered another world. They felt dazed. Their own shabbiness made them even more ashamed and they found themselves unable to even breathe comfortably. Ensnared in a chair, P'angdung lit up a cigar.

"Do you have any relatives here?"

Pong-yŏm's mother lifted her head. "No."

As she realized why he was asking such a question, she felt a keen sense of loneliness run through her entire body. How pathetic she was, asking for P'angdung's help. She gazed at the garden over P'angdung's shoulders. The greenness of the garden was deepening! Suddenly she was overcome with another worry. "The millet seedlings must have grown quite a bit by now. Everyone must be busy with weeding. What am I thinking? If we don't do the weeding, what are we going to eat in the fall?"

She cast her eyes upward, as if she was looking at rice paddies in the clear sky. She thought of the paddies they used to rent. Water was brimming all the way up to their tops! The rice stalks must have grown quite a bit by now! When she raised her head, wasn't

it the sky that peeked its way in through the rice stalks? Her husband would splash water around those stalks with his sturdy legs, dark with hair. Feeling another pang in her chest, she looked over at P'angdung. P'angdung, who had invited her husband over and was sitting right there when it happened, was alive. Why was it that her husband was dead? All the sorrow that she had so far tried not to show was rising up and even her head felt heavy.

"No relatives. Where from?"⁸

There was no response and after a while P'angdung repeated his question.

The resentment and loneliness that was welling all the way up to her throat turned into tears at P'angdung's words. She dropped her head listlessly, wiping her tears with the tip of her skirt. Upon seeing her mother cry, Pong-yŏm, sitting next to her, also began to tear up.

As he looked at the mother and the daughter, P'angdung wasn't sure what to do. He had begun to realize that they had come to him either to get something from him personally or take something from his house. The whole thing was unpleasant. If he were to send them away today, that would mean he would have to give them some money. It vaguely occurred to him that maybe he could have them work for him in his house for a while. He smiled faintly.

"No relatives? Stay here. Pong-sik came and went. He went. Yes."

When she heard the name of her son uttered by P'angdung, she could no longer control the enormity of her resentment, her longing and her loneliness. It all got rolled into one. Doubting that Pong-sik would ever come back to her, she broke out sobbing. Pong-sik would either choose to stay away of his own accord or maybe he would be killed, just like his father.

From that day on, they managed to eke out a living doing chores around P'angdung's house. As time went by, P'angdung be-

⁸ In the original text, P'angdung's Korean is supposed to sound somewhat awkward.

came even friendlier. Sometimes he would come to their room and tell them various stories well into the night. And then there were times he would buy them some fabric or food. Pong-yöm's mother was so grateful on such occasions that she could barely get to sleep.

P'angdung's wife went to visit her family. Pong-yöm's mother spent the evening after she left sewing the cut fabric P'angdung's wife had prepared into underwear for P'angdung. She wasn't sure when his wife was coming back but she knew it would please her if she could finish making the clothes before she returned. So she was working away on the sewing machine without any thought of sleep. She had learned how to use a sewing machine only after coming to P'angdung's house. She was still clumsy and unsure of herself. She was being terribly careful not to break the needle or the machine.

She heard the sound of a flute playing a sad tune in P'angdung's room on the other side of the house. Every evening P'angdung either played the flute or the violin. The sound of the violin was loud, somewhat similar to a puppy scratching a door or yelping for its mother. It was hard to bear and grated on her ears. But his flute playing was not bad. She watched the needle run its way back bravely toward her after it had set in the stitches on the cloth. "Dear Pong-sik, why don't you come looking for your mother?" she mumbled to herself, sighing.

Pong-sik was always on her mind. If a guest visited the house, she did not forget to prick up her ears in the remote chance that the stranger might have brought some news of him. But her anxious waiting did not reward her, and as the days went by the prospect of hearing about him seemed to grow less likely. P'angdung was treating them with kindness, but his wife plainly expressed her displeasure. On such occasions, she would cry, at once full of resentment at Pong-sik and of longing for him.

As time went by, she felt more and more that their days in P'angdung's house were nearing their end, and they should be moving on to wherever the future would take them. As these things went through her mind, she thought of taking the opportu-

nity when P'angdung's wife was away to ask him if they could get a rented room. She pictured P'angdung's plump face as she listened to his flute playing. She stared at the oil lamp. But how can I ask that? Even if we could rent a room, we don't even have a plate to eat off of. How can we live with nothing?

Soon the flute playing ended and quiet descended on the house. The only thing she could hear was the calm sound of Pong-yöm breathing as she slept. Gazing at the dayflies drawn to the lamp flame, she thought about her husband's short life. I was never even able to make him something tasty to eat while he was alive. The only thing with flavor that he ever had was the red pepper that made him drip with sweat. Why is it that salt is so expensive here? In this house they seem to use salt a lot, though. That's because they go buy it with all the money they have, I guess. Money? If you have money, you can do anything. You can even buy that expensive salt as much as you want. Why can't we save up any money?

She heard the sound of steps, and the door opened with a noise. Startled, she turned around swiftly. Smiling broadly, P'angdung, in black pants and a white undershirt, stepped inside. She jumped to her feet, still holding the fabric in her hand.

"Sit down! Only work?" P'angdung's eyes moved from her face to the cloth.

She sat closer to the lamp and hesitated. Should I tell him or not? She sneaked a look at P'angdung in an effort to read his mood, biting her lips so as not to blurt out the words "Can you get us a rented room?"

"Whose clothes? Mine?" he asked, picking up one end of the cloth. "Mine. . . . Not hungry? In our room, eat tea water and cookies. Yes, gone." He pulled on the fabric.

Normally she would have followed without hesitation, but with his wife gone she paused.

"I am not hungry," she said, a bit of shyness passing over her eyebrows.

P'angdung snatched the material from her hands. "Go. Yes. Hurry, hurry."

She looked at the cloth, unsure of what to do. Should I ask him for a rented room or not?

"Not going?" he asked, raising his voice as he got up.

She rose quickly, feeling a chill in her heart. When she saw the fat backside of P'angdung swaying as he walked toward the door she felt a sudden dislike for him. And she couldn't take another step. P'angdung turned around sharply at the doorway. His face had become indescribably fierce. She stepped down from the raised platform limply. She looked over at Pong-yöm sleeping, and her heart felt heavy enough to make her cry out.

3. BIRTH

Dusk had fallen on a day in the spring of the following year. Pong-yöm's mother stopped her sewing, rubbed her eyes, and looked over at the red door. You could clearly see the shadows of the eaves outside. Will P'angdung come today? Where is he and what's taking him so long? She kept dwelling on these questions. She wanted to ask P'angdung's wife. But when she saw her, she couldn't help but note the coldness of the expression on her face, and such questions would quickly evaporate. She would get even more anxious at the end of a day like today. P'angdung's actual return would not really please her that much but somehow he made her long for him as she waited. I wish he would come back . . . This time I will tell him for sure. But tell him what? She couldn't think of what she would say to him. Her ears were getting warm. "What should I do? Would he have any clue? Not at all. Men are that way, that's why. . . ." She pictured P'angdung in her head and stared resentfully at the image.

