

THE CRIMSON DAWN.

A Christian Tale by an Unknown Author

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CHAPTER I

The House of Old Man Ye.

The brown and yellow thatch of two score houses sprawled in crooked, snake-like lines along the sandy shore of the sea. A Korean village is so winding and the streets or alley ways so twisting and tortuous that a stranger visiting one for the first time is apt to wonder how in the world the people ever managed to make them so winding. The houses really are massed together with as little thought or plan as the unintentional grouping of kindergarten blocks dropped from the careless hand of a child. As each new builder adds a house or room to the original he branches off into whatsoever direction or shape his fancy pictures, and the village settles itself into irregular unexpected forms. The result of this accumulative method of village building in Saemal was true to this custom, the paths made many unbelievable windings and turns between mud houses, tumbled down gray roofs and stone encrusted walls. Except for a few well-to-do owners of the near-by rice fields the diminishing population of this little hamlet were mostly fishermen whose boats and nets comprised their chief worldly possessions and the daily haul of speckled, spotted, striped beauties, their stock in trade. The main street was nothing more than a dirty alley ending near the mouth of the small river which flowed from the distant hills to meet the sea at Saemal. With the receding and advancing waters the expanse of sand widens, then narrows, with the changing tides. Racks for drying fish are much in evidence. A few belated women still beat their clothes by the river bank. Scrawny pigs, mangy, blear-eyed dogs and naked children tumble and roll together on the beach.

It was one of the hottest days of an unusually hot July; the air was laden with sickening odours from the heavily loaded racks and noxious miasma and from the sluggish slime-covered river. Poor little mountain stream, you have surely lost your way! The silvery singing brooklet of your far home is now degenerated into a noisome, open sewer. Little stream, do you not remember the firm hard stretch of golden sand and your many happy wanderings between flower-decked banks? How sad then must be your heart at this ignoble fate!

In the early twilight the fierce heat of the day had ended in a smoky redness amid which each rock, pebble and shell was giving forth the heat absorbed from the pitiless blaze of the sun. Two small fishing smacks were lying close to the shore securely tethered for the night. Away

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somewhere between the purple hills and the sleeping river a dog howled. Out across the rippleless surface of the sea many gray hulls and brown sails lay motionless and calm, vividly silhouetted against the hot lurid sky.

A tall, well-built man came with swinging stride along the brink of the river, turned the corner by the fish-racks and passed into main street without a glance at the frolicking children or toiling womrn. He made his way along this narrow road with bowed head, and only now and then gave a frowning glance toward the crowded doorways. The steaming heat of the tiny houses had driven the majority of the inhabitants to seek a cooler place, and many of these were sitting or lying on straw mats just outside their door. The hour of evening had brought Grandfather Ye home from his rice field and when he reached his familiar old wall he entered the arched gate to the women's quarters. With no more greeting than a deeper frown to the busy workers there, he stretched himself full length upon the mat spread invitingly near upon the earthen floor of the open courtyard to take a well earned rest for his weary bones. Although Mr. Ye was a grandfather he was by no means an old man, but to the contrary was in the prime of a vigorous manhood. His life was imbittered and hardened by the loss of his only son a few years past and by the disappointing hardness of fate in giving that son only a daughter to carry on the name and honor of the house of Ye. This balking of his desires and plans by an unkind fate was reflected in an unholy temper, and "Old Man Ye" as he was called by his neighbors was known by all of them as a hard old fellow. He was one of the few well-to-do farmers of the district but he was far too crafty and wise to show his wealth. He protected himself alike from official extortions and exactions on one side and from family demands on the other by the appearance and profession of poverty.

Lying now on the cool earth he gave vent to half muttered grumblings and complaints. The flies, the heat, the buzzing mosquitoes, the delay of supper, all these things exasperated him and added fuel to his temper. His plaint was against all humanity in general but of his "lazy, good for nothing women folks" in particular. These long suffering ones, Mrs. Ye and her daughter-in-law, widow or the late lamented son, flew frantically about the courtyard and kitchen lean-to preparing the evening meal. Kumokie, the eight year old granddaughter, was hidden from Mr. Ye's vision by several huge earthen jars. Bethinking himself that a nice drink of cool water would help his feelings he raised himself upon his elbow and bellowed with all his might :

"Kumok-ah! Kumok-ah! You little beast come here! Why that silly mother of yours wanted to call you 'Golden jade' is more than I can see,

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vile, disappointing creature that you are! I shall call you ‘Kangajie,’ Little Dog,—much more suitable. Where are you? Come here or I’ll beat more speed into your lazy body,” all of which was entirely unnecessary and uncalled for. The trembling child had been standing just out of sight, and at the first call was right there before him. In her hand the big, dripping gourd of water. With a weary grunt Mr. Ye reached out his great hairy hand, took the water with an impatient gesture and drank long and deep. After his thirst was satisfied he gave the vessel a sudden flirt and flipped the remaining water over the child. Kumokie was never surprised by any such affectionate move on the part of this man and so with silent, unchildlike solemnity she shook the drops from her hair and clothes while the man roared with laughter.

“Just exactly like a puppy I used to have! Kangajie! here Kangajie!” Mrs. Ye appeared at this moment carrying the tray-like table with the master’s supper, and as he sampled the savory dishes thereon and lifted the chunks of snowy rice his temper improved and he felt in a real amiable frame of mind. By the time his flying chopsticks had emptied the rice bowl and disposed of the last of boiled fish he felt quite able to discuss family problems and important matters concerning the future of the house of Ye.

The bowls and fragments of the evening meal were finally cleared away, the kitchen shed was quiet for the night. The tired, pale-faced woman whose only name was “Kumokie’s mother,” silently withdrew to the tiny room across the courtyard when the imperious call rang out from the sarang:

“Grandmother! Grandmother! Don’t you know I am waiting for you in here? Why don’t you let that worthless mother of Kumokie do the work of a daughter-in-law instead of doing it all yourself? Sure, you too have to work when we are as poor as we are, but that lazy thing ought to do her share too,” said Mr. Ye as he knocked the ashes from his long stemmed pipe and proceeded to refill it with finely shredded tobacco. Timid, shrinking Mrs. Ye was a very different type from her husband. That gentleman had peculiar characteristics which gave this gentle little woman many hours of care and anxiety. She was as colorless and faded as the sea on a rainy day. Her only desire was to remain unobserved and to keep from displeasing her lord and master any more than she could possibly help. He was a miser at heart and all the petty economies and bitter hardships of the much pressed home fell heaviest on her unprotected, shrunken shoulders. It was a matter of general conjecture that he had many rich fields in distant parts, besides fishing smacks and tackle, but

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never did he admit the ownership of anything besides the few fields in the immediate neighborhood of Saemal. Mrs. Ye had secret knowledge of these facts at which others so shrewdly guessed, but only once, and that in her early married life, had she even hinted at such a thing. Such was the tempest of abuse and the hardness of the blows called down on her luckless head that never again had she been so indiscreet. As for the whereabouts of the secret hiding place of the suspected gains, she knew no more about it than did the others and probably gave less thought to the question, for she had more important and personal matters to face. Another outstanding characteristic of this miser farmer was his intense fear of the unseen. Many say that it is the women of Korea who keep alive the ancient superstitions concerning the evil spirits, the goblins, and folklore of old Korea, but here was one man who was quite the equal with any old wife in his fear of offending some spirit. There was no well defined religious belief in his heart concerning these beings whom he feared. Some of his superstitions he culled from the Buddhists, some from the lowly sorceress, while others which he treasured most were those things concerning the worship of his ancestors. It was an all important necessity to leave behind him a son to offer fitting and proper sacrifices to these august beings. There is no doubt that the desire to obtain for his own soul the proper reverence when he should shuffle off this mortal coil was also a major consideration. It seems truly remarkable that he had never taken unto himself other wives or concubines, and he frequently gave voice to his dissatisfaction and grudge against fate for his present son-less state. This discontentment was written on every feature as he sat and called his wife that evening with harsh voiced words. Mrs. Ye knew that this interview was not apt to be a pleasant one, so it was with visible timidity that she answered the summons and entered the stuffy room in which he sat. She seated herself in silence. Her thin tired hands working and twisting within the folds of her apron were trembling evidence of the condition of her mind.

“Speak, woman! Can’t you say anything?”

“Yes, my lord, what shall I say?” was the low-voiced reply.

“Oh, well, of course! who would be so stupid as to expect conversation from a woman? Answer my question about your daughter-in-law. Why doesn’t she work? Everyone about this place has to work to make a living. I really do not expect you to make intelligent conversation, but it is supposed that you know how to manage household matters. Hey, can’t you make your daughter-in-law obey you? Shame!” the scolding voice rose to a perfect roar.

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“Do you expect me, a poor farmer, to support a woman like that in luxury and idleness? A daughter-in-law without a son ought to be turned out altogether, I say.”

“Yes, Oh yes, indeed she does do all she can,” wailed the harassed woman.

“Truly she does all she is able. Don’t you remember that I have told you how ill she is at times? Since it is the great white sickness, I fear that she may die soon. Did you not say that you could not and would not have another funeral this year?” His injustice and seeming forgetfulness so far overcame her fear and timidity as to make this long speech possible. Just at this moment, as if to justify her defence there came from the room across the court the hollow, racking cough of a consumptive.

“Oh, don’t be afraid of that, she is just playing off, I’ve seen the like before. No danger of her dying soon, that cough is put on, just don’t pay any attention to such tricks and she will soon stop it.” But the uneasy look in his eyes as he listened to the harrowing sounds from the dark room across the way belied his brave words. After all it was easier to keep a living woman even though she was idle than to bury a dead one, especially when she ate next to nothing, and never had need of new clothes. When a member of the family dies, although during life she may have been only a despised and abused daughter-in-law, a disembodied spirit is something to be taken into consideration, besides a funeral is a very expensive item. To be sure it had never entered father Ye’s mind to try to win love and gratitude from that poor tired heart while she lived. It would have given her scant comfort to know that when her spirit was released from that quivering, toil worn body that every mark of respect would be given her, because, forsooth this man feared the harm she might then do to him. Mr. Ye sat listening to these uneasy sounds which came from the kunapang and frowned upon his wife as though she were to blame for this too, as for all other domestic trials, but for once her mind was so taken up with other important things that she did not shrink from the blazing eyes, but sat quietly waiting until the great question which engrossed her thought should be brought up for discussion. The frown of the master deepened as he looked at this woman, who had been his partner for thirty years and more. Three sons and two daughters she had borne him, but only one had escaped the dread scourge of childhood, the small-pox demon. Now this last son, the pride and joy of his heart, was also dead and he was wondering again for the hundredth time why he had been such a fool as to never take another wife. Deep in his heart he knew that he would never do anything that would call for such an outlay of his

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precious money. One household was enough expense, two was out of the question. As for the patient little wife, she was now as always the humble servant, there was no question of love given or received. It is to be doubted if any idea of wifely help above this dumb service and dog-like fidelity had ever entered her mind, or if so such tender thoughts had been killed and buried so long ago that they were forgotten.

After several minutes of reminiscent silence Mr. Ye drew a long breath and asked with seeming indifference :

“Well, did the chugmae (go-between, or professional matchmaker) come to-day?”

“Yes, she came,” this brought up the important matter which was on her mind and the old wife sat straighter and took visible interest in this question.

“Um, very good. No doubt those poor Kims in the city are only too glad to have their son marry our grand-child and become also our adopted son?” This statement was made with the rising inflection of interrogation, but by these words he revealed another strong characteristic, an intense egotism coupled with the determination to connect his family with some old aristocratic blood, that the gold he cherished and hoarded so carefully might build up a great house to the name of Ye and do memory to him as to the founder of such an estate.

Thus he was not merely on the outlook for some man willing to let his son be adopted by another, but he had very definite ideas about what kind of family it should be from which he took this son. After his own boy died this idea took deep root in his mind and now he was fully determined to carry out his purpose. The Kims were certainly one of the best and most aristocratic and high bred families in all that part of Korea, and since they had long ago lost their money he had little doubt that they would receive his proposal gladly.

“This woman says that they are willing to consider it since they have two older sons, but I am not sure that they are glad to do it for they are asking a goodly sum of money in exchange which I am sure you will not be willing to give, or, I mean, which you will not be able to grant I fear. Then they are so proud and high-minded she says that they will have very little to do with common people.”

The dark eyes opposite glittered with a dangerous light as he snapped :

“The slave dealers! How much do they want?”

“Fifty thousand yang.” The answering voice was low and sad.

“What? Dare you to say that again! They must know that I a poor

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man have not that much money," he shrieked in fury.

This was a very dramatic situation indeed, the clashing of two of the deepest feelings of his heart, the desire and determination to have a son, even though an adopted son, and the love of gold, that miserly instinct which so far had been the ruling passion of his life.

Kumokie, the proposed wife for this prospective son, was no more taken into account in these plans than if she had been some inanimate chattel on her grandfather's farm. He wanted a son, she was old enough to marry and by this stroke of diplomacy these two expensive birds would be killed with one stone. There would be one great, grand occasion instead of two and thus save money; that, as always, was the main consideration.

Far into the night the conference continued. The pride and standoffishness of the honorable Kim family made it seem to the plebeian Ye a most desirable thing to form an alliance with such, and he was beginning to fear that this aristocrat was only making a politer refusal to his overtures by demanding a much larger amount of money than he thought Ye possessed. This fear was increased by the realization that it must be a secret deal, for if people heard of such a transaction he would never again be able to pose as a poor man, as poor as he desired others to think him to be.

The final decision was to offer twenty thousand yang for the privilege of adopting the third son of Kim, who should become the husband of Kumokie, or, which according to Korean custom would be the other way around, the husband of Kumokie would be adopted by her grandfather as his heir. While this discussion was under way one of those principally concerned was asleep in the stuffy little kunapang across the courtyard. She is a tiny thing for even eight years, almost a baby. The smooth, soft skin is a creamy pink on throat and arms, shading into a healthy tan on cheek and brow, the golden brown of summer sun reflected by the sea sands. With a babyish movement she flung one plump little arm over her head. The sad hearted, sleepless woman watching by her side stifled a sob and gathered the beloved form to her heart.

"Oh! my baby! my baby! They would sell you, too. They would give you in exchange for something they want. But they shall not do it! They shall not, I swear it. There! There now, precious, don't cry! Its just mother. There! there now, go back to sleep." This last was accompanied by a light tap, tap, on her stomach, for the passionate embraces had half wakened the child. After a while the quite regular breathing told that the little one was again in dream land and the mother took up her soliloquy.

"Only a girl! Only a little girl! But you are mine,—all mine! Who

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else has cared for you or loved and protected you but me? You are only a girl to them—no good to the family, only a burden and expense. Ah! But you are my life. None shall take you from me, my own, until they have first taken that poor worthless life of mine! Yes, but what am I? Only a dying helpless woman.” This, punctuated with painful coughing spells.

What, indeed, was she to take a stand against old man Ye? Homeless, friendless, dying, to whom can she turn?

“O God of Heaven, if there indeed be such a God who cares and loves us, have mercy upon me! Oh God I don’t know how to pray, and I used to laugh when the people in the great city tried to teach me about you. If there isn’t such a God, there ought to be because we poor helpless ones need one so much. Help me Oh! God, help me to be a good woman. Save my precious baby from the fate that has been mine. Please save Kumokie, God. Don’t bother about me if its any trouble, for I’m all worthless and am just about to die, but please save my little girl. Amen.”

CHAPTER II.

A Gentleman of Leisure and Poverty.

The honorable Mr. Kim was very nearly as poor in this world’s goods as Farmer Ye pretended to be, which is saying a great deal. To be as poor Ye wished others to believe him to be, was to have few comforts and no luxuries in life. This was an impoverished and luckless branch of a wealthy family. Noble blood ran in the veins of Kim, blood as blue as any in Korea, and for many generations they held themselves to be superior to ordinary people. Marriages, particularly those of the sons, had always been arranged with great care. Daughters, too, must be well placed in life, that was a parent’s manifest duty. When they were married they became part of another tribe and as such of far less importance than the son. Aristocratic families have always held great honor in this land of Morning Calm. No matter how tumbled down the fortunes or depleted the treasury, still to be a Yang-ban is something greatly prized and to be revered by all comers. There comes a long dreaded day to all such when veneration for their position and nobility, however, can no longer call forth a willing and ready loan of cash. What a sense of the divine rights of the upper classes Mr. Kim must possess to be able to approach a friend like Mr. Cho when he can scarcely fail to remember that he has not returned to him the last,—no, nor the loan before the last, or before that. Whenever, in fact, did he ever repay anything? Such sang-froid is to be admired even though

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disapproved. Be it said to the credit of our friend Kim that he seldom held it against a man that he was unresponsive to his need. He was more nearly angry at Cho for his refusal than he had ever been before, because he expected better things from him. Never before had he failed him. To be sure Cho was but a common fellow, but he had made considerable money by careful investment and high rates of interest, though he had required no interest from the honorable Kim. He calculated that it was worth a goodly sum once in a while just to have this autocrat as a regular visitor at his sarang, and so paid for it as he would any other commodity he wished to buy. This had gone on so long that it was the expected thing. Kim began to look upon it as something of a right, and he had never asked Cho for large sums of money, though of late his requests had been more frequent.

“Well, friend, can you let me have a few cash to-day?” became such a common refrain that Cho tired of it. At any rate his own position in the neighborhood was quite assured and there was no further need of social aid. Why should he help the beggarly Kims any more? Thus argued Cho of the money bags, and, upheld by this righteous decision, he stammered out an embarrassed refusal.

Angry, humiliated, and surprised the gentleman of leisure left the sarang, and as he made his way down the crowded city street he mumbled to himself :

“Things have come to a pretty pass in this land when a gentleman of uprightness is met with such discourtesy. It’s enough to make my grandfather rise from the grave.” It was many years since he had taken much thought of his resources, or rather his lack of resources, and as long as he was able to borrow a little here and there or to sell something of his few remaining possessions he never let such sordid details of this world bother him. Now in this unceremonious way Cho had forced him to regard this matter and to think of his debts and to face the future.

“What shall I do? Of a surety I can’t work, that would be a lasting disgrace and is not to be thought of, besides I’m too frail,” as he pressed his soft hands together in a gesture of helplessness and bewilderment. Cho had always been such a good friend before and had demanded neither interest nor security, though other money lenders were not so considerate and many and pressing were the debts which faced him. To one of this man’s sanguine and optimistic turn of mind debts after all were only abstract sort of things and need use little worry unless they got too pressing, then to be sure they could be quite annoying and irritating. Five years before this time Mr. Kim’s father had died and he as the only son became head of the family. Funerals and weddings are times of great

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importance here and many are the homes which have been mortgaged, many the families impoverished for years in order that the head of the family should be buried with fitting honor and ceremony. Every loyal son of old Korea is apt to say that Kim did only his duty and fulfilled his filial obligation when he mortgaged his homestead and the one small rice field left of his inheritance and spent it all in one grand splurge at the father's funeral and at the appointed times of sacrifice during the two years of mourning. None could deny that the dying glory of the house of Kim flared up in a blaze of brightness and splendor. Such feasting! Such wine! Food of the best and in plenty, proper new mourning clothes for all. This unusual grandeur brought a glow of pride to the heart of Kim and he walked with a little extra stagger; just a little more pride was visible in the way he held his head and it is to be feared that he thought little of the price he would one day be forced to pay for this brave show so long as any of it were left to enjoy. The money-lender into whose hands he had fallen was one of those usury sharks who flourish and thrive on just this sort of pride and folly. The extortionate rate of interest demanded is such that one wonders how any sane man can ever be so foolish as to accept the conditions, but there is abundant evidence that there are nevertheless many who put themselves thus in the power of the usurer. According to the accounts of the latter Mr. Kim now owed him several times the amount actually received and he now declared that the time had come to foreclose the mortgage which he held. Mr. Kim's thoughts naturally took this line as he slowly wound his way towards home. After a few turns in the crooked alley he came to a stone bridge spanning a small stream. Below the bridge there was an inviting shade tree and several large stones for resting places and thither he turned his steps. He sat and thought back on his career. He was not given to introspection but the shock given to his sensibilities by friend Cho had shaken him out of his usual carelessness and lethargy. So he sat and stared with unseeing eyes at the distant hills. He thought of his boyhood, the years of his young manhood and of his later life. This review took some time and the longer he thought the more disgusted and discouraged he became. A kaleidoscopic view of his life passed before him. The shadows of the summer afternoon grew more oblique, the blue of the hills turned to purple. Still Kim sat and stared and thought until out of this searching survey of the past one leading fact took definite shape. This was not an easy path to follow. The man was not a deep thinker, no facile analyst of self. This was the first time in his life that he had unflinchingly faced the disagreeable outlook and the unpleasant situation and acknowledged that it was his fault. Suddenly this

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afternoon he had been plunged into this experience and been brought face to face with the question of failure. Had he made failure of his life? It surely did not wear the face of success, and yet he had been wont to meet the world with a feeling of superiority, with an exalted "Better-than-thou" attitude towards others. He did not realize that this failure of his was due to the inability to put the proper value on things. From a long line of ancestors he had inherited the idea that work was only for the common people and that the spending of money, not earning it, was a gentleman's duty. But Kim was now on the verge of losing his home, all would then be gone. How could he hold up his head before the relations and neighbors, a gentleman without his ancestral home? Then he would have little or no hold longer on respectability.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" groaned the unhappy man as he lifted his eyes to the tree tops as though seeking aid and instruction from them. The usual resort of the Korean gentleman under these conditions is his relatives. The family tie is very strong, and while any member of it has money at his command, all the other less fortunate feel quite at liberty to call upon him. There was none such moneyed member in his clan to whom Kim could go in this hour of need. He himself was the head of this branch of the house and had done his part with the little he had to help the other less lucky ones, but as he thought over his list of kin-folk now, he was forced to admit that none of them were any better off than he. No, it was useless to go to them for help. His three sons, two daughters-in-law and his wife would surely be turned out homeless on the cold, unfeeling world! Then what would they do? This was a sad possibility that brought the gentleman to his feet with a start. Hurriedly he headed in a fast walk for home. That home was dearer to him than ever before because it was beginning to seem so uncertain, and he wanted to see that nothing had harmed it in his absence. When he entered his gate he was much more humble than usual and more in the mood to listen to the propositions of the unusual old woman whom he found there than he would otherwise have been. Whangsi, the Chungmae, or Match-maker and go-between, had just been having a heart to heart talk with Mrs. Kim, and that excellent lady had just arrived at the conclusion that the best way to retrieve their broken fortunes and recover the lost homestead was to drive a bargain with old man Ye of the sea side village of Saemal who was of reputed wealth and anxious to adopt a son from a family of the gentry. Mr. Kim entered his wife's room to find the two of them awaiting him most eagerly with argument and the method of attack all carefully arranged.

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CHAPTER III.

The Go-Between and Her Work.

No ordinary woman was Whangsi but an unusual production of the age and of the conditions of her country. Gifted with a large degree of native wit and astuteness, her abilities had been sharpened to a keenness which might have placed her among the world's diplomats. Shrewd and sagacious, she was a discerning student of human nature, and in making advances was always careful that her point of contact be the most tactful possible. The self-complacent air with which she bore herself, the nice little house she had built, the position of prominence given her in that part of the country, all bore eloquent testimony to the prodigious success which attended her efforts. It will be a much more pleasant subject to discuss this success from Whangsi's view-point, than from that of the many unhappy, mismated ones who marched two by two in marriage chains behind the chariot of her progress. She was a little bird-like woman, quick in her movements as in her thoughts, of uncertain age; her face having a sharp hawk-eye and beak-like mouth which added their lines of craftiness. Of course she was not too truthful. Who expected that? How could a person succeed in a calling like hers and stick too close to the letter of the law? Most certainly that was not to be expected.

This afternoon, spent at the home of the Kim's, was the kind which delighted her soul; such an encounter called for the high order of intelligence which she believed she possessed, while to come out victorious in such a battle of wits meant a neat, tidy sum to add to her nest-egg. All signs pointed to a very advantageous match between the third son of Mr. Kim and the grand-daughter of the old man Ye. She had talked the matter over with Mrs. Kim, and as she awaited the arrival of the master of the house she considered the question. Although this gentleman might be of the same opinion as herself, she was sure that he would not willingly admit it, until she had brought up all the field artillery at her disposal and given him the advantage of all the bombs of her argument. Well she knew that the financial crisis in which he found himself would be the chief inducement for such a match, true also was the fact that this could not be advanced as a point in its favor, for Mr. Kim's pride would be immediately offended by such a suggestion. Thus she found herself facing a very delicate situation as she sat with Mrs. Kim and waited for Mr. Kim to show himself after his return from his friend Cho. He had been

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pursuing the unusual operation of an introspective survey of life. The hours spent under the willows by the bridge had resulted in a self-condemnation as bitter as it was unprecedented. So he took off his linen coat and made himself comfortable to meet the visitor a truly humbler and more chastened man than usual.

With a lordly air the Master approached the shady verandah, Mrs. Kim arose to meet him, every line of her slender form and each delicate feature proclaiming the fact that she was a true lady of the nobility. It is not always a fact even in Korea, that man is the supreme ruler; not so here, for it was my lady who ruled within the domain of this home, and no doubt things would at that moment have been in a better condition with him if she had also ruled in matters of finance as well. Quiet and reserved, with unusual dignity she seemed to come naturally by the right of control and directing. The very qualities of decision and definite purpose so lacking in her lord were quite evident in her. Certainly he would not have made any such admission, but, nevertheless, this quiet little woman of refined manners was the head of the house. Without doubt one secret of this was the fact that she never claimed or assumed any such prerogative. She would have been the first to disavow it, but she guided Mr. Kim with a silken cord of which he was utterly unconscious.

Whangsi greeted the Master with a deep curtesy, prostrated herself, bowing before him until her forehead all but touched the floor while he acknowledged the salutation by an assent half way between a growl and a grunt, and then seated himself on one of the silken cushions. Thus he awaited in the solemn dignity of an eastern potentate, a subject's statement of the petition. But this did not annoy or disaffect the visitor, who straightened out her skirt into its proper folds, adjusted her disarranged head-dress, and proceeded to address him with the highest honorifics and verbal endings in which the Korean language abounds. "Pardon, my lord, that one so humble and lowly as I, should venture into your Presence uninvited. I am but a poor, ignorant woman, the Widow of the late Whang Young Soon, and I crave the privilege of speaking to you concerning a certain friend of mine in the village of Saemal," thus she began with a subtle, veiled flattery which pleased the proud gentleman, her words being accompanied and accented by several deep bows.

"Say on,"—was the gracious response as he waved a lordly hand.

"It is a matter of congratulation that you have been so favored by the spirits as to have three beautiful children when so many are without sons. I perceive, my lord Kim, that you have been most careful in all matter; concerning your ancestors and that through your faithful sacrifices

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they have protected you and yours. Greatly have you been honored, your excellency, in the gift of these lads. The spirits of my ancestors forbid that I should even suggest that you have more than your share but I would call your attention most humbly to the great poverty of my friend, Mr. Ye of Saemal, who 'tho well off in this world's goods, having all that heart can wish, has alas lost his only son so that earthly joys fail to bring him aught of pleasure. Yea, great is his sorrow, and nothing can bring comfort or peace to his stricken home."—Here the tender-hearted creature actually wept over the sorrows of Ye.

