

CN DAWN Installment 4

“And thy pilgrimage north?” asked Tubert of the monk before him. “Did you find it fruitful?”

“Both fruitful, and surprising,” replied Yoo the monk. He was dressed in gray robes, wearing a conical straw hat often popular among Korean segments who still reverently identified the head cover with the vanquished Koryo Dynasty overthrown six hundred years before. “Such a rugged area, and rugged people. The people there speak dialects so difficult to understand, Soldier Brother, but are more reverent to the precepts of our faith, not so contaminated with the current dynasty’s Confucian thoughts as elsewhere in Chaoshien. A thousand thanks for making my trip possible. Truly, the pristine northeast region of this land only reinforces the truth of life being transitory illusion.”

The greetings that Tubert and the monk gave each other that day and in years to come were curious and inspired hunter, *posang* and visitors in the settlement to take note. That first time the northern monk entered the settlement, a grinning Tubert met him near the gate and in a second assumed a fighting stance which in turn caused the holy man to do the same, instantly drawing Pak, Mun, Magnificent Crane and other armed and alarmed hunters. They spared, thrusting their arms, fists clenched, blows halting less than an inch from each other’s body and face. For twenty seconds, the right legs snapped forward as high the other’s face, the edge of the foot halting before delivering a smashing blow to the neck, face or torso. With chuckles and clenched fists, they swirled, performing what would have been lethal kicks. Then they stopped and bowed, the camaraderie from the Guemgang Monastery reaffirmed, and openly embraced one another, ignoring grumblings of the northern hunters.

“Laughter, pain, danger, holy man,” said Tubert, toying with a fresh mussel in the quiet eatery on the sea-facing side of Wolmi Island. The time-honored practice of the great Kungang Monastery to dispatch an occasional monk to wander the kingdom, even visiting distant lands to monitor religious needs and political climates, routinely received generous donations from the barbarian patron. “Even if what we think are passing diversions are but entertainment of the gods, we have no choice but to participate. What of the *Tonghak* movement in the north?”

“The men of Heavenly Enlightenment move through the northeast, but have nowhere near the visibility they have in the north central areas,” replied Yoo. He raised a forbidden morsel of broiled steak to his mouth, relishing such exquisite decadence. His one other lapse from grace was tobacco, which this longtime barbarian friend quietly pressed upon him as a gift. This unique foreigner had suggested that Woo be assigned to such travels to gather information, to keep the temple prepared for the day when Chaoshien would once again turn to the temples for relief from the mounting storms of life. “Two or three missionaries of the Western god are supposedly evangelizing at the northeastern treaty port of Wonsan, it is said, and no good can come of that. And there are second-generation Koreans quietly visiting family in the northeast, who have become Orthodox Catholics with the Russian Church. Can you believe that?”

The traveling monk had appeared at the settlement from a two-month trek into the wilds of the far north, after Tubert had hinted that he wished to know the whereabouts of a bearded Russian border scout who frequented the Russian-Chaoshien frontier. For years, Tubert had made significant donations to Chang-an Monastery. In return, his suggestions were honored, that Yoo should make pilgrimages to selected areas in Chaoshien, thus

effectively becoming Tubert's eyes and ears. Such compliance came not so much from the generous monetary donations to the Diamond Mountains monastery as from Tubert's pledge to use his influence to have the kingdom once again permit Buddhist monks to freely roam the cities of Chaoshien. His influence was temporarily weakened by the heinous attack on Lord Min, and the Yalu River disaster. Then, quite unexpectedly, his influence was bolstered by Doctor Allen's rise to prominence.

"It doesn't surprise me that some of the *Hanguk-saram* of Vladivostok have outwardly converted to the Russian faith. Some of the Western men of the Western god are zealots, teacher, but remember, the tall, bony barbarian with the red hair pushes tolerance for our faith as well as Christianity, along with the abolition of hereditary slavery at the court of Seoul. So we must no longer demonize them."

Earlier that summer, before the changma monsoon rains, three northern hunters en route south, each carrying two hundred fifty pounds of animal hides for this barbarian's trading post on a wooden A-frame *chi-gae*, had quietly informed Yoo that the Soldier Brother's status in Chaoshien, and hold on the property, was precarious.

Never mind that misery and discontent in our land escalates daily, Yoo told himself. And it matters nothing that some claim his presence, perhaps his very life, shall soon end here. Did not the boy I knew in Shanghai survive that dark, evil city, later to arrive here with his head still on his shoulders? Oh, yes, thy presence here is preordained! And even my holy sect, the head priest and myself, cannot be entirely immune from earthly influences.

"I did happen to learn that a Russian such as the one you expressed interest in lives in Vladivostok, and is in charge of a new trading post on the Tumen River. It will open for

trade as soon as the kingdom's treaty with Russia is signed in the weeks ahead. I passed through the Wheryung Trading Station on the Russian side of the Tumen. It is only for trade between Russia and Chaoshien, not to be made into a treaty station. His assistants are Chinese, including one Chinese with an eyepatch."

The Soldier Brother's facial expression told Yoo that the words well justified this barbarian's generous donation to the northern monastery.

"So they're up along the Tumen?" asked Tubert. His mind churned. He would delay killing Feng if Zakuff helped him and Pearl to relocate to Vladivostok after the arms deal. Either way, Feng, the one who had killed Grandfather Song and almost Kwan II, was a dead man. It was but a matter of timing.

And Waeber down here at their legation denying he has any knowledge of Zakuff! Russian liar! And is there really a need to wait to go after that damned, murdering Chinese pervert?

"Eh! Student, have I upset thee?"

"No, teacher. You've helped me immeasurably," said Tubert, regaining his composure. "The one-eyed Chinese killed the man who was the nearest to a father that I'll ever know. He is inhuman, a rabid beast, to all but his master, the Russian."

"Then nirvana is beyond him, student. For salvation, give up thy hatred and craving for vengeance. To punish him is fruitless."

Yes, thought Tubert. But even so, let me be the one to send Feng on the voyage to hell.

"True, teacher. But forgiveness should be sought to be received. What is the head priest's feelings about the *Tonghak*?"

The shaven-headed priest paused before answering, sipping his rice wine, senses dancing with caution as he thought out his answer. While the Buddhist hierarchy valued the patronage and sincerity of the barbarian student, this barbarian was no longer the homeless boy student of Shanghai, nor the powerless wandering ward of the Yi Dynasty. Careful, thought Yoo, for the Soldier Brother is strongly aligned with the upstart dynasty in the false capital of this land, and the wrong words could lead to the end of my own wanderings and any chance for Buddhism to regain status in Chaoshien. Careful, also, for since the days in Shanghai, this unique student has always possessed an inordinately powerful and persuasive personality that, without diligence, could prompt an unwary one to break serious vows, even lose one's head. Yoo had walked into the settlement in search of the Soldier Brother. He had been startled to come face-to-face with an amazing woman of dark skin, dressed in tight-clinging Western clothing, shamelessly revealing much of her buxom and sensuous, abundantly endowed feminine frame. Three times the night before, Yoo awakened in his sleep, his erotic dreams of the exotic mistress of the student as unstoppable as they were unthinkable. *Iii-gu, Iii-gu!* The gods not only indulged this foreign devil's power and recklessness, but also showered him with temptation and indulgence.

Knowing you tests one's soul, Soldier Brother, the shaven-headed monk told himself. I wish I could cut you from me! Inwardly the monk promised himself to never again enter the trading station, nor encounter the incredibly arousing female creature that tempted a man of faith to abandon his celibacy. Debauchery and extravagance by monks had led to Buddhism's banishment from the cities of Chaoshien by the present dynasty, along with the strict isolation of women.

Unthinkable, of course, to risk losing first friendship and now the influence and power, spiritual more than political, of this student, the monk thought to himself. Still, you remain so ready to share what you know, have, and what you are. How he mixes humility with power! Beside your special, always uncertain existence, and the odds against it, you always walk with an unconquerable quantity of hope of which you are entirely unaware. Yet, student, I must be careful. For I do not wish to lose thee, and thus lose the means to know all political situations and the hope for a new order.

“We sympathize with the conditions that prompt the rise of the insurgents, who suffer, as Buddhists suffer, from the arrogance of the present dynasty,” replied Yoo, watching the reaction on the face of the Western man. “But, student, we place no hope in the *Tonghaks* restoring us to our rightful status. The benevolence and magnanimity of Buddha has no place in their violent agenda.”

“I’m pleased to hear that, Teacher,” Tubert nodded with relief, between mouthfuls of highly seasoned buckwheat noodles. They sat in the privacy of the oceanfront eatery. Tubert knew that northern Buddhists, and northern Koreans in general, chafed under the yoke of the current regime. They longed for the days when the Koryo Dynasty, with its capital further north in Kaesong five-hundred years earlier, had been militarily vigorous, forging alliances even with the Mongol hordes. He knew also that Buddhism, although grown corrupt even then, had been the Koryo’s state religion. “Change has to come to Chaoshien, but not by tearing down the entire system of rule and order. One day soon, I hope to have reason to revisit the cleansing area of the far northern monastery, find a respite from the savagery of day-to-day life here. Meanwhile, holy one, I will fund a monk to be dispatched to Japan to learn the language and mood of the people there.

Might I nominate thee?"

"I am not worthy. But, if it pleases thee, Soldier Brother, a thousand thanks."

"It is for me to thank you, for I remain entirely too earthy and materialistic to faithfully chase the lessons of enlightenment, as you do. Someday, but not now. You would not believe the things I do to survive. So different from our days together in Shanghai, and with none of the peace I thought awaited me after my healing and learning after the wounds of Kangwha, so long ago at Chang-an. I'm torn in so many directions, like a fleck of foam when the unstoppable tide rushes into Chemulpo Harbor. Truly I am trapped by my own lust and vanities, and by karma. Someday I must find time for a retreat back to Chang-an, to again let my soul breathe and heal."

"I cannot tell you that you definitely will find enlightenment, nirvana, by leaving this port of craving, hatred and ignorance, and a release of suffering caused by them, by a trip to our remote fastness," said Yoo. "But I can assure you that you won't find peace, unless we can once more bring the faith to the cities of Chaoshien."

"We shall, holy one."

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The high Western holidays arrived, and Eighteen-Eighty-Five turned into Eighteen-Eighty-Six. Official as well as private get-togethers were held among foreigners in Seoul and Chemulpo, and neither Tubert nor Pearl were invited to any of them. They had no choice but to cling to the holidays' shadows by crossing the street to unofficial, impromptu parties by Westerners in the Foreigners' Club, and get-togethers with the Townsends. Yet a few Westerners, especially the Americans, had no hesitancy about

visiting the settlement to exchange pleasantries and seasons' greetings with both Tubert and the black woman.

Less than a week after Pearl's arrival at the settlement, the boyish American Navy ensign had arrived to tell them that, in the eyes of the American diplomatic mission, Ambassador Foote had decided that they had forfeited all rights to American concern and protection.

Horace Allen was a frequent visitor. Sometimes Gertrude, his American wife, had joined him. Like many Westerners in Seoul, they maintained a small cottage in Chemulpo where they spent weekends in the more Westernized setting of the treaty port.

"There's a world we all have to live in, even here," Doctor Allen had told them during a visit just before the holidays. "More Westerners are arriving here, bringing their prejudices with them. And social acceptance is important, despite what the two of you may think or hope. No Western minister will marry you."

"Maybe we'll marry with a Korean ceremony," declared Tubert, his impatience surging. "Every one of you, except for von Mollendorf, so ready to throw the first stone, and to reject. We don't need any of you."

"You don't need the scandal, or the danger, that comes with your relationship," Allen told them. "Yuan Shi Kai undoubtedly has you both marked for death. And you can't be both Asian and Western at once, Timothy. The mores of the West, the county you refuse to so much as visit, reach out across the sea, to damn you both."

"I'll never understand the land you come from," said Tubert told her that February morning, before Madam Ahn's three Western prostitutes, two American and one

Englishwoman, entered the compound at Pearl's invitation for coffee, breakfast and gossip. "You're all from the same country, from the same culture. Your Americans shun us privately, then drop by to socialize, in private accepting us. It's as if one color of Americans grow blind when they're together and meet an American of another color."

"We've been together over a year, Timothy, and you still keep calling it 'my country'," replied Pearl, busy near the fireplace stirring batter for the pancakes so loved by the girls from Madam Ahn's brothel. She called him Timothy when intense feelings moved through her, otherwise she addressed him as *Tim-san*. "My Americans? You'll never understand, though that's part of why I love you. Just seeing me reminds these folks of what was done to an entire race of people in America. But don't let it bother you, *Tim-san*. You were born far past that sadness. You get a group of white folks together, they can't stand to see it, that's all. They don't want to see and acknowledge it, or us. Don't let it bother you, you don't need to understand. Not out here."

"Be damned to all these Western prejudices! It'll be much different when we get to Vladivostok, Joo. I promise you."

"Maybe it will, *Tim-san*. When we going?"

"Late this summer, if a deal I'm working on goes through. We don't want to go penniless. There'll be a trip to Shanghai first. A business trip."

"That'll be so nice. When can we go to Shanghai?"

"It will have to be this spring. I'll know soon. I'll have to work it between the supply and liaison shuttles down to Komun. Got to get over to the godowns and inventory the materials the British supply men are bringing for storage. See you this afternoon."

Tubert emerged from the house as the three foreign women entered the settlement. Mun and Pak were walking towards the gate with a *posang* when two of the three barbarian whores laughed.

“When you makin’ yore next high-spunked visit back to me, Garlic Man?” teased the English woman.

“*Iii-gu!* Hello,” said Mun, fumbling for one of the handful of barbarian words he had learned. He had no idea what the tall exotic creatures were saying to him, but was pleased at the attention the foreign women showed him in front of the others.

Pak and the merchant cocked a quizzical, amused look at his old neighbor, the hunter’s right eyebrow arching. Three other nearby hunters began hooting at the senior hunter.

“I’m due for him again, honey,” cooed the American brunette. “I had him first. Old Garlic Balls is very generous.”

“If he’s that generous and randy, it’s my turn to make his acquaintance,” said the other American woman, reaching out and playfully pinching the beaming Korean hunter’s cheek as they walked past the three Korean males. She was a tall, slender woman with black hair. Like the others, she awaited the day when the settlement’s Black woman would no longer be with Tubert, which would surely open the opportunity to get the attention of the unique White male. “I haven’t had him yet,” she said, suddenly reaching out and playfully pinched the surprised Korean hunter’s cheek. “Special late afternoon rates for Asian men! Visit me, honey, and you’ll walk away stumbling!”

“Since when do you walk in shoes worn by everyone else?” demanded Pak, with mock disdain. “Do you want your manhood to rot and fall off?”

“Ah, rutting with them is like climbing onto a great mattress of flesh,” muttered Mun, appreciatively. “And the one with the brown hair even has coarse hairs growing out of her back. Like a bear! She even smells like Tangun.”

“Morning, ladies,” called Tubert to the approaching females, heading toward the godown where two horse-drawn wagons with British supply men were waiting to store materials. Aside from Satchiko Townsend, the Western whores were Pearl’s only female companionship. “Go on in. Joo’s waiting for you.”

Within an hour the wagons were unloaded.

“Aren’t you going down to the wharves to say farewell to the *Miguk* envoy?” asked Pak that cold morning.

Foote was long weary of the American State Department’s lack of interest in Korea and its failure to act promptly on King Kojong’s request for assistance. He had refused to accept a reduction in rank from minister plenipotentiary to minister resident, and was leaving. The new minister, a man named Parker, was not due to arrive immediately in Chaoshien. George Foulk, a Naval lieutenant recently promoted from ensign, found himself conducting American legation affairs.