His attitude undeniably became cold after that first night, no matter how she tried to cast things in a positive light. At first, she ascribed this to the fact that he was an older gentleman with a wife at his side, but as time went by her resentment grew. Still, the affection she felt for P'angdung seemed to take the form of an invisible

bond that pulled her ever closer to him. She let out a sigh and wiped the sweat off her forehead. When can I open up to P'angdung about this and receive his love? The mere thought made her shudder with happiness. But when she realized the nature of the situation she was in, she felt like crying. And she felt deeply envious of P'angdung's wife. She dropped her head weakly and picked up the sewing material, pondering over her darned pregnancy. The memory of that night seemed to conjure itself out of the needle of the machine.

Didn't P'angdung attack her like an angry tiger? Although overwhelmed with fear and terror, didn't she resist him with all her might, hanging on instead to the long silk drapes that darkened the room? Wasn't she now pregnant with his baby despite her fierce resistance? When she considered these things, it didn't seem like it was her fault. But why couldn't she come out and tell all of this to P'angdung? And why had she put up with everything, not even being able to eat cold noodles and other things she craved whenever she wanted? The reason, it seemed to her, was that she was stupid. Why haven't you told him? Why hesitate? I will let him know this time. For sure. And I will ask him to buy me a bowl of cold noodles. Her mouth watered as she pictured a bowl of cold noodles in front of her. But then she sighed and chuckled, realizing that these were futile daydreams. The fact that, like a child, all she could think of was food even with all these difficult problems pressing down upon her made her look pathetic and funny even to herself. But there was nothing she could do about her cravings. They were like an itch in her throat that just wouldn't go away. Her desire for cold noodles was not about to subside, and this made her all the more anxious.

When she found out she had a baby inside her, she did everything she could to induce an abortion. She would pound on her belly, fall down deliberately, bump her stomach against the wall. When those things didn't work, how many times did she get up to take some lye in the middle of the night? But even in those moments, she was still craving for a bowl of cold noodles. It was al-

most as if someone was hiding the noodles from her. How painfully sad it would be to die without having a bowl of cold noodles. And then, thinking of Pong-yŏm, she would end up throwing out the lye.

The closer she got to the end of her pregnancy, the more she was at a loss as to what to do. She wrapped her stomach tightly with a sash so that no one would notice anything out of the ordinary. She would skip meals. And as much as possible she tried to work by herself, avoiding others.

She heard the ringing of a wagon and looked up sharply. Footsteps came from P'angdung's room, and she heard his children loudly chattering, "Daddy, Daddy." "He's back!" she exclaimed to herself. Her heart started to flutter; it was almost as if she could feel her baby inside moving around and around. She heard steps coming in her direction and thought he might be coming to see her.

"Mother, P'angdung is back. He wants to see you," said Pong-yŏm opening the door and looking inside.

She felt a bit disappointed that it wasn't P'angdung, but also relieved. When she heard that he wanted to see her, though, she felt a shyness quickly coming over her, along with a sudden inexplicable fear. As she realized she was at a loss for words, her limbs began to tremble.

"Mother, are you sick?" Pong-yŏm had pretty bangs on her forehead like Chinese girls. It was through these bangs that she was looking at her mother.

"No," she replied, turning away in an attempt to keep her daughter from sensing anything.

Pong-yŏm seemed lost in thought for a while.

"Mother, P'angdung seems to be mad about something," she declared finally.

"Why? Did he say something?"

"Well, you know." Pong-yŏm stared at her nails, worn from cleaning pots. She was thinking of the look she had seen on P'angdung's face.

That's when they heard P'angdung's wife's yelling, "What are you doing? Told you to come over here quick."

Mother and daughter hurried to P'angdung's room with a sense of foreboding. Flanked by two children on each side, P'angdung looked them over. At first he frowned lightly but then his eyes bulged out ferociously. P'angdung's wife twisted her lips in displeasure.

"Ha! What kind of great son do you have, one who joins the communists, his father's enemies? That kind of person should be killed ten times over . . . we can't have anything to do with communists. Communists are our enemies. You can't stay in our house any longer. You have to get out." He glared at both of them.

They couldn't comprehend what he was saying. Pong-yŏm's mother felt an intense throbbing in her head.

"I was in the Kukcha Street and saw your Pong-sik get killed."

She felt faint, as if someone was mercilessly bashing her head with an iron bat. She stared at P'angdung for some time. He avoided her gaze by dropping his eyes to his child. But he let her know that he was telling her what he had seen. Suddenly she felt even fainter. "Can this be true about my boy?" she cried out silently to herself.

"Get out! In Manchukuo, we kill communists."

Earrings swinging, P'angdung's wife shoved them out of the room. They still could not believe what they heard was the truth and wished that P'angdung would tell them straight out what had really happened.

Just looking at them, P'angdung felt annoyed. After that first night, right after that moment when he satisfied himself with her, he somehow felt like kicking her butt with his foot. He didn't want to go near Pong-yŏm's mother. But his young wife was too inexperienced at housekeeping, and if he chased them out he would have to hire a maid or a decent worker. The salary and meals would cost him money. And so he had been putting up with them, postponing his decision every day. More than anything else, it was awkward to find a pretext to get rid of them.

But then he just happened to see Pong-sik die on Kukcha Street. That's when he made up his mind. What was more, since Pong-yŏm's mother and Pong-yŏm were family members of communists, he was afraid that if the militias found out the consequences would be dire. He himself loathed anything related to communists and couldn't stand to hear the word even mentioned.

As he watched his wife pushing the two women out the door, P'angdung recalled the scene of Pong-sik's death. He and a friend were coming back from the outskirts of the city after hearing that some communists were to be executed. They followed some people to the place of execution, arriving only after scores of communists had already been killed. There was only one left. He tried to squeeze himself into the crowd, regretting that he had not arrived earlier. The communist who had been dragged out and forced to sit in the center by the guards was none other than Pong-sik! Incredulous, he rubbed his eyes several times, but there was no doubt about it, it was Pong-sik. He was darker and rougher than before, but it was him. P'angdung cursed Pong-sik loudly enough for the condemned man to hear him.

His hope was dashed that Pong-sik would return to his mother bringing money he had earned while away. Gone too was the possibility that he would be able to take some credit for having helped his mother. A guard in a yellowish uniform was pouring water over a bluish blade. Water drops ran down the sword like pearls, lending the blade a frightful shine. The guard grinned widely as he prepared the instrument of execution.

P'angdung looked over at Pong-sik. Pong-sik was ashen but was courageously standing up to the situation. A broad, derisive smile hovered around his mouth. P'angdung found it extremely unpleasant. He remembered the moment when his own life had been threatened by a communist. He was convinced that Pong-sik really was one of them. The blade glistened, and he heard Pong-sik let out a loud shriek. The head was already on the ground. Bright red blood spurted up into the air, and the spectators recoiled, chills running down their spines.

The mere recollection of the scene made P'angdung shiver. He held his children close to him, wishing that the two women would hurry up and get out of his sight.

Mother and daughter expected P'angdung to stop his wife from shoving them out the door or at least to come after them. But he simply stood there as they made their way toward the gate carrying all their belongings in a few bundles. Pong-yŏm's mother couldn't control a mounting anger, and she turned and stared at P'angdung's back, visible through the glass window. She was about to yell something at him, at this man who had jumped on her like a maniac, but P'angdung's wife and some man she didn't know grabbed her and turned her right back around, shoving mother and daughter all the way out of the gate.