"Oh! well!" Mr. Kim did not like tears, even crocodile tears, any better than most men, "what has this to do with me? What are Ye's sorrows to me? Why do you tell me of this?"

Even though he had seen the drift of her conversation it would have been far from him to have acknowledged it.

"Nothing, nothing, your honor, nothing at all!" she hastened to add. "Nothing save that I would call your attention to the blessings bestowed upon you by the gods; others are less worthy and less favored. You are most blessed, but does not your heart pity those less fortunate? It is a matter of public knowledge that your two elder sons, Kim Noch Chun and Kim Noch Do are well settled in life, and that you have two daughters-in-law who are models of industry and thrift. May I be so impertinent as to ask about the third son, and whether or not I may make a suggestion concerning his welfare?" The only answer to this fair spoken question was a deep grunt which the speaker accepted as assent and proceeded :

"Farmer Ye of the village of Saemal is one of the four wealthiest men in the eastern part of Korea. This is a well known fact. Rice fields and fishing vessels, gold and silver are his in plenty, but the death of his son leaves him with only a little grand-child, a woman child at that. Is it strange that the deepest desires of his heart, and the sincerest purpose of his life, should be bent towards making her happy and secure for the future? No, this is only natural and right, and to obtain for her a bridegroom of high family, a son of the nobility, he is willing to offer any sacrifice of material things provided the prospective son-in-law becomes his adopted son and heir to all his wealth." The listener was now fully interested in the situation; but such interest was visible only in the tightening of the eye lids. As the woman talked he watched her through half closed eyes seeking to separate the wheat from the chaff, the truth from the vain words, of Mrs. Whang's professional stock in trade. However the lady was not to be daunted and she continued her story:

"It is quite a common practice in our country, when we are so

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unfortunate as to have no son, to adopt one. Most usually it is from among the children of relatives, and sometimes when one branch of an illustrious family has several sons and another several daughters it is frequent that they make an exchange, an adopted son for an adopted daughter, but alas, Mr. Ye has no such relations to whom he can go! Then there is another custom seen among our people, when a very poor, perhaps unfortunate, or unhappy mother leaves her child at the door of the rich man's home. Many such have been adopted into families of wealth. But this would not do for Mr. Ye, he is a great stickler for pure blood, he holds to the old ideas of aristocracy and fears to have common blood, or degenerate lineage, mingle with his. That he would never stand. Some one tried this shortly before by leaving a fine fat baby boy at his house one night, that a tender hearted neighbor rescued." The go-between stopped to catch her breath. Under her skillful manipulations the sordid story of miserly Ye of Saemal was on a tinge of romance which thrilled her own heart, and she knew that her listeners were not untouched by her eloquence.

"Then as you well know, your honor, there is also another custom much resorted to in homes where there are no sons to bless: the adoption of the husband of a daughter, and this is what Mr. Ye greatly desires. Far be it from me, or such as I, to offer suggestions to your excellency, but it is the earnest and sincere wish of Mr. Ye to know what you might think of such a proposition. Certainly you would not object since he would continue to use his own name, Kim he is, and Kim he would remain to the end of his days. That is one excellence about this custom of Korea. Yet Mr. Ye would have an heir to follow him, some one to take his place as head of the house, and the son-in-law would live at the bride's home, instead of the girl going to his home. Even this is of course a sacrifice; but, realizing this, it would be the pleasure of the generous father not only to give in return the sum which you may agree upon, but also to consider henceforth the needs and sustenance of your home as his responsibility and that it would be his duty to see that in the future you have no want for things of this world. You have been blessed by sons, Mr. Ye by material possessions, field and gold and riches in store; so it is a small thing to supply these in return for the boon he most desires. I am sorry to have disturbed your quiet, and to have intruded upon your privacy." It has been said that Whangsi was a diplomat and that she instinctively knew just when enough had been said. As she arose and shook out her voluminous skirts, it was with the assurance that the seeds sown in this fertile soil would surely bring forth fruitage in the near future.

Kim sat deep in meditation, puffing away at his pipe. No heed did

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he give to the bows of the departing guest. Mrs. Kim bustled to the steps of the court-yard with hospitable intent; placed the shoes for her feet; helped arrange the veil over her head, and was ushering Mrs. Whang towards the entrance when a ringing voice came from the verandah :

“Yebo! Say you!” a not uncommon way to call a servant or your wife. “Say, tell that person that this suggestion does not strike me very favorably just at first. But I’ll think about it and investigate matters, and if she wants to talk about it any more, she can come again seven days hence, at which time I’ll receive her.” The listening women then knew that the battle was half won for Ye.

Seven days had passed. During this time Kim had made inquiry into the pretensions and conditions of the gentleman in question and allowing for expected exaggerations and high coloring, he believed that the go-between (Chungmae) had stated the main facts truthfully. Mr. and Mrs. Kim then decided that this was indeed a great opportunity for the third son, and though neither mentioned it except casually, both counted it a god-given way to right their financial troubles and to get a fresh start in life.

On the seventh day the house was set in order and Mr. and Mrs. Kim waited for the arrival of Whangsi. The appointments of this home still bore the marks of former oriental elegance. The broad verandahs decorated with classic mottoes from famous authors, the silken cushions now faded and worn, the massive timbers such as are seen only in the homes of the gentry.

Mr. Kim sat cross-legged on the mat and drew tenderly at the same long-stemmed pipe. Mrs. Kim took stitches in some fine linen while the calm and quiet of the afternoon wore away in the conscious anticipation of a visitor.

The mother had consented to the final decision not without many anxious and sorrowful misgivings. This child was her best beloved of all the children, the joy and pride of her heart.

The hand that held her sewing dropped to her lap as she said: “I do not know how he will take this, he is such an affectionate child, and his devotion to the family and love for its old traditions are stronger than that of the others. It’s a pity that it could not have been one of the older boys, they would have carried it off well, but—he is not like them.”

“Yes, that’s true, but after all it is for his sake. He is not supposed to know as well as we, his parents, what is best for him. He has always been obedient although such a mischievous fellow; don’t worry about that, he will fall into line all right.” She did worry, nevertheless, for she knew

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full well that consideration of his future was not the prime motive in this matter, and that neither Mr. Kim nor she would have considered such a match for a moment if it had not been for the desperate condition in which they found themselves financially. Suddenly a scraping of feet and a cough outside announced a visitor. No knocking here, nothing so blatant or crude; a cough or clearing of the throat, is the proper way to announce one's arrival. The hostess hastened to greet the guest, took her mantle and led her to the porch, where after the preliminary greetings they finally came to the business in hand. It was now Mr. Kim's time to take the initiative and he did so with the pompous dignity of an emperor:

"I have investigated your words with regard to the family by the name of Ye living at Saemal and they seem to be partly true; I am willing to hear whatever proposition you have to make; just remember, however, that this arrangement is not of my seeking. I am not the one who is anxious for this consummation."

Whangsi looked at him a long moment and slowly nodded her head, as she considered the problem of how best to manoeuvre so that she could offer him sufficient money to really tempt him without seeming to do so; and how to bring about this very desirable end so as to make a tidy bit out of it for herself. Then with a flutter, not unlike the bird she resembled she approached the delicate subject thus:

"I could not shame a gentleman of your standing by the mention of money except that in such cases as this it is the custom and we must follow the time-honored customs of our fathers. When I was here before I did not mention a peculiar characteristic of Mr. Ye's, he wants to be thought poor and he is very anxious that this part of the transaction should remain a secret, though others will necessarily know that henceforth your family needs are considered one with his. When the matter was first brought to my attention, before even mentioning it to you, I told Mrs. Ye that it was altogether useless to make any suggestion of anything less than forty thousand yang," here she paused for a second, but a stony stare was the only response. Mr. Kim knew that it was her professional duty to get all she could from Ye and to keep as much of the amount as possible for herself. Although not mercenary Kim is in need, and it is his right as well as his fatherly duty to see that he receives all that is coming to him in this deal.

"As a matter of fact I am not even yet quite sure of the amount which can be expected, but of one thing I am confident, this part can be arranged with perfect satisfaction to all concerned." This assured expectation of Mrs. Whang was not put to shame, for after many alternate

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visits, to Saemal and to Mr. Kim, tactful here, threatening there, always diplomatic everywhere her energy and zeal were after the strenuous efforts of several weeks finally rewarded, by successful arrangements for the completion of the betrothal.

Behold Whangsi at last happy and triumphant on her way to Saemal; a written contract in her possession from the fa of the groom saying that the son agreed hereby to take Ku-mokie as his wife, and to live at the house of Ye as an adopted son. This precious document, together with the parings of the toe and finger nails of the groom, was bound with red thread, put into a red envelope, and carried in a red napkin to the house of the prospective bride, where it was received with due ceremony; while corresponding emblems and promises from the grand-parents of the-bride were returned to the house of the groom.

This groom, Noch Kung, though sixteen years old, had been as little consulted or considered as had the tiny girl of Saemal, yet he had very definite feelings on the subject which sooner or later would have to be taken account of. The morning after the betrothal had been arranged with due formality, the unhappy bridegroom sat near the open door of his room overlooking the courtyard, his hair newly dressed with a top-knot, proclaiming to all the world that he was now entering man's estate and engaged to be married. The sae-su-bang's (new groom) hat is lying on the floor by his side. He must now no longer be called Kung Saiku but Noch Kung, for the boyhood name is done away with, the long shining hair braid and other childish things that he loses when he takes a man's place. The morning was warm and sultry, the leaves hung in languid stillness on the trees, the sky seemed of brass and pitiless in the fierce reflection of the sun's lurid rays; it was the quiet which precedes a storm. This was the season of typhoons; the great rains of summer were long overdue; the farmers prayed for rain, and all nature awaited with hushed expectation that outburst which would break the drought and usher in the rainy season changma. The long morning was wearing away slowly for Mrs. Kim. She sat in her favorite seat on the verandah and stitched away at her never ending task, while she kept a watchful eye on the daughters-in-law as they came and went from kitchen to store-room busy with the noon-day meal. Many glances she directed towards her handsome, sullen son, who sat on a mat near the open door of the room opposite; in his listless hand was a book of Chinese classics though his eyes took not in the mysteries of the wonderful characters therein, but roamed about the court hither and thither, now resting on the women as they came and went, now searching the roof top among the broken tiles, now furtively watching his mother across the

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way, careful lest he catch her eyes. One clenched hand lay on the mat; his knees were drawn up as though he were about to spring to the yard below. This boy was very like his mother in looks and in disposition. One knew at a glance by his tall, straight face that he was a high bred lad. There is a great difference not to be overlooked between the common people, the coolie class, and the upper classes. The peoples of the western world are quick to recognize this fact in regard to their own kin, though they are apt to forget it in dealing with the races of the Orient. But in the eastern world as well as in the western, it is a fact that "blood will tell," in intellect, in habits, and in appearance. Noch Kung was a gentleman. In every finely chiseled line of face and head, in every delicate curve of his splendidly molded hands were to be seen the marks of generations of noble ancestors. But now sullen anger lent a deeper shadow to the beautiful, brown eyes; to the corners of his handsome mouth which dropped with sulky rage. Gloomy and silent, he looked like a young tiger, king of the mountains, caged. The mood of nature around him was in sympathy with the suffering boy, for his quiet was also the calm before the storm. The crash of a falling dish in the kitchen seemed to awaken him, to arouse him to action. With a leap he was on to his feet, the offending book tossed with a petulant gesture into the farthest corner; two bounds and he was across the narrow court-yard, another spring and he stood before his mother. He was a highly strong boy. Thus far his life had been sheltered from care and anxiety, he had been gay and free. And this was his first sorrow. As he scowled down upon the woman before him he was trembling all over with indignation, sorrow and humiliation. There is no denying that the mother was worried but it was for just such crises as this that she required that dignity and force of calm in which she had schooled herself: This child was the pride and joy of her heart; mischievous and daring he was, yet obedient and kindly. His love and admiration for his lady mother held great power over his heart but of this tenderness he was ashamed to let any know lest it seem unmanly. Now though somewhat startled by the unexpected dash across the yard, Mrs. Kim seemed as quiet and undisturbed as ever, when she looked up at her angry boy. Yes, she had thought it all out, and knew that he was apt to have objections to his part in this matter, but knowing their straits as she did, she saw clearly that this was the only means of keeping the home. The only alternative was the surrender and destruction of the whole family, this beloved son included. Hence the sacrifice of Noch Kung was necessary for his sake as well as for the family, and he must give up in favor of a higher and more imperative duty. After all, as the adopted son of the wealthy Ye, his would

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be the chief gain. He was to be given a great opportunity, while theirs was the loss in giving up such a gifted and affectionate son. Having reached this decision herself, her part now was to overcome his objection and make him see the matter in its proper light; he must realize this step to be necessary for his future as well as for theirs. There must be no wavering, no weakness in dealing with him, though she must be careful not to offend his sensitive nature over deeply. With a wave of her steady, white hand she motioned him to the cushion opposite :

“My son, be seated! Here is a fan, the day is too hot to move about so rapidly.”

“Sit down indeed! Sit down! You treat me as though I were still a baby. I’m a child no longer. Neither am I a pig or a donkey to be sold or bought for lands or gold. I’m a man in size, in years and in feeling.” This outburst so surprised Mrs. Kim that she dropped the linen to the floor and looked at him in amazement. This rigid, infuriated young man before her was a stranger. This was no longer the light hearted, smiling boy she knew so well, he had stepped from childhood into manhood. Her instinct told her that he was now to be treated as a man. The reasons for certain actions, the condition of the family, could no longer be withheld from him as from the child of yesterday. The opinions of this man were something to be taken into consideration if he was to take his part in a proper manner and carry the plan out to a successful conclusion. While she looked into his face and marvelled at the change in him, his words came forth in an angry rush:

“Why is it that Noch Chun and Noch Do with their wives can live here at home, the home which I love more dearly than do either of them, while you throw me away, sell me for money and send me to that nasty fishing village of Saemal to become the adopted son of a common farmer, a stranger who is not even a relative? Thrown to the dogs!”

His fierce indignation was giving way, spending itself now in long shuddering sobs. Anger had given place to outraged love. Noch Kung’s was a warm, affectionate nature and he was now suffering as only those can who love deeply. Although his breath came in gasps his stern, young face was white and set, and as his mother gazed at him she realized something of his pain and modified her resolve to be coolly judicious in dealing with him. Her face was as white as his own as she cried out:

“No, no child! You do not understand!” He dashed aside her outstretched hands, and with a moan sank to the floor and buried his face in the cushions.

“Don’t touch me! You say that I am no longer your son.” Aye, no

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longer a child, but a man, a wounded angry man was this lad with whom she had to deal, and one demanding all the tact and wisdom at her command. He must know the truth. So with hands clenched and with a masterly effort to control her voice she commenced with low faltering words to tell him the unlovely facts so long and carefully withheld; the story of financial strain; the poverty and want which had been withstood only by the mortgage on the old homestead; the family ruin and disgrace which was now imminent; the one step possible which stood between them and starvation and worse. As the plain truth came from her trembling lips, she moved closer to the prostrate form, and her tears fell fast upon the dark head. She longed to take him into her arms and comfort him, but there was a newborn fear and respect for him in her heart. That fierce, indignant : "Don't touch me!" meant that he was not yet ready for caresses. As he listened to the pitiful tale he grew more quiet, the storm of dark rage passed, and her tears melted his heart as nothing else could have done. When before had he seen this proud lady in tears? This moved him also to an understanding of the urgency, and the grinding nature of their poverty. After a lengthy period of quiet he raised his head and gave her a long searching look.

"So it is a necessity to save the family that I should be sold! I would die before I would be sacrificed for my brothers. They would not have done it for me; Noch Chun would not, neither would Noch Do, neither would I wish to do it for them. It's like selling my soul for a bunch of garlic! But for your sake my mother, for you I will give up home, family, all,—and become an outcast among these common people." With deepest emotion he hid his twitching face against his mother's skirt and burst into tears. Where now was the stern angry man? He was just a little boy again, the generous, loving child of yesterday, and with murmured words of tenderness and endearment the mother gathered him close in her arms and their tears mingled.

Preparations for the wedding and the attending excitement aroused Mr. Kim from his lethargy. The money in his hand, he again felt the Yangban he knew himself to be, and forgotten were all the vicissitudes of the past in his anxiety to have this present affair worthy of his name. The family jewelry, and many beautiful pieces of furniture once lost again found their place in the home; heirlooms which had long reposed amid the cobwebs of the pawn-broker were now in the hands of their rightful owner. The pleasures and the duties of each day brought to him sufficient responsibility; thus it had always been in the past, and this accounted for the financial stress in which he had but recently found himself. But for the

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present there was an abundance, so why look forward with dread to an uncertain future? Mr. Ye had promised to take care of that and Mr. Kim, never faced unpleasant possibilities until they thrust themselves upon him, and not even then if he could by any means avert the necessity. Just now he was quite happy; the mortgage was paid, and the homestead was his again; the money in hand was enough to carry through the proper ceremony of the wedding occasion with a little left over. Pay his debts? Oh! No that was another matter! Unless there was a note against him, a mortgage, who ever expected him to pay such small loans? Certainly not men like his friend Cho, who knew him of old. With his financial burdens removed, his home restored and the means at hand with which to splurge and regale his friends with good wine, laughter and cheer filled his heart once more as in the days gone by.

The sorcerer was consulted concerning the lucky date for the approaching nuptials, and a day in September was finally decided upon as being propitious and advisable in every way. The fine sewing and needlework exhibited by Mrs. Kim and her daughters-in-law, were well worthy of a bride more appreciative than poor, frightened, little Kumokie. Poor little girl! She knew not which frightened her most her mother's passionate outbursts of anger and helpless remonstrance, or her grandfather's harsh exhortations concerning her future behavior. He alternately lectured her about the proper way for one in her position to behave, and threatened her with unutterable terrors if she disgraced the family by forgetting any one of a thousand difficult points of etiquette. Just what was about to happen she did not exactly know, but something awful seemed ready to befall and she was quite sure that she would forget some one of the many things, that she would make some dreadful blunder which would bring ruin and disgrace upon the family and make her an outcast and a by-word forever. Day after day she went through the ceremony of bowing as directed by Whangsi, her grandmother acting as chief critic. Oh, dear! But it was so hard to learn to be a bride! Those awful, trying bows! How her back and legs ached and what little progress she made! To sink gracefully and slowly, slowly and more slowly still to a prostrate position, her forehead on the floor resting on her crossed hands, then to rise just as slowly, and repeat this three times. Try it if you think it easy! But after so long a time of practice the old women thought that she would get through it passing well, if she could only keep her eyes shut and not cry like a baby!

In after years Kumokie tried to remember the impressions of her wedding day, but it was one confused idea of noise, fear, intolerable heat

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and weariness. She well remembered the delight of the women when the bride's outfit, the presents and trousseau from the home of the groom, arrived; the lovely inlaid chest; the many garments of silk and linen; ornaments of gold and jade, which had belonged to Mrs. Kim when a bride; the beautiful needlework and exquisite embroidery—these all brought exclamations of praise and admiration from the neighbors who crowded in to see the wonders of this fairy chest. The Kims were not common, ordinary people and they did not do things half way; the verdict of the village was that they were true aristocrats and that the Ye family was fortunate and lucky in making an alliance with such people. The one least interested of all in this bridal finery was the child bride; to her it was only part of the new ordeal, something which she could not understand. The many days of anxiety and fright, the weariness and excitement had taken the roses from her cheeks and she heard Whangsi say as she came in to dress her; "What a lovely saxie she will make! So timid and pale and frightened looking! Why we can make her look as fine a lady as any daughter of the Kims!" Then they pasted her eyes shut, put on the thick paint and powder; arms and neck and face were made as white as chalk, deathly, unnatural; then was added the final glory, the crimson spot on cheeks and brow. From the time they led her forth to meet the groom, whom even now she was not to see, until she was carried away in the great chair of gilt and red with the bridal procession on its way to the ceremonial visit to the home of the groom, it was all an indistinct blurr of tumult, heat, pain and fear. As a blind puppet she responded to the whispered commands of Whangsi, who guided and led her through the ordeal; she bowed when she was told to bow; she walked when told to walk; sat when told to sit; her hands were bound and helpless in the long silken sleeves of the bridal robe; the swish of the heavy brocade which might have delighted a more critical owner; the heat; the pressing, unsympathetic crowd of sight-seers and their vulgar talk; the noise of feasting and drinking in the courtyard,—all these things were blended into a dim memory of those long hours of agony when she could neither speak nor show any sign of emotion or life except as directed by the woman beside her. Yet it was with something of exultation that she remembered that she did not cry. All along she had been so afraid that the tears would come, and that she would be a disgrace to the family and receive the mighty thrashing promised by her grandfather; this was truly a victory over self for Kumokie. A dreadfully big lump came into her throat, and it ached so cruelly that sometimes it just seemed as though she could no longer hold back the tears, till her grandfather's voice would sound in the

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outer court and the fear of him freeze the tears from her smarting eyes. Would the day never end? Sometimes she thought she just could not stand it any longer, so faint was she with hunger and excitement. Very slowly indeed passed this wedding day, which lived in her memory as one of the most uncomfortable and unhappy days of all her life. There can be no doubt that the two most miserable people in this affair were the two chief actors, the bride and the groom, the two who having had least to say in arrangements or decisions and yet nevertheless the two most concerned; the two whose future hung on the fortunes greatly of this day,—these two, strange to say, had little thought for each other but were thinking of their own misery and wishing the thing well over.

Noch Kung decked out in all the finery of the occasion arrived with his gay procession. He and she went through the bowing ceremony in proper form. His handsome face was set and hard, for the sight of the painted, little, doll-like thing which was his bride awoke again his slumbering fury against his parents, against fate and against his father-in-law; the red glitter of his eye might have warned this new relative that here at least was one who was not to be easily managed, and who would brook no insolence. This hardness of the eye softened somewhat as it rested on the trembling girl before him; he saw the soft, babyish curves of the little body and thought to himself :

“Poor child! She is only a baby! I’ll be kind to her anyway, but I can make it hot enough for the old skinflint.”

Endless as it seemed, the day was closed at last. Much to his joy farmer Ye had a new son, his grand-daughter’s husband, and quite incidentally Kim Noch Kung had a bride, though many years were to pass before Kumokie became a wife.

CHAPTER IV.

A Voice from the Dead,

Life in Saemal was a contrast to the former life of Noch Kyung.

A literary atmosphere prevailed in his father’s home where even his mother was versed in the Chinese classics, a very unusual accomplishment for a Korean woman, even a yang ban lady. Through her the other women of the family were familiar with the eunmun, the vernacular script. His childhood had passed in care-free play and happy study with his wise old teacher at the shabby school-room. He had been

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considered a good scholar for one so young, and his chief aspiration had been to go to the examinations in the Kyung-bok palace. How he had dreamed of that hour when the subject for his composition would be given him. Ah! He would write furiously on the wonderful essay that would bring him fame, official position, and glory! Yes, those were happy days of boyhood, what would he not give to have them back again, to join in that drone and buzz as with half closed eyes the boys sing out the characters they love! Now this was all changed; in place of the general air of gentility and leisure there was the sordid dreariness of a house which had never boasted a scholar. Farmer Ye never let it be forgotten that there was work to be done if they would have rice to eat. The sarang, a room on the outer court, in which was combined the reception and living room for the men of the house, was cheerless though comfortable in a way. Altogether the whole house was lacking in that indescribable charm which he remembered of his childhood home; these walls were yellow from smoke and festooned with ancient cobwebs; the very dinginess of things combined to make him miserable and home sick, though these material discomforts were the least cause of his distress. These people so grossly illiterate and common; the broken spirited, faded women; their evident fear in the presence of the master; the illness and suffering of Kumokie's mother, her dislike for him and her anxiety for her child; the foul smelling village,—all these things were revolting to the fastidious young man. His beauty-loving soul had nothing on which to feed and some times such a longing for his own kind, his mother, his home and his old fellows took such fierce possession of his heart that it was with difficulty he restrained his desire to run away. That, however, would have been dishonorable, for the farmer was keeping his promise in all things pertaining to the family in the city, and with a regularity unequalled the bags of grain were sent to the home of Kim Young-Suk. The thought that by the sacrifice of self he was bringing comfort and peace to his loved ones far away, brought him small pleasure when he mused upon their willingness to have it so. His soul was tortured by the fact that his parents had known little or nothing about the place to which they had exiled him, and even less about the people with whom he had to live. These feelings of injury harbored in his mind, grew, till they steadily developed the moroseness of a man who has been greatly wronged. A new look had come into his face, the tense and decisive expression of a man who had faced the hard facts of life and was bracing himself for the trials which he knew he must still meet. The boy who had been a ringleader among his gay companions was now a proud, cold lad, who had little to do with the people about him. This aloofness on

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his part was a constant source of pleasure to Ye Chun-Sook whose admiration for the high born son was unlimited. This one person, at least, he did not try to bully or bend to his own will, he seemed to feel that by basking in his light he himself would reflect some borrowed glory of the gentry and his attitude of familiarity and jocular good fellow-ship were extremely awkward and amusing. Noch Kyung found' this almost as distasteful as the rough manner with which he treated those whom he considered beneath him.

This too, added to his feeling of disgust, There was something queer, as well, about the actions of father Ye, which made the boy suspicious and uneasy. Night trips were common when he slipped out of the house evidently believing himself to be unobserved, and then slink back before the dawn. Where did he go on these sacred errands? Noch Kyung made up his mind to find out, wondered if they had anything to do with the mysterious source of Ye's wealth, the existence of which he seemed so anxious to hide and to deny.

It was a lovely day in early spring. Six months had slowly dragged their weary length since Noch Kyung had come to be an inmate of the big thatched house in Saemal, but those nearest him as well as the villagers felt that he was still a stranger, and that his life was lonely. The uncouth, burly fellows of the neighborhood felt as keenly as he the recognized difference in social cast.

A few more luxuries had been added to the plain comforts of the house, the most notable of which was an aristocratic donkey on which Ye rode back and forth from the fields, and at times took more distant, unknown journeys. The little, gray beast, friendly and kind, was fast becoming a great favorite with the silent boy. Ye Chun-Suk was somewhat less cautious in his use of money than formerly. Was the consuming passion of the miser giving way before the pleasures derived from this use of his means? Were the aspirations for respectability, and the honor of his fellows growing stronger than his love of gold? Perhaps it was only that his income was being secretly enlarged in some mysterious way.