“I could care less,” said Tubert, seeing the *Essex* anchored in port. He was still smarting from not having not been invited to the farewell banquet the night before in Seoul. He watched a hunter leading a dog on a rope into the settlement. “I’ve got to go over some numbers with Kwan Il, then make a deposit at the bank this afternoon. Tell the men we’re having poshintang, dog soup, tonight.”

Poshintang was a delicacy of shredded and highly seasoned dog meat soup, guaranteed

to enhance any male's vigor and health.

“Very good! I'll invite any *posang* who arrive to join us.”

Tubert entered the hunters' quarters and sat on the warm floor as Kwan Il laboriously went over rough inventory balance sheets late that morning. He had met the evening before with an American visiting Chemulpo. The American sought agents in Korea to peddle the fake Western goods being produced for export by several Japanese firms.

“This is just flour and water!” exclaimed Tubert, opening cans with imitation labels of American condensed milk. “I wouldn't put products like this into the hands of my *posang*.”

“I suggest you reconsider that,” said his old enemy, the tall, sallow-faced American named Thackett, from South Carolina, in the warm living room of Tubert's home. Through the doorway to the sleeping room, he saw the nigger woman moving about, confirming the rumors he had heard. “These heah Japanese products is bein' sold all over this country. Coreans buy the label, if they think it's foreign made! Shoot, you acts as if you're one of `em! Natives just gobbled these goods up over on Formosa! You've got duty-free status, Mister Tubert. No sense for a white man not to profit from it.”

“Wish I could say it's good to see you. Everyone out here has dealt in contraband at one time or another, Cookie,” Tubert had told the merchant. “But not fake goods. I live here. No thanks. And get out of my station.”

“You still aint learned it's important for white men to stick together out heah,” drawled the bitterly disappointed American southerner, who had been discharged from the Navy. An unpleasant edge strained his voice as he departed the settlement after darkness.

“Important we don’t be think’n yellows or blacks are the same as us.”

Now Tubert became aware that Kwan Il was talking to him.

“Eh? What did you say, Crane?”

“I said we have the equivalent of seventy-eight dollars you must deposit in the bank today.”

“I’ll do it this afternoon,” sighed Tubert with disinterest. “Before the evening meal.”

Outside the godown, a northern hunter began the customary preparations by systematically smashing the dog’s bones and clubbing it to death. The settlement’s Korean servant would then clean it and make the traditional soup. The animal’s agonized yelps and whines brought Pearl storming from the house, broom in hand, bearing down on the bewildered hunter.

“What y’all doing to that animal?” she screamed, flailing the hapless northerner with the broom. The commotion quickly brought Tubert from his frustrating attempts at keeping up with Kwan Il’s bookkeeping.

He approached his hysterical mistress slowly, carefully, lest she also clobber him.

“Joo, dear,” he said, reassuringly. There were many trying moments in their relationship, so many demands that he change certain personal habits. He was totally baffled with this emotional outburst. “It’s all right. I’ve paid for the dog. He’s just tenderizing it. It’s not stolen. What’s the problem?”

Cautiously, patiently, he embraced the sobbing woman, prudently taking the broom from her.

“What they doing to that dog? Nothing ought to die like that! Didn’t you see them? They were torturing it! What kind of people are these Koreans?”

“Ah,” he said, relieved, calling to the shaken, hide-clad hunter to continue the preparations. “You almost had me worried. Nothing’s amiss. We’re just readying tonight’s Korean meal. Very healthy, you’ll see.”

Pearl shoved him, freeing herself, drawing back in wide-eyed revulsion.

“Eat dog? I will not see! You’re actually going to eat dog?”

“Of course. It’s very healthy. It’s a young dog, not old and tough and stringy. Wait until you try...”

“Not me!” she shrieked, turning, stomping towards the house, calling behind her, “That’s like eating people. And if you eat that dog, don’t plan on sleeping with me tonight!”

“What the hell is wrong now?” asked Tubert, dumbfounded, his shoulders slumping. “It’s as if I can’t do anything to please her. Continue that preparation outside the walls of the settlement,” he told the hunter. “I’m going over to Buf’s for a drink.” He stalked from the trading settlement across the dirt road to the club, ordering a bottle of bourbon.

“Comin’ right up,” said Aaron Buferd, soon rejoining him at the table. “But don’t you think it’s a bit early for bourbon, Timothy?”

“Not with what I’m going through,” said Tubert, downing a glass of whiskey, then pouring another. He did not care whether the few American, British and Russian sailors and a handful of visiting foreign traders, including Cookie Thackett who had visited the

settlement the night before, heard him. “We just had another blow-up, about dog-meat soup. For the life of me, Buf, I don’t know how much more of this I can take.”

“Corean dog-meat soup, eh? Can’t says I ever had any of that,” whined the portly American bar manager, thinking to himself that he also never would. May the Almighty forgive me for abandoning you as a baby in Asia, Buferd thought with guilt, by now knowing that Western conventions against eating dog meat were forever beyond the captain’s son. “Good Lord, Timothy. Doesn’t sound like nothin’ to spat about.”

“I’ll never figure her out,” replied Tubert gravely, ignoring the glass, raising the bottle to his lips. “It was first the bear, then I had to dress as she wants, refurnish the house. Now, she can’t stand the food I eat!”

“Back in the States, some folks treat a dog like family. Dog didn’t try to bite her, did it?”

“No, no. She’s just a strange woman, Buf. A poor hunter was getting the animal ready to butcher. She went berserk, almost as crazy as when I offered to take her with me for boiled snakes,” said Tubert, shaking his head.

“No more dogs or snakes, huh? That’s too bad, Timothy,” said the barkeep, not knowing what else to say. He wondered if last winter’s reports about cannibalism in the far northeast provinces were true. “Women’ll always try to change ya. Wearin’ overcoats `n neckties, hats `n God knows what all.”

Snide chuckles wafted from the bar. Tubert knew one of the chucklers was Thackett, but ignored them. He sipped once more from the glass, waiting for the firewater to dissipate the tension and stress.

“Want some grub? Noon meal’s soon ready.”

“No. No thanks, Buf. Just let me alone for awhile with this bottle.”

“Just let me know if you need anything,” said Buford, rising. “*Essex*’s in port. I gotta jack up Sam back in the cook room. He’s got dishes and bowls to wash, and he better have the noon loaves baked! Drink up, Timothy. I’ll be back *mos-koshee*.” The obese American disappeared behind the bar into the cooking area. He caught his fat little Japanese employee napping.

Next came sounds of curses and clanging pots.

Tubert became aware of more disparaging chuckles from Thackett and three other visiting American traders. Walt Townsend described as “carpetbaggers,” who leant against the bar behind him. He bristled, fists flexing, but determined to ignore the cackles, having no wish to fight. Then, as if someone had slapped the back of his head, he was unable to deflect the next remark.

“She won’t eat dog for the man! Hear that?” laughed Thackett with thick sarcasm. “Maybe if he’d bribe her and kiss her black nigger ass the way he does the garlic-stinking Coreans he eats snakes with, she’d eat the poor white trash’s dog for him.”

There were louder chuckles.

“What else would you expect from a white man who surrounds himself with Coreans? Bet she ate all kinds of dog for that Chinaman she shacked with.”

The room suddenly grew ominously quiet. Talk ceased amongst the military men and other traders at tables, all eyes watching the four white visitors to Chemulpo.

“Bet that nigger woman would eat dog for me,” stated the tall trader, red-faced from

beer, nursing his hatred at the rebuke the night before. “Ain’t no harm knowing darkie women, long as you take a strap to `em every so often. Same as no harm in rolling with the Chinese, and especially Japanese girls.”

“Least ways, it don’t rub off, Thack!”

Thackett, red-faced from beer, noted that Tubert’s back remained turned to them. Emboldened, set on entertaining his companions, he moved away from the bar, closer to Tubert, not seeing Tubert’s wild eyes and tensing movements. Playfully, he tugged roughly at the hide pouch suspended from the shoulder of his one-time galley hand. They had heard the far-fetched tale about the leather pouch. Every foreigner in Chaoshien heard Tubert stories starting on the day of arrival.

“Oh, it rubbed off on him. Inside, where you can’t see it! If she refused the food I put on a table, I’d have me a new hide pouch from her black ass.”

There was a catlike movement, a blur of motion as Tubert shot from his seat, and the chair was spinning across the floor. Those seated closest to the bar heard a startled yelp and saw the tall southern trader’s left ear sliced from its base.

“I’ve heard all from you I intend to,” hissed Tubert, crouching, a knife in his hand, facing the four men. “You’re from the Southern United States, lost your world, lost your war! Lost your slaves, just as you’ve lost your ear. Bait me again and you’ll lose the other ear and your eyes!”

One of the traders picked up a heavy wooden stool. He, Thackett and the others circled Tubert. As Aaron Buford rushed from behind the great bar, they rushed Tubert from four directions. The man with the stool smashed it full into Tubert’s face. Tubert felt a

snapping, burning sensation in his nose.

Tubert did not hear Buferd shouting. He drove his knife into the man's right shoulder. The man screamed, dropping the stool, moving out of range of the blade. Thackett and the two others attacked, tearing Tubert to the wooden floor. Despite his severed ear, Thackett grabbed the nearby stool and began bashing Tubert's head. A kick sent one of the attackers sprawling, striking a wooden beam full force where he sank to the floor, with three cracked ribs. The two others leaned over Tubert, fists flailing, and began to briskly kick their boots into Tubert's chest, face and groin. Two British sailors, scheduled to accompany the *Sea Angel* back to Komun-do, rose from a table to intervene.

Suddenly the Western businessmen were propelled from the stricken, bleeding man struggling beneath them. The visiting foreign salesman attempted to swing at the owner of a ham-like hand that pried him from the victim. With a steam-driven movement, the hand clenched quickly into a fist and backhanded Thackett, sending him somersaulting onto a nearby table. The other attacker was hurled as if shot from a cannon, clearing an empty table without touching it.

"Not four against one, by God!" said a resonating voice. "Nothing so fine as a fair fight, or worse than four on one! You still alive down there, Tubert?"

Tubert writhed and moaned on the floor, fighting to control the pain, struggling to rise from the floor.

"There's few enough whites out here without trying to kill and maim each other. Stand back!" shouted Theodore Jewell. Weighing three hundred pounds, he towered over every man. "Let the man get to his feet. Drop that stool, Cookie."

“Get up, nigger lover!” panted Thackett, nursing a bleeding stump where an ear had been. Tubert heaved himself from the floor.

“God, Timothy,” exclaimed Jewell. “Is that you?” Tubert’s clothes were torn. He was covered with blood, nose smashed, eyes blackened and swelling into slits. Hands reached to support him, but he blindly brushed them away, swaying, squinting to locate his tormentor.

“Fight’s over, leave it be, Timothy,” called Buford from the side.

Tubert spotted his old tormentor. The man saw an undefeated bloodlust cresting in the eyes of Corea’s white renegade, and, unconsciously, the salesman instinctively stepped backward, raising his hand to protect his remaining ear.

“Never wanted you people here,” gasped Tubert, gesturing towards the door. “None of you! The only decent thing I’ve ever found from your sick world is that woman. You bring with you only hate. Get out, Cookie, all of you! If I find you in port when the sun rises tomorrow, I’ll have your spines flavoring the dog soup, and I’ll teach you hate.”

The four Westerners quickly limped from the Foreigners’ Club.

“You’ve always been known to stand up to what you don’t like, no matter what the consequences or injuries,” said Jewell wryly. He assisted Buford in putting the table and chairs into upright positions, and helped Tubert ease himself into a chair. “I’m sending for the ship’s doctor to look at you.”

“Don’t bother, Theodore,” said Tubert, breathing deeply, accepting a moist towel from Buford, wiping the blood from his numb, sweating face and neck, lips thick and face horribly swollen, his head pounding. “Buf, bring us another bottle. And free drinks for

the entire club for the lunch hour.” The words brought applause from the military men in the club.

“I sent next door for Pearl to come over here,” said Buf, suddenly horrified at what would happen when the day came that Timothy discovered that he had abandoned him as a new-born in Shanghai. “You look a mess.”

“Made a mess of the club, Buf, but I’ll pay for it. Sit down, captain. I’m celebrating.”

“What are we celebrating, Soldier Brother?”

“Righteous anger,” winced Tubert, pouring dark liquor into two glasses. “Ouch!”

“I’ll drink to that,” said Jewell. He raised his glass towards Tubert in a mock toast. “Might as well. You’re the bloodied victor. And Foote is on a steamer out of Corea; Ensign Folk is stuck for the moment with American affairs. Missionaries are starting to demand more protection out here. Poor Foulk. And now, this. Messy world we live in. Not smart to pick a fight with four men, Timothy.”

“It was a good fight,” said Tubert, the bruises and liquor slurring his words. He winced again as the alcohol burned his lips, an exultant feeling temporarily keeping the physical pain in check.

“Your day, your victory, Timothy. Drink up. The drink will dullen the pains, for awhile,” said Jewell, refilling his glass and Tubert’s. “And yes, a good fight in a land where almost everyone deserves a good beating,” said the dashing forty-year-old naval officer. He was no admirer of traders or missionaries or Chemulpo, and found Korean culture unfathomable. “Too bad it wasn’t missionaries you were thrashing. Or Coreans.”

Unlike some other Westerners, Jewell did not believe that Coreans were an inferior race.

Yet, thought Jewell, some powerful force is at work that's brought them politically to conditions even more despicable than elsewhere in Asia.

How could anyone wish to live among them? Koreans, even coolies, seemed intent to live out Confucian precepts, with no inkling of the value of time. Death did not end earthly life for Koreans: They lived on in ancestral tablets, joined the family circle at gatherings inhaling sacrificial food and presiding over occasions of importance, as if still alive.

What point in hurrying if you're going to live forever? Thought Jewell contemptuously, as he spotted the two British sailors rising from a table. How we struggled to open this kingdom, only to find what? For sure, not even the Brits making their stand at the islands to the south had found much to admire in the Koreans.

The *Essex* commander had watched Confucian mourners groveling in the dust, going unwashed for long periods of time as a mark of degradation at the passing of a forebear. For in Chaoshien, men considered it a personal failing that a parent should die. The more faithful to such notions a Korean was, the more would be seen the uncleanness that marked his mourning. And over it all brooded this atmosphere of ancestral spirits and demons and goblins, all to be propitiated and kept in good humor to stave off the end of earthly prosperity and well-being.

Two British supply clerks, on leave in Chemulpo from the island fortifications along the south coast, approached their table.

"That was giving `em what for, Mister Tubert," said the older clerk, a bald man, gently patting the battered contractor's shoulder. "Tremendous fight! Never saw better."

“We be tellin’ the men on the island `bout it,” said the clerk behind him. “Thanks for the drink, Mister Tubert!”

There were shrill shouts behind them.

“Damnation,” swore Aaron Buferd under his breath. “Here comes the conniving old hag herself!”

Madam Ahn entered the hotel from the rear kitchen entrance and quickly scurried from behind the bar.

“You will ruin my business! Keep your violence from my premises!” she shouted indignantly, shocked at the welts and bruises on the barbarian neighbor. She was disappointed that his injuries were not fatal, which would have ended Mihashi’s pressure on them to destroy the black female. So far they had failed to find an opportunity to openly attack the black woman.

“I rid your club of human vermin, madam,” replied Tubert in Korean from the chair. “And you fault me for that?”

“Why you letting `dis happen?” she demanded of Buferd in broken English. “You t`ink, why I paying you?”

“That’s it. I Quit!” cried Buferd. He had quit twice before. Each time, the mercurial-tempered old woman had enticed him to stay with an increase in pay and a promise to not meddle in the day-to-day operations of the hotel.