They left the town without further ado, walking hurriedly in the direction of the Haeran River. They reached the river and stopped cold, unable to cross. They had no choice but to calm themselves and gather their wits about them as they contemplated just where it was that they should go next. They lifted their eyes up to the sky. The sun was already hanging low over the western mountains. In the distance they could see a cluster of willows in front of a village that looked like the woods near Ssandŏgŏu. Her husband and Pong-sik would be waiting over there, that's where they should be. But then she looked far into the distance and dropped to the ground, rubbing her eyes. The sound of the water rushing by assailed her, and she wondered whether it might be best just to kill herself right then and there. The news of Pong-sik's death had seemed like a lie, but now a splitting pain struck her in the heart and she suddenly began to ache with worry. She didn't want to believe what she had heard. Pong-sik was a smart boy. Such a clever child would never have joined the communists, his father's enemy.

It was a lie made up to get rid of her and her daughter. "What a bitch she is, calling my son a communist. Damn those people. Who are they calling a communist . . . ? The day will come when you people will get yours and die. How dare they dare call my son a communist."

Gnashing her teeth, Pong-yöm's mother looked back at the town. The town was filled with brick houses stacked up against each other. With so many houses around, the idea that there was no place for them to go, that they had been chased all the way out here, was enough to make her gasp for air. It suddenly occurred to her that every last one of them back there must be as terrifying as P'angdung. She was overcome with resentment. At the slightest sound her heart would skip a beat—it might be P'angdung coming after her.

Darkness began to envelop them, and they felt even more at a loss. "Where are we going to sleep, Mother?" Pong-yöm asked, sniffing.

Right then she wanted to do nothing other than go back to P'angdung's house and kill them all and then themselves. She gathered herself up. Before her, railroad tracks stretched into the distance, and she imagined Pong-sik walking down a road, looking for his mother. She felt like bursting out into tears at the thought that they would never meet again, if Pong-sik's death was real, as P'angdung had said it was. Should I go to Kukcha Street and find out once and for all for myself what happened to Pong-sik? Yes. And if it's true, I'll kill every last one of them and myself as well. Her mind made up, she slowly began to walk again.

Mother and daughter spent the night at a shed attached to a Chinese house overlooking the Haeran River. They were able to stay there after begging for help and offering to clean the vegetables to be sold on the market the next day. As the night deepened, Pong-yöm's mother began to feel pain in her stomach. Her intuition told her that she was about to give birth, and she prayed that Pong-yöm would fall asleep.

Pong-yöm, who would normally fall asleep quickly, lay awake for a while complaining about P'angdung and his wife. She grumbled about the fact that she had done all manner of work for them, never once refusing a task. "I wonder how Yong-ae is doing. Are there still a lot of students in my school . . ." Pong-yöm drowsily muttered on like this for some time and finally dozed off.

Her mother, sighing deeply, decided that while Pong-yöm was sleeping she would quickly kill whatever came out and throw it down the river. She began to push down on her stomach. The winds picked up and were soon followed by raindrops. She felt that a downpour would, in fact, make everything go better. No one would notice a dead baby on such a rainy night. She covered Pong-yöm's head with a piece of cloth and patted her body down gently. The rain began to leak into the shed here and there. Worried that Pong-yöm would get wet, she moved her a little to the side, setting herself where the rain was leaking in the worst. The rain got even heavier and the pain in her body got worse and worse.

Afraid that she would wake Pong-yöm, she bit down on her lips, trying not to let out a groan. But her moaning exploded through her nose, blowing out forcefully like fire. Raindrops flew down into her hair, trickling over face into her mouth.

"Mother!" called Pong-yöm, sitting up and groping for her mother. "My gosh, you are all wet." As she felt around in the dark groping for her mother, Pong-yöm realized it was raining and all of her sleepiness left her. "It's pouring. What are we going to do?"

Pong-yöm's mother could no longer hear her daughter's voice. Nor could she any longer hold back the moans that she was afraid her daughter might hear. She writhed, groaning loudly. Hurling her head against the wall wasn't enough and she began to tear at her own hair. Pong-yöm shook and shook her mother and then finally began to cry herself. Shoving Pong-yöm away, her mother pushed and pushed, gritting her teeth. After a long while, they heard the cry of a baby, "Uaah!"

"A baby?" cried Pong-yöm, moving closer to her mother.

Pong-yöm's mother quickly tried to grab the baby by its neck. Her eyes were burning, as if peering into blue flames. Then she felt a mother's love coursing through her entire body like electricity! She choked on her own breath and the ends of her fingertips quickly lost their grip. Sweat was pouring down her face like rain, and she turned on her side, letting out a cry, "Aigooo!"

4. A NURSEMAID

Having failed to kill the baby and now out of the terrible labor pains, she was overwhelmed by an extreme hunger. A hot bowl of seaweed soup would make her feel so much better. Seaweed soup! She screwed her eyes shut, recalling how her husband had cooked white rice and seaweed soup and spoonfed it to her. The dirt floor of the shed, wet from the rain and soaked with blood, gave off a stomach-churning smell. What should I do? I have to eat something if I am to take care of these two. What can I eat? Even a bowl of boiling water would make me feel better.

But there was nothing, unless she could eat the dirt she was lying on. Should I wake Pong-yöm up? And have her ask for something to eat? No, no, I can't do that. Nothing to be proud of, this birth. Then what? Not long until the sun will come up and then maybe we can get something to eat for breakfast. . . . She opened her eyes wide and peeked through a hole in the shed door. It was still dark. When will the night end? Don't they have a rooster at this house? And she listened for it. It was deathly quiet everywhere. Only the sounds of insects in the vegetable field beneath the stars in the night sky could be heard.

She held her baby next to her beating heart, resolving to live no matter what. "Why should I die? I must live. For you two, I must live," she mumbled to herself. Before she gave birth, or rather before she experienced this pain, the talk of dying never left her lips and she indeed often wanted to kill herself. But now that she had found herself on the precarious borderline between life and death and survived, she did not want to die. Instead she felt the ecstasy of living. Of course this wasn't the first time that she had been in this situation. But when her husband was alive, she had never really thought about death much and thus had no desire to put an end to it all. She had never really given serious consideration to dying.

In the morning, she shook Pong-yöm, waking her from her sound sleep. Pong-yöm sat up straight.

"Go wash this stuff for me. You can just rinse it," she told Pong-yöm. She handed Pong-yöm a bundle of her blood-stained underwear and some rags. Somehow she found it difficult to face her own daughter at that moment. Her daughter's eyes made her feel awkward.

Pong-yöm could feel the pounding in her chest and everything seemed hazy, as if in a dream. Doubts and fear, spreading like a spider web, took complete hold of her small heart. She got up and walked out quickly.

"She must be cold dressed like that," muttered Pong-yöm's mother, watching her leave. She felt indescribably dirty.

Even before Pong-yöm's footsteps disappeared into the distance, she peered into the baby's face closely. The more she looked at the baby, the more adorable it was. She couldn't help but press her face against the baby's. She heard the family in the house up and about. Are they cooking breakfast? Will they offer me some? Maybe. She was craving seaweed soup again, to the point where she imagined she could see a steaming bowl right in front of her. She became even hungrier. If she went starving for a few more hours she wouldn't be able to go on, no matter how much she wanted to live. Suddenly she was afraid. I have to eat something.