By the call of the wild nesting birds on the hills, the young buds bursting into tender green, the soft balmy fragrance in the air, the thousand vibrant voices everywhere nature spoke of a new awakening, an awakening to the joy and ecstasy of springtime. In the sad heart of the young man who walked along the shining sand of the sea shore, however, there was no spring, only the bleakness of winter. Noch Kyung came to a sloping hill where a stony point over-looked the changing sea; this promontory was far enough from the village to be reasonably sure of

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being undisturbed, and it had become his favorite resort for meditation. He came here to think and dream, Away from the vile filth and offal of the fishery, away from the squalid meanness and commonplaceness of the people, he could here forget his fate for a little and dream of other days. He stood with folded arms and gazed out over the waters, It was mid-afternoon and the sun cast a shimmering light of silver over the faint blue of sky and sea until it merged into an indistinct blur. The white sails of the fishing boats looked like huge gulls poised between earth and sky. Across the radiant sheen of the sea came the sing song echoes of happy fishermen home-ward bound.

“Is it possible that I am the only creature that is sad and lonely on this spring day?” murmured Noch Kyung, setting his lips in a thin firm line. He stood there a long time and thought of the far away home, the old comrades of his child-hood. What were they doing in the city? Did they ever think of him and miss him, or had some one already taken that place of leadership which had been his? He struggled hard to keep the tears from his eyes, but only to make the ache in his throat more intolerable.

“How long I wonder before I can see them again!” he mused. “I shall write to father and ask him to let me have a short visit home, that will help somewhat!” Suddenly, as he stood thus gazing over the sea, there came to his ears the sound of rapid footsteps on the hard sand. Wondering if some one had followed him to his hiding place he turned and looked down the rocky path to the beach. Who was this? A flying figure in bright blue skirt and a vivid red jacket. It was with astonishment that he watched her come to within a few yards of him, her face bearing a look of distress and fear as she stopped with an air of startled uncertainty.

“Kumokie,” he exclaimed, “what does this mean?”

“Grandfather sent me to call you,” she panted.

“But how did you know where I was? How did you dare to follow me?”

How stern and angry he was now! Gone was the big brother attitude which he generally bore to her on those rare occasions when he deigned to notice her at all, Now his eyes were stern and his voice harsh, which frightenrf the child. She put her finger in her mouth, hung her head in the shame, and dug her sandalled toe into the damp earth. The beautiful brown eyes were brimming with tears and she was just about to flee in dismay when his voice came again little less severe.

“Don't be so fearful of me! I have never been unkind to you, have I? Tell me, how did you know I was here?”

“I knew you were here!” the tears were running now, so she thrust

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both chubby fists into her streaming eyes and turned her back upon him,

“Yes, but how did you know?” his tones were kinder, more like his usual gentle way and she turned again to look at him to make sure whether she dare linger to tell him about the strange happening at home or whether it would be best to flee. He was very much annoyed that his secret place had been discovered, especially by this despised creature, and was thinking more of this than of the urgent matter which brought her. For her part, she decided that he was not angry enough to beat her as Grandfather was quite sure to do if his message were not delivered. To meet him seemed the safer, so she lingered, though far enough away to run if necessity demanded,

“I saw you come.”

“Have you followed me before?” Poor, miserable, little culprit! She caught her shirt in her nervous fingers and twisted it into a rope as she dumbly nodded her head. She was naturally a truthful child and it had not occurred to her to evade his anger by telling a lie. After all she was such child, how could she know that it was indelicate, and immodest, to follow her lord to the sea-shore? This proud handsome boy had such a fascination for Kumokie. He paid so little attention to her that he did not know that those great eyes of hers were often on him in unchildlike tenderness, when he thought himself alone. This anger and disgust of his cut her heart like a knife; she was a pitiful, forlorn little figure as she stood thus apart, and writhing under his contempt; but the boy's heart was too full of his own misery to pity her.

“I . . . I didn't know you cared, that you would be so angry . . . I . . . that you didn't like it,” faltered the little girl. “I won't do it ever again,”

“Well, see that you don't,” The indignant chap turned oil his heel and was about to stride off down the beach when he remembered that she came with a message.

“Why were you sent to call me ?”

“I don't know, Grandfather is acting very strange. He has heard a voice calling him and he is much worried,” her face was greatly troubled.

“Voice, a voice calling? Sounds sort of daffy, He isn't crazy I hope !” This conversation was beyond the depth of Kumokie, but the earnest eyes that searched his were like the faithful eyes of a dog,

“Come, I'll sit down now. Tell me what you know about this matter,” He seated himself on a huge boulder, but she stood rigidly at attention, her whole mind bent on saying nothing that would displease him.

“All that I know is that Grandfather came in from the rice-field where the men were ploughing. He looked strange and frightened, his

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eyes were awful to behold. I heard him telling Grandmother that the spirits were calling him, that his father who has now been dead a long time, had spoken to him this morning,”

“What did the voice say?” Noch Kyung was skeptical, his father-in-law disgusted him beyond measure with his superstition and witch-goblin ideas. He himself was a Confucianist as fitted a gentleman of the literati; such folly as this was only fit for women and children, Kumokie had a splendid memory, but her voice was low and frightened

“My grave! My grave! My grave! Three times like that. Slowly,—so, three times!”

“O rats! What stuff is this?”

“O don't you know? It might be that the grave site must be moved. If that be wrongly placed we shall all have bad luck because, the spirit can not rest!” Noch Kyung looked at the young prophetess thoughtfully and the kindness in his face made her less uneasy.

“Huh!” He grunted, “Does he want me to go spirit chasing or to answer this visitant from another world?”

“I don't just know. But he said that you could ride the donkey and go tell the chiquan (geomancer) to come quickly and find out the trouble.” “So? I see! I'm to find someone who is more capable of answering the voice! All right!” But he did not make any move to start on this mission. His gaze was on the distant horizon. As he looked with unseeing eyes across the sheet of silver his sad expression of face returned.

“I wonder what trouble is brewing for us now?” The child did not answer this query but watched every shade of expression on his face with the light of adoration in her own. This man was like a young god to her; he had never been cross until to-day; he was proud and cold and distant, but that was because he was of the nobility and he had a right to be! As she watched his expression she saw the look of sadness and with a gesture of loving pity she took a step closer and laid a timid finger on his sleeve:

“Say! Are you so very unhappy with us? Mother says you are.”

“Hey? What's that?” He hurriedly got to his feet and shook off the gentle hand, “We had better go I guess.” He could not endure her pity but strode along the sand at a fast swinging gait and the child followed as quick as she could, sometimes breaking into a run to keep from losing sight of her hero along the curving beach. At last they passed the few boats anchored in the river's mouth, the grey old houses with the neighbor children basking in the sunshine, and finally through the group of curious eyed sight-seers who filled the door and courtyard of the Ye home. Noch Kyung went on to the sarang and there a strange sight met his vision: the

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cantankerous old man Ye, the bully of the village, the fear and terror of his family, was weeping like a woman. Hysterical and wild his voice rang out so that all could hear:

“My grave! My grave! My grave!—that is what it said, and I know my father's voice. I tell you it was surely his voice!” The faces or those in the courtyard were filled with horror, incrudelity and wonder. What strange drama was this which was being enacted before them? They loved to tell the dark stories of goblins and fairies, their myths and legends of imps, hobgoblins and ghosts which would fill a library. In the winter nights when the wind howls about the court and weird, unnatural sounds come from the dim, unknown regions of darkness, they whisper these tales to each other with a real enjoyment of their creepiness. So the people listened with great excitement, wondering what it could mean. Was this really Ye Chung-Sook's father's spirit, or was it some malignant queson or tokagabie? The master of the house stood among them, wearing a yellowish, sickly green expression beneath his tan; dishevelled hair, his hat gone, his clothes torn, certainly he was the picture of fright and terror. He caught sight of the new comer as he pushed his way through the crowd:

“Oh here he is now! There boy, take the donkey and bring the Chiquan quickly.” Noch Kyung had heard enough from Kumokie to understand the condition of affairs, and knowing that he could get no detailed account of the happening of the morning from this half-crazed creature, turned away without question to prepare for the errand. He enquired the way to the hut of the geomancer, and was soon riding along over the hills. As he trotted along he mused upon the belief of the people :

“Now if the dead are in paradise, and if the living by proper sacrifice, and all due honor have cared for the souls of the departed, how is it that the burial site and the location of the grave itself can determine so much of happiness or woe for us? If a man's soul is at rest,—what matter about the worn out body? I have read that in some countries the bodies of the dead are even burned and yet strange to say these very nations are a prosperous and happy people. Yet they tell us that a man's prospects in life, and in business may be blighted by burying his father's body in an unpropitious sp'ot, that sickness, bad luck and all kinds of dire disaster are caused by this, more than by all the other things we fear! Well, I don't believe it myself! But Ye does, he is more credulous than a child! I do believe that he would spend every cash he has at the command of any scoundrelly sorcerer!”

At the time of his father's funeral Mr. Ye had taken every precaution possible. In order to be sure that all was right, he had even

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called in consultation the famous Mo Chiquan. The large fees paid to these greedy professionals were startling but in return Ye had the assurance that the grave site was the best in that part of the country,—and perfect sites are not easy to find. It lay about 30 li north east of Saemal towards the mountains, yet not far distant from the sea. He had been satisfied at the time as he listened to the explanations of the knowing ones; the “advancing dragon” that is range of hills above the grave, was perfect; the “blue dragon” and “white tiger,” those to the east and west, were equal in length and thus their influence for evil was overcome; the spirit which crouched behind these hills and kept an evil eye upon the tomb was certainly thwarted for there was no “spying peak” to lend its baleful influence, and the grave itself pointed toward no other grave. The judges pronounced it good, what ever could be the trouble? A short ride over the hills in the glorious spring air brought back the sparkle of youth to the eyes of Noch Kyung. The possibility that disaster was threatening the house of Ye seemed only a silly superstition. Little did he dream how the events of this affair would mould his future! Paek Chiquan, the Hermit, lived in a tumbled-down hut on Stony Mount, a rough, precipitous path leading to the lonely heights where it hid itself in a thick cluster of gnarled, old pine trees. Noch Kyung left the donkey at the foot of the ridge, and slowly climbed the steep trail till he arrived at the shabby, weather-beaten hut, the thatch of which was of a dingy grey and brown evidence of the storms of many winters. The mud walls leaned in sharp angles outward as though defying the laws of gravity in the same manner that the master of the house defied the unseen forces of the spirit world. Yet the interior of this ramshackle dwelling was more comfortable than one would at first suppose, the stone floor had a new covering of oiled paper, and bright quilts were piled high against the wall to be unrolled on the heated floor at bed time. The room, however, showed the untidy carelessness of a man house keeper. Here he sat pouring over a huge, musty volume, the great text-book of his profession,—”The Great Important Celestial Instrument.” He crooned aloud its magic formula in a sing song monotonous tone, Every now and then he stopped, turned his head, listened intently, then intoned the chant again. After a while he arose, pushed back the sash of the long, high window, and took a searching look at the road below, which lost itself in the shadows of the distant hills. From the vantage-point of this eyrie of the pine ridge he could see many miles of the approach to his house and yet be unseen. Was he looking for some visitor? This strange performance he repeated several times, and at last nodded his head in evident approval and satisfaction, closed the sash and returned to his

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beloved book. When Noch Kyung approached the tiny courtyard the old fellow was so deeply buried in his mystic rites that it was not until the boy cleared his throat a second time that he was roused from his abstraction to the realities of the world. Then with a look of surprise and innocent wonder he pushed his horn spectacles up high on his forehead, slowly opened the door and said:

“Did I hear a noise out here as of some visitor or is it merely the wind in the pines overhead?”

“Yes, it is I, the son-in-law of Ye Chung-Sook, of Saemal.” At this the host hurriedly arose, made excuse and apology for his poor house and all it contained and bade the yong man enter and rest his body after the arduous climb. But Noch Kyung realizing that he had better hurry as he had been bidden, lost no time in introductory or preliminary but came to the point in a business-like manner, told Paek what had occurred and begged that he come with him at once to the village.

Paek Chiquan was a curiously grizzled specimen, dried up, wizen and brown; he looked like an animated death's head or what I imagine a two thousand year old mummy might seem should it suddenly decide to move about in life. His deep-set eyes grew more intense as he listened in astonishment to this amazing tale.

“What ever can be the trouble?” he exclaimed Something is evidently disturbing the spirit of the departed, but I myself was present at the funeral of Ye Chung-Sook's father, and I am quite sure that all things from the sabgju (death carriage) to the sinju (spirit tablet) and the chisuk (tomb stone) were in perfect order and that there are no disquieting influences about his resting place! For fifteen years his spirit has been in peace. What can be the trouble?” Noch Kyung had no solution to offer this difficult problem and so he answered

“Will you come? The donkey is waiting at the poot of the pass and if you will be so kind, let usgo. I will walk the shorter way across the fields.”

When he arrived at home he found all in confusion and disorder. The frantic Ye was even more distracted than ever by the reiterated assurances of Paek Chiquan that the grave site was in perfect condition. It looked as though there must be some other secret and awful trouble. This terrible uncertainty was unnerving the strong man. His whole thought was taken up with surmises as to what could possibly be the matter with the poor restless spirit of his father, and the neighbors were all eager to tell of some such experience of which they had heard, and to offer advice. The mudang, or sorceress of the village, was present too. She had extorted

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many comfortable fees from him in exchange for her influence with imps and goblins she pretended were causing him trouble. The great spirit of small-pox which had devastated the home and carried away the children had failed to yield to her power, it is true, but a few failures did not shake his faith in the power of the exorcist, but rather increased his terror of the unseen, awful beings with which his imagination peopled all space. One of the friends told of a case like this when it was found that robbers had stolen the body of a man's father as means of revenge for a wrong done. To one of his superstitious and over religiously inclined nature there could be no greater disaster than to have the grave of his father desecrated. It would mean unlimited trouble for him both now and hereafter, and even though it took every cash of his fortune no son who knew his filial duty could fail to respond.

Korean history abounds in stories of robbers kidnapping the body of the father and demanding immense ransoms in return. It is not the living children who are stolen away, for the robbers know very well that a man will give more for his father's corpse or any missing part of it, than for any living children. Preparations for sacrifice before the ancestral tablet were going forward, sacrificial foods were being made ready and the memorial room set in order; the family finally assembled and the shrill wailing which broke the stillness of the spring night was heartrending in its hopeless sadness:

"The post-man is coming! There is a letter! The mail, the mail!" The crowd of sight-seers in the courtyard took up the chorus over this unusual occurrence. The disturbance drew Noch Kyung to see what it meant. Sure enough, a rare thing indeed in this remote village, a postman stood outside, a leather pouch on one shoulder and a lantern swinging in the other hand.

"Perhaps it's a letter from home!" thought he, "I hope it tells me that I may go home for a little visit!" and his heart took an extra beat as he reached his hand for the letter. No, this queer letter could not be from his home, What was it anyway? The awkward characters of the address to Ye Chung-Sook were scrawled in wavering, ungainly lines like the first efforts of a clumsy school-boy. There was no envelope, the flat of the paper was doubled over and glued down with a bit of rice. Noch Kyung took this uncouth production and went to the room where father Ye was still prostrating himself before the tablet. Of course he could not give it to him just then, but a letter could wait. Thus some time elapsed before the strange epistle was placed in the hands of the owner and in the meanwhile the man who had played postman was getting farther and farther away

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towards the hills. It was with scant interest that Ye received the letter, his mind being still occupied and disturbed by the events of the day.

“It is probably from some of the Ye family in the Wun Province,” said he, turning it over and over in his hand. “By post you say, why it has neither stamp or post mark?” He unrolled a long, scroll-like parchment, read a few lines then suddenly the expression of his face changed, extreme fear that agitated mind and body shook him from head to foot, he could scarcely hold the letter, the hand holding it dropped to his side and his eyes took on a wild, strained look. Noch Kyung snatched the letter from the nerveless hand of the terror stricken man and with some difficulty read

“Greetings to Ye Chung-Sook, read and tremble!

Behold the body of your father has been taken from its tomb!

Are you a true and faithful son? If so prove it now.

On the fourth day of the third moon at an hour past midnight bring 40,000 yang to the tall pine tree on the ridge back of your father's grave-mound. Come alone and you will then be told where to find the missing corpse.

You are solemnly warned to keep this matter secret, We know your every move and if you report it to the police and officials either now or hereafter such action will be immediately fatal to you and your family.

Woe, woe betide you if you fail,”

CHAPTER V.

A Family Council.

Confusion and terror reigned at the house of Ye Chun Sook. From the time he had heard the voice speaking to him in the field until the receipt of the strange letter he had been like a different man, no longer a bully to be feared, but a trembling, faint-hearted weakling. Although the letter from the grave robbers had shocked and horrified him beyond measure he found that as time passed the tension relaxed and his mind regained composure. This at least was something definite and tangible. His first perplexity and anxiety was much augmented by the dread uncertainty as to which of a thousand possible causes might be bringing this unrest to the spirit of his father. Even the sorceress, the Pansu, or the chiquan, with all their uncanny knowledge of mysterious cults, might not be able to solve the problem without much difficulty and disagreement among themselves. Yes, much better was this catastrophe, dreadful though it was, than that dark uncertainty!

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The frequency of this manner of robbery and desecration of graves to gain a ransom, led to very stringent laws with regard to this matter in Korea. It was one of the most serious crimes of the penal code. But, although a capital offence, it was very seldom that any great amount of thought was given to the question of catching the offenders. The great and important thing was to get back as quickly as possible the grewsome, missing treasure. No self respecting man of old Korea would consider his financial loss for a moment when the honor and peace of the family were thus at stake. Robber bands who made this work a specialty were more dreaded and feared than all the many other outlaws in which this country once abounded. Farmer Ye had been wise and discreet thus far in keeping secret the fact of his large possessions, but the transaction in connection with the marriage of his grand-daughter was of a kind difficult to conceal for long. It was a much discussed fact that provisions, bags of rice and other grain, were sent regularly to the Kim family. Although Whangsi had been bound over to secrecy concerning the money part of the bargain, it is nevertheless quite true that her desire to gossip and tell of her part in the affair finally overcame her discretion. The bandits were not in the habit of exercising their dangerous calling save when sure of results and so in this case also they had definite and reliable information upon which to base their attack.

After the reading of the threatening letter little else was thought of or discussed in the village that night Five days remained before the time appointed. What would Ye do?

The amount of the demand was exorbitant; could he, would he pay that amount? There were various opinions among the neighbors; some thought that his miserly instincts were so strong and of such long standing that they would rule even here. Others said that old manYe's fear of the spirits and of their all-seeing eyes was greater even than his love of gold.

The next morning fresh sacrificial food was placed. before the tables of the ancestors, while the .anxiety and suspense in the hearts of the inmates of the home were visible in the faces of the worshippers at the household shrine. Between periods of wailing and bowing, Ye Chung Sook wandered about the court-yard with aimless feet. Catching sight of Noch Kyung in the sarang he entered and sat down.

“Woe, woe is me! What have I done, what dread misdeed is mine that I should be so punished? What shall we do?”

“Quite true, what are you going to do? There are only five days in which to decide and prepare. Every moment is precious.” The boy's words were coldly judicious and showed that he had been thinking deeply, while

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Ye in his frenzy and excitement was taken up with the action of the moment.

“Do? There is nothing to do but to submit to the demands of the rascals! What else could one do?” Now Noch Kyung had little patience with the old man’s fetishism, but when it became a question of reverence of ancestors it was a very different matter. This had turned out to be a matter of much more importance than he had supposed when he first heard the story of the ghostly voice. He prided himself on being a Confucianist, and in this great orthodox belief of the scholar ancestral worship is the chief cornerstone. You may not be a believer in goblins, imps, evil spirits, divination or star influences, but you must, under all conditions, follow the forms and rites of ancestor worship.

“What shall I do?” repeated Ye in a voice of shrill annoyance. The boy knowing very well what would be the action in such a case in his own family gave it as his opinion of what would be the proper thing here.

“Have I not heard you say that the elder of your family clan, your father’s oldest brother, lives in Kang Wun Province? Such an important matter concerns the whole family. Is it not of sufficient moment to be taken up in the conclave of the family council? If such a calamity occurred in our Kim clan that would be the first step. This is surely too great a matter for private decision.”

This was a very sane and sensible speech for one so young and Ye looked at his son-in-law in pleased surprise. “Very wisely said!” replied he, then sat quietly thinking it over. At last he looked up with something like relief in his worn face.

“I’ll start to-day! There are several reasons why it will be well. They may help me raise the money. Perhaps they will counsel catching the thieves. My uncle lives two days’ journey from here, that gives me a day for the conference and plenty of time in which to go and come.”“ Having made this decision he hurried to his feet and hustled out to get things moving. There were not many preparations to be made for the journey. The gentle donkey was fitted with his odd-looking, high bridge saddle. Being one of the few well trained “bridle wise” animals, he did not need a mapu to run along in front and lead him. Mother Ye filled a brass bowl with flaky rice, folded it in a napkin for his lunch and tied it to the back of the saddle.

Much of the mountain road that he was to travel was through wild, unsettled sections known to be infested by robbers, so he was careful to take nothing of value except a few cash to buy his necessary food and night’s lodging. It was by no means such a route as one would select for a

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pleasure trip, but this was a matter of stern duty and Ye was not a coward. In fact he was almost a brave man where visible, tangible enemies were concerned; only when those fearful inhabitants of the dark world of spirits were in question did he quake and tremble.

The noon sun saw him started on his way across the brown hills towards the mountains of Kang Wun Do. That night he slept at a way-side inn and on the evening of the second day neared his old home village of San Kohl with no incident worthy of note to mark the journey. The few houses of this remote hamlet were mostly of the Ye family. From the general air of comfort one would suppose that they were neither rich nor poor, and such indeed was the case. They were middle-class people, farmers who had what they needed to eat with sufficient produce to sell or trade in the market town for cloth and farming implements. The tough little donkey was pretty well spent as he over-topped the last pass and came in sight of the gray, old rambling house, the home of Ye's childhood. But Ye Chang Sook was far from being a man of sentiment, and just then his attention was fully centered on things vastly more important than memories of the past. He dismounted before the deeply thatched gateway, left the faithful mount with trailing bridle and drooping head, opened the ponderous gate and entered the broad court-yard of the homestead.

The elder of the Ye clan was an old man, but hale and hearty still in spite of his eighty storm swept winters. He heard the painful creaking of the gate on its rusty hinges, and peeped out through a hole in the paper covering of the door. Seeing his nephew advancing he shoved back the sliding entrance of the sarang and greeted him.

“My son! Have you come in peace? I have not seen you since the family gathering at the harvest festival in the eleventh moon. Come in, you are welcome home!” With a few words of greeting to his venerable relative Ye entered the homely room and before long was telling his interested, sympathetic listener the remarkable doings of the past week in Saemal. Elder Ye was greatly troubled by the news, and thought it was certainly a matter for family deliberation. Of such things he had heard all his life, but never before had anything just like this happened in his well-ordered family. It was most astonishing!

The darkening sky of early evening found the nearby members of the family in attendance. Another uncle, two more distant relatives along with Elder Ye and himself, made a goodly representation. Other members lived too far away and were too scattered to have word sent them during the short time at their disposal.

It was one of those chilly, raw nights of early spring and the five

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men gathered about the cozy warmth of the brazier. The light of the candle was reflected by the brass candlestick and the burnished plates of the heavy chest, which were the only furniture in the room. There was perfect housekeeping visible in the spotless cleanliness of the oil-paper floor and the brightness of the polished brass. The men tucked their feet under them in comfortable attitudes, and with the scrawling characters of the letter spread out before them filled their long-stemmed pipes from the old man's tobacco-pouch.

“The corpse stealing robbers,—dogs! They are getting altogether too bold! For my part I believe that they ought to be punished. The heads of a few such offenders hung up before the south gale of the capital would be a wholesome warning to all such in the future! That's the law.” Thus spoke Ye Pilsu.

“But how?” this speaker was a swarthy faced new-comer. “Don't they take every precaution for safety? And even though you catch one or two of them, which after all might not be difficult, there is the biggest part of the gang left and the thing of most importance, the body of our brother still missing. What good would it do? It would be like binding a tiger with rotten straw rope.”

“Call out the gendarmes,” interrupted the first speaker, “rouse the whole country side; have the soldiers and officials out and clean up the entire bunch. Don't be easy about it, or dumb like a lot of cattle, make a fight.”

“Ycs, that's sooner said than done. It is not so easy to arouse soldiers and officers of the law who have these things to deal with. They will not move without a big fee for themselves and then another squeeze to each of the soldiers. Their half-hearted efforts would cost as much or more than the ransom, with that probably to pay in the end also. Oh, they are just a crowd of hungry wolves; take all and give nothing in return! I know these hounds of the law, it would be better to be in the hands of the robbers themselves!” They all looked with respect and pity at this speaker, a pale-faced sad little man who put much bitterness into his denunciation of the minions of the law.

“It would accomplish nothing, I tell you. What is to be gained by poking the nose of a sleeping tiger? But granted that they might capture some of these rogues and hang them. Even though you accomplished the punishment of a few, the larger number who are very sly and cunning, would be still free and their promise to punish the betrayer would assuredly be fulfilled. What would you gain? Your days would be numbered. If you call the officials in you might as well call your grave

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diggers at the same time.”

“You are afraid,” said Pilsu. “Just let us think for a moment how easily it could be done! Agree to their demands, and when you go to the place of meeting on the ridge have a crowd of good strong men in hiding to nab them before they know it.”

“I never heard of anyone doing it in that way. That is not the ordinary method of managing things. If you try to take any one with you, no matter how secret you may be, they will know it and not appear. I have heard many say that the very spirits of evil seem to be in league with them. They are aware of every movement you make. No doubt they know that Chung Sook is here now, and all that we are discussing. They always receive the money first before they tell you where to find the thing that's lost. There is no use in with-standing them; if you do, it will surely end in death for you and misery for us all.” At mention of his name Chung Sook shivered and cast furtive, frightened glances behind him.

“Oh it isn't that I'm afraid,—not of the robbers! And yet I have considered it necessary all along that the ransom be paid. But what about the money? They ask more than I've got. You will have to help me. It is a matter in which the family must stand together, for it isn't a personal matter you see. I'm only a farmer, we are all poor and it is generally rich men that these swine go for as a rule. Certainly I can not raise 40,000 yang alone.”

Then spoke the elder, who up to this point had said nothing in the discussion:

“Come now, Chung Sook, don't lie to us! A man who can pay down 80,000 yang in cash in a bargain for a yangban son-in-law then send rice besides to feed a family of Kims can scarcely be called poor! This is your business and it was brought about, no doubt, by a careless handling of that wedding. We give you the family aid in our advice and decision but you need not ask us for money.” As the harrassed man looked into the pitiless faces about him he knew that this decision was final. There were a few minutes of quiet puffing at the pipes, then the swarthy one again took up the thread of the argument:

“This robber gang is no doubt a band of desperate fellows, as such usually are. If you try to thwart them, you pay for it with your life. You all heard of what happened last winter in Ham Kyung Province. They said it was this Ponto gang who were back of it, the most lawless, fearless, gang Korea has known for years. In that case the ransom required was so enormous that it aroused the man to fury. He claimed that it would take everything he had and leave him a pauper So he secretly planned to

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catch the robbers who came for the money. This was done without much trouble, but two days later the man himself disappeared and was never heard of again. Better be a pauper than a corpse!"