“Not very neighborly, madam,” said Tubert coldly. He gestured to the floor at her feet. The agitated Korean owner glanced downward and saw a human ear at her feet. With a

scream, she leaped backward two feet in the air with a dexterity that brought immediate shouts of laughter from the Westerners in the club. The Westerners in the club laughed long and hard, and wildly applauded.

“You lowlife *sang-dum!* I want you off of my property and out of Chaoshien!” she screamed, pointing wildly at Tubert, her nerves snapping. “You won’t be a neighbor for long! Cursed was the day when...”

The door to the Foreigners’ Club was flung open. An iron arrow shot through the doorway, imbedding itself two inches into the mahogany bar less than one foot from the hysterical madam. The tall, erect leader of the northern tiger hunters quickly strode through the door, another arrow taut in a longbow, pointing it at the startled Westerners. Madam Ahn darted through the bar and kitchen and disappeared out the back door.

“No mov-a!” Pak cried in English, advancing forward, menacingly pointing the arrow from left to right. “No mov-a.” Behind him came Mun, fuse lit on an old breech-loading rifle, and then Kwan Il, brandishing a hunting lance. With slow, careful movements, the foreigners cleared a path for the Koreans. For fleeting seconds, Jewell had a feeling of being back at the Kangwha Battle.

The same tiger hunters, he thought incredulously, astounded at the armed intrusion. Here to claim one of their own.

“I’m fine, brother,” moaned Tubert, drunkenly, to the approaching hunters. “Put the bow down.”

“*Nu-go?* Who?” cried the hunter, seeing Tubert’s condition. Pak’s face darkened with rage. He did not lower his bow. “Who did this to you?”

Pearl walked through the doorway. Her eyes saw the great welts, the clotted blood on Tubert. Theodore Jewell saw her facial expression change.

“Timothy! What happened to you?” she said, racing forward, dropping to her knees before him. She began to cry, inspecting him, her fingers lightly touching his face and neck. “How could this happen?”

“A couple men were making remarks about you, Miss Pearl,” said Aaron Buford.

“What?” she said, barely hearing the barkeep. Behind them, Pak lowered his bow and shouldered it, then helped the black woman lift Soldier Brother from the chair.

“Your honor has been defended, Pearl,” said Jewell, rising carefully, moved by the emotion on the face and in the voice of the female, and the total devotion of these bristling Coreans, helping her and the hunter raise his battered friend from the chair. “An American who has never touched the soil of the United States has just refought the slavery war, twenty years after it ended back home. For you, Pearl. And I no longer blame him.”

“No one has ever bled or fought for me,” Pearl said, tears flowing, draping Tubert’s left arm over her shoulders, Pak doing the same with the other arm. “I’ve done this to him. My poor, decent man! I’ll kill whoever did this to him!”

“No tears, Joo darling,” said Tubert, thickly, seeking to comfort her. His head was swimming from drink. “You’re worth every drop of blood spilled here. See you later, Captain. Another round for everyone, Buf.”

“Rest well, Timothy. You’ve won a spiritual battle of race and culture,” called Jewell. pleased that Tubert was back in hands that would care for him, and raised a half-filled

glass in their direction. "I just hope you can win the wars ahead."

Supported by Pearl and Pak, Tubert limped toward the door. Mun and Kwan II brandished their weapons, backing away carefully and unchallenged, eager to cut down any foreigner who made the slightest attempt to obstruct removal of the Soldier Brother.

* * * *

At first, the near-illiterate Mihashi hated Kyoto. He agonized physically and emotionally at the early months of humiliation and degradation as he was put through an intensive course of discipline, culture and academics to prepare him for political and organizational leadership classes at the elite Peers' School. He was lonely and felt out of place, the only Tsushima Islander, and the younger students of wealthy Honshu families made no secret that they regarded him as a member of the *eta*, the outcast class with the same status as lawless criminals.

I am *eta*, he thought miserably to himself as he looked at *Toji*, the Imperial Palace, and *Nijo-jo*, former abode of the Tokugawa shoguns. His self-esteem was shaken, even though a decree now gave the *eta* equality under the law with other citizens. I feel the prejudice against me here at school. They don't want me to make it through here.

Gunjiro had limped breathlessly westward through Seoul on foot after his attack on Lord Min. As planned, two mounted Japanese with an extra horse were waiting for him at a quiet spot along the Han River. The Korean's blood that covered him was freezing stiff on his clothing as they immediately charged westward into the night toward Chemulpo and the steamship that would whisk Mihashi out of country the next morning. Near dawn, they detected a fast-moving column of Chinese behind them and were convinced they

were being pursued. They redoubled their speed, spurring their mounts, unaware that throughout that fateful night they were at all times only one-third to half a mile ahead of the hated *gaijin* and the fugitive black woman.

In a back room of a Japanese eatery, the assassin changed clothing and awaited the steamship's pending departure. A bespectacled shipping company clerk brought a message that almost imperiled the assassin's scheduled enrollment at a special school in Japan. Gunjiro started at the paper, and, scarcely able to read any of it, and at last requested that the clerk read it. Thus he learned that his aging father on Tsushima was dying. At the last minute, he diverted his cruise to Honshu and made a hurried eleven-day trip to the island to be by the bedside of his father, long ago crippled by Korean arrows from an attempted raid at the fishing port of Mokpo during Gunjiro's first seagoing voyage at the age of nine. His father was with a Tsushima raiding party forty years earlier when one morning on the Korean shoreline of Mokpo the group had appeared, claiming that they were shipwrecked fishermen. The Koreans, although filled with contempt and suspicion and keeping the lowly Japanese under surveillance, fed the stranded Tsushima men. For three days and three nights, the islanders had wandered through the southern coastal port, for ages a smuggling channel for goods into and out of the closed hermit kingdom, the contraband contacts and channels now controlled and operated by the predatory and notorious Kang family. The unarmed, seemingly innocent castaways took careful note of where the wealthiest homes, the best-stocked shops and the town's granary were located. In the wee hours of the third morning, when the eight raiders had curled up under an ancient tree to sleep, Gunjiro's father had risen and drew his filthy shirt four times across a lantern, then pausing, repeating the process two more times, a signal that

told the men aboard the three seagoing junks to send the thirty more pirates ashore. In the darkness, the practiced raiders handed their eight scouts their swords, and diversionary fires were quickly started in Mokpo. The pirates immediately broke into three parties.

The slumbering town awoke as fires began to spread through the market place and among a half dozen straw-thatched homes, occupying the attention of the alarmed Koreans, who began to be cut down by the sword-wielding Japanese. As the other parties sought the granary, ginseng and other stores, Gunjiro's father led ten men to the tile-roofed house of a rich Korean family. Quickly, two marauders were hoisted over the seven-foot-high fence encircling the residence. They unbolted the doors to the heavy wooden gates as servants and children within began to scream. The men poured through the gates in the darkness, swords swinging, quickly silencing one male and two female Korean servants. The elder Mihashi led the intruders to the main bedroom where they found the terrified Korean landowner, his young second wife, and small son and teenaged daughter cringing in a corner. Swords neatly dispatched the middle-aged Korean landowner and wailing son, then each marauder frantically grabbed whatever he could carry of value. It was then that Gunjiro's father's own sad fate unfolded, for as several of the pillaging Tsushima men started making for the gate and the nearby boats along the shoreline, father had spotted a Japanese man roll off the nude body of the fourteen-year-old Korean daughter who lay next to her mother, who was also being raped. Recalling the satisfaction of having raped during two other raids along the Korean coastline, the senior Mihashi had mounted the Korean girl, the act taking but two minutes to consummate. He immediately arose and, grabbing his blanket-wrapped booty, sought to join the others, only to discover that stone-throwing Korean males had rallied between him and the boats.

With no choice, he had run through the gauntlet of Korean men, taking a shower of large stones in the back. He suffered two herniated disks, which crippled him, thus preventing him from ever returning to sea again. The damaged nerves grew progressively worse in later years.

Gunjiro arrived home on Tsushima from Chemulpo to discover that it was not the crippled back that was ravaging his father.

First, pustules had appeared. A day later the old man had tossed with fever, vomiting intermittently. A Japanese doctor diagnosed smallpox, and gave orders that prayers be said for the old islander. Too weak to move, the elder Mihashi dozed and waited, the family at his bedside, all hoping that his only surviving son would arrive back from Kyoto for the old man's last moments. The day Gunjiro arrived, the aged pirate was covered with oily pustules, his throat too sore to let anything but chilled liquids pass. The following day, the pox turned purple, although the elder Mihashi ate rice and gruel and actually passed wastes. He seemed to recover for a few days and even ate heartily. But he awoke in misery the morning after he had attempted to consume sake.

"I've lived long enough to know that Japan proper will forever regard us with contempt," gasped the old man to the son at his bedside. "You were never my favorite, but you have the opportunity that none of us could dream of, and also the chance to avenge ourselves on the rock-throwing Coreans. Will you promise me that you will finish this school in Kyoto?"

"I will, I swear it, Father. They will pay for rendering us destitute."

"*Hai!* Then seek a position that returns you to Chaoshien. Do what your brother and I

could only dream of: wrest wealth from it. Because only there can such as we achieve face, and a lifestyle that we shall forever be denied in our own land.”

“You have my word, father. How can I comfort you before you leave us?”

“After you exploit the opening of the land of the garlic chewers, one day take vengeance upon the gargoyle-like *gaijin*, who has the gall to wear thy brother’s hide. Promise me you will one day take your brother’s hide from him, and properly bury it,” whispered the old man. “Become a man of culture and refinement. Go to this school, but never forget our roots and poverty, lest you be thrown back to it. Your promise shall be my final comfort.”

“I will do these things, and more, Father, I swear it,” said Gunjiro. The elder Mihashi, too weak to move, closed his eyes and began vomiting, breathing like an insect, passing blood in his last minutes of life. The evening following his father’s burial, in the dilapidated Mihashi home that existed solely from the funds Gunjiro sent monthly from Corea, his bent, haggard mother approached her depressed son.

“You are of an age to marry. A half day’s walk across this island is Yumi, a stout, clean girl whose mother grew up with me. When you return from Kyoto, I want you to marry Yumi-san, for it is important that you begin your own family.”

“I have no better prospects,” said Mihashi, shrugging. He that the Corean *kisaeng* could never become wife, and the sing-song girls of Chaoshien's brothels and sake houses were unfit for marriage. It mattered absolutely not at all that he would not see or know his future bride. Neither affection, intimacy, nor certainly romance were required for a woman to bear sons and manage a household. Was it not time to have both mistress and a

wife? “It shall be as you wish, mother.”

With a heavy heart, Gunjiro turned to his disrupted travel to Kyoto.

“Welcome, Mihashi-*sama*,” said a man in a Western suit, bowing low to him as Gunjiro debarked the next evening at Osaka. “Count Inouye has made arrangements at a special school in recognition of your, ah, demonstrated exceptional patriotism. So fortunate, all your expenses are paid, even a generous stipend. It is operated in Kyoto by the Black Dragon Society. You will be there one year, and under no circumstances are you to discuss or reveal exact details of the deed that has sent you there. We must proceed immediately.”

Well now, this is more like it, the tough, stocky son of pirate stock thought to himself, savoring the deferential treatment of his foreign ministry escort as they traveled on the efficient, smooth-running trains that took them northward. But all deference ended when he entered the grounds of the Peers Academy in Higashiyama, an area in eastern Kyoto where *Ginkaku-ji*, Temple of the Silver Pavilion, and a score of other shrines and temples were within earshot.

The new school, designed for promising sons of aristocratic families who were not university bound, was a descendant of an academy for noblemen established in Kyoto late in the last century. Its headman was a distinguished, patriotic former samurai. Much as it galled the faculty, they were ordered to chart a curriculum for Mihashi. And as much as they clearly disliked him, the schedule provided for a course of study rich in Western economics, technology, political and military tactics, interwoven with Japanese ethics, culture and history, including the works of the great Musashi. Gunjiro immediately sensed that he was trapped.

If I fail here, he realized, there will be no future.

It was as though the *sensei* at the school wished him to hate everything that he was.

They do, and I hate my roughness and pitiful lack of knowledge and sophistication. Yet they dare not defy the wishes of Ambassador Inouye, who sent me here. Still, this is not a bad place to hide out and lounge for a year, here in the spiritual cradle of Japan, he thought smugly. Am I not, after all, a national hero? *Hai*. Then to return to Chaoshien to mount that lusty Korean whore, and build wealth and complete destruction of the villainous *gaijin*.

That first morning in Kyoto, he and fifty-two other students were awakened early and marched in the freezing cold before sunrise to worship services at *Ginkaku-ji* before the first meal. Gunjiro justifiably complained of the cold, his posture slouching during the long period of chanting, the pains from a torn ankle still excruciating. Behind him, a grim, humorless forty-year-old ex-samurai instructor named Tora, from Kyushu's legendary seagoing Satsuma Clan, brought a bamboo cane down full force on his back, then made him stand naked outside in the snow, splashing buckets of water over Mihashi as snickering, younger classmates marched back to school for the morning meal.

“Quit now, you gull-spawned son of pirates!” Demanded Tora, cracking the shivering islander with another blow that raised a welt on Gunjiro's buttocks, and causing the hero to drop his adequate, but inexpensive longsword into a puddle of water. “The book that is your face says that you think you're politically placed here, and cannot be expelled! But if you quit, you disgrace and discredit yourself, and no more contaminate this school or this nation. I say quit, damn you!”

“I never quit, *sensei*,” gasped Mihashi, clenching his teeth to deny the Satsuma man from any satisfaction in hearing them chatter, channeling his hatred of this tormentor and therein finding the strength to defy the stinging cold, sharp pain, and this sadistic instructor at the start of what soon became a pattern of daily harassment and humiliation.

“Then pick up your sword and never again drop it in water, you Tsushima oaf,” said the aristocratic instructor. “A man’s sword contains his soul, even with the new reforms, *wakarimas*? Now stand straight and ignore the ice forming on your body!”

By the second month, he became convinced that he lacked the ability to ever satisfy his instructors. Struggling constantly to keep up with well-educated and prepared students often ten years younger, the dark-complexioned, broad-faced islander cringed at the prospect of learning Kanji, Chinese characters and the daunting complexities of the English alphabet of twenty-six letters.

I cannot endure such pressure, the Tsushima man told himself. And I will not.

Gunjiro formally requested, through his teachers to the old samurai who headed the school, permission to commit ritual suicide.

The old, crusty commandant believed implicitly in the traditional samurai bushido mystique of killing with honor, of magnanimously dealing with the crushed and defeated, of appreciating poems and delicate paintings of the moonlit reality of death’s spirit world. Summoned to the office of the headmaster, the teachers informed the aging samurai that the islander was indeed still nearly illiterate, but bright and making progress. Headstrong, but with a will and determination that measurably was being molded.

“He is motivated, I think, from hatred which we don’t understand, *sensei*,” remarked a

tactics instructor. “He has much to absorb, and I would not trust him in Japan proper, but perhaps in a position in Chaoshien, or over on Okinawa or Formosa. He shows promise in the kendo classes. His savagery and brutality might allow him to serve national interests and make his mark in Northeast Asia as a member of the Black Dragon Society. And will not the Meiji Government only send others like him if we drop this Tsushima man? Damned quotas, *neh?*”

Four months after he had hacked the Korean lord to pieces at the postal office in Seoul, Gunjiro’s written request to destroy himself came back from the headmaster: “You will not commit *seppuku* while I am headmaster of this institute. I order it so.”