Her eyes panned around the shed. It was still quite dark inside. In the far corner, through the darkness, she could make out some scallion roots. She remembered that last night this was where the owner's wife had stored the scallions she was going to sell in the market today. All right! Anything would make me feel better. She bolted up and yanked at some scallions by the roots. Afraid, though, that the owners would come upon her, she kept putting one in her mouth only to pull it out and hide it. Eventually she was able to bring herself to stuff one all the way in. She crunched down on it. She felt a shooting pain in her teeth as they gritted against each other. Frowning, she let her mouth hang open for a long time.

Saliva started dribbling down her chin, and she drew it back into her mouth. Swallowing her own saliva might revive her, she thought. She put another scallion in her mouth but this time she

swallowed without chewing on it. How tough and cold the scallion felt in her throat! Her throat felt like it was being ripped apart, and her eyes welled up with tears. Can you stay alive by eating scallions? She vacantly gazed out at the sky through the gap between the doors.

She heard footsteps and then the shed door opened abruptly. "Mother! I ran into Yong-ae's mother at the laundry place. She's here with me." Yong-ae's mother rushed in before Pong-yöm could finish her sentence.

In Ssandögöu they were close, like family. That's why Yong-ae's mother had not hesitated for a second to follow Pong-yöm, but when she saw the miserable state they were in, her happiness at meeting them vanished and she regretted having come at all. She didn't know what to say to comfort them.

"What has happened here, Pong-yöm's mother?" Yong-ae's mother managed to ask after a long silence.

Pong-yöm's mother stopped crying. "Well, it's a terrible fate. I keep on living only because I can't die, you know. . . . But when did you move here?"

"Us? We all came last year. Everyone in our village got out. We all had to leave in the middle of the night because of the raids. We couldn't farm there anymore. But it's just as bad here."

Pong-yöm's mother was so glad to see her. Realizing that she could not afford to let Yong-ae's mother go, she made up her mind to tell her everything, hiding nothing, and to beg her for help. "Yong-ae's Mother, I just gave birth. Last night . . . What can I do? You would be saving a life if you could let us stay with you for a few days. It's not such a great thing for you, I know. Coming across someone like me is your misfortune, isn't it?"

She started crying again. When she saw Yong-ae's mother, the image of her own husband and Pong-sik rose up before her, along with the thought that others live happily with their husbands, sons and daughters. She was overwhelmed with the sense of her own tragedy.

Yong-ae's mother seemed at a loss as to what to do for a long while. "All right. There's no other way," she finally said reluctantly. She did not venture to ask any further questions about their situation. Pong-yöm, nervously waiting behind her, heaved a deep sigh, as if rescued.

"Thank you. How can I ever pay you back for this?" Pong-yöm's mother declared with a trembling voice as she put the baby on Pong-yöm's back.

Yong-ae's mother began to walk with heavier steps as she realized that they really were coming with her. She worried that her husband would scold her.

But three days passed by at Yong-ae's house without any trouble. Yong-ae's mother hired herself out as a laundress and would go out to the village washing-place before dawn. Yong-ae's father, a worker at a railroad construction site, was also gone early. When Pong-yöm's mother saw how hard up they were, it was difficult to face them.

"Can you get give me some of the laundry to do?" she asked that night, when Yong-ae's mother got back from the washing-place.

Yong-ae's mother's eyes opened wide. "You should rest some more. Why . . . Don't worry," she said. Then, blinking her eyes as if she suddenly thought of something, she moved closer. Pong-yöm and Yong-ae were chattering away in the kitchen. "You know, there is a family I do laundry for, and they are looking for a nursemaid . . . Even if a mother has her own baby, they say they would hire her as long as she has enough milk. They don't pay much though . . . what do you think?"

Pong-yöm's mother pricked up her ears. "Is it true? Is it all right even if I have a baby?"

Yong-ae's mother hesitated and then replied, "In any case, if you made twelve to thirteen *wŏn* a month, you could rent a room for Pong-yöm and the baby. You could feed your baby cow's milk and also come by from time to time and nurse it yourself. What

other option is there? It wouldn't do you any good if they found out your baby is a newborn. So for now you should get the job by lying that yours is older. The pay wouldn't be that bad at all."

Pong-yöm's mother was happy, her heart fluttering just at the thought of being able to get a job that would pay. "Whatever you say to them, please just make sure I get the job," she said.

She promised herself that she would pay this family back. Her eyes then rested on her sleeping baby. I have to leave this one behind and nurse someone else's child?

Several days later, after Pong-yöm's mother began to feel a bit stronger, she was hired as a nursemaid. Pong-yöm and the baby moved out by themselves to a small rented room. Every night the baby cried without sleeping, as if it were on fire. Pong-yöm would walk around the room with the baby on her back, pinching her eyelids drooping with sleep. Often she would end up crying along with the baby as she gazed into the darkness outside.

A year went by and the baby cried less and less; it would even try to pee and poop on its own. Pong-yöm generally took good care of the baby but if the crying continued when her friends were over or if she made a mess of things, she would beat her up mercilessly. And if the baby went to the bathroom on the floor, Pong-yöm would thrash her around like she was going to kill her. It wasn't that Pong-yöm hated the baby, but that she was simply worn out.

They called the baby Pong-hŭi, after the common character "Pong" that the children shared as sisters. Pong-hŭi was not fed cow's milk any more but was periodically given her mother's milk and also some rice. She could now crawl around quite actively. Sometimes she would also stand up straight on her two legs. She was oddly quick. She would deposit her poop on the floor and start crying out of fear at what was coming even before her older sister could smack her. And sometimes when Pong-yöm would yell at her to go to sleep so that she could play with her friends, Pong-hŭi would simply pretend to doze off, shutting her eyes tight while sweating profusely.

Her one-year birthday passed, and all that had grown was her head and her obsequious quickness, not bones or meat on her. Her head was about the size of a small gourd. And it was very hard. Covering her head was the same hair, yellowish and sparse, that she had at birth. In any case the only part of her body that seemed to have any life in it was her head, disproportionately big for its body.

Pong-hŭi was able to recognize her mother. So every time her mother visited, she would cry. Mother and the two daughters would sob as they held each other tightly, until it was time to part.

One summer day, Pong-yöm came down with some kind of fever and was laid up, unable to cook or even eat. Her entire body was so hot that she couldn't figure out just where exactly she was sick. Pong-hŭi was sniffing by her side. Pong-yöm, wishing that her mother would come, placed a bit of leftover rice in front of Pong-hŭi, who stopped crying and started to shovel the rice into her mouth. Pong-yöm closed her eyes tightly and put her arm over her forehead. She opened her eyes wide at what seemed like the sound of footsteps. It wasn't her mother but Pong-hŭi, pulling the rice bowl around. All of a sudden she felt angry. "You little bitch! Why don't you stay put and stop throwing that bowl around?" she yelled, scowling.

Pong-hŭi twisted her lips, trying to stop herself from bursting into tears. And then she looked toward the door. Pong-yöm realized that Pong-hŭi too was searching for her mother, and she felt the strong urge to cry out, "Mother!" Pursing her own lips to hold back her tears, she gazed at Pong-hŭi for some time. "Pong-hŭi, do you want to go see Mommy? Should we go see her?" she blurted out.

Pong-hŭi stared at her for a while, then dropped her spoon and ran toward her. Regretting that she had spoken senselessly, she held Pong-hŭi close to herself. She suddenly realized that there two streams of hot tears were running down her cheeks. "Why isn't Mother coming? It's time for her to come, for sure. Right, Pong-hŭi?"