Thus back and forth, pro and con, the argument waxed hot and lasted far into the night. Then again spoke the man of authority:

"Time is passing. It would be well for you to get an early start with the dawn of to-morrow. You must yield. I have never heard of a refusal ending in anything but confusion and disaster. A true son would give all that he had to redeem his parent. Did not his voice speak to you in the fields? What clearer sign do we need that this is his will and desire in the matter. Then all will be peace and quiet again. Fear not. Do your duty as an honest son and you will be blessed by the spirits of your ancestors."

"Yes, my father, that too has been my thought from the first. But will not my family stand with me in this trouble? I have not the money, what am I to do?"

"You must get it, and you can. As I said before you brought this thing upon us by false pride and folly. Now you must pay the price!"

To remonstrate was useless, to argue folly. He knew that his uncle was right and that if he created a breach with the family it would only mean that he would be cast out and disowned, disgraced. The two wayfarers made good time on the return trip and early the morning of the second day they arrived at the sea-girt rocks of the familiar coast not a great distance from their home village. Ye did not plan to go directly home, however, as would have been natural. Instead, he turned his course directly towards the surf line on the beach. The Gray Friend was not a little displeas'd and disappointed at this turn of affairs. In fact he tried hard to take the bit in his teeth and make for the comfortable stable and hot bean-mash that he knew would be waiting for him. It took several severe commands and cruel blows from his master to convince him that they were not going to those pleasures yet for awhile. With a despondent droop to his soft, long ears and a look of feeling very tired as well as much abused, he was compelled by the same hand to wait for long weary hours in a lonely ravine whose throat opened to the sea. There his master left him alone till he went off on some kind of a secret mission. Strain his eyes and ears as he might he could see nothing, and hear nothing but the surge and swish of the long line of sea. After what seemed an age there was heard the dipping of an oar, nearer and nearer it came and then the faithful watcher gave a great bray of delight and welcome as he recognized the occupant of the tiny craft. But what is this? Not to go home yet it would seem. For after lifting a great heavily loaded sack to his

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saddle he turned his head again to the north. As he walked he held this cumbersome thing in place while they trudged some distance further along the sandy beach. Before the turn of the tide it was necessary that he reach a certain little cavern, a secret hiding place, which lay among the rocks and sands of the sea not far from the ridge of pines that shaded his father's tomb.

CHAPTER VI
A Midnight Tryst.

The setting sun was casting a glimmer of molten gold over the western sea as the wearied travellers passed by the fishing nets, up the winding lane to the heavy, iron-studded gate. This was the third moon, first day, and the fateful hour for the midnight tryst was drawing near. Ye heaved a great sigh of relief as he thought of what he had already accomplished in readiness for that time. The family rushed out to greet him after the long and dangerous journey. Noch Kyung took the tired little donkey to feed and to attend with the loving hand of which the little gray friend had been dreaming for many trying hours. The news or the return spread like wildfire throughout the village, and soon a crowd of curious neighbors were flocking towards Ye's house and crowding closely about the door to hear what he had to say. They were anxious to know who among them had read him aright and prophesied truly. The family awaited his words with earnest desire to know the result of the trip.

"Clear out, every body now, and give me a little rest. I'm weary unto death! Whew, can't get my breath in this crowd!" The visitors scattered to their homes but they understood his silence on the point of interest, and they guessed also the decision of the family clan.

"Of course," said the knowing ones, "it is quite natural for Mr. Ye to be nervous and somewhat cross, think of the burden on his heart!" Thus, for the time being, the uncouth fellow became quite the hero of the village and the lack of courtesy and scant welcome to his neighbors was excused.

Pack Chickquan came at dusk to pay his respects and to learn the results of the trip to Kan Wun Do, a very fitting and proper thing for an old retainer of the family, and one who had such a personal interest in the burial sites and all that concerned them,—so thought Mr. Ye. He stayed but a short time and when he left his wizen, dried-up face was more monkey-like than ever, so distorted was it with pained sympathy for his client's misfortune. Perhaps Mr. Ye would have been less certain of his

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fidelity had he seen this look of pained sympathy turn to a leer of triumph as the Chiquan left the narrow alley of the villages.

Reaction was setting in for Ye; as he saw events shaping themselves, and became sure of the way in which he would meet the present crisis, his calmness returned. The strong mind was again on the throne, and the awful fear and distracting terror which had gripped him relaxed its hold, as he realized that he could overcome the present circumstances. During the quiet days he had been riding along on the sure-footed donkey, he had been considering the situation in all its relations to his every-day life. He saw now how his folly and pride had led him into the very snare he had tried so long to avoid and he made a firm resolve that the future should see no more such foolishness. It would never do to let people think that he had invisible means wherewith to defray such enormous and unexpected expenses as this. If he did, his life would henceforth not be worth a cash piece, and the extortion of officials and demands of robber bands would make it a constant burden.

No, that would never do! It would be necessary to make all the neighbors and relatives think that he had been beggared by this affair. So he said to his family:

“I must sell all that I have. All these fields and my farm, all my worldly possessions go to meet this demand. Neighbor Han has long wanted the land and it will just about bring in the amount needed.” They listened in pained silence not knowing just what this meant but fearing that it foreboded some dire calamity.

There was much to be done, and little time in which to do it. Tomorrow was the fated day, but it was now the duty of Ye to manage these preliminary affairs in such a way that the members of his clan would not again taunt him with having brought disaster upon them by carelessness and sinful pride.

During the day following the return of Mr. Ye an atmosphere of mystery pervaded the house; the villagers spoke in subdued tones as they passed the door, then gathered in groups to discuss this unprecedented occurrence. They knew that Ye was selling his farm; some of the best and most fertile land in that part of the country was going into the hands of Han Comchil who had long cast covetous eyes upon it. To be sure 40,000 yang (about \$400) could not be easily raised in this part of Korea in those days. Currency was scarce; farm products, especially rice, passed as legal tender and the merchants were the real bankers of the country. The very real and ever present danger of robbers made it unwise to keep even a small amount of coin in the house. The unwieldy bulk of the money was

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also another reason for handling as little as possible. The greater part of it was in ponderous copper cash, so heavy that even an amount equal to Yen 20.00 (or ten dollars American money), would have made a burden too great for a man to carry without much inconvenience. There was no Korean money larger than the nickle piece, which although much better than the copper was still difficult to handle, especially if secrecy was required. Thus it was all but impossible in a country fishing village to bring together so large a sum as Ye found necessary with only a few days' warning. With much flurry and bluster he made the wining Han swear that he would never tell the price of the land nor the details of the transaction. He wanted the people to believe that this was the ransom money paid to the robbers, but when he remembered a certain cavern and that which was hidden there his heart lost much of its heavy burden and a glow of satisfaction flooded his being. Yes, in his own way, and a very sly way it was too, he would get even with the dastardly rascals!

At sunset the patient partner of his nocturnal adventures was brought forth. The assembled family stood about to bid farewell, but to their respectful greetings his reply was scarcely more than a deep growl, which might have meant much or nothing. He rode away with his face turned to the challenging blue of the eastern hills. The king of day gave the earth a lingering kiss of glory, then dropped like a ball of fire beneath the western waves, while a thousand shafts of opal light flashed between sky and iridescent sea, but his eyes saw none of this wondrous beauty about him. After a steady trot of an hour the donkey was reined up while they turned from the well-trodden highway into a trackless maze of wilderness. At the far end of lonely, rock strewn valley he came to a chestnut grove which he sought. There he tied the beast and proceeded on his way on foot. Time was precious for he had a long way to walk before midnight; he feared to ride lest they track him. On foot, he could defy even the hounds of the mountain to find out his secret. The near cut, the unused trails of the hills and vales about here for many li were all precious to him. Leaving the grove and its lone occupant he made his way with the same sure-footed tread over hills and through valleys, by fields and woods back in a westerly direction, to the sea-coast. His feet were as light and as stealthy as a red Indian's, and anyone disposed to follow him this night would have needed all the cunning with which nature has endowed the inhabitants of the forest.

He stopped and listened carefully every little while. When he came at last out of a patch of woodland in full view of the great waters a crescent hung, a thread-like line of silver, over the sullen waves. Keeping

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still to the hills above the irregular beach, Ye went steadily towards the north until the pale moon went down in a faint gleam which was soon swallowed up in the all-embracing darkness of the night. He was glad of its friendly aid for now he dared at last! turn to the hard sand of the beach where he made faster progress. With long swinging steps he pressed onward till he reached a place where he stopped and made a careful survey of the heavens. The stars told him that it was about the second watch of the night, or the hour of the Pig (which is shortly before midnight) and here was the familiar pile of rock which hid his treasure.

“Well timed,” said he, observing that a certain flat rock was just uncovered by the waves.

A long, searching look up and down the beach, listening keenly as he peered out through the soft, pulsing shadows of the night revealed only the swish, swish of the water and the purling wash of the tide as the waves broke in smooth widening circles on the yielding sand.

After some moments of tense watching he gave a sigh of relief, put his shoulder to the great flat rock and exerted all his enormous strength against it. Slowly it yielded and swung back as though on a pivot, revealing an opening large enough for a man to enter. With the furtive, stealthy manner of a thief he entered this dark cavern, drew out his hidden treasure and carried it to the entrance. With much less exertion than it took to open it the pivot rock was swung into place again. The man stood a moment watching the lapping waves creep nearer the rock with a satisfied knowledge that his tracks in the sand, with all evidence of his visit, would soon be obliterated by the spreading waters. The bag before him was large and very heavy. Vainly now did he long for his faithful, surefooted friend but the delicacy of this task made that companionship and assistance impracticable. With a strenuous effort the burden was taken upon his back, and bending almost double beneath the load, he made his uncertain way. Ye Chung Sook waded into the water and with slow deliberate steps followed along the shallow edge of surf, leaving no footprints in the sand. After half an hour of this slow trudging he left the water, turned to the west and thus approached his destination, the ridge of the tombs, from a point quite remote from his secret cavern.

“In very good time,” mused Ye as he toiled up this steep ascent. Every little while it was necessary to put down the burden and rest his tired back. That he was now within the range of many unfriendly eyes he knew to be quite probable, but he knew also that he was now safe from attack or robbery. The honor of thieves is proverbial in Korea and if this were indeed the well known Ponto, as many believed, then, he, the most

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terrible of all bandits was also most scrupulously careful of his honor, the honor of his word. Did he threaten to kill a man who disobeyed his commands? Then kill him he surely would! Did he promise devastation and destruction? Then woe betide the helpless victim! But if the object of his threat yielded in a quiet and obedient manner he could be quite as confident that the robber chief would keep his part honorably and so had no need to fear approaching him with the ransom.

Tugging and panting the weary man at last reached the summit of the ridge where stood the tallest pine. Many other pines grew as sentinels in a grove about its feet, but this magnificent giant reached its long branches to the sky in brave fearlessness of wind and weather. The soft zephyrs of summer and the frigid blasts of winter for many cycles of years had passed over this proud prince leaving it standing still undisturbed Monarch of the Pines.

Well nigh spent, bending low beneath the load of metal, Ye shuffled along until he came to this place of rendezvous. He slipped his bag to earth not far from a fallen log and fell beside it panting and gasping with exhaustion. Here he lay motionless for some time, waiting for the meeting which he knew to be not far distant. To his straining ears came night voices; the whispering wind among the pines; the startled cry of some wild bird in the trees near his father's rifled tomb; the distant baying of a watch-dog; the hideous scream of an owl,—these sounds only, no foot-fall, nor echo which told of human nearness. After a time of waiting which seemed endless, though in reality not long, he felt that he had been there waiting for many hours. He had that weird, uncanny feeling that others, unseen, were watching him; that eyes were upon him; a sense of some terrible, unknown presence. Brave though he had thought himself he knew that he was trembling from head to foot. That fear of the unknown which is so much worse than the most painful certainty took hold of him. Cold sweats broke out all over his body as he remembered the horror associated with the mounds below, and he would not even have been surprised to have heard the awful voice itself which had called him to this labor of filial duty.

Why did they not come? The thickness of the matted leaves overhead hid the stars from view but he felt positive nevertheless that it was long past the appointed hour. Could he have made a mistake in the date? He wished that he had not destroyed the letter so soon. His mind was so occupied with this dire possibility that he did not see the dim figure which moved stealthily from behind the fallen log, as silently as a cat stalking a mouse. The fearsome creature was almost opposite Ye

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before he realized its nearness. Then the stillness of the night was broken by a long, shrill whistle. With a scream Ye leaped to his feet shaken and trembling. What new horror was this which confronted him so silently from nowhere? Then the human voice which spoke reassured him. At midnight, by a mountain grave-mound, a robber, even a desperately notorious one, is a much less fearsome companion than a ghost. The voice had the monotonous strained tone of disguise:

“Did you bring it all?”

“Yes, it is all here.”

“That is well, the worse for you if you had not.” The speaker was dressed in black and his head was bound about in turban fashion. In answer to his whistled call two other men appeared as noiselessly as himself. Obeying a motion from their leader they took up the heavy bag, tied an extra rope about it, thrust it through with a pole and slung it between them. Then they started down the opposite side of the ridge from which Ye had come. For perhaps twenty minutes the two men faced each other without a word; there was nothing to be said. Ye felt that the worst was now over, and he was truly much more comfortable with this strange companion than he had been before. By the time the men with the ransom money were safely far away, the impressive stranger spoke again:

“If you will dig just by the north side of yonder tall pine beneath a flat rock you will find that which you seek!”

With no more ceremony or greeting the dark visitor turned. No look did he cast behind him, but with calm, majestic strides he took the measured pace of conscious victory down the side of the ridge. Ye waited spell-bound until he heard the last faint foot-fall die away; then shook himself as if awakening from a nightmare.

“Well, I never! Ponto the Terrible!”

His eyes turned in question to the great pine tree. What was hidden there? His nerves were too jumpy and unreliable for further investigation that night, so, this would have to await a more convenient season. Feeling again that overwhelming sense of an unseen Presence, and with an agony of helpless fear gripping his heart Ye turned and fled.

CHAPTER VII. Retrenchments

When Farmer Ye rode away that memorable night to meet his weird experiences on Tall Pine Ridge those who were left behind could only

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watch and wait for his return. He had scarcely spoken to them that day, had been so glum and taciturn that the family dared not even ask when they should expect him home. The evening passed in that peculiar tenseness which is brought about by the suspense and anxiety of waiting. Mrs. Ye sat with folded, nerveless hands and gazed with unseeing eyes at the sputtering candle. Kumokie and mother went to their little room, the child to the undisturbed slumber of childhood, the mother to lie awake and cough and muse upon the strange compensations of life. Noch Kyung walked up and down the courtyard; he had wanted a part in this experience himself, but to have only the waiting, a woman's part, bah! This was far from his taste. However the orders of the robbers positively forbid any one to accompany Ye to the place of meeting and when the boy had suggested that he go with him to the foot of the ridge his kindly offer was met by a gruff refusal. Although the boy had little love for this harsh old fellow, he nevertheless realized, being a part of this household, that all that concerned it must concern his welfare also. Midnight came and passed, still Mother Ye sat by the candle. When it burned low it was replaced by another; when guttered up with grease she took the snuffers from the hook and carefully tended it, then sank again into her abstraction and gazed with a fixed stare at the tiny blaze. In its unsteady, wavering flame she saw reflected pictures of the distant past, pictures of memory that came and went in its flickering light; faces of long ago, scenes of her childhood, when far distant, happy days passed before her. Her thoughts were not with the man yonder who faced present danger on the bleak hill side alone. He would come back all right, there was little doubt of that in her mind. Nightly vigils were nothing new to her, so she had long ago given up worry on account of these. She waited, for her husband's return, but her mind and heart were far away. At times through the long night Noch Kyung came and sat near her though few words passed between them. The crowing of the cocks announced the coming dawn, and still Ye Chung-Sook did not come. The sky was pink and gold, flushed with the rosy light of a new day when a familiar bray announced an arrival. The watchers rushed out to the gate, unbarred it and hurried to greet the master. The donkey, glad to be home again, and knowing that he had done a good night's work, rubbed his friendly nose against the boy's shoulder, flapped his long ears in his affectionate way, then brayed again loud and long as though calling their attention to the fact that this wise and crafty fellow had been through some exciting perils himself. The Master was exhausted, hungry and in a terribly bad humor, so he vouchsafed no information

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concerning the vigil of the past night. His wife hastened to do his bidding about the breakfast, guessing that all must be well since he was back safely. In fact it is quite probable that to her dying day she never heard all the details of that night's experience for he spoke of it very seldom and then only to intimate friends.

After some days the stolen body was exhumed from the robber's hiding place beneath the flat stone and was again buried with the usual pomp and ceremony in its original and proper resting place.

This disagreeable experience cast a gloomy cloud over the disposition of Ye Chung Sook whose nature was already inclined to be sullen and austere. From the time of the marriage, his temper had been gradually improving, and during the few months that he had allowed himself and his family some comforts and the enjoyment of a moderate use of money, he had felt a very agreeable glow of respectability. This catastrophe had brought him to a sudden halt, and caused a reversal of feelings; like a which horse that has been on a head-long plunge towards death, drawn back suddenly, rears, and turns wildly in the direction from which he has come. He determined now to practice the strictest and most pinching economy. Ye's conversation on this subject became one continuous harangue. He raved and stormed at the small, necessary expenses of the household until the patient little wife was almost desperate. Thus several months passed away while the situation in the home grew steadily worse; Mrs. Ye tried to do as he desired in all things but abuse and not infrequent blows were the only reward for her trouble.

In olden times the true Korean gentlemen felt that any kind of manual labor was degrading; he might starve but he could not work. One thing which constantly brings amazement to the foreigner visiting this land is that there are so many of this class who subsist with no more occupation or visible means of livelihood than the birds of the air, or the flowers of the field; they toil not, nor spin neither do they dig, hoe or plough. Ye, however, was not posing as a Yang Ban, and the consuming desire of his nature just at this time was that no one should become suspicious of his income, or that he had a secret source of funds. Thus with farming lands sacrificed it became necessary to have some other means of visible livelihood that the neighbors' curiosity on this point be not aroused. After much concern and deliberation he determined to become a fisherman; there were several considerations favorable to this decision, the chief of which being that he could then come and go without so much danger of arousing suspicion or curiosity. An old fishing-smack made its appearance and he announced to his astonished family that since

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he was now a poor fisherman that they would please behave themselves accordingly.

“This big house I have sold to Mr. An, and next week we must move to that small house near the beach”—this he said with the assurance that there would be no question of remonstrance on the part of that well-trained family. Should his wife have raised any question about leaving the only home she had known for thirty years, the home she really loved, Ye would have been utterly shocked and surprised.

Noch Kyung’s one faithful friend, the little gray donkey, had been long since sold, and he stood now looking at his hard visaged father-in-law and pondering this new development. Turning to him the old man said:

“As for you, make ready to go with me on our first fishing trip. We will start at the turning of the tide.” He did not wish to be bothered with the boy’s presence and yet his idleness aggravated him beyond measure. He was used to unquestioned obedience, but this boy stood now tall and straight, and as he stood and looked at the older man he seemed to grow taller. Ye was fascinated by the cold gleam of disgust

gust in the boy’s eyes, it held some subtle power over the hardened bully. They looked long into each other’s eyes, then with curling lips and a flash of perfect white teeth Noch Kyung spoke in the short, jerky tones of suppressed anger:

“Sir, if work I must, I shall at least choose the calling of a gentleman. Remember that I am still a Kim, and no son of Kim ever becomes a common fisherman!”

“Oh, you are proud of being a Kim are you? Small good it did you! I would have you remember that you are now a member of the household of Ye Chung Sook, and if you remain such you shall obey me! See that you are on deck at the turning of the tide!” This was said in a domineering voice of authority; but he did not look at the young man; it was difficult for him to meet that look of indignant disgust and to know that he was bitterly despised by this lad whom he had for a while hoped to win. As he spoke he turned and started to the gate, his heart hot and angry against the turn fate had taken with his plans for a high bred son!

It is scarcely necessary to add that Noch Kyung did not go on the fishing trip. The boats of the villagers remained out all night and when Ye returned with them at sunrise he had decided that the most diplomatic way to treat this was to ignore it as though forgotten. It was not forgotten, however, neither was his temper improved by the painful episode. As he ate his breakfast Mrs. Ye hovered near. His eye roved about seeking some

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object on which he might vent his wrath. Poor Mrs. Ye found life unusually difficult that morning. None of the carefully prepared food was as it should be, and he roared loud complaints at her as he rapidly emptied the bowls of food. At this inopportune moment Kumokie entered the gateway with a happy skip of childish joy. In her hand was a beautiful dove, the gift of a friendly neighbor. The child's happiness was complete, governed by the pleasure of the moment, and somehow this vision of innocent happiness only made the half-crazed Ye more angry.

"What now, my little lady?" Kumokie stopped as she saw her grandfather and the look of condemnation in his eyes; the happy look fled from her face; her eyes filled with apprehension and fear; her hands relaxed their hold on the gentle dove and she would have fled from the yard had she dared but her feet seemed like lead,—so she only stood before him helpless and trembling. The released dove with a friendly "Coo-oo" fluttered to her shoulder and perched there.

The searching eyes of her grandfather had found the occasion they sought:

"Take off those shoes instantly," he demanded.

Obediently, though half benumbed Kumokie slipped her little feet from the red leather sandals. As she leaned over to pick them up the bird on her shoulder fluttered to the ridge-pole of the thatched roof above. She was not left to face the stern judge alone, however. Noch Kyung was taking in the scene from the outer court-yard. He was not deceived for he realized that this fit of anger was caused by his own rebellion and he determined that the innocent, helpless child should not bear the brunt of that anger. True, before this he had been an unwilling witness on more than one occasion to harsh, unjust blows on the women of the family from this household tyrant. But this was different in that he himself had caused the tempest and he would not see his child wife suffer in his stead.

Again the high, angry voice rang out:

"Bring me those shoes!" With hesitating steps Kumokie came nearer and held out in her trembling, dimpled hands the little red sandals.

He took them roughly into his huge, clumsy paws, turned them over several times, looked at the soles and grunted while she stood waiting in an agony of suspense.

"Huh, worn out already! How do you dare, you extravagant chit to wear your best leather shoes at play? Soon you will have none at all, no not even straw sandals!" his voice grew louder and louder as his pent up passion found expression. He rose and towered above the frightened child: "Why don't you go barefoot like other poor children? There,—now, off

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with those stockings, make haste too!” Kumokie knew not how to defend herself. She had always had shoes. None but the very poorest coolie children go without. No one had ever told her before not to wear them, how did she know? But no sound of this came from her parted lips. Speechless she stood before her judge.

“Quick! Didn’t you hear what I said? Off with those stockings! Disobey me, will you, my fine lady? I’ll teach you to obey, and to be quicker about it, too!” Much too terrified to move now, the cringing offender stood helpless before the uplifted hand of the strong, angry man. Before the hand struck a new voice sounded :

“Stop!” at this one word spoken with authority the lifted arm of Ye fell to his side and with great surprise he confronted Noch Kyung who also stood there almost princely in his indignation. Such a thing in Korea was unheard of, for a man who is head of his family is absolute lord over his own house. To defy a father in the chastisement of his child is an unpardonable offence of etiquette. The two men again confronted each other, one dark-browed, passionately angry, the other cool, self-controlled, but with the glint of suppressed wrath in his eyes. The boy’s aversion to all that was common and vulgar had grown into a positive loathing for Ye. As they thus faced each other and the older man knew that he was despised for the vile coward that he was, his eyes fell, then shifted to the child standing motionless between them.

“She is my wife.” He put a world of meaning into these four words and it made it seem the right and proper thing that he should defend the child chosen as his wife from even the cruelty of her natural guardian. In the loving heart of Kumokie these tender words lingered through long years of sorrow and loneliness. He called her his wife, and thus bound her to him for life with bonds more secure than did those of custom or law.

Whatever thoughts may have been in the mind of Ye he did not utter them. More blustering and quarrelsome than courageous, he was completely conquered before the just wrath and indignation of Noch Kyung, though he chose to ignore the interruption, which was his favorite way of dealing with matters out of his control.

“I am talking to you!” he said turning to Kumokie. He preferred to deal thus with those whom he could intimidate by his tyrannical manner. The child having regained her power of action in this moment of by-play, stripped from her feet the offending socks and placed them by the shoes. There was a warm glow of gratitude in her heart for her rescuer. Ah! What a hero was this and what deeds of glory would he not do in the world! As her eyes now turned again to her grandfather’s face, he might have read

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there, had he been wise in matters concerning a woman's heart, the dawning devotion of a life time.

"So you have decided on obedience, have you my little lady?" said he.

"Well, just as well for you! Now get out of my sight!"

Which last injunction she very gladly and quickly followed.

Such domestic scenes were of constant occurrence in the house at Saemal, and not always did they end so favorably. After the removal of the family to the small, crowded hut on the beach the intensity of Ye's temper and injustice seemed to grow with his physical discomfort. This was the house of a very poor man, the tumble down mud walls had been but imperfectly repaired, the thin layers of mouldy thatch would surely leak with the rains of summer, unless new straw were used in lavish quantities. There were two tiny rooms and a single court-yard in contrast to the spacious comfort of the former home. These hardships were bad enough but Ye's perversity, his violent and volcanic outbreaks sometimes made his wife wonder if he were not losing his mind, so well did that crafty gentleman act his part, the role of a bitter and dis appointed man who has lost all of his earthly possessions.

Noch Kyung had seen many things, some of them small and insignificant in themselves, which taken all together were to his keen mind conclusive evidence that the old fellow was playing a part. Then also the boy was growing more and more suspicious of the secret trips made by him. Since the addition of the fishing boat Ye spent much time away from home supposedly at sea, but if this time was spent in fishing he was clearly a very poor fisherman. Many times when the other boats returned with a heavy haul his boat would be nearly or quite empty. What was this mystery? Where did he go and what did he do on these long trips alone? Thus while the boy was making up his mind to find out the secret of these vigils and to see if they were as poor as Mr. Ye pretended, Mr. Ye was also reaching a conclusion concerning the lad. This Noch Kyung was altogether too bright, and Ye had read in the searching looks the suspicion of the boy's mind. Either he must take him into his confidence or get rid of him and with him the danger of discovery.

The limit of Noch Kyung's endurance was reached, however, when he found that Ye was not sending the regular instalments of grain to the family in the city. His remonstrance was a call for an outbreak :

"Well, of all the stupidity! Do you not see that I can not support my own family? We have sold our home and by my daily labor I support my children in misery whereas we once lived in comfort. And can you

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have the impudence in the face of these facts to ask me to send rice to Seoul to your family while we eat millet? Let the Kims work as I have to do. I'm tired of your idleness; why don't you go and earn their rice and your own too?"