Cursing the fate of being the first Tsushima commoner ever to attend the Peers’ School and his promise to his dying father, Gunjiro hoped that the grueling pace and harassment would ease. But the academic and esteem-building curriculum meant to guide the future non-college-bound aristocrats of Nippon only intensified. Training called for ancestors research and veneration, and development of propaganda about one’s lineage.

Mihashi would be required to learn Chinese characters. Through movement of hand and writing brush, they expected him to memorize the primary and variant forms, meanings and pronunciations of from three to four thousand characters, each consisting of one to forty-eight brush strokes. By constant drill and reading, he would have to recognize twenty-thousand combinations of the characters, which represented whole words.

Gradually, Tora-san’s savage, unmerciful cracks with a bamboo sword to the top and the side of the head of the roughhewn islander during strenuous and brutal kendo practice became less frequent.

Kyoto, more than a thousand miles from his comfortable but crude lifestyle in Korea, began to change Gunjiro Mihashi. Never again would he have to ask another person to read a message to him. He realized that education and knowledge were power.

And had I possessed such swordsmanship skills in Chaoshien, he thought to himself with satisfaction after six months at school, that Korean lord would not have survived my attack. Next time, no victim shall survive an assault.

* * * *

Tubert climbed down the side of the *Sea Angel* and boarded the sampan that carried him into Flying Fish Channel and to the wharves. It was a warm spring day, the breeze gentle, the sky a clear brilliant blue. But since approaching Chemulpo after his final trip to the British fortifications on the largest of the three Komun Islands, he had sensed something was amiss.

No surprise the contract will soon be null, and it may be just as well, he told himself. The contract with the British stipulated that the agreement ended if construction was permanently halted, or the British evacuated the fortifications. Even more than Chaoshien's treaty signing with Russia, was the arrival in Seoul of the Tsarist envoy, Waeber. A signed agreement clearly granted Russia's use of Port Arthur and other areas in Manchuria, which gave China the needed leverage to diplomatically rally the call for the end of construction of the fortifications and British withdrawal from the island.

The concrete and metal support beams for reinforcement, the canned foodstuffs and lumber in the godown Tubert rented to the British had already been removed from the settlement.

I can't fight them all, thought Aston. How blind, the preoccupation with Hong Kong and Parliament by admiralty the Parliament as a bastion of power, when Korea is the center of Asia, the strategic spot that is a lance pointing into the heart of Asia, and also pointing outward. Overnight, the British minister's attitude towards him, now that his use of Tubert and the settlement was finishing, cooled abruptly.

"It's only too true, Tubert," Aston had told him in the Foreigners' Club the weekend before. There was an edge to his voice, for Aston wanted this Western orphan to beg for continued association with the British legation. He wondered what Timothy knew about the rumors of a weapons delivery to the Korean forces. "And I hear taut strings being strummed in the background by that bloody intriguer, your drinking friend, von Mollendorf. Aside from the admiralty, and the out-of-touch bureaucrats in Parliament, the goddamned Germans and other European powers, even besotted old Parker, your new American envoy, are clamoring with China and Russia for us to evacuate Komun! So regrettable, what? Opens the vacuum of power again in Chaoshien, I tell you. One final trip for you to liaison between the natives and our troops, and our materials to be out of your warehouse in weeks. You'll draw cancellation's pay for the use if it, of course. So sorry, old man."

No matter that my use to them is finished and the British envoy clearly regards further association with me as a liability, thought the head of Chemulpo's unconventional, untouchable trading station. In fact, as much as the Komun do withdrawal vexes William, it may actually be good timing for me.

"Very generous, Will," said Tubert, finishing his wine at the table. He knew that Aston, like most of the other diplomats who spent weekends in Chemulpo, would depart the club

before Eight O'clock for his cottage, before the rowdy, hard-drinking foreign traders and off-duty military men arrived. "It's been my pleasure to be of service. A chapter ends, but not the book."

No matter, that is, only if Paul can get the queen to at last come through with the bullion with which to make the downpayment for modern rifles for the Korean army, mused Tubert, soon following Aston out of the club. Only then will the timing of being cast out from under protection of these British, and the almost sustaining but inadequate income from rent of our storage space and my services, be heaven-sent. For it will be months before the British completely dismantle and withdraw from their fortifications, thus months before the Chinese attempt a move against me.

There was only one way to insure survival and secure the settlement's status and his own status, Tubert knew. With Lord Min now a pitiful, broken human vegetable who could no longer even use his vocal cords, he had to forge new ties to the throne of Yi Chaoshien. Aside from the revenues an arms shipment would provide him, the weapons delivery would be the perfect means of having the royal couple themselves become obligated and grateful to him.

Two weeks after his fight with the Westerners in the Foreigners' Club, von Mollendorf had persuaded Tubert to secretly allow Judge O.N. Denny, former consul general of the United States in China, to review the document that granted special status and land to Tubert. For years prior to his arrival in Chaoshien, Denny had been on intimate terms with Li Hung Chang, who hoped to use him to further China's hold on Chaoshien.

"The parchment identifies you only as a foreigner, not as an American, therefore neither it or you are covered by any foreign treaty," the German said. "The judge says the

document is limited, though legal enough, even providing for a son to assume your status and possess your ground, should you ever have one. But only at the pleasure of Yi Chaoshien, and only so long as the dynasty endures.”

When will the queen have the bullion for the arms? He had pressed the question on von Mollendorf before sailing south six days before.

“Soon. It could be any week,” replied the German. “With Lord Min broken, it has taken nearly eighteen months for Her Majesty to siphon off such funds from other palace accounts, and keeping the gold secret from the eunuchs and Viceroy Yuan is even more difficult. Patience, Timothy. I’ll let you know how soon when you come back from Komun-do.”

The Soldier Brother momentarily shook the thoughts from himself, and scanned the waters around Flying Fish Channel, glad to be back in Chemulpo, also glad that the involvement with the British to the south was ending. He spotted three Chinese man-of-war in another part of the harbor. Squads of armed troops stood near the wharves of Chemulpo, banners flying, elaborate rowboats nearby signifying the arrival or departure of an important personage. A premonition, almost leaping at him from the muddy waters of the channel, reinforced a feeling that whoever was coming or going was going to impact upon him.

“Perhaps the effeminate Chinese viceroy is fleeing the epidemic?” he asked the Korean sampan owner who was handling the tiller, his right biceps bulging, a full eighteen inches in circumference.

The man moved the tiller easily, and shook his head.

“*On-ee*. No, Soldier Brother. I think not. The illness strikes mainly the poor.”

“Is the epidemic spreading?” Tubert asked with concern, tearing his attention momentarily from the Chinese warships.

“Chemulpo and your settlement are so far spared from the illness. Perhaps those warships just wish to welcome you back from the south.”

“There are many things the Chinese wish for me. And for Chaoshien,” laughed Tubert, accepting a tentacle of dried squid from the sampan owner. “But friendship is not among them.”

May *jes-u* spare us from the sickness spreading from Seoul to this treaty port, he thought to himself. He shuddered: As important, and nearly as deadly, may we also be spared from the Korean doctors. Medicine men pressed red-hot coins against the forehead to cure convulsions. Acupuncture, the poking with needles that might have helped him recover from the malarial attack, was a common form of treatment. Sometimes Koreans were cauterized for indigestion. Poultices of cow excrement were used for sores, caterpillars for bronchitis, maggots for delirium. General weakness called for tiger bone, the strongest part of the strongest animal. A soup made from snakes, toads and centipedes was guaranteed to kill or cure. Korean doctors, of course, did use ginseng and other healing herbs, but Horace Allen convincingly argued that Western medicine was needed for syphilis, common leprosy and typhoid, smallpox, epilepsy, dysentery, malaria and tuberculosis.

Worst of all was cholera. Koreans said the muscular pain one felt at first seemed like a rat gnawing its way up the leg. Then, when it reached the stomach, the end came quickly,

horribly, and nothing seemed to help, least of all the paper images and demon incantations.

The sampan passed Japanese in rowboats and fishing sampans. The yellow dwarves jabbered loudly. Some nudged their companions, jabbering, pointing knowingly at the hide worn by the *gaijin*. Tubert deliberately patted the pouch, pleased at the notoriety. For a second, he wondered where the living brother of his grisly souvenir, the one who had posted signs declaring his intention to destroy him, had disappeared to.

Someday, when my Kungang monk returns from his travels and studies in Japan, I'll learn Mihashi's secrets. For someday, Mihashi will attempt to make good on his threats.

Tubert spotted the boy Yong Bae on the shore.

The sampan owner secured the craft against the fishermen's wharf some distance from the large commercial unloading docks, and Tubert leaped to the wooden platform. The Korean youth scurried to him.

"Soldier Brother!" cried the lad, breathlessly, with effort keeping his voice low. "Pak *sang-nim* and Mun *sang-nim* say you are to hurry to the settlement as soon as you come ashore!"

"Why the rush, boy?"

"I know not. But please hasten, Soldier Brother."

Tubert hurried up the main street, now partially cobble-stoned, in the direction of the settlement. He spotted a score of Chinese soldiers lounging in the dirt road between the trading station and the two-story hotel, another two dozen armed Chinese troops occupying the area in the rear between the Foreigners' Club and Madam Ahn's walled

one-story original establishment. With relief, he noted that the Chinese were paying no attention to his compound. Not one Westerner was visible, either going into or emerging from the white-washed wooden building. Even the usual flow of Korean, Japanese and European humans and oxcart traffic from the residents, shops and storage yards now behind the walled trading post had completely ceased.

The feeling of foreboding began to lessen, until he spotted three hunters, instead of the normal one sentry, on the tower next to the gate. Inside, Pak awaited him.

“What’s happening, Older Brother?” asked Tubert, stepping next to the wall, perspiring heavily. “Have those troops attempted to disturb my black woman?”

“No, not at all,” said the hunter, calmly waving aside any concern. “Your woman remains out of sight in your quarters, safe and comfortable, but understandably nervous. Those Chinese insects, however, are frightening away our *posang* and other customers since they arrived last night. We haven’t done any business all day. How was the trip to Komun-do?”

“May you have snakes in your dreams,” said Tubert impatiently, wiping his brow, noting the laid-back atmosphere in the settlement. “Don’t toy with me! What does a man have to do to get a simple answer from you? The boy said you wanted me to rush here. Since when have you concern about Komun-do? You have three men on the tower to watch for *posang*? What are those damned Chinese doing over there?”

“Eh? Oh, them,” said Pak, evasively. “I feared that you might unnecessarily antagonize the imperial troops. The Chinese will soon leave. They’re just deporting a barbarian from Chaoshien. Three sets of eyes on the tower see more than one. We’re watching them, just

a routine precaution. You're looking peaked. Why don't you go and rest? The woman is awaiting you. We don't want a relapse of the Malaria, do we?"

"Ah," said Tubert, with relief, leaning against the wall. "Who's being expelled?"

"No one we'll miss," said the hunter. "They'll escort the meddlesome barbarian from Ahn Madam's motel shortly, when the tide is fully in and they can reach one of the Chinese warships and place him on it. Relax. Go to the men's quarters and let the servant girl get you a bowl of naengmyon noodles."

Tubert nodded in approval.

"It's good to be back, and good the Komun-do contract is over. It was getting tiring. No more British soldiers transporting material into and out of our compound. Things can get back to normal. Who's the foreigner being tossed out of country?"

"No-one Chaoshien will miss," said Pak. "Just the self-important German customs agents."

"*Iii-gu!*" said Tubert, springing from the wall, all tiredness suddenly gone. "That can't be!"

"Yes, it can, and should be," said Pak, emphatically. "Word has it that he has told Russians in Japan that Chaoshien wants Russian officers to train the Korean Army. He has thus betrayed both Yuan Shi Kai and the royal couple, embarrassing Russia, America, with whom he's a citizen, and Germany, the land of his birth! Some say he even has a secret plan to arm the kingdom's military with modern weapons. You'll be much better off without such a trouble-maker. Don't get involved."

"If you want to hold on to the rice lands you have been purchasing in the northern

village, I must get to him,” said Tubert, angrily, a chill forming in his veins. “If I can get him from that barbarian hotel, what are the chances we can flee overland to Vladivostok?”

“Not one in a thousand, Soldier Brother. Nonsense to even think of it. Worse to try it,” remarked Pak, having anticipated Tubert’s volatile reaction, his worries justified, damning the timing of his younger brother's return. “More than a hundred Chinese surround him. He is in disgrace. Go frolick with your woman.”

With familiarity, Pak watched the face of the Soldier Brother he had learned to sometimes read in the past fifteen years. The clean-shaven face was not as repulsive as those of other Westerners. The face was tired, still young, but etched by premature furrows caused by his own recklessness. The older brother frowned, cocking his head, his right eyebrow arching as he fixed his unpredictable younger brother with a stare of gravity intended to force his will on their entirely too excitable barbarian.

“Listen to me, for once,” said Pak. “We have only eleven men present for duty, not enough to defy one hundred...”

Without a word, Tubert turned and strode toward the gate.

“Stop, I say!” cried the tiger slayer with the topknot, rushing to the side of Tubert. “The Chinese already have a price on your thick, stubborn head! They’ll kill you, or deport you also.” He attempted to grab Tubert’s left shirt sleeve. “Listen to reason for once! Don’t go out there!”

Tubert shook himself free. He stepped gingerly outside the walls. His gait changed, a casual, unhurried springiness and the limp from the old battle wound accentuating his

steps.

“Now he’s done it!” Pak smashed his fist into the wall, out of sight of the Chinese. He called into the settlement, “You three on the tower, cover him! Kill the first imperial troop that tries to harm him. Mun!” The alarm in his voice brought hunters to the entrances of buildings, and Pearl to the doorway of the house. “All of you, over here with arms! *Bal-ee, bal-ee!* Now!”

The tall barbarian feigned an idle whistle as he ambled halfway across the dirt road. The distracting noise caused the frowning Chinese general and his idle troops to fix their gaze upon him, as he intended. Slowly, still whistling, Tubert unbuttoned his trousers.

If the gods are with me today, you have greater concerns, and you won’t come at me, he thought, nodding in the direction of the scowling Chinese general. He noted that most of the imperial troops remained sitting along the road, watching the curious foreign devil. And if the gods are occupied elsewhere, and I can’t see Paul, and if there’s not to be an arms shipment, what happens doesn’t matter anyway.

He unleashed an arc of urine into the air. The act brought ribald laughter from the Chinese, including the bored general.

“Foreign dog! You forgot to lift your leg!”

“He is but readying tonight’s resting place!” jeered troops on either side.

“An earthy devil, aren’t you?” he heard the grinning general in the palanquin say. “One would think thy stalk would have been dyed black by now from poking Viceroy Yuan’s devil whore!”

Tubert also chuckled, pleased at the dissonance. He rebuttoned his trousers and walked

slowly in the direction of the Foreigners' Club, halting within ten paces of the general.

“It keeps its color by frequent dousing in the golden cave of yonder building's blonde-haired, blue-eyed foreign sing-song wenches,” remarked Tubert in flawless Mandarin. “The waters of her ying cleanse, restore strength and color, to even the most abused yang. I'm going there to bathe it now.”

Tubert's audacity and fluency in Mandarin caused the whiskered general to shake with mirth and sparked another round of sneers and laughter from nearby troops. For the moment, the tension was broken.

“Be on thy way then, *feng-qua!*” said the general with a gesture, despite orders prohibiting any Westerners from visiting the *feng-qua* inside the hotel who was being expelled. He quickly decided it would be wiser to carry out his politically charged mission of placing the carrion-spawned former customs agent on the waiting warship, rather than seeking to collect the tempting reward for this particular foreigner's head. “Bathe well today. But only today; I'll have the reward for thy head, next time. And tell that treacherous cow-eyed German devil to be ready to board our vessel within the hour.”