"Uh," Pong-hŭi grunted, not knowing what was being said to her.

"Go ahead, eat your rice. You are a good girl, Pong-hŭi."

Pong-yŏm put Pong-hŭi down, stroking her hair as she did so. Pong-hŭi picked up a spoon and started eating again. Pong-yŏm stared vacantly at the ceiling. Her mother had come a while back and swept the cobwebs out of the corners, but new ones had formed like balls of smoke. "Why doesn't Mother come when we have so many cobwebs in here?"

Her mother had actually been there several times since she had swept up those cobwebs, but Pong-yŏm couldn't remember any of this clearly. She couldn't help but wonder why her mother was not there when they needed her. She turned on her side. "Breakfast is over, so she must be walking outside carrying Myŏng-su on her back . . . She must have passed the chink's⁹ store. Maybe she is right outside." She glanced at the door. But she couldn't hear any footsteps, only Pong-hŭi's spoon clanging on the bowl.

She bolted up and threw the door wide open. Pong-hŭi had no idea what was going on; she just stared at her older sister for a while and then came crawling toward her. Feeling bursts of hot air shooting out of her nostrils, Pong-yŏm plopped back down on the floor. Outside, the next-door neighbor was making crisp, crackling noises as she hung some white laundry over the reed fence. The woman's fingertips running over the board reminded Pong-yŏm of her own mother's affectionate touch. It was as if her mother, who was always giving off the smell of her milk, was standing right outside. That milky smell never failed to make Pong-yŏm feel peaceful inside.

How she longed to throw her feverish body into her mother's arms—the desire was almost unbearable. A powerful thirst came over her and she reached for some water. She downed the water that Pong-hŭi had left there, but somehow she felt more anxious

⁹ *Tioenom* in the original. It was and still is the most common racial slur for Chinese in Korean.

than ever. She tossed and turned fitfully but was finally able to fall asleep.

She started from her sleep, not knowing why. The only thing she could hear was the whirring noise of all the flies that were hovering over her face. She noticed that Pong-hŭi wasn't there and suddenly she was wide awake. Did Mother come and take Pong-hŭi away, leaving me behind? She wanted to cry out. As if crazed, she bolted out of the room. But she couldn't see either her mother or Pong-hŭi. The sweltering heat seemed to beat down upon the yard as if to bake it brown. "Where is she? Where did my mother go?" she murmured.

She crossed over the hedge and ran into the lady who lived next door. "Have you seen my mother?" she asked.

"No . . . are you sick or something?"

Since she had not seen her mother, Pong-yŏm no longer wanted to talk to her. She rushed about looking for her mother and then came back inside. Then she heard a noise from the backyard and ran straight out. On the far side, next to the jar used for washing rice, was Pong-hŭi. Her big head was stuck down in the jar. She was sucking up the water used for washing rice like it was coming from her mother's nipple. And her hair was red, as if burnt by the sun.

5. A MOTHER'S HEART

Pong-yŏm lasted three more days before succumbing to her illness. Her mother quit her job as a nursemaid and left Myŏng-su's house. Soon afterward Pong-hŭi also became severely ill and died. Having seen the two sisters die, the landlord was anxious to get Pong-yŏm's mother out of the house. Pong-yŏm's mother found herself unable to hold back her feelings and got into a bitter argument with the landlord's wife. She lay in her room all day long, intending not to budge until they dragged her out. She used to feel awkward facing the landlord since she was always behind with the

rent, and the audacity that arose from somewhere within surprised even her.

She fought and fought with the landlord's wife. If the landlord's wife had been any harsher, Pong-yöm's mother might have gone at her with a knife. But luckily for her the landlord's wife sensed how Pong-yöm's mother felt and eventually slipped away. "Ha! Who does she think she is, telling me to get out? I'm not leaving no matter what they do," she mumbled, staring at the door. She even began to feel that her confrontation with the landlord's wife, who clearly did not want to fight any more, had somehow not gone as far as it should have. A powerful anger was rising within her, one that seemed like it would give her enough energy to dig several tens of miles into the earth.

When her wrath finally subsided, she began to think of Pong-yöm, Pong-hŭi, and even Myöng-su, whom she momentarily had forgotten. The more she considered what had happened, the more it seemed to be all her fault. If she had been by their side, they might not have caught whatever those diseases were, and even if they did fall ill, they probably wouldn't have died. She pounded her chest. "How can I have raised someone else's child while killing my own? Now that you are all dead, what is left for me? Take me with you," she cried out. But her voice was already cracked and exhausted and after a few words she choked up. She coughed hoarsely and looked over at the door, suddenly reminded of an incident that had taken place several days earlier.

There was a violent downpour that night. She couldn't get to sleep, having seen how sick Pong-yöm was when she had stopped by earlier. So she snuck out of Myöng-su's house in her night clothes in the middle of the night. When she had first moved into their house, she would go to bed fully dressed, sneaking out to go nurse Pong-hŭi as soon as Myöng-su's family went to sleep. Once Myöng-su's mother started staying up to keep an eye on her, Pong-hŭi's mother would change as if going to bed and come running to her children in her night clothes whenever she saw a chance. Since Myöng-su's mother knew that she had already visited her children

earlier that day, Pong-yöm's mother couldn't possibly ask to go again. So she slipped out without making a noise while they were sleeping.

She was enveloped in darkness and large raindrops driven by strong winds were pounding down mercilessly on her bare shoulders. The lightning was blinding and the thunder was bursting so loud it seemed they were splitting heaven apart, startling her as she made her way forward. But she was afraid of nothing. As the lightning flashed above her in the sky, she worried only about her daughters' well-being. She arrived at the house panting, only to be startled by a large, whitish mass. Realizing that it was Pong-yöm, she rushed toward her.

"My gosh, why are you lying here? Do you want to die?"

Although wet from the rain, Pong-yöm's body was burning hot. Her mother felt faint. She shuddered at the pain that came over her. It felt like someone was scraping out her liver. She kept beating her own head, unable to rid herself of the thought that she should just throw away her job as a wet nurse. They lay down together side by side, and the flames of anxiety once again began to lick at her. She imagined that Myöng-su had just woken up; that his wailing was reverberating through the large house; that Myöng-su's mother and father were now wide awake; that they were frowning upon her, berating her, roaring at her to quit and get out. Even as she alternately caressed both of her daughters, these images remained vivid in her mind, making the tips of her fingers numb. Finally she got up. She thought Pong-hŭi was asleep, but she tried to come along with her mother, hanging on to her nipples. "Mommy!" Pong-hŭi cried. Pong-yöm could not quite tell her not to go, but sobbing she clung to her skirt, "Stay just a little longer . . ." She could almost hear Pong-yöm's trembling voice now. No, she would never forget that voice.

She sat up straight and then got up and walked around the room trying not to think about these things. But these painful memories were like sparks flying from a fire—they could not be stopped. "I wonder if he is crying now," she mumbled to herself,

thinking of Myöng-su's smiling face. Then she spat out words that she really did not mean, trying to purge herself of her angst-ridden thoughts. "Aiii! You bastard, it was because of you that my Pong-yö'm and Pong-hüi died. Get away from me!" But Myöng-su's face moved closer to her, almost to where it seemed she could reach out and touch him . . . She bit her hand hard. Her longing for Myöng-su was as painful as the ache she felt in her hand. She stopped in her tracks, recalling how Myöng-su's mother would not let her see him. She listlessly dropped her head. Ha! What a stupid bitch I am! You killed your own children and you want to see someone else's? Why are you alive, not dead? Why live? Why live? If I had died then and there, I wouldn't be going through this ordeal now.