"But, sir, we do not eat millet! We have food of the best and in plenty. Can you not send my father part of your contract amount even if not all? He will be expecting it and depending upon it"

"No, not a grain! And if these wasteful women are extravagant with the food they must stop it! What fools they are! Can I watch every leak in the gourd?" This speech boded more trouble for poor mother Ye, she would most probably be reduced and that right speedily to the expedient of making brick without straw, or more correctly to the making of good tasty pan-chan with neither oil nor vinegar, chicken or beef. Ye was inconsistent in the matter of food. He liked good things to eat and had always demanded it for himself, neither had it been denied the family, but evidently consistency in household management was required by this clear-eyed young judge. So he would doubtless have to be content with poor folks' food also.

"No, not a grain,"—he repeated. "You sit here like a gentleman and I work like a slave in the fishing-smack to support you, isn't that enough?" This smarting taunt cut pretty deeply and a harsh reply was on his tongue, but Noch Kyung caught himself as he realized that to lose his self-control was to give up some of his dignity and self-respect. When at last he felt that he could speak calmly he said :

"I am only asking you to keep your contract with my father. I had no part in making that contract, it was against my desire, but surely you expect to keep honorably that which you have yourself sought?" A hope was dawning in his heart. Suppose this miserly old cheat would go back on his bargain, could he not be free again? While he was turning over this possibility in his mind the man was saying:

"Contract? Huh! Didn't the beggar get a good round sum besides? That was enough too. Changed times make changed circumstances. I was then a prosperous farmer, now only a very poor fisherman. You are trying to lead an ox through a rat hole!"

"Do you really mean that you will not send any more rice to my father?" This, was too good to be true and yet as a faithful son it was his duty to gain this patrimony if possible and in his heart he knew that Ye was little poorer now than a year ago.

"I mean it! If Kim Chung Sook had not eaten so fast he would not have choked himself! What if he dies, it is none of my business. A lot he

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cared for you, too, didn't he? Sold his son for an easy living, so he did, that is a gentleman's honor. Now let him lick the outside of the melon!" With a nod of finality he went into his room and slammed the door, while he cursed the whole Kim family and the trouble they had brought upon him.

Midnight. A tall, slender figure steals quietly from the house. It is Noch Kyung. On his back tied up in a small bundle are a few of his books and dearest treasures. Whither? He himself scarcely knew, but somewhere in this wide world there must be a place where willing hands could find congenial work, where fortune and honor could meet. He knew that Ye would be glad of his going and felt that since he had broken the marriage contract that he also was no longer in duty bound to this sordid life at Saemal. His heart beat high with new ambition and reawakened hopes. He might still make a place and name for himself in this world! With head held high and with bounding steps he hastened along the beach. He stopped a moment when he came to his favorite spot by the sea. He looked around and smiled as he thought of the hours of bitter loneliness and of the suffering there which even now seemed in the distant past. Such is youth, that speedily forgets the old and sad past as it enters into new promise of better things. Tender thoughts of little Kumokie came to him now that he was leaving her: "Soon she too would pass out of his mind and heart as a cloud passes over the face of the moon.

"She is a sweet child. But they will soon marry her to the son of some farmer and she will be far happier." With this comforting assurance he pressed onward and faced the beginning of a new life.

CHAPTER VIII A Child Widow

Noch Kyung was gone. The morning following the boy's quiet departure from Saemal Father Ye found a little note written in elegant, carefully formed Chinese characters :

"To the honorable Ye Chung Sook, greetings:

"When you receive and read this I shall be far away. The life at Saemal has for us become mutually impossible. You are tired of your part of the contract and wish to be rid of me, and I therefore consider myself free from the agreement. "Kim Noch Kyung wishes you happiness and prosperity."

Ye laughed as he read this. The first time for many weeks that he

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had done so, laughed loud and long. A cynical, harsh laugh it was with nothing of mirth in its tones, but showing nevertheless a great relief that the boy who had

gotten to be quite a problem under present conditions, was at last out of his way. His wife hearing this unusual sound, and fearing some new danger that it might portend, hurried from the never ending tasks in the kitchen, drying her hands on her apron as she came. Kumokie and her mother huddled together in one corner of the tiny court-yard and all of them gazed in awe upon the man as he stood there shaking, with mirthless laughter, a sheet of crumpled paper in his hand. They dared not ask the reason for this sudden and unwarranted glee, but stood in silent wonder. At last he waved the paper in a triumphant flourish about his head and proclaimed in great good humor:

“Well, he stood it longer than I thought he would! A pretty fine chap, I almost had to drive him off and I don’t believe he would have gone now if I had continued sending the supplies to the city! Yes, he did ‘eat’ a whole lot of abuse!” Neither of the two women grasped the meaning of these words, their minds had been cramped for so long that they had many years ago given up trying to understand when man spoke in a cryptic language. Not so Kumokie, her mind was now preternaturally alert. Kindled by a great love, the dormant intellect was expanding day by day and a woman’s intuition had come to her during the past year. Some strange presentiment gripped her heart with a deadly fear, unconsciously she clenched her hands and her voice came low and trembling :

“Is he gone?”—it was almost a whisper.

“That’s what! Gone for good I guess. Now we can have a nice time and be comfortable without any one spying around all the time!” He gave another dry laugh as he tossed the letter in the direction of the rubbish heap.

“Sure, he’s gone, all right!”—he repeated as the wild-eyed girl continued to stare at him.

“Yes, my little lady, you are a widow now! But for mercy’s sake don’t look so disconsolate! There, there, be more cheerful! We’ll have you married to that spry son of neighbor Han in no time at all.”

There was tragedy in her broken heart, though the rough man failed to see aught but sheer comedy, and the young girl proudly lifted her head and declared vehemently :

“I am his wife! He himself said so, and he will come back!”

“His wife, you say? Hear that now will you! My life, isn’t she

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funny? Come back again? Not very likely. He has just thrown you away, that is every man's prerogative when he so desires. Oh, he will have a sure enough wife by the time you are a daughter-in-law in the house of the rich Mr. Han!" With these comforting words Ye strode off towards the nets and boats along the sea shore. The child, a widow before she had been a wife, turned her stricken face to her mother. By his never failing kindness and courtesy to others, most of all by his big brother attitude of protection towards Kumokie, Noch Kyung had finally won a grudging approval from even this stern judge. Now, realizing that he was gone out of her life forever she looked at her daughter's stricken face and her fond mother eyes saw the anguish in the child's heart.

"Poor darling! Come to mother!"—Before this Kumokie had known no sorrow that mother's love could not soothe, no pain those loving hands could not charm away. But in those few moments she put away forever childhood and childish things. From this day her pain was to be the secret agony of a loving woman's heart. Those dear arms held out with such longing? Yes, her mother understood and she would have gladly given even life itself to bring happiness to her loved one, but no, that can not be. No, mother, the time has passed when your love sufficed! The girl turned blindly to the open doorway. With a pitiful, dry sob she threw herself on the floor. The two women outside mercifully left her alone with her sorrow.

Ye thought the whole matter where Kumokie was concerned a huge joke. The women tried to shield her as much as they could from the torture he found such pleasure in inflicting upon the suffering girl. He would have had boundless amusement over the affair had he known of the soft silk vest that had found its way to the bottom of Kumokie's bridal chest. There the worn little garment reposed among the embroideries, the new silks and linens of the treasure box. The other belongings of the boy were carefully packed away to be returned to him if the occasion arose, and no one missed the garment which having been worn and liked more than any other was most eloquent of its absent owner.

Those were trying days for the sensitive girl and more than any other place she loved the spot by the sea, the place where her boy husband used to sit and muse. Here, somehow, his spirit seemed yet to linger. Often the sunset hour, which he had loved best of all, found Kumokie at this shrine of memory. There, in the very place he used to stand, stood the deserted wife, the child-wife who had learned to love him with all the passion of a wilful child and with the tenderness of a woman. Her yearning eyes searched the sea and distant horizon in just the same restless

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way as had his, revealing the discontented unquietness of the spirit within.

The flame of an unusually gorgeous sunset had died, though golden glories still flecked the western clouds. This glow paled to gleaming silver, still, as though there were nothing else worth doing she continued to gaze on the distant horizon. The song of the sea grew sadder, more mournful, as though it too sighed for a day that was gone. The chill of coming night was oppressive. The girl shivered, for she felt the depressing future, and she feared what life might hold for her. The sadness that had fallen upon the sea was cold upon her heart. Over and over like the refrain of some sad dirge, she murmured the words :

“He will come back. He called me his wife!”

The flaming lights in the west had faded to a dull gray. Far away the sea and sky blended in the soft shadows of night. Day had passed in a burst of dying glory and its light was gone. There were no more golden, purple gleams to watch. Kumokie realized that she was tired and cold. She turned and went down the narrow path to the sandy beach. Each step of the way was fitted, dedicated to some memory of her husband.

CHAPTER IX A Child Widow

On the morning following Noch Kyung's quiet departure from Saemal, old man Ye found a little note written in elegant carefully formed Chinese characters:

“To the Honorable Ye Chun Sook greetings. When you receive this I shall be far away. The life for us at Saemal has become mutually impossible. You are tired of your part of the contract, and I therefore consider myself free from the agreement.

“Kim Noch Kyung wishes for you all happiness and prosperity.”

For the first time in many months Ye laughed as he read this, laughed loud and long. A cynical, harsh laugh to be sure, far from being a pleasant sound. Though there was no joy in its tones it showed nevertheless a great relief. His wife hearing this unusual sound dropped her preparation for the morning meal and hurried out into the court, drying her toil worn hands on her apron. Kumokie and her mother huddled together in one corner of the tiny space which served as court-yard and all of them gazed in awe and fear upon the man who shook with mirthless laughter as he held a crumpled sheet of paper in his hand. They dared not ask the reason for this strange conduct but stood in silent wonder awaiting

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his pleasure. At last he waved the paper in a triumphant flourish about his head and proclaimed in great good humor: "Well at last, at last! He stood it much longer than I thought he would. A brave chap he is too! Yes, sir'ee, I surely did make things hard for him, but he ate all that abuse as long as he thought it was his duty to his family, why I almost had to drive him away."

Neither of the two women grasped the hidden meaning of these words. Their minds had been so long cramped that they had long ago given up trying to understand when man spoke a cryptic language. Not so Kumokie, her mind was preternaturally alert. Kindled by a great love the dominant intellect was expanding day by day and a woman's intuition had come to her awakened heart. A strange presentiment, a premonition of evil gripped her heart now with a deadly fear, but she clenched her trembling hands:

"Is he gone?" the voice was low and faltering, almost a whisper.

"That's what! Gone for good I guess, and a good riddance too! Now we can be comfortable without someone always spying around all the time." He gave another dry laugh as he tossed the letter in the direction of the trash heap. Then as he turned and saw the wild-eyed girl still staring at him he repeated with a show of annoyance :

"Sure, he's gone all right. But what's the use to look so distressed, you little fool?" Then as he saw that the child really cared he continued with bitter scorn:

"Yes, my fine lady, you are a widow now! But be more cheerful, we will have you married to that spry son of neighbor Han's in no time, three months at most."

The stricken girl raised her clenched hands to hide her agonized face for a moment, then lifting her head like a young princess. she declared vehemently :

"I am his wife. He himself said so and I know that he will come back for me."

"His wife! Hear that, ye stones! My life! Isn't she funny and tragic? Now this is real comedy. Call yourself a wife, do you? Hey? Much you know about such things. Well, who ever heard tell of such a child? So you think he will desert the family but come again for you, do you? Ha! ha! ha! Now very likely. Get this fact into your head for good and all, he has thrown you away, like I throw away my old shoes. That is every man's right when he so desires. He will have a sure enough wife by the time you get to be a daughter-in-law at the house of the rich Mr. Han." With these comforting words Ye strode off to the boats and nets to spread the news

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among the villagers.

The child, a widow before she had been a wife, turned her face to her mother. The absent boy had won even this sorrowful mother's respect during the trying months past. By his never failing kindness to others, his courtesy, most of all by his big brother attitude of protection towards Kumokie he had finally won a grudging approval from even this stern judge. Now as she realized something of the pain in the tortured heart of her child and opening her arms wide she murmured: "Poor baby! Come to your mother." Before this Kumokie 'had known nothing of sorrow that mother's love could not soothe, no pain that those loving hands could not brush away, but in the few moments she seemed to have put from her forever all that belonged to her childhood. She was no longer an irresponsible, thoughtless child. Her pain was the anguish of a loving woman's heart. She looked at her mother's face, a sad face filled with longing and bearing the marks of many sorrows. Should she flee to those tender arms held out so longingly to her? Slowly and sorrowfully she shook her head. Well she knew that her mother would have given even life itself to have been able to comfort her, but this was something beyond her reach. Ah, mother, what an extra stab must have been sent to your faithful, gentle heart by the knowledge that your little girl had passed the day when your love alone sufficed! Kumokie turned blindly to the open doorway, entered her tiny room, then with a hard dry sob she threw herself on the floor. The two women outside turned away and mercifully left her alone with her grief.

The days which follow were like some awful dream and in after years Kumokie could never quite remember their events clearly. She was only conscious of a desire to hide away from all the curious eyes and hateful questions of the neighbors; away from the caustic, biting sneers of her grand-father's tongue, yes, even to hide from the loving eyes of her mother. Like some hunted, wild thing in pain she wanted only to get away and be alone with her heart-break. The women carefully folded and put away the clothes and belongings of the boy and waited for an opportunity to send them to their owner. What a joke it would have made for old man Ye had he known that from this bundle a soft, silken vest, much worn and now somewhat shabby, but eloquent of its absent owner, had disappeared; that the little, much worn garment now reposed in state among the fine silks, linens and embroideries in the bottom of Kumokie's bridal chest! But he never knew. There was tragedy in her heart but the rough man failed to see aught but sheer comedy. When she could no longer endure his coarse jokes and ugly laughter, his amusement at what he termed the

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“child’s romantic turn,” she used to run away to the stony point overlooking the changing sea. Here alone the presence of her husband seemed to linger. Here in the very place he used to stand now stood Kumokie, the one who had learned to love him with all the wilful passion of a child, with all the tenderness of a woman. She chose this place because he had loved it. In those old days which seemed so far away she used to wonder why he was so sad and why his eyes had such a hopeless look as they brooded over the distant waves, now her own dark eyes searched the sea in just the same yearning, restless way.

The flame of an unusually gorgeous sunset had died, though crimson glories still flecked the western clouds. The golden glow paled to gleaming silver, still as though there were nothing else worth doing she continued to gaze on the distant horizon. The song of the sea grew sadder, more mournful, as though it too sighed for a day that would never come again. The girl shivered. The chill of coming night crept over the darkling waves. The sadness that had fallen upon the sea was cold upon her heart. Over and over again she intoned the words, like the refrain of some dirge:

“He called me his wife! He will come again.” Yet for all her brave words she feared the future life and what it should bring. Not that she doubted her husband, no, not that. The fear that clutched her heart was that the tyrant of the home should fulfill his threats. Helpless in his hands, how could she wait for Noch Kyung to come? Suppose that he came too late?

The flaming lights in the west had faded to a dull gray. The sea and sky blended in soft shadows of night. There were no more glowing, purple glories to watch,—she was tired.

She turned and came slowly down the narrow path that led to the sandy beach. Each step of the way was fitted, dedicated to the memory of her husband. The remembrance of his kindness and his gentleness seemed only to enhance the realization that he had passed out of her life, that most probably she would never see Kim Noch Kyung again.

CHAPTER X A Better Country

“The sands of time are sinking:
The dawn of heaven breaks;
The summer time I’ve sighed for,
The fair, sweet mom awakes.

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Dark, dark hath been the midnight;
But Dayspring is at hand,
And glory—glory dwelleth,
In Immanuel's land."

The dread disease which had fastened itself upon Kumokie's mother had nearly run its course. Day by day she grew weaker until pale and emaciated she was not able to stand. No longer could she do even the lightest household tasks. Not only were these now shifted to the frail shoulders of the daughter, but in addition to these heavy duties it was her only pleasure to nurse her mother. By day and by night the young girl stood on duty and during the suffocating hours of the long, sultry nights it was she who ministered to her mother's needs. It was her hand which waved the fan, she who kept away the vicious mosquitoes. Not once did that feeble voice call in vain, and she did all that she knew to relieve the pain and to bring comfort. The passionate remonstrance of the years past had given place now in the heart of the dying woman to the lassitude of passive hopelessness.

There was no money to buy medicine, so Ye said. There was no medicine to buy, for that matter, except the nauseating, filthy messes of the old witch doctor, worse far than nothing at all. Sometimes the kindly sympathetic neighbors brought some brewed mixtures of herbs or outlandish concoctions of unnamable ingredients for her to try. With as little partiality as hope, the doomed patient took whatever was brought to her. Steadily the racking cough grew more torturing, her strength less and less until finally she could only speak in a whisper and that with difficulty. Hot summer gave way to the cool days of September which in turn made way for the cooler October days and winds of November, as the flickering spark of life grew weaker.

Father Ye still spoke often of his plan to marry Kumokie to the son of his old friend Han Comchil. He knew that in spite of his pretensions to poverty that the secrets shared by this Han were strong enough to make that enterprising gentleman anxious to form a closer alliance with the Ye family. To him it brought a sort of fiendish joy to be able thus to torture the quiet Kumokie. Pale and quiet she moved among the innumerable tasks, her heart too full of the agony of her mother's sufferings and of her own sorrow to have any room for the simplest joys of childhood. All of her life she had been a target for her grandfather's sneers and jests, had lived in constant fear of this harsh, unfeeling man; but since life had dealt so bitterly with her the past year she had an inexpressible, dimly understood but clear realization that fate had done its worst in robbing her

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of Kim Noch Kyung. There was a deep, dark pool under a high bluff down below her rocky out-look and if the worst thing her grandfather threatened should come to pass there was always the possibility, the alternative of the rest it offered. Even in her short life she could remember three darkened young lives that had ended thus in the oblivion of that dark pool.

In the mind of Ye Chun Sook the plan for Kumokie's second matrimonial venture was well defined and determined, the only thing which delayed its immediate execution was the illness of her mother. He knew that she could not live much longer and during that time of waiting it was necessary to have the daughter to help with the house work. Grandmother Ye worked like a slave, to be sure, but she was slow and not so strong as she once was. So Ye waited impatiently for the time when the burden of the sick woman should be gone, and when the bright eyed intelligence of the young girl could also be removed, then he might be really comfortable with his dangerous work for the old lady would be as one both dumb and blind when he so commanded.

The future looked black indeed for the child widow. She felt like a bird in a cage, for by beating her wings against the bars she but bruised herself and made her condition more helpless and painful. She tried not to think beyond the present duty, she dared not know what the future held for her. At this darkest hour before the dawn a letter came to her mother from a brother, Chun Tochil. He lived in a distant village, Okchun, and she had not heard from him for many years, neither did he know of her present condition. He wanted to tell her his good news, that he had become a Christian, through the influence of a godly wife, and he wrote to tell her of his new found joy and peace and to urge upon her the claims of Jesus the Saviour of the world. The dying woman had been very near the brink. After the hopeless, futile efforts of the past years, her spirit had been sinking into the lethargy of indifference. Yet the contents of this letter aroused her, seemed to give her fresh courage, and to fan into new life the faint spark of vitality.

"I must see him," she whispered, "I must see Tochil before I die!"

"I should like to know why!" Ye was most indignant. "He has become one of those despised Christian dogs, what have we to do with such as he?"

"No, the Christians are not bad," she replied in that ghastly whisper, "I knew many of them long ago. They are kind, love is their watch-word. Oh! I must see Tochil!"

"A kind, loving brother would surely help a dying sister and pay

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her funeral expenses, don't you think so?" This was new light on the subject. Though at first he had been sure that one of this hated religion should never enter his house, it might anger the spirits and bring bad luck and calamity upon him, yet if this fond brother could be persuaded to take upon himself the burdens of relationship and its responsibilities, surely then he, Ye, would be free from blame in the matter. The expenses of the funeral which rightfully devolved upon the father-in-law could thus be shifted to the shoulders of the other man. After thinking the matter over carefully he decided that there was a better chance to gain than to lose by this action, and posted a letter to the brother in Okchun telling of the condition of his sister. The message which found its way very slowly over the distant mountains by the overland post was to tell Chun Tochil that his sister was dying, that the Ye family was living in poverty and destitution, and that she was desirous above all things else to see him before the end, also that if he would see her again he must not lose a moment but come immediately. Meanwhile death hovered over a miserable hut in Saemal where a sad-eyed young girl kept watch by the side of a lowly pallet.

"I can not, must not die until he comes!" murmured the sick woman over and over again as she kept the grim enemy at bay seemingly by means of her determination and power of will.

One, two, three days passed in this tense eagerness of waiting and the sick woman could no longer articulate even the whispered words. Still, thin lips formed the words of encouragement and purpose. Four days, five, a week at length passed. The emaciated form was still now, very still, only the eyes appeared to live, they searched the door at every sound. Once in a while the lips moved as though in prayer and the watchful eyes were closed. Was it too late now? She had been so long motionless that the faithful watcher feared it was the end and in an agony of fear called out shrilly as she shook the quiet form:

"Mother! Mother! Oh Mother don't leave me alone! Please, please don't go away!"

Just then the opening door gave entrance to a stranger. Escorted by Ye a fine looking gentleman of middle age came into the little room. He knelt by the humble pallet and took in his the poor, tired hands, the hands now nerveless which could no longer respond to the touch of love so longed for.

"My sister? Dear little sister, do you know me?"—there was a deeper agitation of the fluttering breath, the beautiful dark eyes opened wide, the eyes which a moment ago had seemed forever closed to life's sorrows. Slowly over their glazed dullness came a look of joyous

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recognition.

“You do know me! I came just as quickly as I could after I received your letter. What is it you want specially to say to me,” the brother saw that her time in which to speak was indeed short and that there were no precious moments to be lost if he would know the desire of her heart.

“See, I am listening, tell me what is your message?”—but even this tender invitation could not draw forth a response from the lips already stiff. The glorious eyes looked lovingly, with unutterable yearning into the face so near her own, and her brother saw that though her mind was clear and purposeful that encroaching death had so benumbed the poor body that it no longer responded to her will. Then slowly her eyes turned to Kumokie seated on the other side of the bed, to the child she had loved and still loved with all the deepest passion of her life, then back to him. Long she gazed into the eyes bending above her, then with a superhuman effort of will she lifted the now pulseless hand and laid it on the head of her sobbing child, all the while looking steadily into her brother’s eyes.

“Oh! Is that your child? Yes, I see. Do you want me to care for her? Is that it?”—the lids softly fluttered shut as if in assent. “It is evidently my sister’s wish that I take her child. Is this little girl the only one?”

“Yes, the only one.”

“Very well, I suppose that you will not object since she is a girl. Let us decide it right now, that the mother may die in peace. I am not a rich man, but my family lives in comfort and this little one shall have just what my own have. Do you consent?”

Ye was true to old time-honored ways of his people, he liked to do things in a very deliberate, unhurried way which he considered dignified. He didn’t like the way this man had of rushing things in this manner. Yes, he did want to be rid of Kumokie and this was a very fortunate and convenient as well as inexpensive way in which to do so but he would rather decide in a long drawn out conference which he considered more elegant, and dignified.

“Well it’s this way. I had intended marrying her to the son of an old friend and neighbor of mine, Mr. Han. This would be quite a disappointment to me,”—then in a hesitating, undecided voice; “It would be too bad to overthrow my long cherished plan.”

“Why no, surely you couldn’t be so heartless as to refuse this dying mother her last request. I believe that you are too kind at heart to really do such a thing!” The hurt, surprised tone in the stranger’s voice struck an answering chord somewhere in the hardened breast of old man

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Ye. To have bullied or threatened him would have only made him more determined, but the intimation that he was so kind and good that he could not refuse a dying mother's wish, this was an attitude entirely new to him, something not easily put aside. Suddenly he had a real desire to appear at his best, to be magnanimous in this good man's eyes, so he answered:

"This is my only and well beloved grandchild. But since you are in a position to do for her what I can not do, and if it be best for her sake that I give her up, then I consent."

"Thank you! That is unselfish and most kindly said." The waiting, eager eyes of the woman on the floor had not left his face for a moment, and he turned to her again :

"It shall be as you desire, little sister! Your little girl shall be my child, she is just about the age of my Elizabeth, and I solemnly promise to love and cherish her as my own." With these words a smile of understanding and of ineffable joy broke over the still face. The brother knew that the end was very near and his voice was vibrant with sweetness as he said:

"The Lord has answered your prayers. He sent me to you not only to comfort your heart about the child, but also to speak to you of your Saviour." At these words Ye got up and glided from the room. In a few short, clear sentences the man pointed the way to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. Kumokie no longer shook with broken sobs but listened eagerly to every precious word and when he ceased speaking she cried excitedly:

"That's her God's; that the God. she has been praying to all these months. I've heard her at night when she thought that I was asleep."

"Bless the Lord O my soul!"—and kneeling he poured out his heart in praise and thanksgiving The trembling child beside him felt a great peace and calm, such as she had never known before, flood her heart, and while he prayed the earth-worn spirit was set free from the suffering, crumbling clay to be forever with her Lord.

The two who had loved her stood and looked upon her. No sign now in that dear face of pain or sorrow; the calm, glad smile of understanding still curved the lips and the man smiled too as he gathered the little orphan to his great, unselfish heart and whispered :

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord!"

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Never even in her wildest dreams had Kumokie imagined that there could be so much love and comfort possible in this sad world as she found in the heart and home of her Uncle Tochil. That day when he opened his arms to the lonely little orphan by the death-bed of her mother and promised her a place in his home it had meant much more than she had ever seen or known,—a Christian home! When he knelt by his dying sister and strove to comfort and lead her to the Savior the seed had found fertile soil in the heart of the child. This man who had come in such a miraculous way to answer her mother's agonized prayers, this man who by a wave of the magic wand of love had cleared away the clouds from her mother's troubled heart, this kind man who made it possible for her to die in peace with a smile of satisfaction on her sweet face, yes! this was a good man that she could trust!

In that dark hour of need when the cruelty of Ye had driven her to such extremity that she could see nothing in the future but the reflection of that deep pool beyond the cliff, in this hour of hopeless night this man had come like an angel of light and carried her away from the sorrow and suffering of Saemal to a life of care-free happy childhood in Okchung.

The welcome accorded the little stranger in the home of Mr. Chun was typical of her sojourn in the wholesome purity of the new life upon which she was entering.