With a mocking half-kowtow, Tubert continued his seemingly leisurely gait, feeling eyes on his back as he sauntered up the broad wooden steps, past half a dozen armed and uneasy Chinese troops, and then across the porch of the hotel. He glanced casually backward. Most of the Chinese had returned to idling along the road, some of them resuming crap games. Behind them, he noted Pak on the tower, and he saw the other hunters were within the walls and armed.

Out in the harbor, the only large foreign vessels were the Chinese warships.

He opened the summertime swinging doors and entered the first-floor barroom.

“My Gawd, Timothy! How’d you get through those murderin’ bastards?” Bufferd, looking pale and drawn, moved quickly from behind the bar. He had sat up terrified throughout the night, believing the carnage would begin any minute. “See any Western troops headin’ this way? We’ve been surrounded by those hellions since they dumped Paul here last night.”

At a table with a half-empty bottle of whiskey sat a different von Mollendorf. Gone were the flowing Korean robes and the horsehair hat of a native aristocrat. The man before him was impeccably dressed in a three-piece Western suit, his hair oiled and combed, beard neatly trimmed.

“No one has any troops in port, Buf,” said Tubert softly, moving away from the door. “And the Chinese aren’t waiting for any to arrive. With three warships in port and armed troops in a treaty port, they mean business.”

“Quite an escort, aren’t they? *Anyang-ha-sayo*, Tubert-*shi*,” said von Mollendorf, not rising. “Mister Bufferd, would you please bring a glass for my only well-wisher, the daring Soldier Brother of Corea? Sit down, Timothy.”

“No glass,” said Tubert, seating himself, staring at the transformation of the man who had become his closest friend. The German’s eyes had a distant, faraway look, the same look Tubert had seen in captured wild animals that had ceased all struggle to escape. “I just got back in port, Paul. We can’t allow this to happen. We’ve got too many plans for the years ahead.”

“Leave us,” von Mollendorf said coldly to Bufferd.

“The game is over here, for me,” said the German, pouring more whiskey into his cup. “You don’t mind if I drink to my own departure? I hoped you would make it here.”

“Our dreams, Paul. More than enough plans for a lifetime. You can’t leave like this. I’ll go to the legations.”

“They’re all in favor of my expulsion, understandably. I turned the British on the Russian. Played all of them to check Yuan’s chokehold on this land.” The man shook his head and smiled. “There was my secret agreement to place Chaoshien’s army and police under Russian control, to loan Wonsan to Russia, an ice-free port sought by the tsars since Peter the Great. Secret, until a few days ago, when a Russian party arrived, stupidly announcing hopes to place the peninsula under Russian protection. You should have seen the look on the faces of the Japanese!”

“It can’t end like this,” Tubert said, struggling to imagine a world without the colorful, resourceful customs inspector. “If I can get you out of here, we can flee by land to Vladivostok...”

“*Nein*, Herr Tubert! Nor to China, nor Japan. I’m to be taken to Antung, where Li Hung Chang himself will officially denounce me, then turn me over to an American warship, which has no choice but to accept me. Only a formality, of course. I have plenty of funds in a German bank, I’ll be fine. My concern, as I unceremoniously leave this land I’ve played in, is with you.”

The sounds of a drum, bugles, gongs and cymbals began outside. Chinese officers shouted orders for the troops to form a formation.

“Eh? Get up, Paul. We’ll make a dash over to my settlement!”

“Ah, that sanctuary! And be cut in half along with Chaoshien’s only white Korean? No thank you, Timothy. It was through you that I came to know and care about these people. I did what I could to keep Korean sovereignty alive, help Her try to catch up with the rest of the world. Your needs and the needs of Chaoshien’s coincide, and that’s my last secret to share with you. Queen Min will provide gold for half the arms payment, the downpayment, within three days after you send her three stalks of dried ginseng. Royal boats will transfer the gold to your junk in the Han River Estuary near Sand Island just before dusk, the rest of the bullion to be made available in September, the arms to be delivered then to waiting troops near Masan, as you wished. It is your only hope of raising enough funds and acquiring high-level protection to stay here, also Yi Chaoshien’s only hope of loosening the Chinese, Japanese and other nooses that choke Her. Your fate, forever inseparable from the dynasty’s. But not mine, understand?”

“Yes,” said Tubert, exhaling, breathing with effort, struggling to absorb the German’s final intrigue. “My only hope.”

Outside, the Chinese general loudly denounced the treacherous foreign dog, ordering von Mollendorf to appear for righteous deportation and retribution.

“My last words to you: stop trusting anyone,” said von Mollendorf, rising, reaching for a leather traveling bag on a table behind them. “Your hunters sympathize with the *Tonghaks*, the captain of your junk tells all to your foster father, that opium peddler, Mao. Now you must use your eunuch to coordinate the arms shipment with the queen, but without the eunuch knowing it. And the eunuch is also employed by the Japanese, who have vowed to kill you. You must deal savagely with him for he is ruled only by fear, brutality and greed, never by loyalty. He was seen in the company of the Japanese

believed to have attacked Lord Min in Yongsan the night before the attack. You must keep them all off balance.”

“Yes, but it won't be half the fun, or nearly as satisfying, without you,” said Tubert, also rising, feeling the weight of a boulder on his shoulders. The world quaked, the hopes for successful delivery of an arms shipment without von Mollendorf's presence dwindling with each second. He wondered whether he would ever laugh again. “I'll miss you, Paul.”

“Everything you love is still here, *Herr* Tubert. I was but passing through, as most Westerners shall always only pass through Korea. But the things we've known, done and attempted shall stand if you make our final secret, the arms delivery which is your salvation, explode in the face of the Chinese and other parasites,” said von Mollendorf. “Say goodbye to Pearl for me, and God help you two. And don't trust this new American minister, Parker. He's a drunken, lecherous old fool.”

At the doorway, von Mollendorf looked at the massed Chinese troops waiting to escort him to the wharves, and suddenly broke into a mischievous, boyish grin. He glanced at the forlorn Westerner next to him, then embraced Tubert around the shoulders with his left arm.

“Win for us. Tooth and claw, Soldier Brother!”

The grand foreign schemer walked onto the porch, not like a man in disgrace, but with the self-assured pomp and stomp of a government minister. He hurled his thirty-pound traveling bag at the unprepared Chinese lieutenant heading the squad of troops readying to surround him at the foot of the steps. Then he marched down the steps and past the muttering, standing Chinese general and seated himself in the surprised commander's cushioned palanquin chair.

“What are we waiting for? Onward!” demanded the German imperiously. “We haven’t got all day!”

From the porch of the Foreigners’ Club, Tubert watched the procession march down to the wharves, where rowboats took the exiled adventurer to a waiting Chinese ship. Pearl was standing in the gateway of the settlement.

“I’m leaving you,” she said to him as Tubert approached. “Every time I look at that hotel, and each time you go into it, I feel the hatred of the world draw closer around us. And the sight of those Chinese. If we stay together, they will destroy us. I feel as if Korea is reaching out for me, that I’m going to die here. I’m sorry, *Tim-san*.”

“I can’t have another loss, Joo. It would be a mistake to leave, we’ll have a home in Vladivostok by the end of the year, away from the damned Chinese and the hatefulness of the West,” he said, the impact of her words clanging emotionally within him, adding to the stress and uncertainty ahead. “We’re leaving in a matter of days for Shanghai, business for me, a vacation for you and, if you want, Satchiko, if she wishes to accompany us. Keep the destination a secret, Joo. Let’s discuss this when we return.”

Her expression changed. Excitement quickly animated her face.

“All right, *Tim-san*. Maybe a break away from here will change things. And yes, I know Walt Townsend’s wife would love to go with us.”

“Those Chinese troops won’t return to this part of town,” he said, turning and watching von Mollendorf being rowed to the warships. “Why don’t you take Mun and go and tell her? And don’t pack much. You’ll want to do a lot of shopping.”

She embraced and kissed him, sensing his tenseness and exhaustion as he called for

Mun, then walked briskly with her guard down the road towards the Townsends' hootch.

Tubert walked slowly into the settlement, knowing that he had to reconnect with Pak. He knew too that there wasn't the usual week left for the leader of the northern hunters to get over his stung feelings before the voyage across the Yellow Sea. In a godown, Tubert found three exquisite, highest-grade stalks of dried Kaesong ginseng, the stalks partially resembling a sensuous human body. He walked to the house, then called for Kwan Il.

"I need you to ride to Seoul today, Crane," he instructed the northerner. "Tell our eunuch at the Foreign Ministry to meet me along the road at the western outskirts of the farming village of Bupyong at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. Tell him it is urgent and involves the Queen of Chaoshien. And that his own well-being depends on his being where I order, when I order."

* * * *

The arrogant dog is at last on his knees, thought the eunuch, glancing out of the swaying palanquin through the cloth curtains and seeing farmers, peasant men, women and children, bending over in surrounding paddies planting rice. On higher, drier ground, older men and women were harvesting leafy vegetables that quickly found their way to the markets of Seoul.

Oh, yes. Soldier Brother is vulnerable, at last, Yi told himself, savoring the power to finally treat the foreigner as he deserved. And I shall break him. He shall grovel on his stomach like the barbarian lizard I've always known he is.

"Hurry, out there!" he cried to the four bearers, four rotating bearers following immediately behind them. The right corner of the palanquin lurched as one of the slaves

stumbled on the path and Yi was pitched roughly forward, nearly toppling from the conveyance.

“Careful, you slave dog! Do that again and I’ll have you flogged and starved constantly for a month!”

The planning for this sudden trip had precluded selection of a more ornate box and an efficient slave team. The tall, long-legged young northern savage, the trading station’s compradore, had appeared at the ministry near closing yesterday, informing the eunuch clerk that his barbarian goats herder ordered Yi to be present at Bupyong today.

“Orders?” snapped the eunuch haughtily. “What do you mean ‘orders’? I don’t need to take orders from that already ruined foreign devil. The British have forsaken him, the Americans disown him, and Lord Min shall soon die! He stands alone.”

“Soldier Brother has a gift which is to be presented to the Queen no later than Tuesday Night, tomorrow night,” patiently explained the young northerner with the long, crane-like legs. “He’ll meet you at Bupyong at ten o’clock in the hills along the path to Chemulpo.”

Yi had made the fitting outward show of indignation, but immediately informed his supervisor that he had been requested to travel to Chemulpo the next day to accept a copy of the minutes of the treaty port’s newly formed municipal council. Unlike King Kojong, no one in his right mind dared to ignore anything that dealt with the formidable, vengeful Queen of Chaoshien. Despite the fact that Lord Min, her nephew, had thankfully been chopped into a human vegetable, Min clans-people still infested all levels of Chaoshien’s ministries and court. One has to work with political weather, the bald-headed, overweight

Corean reminded himself.

Yi adjusted his sore behind in the rolling conveyance, tired of the six-hour palanquin trip to these hills behind the nondescript farming village of Bupyong, located halfway between Seoul and Chemulpo. It was common knowledge that his barbarian client was in his financial death throes. Accordingly, Yi had not bothered to greatly concern himself with the Soldier Brother's interests, contentedly accepting the normal strings of cash coins from the young northern compradore earlier that month and, of course, collecting an even greater retainer payment from Mihasi's two silent Japanese riff-raff who also visited his office each month

Ah, but life and profit does surge forward. And perhaps good to get out of Seoul occasionally, he thought. The new crops and green foliage assure a future, even if humanity's harvests at times are of questionable worth. If one is clever, one can be like the earth and endure forever, while ministers, rulers and foreign devils produce year-round crops of opportunity for a clever man's harvesting! Of course, the Japanese could prove unpleasant if the good-for-nearly-nothing kisaeng and the shriveled old brothel madam soon do not find a way to have the Soldier Brother's black strumpet meet with misfortune. Even if Mihashi-san lies dead somewhere, we're being provided with those ever-welcome squeeze payments from someone aware of the service we pledged to perform. Yes, I must deal sternly with those lazy females and meet them soon. Unwise to trifle too long with the forces that so ruthlessly took out Lord Min.

It mattered little to Yi and scores of others in the court of Yi Chaoshien that unprecedented opportunities were arising from the presence of the heavy-handed Chinese, who were carefully blind-siding Chaoshien's benevolent, out-of-touch king. It

was not difficult to sway Kojong. Simply insure that you were the last to talk to him, while quietly learning from Viceroy Yuan's people of who had gone before you in front of the Korean king.

Unlike certain fools, I could care less that Yuan, whose people have wrested control of Seoul's public utilities, now even calls himself 'Resident', and blatantly blocks all efforts to assert any vestige of Chaoshien independence. So stupid, for as surely as those peasants and the land out there exist, a clever man like myself can always find ways to prosper.

Fools included Queen Min, though she was admittedly capable and deadly, and especially included a handful of foreign diplomats and missionaries who seemed to have nothing better to do than to occupy themselves with Chaoshien's affairs. Just this past spring, the Japanese and Westerners now residing in Korea based on the most-favored-nation clauses in the treaties, had protested the pig-tailed Chinese viceroy's dominance of the royal family and of Chaoshien's affairs, and had cried for the removal of the Chinese. There was even talk of removing all foreign nationals to the predominantly new town of Yongsan, near the Han River three miles from Seoul. But the Japanese had countered that proposal noting that legally, if the Chinese had been removed from Seoul, others would have been compelled to do likewise.

I have no liking of Yuan and his Chinese. Is not their system of rule as corrupt and atrophied as our own? *Iii-gu*, but with the Taiwongun, the former regent, no longer here to check the wolf-willed queen's power, opportunity seekers such as myself are hard pressed to squeeze so much as one square-holed copper cash coin from our official duties with the locusts from the Middle Kingdom watching everything!

The eunuch picked his nose thoughtfully, then scratched his aching behind as he stared through the curtains of the sedan chair, deriving immense satisfaction from watching commoners in their back-breaking work that fed the kingdom.

Does not the wise man have many masters, only to become the master?

As a precaution, he had leaked word to Minister Inouye of the move to turn the hills of Yongsan into an international colony, foolishly enabling former samurai nobleman to thwart the move.

Oh, yes! Should the mysterious Mihashi yet live and some day return to Chaoshien, Yi had carefully cultivated verifiable friendship to the interests of Nippon.

Truly, a wise man took precautions. Headed by Fat Old Mao, that Shanghai-based opium peddler and confidant of Viceroy Yuan, just that late winter the Chinese merchants exporting Korean ginseng had attempted to evade customs regulations, which resulted in a serious confrontation led by the Soldier Brother and his grisly northerners in Chemulpo. Yuan had tried to back the Chinese traders, of course.

Did I not earn the monthly squeeze of the Soldier Brother? Yi told himself. I found King Kojong alone late in the night and, after slipping his bodyguards a cash string of coins, acquainted the wobbly but well-intentioned monarch with the plight of Tubert and other Korean businessmen. How cleverly I inserted the information into His Majesty's weak ears, which resulted in him sending a vigorous protest to Li Hung Chang, who promptly righted the matter. Except for Yuan's old stooge, Mao, virtually every Chinese offender was deported. And sadly, the customs service with that diabolical von Mollendorf, was temporarily and unintentionally vindicated in the process.