She had considered following her husband in death and now the idea came back to her. The reason why she had met with such tragedy in her life, she decided, was because her husband had died. And the communists who killed her husband, they were her archenemy. And when she thought about it, the reason why P'angdung dared to commit such an act against her was because she didn't have a husband, wasn't it? That's right. It is all because of the communists. She could see Pong-sik's face, Pong-sik who was killed by the militia for being a communist. The image of P'angdung also floated up clearly in her mind. "That bastard. How dare you say that my son is a communist? . . . If you want to throw me out, then just do it. What kind of trick is that? Dirty bastard. Pong-sik, are you dead or alive?"

Just calling out his name gave her a glimmer of hope, as if she had been able to get a grasp on the end of a string that might lead her to him. All right, let's go to Kukcha Street. As soon as she made up her mind to go look for Pong-sik, it also struck her that she must go see Myöng-su first. As she called Myöng-su by name in her mind, she unconsciously squeezed her nipples. He must be crying out for her now . . . She rushed outside. But Myöng-su's mother's face appeared right in front of her, mercilessly blocking her path. She found herself unable to take another step forward. "You bitch! Why are you stopping me from seeing Myöng-su? All you did was

give birth, and I am the one who has been raising him. Bitch. Who would he be more attached to, you or me? He's mine." She glared around her. But then she dropped her head, realizing there was no way she would be able to see him and run her fingers through his hair.

The night was calm. The quiet seemed to cast a deep pall over her heart, which had been burning so dreadfully. The strong smell of boiled potatoes came her way through the heavy air. Recalling that it was harvest time, she looked around to see who was boiling such delicious potatoes. For a moment she wished for a warm potato and then a bitter smile came upon her face. She felt infinitely sorry for herself, for wanting to eat something and for wishing to go on. Leaning against the wall, she gazed vacantly upward. The moon was aloft in the sky and stars shone here and there. Bright stars. They reminded her of the eyes of Pong-yö'm and Pong-hüi, and were also like Myöng-su's clear eyes. Myöng-su used to gaze up at her as he squeezed her breast. "Bastard. Get away from me!" she mumbled to herself. And she returned to the eyes of her two daughters, swollen from crying for their mother. She would never be able to see those eyes again in this world! She thought of visiting the public cemetery. Countless graves lying quietly in the moonlight entered her mind. She felt a sense of discomfort passing over her like a splash of cold water. At that moment Myöng-su's face, like the moon, suddenly appeared before her. She stopped herself short, thinking that death was indeed a terrifying thing. She looked away, in another direction. And then she started forward, as if startled by something.

Spread like snow flowers between her room and the shadow of the eaves of the house across the way, the moonlight seemed to her like the white baby blanket upon which Myöng-su would be lying awake while calling for her. For its part, though, the moon cast it beams down upon her face without pity. Holding her cheeks in her hands, she stepped into its light. She was trying as hard as she could to hold back that which was pouring out of her, her call out to Myöng-su. She gasped for air, looking up at the moon, so per-

fectly full and round, without the slightest blemish. Tears were streaming down her face. "How ugly it can be to feel such affection," she thought to herself.

Looking down at her own shadow, the question for her now was whether she should live or die. It seemed to her that there would be no greater happiness than to die right away, forgetting everything. Her body felt like it weighed a thousand pounds. Death would take care of all this weight. How should I kill myself? Lye? No, no, that won't do. You die only after all your insides rot away. How could I do it that way? Maybe I should I drown myself then . . ." Towering blue waves whirled around in her mind, terrifying her. She grabbed the wall. "I'll live as long as I can. And I will see Pong-sik again and what happens to the communists. Heaven will punish them. Those bastards, just wait and see." She shuddered, her teeth chattering.

She heard footsteps and looked toward the inner quarters, thinking that the landlady was coming to fight with her again. "Why are you standing there?" someone asked from behind.

She turned around quickly and was happy to see Yong-ae's mother. Maybe she had news about Myöng-su.

"Have you seen Myöng-su?"

"Myöng-su? I saw him just for a moment this afternoon."

"He cries, right? I am sure he is crying a lot."

Yong-ae's mother gazed at her, thinking back to how earlier in the afternoon Myöng-su had been crying so loudly. She realized instantly how much Pong-yö'm's mother longed to see Myöng-su.

"Did you go see Myöng-su yesterday?"

"Yes, but that bitch wouldn't let me see him. Ha! What a stupid bitch."

Yong-ae's mother hesitated a bit. "Don't go there anymore. I don't know who told her, but she heard that Pong-yö'm and Pong-hũ died from typhoid fever. And she was fuming. Don't go there," she said.

Pong-yö'm's mother felt a wave of resentment come over her. "What typhoid fever is she talking about? They are both dead, so

why play these tricks anyway? Just let it be. Do they think I'd kill myself or something if I can't see him? No, I won't go, won't go. Ha!"

She was venting an anger that arose from deep within, as if she was confronting Myöng-su's mother right then and there. Yong-ae's mother was watching the expression on her face. "Let's stop this kind of talk! Have you eaten dinner yet?" she asked.

The smell of bluefish seemed to be coming from Yong-ae's mother, who was squatting down with her skirt folded underneath her. She suddenly realized that hunger had been making everything that much harder to take. She considered asking Yong-ae's mother for some cold rice.

"You didn't eat today either. Those of us who are alive have to eat! I knew you wouldn't have eaten and I was going to bring some rice . . . Wait just a moment. I will bring it right over." Yong-ae's mother got up quickly and left.

Her stomach felt so empty that she was barely able to go back inside the room and plunk herself down on the floor.

Yong-ae's mother came back right away. "Have some of this. And you must get up. You have to find a way to make a living. . . . Someone told me about a profitable business."

For a long time, Pong-yö'm's mother was completely absorbed in eating. Finally, she looked up at Yong-ae's mother.

"It has a high margin. You know, my husband left today to do the work."

"What kind of work is it?" She pricked up her ears at the word "work."

"You know, selling salt," replied Yong-ae's mother, lowering her voice.

"What if you get caught?" Pong-yö'm's mother opened her eyes wide.

"Well, that's why you have to be quick about it. Nothing is easy when it comes to making money, you know," she said, her own worries about her husband who had left on a long journey coming back to her. They were both silent for quite some time.

"When you are feeling stronger, you can try it yourself. Salt costs less than thirty *chŏn* a pound in Korea, but here it costs two *wŏn* and thirty *chŏn*. Wouldn't that leave you with a nice little profit?"

Pong-yŏm's mother felt her strength coming back at these words, but then she thought of the two daughters she had just lost. Other people go around selling salt for the sake of their sons and daughters but in her case was there anyone she needed to work so hard to provide for? . . . When she finally came to the conclusion that it would be for her own survival, she felt a powerful sense of loneliness. But even if it was just for herself and no one else, if she didn't struggle to earn some money could she somehow expect someone to offer her as much as a spoonful of rice water? Starving was actually something much more terrifying than death. It was far more difficult to endure. Just a moment ago, her thinking had been hazy and her body unbearably sluggish, but a few spoonfuls of rice had made all the difference in the world. Didn't the oppressive air pressing down on her chest seem to have floated away? As long as you are alive, you have no choice. You have to eat. She suddenly remembered chewing on the scallion roots after giving birth to Pong-hŭi in the shed. She shuddered at the thought. And she realized for the first time that although she had suffered a great deal emotionally, at least she had not gone hungry all this time. She once again pictured Myŏng-su's face, thinking to herself that Myŏng-su's mother might come and get her because he would not stop crying. She put her spoon down.