Uncle Tochil and Kumokie had walked many weary miles on that long journey from the village by the sea to the little hamlet nestling among the foothills of the north mountains. Footsore, worn and weary, for many days the travellers had trudged along the highway. This is the mode of locomotion best known in this land even today; only the favored of fortune can afford an aristocratic donkey, or even the humble cow for a mount. Mr. Chung was in moderate circumstances, as he had told old man Ye; he was not a rich man and the best that he could do for the little girl by his side was to take the trip as slowly as possible, with frequent stops at the way-side inns. To one who had hitherto known so little of out-door life or active physical exercise, however, it was a difficult journey. The second day the little feet were cruelly blistered and after that each step was torture, but as Kumokie limped along by her uncle's side not one word of complaint did she utter; she only set her lips more firmly and determined to bear it all unflinchingly. It was very hard at times to keep her thoughts on the words he was saying. Her uncle was trying to make her feel that she was really going home and was telling her of those whom she would find there, of gay little Elizabeth, and Baby

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Yohn, of the big hearted little mother who would also welcome this new daughter into the blessed family circle. This second day's journey had been very hard, much more than the first, because of the poor blistered feet, and the two had made very poor headway. The inn which Mr. Chun had hoped to make for the night was yet ten *li* away and between them lay a long and rocky pass. Night was fast falling. The short November day was dying in a shroud of gray clouds which promised snow before many hours. The man, so strong himself and used to long trips a foot, had not realized what suffering this day had meant to the tender little companion. Now as his eyes searched the lowering sky and he realized that they were yet a distance from their stopping place he unconsciously quickened his pace as he remarked:

“We must be getting along faster, night is catching us before we can reach our resting place, which is on the other side of yonder pass.”

They were going along at a good steady gait and the man was talking in his quiet, soothing voice, when suddenly a smothered sob brought him to a sudden halt.

“My child! Are you crying?” he peered into the pale, convulsed face of the little girl, and then knelt beside her in the road.

“Why what in the world?” the surprised man had congratulated himself, that they were getting to be good friends and that all was well, but what could this mean? But the child did not answer, she was now so ashamed of her weakness and that she was not measuring up to this splendid man's expectations, that she could only hide her face in her arms and sob the louder.

“Can't you tell your uncle what the matter is, my dear? Think of me as your father, for such I am now, and tell me what is troubling you.” As he tenderly laid his hand on the bent head he felt that the slender frame was all atremble, it seemed that the child could scarcely stand, but leaning against the man who knelt beside her, the almost fainting girl whispered:

“O, Uncle, its my feet. They do hurt so bad, and I'm so ashamed!”

“Well, poor baby, what a thoughtless creature I am! Those little feet are not used to such trips. Here let me see the feet.” They sat down by the wayside and by the fast fading light he removed the sandals and stockings and saw the cruel blisters on the tender, pink flesh and Uncle Tochil felt that he had been very inconsiderate when he had dreamed that he was very thoughtful and kind. It was only that he had over estimated the strength and endurance of the frail little thing that he had taken under his care. For a moment he held the trembling little girl closer to him.

“I will be more careful after this. But now we must get to the inn

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as soon as possible..” Suiting his action to these words he took the bundle from his back, a pitiful little bundle which held all the earthly possessions of Kumokie. None of the beautiful things in her inlaid chest were here, no, indeed Grandfather Ye saw to it that nothing of value was taken away. Mr. Chun stood looking at this burden, not a very heavy burden, but rather bulky, and pondered the situation. Then with a good natured laugh he said:

“Well, Kumokie, you and the bundle will have to take an ‘obuju’ (a ride on another’s back) together! Come along and let us see how heavy you are.”

“O! no, Uncle, I’m so ashamed, you are tired too and how can you carry me?”

“Tired? O no, I’m not in the least tired, and I am very sure that you are not as heavy as that Elizabeth of mine. I carry her often this way and she is larger than you even if you are nine years old.” The light hearted banter of his voice at last persuaded the weary child, for she was now so weary that she felt that she could not take another step on those poor blistered feet. So she timidly put her hands about his throat and snugged up to his back as she had done many times as a baby. She also had carried many of the neighborhood babies in this most approved style. After all this is by far the easiest way to carry a burden. Why is it that in the west people still insist on carrying children in their arms when in the east they have found so much easier a way? As she thus fitted up to his back in this cozy fashion of babyhood, Uncle Tochil lifted her off the ground and then commenced to wind about her body and his own a long scarf that he had taken from the bundle.

“Hum, heavy? O yes, about as heavy as a nice spring chicken! Why, child, you are as light as a feather! We will have to see about that when we get you up to the good mountain air, where there is plenty of wholesome food and the right kind of exercise for children. Heavy? I wish you were heavier and stronger, little one. But that can all be cured in time. If you could see how much your uncle can carry and what he has carried when necessary you would not worry. So just ride easy now, put your arms tight about my neck and see how fast we can go.” Then taking the bundle in his arms he hastened along to the friendly shelter of the inn. It is always safest in those wild regions infested by robbers and wild animals not to be long after dark in finding such protection.

After many days the pilgrims neared the foothills of north mountain. When Kumokie had been too tired or footsore to walk she had been carried, and just how much this was she never knew. But each mile of the way had but added to her debt of gratitude and love to this kindly,

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gentle man. She realized that she was to have at last the care and protection of the father-love which she so much needed. The two were the best of friends and companions now and Mr. Chun rejoiced as he saw the face which had been so unchildlike in its sorrow and gravity, now take on a shade of intense interest as he talked of the home to which they were going, or heard the ripple of sweet laughter drawn out in response to his tale of some of Elizabeth's gay pranks. But now as they drew nearer to this much talked of home the child began to feel that she was an outsider, an interloper, that she had no right in this bright sphere. She did not mention her fears to kind, fatherly Uncle Tochil, but the wonder as to what Elizabeth would think about the stranger sharing her home, held her lips sealed on this subject. Why should she not hate any one who thus came uninvited and without warning to share the blessings which had before been hers alone? Then there was Aunt Maria. Uncle Tochil said that she was beautiful and good, that she had the kindest heart in the world and that she would welcome this little stranger. By the proud light in his eyes as he talked of this woman any one could see that he thought all this of her, that he loved her so much that he felt sure that she would do always the right and beautiful thing. Kumokie doubted this, but she could not openly express these doubts. Had she not heard her grandmother say hundreds of times that children were a great burden. There was sewing, washing and many things to do for a child. Had not Grandfather Ye said times without number that no one wanted a girl to bother with? Then why should Mrs. Chun, however lovely and kind she might be, care to have this extra burden thrust upon her? Of course, thought Kumokie, if her husband commanded her to do she would have nothing else to do. But to one of her sensitive nature it meant a great deal of suffering to be in a place where she knew she was not wanted. When ever had she known anything else? No one in all this world but her poor, dear mother had cared for her, she had always been made to feel in her grand-father's house that they merely endured her because they couldn't help it. Why should she look for something different in her uncle's house in Okchung? In truth she did not look for anything better. By this time she had grown to have perfect confidence and love for her uncle and knew that he would do what he could to make her life happy, and that since he was the head of the house the others would not be unkind to her, but the fact that she was a little, unloved stranger whom no one could want was so deeply carved into her heart that it would take many months for her to realize that difference in the ideals which prevailed in this place and in Saemal's big thatched house.

The last hill had been climbed, and the man and child made their

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way through the fast drifting snow towards the sleepy little cottages that clustered in friendly fashion at the foot of the big, grey mountain.

“We are just in time to escape the big snow of the winter. How glad I am that we will not have to make our way through the new made drifts tomorrow. Yonder house, Baby, there by the big old Nootie tree, that is your home!” Expectation, fear, and the dread of the new relations she must soon see were filling her heart with apprehension and the tears so dimmed her eyes that she could but see the outlines of the house indicated. The skeleton-like limbs of the big tree skipped and danced before her gaze and she failed to realize that the place they now approached was neat and clean. From the trimness of the spick and span thatch of the roof to the garden every outward sign of thrift and comfort was manifest. Though it was certainly not the house of a man of wealth it was just as evident that the people who lived here were not the ordinary, ignorant mountaineers of many of the other nearby houses. As the two strange companions passed through the narrow, winding alleys of the village several neighbors met them. Their curiosity was evident as they spoke to Mr. Chun and then stopped to watch them as they went on their way. A bright smile and a kindly word of greeting to each but he was too eager now to reach the end of this journey, the neat little nest under the nootie, to indulge in even a friendly chat with his friends. His steps unconsciously hastened as they drew nearer the heavy outer gate of the courtyard, or “medang,” which is the center of life and activity in a Korean home. The big gate swung back with a loud creak of welcome and announced an arrival to the inmates of the inner portals. For many long years Kumokie cherished the memory of the scene then enacted with the neat Chun madang for a stage setting; the frightened child, trembling with apprehension and dread of meeting the new relations, a forlorn, queer little figure in her ill-fitting, scant clothing shivering pitifully in the cold November wind at the door of a stranger; the door opened and a beautiful woman stepped out on the veranda, her beautiful Madonna eyes full of tender wonder as they fell on the pathetic child before her. She saw the timid anxiety in the sad face of the little stranger, she saw that here was one who needed her love and care, here was one who called forth all the instinct of the mother towards the helpless little ones, as she gazed down into the little upturned face of Kumokie. Before she knew who this was or whence she came the heart of this great woman went out to the forlorn waif at her door and she stepped off the veranda and knelt by the side of Kumokie.

“Maria, I’ve brought you this little girl. Her mother is dead and she needs a mother’s love and care.” There was nothing strange to her in her

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husband's announcement that he had brought the homeless waif to share their home; to comfort the comfortless, and to mother the motherless, was with her a special gift and the man brushed a tear from his face, a tear of which he was not ashamed, as he watched the pretty scene before him, this woman whom he adored, down in the snow on her knees by the orphan chafing her numbed hands and murmuring words of love and welcome. A whole flock of children came tumbling out of the open door and by their shrill voiced welcome demanding instant attention. This onslaught was led by a ruddy little girl in a bright red jacket who with loud, insistent cries claimed him as "Father." After a vigorous greeting he was allowed to turn his attention to the crowd about him. Kumokie was taken by surprise, utterly astonished by this crowd of lovely, happy children. Where did they all come from? Uncle had only mentioned two, Elizabeth and Yohn. Who then were all these? She almost forgot to be afraid, she was so amazed. Mrs. Chun saw her questioning look and laughed as she said: "Oh, no, these are not all ours, all the time! But these fifteen girls are mine during the day time, for I teach them. This is my school."

A school, a school for girls, and with a woman teacher! Would wonders never cease? But before her mind could quite take in just what this might mean for her in the future her uncle was saying to Maria:

"This I kept for a surprise for the little girl. Her grand-mother said that she was wild to study and become like some great lady she knows about, who can read the Classics. I can see that she is an unusually bright child and with a fair chance in this world she may make a name for herself yet." Then with a ringing, happy laugh as he turned to Kumokie, "So little daughter that is your new teacher and mother. This little rascal,"—drawing closer the child he held by the hand, "this is Elizabeth. And for you, Elizabeth, I have brought a new sister, and you are going to love each other very dearly, I know." The outsider looked at the lovely face of the child before her who was holding very tightly and shyly to her father's hand. She felt that it would be a great joy to love Elizabeth but she could not have uttered a word to have saved her life, she could only look embarrassed and take a firmer hold about the neck of the lady who still knelt beside her. She clung to Maria with an ever tightening hold. Now that she felt again the clinging tenderness of mother arms about her, she felt an overwhelming realization of how lonely she had been since that dear form was put to rest beneath the pines. The flood gates were opened and she &ve way to passionate weeping, clinging all the more closely to mother Chun. Maria's heart had already gone out in longing tenderness

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and compassion towards the orphan, but this outburst of childish grief, those clinging little hands, opened the way into the inner recesses of her heart, and gained for Kumokie more quickly and more surely than any other means would have done her full protection and loyalty. This lost, motherless lamb was hers now to nourish, to teach, to cherish and to love always.

“Come in quick, children, and let us warm up the travellers and get them something to eat!” Gently she disengaged the grip of the tiny hands about her neck and into the house they went to find cozy comfort awaiting them. Love and happiness of a Christian home for the first time welcomed Kumokie. Thus commenced her new life, a life wonderfully rich in blessings never before dreamed of, for Jesus was the head of that house, and He had found an abiding place there in the hearts of His followers.

CHAPTER XII

School Days

The wonderful new life in the home of her uncle was a revelation to Kumokie of what a child's life may be and of rich blessings of which she had never dreamed before. The days passed all too quickly, each freighted with some new joy: the weeks lengthened into months crowned with love and happiness; the months all too quickly drew themselves into beautiful years filled with memories dear to childhood. Days, weeks and years alike seemed much too short to hold the pleasures and blessings so abundant in the life of the little girl whose earlier experience had been so starved and lacking in these things. Quiet Kumokie, sweet and gentle, had found the best of friends in gay, happy Elizabeth and they shared alike their household tasks and pleasures. The happiest hours of all to Kumokie, however, were those spent in the school room. When she found that she too was to be allowed to study, to learn the real characters in books such as *Noch Kyung* used to read, her joy knew no bounds. It seemed too good to be true that now at last she was really to have the opportunity to fit herself to be his companion. In spite of her grandfather's sneers she still cherished the belief that if she was his wife, as he had said, he would come for her some day. Her secret ambition was to so improve herself that when he came he would not be ashamed of her, to become a bright useful woman like Maria to whom her husband was not ashamed to pay honor, yes, and like *Noch Kyung's* mother, of whom he was so proud. The eagerness of the child over her books, and the rapid progress she made

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was a constant source of wonder to her relatives. After the first year in school she easily passed the other children in their studies. Her mind was always craving more knowledge, yet never for a moment did she shun or neglect the common household tasks. There was no servant in this humble home, but many willing hands made light work, and most eager to help was the homeless orphan who owed so much to these unselfish friends.

The tiny church building erected by the village people through much self sacrifice and endurance; the patient efforts of the little group of believers to win their friends and neighbors; their struggle against opposition and persecution; the final victory in Okchung—the story of these struggles is like that of hundreds of other little groups scattered over these mountains and valleys. Maria, wife of Uncle Tochil, had been the first believer in Okchung, and he never tired of telling how she had won him to Christ and had finally overcome the opposition of the village. He was now class-leader, Sunday School superintendent and Brother to all the nearby country side, while his wife taught the little school for girls, the first the people had ever seen—cared for her family and home, and still had time always to go to those who were sad or in need. Under the sheltering of these good people five years soon rolled by,—and during this time Kumokie had no news from the far away city, no word from the old people in Saemal. During this time there were hours too of care free frolic under the old nutie tree with Elizabeth and jolly little Yohon, when Kumokie almost forgot the blighted years of her childhood and the sad burden of being a deserted wife.

One night soon after her fourteenth birthday Pastor No preached at the village church, and as was his custom, came home with the class leader to spend the night. The men were seated in the outside reception room—the sarang, and being summer time the windows were opened into the inner court. Kumokie sat alone on the verandah—for the others of the family were probably lingering at some neighbor's house and were not yet home. As she sat thus her thoughts drifted idly over the past years, the blessings they had brought to her, and her heart overflowed with gratitude and love to her benefactors, while the drone of deep voices came from the room beyond.

Then suddenly she was startled from her dreams and her attention called to the conversation in the sarang by hearing her uncle use her name:

“Kumokie is getting to be quite a big girl now and a brilliant student too—she is the brightest star in our little school.”

“Yes,” answered the old Preacher—“One can easily see that she is an unusual girl—spiritually minded, too. I feel that she has a great future

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ahead of her, Brother—yours is a great responsibility. I asked you about her because I wanted to tell you about her husband—” The listening girl never thought of the dishonor of eavesdropping but her hungry heart was craving even the sound of the beloved name—so unthinkingly she crept close under the little window and listened to the low voices within—what was she about to hear? Her heart pounded until she feared they might hear it and she clasped her hands over her bosom to still the throb of it while she eagerly listened.

“I did as you asked me and the last time I visited the city I hunted up Kim Noch Kyung. A nice gentlemanly fellow he is too—a rice merchant, doing very well. He is married again. That was to have been expected I suppose—What noise was that?”—as a queer moan-like sound came through the window.

“Probably the dog,” said Mr. Chung, “he sleeps in the court. So Kim is married? What kind of a woman is she?”

“You can judge her part there by the fact that she is still called ‘Cusagie’— (What-you-may-call-her). From what I saw and heard I judge that when he left old man Ye’s house and set out to earn a living for himself, Kim found it necessary to have some one to cook, sew and work for him. She does this as well as any one; stupid, ugly, and most nonde-script, but she is not considered a first wife. A small wife of course has no position or rank and since all knew that a wife had been chosen for him by his parents he could not take the daughter of any man of position or family standing—”

“That is true,” answered Mr. Chun. “If my poor little, sad hearted Kumokie were seeking revenge she would have it in this: although she is thrown aside and deserted she has been chosen by his parents. Empty honor though it be, by law she is a first wife.”

The girl who crouched without had a thousand questions trembling on her lips but she knew that she could not even speak his name much less ask the questions burning in her heart—so she crept still closer to the men and listened eagerly as the preacher continued; “That is the important point, Brother. Kumokie is now getting to be an attractive young woman; she is like your own child, and it is your duty to see that she has proper divorce papers. She is not a wife according to our way of looking at things, she has never been. That arrangement was nothing more than a betrothal—nevertheless according to our old queer Korean customs she is not yet divorced for he did not give her back her marriage contract papers. Now under the Japanese law a woman can not get a divorce unless the man consent, no matter what her ground for action.”

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“There is no hurry, plenty of time yet. He was glad enough to get rid of his child wife—I expect no trouble there! Then, too, it will be a long time before I expect her to marry—Maria and I have been saving money to send our two girls to the school in the Pine Capital; that means at least four years of school. Plenty of time yet.” How bitterly he regretted that decision in after years!

The eaves-dropper outside, with bated breath, pressed her clenched hands closer over her heart and looked wildly about. She must be alone a while; she felt that just now she could not face the searching loving eye of Maria. Without a candle she tripped away to her little room and pretended to be asleep when Elizabeth came in, but far into the night she lay with wild startled eyes searching the darkness :

“What does it an mean?” Then slowly, carefully she recalled word for word of the stolen conversation, and lingered over its strangeness.

“But he first said that I was not a wife and then at last he said ‘Although she is deserted she has always the honor of a first wife until divorced.’ Oh, I can’t understand!” The timid, self-conscious maiden dared not go to even these who loved her and ask about these perplexing problems. After a long time of anxious thought she reached the conclusion that the one thing she did not want was that which they called a “divorce.” As long as things were as they were, now there was some kind of a legal bond uniting them. Her mind was a maze of tangled questions, though, with a firm determination to cling to this frail link as long as possible, to pray and hope that all would come right, to study hard and make him proud to claim her when the hour should come, she at last fell asleep.

True to their decision the class leader and Maria had made every sacrifice possible, and with high hopes and expectations for the future prepared to send their two girls to the school in the time-honored Pine Capital.

We will pass over those days of eager preparation. Who among us does not remember such times of joyous anticipation of happy days to come? Then, too, nervous dread of the new teachers, new companions, new duties, and new surroundings came to the young students at times. When the morning of their departure finally dawned both girls were so filled with dread of the unknown and untried, that both would most gladly have unpacked the fresh neat clothes they had helped stitch so carefully and with so much hope.

Uncle Tochil had borrowed a neighbor’s strong bullock to carry their loads and he strapped and tied the boxes and bundles in place with great precision for they must balance each other exactly or there would

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probably be a great spill of baggage on some steep mountain-pass. While he busied himself the two girls clung to Maria and declared with tears that they would not leave her at all.

“Go along, you foolish dears!” and she lovingly and very tenderly shook the sobbing girls.

“I do not want you to forget me or your old homestead. We should be very sorry if you should do that, but down in the valley yonder are new friends and happy days awaiting you. I have given my book-worms all I can give them now, you must go to others who can teach you other things that you must learn. But always remember your home and those who love you here. Then, when vacation comes, you will return in triumph and tell us the wonderful things you have learned. Come here, Yoban, bid the students a happy journey.” So with words of comfort Maria sent them on their way, but her eyes were dim as she climbed to the top of the hill to watch the little procession trailing down the narrow road. Turning to the steady boy by her side she said, “You too, little man, will be leaving us before many years to seek for knowledge.” “No, never, mother, I shall not leave you even to study, for when I know all the characters you can read I shall know all my head can hold!” Thus with tears and laughter the two returned to the home while the others turned their faces to a new world.

The two new girls had thought that they would feel very lonely and sad at first in the big school but what was their surprise to find that they did not seem strangers at all, and the other girls soon were like old friends. There were few days of home sickness and loneliness, there were so many new interesting things to see, and the “big sister” under whose special care they were placed was most eager to show them all the wonders of the place and to initiate them into the mysteries of the large buildings. But why linger over the first days at school, or other school days? Are they not all much alike? These two girls from the distant mountain village had been well coached by the faithful Maria, they knew many things about life in a mission school, and very quickly the feeling of strangeness gave way before the warmth of welcome and the kindness of the other girls and so with study, work and play, the passing years went swiftly by.

The times of vacation were looked to with great joy, not only by the girls but also by the folks at home. Such times of rejoicing as they had at these family reunions. Then there was high carnival in Okchung village and all celebrated the glad return. Three summers had thus seen the girls come and go, each advent marked by some development of character that brought an added pride to those who loved them. Realizing that their

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education was to be a severe financial strain on the entire household, Kumokie and Elizabeth had made the joyful discovery of a way to relieve Uncle Tochil of the greatest part of this burden. They had found that it was possible to work their way through by taking a year longer in the "Self Help Department." Many such as they, had found helpful, congenial work, beautiful work with silk and wool and flowers, where, under the wise eye of a loving teacher, they learned to do many wonderful things and by so doing could earn their own board and save the burden at home. Oh, that was the most wonderful of discoveries and great joy it gave them both to know that they could help, instead of being a burden. It was Elizabeth's quick fingers that first caught a new stitch, her eyes who saw through the most elaborate designs, but it was Kumokie who could explain to Maria some difficult passage in the classics or solve the knotty problem.

Mr. Chun had just returned from his fall visit to the city. The two girls were safely settled for the winter work, and as he talked of the trip and the school Maria sat near by him intent on the sewing in her hands and listening to his story.

"They say, and of course we already know, that Kumokie is a very unusual girl. She is beautiful as well as good and clever, an unusual combination!"

"Yes, she is unusual. We shall be very proud of her some day."

"We are proud of her now. you know you are. and how thankful that you rescued her from that awful life in Saemal."

While they sat thus they discussed the future of the two girls who were so dear to them. The result of this conference was that before many days, a letter was sent to Kim Noch Kyung concerning Kumokie whom he had once called his wife.

"To Kim Noch Kyung, greetings. It may be that during the eight years since you left Saemal you have probably forgotten the child wife Kumokie. Certainly you have taken no interest or responsibility in her fate and I take it for granted that since you are married again that you will be generous enough to approve the divorce papers which I wish to procure for her.

"You probably wonder who or what I am and why I should be so much interested in her. I am her uncle, the only brother of her mother. When her mother died I took the child to my home and she has been the same to me as my own daughter. I am a Christian and our ideas about the sanctity of marriage are very strict, and while she was no real wife we recognize the law in such cases and desire to have a divorce. If she had remained with her grandmother she would have been married again long

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ago, she has no such scruples about these fine moral points. May I hope to meet you before my lawyer at the local office of the county at 10 o'clock the 20th of October!"

It would be most interesting to know just what Mr. Kim Noch Kyung's thoughts were as he read this letter. He must have been greatly surprised that the friendless, shy waif of Saemal had found a friend and protector of such high moral standards as this Chun seemed to be. He must have realized that this was true, that although there was a divorce law, very few bothered to take advantage of it, perhaps not one cast-off wife in a thousand paid any attention to such legal forms before going to the home of a new husband. The fact that the first marriage only was attended with any ceremony or formality whatsoever shows that these "small wives" or concubines had no rights or position, a thing which seemed to matter little or not at all to the great mass of people. No doubt he thought that Kumokie had long ago been sent to the house of a new "mother-in-law" if he thought at all of the fate of the child. Perhaps the first thing which made him wonder about the girl and her present life was the evident high minded ideas of the man who was now her champion. His reply to the letter was very non-committal as to his opinions on the subject, he merely stated that he would meet Mr. Chun as he desired at the legal office on date indicated. This answer brought much relief to Mr. Chun, for he was just beginning to realize that Kumokie being now an attractive and well educated young woman this old affair of her childhood might make trouble for them if the man was so minded. This relief, however, gave way to greater anxiety when after waiting at the office a whole day no Kim appeared. What did it mean? Was the man not going to keep his word?

After receiving the unusual and unexpected letter Noch Kyung's thoughts dwelt much upon the subject of it. He was now a well-to-do merchant, with all of the comforts and many of the luxuries of life. Several years before he had been made a partner in the firm where he had been first apprenticed when he fled from the house of old man Ye. His wife was ignorant and stupid though she kept his house, did the house work and cared for their two children with unselfish devotion. The more he thought of the proposed trip and divorce the more insistent became the thought that if these people were Christians and had educated the girl that she might be just such a woman as his wife should be. Surely he was able now financially to support two households if he so desired, this would be but replacing his first wife in her rightful position. The outcome of his meditations was a determination to find out what he could about Kumokie

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before he should appear before the court and give his consent to the papers of divorcement.

The first objective of his search was Okchung. Here in this obscure mountain village where no one knew him it was easy to get the neighbors to talk of Chun Tochil and his household. Only praise and words of loving admiration were heard from any one concerning the adopted daughter. The things he should concerning the beauty, the character and sweetness of his child wife only strengthened his plan to see her before he shall decide definitely concerning the future and whether he cared to lose her or not.

It was not a difficult matter to obtain information from the unsuspecting neighbors concerning the whereabouts of the girl, so he set forth again with a light heart for the far distant city.

CHAPTER XIII

An Unwelcome Visitor

After gaining what information he could at Okchung, Noch Kyung lost no time in making his way to the Pine Capital. One bright, crisp day in the late fall he entered the ancient gate of that city. He stopped after passing through the great South Gate, and gazing upon the old grey walls and the ponderous, double roofed archway said to a fellow traveller: "Well, I've long thought that I'd have a sight-see of this city. Truly it does not seem much in comparison with the beauties of Seoul, but before we leave we must see the crumbling foundations of the old palace and those relics of by-gone days for I love the study of history and like to think that our country was old and our civilization hoary with age when the ancestors of these upstart western nations were still wild savages. The conceit of them! Coming here to teach their little mushroom classics and so called "education" and "refinement" to the people of an ancient city such as this! Americans too, they say, the very newest nation of all. Why their little island in the midst of the western ocean had not yet been discovered when the great Wangs reigned here. What under the sun do they have of value to teach our people who are taught in all the learning of the sages? It is disgusting!"