No hope for the Soldier Brother, the eunuch reasoned, feeling his pulse beat faster as they passed just south of Bupyong Village along the trail. He mentally braced himself for the confrontation that was inevitable within minutes on the hills behind Bupyong. His barbarian's downward spiral began with his losses on the Yalu, then the attack on Lord Min. His own embassy disowns him, and the American mission has been downgraded, headed by this recently arrived old drunken sop, Parker. Now that the British withdraw from Komun-do, they no longer will watch over or protect him. And, thanks to merciful spirits, the last of his allies, the arch-rogue von Mollendorf, was cast from our court and our shores just yesterday. Does he think me a fool to believe that he possesses something that will interest Queen Min, now herself also defended, thus politically caged, by the Chinese? Oh ho, Soldier Brother, so ever proud, bad *jes-u* can be overcome by the head, but never by the heart! This morning is when your summer becomes thy winter and I humble you as your new master! And before autumn's harvest, I shall amass a fortune from transferring your settlement to the clamoring Germans. Thank the spirits I am who and what I am.

Yi spotted the barbarian, sitting astride a Mongolian pony from his station.

"Take me to that *kojeng-ii* long nose!"

From the knoll, Tubert eyed the procession approaching him. His eyes had a predatory coldness, his expression stone, as though the panting Korean slaves bearing the conveyance, and the traveler inside, were at once both prey and enemy. The party halted before him, the slaves easing the sedan chair to the ground. Tubert dismounted.

"*Ka!* Go!" he shouted in low Korean, pushing the nearest slave, kicking two others, driving the eight bearers from the knoll. "Away from us! Wait down the hill."

The curtains of the sedan were drawn.

“You’re late. You kept me waiting. Get out of there,” said the barbarian. “Very fast.”

“Not the place for me to be seen with you, Soldier Brother,” said the eunuch’s voice from inside. “And you no longer have power to command anyone, or anything. Now it is you who shall wait. Your fortunes have changed, foreigner.”

“How so, seedless one?”

“Even the sun turns from you! I am thy last link to life, you repulsive devil. Acknowledge your station: Kowtow, immediately!”

The huge, hairy foreigner's hand snaked through the curtain without warning. It grasped the front of Yi's cotton robes, then yanked violently. The eunuch was aware of the curtains rustling as he landed in a heap, head first, on the ground, seams of his robes bursting.

Panting, the royal clerk clamored to his hands and feet.

“You’re nothing anymore! Defenseless. I can destroy you in a matter of days, and I have only to do nothing for it to happen.”

The stiff metal tip of the barbarian’s boot collided with the eunuch’s forehead, the martial arts kick sending the rotund court staffer sprawling. The sole of the boot came to rest on Yi’s neck as he saw the ugly devil, face smirking, tower above him. The boot’s pressure increased and began to choke the royal clerk’s breathing.

“Very sad, for the darkness has eyes and ears, Eunuch. I’ll have to take these three stalks of ginseng to the Queen myself. Truth shall be seen and heard, even in darkness,

and the Queen shall learn that you were in the company of the Japanese the night before he hacked her beloved nephew to pieces.”

“Help!” Yi tried to shout to the coolie slaves below, but the boot throttled his screams. “Dog’s whelp! You speak nonsense!”

“You’ll die miserably, of course,” said the Tubert, blithely drawing a long knife from his belt. “Probably by oxen pulling your body in five directions.”

“Noooo! I’m your devoted servant! Why do you torture me?” pleaded the court intriguer, squirming in terror. The round-eyed tormentor loosened his chokehold on the prostrate man’s jugular. “What is it you want?”

“My pact is with the gods of Asia! The beasts of Chaoshien’s mountains obey me. I trust no nation and no man, and I want my money’s worth for the squeeze I pay you, Eunuch. Spin any political intrigue you wish, mate with the spirits of hell for all I care. But when I have a need, my interests and those of my settlement have priority.”

“How could you doubt me, Soldier Brother?” Whimpered Yi. “You have only to tell me of your wishes.”

“Take these three stalks of fine ginseng to Queen Min before the palace gates close this night. That’s all.”

“I can’t let Her Majesty see me with these cuts and bruises, Generous One,” said Yi, immediately aware that the significance of the three roots reached much deeper than a mere gesture. His own predatory instincts screamed in alarm. “Tomorrow I can arrange...”

The tip of a knife cut the sash of the squirming eunuch’s robes.

“Tonight. Or you’ll have no tomorrow.”

“Yes! Very well. I’ll do it tonight,” shrieked the eunuch submissively.

Wordlessly, the menacing foreigner mounted the pony and galloped westward down the cart path, back towards the treaty port.

“Get up here and help me!” shouted the eunuch, struggling to his feet. He willed aside his pain and humiliation, every fiber of his being shouting that there was a conspiracy at hand that he could profit from. “You let that vulture-faced outlaw attack me. Get me back to the court in record time, or I’ll have the eight of you lightened of your balls!”

After darkness had fallen, after calling in several favors owed him, Yi managed to appear before the Queen’s personal staff with the three stalks of the sensuous medicinal roots.

“Impossible for you to see Her Majesty this night,” explained the eunuch in charge of the Queen Min’s ladies in waiting. “She is already with a fortune teller, with another fortune teller scheduled to follow. Come back tomorrow. What happened to thy head?”

“Merely a fall caused by clumsy palanquin coolies, brother. And it is absolutely essential that I give these common roots to Her Majesty tonight, gifts from simple, cultureless, penniless foreign devils who have found their way to the lair of impurity that is the treaty port,” said Yi, forcing a silver coin into the fellow’s hand. “I promised them to hand them to Her Majesty this evening. Gave my word.”

“*Iii-gu!*” said the etiquette expert before Yi in the torch-lit outer chamber, staring at the coin, knowing Yi for years. “You can wait until after the fortune tellers have finished, and hope that our Majesty has not fallen asleep.”

“Here, damn impatient barbarians, and your own selfish soul!” rasped Yi, quickly pressing a second coin into the anemic-looking creature’s hand. “Now get me in there before that other moon-gazer gets before the queen! I’m not after court seekers or great favors.”

Just after ten o’clock that cool spring night, Chaoshien’s queen appeared at the outer chambers to her palace sleeping quarters.

“Well, Foreign Ministry Yi, how is it that you exert yourself at such an hour?” asked the strikingly attractive, bright woman, then in her forties. “And you appear to have injured thyself!”

“Merely a tumble from a sedan chair while on an official mission, Your Majesty,” said the prostrate creature before her. “My pains are nothing, if they serve our kingdom. A thousand verses of gratitude, *Ma Ma*. The foreigner we know as the Soldier Brother asked me to drop by with these fair quality roots of health from the fields of Kaesong.” Remaining prostrate, Yi lifted the ginseng into the air with his right hand, his ears straining for any telltale sign of reaction. There was a rustling of silk as a court lady next to the queen came forward and accepted the three roots.

“So considerate of you, Foreign Ministry Yi,” she said, with effort, keeping the urgency from her voice. The Queen’s eyes became intense. With a cold, quick nod of her head, she told the female next to her. “Take those to the kitchen immediately, to be cooked with chicken for tomorrow. I vaguely recall once hearing of such a barbarian. Convey our thanks to him, eunuch.”

Ten seconds of silence followed and the woman who was the power behind the throne

knew instantly that the groveling dung-heap before her was fishing for some clue to the significance of the three stalks. She smiled, almost imperceptibly, certain that the schemer at her feet had not toppled by accident from any conveyance. Then her voice lowered.

“It is late, Eunuch,” she said pointedly, her words both dismissing and lashing at the impertinence of the bloodsucker from the pro-Chinese ministry. The capped bald head on the mats before her bobbed nervously.

“Yes, so late, Majesty,” said Yi, knowing that he was being summarily dismissed. “I bid you a restful, joyous night.”

Two minutes later, on the dark streets of Seoul, he cursed vehemently as he headed toward his home.

Ginseng roots from a devil nonentity and a queen that accepts them, unbecoming and indecent, in the wee hours of darkness? May lightning strike both of them! Something lucrative is being kept secret from me. I’ll show them this land has no secrets from me. With that German maniac at last removed from the Customs Service, I’ll start making inquiries tomorrow.

* * * *

The three royal coastal vessels moored in the waters of the estuary as darkness fell that Friday night. A Min clansman insured that the foreign devil was indeed the one intended to receive his Queen’s weapons proposal that he would negotiate and secretly represent the court for the arms deliver of two thousand firearms. He noticed that the entire Chinese crew had been locked by the Soldier Brother in the barbarian’s own cabin.

Only after darkness had fallen, when the royal coastal patrol boats had vanished, did Tubert release T'ang and the Chinaman's relatives who comprised the crew.

Throughout the night Tubert remained armed, Just before dawn he went briefly on deck.

“Get us to Chemulpo, in a hurry,” he said to the Chinese skipper. Nervously, sensing a covert nature of the Soldier Brother's tones and actions, the Chinese sailed into the harbor waters.

As soon as the morning tide allowed, rowboats brought Pak, Mun and five hunters from shore, then returned for Pearl and Satchiko Townsend. Tubert took the women to his cabin, carrying their bags into a room ten feet wide with thick glass windows in the stern of the junk. The floor was covered with a carpet, a small bed with a cabinet next to it built into the left wall, a desk table and shelves secured against the right wall. On the rimmed shelves were dishes, eating utensils, cups and a bottle of brandy, bourbon and red wine. Two comfortable wooden chairs with armrests were next to a fixed table. A small mirror above a wash table with a fresh water container was screwed permanently just below the open windows with clean, white curtains.

“My cabin is yours, ladies,” he said, placing the two traveling bags in the middle of the floor. “Not quite the amenities of the Foreigners' Club, but we'll be in Shanghai by tomorrow.”

The remark both startled the women and clarified his insistence that they pack for a week of travel.

“Shanghai? You mean we're at last making that vacation?” said Pearl, her eyes wide open, her smile radiant.

“As I promised you, Joo. Sorry I could not give more notice, ladies. Relax, enjoy. Rest, and come out on deck as you wish.”

“*Hootch* very nice, Tim-san!” said Satchiko, quickly going to the open windows, feeling the junk moving. At Pearl’s urging, she had packed a bag days earlier. Walter and the boys knew she was accompanying the black woman and Tim-san across the Yellow Sea

“So this is where you hide from the world, when you wish to?” said Pearl, exuberant, embracing her man, seeing the exhaustion in his face. “It’s beautiful, Timothy. How I’ve waited for this vacation! I can’t wait to shop in Shanghai. Thank you, darling. But aren’t you sleeping here?”

“Oh, I may sneak down for a visit, if I see that Satchiko-san has left you in here alone,” said Tubert, teasing. “But I’ll be sleeping in the hold with some cargo, next to the crew’s open quarters. I’ll be comfortable. If you develop seasickness, have some of that brandy, then rest. I must get on deck. I’ll send lunch down in a few hours. You can use the kitchen, if you wish.”

The Chinese crew on deck busily made sail. The armed hunters stood in the middle of the deck, curious and uncomfortable.

“Up and down, up and down!” growled Mun, his dark pallor changing at the roll of the junk. “I’ll never get used to this. Your boat rises and lowers with the waves, as if making love to the sea. Almost like me on top of that round-eyed woman.”

“Quiet about that foreign temptress, I’m sick enough as it is,” said Pak, as Tubert emerged from his cabin. “Now, what’s the mystery? Where’s this new place you say you’re taking us?”

“Westward. Across the Yellow Sea,” said Tubert, pointing across the waters. “A vacation back to where I was born. We’ll be back in a week.”

“*On-dae!* No! Let me off,” said Mun quickly, shaking his head, instantly seasick, along with the others. “I don’t want to be on this creaking log if we’re not in sight of a coast!”

“Too late! The winds have hold of us, Brother!” laughed the Soldier Brother.

“Stop sniveling, Mun! Why should we not visit China?” asked Pak, pleased at the thought of travel, but not pleased at the sight of the homeland’s coast growing smaller behind them. His stomach was already churning.

He had not yet noticed the station’s scale sitting next to the nondescript boxes in the hold.

* * * *

Along the bund, the road edging the Whangpoo River, stood the great prosperous bastions of Western life in Shanghai, the solid blocks of Dutch, British, Russian, French and American insurance and shipping companies. From the deck of the *Sea Angel*, they spotted the marble-fronted Messageries Maritimes, the colossal facade of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, and, in the distance, the domed Cathay Hotel.

“You’ll stay at that hotel,” said Tubert to the women.

“You mean, *you* won’t?” asked Pearl, the Japanese woman beside her. The wife of Walter Townsend was quiet, more docile than normal.

The Chinese crew was busy, but the Korean hunters chattered with animation at the

amazing sights of the international port, which was grander and far busier than anything they had observed at Chemulpo or even Sinuiju. The busy river traffic moved freely, accentuated by the hulks of graceful Chinese junks with translucent square sails like those of *Sea Angel*, and dozens of warships, sloops and commercial freighters, barges and steamships from various nations. Shanghai was at once as run-down but vibrant as ever, and even with its noise and squalor, more prosperous than ever. Beyond the bund, past creeks and inlets useless for navigation, sampans moored with scarcely an inch between them, large, incredibly packed Chinese families cooking on tiny afterdecks with charcoal braziers, scooping water from the foul water of the sluggish canals, marketing wares and foodstuffs with narrow rowboats that slithered with extraordinary dexterity between them. Stronger than the fumes from the steamer traffic was the smell of overcrowded humanity, the hot, musty air spiced with the delicious fragrance of grease and cooking. On the banks, figures slept in huddled masses between fragile awnings, lucky to have any place to exist.

“I’ll join you in two, at the most three, days,” replied Tubert. “I need to visit some old acquaintances. A business thing. T’ang will escort you to the Cathay. Get us a suite with two rooms. I want you to get a new wardrobe, whatever else you want, Joo, as long as you stay in or near the Western sector, you’ll be safe.”

She nodded. He had provided her with more than an ample number of gold coins to indulge herself and the Japanese woman. Pearl sensed mixed feelings and a reserved excitement in her lover at the return to the city of his childhood. She knew he had rested, but had not slept well, in the hold, apart from the crowded crew’s quarters, on top of the wooden crates in the cargo area.

“Be careful, Tim-san,” she said, kissing him lightly, her concern genuine yet ambiguous, conflicting with her determination to leave Asia, and her understanding that Tubert would never leave.

“T’ang,” called Tubert, in Chinese. He pointed to Chinese wharves along the river next to an inlet in the native sector in view of the Western territories. “We’ll dock over there!” They saw that the bund was already crowded with humanity. There was the pre-noon sprinkling of Westerners shopping in the suit and dressmaking shops and at flower and oddity concessions, and the uncountable number of Chinese working among the boutiques, stalls and open-air markets and pushing rickshaws. Prosperous, successful Chinese merchants catered to the European enclaves. Within minutes, Tubert summoned two rickshaw men, human skeletons dressed in rags, and dispatched the women and one of T’ang’s nephews in the direction of the Cathay.

He turned and boarded his junk.

“Old Brother,” he said, calling to Pak. The tall Korean in the hide jacket, full quiver and bow over his shoulder, stood on the deck watching with amusement as other northerners crouched before members of the Chinese crew playing a Mahjong. “I want two heavily armed hunters, here on deck. No Chinese allowed near the cargo area. The crew is not to talk to any passerby. We’ve landed here to avoid customs. No visitors allowed aboard. Challenge anyone attempting to board. Kill, if necessary.”

“Eh? What kind of vacation is this? Do you expect Viceroy Yuan’s henchmen to attack you here?” asked Pak, uneasily, his curiosity stirring about the contents of the crates below.

“Just a precaution,” said Tubert, warily, his eyes bloodshot. “It was pirates here that killed my father. The slicky-boys and pirates of Shanghai are bolder than their counterparts in Chaoshien. I’m going below to rest. Knock on my cabin door in four hours. You, Mun and a third man, rest. This evening, we’ll take a long walk to the northwest outskirts of Shanghai. Perhaps let old Mun sample some female companionship. Send for me in four hours.”