"Why don't you eat some more? You shouldn't worry about anything else. All you have to focus on is getting your health back," said Yong-ae's mother.

"Ha, what health . . . I lost my husband. And then my son and daughters." Her shaking voice trailed off, and she looked over toward the door.

Yong-ae's mother was looking into her face, made even more terrifyingly ashen by the moonlight seeping in, and heaved a big

sigh. "How can Heaven be so indifferent?" she thought, gazing at the moonlight.

"Well, what can you do? Since you can't kill yourself, you have to get stronger and live. And don't even think about the past." Yong-ae's mother sat closer to her and tidied up her disheveled hair.

Pong-yŏm's mother was thinking of Myŏng-su's chubby fingers, how they would play with her hair while he was suckling. She once again felt her chest fluttering and suddenly and almost unconsciously reached for Yong-ae's mother's hands. "Do you think Myŏng-su is sleeping now?" she asked, burying her head in Yong-ae's mother's skirt and sobbing.

"Please don't cry. He's someone else's child. What's the use?" declared Yong-ae's mother, also crying in spite of herself.

"I just want to see him once more time . . . And I'll never go there again. Let's go, Yong-ae's mother." Knowing she would be refused if she went alone, she figured that she would take Yong-ae's mother along with her.

Yong-ae's mother was at a loss, especially when she remembered the harsh curses that Myŏng-su's mother had been throwing out at Pong-yŏm's mother. So she sat there quietly for a long while. Suddenly Pong-yŏm's mother bolted up and started pulling Yong-ae's mother's arm.

"Pong-yŏm's mother, please calm down. Maybe we'll go tomorrow." Grabbing her tightly, Yong-ae's mother sat her down. The moonlight was still playing on their faces.

6. SMUGGLING

Autumn in the north is particularly bleak. On a day when the thundering sound of the wind seemed to be shaking the earth, Pong-yŏm's mother poured four pounds of salt in a bag, hoisted it on to her head, and set off behind her fellow merchants. The party con-

sisted of six people, but Pong-yöm's mother was the only woman. Their guide was a man who had spent his last ten years smuggling salt. He would have been able to find his way blindfolded. Knowing this, everyone simply obeyed his orders. They had to keep their mouths shut while on the road with the salt; they used body language to communicate with each other.

They walked in single file. The wind was still blowing hard. Each of them focused on the person immediately ahead in the line. They marched along with bated breath, sometimes mistaking the sound of the wind for the shouts of policemen. Fresh in their minds was what they had heard yesterday about a man who got shot to death. Their sense of foreboding only deepened, growing as dark as the shadows spread across the path they were treading.

Everyone was dressed in quilted cotton except for Pong-yöm's mother, who was wearing summer clothes and old rubber shoes, with a toe sticking out. As time passed, she didn't feel the cold as much as the unbearable heaviness of the salt on her head. Her head smarted as if she was carrying a bundle of branches on fire; other times it felt like an iron bat was drilling a hole in the middle of her skull. When they divided up the salt, she insisted on taking six pounds like all of the men, but they were finally able to persuade her not to take so much. So she was carrying only four pounds. She hadn't walked ten *li* before her head began to ache. Grimacing, she tried to lessen the pain by lifting the bag of salt a little above her head. But it was useless. Her arms hurt so bad it felt like they were falling off. She wanted to throw the salt down on the ground as hard as she could and just die right there. But that was a futile thought. Her feet were following those of the men in front of her. "Maybe I could put it on my back like the men . . . I wonder if I could do that at this point. . . . But I would need rope, yes, some rope. . . . Are we going to take a break? Let's take a break." These words were on the tip of her tongue, but she soon swallowed them. She kept trying to lift the bag of salt a little bit to relieve the pain on her head.

Sweat was dripping down her forehead and the small of her back, forming a stream that reached all the way down to her feet. Her rubber shoes, wet with sweat, were so slippery that the slightest misstep almost made her fall over. She tried to gather herself together each time she stumbled, but the sound of the footsteps in front of her would immediately start to fade in the distance. Gasping for air and her sides cramping, she would try with all her might to catch up with them. I should have taken just two pounds. . . . Should I throw some out? What should I do? But feeling the salt perched on her head, she couldn't quite bring herself to do it.

She soon heard what seemed like a river flowing in the distance. Just the sound of the current was relaxing, releasing the tension in her heart. When they made it there, she thought, they would all take a little break, put down their salt loads and drink up the water to their heart's content. No sooner did she envision this than a new anxiety came over her. Would somebody be lying in wait, hiding on the opposite bank? This new worry intensified as the sound of the current grew closer. Even this cool, refreshing sound began to cause pain, as if it were pricking her ears with the end of a needle. She thought that she would die from exhaustion if she had to go on like this any longer.

Right then the man in front of her stopped in his tracks and she followed suit. There was a terrible gust of wind and then the buzzing of an insect came from somewhere, mixed in with the sound of flowing water. The man in front of her groaned as he sat down. Letting her salt bag down, she too collapsed on the ground. And then clutching her head with her two hands, she forced her eyes shut. Up to this point she had not closed her eyes for a second, as if needles were stuck inside her eyelids. Even as she sat herself down, though, she was paying attention to the men in front of her to make sure she wasn't the only one taking a break.

Now that her pain had subsided a bit, her whole body began to shake like a leaf. She started to roll herself up in a ball, but the man next to her nudged her on her side. She stood up quickly. And then

she straightened up even more at the sound of the men taking their clothes off. She hesitated a bit but then swiftly undressed, rolled her clothes into a bundle, and then hung it around her neck. She felt a considerable pain in her neck, which had been immobilized from all the weight, and she rubbed it with her hands. Will my neck still be there on my shoulders by the time I get to Yongjöng? One of the men placed the salt bag back on her head, and she started walking again.

She heard the sound of splashing in the water; the men up front must have already waded into the river. She could feel her own toes already stepping past the sand on the shore and into the water. She looked down at the current and fear rose up inside her as the chill of the river entered her bones. The sound of the current flowing in the deep darkness was overwhelming. The river swirled around her, wrapping her body in its embrace and shaking it. She felt her hair standing on end and shuddered. She was breathing the air in deeply.

The deeper the water, the larger the stones under her feet, and it became increasingly difficult to take a step forward. The gravely bottom was buried underneath slippery weeds. Her toes would slide this way and that as if they had a mind of their own and she felt faint. She lost her footing time and again and kept trying to regain it. She got far enough in to where the river ran above her chest. Right then she once again slid on a stone. She tried to regain her balance, did everything she could to hold herself back from falling, all the while grasping the salt bag so tightly that her body felt hot. But there was no way she could pull her two legs back up straight to a walking position—they were just slipping away from her too fast. She made an effort to call out for help, but for some reason she felt suffocated. Her voice was ever so faint, almost completely lost in the flow of the river and the winds; she barely seemed to be making any sound at all. Mustering everything she had, she was able to maintain her balance by standing on her left leg. Even as she trembled in fear, recognizing that she was on the verge of death, the only thought that ran through her, from her head down

to the toes slipping away at the bottom of the river, was that the salt would melt away in the water.