So with mumbled defiance he made his way in search of a friendly inn, which is not a difficult matter when one has plenty of the coin of the realm and is possessed of the manner and airs of a gentleman. After settling in a comfortable place for the time he should be in the city, Noch Kyung began to make inquiry concerning the school for girls. Perhaps the

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majority of the people here would have felt as did he, that girls had no use of any knowledge outside the four walls of their homes. There was, however, even twenty years ago a little group of Christians in this the seat of the glorious dynasty of the Wangs. The vision of these people was unlimited by the prejudices of their ancestors, they saw beyond the narrow confines of their surroundings and sought for wider fields of development and usefulness for their daughters as well as for their sons. The beginning of this school was not instituted by the missionaries but by the Christians themselves who saw the need of educating their daughters if they would build up a strong, intelligent Church of Christ in Korea. Just about the time that our story opened at Saemal the faithful, energetic men and women in the old capital had gathered the funds to pay the salary of a girl from a Seoul mission school who came to do the work of teacher, and asked the Board of Missions to send a lady to direct the work. The beginning with twelve little girls and one teacher was small but developed rapidly and was soon housed in a more comfortable building with larger financial aid from the friends in America. However, Noch Kyung knew nothing of these things, he only felt that these insolent, undesirable foreigners were trying to graft something alien into the ancient civilization of his people. He resented the idea that they should be leading the young women away from the old ways which had been good enough for their mothers; yet he was so inconsistent as to be willing to reap whatever advantages there might be from the education of Kumokie. He thought bitterly of the things he had heard concerning the lack of filial piety on the part of the new women of the west, he knew nothing about what they were teaching the girls here, but the more he thought about it the more he feared that their minds would be turned away from the duties of home and "the four principles of conduct." Like a typical old timer of the orient he thought that a woman's place was to obey her father and her husband, to work hard and keep the home, to bear children. What need had she to read the classics? In the bitterness of the moment he forgot his lady mother and her boasted knowledge, but then he always thought of her as a brilliant exception to a general rule.

As he jauntily lighted a cigarette our young friend emerged from the inn ready for his first battle with modern thought and said to the landlord:

"My good fellow, can you tell me where or in what direction I will find the Christian school for girls? I understand there is such an institution in your progressive city."

"O, yes, any one can tell you the way. It is that large building on

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the hill in yonder north part of the city. You can scarcely lose your way. Are you a teacher?"

"A teacher in a girl's school? Well, hardly. But tell me, pray, what kind of a place is this school? I have a very poor idea of a place and people that give their time to teaching stupid girls, putting foolish ideas into silly heads. They would much rather leave them to be taught by their husbands and mothers in law. What sort of people are they anyway?"

"O well enough. I suppose; I never heard any special harm of them. I have a niece who went to school there; she is a nice girl. Is married now and doing very well. I have enough to do to attend to my own affairs and don't pay much attention to the new-fangled ideas of these Christians, but I don't think they do any harm!"

"Harm! Harm! What do you mean, harm? If leading young girls from the paths of obedience and virtue as taught by our sages, if that isn't harm enough what is it?"

"Yes, sir, well I'm sure I don't know." The old fellow was servile in his desire to please this peppery young patron. "I'm sure I don't know, haven't thought much or deeply about these matters as your excellency has undoubtedly done. As I said they let me alone, and I leave them alone; I don't know much about them."

"Seoul is already contaminated by this new education idea, but I was surprised to find it getting a hold in this conservative city of an ancient civilization. This Pine Capital has a reputation of being very devoted to the old code of our ancestors and I am astonished at this nonsense here!" With this parting word the gentleman passed out of the noisy court of the inn and with the gleaming stones for a guide made his way with something of anxiety towards the school building. Noch Kyung was much changed since the early days of his youth spent in Saemal. He was now a successful man of business with an air of command and a somewhat haughty manner. He had found the business world a hard place in which to hold ideals, much of the fine sheen of his youthful days had been sadly rubbed off in his contact with a godless world. In daily touch with men of dishonor and dishonesty he was tainted by the atheism and materialistic tendency of the age. In fact he was unconsciously somewhat of an Epicurean. "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," might have been his motto. The higher ideals of his sages were no longer pondered, he merely tried to be honest and respectable because it was the safest way. His two chief aims in life were the pursuit of success in business and the pursuit of happiness. To desire a thing meant that he would bend every energy to obtain it. As for his home life, it was the

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counterpart of that of numberless young men such as he. The ignorant woman who did the work of the house, the cooking, washing, sewing, was little more than a slave. To him home was merely a place to go after all business and pleasure was over. For companionship and happiness he searched elsewhere. "Cussagi" or "What-you-may-call-her" had a great dread and fear of her master, yet she would have given her life to have been able to please him. She yearned for a kind word; her eyes dumbly sought his approval like those of a faithful dog; whether she served his food or answered his call it was always with the hope that perhaps he might give her a kindly glance, that she might win a word of approval. Yet with all this passionate desire to please him she would have been the most astonished person in the world if he only once had turned to her for advice or companionship. She was only the "inside of the house," a nonentity. Was it strange that her dreams and aspirations were not very high?

As Noch Kyung turned his face to the school on the hill his mind went back to the Kumokie of the old days. What would she be like now? She had been devoted to him in her childish way and would now no doubt be pleased and flattered if after seeing her he should desire to reinstate her as his first wife. Thus in his masculine vanity he reasoned, with never a thought that the young lady in question might have some ideas of her own about her future. So with great assurance and a cock-sure air of self confidence Mr. Kim approached the gate-house. The old man who answered his summons asked him to state his business, but pushing by the old man with scarcely a glance at the object impeding his progress he continued on his way,

"Wait, please wait, sir, you must tell me your message and I will take it for you to the school."

"I want to see my sister, of course. Call Kim Kumokie and tell her that her brother wants to see her. Hurry up," with a haughty stare at the uncomfortable servant

"Yes, sir, certainly, just come this way to the office and wait a few minutes, please." So Noch Kyung was led into a little room near the front entrance where he seated himself stiffly in the big chair in front of the desk and with a pleasant feeling of adventure awaited the next act of the drama.

After a short time of waiting there was the soft thud of sandalled feet in the corridor outside, the door was opened quickly and Kumokie was before him. But what a different Kumokie from the child he remembered in those far distant days by the sea. That had been a quiet, timid child, too shy and easily frightened to even answer when spoken to;

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pretty in a way, yes, but scarcely giving promise of the loveliness of this young woman who stood in the door. Modest and quiet she was still but there was some undefined quality in her poise that spoke of a beautiful spirit; that calm brow; those mobile tender lips; the soft steady light in the limpid depths of the sweet brown eyes all told of the purity and peace of a heart at rest. Her abundant hair, black and glossy as the wing of a blackbird, was wound like a coronet about the shapely head, framing a face of rare beauty and throwing into contrast the creamy skin.

Kumokie had been greatly surprised to hear that her brother had come, this could be no other than Yohn and perhaps he bore an urgent message from the loved ones in Ok-chung. So she hurried down to the office and there found a stranger before her. She did not recognize the visitor and thinking that it was a mistake, a message meant for some other student she murmured.

“Excuse me, please,” and was about to close the door when an amused voice called to her:

“Kumokie! Don’t you know me?”

“You? Here?” Surprise and indignation filled her heart as she entered the room and closed the door. This man was one who seldom stood in the presence of women. As a favored lord of creation he was used to receiving homage from them. It would have been in line with his usual conduct for Kumokie to stand while he remained seated but something in the queenly grace of the young woman before him called him to his feet and not realizing what he was doing he had risen and was facing the little one whom he had left—thrown away like a worn-out shoe with scarcely a thought, certainly with no care for her future or regret for a blighted life. Now he looked at her as he might at one who had risen from the dead. Could this really be the Kumokie whom he had pitied and despised? He scarcely knew what he had expected to find, surely nothing like this wonderful creature.

“How dare you come here?” The fear which had gripped her heart at the sound of his voice—the voice much loved, long waited for, was giving way now before the indignation of her heart. He did not answer, merely gave a supercilious laugh and looked at her in a way which made her flush hot with shame and humiliation.

“You have no right to come here like this. You deceived me and have made me break the school rules.” With a quick action she turned to the door and would have slipped out in another moment, but he saw her intention and had no idea of letting her bolt in this way before he had his say. So springing past her he shoved the door shut again, put his back

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against it and faced again the helpless, angry girl. His lips were curved with a smile of scorn as he said :

“Don’t be impolite! Now you cannot go until you hear what I have to say. I have come a long difficult road just to see and talk with you, and now would you run away and treat me like this?” The man watched the rich blood mount to her cheek and the flash of the beautiful eyes and he knew that his search and journey were well worth while; that this treasure was even more lovely than he had dared to dream; best of all that she was his own after all these years. But she did not answer this taunt, neither did she tremble with fear, but stepping to the window calmly looked out on the tennis court. Only her high color and the proud tilt of her head marked the indignation she felt as she waited for him to speak.

“What? No word of welcome, little lady? Not one word? You liked me well enough in those days long ago, have you so easily forgotten then? You ask why I came thus. There is no reason why I should not tell you at once. It seems that you have an uncle, Chun Tochil, who is more or less anxious about your future. This meddling gentleman wrote to me about a divorce, so I just decided that I would come and see you and talk with you, and,—ah, eh, well just see what your mind was on the subject Now that I’ve seen you again I like your looks. Why you are a real little beauty!” The girl at the window turned towards his as he talked. She was fiercely indignant now.

“You are insolent; impertinent, sir. Please remember that you are speaking to a lady and a stranger!”

“Indeed? Well, my lady; please excuse me!” He mockingly made a deep bow but he realized nevertheless that this slip of a girl was more and more commanding his respect as well as his admiration.

“A stranger’ did you say? Well perhaps we are somewhat strangers, but you are still my wife, you know.”

“Your wife?” What scorn and contempt she threw into her voice.

“Surely. Your uncle realized this or why should he have asked for a bill of divorcement. If he had been lacking in honor like your grandfather he might have long ago sent you to the house of a mother-in-law but you see he realized my legal rights and did not do so. As for me I had about forgotten all about that child marriage, but I shall not forget again.” His admiring eyes dwelt caressingly on the perfect form, the soft womanly curves. His glances seemed to scorch the sensitive girl and the bright color fled from her face, leaving her pale and shaken.

“Why should you be angry? I was not to blame, neither were you for that mistake of our childhood, but since the law still acknowledges it

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as valid why should we not make the best of it? ·

Kumokie forgot all her fear and from her pale lips tumbled all the things she had been thinking these many months.

“Why should I be angry? You left Saemal and the child there with no care for what ill fate might befall her. With a selfish desire to carve a future for yourself unhampered by such burdens you left in the night like a thief. For many years that child did not understand the meaning of this and her devotion followed you as she foolishly looked and longed for your return.” The listener’s eyes grew brighter at this confession and he drew a step nearer, but she lifted her hand with an imperious gesture of warning as she continued:

“Now I understand, and later years have proved how utterly childish were those hopes. I also realize how miserably low and selfish are your motives in coming here now to destroy my peace of mind. Your wife? Never! What of the wife and children at home? Before God she is your only and lawful wife and you insult and enrage me by coming here in this manner. Do you not know that to us Christians death is preferable to dishonor?” Pointing to the door—”No, leave me instantly. Not one word more will I hear!”

This commanding, queenly woman was something new to Noch Kyung and infinitely more attractive and interesting than the insipid, clinging thing which he had expected to find. The result of her defiance was but to strengthen his determination to convince her of the right of his position.

“Why so hasty in your judgment? There is much to be said.”

“Go! I will not listen,—go!”

“Yes, you shall listen. You can not help it, you have got to listen. If you call out you will bring some of those foreigners here and they will expell you in disgrace for immodestly talking thus to a strange man. So,—as I started to say—” but his light, jeering words had given the desperate girl a new idea and before he saw her motive she had thrown up the window sash and called to a girl who was crossing the court:

“O Alice! Please help me just a moment, won’t you?” The younger girl came near the window and showed her willing eagerness to do anything for the much adored Kumokie.

“Thank you so much! Please go to Miss Keith’s room and tell her that there is a matter of great importance concerning which I need to see her here at once. If she is not there then please find one of the other teachers, for it is something specially urgent” With her back to the dismayed and out-generalled young man she stood by the open window

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and gazed out over the city, ignoring his presence completely. Dismay, unbelief and anger were all visible in his face; the way he clenched and unclenched his hands showed that he would have liked very much just then to have exercised his rights of chastisement by giving this unruly, disrespectful woman the beating she so richly deserved; astonishment sealed his lips and he could only stand there dumbly and stare at the now thoroughly composed young lady. Then with a start he saw that he had committed an unpardonable offence against good custom and that if the teacher found him here that serious trouble might result. There was nothing for him to do but to accept his defeat as gracefully as he could and to retreat while the road was open, but so angry and humiliated was he at this unexpected move on her part that he fairly hissed:

“This is not the end, proud lady! You think that I am vanquished but although you seem the victor now the battle has just commenced and I swear that you shall pay for this and pay dearly!”

A few minutes later Kumokie still stood by the window and gazed with unseeing eyes out over the grey old city as quick footsteps sounded without. The visitor had just passed the inhospitable gate-keeper as Miss Keith entered the office. She gave an exclamation of distress as she saw the face of the girl. The meaning and possibilities of Noch Kyung’s last threat had reached her understanding and she was no longer a tragedy queen, no imperious airs now, this was only a frightened little child who ran to her friend with out-stretched hands.

“Kumokie, child, what is the matter? Are you sick?”

“No, not that, but something awful has happened. What shall I do, Oh, what shall I do?” Putting her arm about the weeping girl the missionary drew her gently to her side and waited for her to speak. Something serious had happened she knew, to so distract Kumokie who was usually so calm.

It had never been known at the school that this favorite pupil had been married. Her uncle, feeling that in reality it had been nothing more than a betrothal, thought to save his adopted daughter this shame by saying nothing about it. So now for the first time Miss Keith heard the story of Kumokie’s childhood and of the old days at Saemal. Between sobs and in broken snatches the sad, pitiful tale came from the trembling lips, with an account of that day’s incident.

“You dear, brave girl! You answered him well. Your uncle and aunt will also be made happy by your stand for the right.” Then with a few words she tried to comfort her. After all, the story was easy to understand, and that which under the circumstances one would naturally expect. The

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man, after forgotten years of neglect, on seeing this beautiful, accomplished young woman, was determined to claim her again even though he darkened her life to accomplish it. Ten years before under the old Korean regime it would have been a simple matter to have acquired the divorce. If he had not been in such a hurry on leaving Saemal, a few words before witnesses, the torn documents, (wedding contracts) and the deed would have been done. With the present day, after the Japanese occupation, the laws were more strenuous, but that concerning divorce brought no more relief than the former. The requirement is that husband and wife appear at the local office before the proper officials with the application, but if the man refuse his consent then the woman can do nothing, she has no recourse or defence if he refuse to grant her the legal papers. Hundreds and thousands, in fact nearly all, save the higher classes, really pay little attention to this troublesome formality and frequently women who have been deserted as was the little widow of Saemal would think it quite a matter of course to go to another husband with little or no ceremony whatever. Knowing old man Ye as did Noch Kyung, he had thought, when he considered the matter at all, that this old tyrant of Saemal had followed this custom, as he doubtless would have done but for the timely interference of Uncle Tochil. He had said that he would not release her. Was she thus to be bound to him as long as she lived although another woman was his wife and the mother of his children? This was an intolerable situation for an earnest Christian woman and the two friends wept together over the bitterness and pity of it all. Kumokie's cold, little hands clung to the older woman's dress. As she buried her face on her teacher's ' shoulder deep, painful sobs shook the slender body:

“What will he do? Can he take me away? I hate him: yes, I do, and I used to love him so, for he was good to me in those days.”

“No, dear, of course he can not take you away. I do not know the law or very much about such matters, but he certainly has no right to you before God or me. We must send for your uncle and he will have a good lawyer to advise him as to what steps it will be best to take. But of one thing I am sure, he can never take you against your will. If you remain true to the right and trust you Master to keep you from harm you need have no fear for the future, dark as it may seem just now.”

Ab, yes, true enough, but while her lips were still declaring her hatred and distrust for Noch Kyung she instinctively knew that the hardest battles would be those to fight in her own heart, that if she could remain true and strong to oppose this evil thing the victory would be hers. That had come at last for which she had longed and prayed during so many

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wearry hours, the man she loved had at last claimed her, but too late! The barriers which separated them now were insurmountable if she remained true to the principles which she professed. Suddenly this truth like a flood swept over her, leaving her weak and faint. Then sinking on her knees beside her friend she gasped :

“I am so weak, and I feel so helpless, please pray that I may have His grace and strength for the struggle.”

CHAPTER XIV
To Make Doubly Sure

Not very long, counted by figures on a dial, after the dapper young visitor came inquiring for his sister, the same gentleman again passed the school portals and the old gate keeper wondered what his sister could have done or said to have made the young fellow look so angry.

Surprised and confused he could do nothing but accept the ultimatum of that queenly young person, and had left rather more hurriedly than was consistent with proper dignity, but that course had seemed necessary to escape further humiliation. If Kumokie had been trying to awaken his interest, which thing had not entered her mind, she could scarcely have found any method more successful than that which she had followed. The same queer kink of human nature which makes the child prefer the forbidden sweets to any other treat, in the full grown man makes him more anxious to acquire that which is most difficult to obtain, and particularly is this true in affairs of the heart. The woman too easily won has little attraction compared to the bright being who, with maiden modesty, holds herself beyond his sphere.

Noch Kyung had gone to the school coolly indifferent, though curious as to the charming young woman; he came away hotly indignant but keen to conquer her rebellious spirit, to make that proud creature bow before him as master. It would be too strong to say that at this first interview he had fallen in love with his wife, but he had seen that this was an unusually beautiful woman, that she had the culture and refinement desirable in the one who should take the place he offered her in his home.

“She is mine and I’ll have her,—the tigress!” this was his avowed course as he strode away moodily to the inn. Whether he won her by the tenderness and devotion of a lover or by the hard, harsh methods of the cave man, was of no importance to him. He knew that she had been prejudiced against him by the Christian teachings of the relatives who had

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reared and educated her, and his bitterness against them increased. He completely overlooked the fact that she owed to these influences the very qualities which had drawn him to her again. Neither did he think of her probable condition if she had remained with the old miser in Saemal, where, long before this, in following the customs and ideas of those people, her life would have been so degraded and the burdens so heavy as to have brought her to misery and premature old age.

Feeling thwarted and altogether uncertain as to his rights in question, although he had spoken with such assurance, Noch Kyung sought a well known lawyer and laid before him his interesting problem, asking his advice in making more secure the slender bonds which existed between him and the girl. That which he heard from the legal adviser sent him off again in post haste, this time in the direction of Saemal.

He had never expected to visit again this despised spot. Those long distant unhappy days of his boyhood seemed like half-forgotten dreams. He approached the village by the path along the beach but his thoughts were so preoccupied with plans for the future that he passed the old lookout, the spot which had once been his house of dreams and later the greatest solace to the deserted Kumokie—passed it without a glance of recognition. Riding at rest on the blue waves of the tiny bay were two fishing smacks; and nearby a rusty looking old man sat on an overturned dory by a sand doon and puffed away at his pipe while he lazily mended an ancient net. The young dandy from the capital, fresh and crisp looking in his new mantle, approached this individual and stood looking down on his work a moment before he inquired :

“Will you please tell me, stranger, where I can find the house of Ye Chang Sook? I suppose that he still lives in your honorable village.”

The old fisherman very deliberately and slowly laid down the net, took the long stemmed pipe from his lips and with the dazed look of non-comprehension gazed at the newcomer as though he had not heard.

Then raising his voice and with a show of some annoyance Noch Kyung repeated:

“I say, where does Ye Chang Sook live here? Are you deaf?”

Disdaining to answer the question the old man replied with evident distrust:

“Who are you? What business it that to you?”

“Me, Oh, I’m just a business man from Seoul, used to know Ye a long time ago and just thought I’d hunt him up.” The steady, inquisitive gaze of the old fellow made him somewhat self conscious and embarrassed, and he stooped to pick up a shell and flung it out over the

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blue water. With an inarticulate growl the old man took up his mending again and turned a cold shoulder to the unwelcome visitor, which strange and impolite behaviour nettled that gentleman very much.

“What’s the matter? Why don’t you answer a polite question?”

“I don’t know any thing about it, you can find out for yourself,” he shrugged in answer. Then some trick of expression or turn of speech brought back to Noch Kyung some vivid recollection of the past and in a swift moment he recognized the man, and in a warm friendly voice he said :

“Oh, I know you now, you are Mr. Paek who once lived on the hill near the great chestnut tree!” Mr. Paek gazed at him open-mouthed with astonishment, still his sense of discretion did not desert him:

“Well, what if I am? I didn’t say I wasn’t, did I? But who are you? That’s what I wanted to know.”

“Come now, don’t be so suspicious, Mr. Paek. Don’t you remember the chap that came and lived with Ye for a while as his son-in-law. Don’t you know me?”

“There does seem to be something familiar about you,” shaking his head doubtfully, “but I don’t know. Those dogs of the law are mighty cute and smart, but it’s none of my business to help them even against old man Ye.” Seeing his fear, Noch Kyung told him enough about himself to allay his distrust and to prove his identity. Then he asked:

“Does Ye still live in the little house on the beach?”

“No, that house fell down while he was in prison. The old woman died during that time too, and he now has one room at the house of Han Comchil’s since he came back.”

“Prison? What did you say about prison?”

“Yes, prison. Where have you been that you did not know that?”

“Truly I have heard nothing from Saemal or of the people here since I left ten years ago,” sitting down near the over-turned boat on the white sand, “Won’t you please tell me about what has happened before I go to see him? Then I will know better what to say to him.”

“Counterfeiter. Buzzard’s island over there,” pointing with his chin in a general direction seaward, “got caught shortly after you left. I guess. He and Han were put in prison. Just got out three weeks ago.”

“So that was it? Well why didn’t I guess it before?”

The old Korean money, the nickel or the cash was easy enough counterfeited with even a few crude instruments if one had the ability to imitate or copy designs. This news explained the many things which for these years had remained a mystery about Ye, and as he climbed the hill

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leading to Han's house he mused on the probable condition of the Ye exchequer and on the way in which fate was playing into his hands:

"Just the same Ye, no doubt, and in the old days he would have sold his soul, if he has one, for a few hundred yang, and his precious grand-daughter will be no more to him now than she was then. Looks pretty smooth sailing for me." Thus comforting himself he came to the door of Han's house. There he was immediately ushered into the sarang. He could scarcely recognize in the white-headed, broken old man whom he found there, the man he had once so hated and despised. The changes wrought by the years however were mostly external, in many ways he was not greatly different. The loss of most of his hoarded wealth and the secret source of it had filled him with a great bitter ness which had been intensified by his long term of confinement.

He did not recognize the visitor who now stood before him and glanced at him with scant interest and less courtesy.

"Well, father Ye, you don't seem to know your long lost son!" Long and searchingly this strangely assorted pair looked at each other, looked as though each was trying to read the other's thoughts and motives. The old antipathy revived and the man seemed more like he used to be as he proceeded to lash himself into a fury:

"You low down, good for nothing son of Kim! What do you come here for now? Just to torture and laugh at a poor, broken man. Why don't you laugh? Isn't it funny to see me thus? Ha! Ha! Well, even if it does amuse you it will be safest for you to get away from here and pretty quick too. I am not in the mood to take any of your impertinence now, not one word! Go, I say, go!" he shook a menacing fist at the visitor and scrambled to his feet.

"It isn't good business sense to send me off like that. Neither is it wisdom to act and judge so harshly before you know the facts and the purpose I had in mind when coming here. I did not know about your trouble until a few minutes ago. I only came to talk over a certain question of business. There is a little matter in which you can do me a great service and in so doing you have much also to gain. It is to your favor to hear what I had to say, but of course if you refuse to hear me I can only retire," as he made a motion to turn away. "Business? What business transactions has a dragon with a snail? You seem to have managed very well in your honorable business for these past years without any great need of my aid. I'll make a guess that it's some knavish trick of which you are ashamed that you are up to now!"

Noch Kyung was generally somewhat of a diplomat not lacking

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for words but this unexpected attitude on the part of this old man made him very uncomfortable and uncertain as to how to begin his story or what to say. It was hard to tell a man like this his plans for the future, not knowing just what to say or what would be the best manner of approach, but realizing that something had to be done quickly he blurted out the whole secret without any introduction :

“It’s Kumokie!”

“So that’s it, huh? Well, my fine gentleman, she has turned out to be a heap too good for you, from what I hear. I’ll tell you right now before you begin, to save your breath. The despised daughter of the low house of Ye despises you now, does she? Well, I’m glad it, proud I am of her for it. You need not come to me for any help in your infernal plans. Her mother’s brother is now her guardian, her father, go to him and make your important words!”

“I suppose I had best tell you the whole story. It is my way to be frank and sincere and I’ll tell you everything,” then he told about Uncle Tochil’s letter, of his visit to Okchung and to the school; of his determination to keep her as his legal wife and of the way in which she had disdained and refused his offer.

“So? Good for my grand-daughter! Good for little Kumokie, I’m glad she has some spunk. May she live ten thousand times ten thousand years!” .

The embarrassed boy flushed at these taunting words and replied:

“You thought that I had come to glory over your misfortunes but it is you who are rejoicing over my troubles. I intend to have Kumokie whether or not you help me, but it is very much to your interest to do so.”

“None of my business, I’m through with you and all your tribe forever!”

“Please don’t say that! After all why should you refuse to help your grand-daughter to her rightful place as the first and lawful wife of my father’s son? She can not marry any-one else according to her Christian notions for I will not give the consent necessary to the divorce. This is the point on which the case hangs and that child marriage is still binding before the Japanese courts. But one point I fear, and I tell you frankly, those foreigners in that school may take the matter up and the lawyer whom I consulted said that if I could have evidence that my money was used to help support and educate her that no court would break it. All I ask is that you accept certain funds regularly for your own use and for her, of course she and her uncle are to think that it is your generosity, and then if ever it becomes necessary that you testify to the facts,—well I am

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doing well in my business and can afford to be liberal.”

Knowing old Ye as we do it is scarcely necessary to say that before long they wonder to the sordid details of the money transactions. Sarcastic and biting he continued but he saw that this was a most glorious opportunity to feather his nest and at the same time to help his “Beloved grand-daughter” to her rightful position. It gave him unusual pleasure to appear to stand with Kumokie in her opposition as long as by so doing he could annoy Noch Kyung, but like the weather-cock his opinion could easily change if the variable wind was advantageous to him, and before the young man left Saemal the matter was arranged with perfect satisfaction to each of them, and the certainty of Kumokie’s future made doubly sure,

CHAPTER XV
A Sweet Girl Graduate

The pride of Okchung over the achievements and honors of Kumokie and Elizabeth was beautiful and became a means of encouragement to other parents in their efforts to educate their daughters.

For days before the return of the two girls this was the chief topic of conversation in the village and all were on the alert to see what changes had been wrought in these who were their joy and crown. On the day of their return many friends, neighbors and former companions at Maria’s school came out to meet them. As is the happy custom of Korea they come in a crowd about ten li down the valley and there awaited the travellers. During the days that followed little escaped their eyes for they watched and observed most carefully every action and word of these old friends who now seemed so different and in whom they looked for some other changes even more radical. The attitude of the girls towards their parents; whether or not they were helpful in the home; whether they would be selfish and proud of their success; whether or not they would add anything of interest and inspiration to the Sunday School and Church services, in all this Okchung became a self constituted committee of observation. No critical spirit, not that; no, they were merely waiting anxiously to see whether or not a diploma in the hands of a Korean girl would turn her head.