The northerner assigned hunters to their sentry posts as Tubert gave other orders to the Chinese crew. Then he went below, entering his cabin, locking the door. He unlocked an iron-reinforced drawer next to the shelves. Opening it, he withdrew a fist-sized sack filled with gold coins and placed them on the table. Perspiring, he sat on the bed and silently prayed that *jes-u* would smile, that he could accomplish and obtain what was so vital but perilous, that he could find Old O’Niel and Uncle Kider, and that the fugitives from his father’s ship could arrange for the perilous shipment of arms to Chaoshien. He did not pray that the white renegades could be trusted; odds were against maintaining secrecy with the staggering amount of bullion involved, the risks of attempted interference by foreign powers highly likely. Even the hunters would be opposed to modern firearms reaching the hands of royal troops. Removing his boots, Tubert rubbed the aching wounds of the Kangwha Battle, then the scalp wound from the arms shipment to Hong five years before.

At least this time we don’t have to rely on Henri Zakuff for anything. And I have more control of most parts of the arms delivery, he thought tiredly.

Weapons, and royal favor, are both curses, but our only chance, he thought, his old leg wound pounding, as he slipped into a deep sleep. There would be no settlement without

the revenues from the rifles for Kim's rebellion. This time, even with secret royal involvement, the stakes, but also the profits, are incalculably higher. But there's no hope for the station's survival without this mission.

A knock on the door awakened him four hours later. He arose refreshed and bathed, to emerge from the cabin dressed in a white flannel shirt, dark trousers tucked into sea boots, the gold coins, a revolver and spare rounds in the weather-beaten hide pouch suspended from a sling over his left shoulder. Pak, Mun, and a veteran of the Kangwha Battle with a fighting axe in their belts, their topknots freshly washed and coiled, clad in buckskin jackets, black horse-hair hats and white Korean trousers, stood waiting for him.

"Stay close to me," he told them. "We're taking a very long walk into an especially evil part of this city."

"We're ready," Mun said grimly, a tiger lance in his right hand. "I see nothing in this town of tall dog houses to daunt men from the roof of the world."

"We'll see, Old Brother." He turned to T'ang. "If I'm not back in four days, take the women from the hotel, and the remaining hunters, and sail back to Chemulpo."

"*Joss* be with you, Soldier Brother," replied the old mariner, watching Tubert and the hunters leap from the rustic wooden wharves to the teeming bank, then cursing the foreigner for his secrecy, realizing that the Chinese in Chaoshien would have paid handsomely for such word. No one had been informed of the exact destination before the anchor was weighed. And where was that gruesome Japanese dwarf, Mihahsi?

Old Mao and especially his son would have paid a fortune to have known in advance

you were returning to Shanghai, thought the Chinese skipper, with rancor, emboldened at being once again in the homeland. What secrets are now hidden in the crates in the hold, hey? Unwise to attempt to fall upon these four northern Koreans, but if they should sleep at their posts, it might be possible to slit their throats.

In the fading evening light, Tubert and the hunters walked for some minutes along the banks of the Whangpoo, seeing dozens of pleasure sampans with gilded roofs and painted decks, others with roofs adorned with shrubbery, flowers and even tile. To their right, on small balconies with brightly painted wooden ladders, nubile Chinese girls stood and sat in blue or pink clothing, expensive and semi-precious jewelry around their slender necks. Several of them shouted that summer evening, teasing the four colorful, contrasting foreigners, their voices sing-song and melodic.

“Your pleasure is ours, foreign devils! Any entrance you please!”

Tubert smiled at his boyhood memories of such districts and waved, recalling the small kindnesses of such girls during his penniless adolescence.

“*I-gu*, but to warm eggs in the nests of those song birds,” said Mun.

“Mother Mun would hatch chicks, eh?” retorted Pak, himself spellbound by the painted hussies. “You don’t have the stamina left for it! We’d haul you out dead from that flight, you old fool! Soldier Brother, what’s our agenda? Where are you taking us?”

“To a pleasure spot in Chinese called ‘The Place,’ Old Brother. Rough, rowdy entertainment. I used to steal from market people in that area. Over there is where I met my first Korean long ago. The monk, Yoo.”

Behind Tubert, Pak scowled, not at all pleased that the wandering monk’s relationship

with their younger brother predated theirs. Soldier Brother had a pious streak, but was not sufficiently devout to draw a monk all the way from the great Kungang Mountains temple to Chemulpo. The lead hunter did not completely trust any holy men, yet drew short of challenging the relationship between Tubert and Buddhist monks. What are you paying them? He wondered for the hundredth time. And what services is that shaven-headed one rendering in return?

Tubert led them from the riverbank into the Chinese city, away from the water traffic and the western sector of town. Even in darkness, Shanghai was vibrantly alive. Most of the Chinese they passed were poor, dressing in blue canvas and padded cotton, living mostly, it appeared, in the streets. Scores of streets. More streets than the hunters had believed could exist anywhere. Along the streets, paupers curled up that spring evening, using the curb as a pillow.

The four-storied brick and wooden structure that was their destination was situated in the midst of a vast Chinese marketplace of northern Shanghai, well beyond foreign influence and, through bribes and geography, beyond official interest. The Place never closed its doors to a wandering and diverse flow of humanity. Starving country farmers who had left their fields hundreds of miles away brought their daughters to the market to be sold, desperate for a chance for the remainder of the family to survive. Men drifted in from northwest of Shanghai, sometimes from as far as the Gobi Desert, and that night there was a caravan of chortling, humpbacked camels and armed, dusty men outside of the building's entrance.

Inside, opium and black-market weapons retailers and wholesalers of various nationalities met or sought potential clients. The first floor of The Place, The Hall of

Happiness, easily accommodated two hundred people and was never empty. European men quietly assured one another that no man had experienced Asia until he had discreetly experienced an evening of debauchery at The Place. A modestly successful Western businessman or young engineer or policeman could afford a monthly visit for a sum that would have allowed a hungry Chinese to eat well for an entire month. The brothel accepted all international currencies, plus currencies of remote Asian lands that the West knew little of. In whatever currency, the denizens of The Place stood ready to do business. The sweet stench of opium from dens secluded along the walls of the Hall of Happiness permeated the air. High Manchurian generals, safe here from recrimination, smoked the potent drug or drank the grog and, if they were capable and so inclined, partook of the expensive round-eyed or nubile young Chinese whores in the upstairs rooms. Green and yellow lanterns were suspended from great wooden beams overhead and also from supporting wooden and mason-work pillars, illuminating a score of tables with chairs.

A tiny Chinese escorted them into the center of the hall, to Table Thirty-Seven. A waiter asked a question in French. Tubert shook his head.

“So sorry! Never know-a,” shouted the pigtailed waiter, above the din around them. “English speak, can! Wat you lik-a?”

“Chinese whisky for us,” said Tubert, in English, not wishing to immediately show that he spoke Chinese.

“Hav-a smoke,” said the waiter, beckoning toward the dimly lit curtained dens along the wall. “No sweat. Here, can do.”

No smoke. Three women, Chinese, for my friends.”

“You no like girl?”

“I’ve come to talk with O’Niel. Can you get word to him?”

The expression changed on the waiter’s face.

“Do’an, know-a!” There was suspicious and an element of calculation in the man’s voice.

“Do think I’m a *feng-qua* pigeon here for a plucking?” snapped Tubert impatiently in Chinese, instantly taking the pompousness out of the man. “I roamed yon marketplace when you were a suckling child. I tip in gold. Bring me whoever you work for.” He spread two gold coins on the round table before them.

“One thousand apologies, *tai-pan*! Allow me to send companionship and refreshments to your table, and enjoy the show. It may take until morning for the other request, if that foreign devil is in town, and if he chooses to show. And the message? Your business with O’Niel?”

Additional lanterns were being lit around a rough wooden stage built against a wall before them. Muscular, bare-chested Chinese bullyboys with long cutlasses, the entire bouncer staff of The Place, positioned themselves on all sides of the stage.

“Known only to heaven, and to be known only to the *feng-qua* trader of stolen horses and contraband arms. Both gold pieces for bringing O’Niel here. Move quickly, waiter!”

The young Chinese waiter bowed, then instantly vanished.

There was applause from nearly two hundred people in the Hall of Happiness. A broad-

faced, husky Chinese woman in a silk green robe climbed onto the wooden platform. The woman disrobed, standing nude, men of half a dozen nations on their feet, toasting her. Guffawing.

“What manner of establishment is this?” asked Pak, much of his discomfort ebbing. A tray with a large clear bottle and seven glasses arrived, a waitress ushering three blushing, giggling Chinese girls behind her. The hunters fastened their gaze upon the girls before them. The girls moved with the peculiar gait the Koreans had noted while walking through the city, the animated, sensuous gait caused by feet deliberately deformed by being bound since children.

“One without conscience or morals, where debauchery is treated like virtue,” replied Tubert, nodding toward Mun. One of the girls had grasped Mun’s oiled topknot, smiling, and as she massaged the thing with delicate, sensuous strokes, the old hunter began to beam. Nearby, the girl next to Shin, another hunter, did the same. Tubert and Pak laughed. In perfect Chinese, he invited the females to sit at the empty seats beside each hunter.

“But we can’t even converse with these *kisaeng*,” protested older brother.

“Whoa!” cried Mun, as the smiling girl next to him filled glasses with her right hand, her left hand squeezing him below the table. “These are but *mocoli chee-be* girls, like we have back home. Stop ruining things, Pak; if you don’t want to drink from a cup, don’t piss in it. Think you that anyone believes you remained celibate during your years of wandering with Soldier Brother? As if we haven’t heard of the blind girls of Pusan’s hot springs, the wine-shop hussies up along the Imjin River! Relax for once; culture sits before you. I like their feet. They’re not going to run away.”

“Oh, very well,” said Pak, accepting the drink from his girl, not noticing her quick grimace at the garlic aroma exuding from him, his head and stomach again normal from the feel of land beneath his feet. He turned to Tubert. “I suppose we’ve come all the way to China for this? And where’s your piece of culture?”

“In the hotel where I left her, I hope. These girls, and as much as you can eat and drink, and four rooms upstairs, have already been paid for.”

Gongs, cymbals, drums and horns from a six-member Chinese band down near the stage shattered all conversation. The naked Chinese woman on the stage reclined on a wide wooden bench, legs spread, opium-glazed eyes riveted on a ceiling opening fifteen feet above her. There was applause and a loud chorus of hoots and howls. A Chinese bouncer shoved a drunken Frenchman away from the stage, shouting at the Caucasian, patting the hilt of a sword at his belt.

There were blurred movements in the space overhead. With relief, Tubert watched each hunter quickly drain their glass. A sexually aroused donkey, braying and kicking the air, was suspended by a rope harness. The animal was lowered slowly from the opening in the ceiling. Four Chinese bouncers were on stage to guide the lewdly swaying animal, each tightly clasping one of the animal’s limbs to protect the female below from being pummeled by hooves.

Tubert glanced around the club, seeing no sign of either the Chinese waiter or of O’Niel. Several tables in front of them, a blonde Russian woman rose, and seated herself on the lap of an exposed Mongolian male, their eyes transfixed on the stage before them. Tubert gestured for the girls at his table to refill the glasses.

“By the snows of Mount Paektu,” Mun called out, his voice rising above the din. “Not since the half-bear creature *Tangun* emerged from a cave in Chaoshien has a beast attempted to mate with a human!”

When the animal hovered a mere two feet above the woman on the stage, the rope harness snapped, plunging the donkey’s headfirst down upon the screaming woman pinioned under the beast’s weight, hooves pummeling her neck, breasts, stomach, torso crushing her, before the attendants pulled the animal to one side. The broken, bleeding woman was carried from the stage and there was babble from the patrons of The Place.

“We’ll get another woman,” loudly announced one of the attendants. “In an hour, another show!”

Tubert translated.

“We’ve got an hour,” observed Mun. “What floor are the rooms on?”

“Third floor, brother. But I’ve ordered another bottle of whiskey. You surely wouldn’t want to miss the show.”

“Shin,” said Mun to the third hunter, his face crimson red from the alcohol, busy stroking the hair of the girl next to him with one hand, his other hand rubbing her breasts.

“Can you wait an hour?”

“If I don’t get this wench to a room quickly, I’ll start braying,” replied the Kanghwa veteran.

Both Coreans rose, gently clutching the arm of the girl beside them.

“Why should we waste an hour, eh, neighbor?” said Mun to Pak.

“It has been a stressful voyage,” said Pak agreeably, rising with them, not put off by a smoke screen performance between a beast and a human, promising himself to determine the real cause for the presence of the foreign scale in the hold of the junk as soon as they returned to the *Sea Angel*. “I suppose a trip to a room to relieve stress, and learn some culture, wouldn’t do us any harm.”

Tubert told the girls the room numbers.

“I’ll be down here a few more hours to see if I can recognize anyone from the old days,” he called after them. “I’ll send a bottle to each room. If you don’t come back downstairs, or if I’m called out, I’ll see all of you late tomorrow morning.”

As soon as he was alone, Tubert felt vulnerable. He had succeeded in keeping Pak away from prying open the crates and discovering the bullion, and the hunters were nearby should he need reinforcing. But the bullion in the hold of the junk made him uneasy, and there was no predicting whether the white rouges from his father’s ship would meet with him or, if they did, whether an agreement could be struck.

All of this is chance. It’s been five years since Kider brought our weapons for the ill-fated rebellion. O’Niel and Kider could be dead, and what am I going to do, should they still live but choose not to deal with me, with more than two thousand ounces of Yi Dynasty gold in the hold of my junk?

He sipped the drink in front of him. Such a fortune needed to be used for the intended purpose very quickly for its presence would not remain a secret for long.

If there can be no arms deal, I could remain in Shanghai forever with it, a man of filthy wealth. Or, even with the risk, have *Sea Angel* sail around the Korean Peninsula way up

past the east coast, to Vladivostok, with Joo. For if this fails, it is death to return to Chaoshien.

Visions of old Song, of Pae Sung Ip and of the hunters and the faces of their families and even Yoo the monk, sprang into his mind, along with visions of snow-covered mountains and frozen rice paddies, other visions of those mountains and rice paddies and rivers alive with summer growth, illiterate farming families greeting him warmly, sharing their noon meals next to paddies, the old cart-pushing couple in Kimhae sharing warmth and laughter with the familiar foreigner officialdom claimed did not exist. All images that of home, all the faces of people whose king and queen were under the so-called protection of a corrupt, heavy-handed mandarin.

I can't fail them, neither the people, nor the royal couple, he realized. It's more than the gold. Chaoshien is my home, the place, the people, all I have to love, and also to hate. The arms will give Yi Chaoshien breath to grow into a government of fair rule for the place, and people, that I call home. Will that not in itself cause the movement of the misguided *Tonghaks* to evaporate?

Having inventoried his conscience, the dilemma that remained had a crushing weight that grew heavier that night.

If I fail, even if I am lucky enough to return the bullion to Queen Min, I'll be ruined, never to be trusted again, my status lost, the settlement lost, just as surely as if I would steal the gold and stay here, or make a dash for Vladivostok. Where the hell are those treacherous white dogs who once sailed with my father?

When the gongs again sounded and a younger Chinese woman took the stage well after

midnight, Tubert picked up the gold coins and walked out to the entrance of the club, having no interest in watching the perverted spectacle. He was tired, needed rest badly, and realized he should have never come here or have accepted such an assignment that had all odds against it.

“The coins, *feng-qua*,” said a voice in front of him. It was the slender, olive-complexioned Chinese waiter, walking fast towards him from the dark, still busy street. “Give me the gold coins, then I’ll take you to the barbarian you seek!”