The men in front had almost reached the opposite bank when they noticed that Pong-yöm's mother wasn't with them. They looked around for her and the leader doubled back. He was able to find her easily. And he realized instantly that if he had delayed a moment longer, Pong-yöm's mother would have died. Holding her hand, he pulled her up and lifted the salt bag onto his own shoulder. He felt a rock underneath his foot and immediately knew that was why she had stumbled. He had guided the group far away from that rock and wondered what had happened. He held her hands tightly as they crossed together.

Everything around her had been hazy, but Pong-yöm's mother began to think clearly again as she stepped through the water. Still, her dizziness made it somewhat difficult for her to walk in a straight line and she gagged on the excess saliva whirling around in her mouth. She was doing what she could not to move her head, unaware that she was no longer carrying the salt bag. The rest of the men had been anxiously waiting for her; they all got up when she and the guide reached the bank. The men embraced them and some even shed tears. Their own situation was painful but they seemed to have felt even worse for this woman. And thinking of their wives, their children and their parents going hungry in the night, waiting for them to come back without a wink of sleep, they heaved long, deep sighs.

The moment passed; nervous and terribly frightened, they knew they couldn't rest there for even for a short period of time. So they placed Pong-yöm's mother in the middle of the line and started walking again. They must have reached dry fields. She felt with her toes the sharp, cut edges of the stalks of millet and sorghum. It was unbearably painful. Several times she tried to take off her rubber shoes but she couldn't bring herself to leave them behind. She would tell herself to throw them away but then find herself unable to carry out her own orders. She just couldn't make up her mind. Her torn rubber shoes would occasionally get caught

by millet and sorghum roots and it would take her a long time to dislodge them. But she still couldn't discard the shoes. They moved through the fields and eventually reached the top of a mountain.

"Who are you? Raise your hands and stay where you are. Or else we will shoot!" A brilliant bluish light showered on their faces. The light felt like a sharp blade or even a flying bullet coming toward them and they involuntarily lifted their arms up quickly. The same thought crossed all of their minds: They will confiscate the salt. Having resigned themselves to this, all they could do was pray that these people were either communists or members of a militia. There was a chance that if they pleaded with either of these groups hard enough, they would let them pass with their bags of salt. Their captors searched their guide first and then everyone else, going through everything. Then they blew out the light and whispered among themselves for a long time. The salt smugglers felt a chill coming over their bodies in the darkness; they could not tell whether these people had drawn out their swords or were aiming guns at them. They became all the more anxious.

Out of nowhere, a resounding, steely voice floated up through the blowing wind. "All of you! Do you know why you are carrying these bags of salt in the middle of the night when you should be sleeping?" They all thought the same thing: All right! They're communists! At least they won't take the salt away. What can we say to them? The voice was still flowing out in the darkness. The longer it went on, the more they wished they would just be released. The thought that the Security Forces, hiding either near them or on the other side of the mountain, might find out that they had been listening to the words of communists made them increasingly nervous.

Pong-yöm's mother recalled a speech given by one of the teachers at Pong-yöm's school in Ssandöggöu. This voice sounded quite similar to that teacher's. She raised her head and tried to see who it was that was doing the talking. But only the voice could be

heard in the pitch darkness that surrounded her. Is my Pong-sik with these people? This thought suddenly occurred to her, but she quickly told herself that this was a needless worry. Her Pong-sik was an unusually smart boy, one who would never have gotten mixed up with the likes of these people. With this in mind, her anxiety about Pong-sik diminished somewhat. Then she began wondering whether their words were just a ruse to take their salt from them. Or, she thought, they will kill us after the speech is done.

The speech in the darkness came to an end, and the salt smugglers even received a blessing for their distant journey. They started to walk again. But their steps were hurried. What if they are just pretending to let us go? What if they come after us and shoot us down? Only when they had finally made it off the mountain and entered an expanse of dry fields, did they all begin to breathe more easily. The communists are XXXXXXXX, they thought, and everyone heaved a sigh of relief one more time.¹⁰

As her nervousness departed, it began to occur to her that those people were indeed communists. And she felt only contempt for herself, she who had just stood there without doing anything. She considered herself to be absolutely the stupidest person on earth. There she was, face to face with her enemies, those who had killed her husband and pushed her into such desperate straits. And she had not been able to utter a single word. What was more, even at this very moment she was not properly full of the hatred and abomination she had always maintained toward them. Ah! Here she was, moving one leg forward after another while carrying a bag of salt on her head, all just to live. It was enough to make her laugh. She considered that the less capable a person was and also the stupider, the bigger the desire to live must be. One question that bothered her, though, was why they just let them go without

¹⁰ Colonial censors cut this passage. See the image of a censored page from "Salt" in this volume.

XX
 XX
 XXXXXXXX could help fight. No XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
 XX
 XX
 rose.¹¹ She bolted up.

Translated by Jin-kyung Lee

¹¹ This passage was censored. In 2006 a Korean scholar, Han Man-su, was able to recover most of this lost passage with the help of forensic science. See Han Man-su, "Kang Kyŏng-ae 'Sogŭm' ūi pokcha pogwŏn kwa kŏmyŏl uhoe rosŏŭi 'nanwŏssŭgi'" [Restoring Kang Kyŏng-ae's "Salt" and the strategy of bypassing censorship by "distributed writing"], *Han'guk munhak yŏn'gu* [Korean Literary Studies] Vol. 31, (December 2006): 169-191. By "nanwŏssŭgi" (distributed writing), Han means that the colonial period authors "distributed" or "scattered" key passages with political messages throughout the texts rather than concentrating them in one spot. I add my translation of the restored passage here:

She XXX remembered their words from that night on the mountain ridge, the words that she listened to with indifference or rather with spite. "You are our comrades! Only when we join forces, can we counter xx our enemy, those who are rich." Those words XXXX in that pitch darkness! She could feel her heart quaking. Those people who did not confiscate our salt bags. If those XXXX were at her side now, she felt they very well might have fought on her behalf. No, she was certain that they would have fought for her. "It was the rich who stole my XXX salt!" Unwittingly, like this XXX, the complaints that she had silently suppressed until then were soaring up like a towering blaze inside her. She bolted up.



"Wandering swans." A life of impoverishment sends streams of families into Manchuria. This image was part of a series that the artist and writer, Yi Chu-hong, created in dialogue with contemporary developments in animation and film. Yi called this comic a "cartoon talkie" — he placed the Korean term, "manwhatoki," in roman lettering at the top of its first installment—and he designed each image in the form of a still film frame. Yi appears to have adapted this term from its contemporary usage in Japan, where it referred to early animation techniques. Source: *Sindonga*, July 1936.

"Where can we go now?"
 A wave of Japanese settlers
 enters Seoul by train,
 pushing Koreans out of the city.
 Source: *Sidae ilbo*, July 4,
 1925.



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A postcard showing a steamship docked in Pusan harbor during the 1920s. As Yi Nam-wŏn's "Pusan" high-lights, during the Japanese colonial period Pusan served as an important transfer point between the metro-pole and the colony. Source: image courtesy of the Busan Museum (*Pusan pangmulgwan*).



The colonial police implements new crackdown measures.
 Source: *Chosŏn ilbo*, April 23, 1925.



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