There had not been lacking those who from the start were pessimistic and who did not hesitate to say that they expected nothing good from such a course. As each returning vacation proved the girls the

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same sweet, unspoiled daughters they still shook their heads.

“Too soon yet to know! Just wait until they return with their diplomas and see what proud minds they will eat then.”

On the other hand there were those who pointed to Maria as proof sufficient to refute the argument :

“Just look at Maria! Hasn’t she more book-knowledge than all the country side put together? Yes, and who would hesitate to say that she is without doubt the most beloved woman we know?” but the other critics continued sadly to shake their heads:

“Could we expect any one else to be like our Maria?”

The girls, unconscious of all this talk, came home glowing and happy to tell their friends of all the things which had happened to them. Not knowing these thoughts and fears they were natural and unaffected in their relationships with old friends and never even noticed the slight embarrassment on their part which marked the first few days.

For some months Elizabeth had been betrothed to No, the son of their old friend, Pastor No. This was a fine young man, a successful teacher in one of the largest Mission schools, of splendid character and making a name for himself in the life which he had chosen. They had known each other from childhood and there existed between them that mutual admiration and esteem which is as yet rare in the orient between men and women. Although one page of history was turned and her school days ended, Elizabeth had no doubt that life held many beautiful and happy things for her and looked forward with joyous anticipation to the days to come. To Kumokie there was trepidation and hesitation, shrinking from the suffering which she knew lay before her. What was yet sealed up in that mysterious Book of Life? She longed to know and yet trembled with fear to approach and read.

The days following the visit of Noch Kyung to the school she had lived in constant dread that he would return or send some message to her. She did not know what to look for and this uncertainty made her restless. She had no doubt that he intended and was fully able to carry out his threat. She underestimated neither his determination nor his ability but she had no idea of the length to which his patience would carry him. As the months passed and there was no evidence on his part of active hostility she could not understand, never dreaming of the real subtlety with which he was silently but surely weaving about her a strengthening warp in the web of the bonds which held her to him. For a long time she was startled and frightened by each stranger who appeared; every time the postman came she felt that chill clutch of fear until the letters were distributed and

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she was certain that there was no word from Noch Kyung. She grew more anxious and nervous waiting for the thing, she knew not what, which was awaiting her. Our fears are always more dread inspired when we see before us some mysterious dark menace yet can not discern the nature of the harm threatened.

Uncle Tochil had made investigations into the law and being at last convinced that for the present there was nothing that he could do he maintained his optimistic hope that Nock Kyung would finally consent to the proper legal forms when he realized that his claims were useless. After many weary, anxious days Kumokie too was satisfied that he had only spoken thus in his rage and that when he considered the matter more carefully that he had come to the sensible conclusion that he did not want an unwilling bride. The long, continued silence confirmed this belief and the last year in school was much less perturbed, though her mind was frequently agitated with fears. Sometimes at night as she tossed restlessly from side to side, she asked herself the questions which she most feared to answer. After all, was it the fact that he would not divorce her which disturbed her peace of mind? Had she not long ago decided that she did not want the thing they called a divorce? A torn piece of paper, what did that matter? Not a whit! Hundreds of times in her mind had she gone over again that memorable conversation. She could recall every word he had spoken, every tone, every glance. Would he indeed claim her again? Did she not long and hope that he would do this very thing even while she struggled against it? Regardless of what she knew to be right her loving, human heart spoke for him more eloquently than any word of his. Perhaps he had gone forever! Would she ever see him again? Over and over again she asked herself turbulent questions; round and round in a circle spun her thoughts until she grew dizzy and weary with the thinking.

During these last two years in school the unexpected kindness and the financial aid from grandfather Ye was the means of relief to Uncle Tochil and of providing many little necessities and luxuries which before had been beyond the reach of Kumokie and Elizabeth.

Now school days were over; the sweet girl graduates were back home again in the dear old village, and were the pride and life of the fond friends there. Under the protecting love of home even Kumokie was beginning to feel once more the thrill and joy of living and serving. Maria's faithful eyes searched the dear face to know the true state of her heart, but the calm exterior gave little hint of the storms which sometimes raged within. That the girl needed comfort she well knew, and perhaps advice. She was no longer a child, but a woman. No matter how much her

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friends might love and wish to shield her from danger and temptation there was no fortress save that erected in her own heart which could protect her in this time of need. The opportunity to speak to her came one afternoon as they two sat alone under the old nuttie tree. The work of the house was neatly done; the sun of the long summer afternoon was ablaze on the mountains and the distant valley, and the cool shade of the friendly tree was refreshing. This was the most delightful and quiet spot about the home. Maria lifted her eyes from the new stitch she was learning by the aid of the accomplished Kumokie and with a look of compassion and tenderness she said :

“My daughter, it is hard for even me to speak to you on the subject which I know is so painful to you. But we know not what a day may bring forth and you may need a true friend to advise and comfort you. It breaks my heart to see the look of sorrow and loneliness which comes to your eyes when you think no one is noticing you; you never speak of your life in Saemal though of course I know about it; you never speak of the things which you think and feel now, but I believe that if you would open your heart and tell the one who has tried faithfully to be a mother to you, if you could tell me about these things it might ease the pain and perhaps make the way seem plainer.” She took up her work again, the needle flashing as she bent her face above the delicate fabric in her hands. Kumokie however laid aside her embroidery; the bright color flooded her usually pale face and her eyes sought the face of this friend whom she knew to be wise and good and yet so loving and able to understand. But she did not answer and Maria took up again the thread of thought :

“You have a hard fight before you. I do not believe that the determined young man has given up so easily his demands and I think it is most likely that we will hear something more from him before many days. In the meanwhile you must be sure of your own heart, your line of action must be decided and secure. Those even who love you most are helpless in this time of trial, you must know the thing which is right for you to do and if you have not the strength to abide by that then no one else can help you.”

“O, what shall I do? I hate him! Yes, I do, I hate him! He has made my life miserable since I was a little thing. He went away and left me without a care to what-so-ever sad fate might await me, went away forever! After you had taken me and helped me to a higher life, educated me, loved me as I never saw love before,—then he comes back to do that which will ruin my life and my happiness. Yes, I hate him!” the vehemence with which she made this declaration did not deceive the wise

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woman beside her. Did she not know that the pain of a woman scorned was apt to bring just such outbreaks? Maria's life had been ever shielded from evil things without or within; her home was almost ideal so far as the benedictions of love were concerned; about her were loving children, the devoted husband whose care was always to keep her from the bitter and rough experiences of life. How then did she know how to read the heart of this other woman whose story was so different from her own?

Whence comes woman's insight, call it intuition or what-soever you will, by means of which she is able to discern the mind of another without reasoning and without experience of a like nature? Perhaps it comes from a veiled introspection, an unconscious knowledge of her own heart and of what she might herself be capable of under like circumstances. Is it this cognizance that each human heart has of its own possibilities, which gives this finer understanding of another's actions and words? Such intuition on Maria's part gave her a comprehending sympathy for the anguish of Kumokie and in consequence she could and did feel with her in kind if not in degree the pain of her situation.

Her cheeks flushed and eyes sparkling, the girl continued: "Do you think that I could have lived with you all these many years and have learned from you the things you have taught me concerning God and life and yet not know my duty, not know what is right in a matter of this kind? If I should fall into this temptation would it not bring shame and sorrow to you? I must think not only of my duty to God and to my own soul but to you also who have been more than earthly father and mother to the lonely orphan girl."

"Yes, I am confident, Kumokie, that you know the right from the wrong and I believe also that you have no other desire or purpose than to do the honorable thing. I foresee, however, that there is a trial more tempestuous than you yourself as yet can understand and when that day comes you will not be able to stand alone, yet no earthly friend, no matter how much they love you nor how greatly their hearts may yearn over you, will be able then to help you, there is only One on Whom you can depend for help for your own heart is your worst enemy."

Kumokie looked in amazement at her friend; she knew that Maria would understand and yet this expression of what she herself had realized was almost uncanny.

"Yes, I know that what you say is true. But there is only one thing in earth or under the earth of which I am afraid,—that is sin. As long as my heart is pure and clean I will trust in my God to deliver me from sin and from temptations too strong for me to bear."

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“I am glad that you recognize your danger, I had feared that you were still so much of a child that you would fail to see where the real trial would come. I have heard that this boy was kind to you in those days at Saemal?”

What memories came trooping back at this simple question! Again she was in the big thatched house on the hill and trembled with terror before the fierce anger of old man Ye; once again as many times in memory she stood before that cruel judge in the little hut by the beach; had her quick feet sped noiselessly towards the outlook where she was sure to find Noch Kyung,—in all these dark places there was always one bright ray, one person besides the frail little mother who was never cruel to the little child. As she still did not answer, but kept that far away gaze fixed on the distant valley, Maria softly asked again :

“Was Noch Kyung not kind to little Kumokie?” With a start she brought her roving mind back from those long distant days to the present; slowly and carefully she answered:

“He was never unkind to me.”

“But he long ago forgot and cast you away and took another woman for his wife, and before God, if not before all men, she is his only lawful wife. If you should go to him now it is you who would be in reality the concubine.”

There was a slight note of indignation in her voice as she replied:

“Have I no knowledge of this elementary truth?”

“I am only reviewing in my own way the present status of the case. We must both understand the crisis and what is involved.”

“The subject is so painful to me, there is no need now to talk more of it surely. I have no other idea than these, and although I thank you with all my heart for telling me and for your sympathy, still I believe that it is all past now and I wish to forget those sad things and to remember only these latter sweeter days.”

There was a gleam half of pity, half sorrow in the long look which Maria gave the young girl; she watched with soul deep longing the poise of the flower like head, the childish set of the pouting, red lips, the clear, star-like gleam of her dusky eyes. She was so adorably unselfconscious, and the older woman knew that she must tell her that which must somehow change the present even tenor of her way, that which would perhaps bring separation and sorrow to them both,—just what possibilities lurked in the future unknown she dared not even guess. For a long moment the two looked at each other so, Kumokie’s lips parted in a faint, wistful smile for there was that in her friend’s steady sorrowful gaze

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which made her uneasy.

“The time has come, beloved, when you will need all the strength of a determined will and the help which is divine to enable you to keep your feet set in a right path.”

A long tendril of glossy, black hair fell across her face; her eyes were steady and enquiring but she sprang to her feet panting:

“Maria,” she commanded sharply, “What are you saying? What do you mean? Tell me what has happened.”

They faced each other in the middle of the room. Kumokie raised one hand with a mechanical gesture to brush back the tendril of hair, but her wistful, frightened gaze did not leave the face of her friend.

“I am no longer a baby, tell me what has happened! Do not try to be tactful and careful, I want the truth and quickly!”

“Noch Kyung has written to your uncle,” said she as she quickly untied the string of her chumanie (purse-like bag) and drew from it the letter, “Here, you may read it for yourself. He says that it was he who supplied the money which your grandfather has been sending to help you these past two years; that this binds you to him more securely in the eyes of the law; that he has waited patiently until now but that shortly he will come to claim you as his wife.”

Something caught in her throat, seemed to choke her, weakened her knees so that for a moment she thought she was going to faint, but still she said nothing, the red, half parted lips were those of a child, but the dark, anxious eyes were those of a proud woman.

CHAPTER XVI

Kumokie found herself filled with the spirit of restlessness. Her customary even calmness of disposition was gone and in the midst of the happy, active life about her she led a brooding, solitary life; into the fortress of her confidence she admitted not even these friends who loved her. She seemed to have withdrawn herself unobtrusively and silently to a retreat far removed from those about her. She wandered and fluttered from one household task to another without completing any one detail of the work. Out of the present her mind was always escaping to other scenes and to the possible future. But a few days before she had been absorbed in needs and happiness of the quiet household. Now she had no real part in it.

Often she stood quietly her eyes fixed on something far distant, her mind and heart on some vague, misty dream which so chained her will

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that their bonds though firm were so soft and beautiful she had no strength and no desire to break away from the sweetness of these reveries. Then she could unnoticed steal away to the shade of the old nutie tree and dream, dream on vaguely, sweetly dream. She wanted nothing so much as to sit on and let her mind drift away from her body into the beautiful clouds of that dream-land called "What might have been." Then suddenly realizing that this was just the danger of which Maria had tried to warn her, that she must not indulge these fancies if she wished to be victorious in her fight, she took this state of mind much to heart and fought it with all her strength. Then inexorably she held herself to the tasks she found to do; stern set lines gathered from day to day about the sweet mouth; the dusky eyes had a look that was almost haggard from the nights of sleepless struggle. By an effort that was super-human she succeeded at last in applying herself to the life about her, but the effort left her weak and shaken. The thing which would possess her soul must be put aside, she dared no longer stand and face the radiance until she could control her own heart and will. In the midst of her agony as she sometimes struggled and sobbed with her desire to seize the happiness of earth which was so near she realized that the prize which throughout her childhood days had seemed remote, impossible,—had now come to her, was pressing itself upon her acceptance and yet that she must hold back, must send him away again; she must not even give a sign that she cared. She dared not look again through the misty dreams into the future if she was to meet and conquer the present. She searched eagerly, humbly through the deeps of her agonized spirit and found there nothing of strength to comfort; in her own heart there was only that which had grown with the years until it would overcome her, that which would, if allowed, sweep over her and leave her passion-racked. Ah, but dear God, the beauty of that dream! the sweetness of it! those dreams!

Maria watched her with a deep understanding of her moods and with anxious longing to say some word, to do something, to help in however weak a way to show her the path for those tender feet. But she was a wise woman and well she knew that this was not the time to speak, that this was Kumokie's battle and she alone could fight and win. The moment of her trial had come and she must meet it,—meet it alone with her God. Uncle Tochil who was generally so placid and optimistic in his views was greatly disturbed and constantly urged Maria to speak again to the girl.

"Don't you see that she needs you. Go, Maria, and speak to the child! It breaks my heart to see her suffer so, but I can think of nothing to

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comfort her. Surely you know what to say! You are always so wise and have always the right word for the need, I should be like a huge, awkward ox in a dainty rose garden, I would only bring havoc and ruin.” To all his words she sadly shook her head:

“No, the time has not yet come. Be patient, she will come through all right. The best and only help you can render her now is to pray. When you feel that you must speak to her, that something must be said, but you know not what, that comfort must be given when you have none to offer, do not forget the Comforter! What can I say to that broken hearted, lonely child? Nothing. But there is One who can calm the storm there even as He did on Gallilee. Ask Him to speak the words that you fain would have spoken.” After this gentle reprimand he stole away to the hill and there under the glorious radiance of the afternoon he met his Lord and talked with Him as he would to his dearest friend. When he returned to the house his wife rejoiced to see that he was again his usual, placid self, serene and sure. After that although his heart was troubled by the drawn look of suffering on the face of Kumokie he was confident of the outcome, and did not speak to Maria again about it. This time of waiting and uncertainty was so hard, what would Noch Kyung do? When would he come? These were the questions in the heart if not on the tongue of each. But the days slowly passed with no further sign from him, and each day but added to the spirit of restless anguish and uncertainty which filled Kumokie’s heart. The present was a terrible blankness and for the future she saw only loneliness and despair.

The Sabbath came around, and so black was the darkness which filled her heart that when the other members of the household left the house at the hour of service she felt that she could not face the friends at the meeting house, the look of sympathy that some would wear, the curious stare of others, nor yet the critical air of the few who were just waiting to say: “There! I told you so, the little saint is no better than any other sinner!” She did not go to service, but she found her way up among the pines which clustered along the ridge over-looking the little brown church in the valley. Perhaps it was the urgent need that drove her to this place where so many times before she had held sweetest communion with her Lord. Maybe it was an unrealized desire to be near her dearest earthly friends, or the Spirit Himself leading her wayward feet, whatever it may have been, she felt a sense of nearness and fellowship with those who worshiped within even as she sat on the ridge above held hidden by the pines. She was too far away to hear the words that were spoken, but the hymn reached her distinctly. How well she knew the words of that dear

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old song! The light breeze swept up the valley and carried the words to her ear, the inspired words, so simple, but so full of vital meaning that they were to bring her the very message for which her soul longed.

“Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go,
Anywhere with Jesus in this world below;
Anywhere without Him, dearest joys would fade,
Anywhere with Jesus I am not afraid.”

At the first sound of the music the girl had started and caught her breath. Who has not felt the wonderful power of inspired song? Have you not at some time been lifted out of self and time and sense by the holy strains when the music is from the throne of the Divine? It offers to the sad heart an irresistible appeal and God speaks to His own through the tender pleading of the words.

Louder, fuller swelled the chorus of the little group who were not afraid with Jesus, anywhere to go! These were not trained voices. To many a delicate ear the harshness of the notes, the lack of harmony, the many discords would have grated so much that these would have been the only things noteworthy about the singing of that mountain congregation. Most of these people had never tried to sing a tune of this kind until a few short years ago. Kumokie, too many times, had felt the rudeness of the singing and had a secret hope that some time she would be able to give them an organ and teach them how to keep more nearly to the tune. This morning, however, she did not notice the discords, she did not hear the harsh nasal tones of Grandfather Im who could sing everything in the Hymnal from the Lord's Prayer through the index to the same tune,—no, she heard none of these things, but only the sweet, simple words of prayer and praise. The strains of melody rose from the expectant, believing hearts and the lone watcher on the hill became conscious that she was not alone. There was One with her of whom she had thought little during the days just past. Unseen He was in the midst and His glory shone around.

“Anywhere with Jesus I am not alone,
Other friends may fail me,”
“He is still my own;
Though His hand may lead me over drearest ways,
Anywhere with Jesus will be home, sweet home.”

The soft, balmy air of the summer morning, the distant, tinkling sounds from the valley below, the drowsy buzz of insects united in a soothing lullaby. Kumokie yielded to their gentle influence; the dark head sank lower against the brown bowl of the gnarled old pine; the dark lashes swept the creamy skin and cast a darker shadow on the wet, stirred face,

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then deep, regular breathing stirred the soft throat. A little ground squirrel came out, cast suspicious glances at the queer invader and then scurried away on some half forgotten errand. Then all was still.

CHAPTER XVII The Parting of the Ways

The purple shadows of twilight seemed to enfold Kumokie's spirit. The restless pain and indecision of the past days grew more and more intense. Atone she was treading a winding mountain path and the darkening shades were creeping longer and blacker over the low sleepy valleys. She was very tired and her feet dragged wearily. Just before her was the parting of the ways, where the mountain trail branched. One, a straight, narrow way was very rugged and rough with stones to bruise her tender feet, and steep ascents too high for her frail strength to scale. As she stopped in speechless sorrow and gazed up this hard and lonely way she trembled in fear; chill loneliness gripped her heart and she sobbed aloud :

“Oh, no, not that road! It is so hard and lonely.” She shivered, buried her face in her arms and turned away. Then one stood beside her though she had thought herself alone. His eyes held the tenderness of Divine love and on His brow was a crown of thorns. One hand was reached out towards the hesitating girl with an appeal of infinite compassion and the other pointed to the heights beyond, but in those hands were wound prints. The pilgrim knew Him instantly and recognized, too, that His call was to the higher road, the narrow, ragged way which seemed so rough and steep.

Sadly, mutely she turned away to contemplate the beauties of brightness and the other way. Broad and shaded it stretched away in smooth invitation to the valley below.

Half hidden amidst the verdant loveliness of the valley was a silver, thread-like river, sparkling in the sunlight. How peaceful and enticing after the dreary mountain path.

Did someone call her? She listened and strained to hear the faint sound. Again. Did she not recognize that beloved voice? Aye, anywhere and always she would know its faintest whisper. She fancied that even in death that voice could call her back to earth. It was Noch Kyung, but where was he? What did he say? She looked eagerly, anxiously towards the valley; she listened to the deep voice and then forgot the Thorn

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Crowned One above. Nearer, more pleadingly came the voice from below. She could hear the words now.

“Kumokie, Kumokie, Where are you?”

With eager feet she hastened to meet him. O, to see him again,—to listen to the sweet words she had so longed and feared to hear, to look again into those dear eyes and see the love light gleam there for her alone, ah this would be paradise!

“Here, here I am,” and even as she called he stood before her in all the perfection of her dreams. The one upon whom she gazed with such adoration was not the hard, cynical young man of the world who was Kim Noch Kyung. This was the beautiful ideal whose image she had carried in her heart and called by that name she loved. The light of a noble love shone in his face and she responded with gladness.

“Come with me, my Kumokie; I have many beautiful things to show you in the Valley of Love. Come with me. Do not fear for you shall no more know sorrow or loneliness or pain for I love you and will show you the meaning of life. Come, do not look upwards to that steep mountain way for there are stones to bruise your tender feet and thorns to tear your dear flesh. I would lead you through this sweet valley into the Garden of Rose where blooms every variety of pleasure and of beauty that the world can bestow. Do not hesitate. Beloved, have you not waited through long weary years for this? Put your little hand in mine and then forget the pain and anguish of the way.

With a long quivering sigh she turned and said:

“Oh, I do want to go with you for I fear the hard toil and loneliness of the mountain peaks, but it is not right. It is wrong, and I am afraid of sin!” and she drew back and hesitated.

His glad laugh rang out :

“Sin? And what is sin? The pleasure to be found in this world ends all! Foolish child! Forget such folly and enjoy this life while you may, for tomorrow you die.” While she still hesitated he came nearer and with the tenderness of an accepted lover clasped her in his arms and drew her to his breast. As she yielded herself to his embrace all the pent flood of longing seemed to burst their bonds and to go out to him. What else mattered? So with a happy little smile she said :

“Yes, I will go with you anywhere. But come into the beautiful valley, for I must pluck the flowers in that garden and taste the fruit which is so wondrous sweet.”

Hand in hand they descended into the valley, but the Thorn Crowned One looked upon them in Divine pity. The voice beloved

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sounded in her ears:

“All that is lovely, all that you desire will I give you. No more rough hardness for you now. We will enter together the Garden of Delights.” Immediately they stood by its high stone wall. The ponderous gate swung back of its own accord as they approached. Breathless with wonder and admiration she looked about her at the profusion and richness of the flowers: roses, blushing, beautiful, beckoned to her; lilies slender in pale loveliness nodded their sweet heads in welcome; violets, heliotrope and all manner of blossoms that she had never before seen lifted their urgent call of fragrance; upon the wall rested luscious clusters of purple grapes, and heavily laden branches of fruit trees gave her a more intense reminder of her hunger.

“How beautiful! how beautiful it all is: I shall be satisfied when I can pick those lovely flowers and eat this perfect fruit.”

“It is all yours. Take, eat and be completely satisfied.” With a glad cry she ran forward to snatch a blushing rose bud, but even as she touched it fell to ashes under her fingers. Disappointed and surprised she turned away but the queenly grace of the pale lilies made her forget the rose dust and in breathless expectation she leaned over the nodding beauties; their sweet breath fanned her cheek and she buried her face in their silky petals to inhale their fragrance. Behold! the flowers had turned to filthy carrion and the putrefying odor took her breath away. Struggling for air she fled from this horror. Yet again her attention was turned from this strange thing to the purple, dewy clusters which covered the garden wall. She was utterly tired and very hungry and she reached out her hand to take the largest bunch. But what was this awful thing? It was a grinning mocking demon that leered at her; she could not shake it loose from her hand, it seemed to become a part of her, and others more hideous thronged about her. With growing fear and terror she tried to call aloud for help but her tongue refused to utter a sound and with staring eyes she looked at these hateful apparitions. All the joyous anticipation fled from her, leaving her cold with fear and apprehension. Then suddenly were her eyes opened and she saw all things for what they were, not as they had seemed a short while before to her intoxicated senses. This was only a prison filled with dead ashes of hopes, hideous demons and repulsive carcasses, and she had thought it a beautiful garden with rich fruit and fragrant flowers.

She looked for the gate to find a way of escape, but there were only high, bare walls of stone. In anguish of spirit she remembered the Parting of the Ways and the choice which she had made, then she cried out in terror to the man who had led her this way :

The Crimson Dawn

“Noch Kyung! Noch Kyung! Take me away. I’m afraid!” The hard, cold voice of a stranger answered :

“How? Do you not like my garden?”

“No, no, let me out. It is not a garden, it is the prison place of lost souls. You promised me love and beauty and happiness but you are only a cruel stranger that I do not know. Let me out, I beseech you, I am afraid.”

Only a laugh of cruel derision met this frantic wail; her heart was bursting with an agony of shame and remorse. Then she remembered the tender pity of the Thorn Crowned One at the Parting of the Way .

“O if it were not too late and I could choose again, dear Lord, I would not shame Thee so ‘Just once again.’ I pray for one more opportunity to choose the right way!”

In that place of awful memories, amid the skulls and hideous relics of the tombs she fell upon her knees and lifted up a cry of agony:

“Thy will, O Lord, be done! I see how foolish and ignorant I have been I do not want my own way now. Anywhere with Thee, Master, the road would not seem lonely nor hard!” She covered her face with her hands and with broken sobs made her confession and a plea for mercy. She saw clearly now that during the past time of struggle it had been because she wanted her own way and was not willing or ready to say ‘Thy will be done,’ but now how happy she would be to be able to choose again that upward way with the Thorn Crowned One to lead over the dreary ways. Then a strange peace and calmness came over her troubled spirit, that peace which the world can not give and which the world can not take away.

She sprang to her feet and was amazed to find that the Garden of Pleasure had vanished. Again she stood at The Parting of the Ways. She gazed upward toward the heights: the way was narrow and steep, but it did not seem lonely for the Thorn Crowned One was there. With a joyous cry she realized that another opportunity, that for which she had prayed, had been granted her. Above the rugged steeps she saw that the higher peaks were touched with the crimson and gold of the dawn; over the distant heights there hung a cross which was bathed in the radiance of the coming day; above and encircling the cross was a crown of glory which sparkled and shone resplendant in the light of heaven which streamed down upon it.

The little squirrel came out from his hiding place and looked again and more closely at the strange visitor. She was so still and quiet that he thought she might be dead. No, she was only asleep, for she opened startled, dusky eyes and lifted her head, then Mr. Squirrel scampered away to his home.

The Crimson Dawn

With the dazed, uncertain air of one suddenly torn away from the scenes of another world, Kumokie looked about her. To her awakened senses slowly dawned the meaning of the things she had just witnessed.

“Thank God,” she murmured softly. In her heart was a new revelation of a truth which she had known before, but not in her own experience. With closed lips she hummed to herself the words which meant more to her than they had before:

“Anywhere without Him dearest joys would fade;
Anywhere with Jesus I am not afraid.”

Gone was all the restlessness. The storm was stilled, leaving clear, unclouded skies. The Master had spoken His “Peace, be still” to her troubled spirit.

As she slowly made her way homeward her whole face and bearing was a visible expression of this new found calm; the tired, drawn look about the mouth was gone and the lips were set again in their wonted mobile lines of tender beauty; the timid, half-frightened, half-defiant air had given place to that quality of poise, undefinable, which expresses the assurance of a peaceful spirit; the brow was placid and serene; the soft, steady light in the limpid depths of the sweet brown eyes told again of the purity and calmness of a heart at rest.

THE END