Tubert showed the coins on the palm of his right hand, then snapped the palm closed. “Only after I see the barbarian with my own eyes. Move fast!”

* * * *

The cudgel hit Tubert hard next to the left side of his head. He fell dazed to the dirt in the alley. They had walked silently for several minutes, the Chinese waiter in Western clothing and black silk vest leading him along the perimeter of the torch-lit, open air Chinese market, then down a hill of stone steps into a twisted labyrinth of pitch-dark alleyways in a Chinese shantytown.

The blow came at the foot of the steps, driving Tubert to the ground half unconscious, pain exploding, his coordination numbed by the blow and from exhaustion. The blow was to stun, not intended to kill.

“Nobody sees O’Niel armed,” said the familiar voice of Jackson Kider. “Any foreigner what’s come to find him, oughta know that.” The Chinese waiter joined Kider in removing the pouch from the stunned visitor, the young Chinese man quickly rifling through the pouch, ignoring the revolver and rounds, finding the small bag with the

remaining coins, glancing at the white man next to him. Kider nodded, reaching for Tubert's pouch, taking it from the Chinese. "Take the money, and be off.... My God!" exclaimed the Westerner, making out the victim's features. Uncle Kider rose. "Welcome back to Shanghai, Tubert! Been about five years, hasn't it?"

Tubert groaned and attempted to sit upright, his head throbbing. There was a cold sensation on his left neck, a wet trickle of blood down his chest and back. He fought the pain and dizziness, focusing on the alleyway before him, willing himself to an upright seating position, sensing danger in the voice, instinctively knowing that he needed to destroy it. He paid no heed to the departure of the Chinese waiter.

"Kider?" he gasped, the pain blinding as he struggled first to his knees, then, with a supreme and agonizing effort, swaying to his feet. "I need to see O'Neil."

"I'll do that, China-boy," said Kider, cautiously moving behind Tubert, uneasy at the realization that the son looked like a reincarnation of the captain. A heavy barrel pushed against the small of his back. "But I ain't forgettin' the words from last time we met! Wrong move `n I'll blow you to Chinese heaven in little pieces. Move! Straight ahead. Ain't far." For five minutes, they trudged through narrow alleyways, then entered a small street. Along the street was a modest Chinese home rising two stories above the shanties that surrounded it. Inside, Kider bound Tubert to a sturdy wooden chair. Minutes later, the former first mate of the *Trojan* slowly made his way down the wooden stairs. O'Neil walked with a cane, arthritis and body wounds crippling him.

"I should say, welcome home," remarked the white-haired old man, moving slowly forward, the chill of that early April morning causing him to wince. He walked past Kider. O'Neil seated himself across the table from Tubert. "Ah, don't mind me, I'm fine.

We all get slower when we're older. After we've paid our dues. You looks like yer old man, boy. Like coming face to face with him, except for your mother's eyes, twenty-eight years later. Uncanny. What brings you back?"

"Guns and money. Kider has my weapon. Cut me loose, then I'll talk."

The blackmarketeer arms merchant nodded towards Kider. From behind, a knife cut the hemp rope securing Tubert to the chair, then severed those around his wrists.

"We live in a dangerous world, young Tubert. Can't be too careful. Now, how much money and how many guns and what kind?"

"Two thousand Mausers, same as the Chinese and Japanese armies. And two hundred and fifty rounds for each rifle. Delivery at an island off the East Coast of Corea in September."

"Good Christ, young Tubert, that's a lot of arms," said O'Niel, shocked, instantly suspecting a trap. "Kider, keep a watch out that window!" He turned and stared into the face of the captain's son. O'Niel thought: That be more'n we've ever handled at once. Where is such a market, and funding, for such an undertaking? That quantity is like what the mucky-mucks, authorized by the legations, deal in officially for the imperial forces. They're our main source of weapons, but indirectly, if you know what I mean. That's a whole lot more than we brought down to Corea with that Russian for you five years ago. Who be footin' the costs?"

"The guns will go into the hands of Corean soldiers, O'Niel. The entire bullion, upon delivery of the arms and ammunition at an island off the Chaoshien coast, in September."

Kider turned from the window.

“Ain’t nobody buys direct that many guns at one time, not even the warlords upcountry, except the Chinese officials, or those tinsel-arsed Jap officials. Captain’s whelp be trying to trick us, O’Niel.”

“No trick, Kider,” said Tubert, feeling his hatred for the sadistic renegade rise in his throat. “Western arms merchants authorized by Western powers have concession strings attached to any deal. I’m shopping for Korea. If you can’t come up with the arms, someone else will. And that was quite a blow from behind. You’re lucky I’m busy on this visit; you won’t be as lucky, next time. Didn’t I warn you down in Korea, years ago?”

“Threaten me, will you, you sonofabitch!” cried Kider, his face reddening, springing from the window towards Tubert, halting as O’Niel raised a hand.

“Stop it, Kider!”

The old man before Tubert sighed.

“We take precautions, young Tubert,” said O’Niel, studying the face of the man in the blood-covered shirt before him, seeing the hatred ease in the eyes of the visitor. “The likes of us can’t be too careful. And better get used to Kider `cause he’s the right-hand man here. At least, til you get what you’re after, cause it’s him who’ll deliver your arms, if we be makin’ a deal. The gold per Mauser to be based on the tael’s two and one half ounces gold. And the two and fifty rounds. Big business, son.”

“I can cover costs on the scale I’m buying at,” said Tubert, returning O’Niel’s stare, knowing that the monetary offer would afford them a decent, but not exorbitant profit. “I am representing the Korean kingdom. The offer is firm, my terms, or nothing. Asia’s flooded with five-shot Mausers and ammunition. If you don’t want it, I’ll go to the

Chinese. They'll put together a shipment, even if they have to draw from many sources."

"Didn't say that! Didn't say that at all," said O'Niel hotly, his face perspiring, fighting the urge to use his cane and beat the arrogance of the Tuberts from the haunting face of the young man across the table. "Two thousand and one hundred ounces in ten gold ingots be the cost. Why delivery along the coast of Chaoshien? That's a long ways off. Ups the risk considerably."

"You absorb that risk. There's too much international traffic, too many pirates, in the Yellow Sea," said Tubert, withdrawing a folded paper from the right pocket of his pocket, thinking that he would tell the queen's messenger a total of fifteen such ingot and keep five as profit for himself. "Five days before delivery is due, you watch for a sampan with a yellow sail two miles from the mouth of the Whampoo. A Corean Buddhist monk will give Kider a British-made map, in a sealed envelope, to an island I specify. You don't think I'm fool enough to attempt to take delivery of such a shipment in your back yard, do you?"

"I suppose not," said the old Caucasian, thinking that five days was plenty of time to come back to Shanghai, after the exact location of such an island was known, and make arrangements to lift both the gold and the life from this man who should have died as a babe. "You're much like your Dad, you know."

Tubert nodded.

"And full payment on the island, my risk to get the bullion there. Your risk to get the arms and ammunition there. Nothing signed. No paperwork, nothing in writing. And in September, it will take five days of hard sailing to reach the island, so no turning back to

Shanghai to tell anyone of the destination. My monk with the map to be awaiting Kider along the shore of Masan. And at the slightest appearance of other seacraft near you, the monk tosses the map into the sea. If you're not at the island by noon, the deal is off."

You are the son of your accursed father, thought O'Niel, his face flushing. Had I stayed aboard *The Trojan*, we for certain woulda had a test of wills and wits. It's as if the ghost of the old captain comes back to me for it, in the body of the son. For long moments, the old white man glared silently, realizing that the captain's son would not be easily trapped and destroyed. Yet there was no turning away from this, even if it was unthinkable to allow a Tubert to remain alive in Asia.

"I no longer take to sea. Too many wounds and sore bones," said O'Niel. We got a deal, let's talk specifics. Kider will deliver the guns.

"The seventh day of September, on a Corean island, then," said O'Niel, already feeling eyes upon them, knowing it would not remain a secret for long. He thrust forward his hand to their client from Corea. "Cursed business, guns. But we be just a followin' markets. Safe voyage back, young Tubert."

Along the shore, the old weapons merchant watched the *Sea Angel* depart, then turned to a Malay employee.

"I want you to find old Mao's youngest son, tell him we got some news his old man over in Corea can use," said O'Niel, minutes after leaving the *Sea Angel*.

"You ain't bringin' that old thief in on this, are you?" asked Kider. "Me and the men can take care of the captain's son, without him. I'll have men on that island a few days before the rendezvous."

“Course you will, Jackson. Be not aworryin’, I ain’t handing guns or gold to that old *cumsha* thief! Yes, you’ll take the life of the captain’s arrogant young pup, then bring the all of the gold back, along with our weapons. We don’t be needing a Tubert with money in Asia, cause one day he’ll come after us. You just let the Maos know a great shipment of secret arms for the Corean Kingdom will be making its way down along the coast of Chaoshien come early September. Old Mao doesn’t want a live Tubert, any mor`n we do. A favor, in return for safe passage of our own vessel.”

“Gotcha, mate!” said Kider. “My pleasure, I swear. The welts on my back from his Dad’s lashing fire up at the sight of him.”

* * * *

“Careful, Mister Parker,” gasped Aaron Buferd, securely holding the left arm of the intoxicated new American minister to Korea, while a Marine legation guard sergeant held the wobbly Caucasian’s right arm as they crossed the porch and negotiated the steps. Buferd had sent food and drink out to the entourage earlier, compliments of the house.

“Wouldn’t want you to break a leg now.”

“Kind of you to say that, George.”

Buferd glanced at the marine sergeant as they eased the wheezing diplomat into his travel chair.

“Aaron, Mister Parker,” said Buferd, only too happy that the derelict diplomat was leaving the club. “I’m Aaron, remember George Foulk is over in Japan. There now. Best you let these men take you home.”

A squad of dusty marines surrounded the minister's palanquin, four Chinese coolies ready to transport the envoy into town for the weekend to his Chemulpo cottage. Old man Parker had graduated first in his class decades earlier at a seamen's school called Annapolis. Hiram Parker had been a captain, a fighting southern naval officer. The man had even set an enviable record in American courtrooms before Grover Cleveland gave him this appointment to Chaoshien. At first, the Korean court and foreign community saw him as an affable old gentleman who had arrived in Seoul on a sedan chair, regal, dignified, friendly and competent. Indeed, Parker was sober that day, and the following week when he presented his credentials to the king. But thenceforth, the bottle beckoned. And beckoned more each day.

"Why, yes, you are Aaron, so you are," said the drunken envoy profoundly, his words slurring, to Buford, who had served him whiskey for the past three hours. The envoy hiccuped. "You're a good man, Aaron! We'll want you on the team that'll lead these heathen Koreans into the world of enlightenment and American rule and technology, by God. Aaron, where's my drink? Heavens, you didn't forget my drink, did you?"

"There's a bottle waitin' for you at your cottage, sir," said the barkeep, wishing that Foulk was back, that the pressures of his job of holding the legation together had not so severely undermined the lieutenant's health. "You need to go there, Mister Parker. It's soon gonna be dark."

Disgraceful, thought Buford with disgust. It was common knowledge that there were days when Parker could not pull his rum-soaked frame from bed and, when he did stagger to his feet, it was solely to guzzle whatever alcohol was nearest to him. Americans interests out here don't have a chance with this old fool headin' the helm.

“Good point, Aaron!” quipped the imperious official who had helped to capture Vera Cruz in the war with Mexico, and who had guided creation of the Confederate navy academy. As if comatose, his body below the neck sank like a sack of sand into the sedan chair. Old Parker belched. “Need some rest, plenty of rest, to represent the damned Yankee flag out here.”

“You certainly do, sir,” said Buford, motioning to the coolies to lift the conveyance, nodding to the marine escort that Friday night in early May, the smells of Chaoshien, of drying fish, dung, freshly tilled earth and who knew what else, assailing him. “They’ll have you at your cottage in ten minutes. Good evening, Mister Parker.”

With relief, Buford watched the sedan chair rise. It swayed slightly, and the marine sergeant jumped next to the palanquin just in time to prevent America’s representative from toppling from it.

God help us, thought Buford, recalling the derisive pantomime Madam Ahn had made, using Pidgin English, of Parker’s drunken assault on a Japanese woman in Seoul earlier that week. Officials from the Japanese legation had invited the American minister to a Japanese restaurant over at Yongsan, deliberately plying the Southern gentleman with sake. Blind drunk, Parker had to be pulled from a serving girl in plain view of the restaurant patrons.

“You no giva our girls him, *hadda-so?*” The madam told him. “American *honcho* too muchee stinko!”

That fool is making America the laughing stock of Corea, and the loss of face hurts each American out here trying to make a living, reflected the barkeep unhappily. In the eyes of

these Confucian Coreans, the deportment of the top dog from each foreign nation determines how the rest of us get treated out here.

Doctor Allen, physician to the royal family, was doing all that was possible to contain the devastation old Parker was creating, but the scandal and credibility of the American presence in Chaoshien was growing worse daily.

This is all I got; there ain't no goin' back to Hong Kong or Shanghai, and I'll be damned if I'll go back to a threadbare existence in California until I make my fortune, thought Buf, with worry. But jumpin' Jesus, I can't afford to lose my job because of old Parker!

Buferd saw the envoy's arm waving, halfway across the street, in the direction of the open gates of Timothy's settlement.

"Over there, sergeant! We'll pick up a small keg of cool Jap beer to take back to the cottage. I take my business to other Americans, you know? Even if they think they're not American, like that nigger-lovin' Tubert. That's it, sergeant! Right turn, march!"

Buferd sighed, shrugged and climbed the stairs to the porch, watching the conveyance swing right and enter Tubert's compound. A dozen torches in the falling darkness already lighting the interior of the trading station.

Just days earlier, Tubert had returned, changed, from the vacation in China. The barkeeper's worries that Timothy might run into the pair of Americans who had helped jump the captain's ship, with Buferd's help, dissolved as he heard of Miss Pearl's delight at the suite they stayed in at the Cathay, and both she and Satchiko Townsend had done enough shopping to give both men difficulty breathing. It wasn't even strange that Timothy had not loaded that junk with tin sheets and other goods while over there, not

when he sailed over to the bund to patch things up with the black woman. The tolls from von Mollendorf's departure and all the setbacks, the losses on the Yalu and last month's end of the Komun Island contract, Buferd realized, had seemingly lifted, yet in front of Western merchants at lunch earlier that day, the captain's son had astounded Buferd, all but admitting total defeat at the acts of Providence.

"I'll have nothing further to do with the interests of foreign powers. I've tried everything to rejoin my own kind. Nothing has worked," Tubert said, louder than he had to, sounding lost, over a quick beer at the bar. "No more hob-nobbing with foreign officials who use you up, then spit you out like you're tobacco juice. We'll keep trying to compete with the big trading firms, though we can't win. No hard feelings, don't want to fight no one for nothing, anymore. I know it's hopeless, that I'm licked. It's just a matter of time, Buf. And, maybe, *jes-u*."

Who would have believed, just weeks ago, the feisty former white ward of Chaoshien would ever utter such humble words of abject defeat? Walter Townsend, who had stopped by the Foreigners' Club to deliver two sacks of white flour and a case of condensed canned milk, had patted Tubert on the shoulder.

"Losin' is tough, Timothy," drawled the lanky Southerner with genuine concern. Satchiko had told him that, other than taking the Koreans on an overnight drinking binge and cracking the side of his head badly, nothing especially memorable had happened on the Shanghai visit, other than the expensive but delightful shopping spree Satchiko and Pearl had indulged themselves in. "Maybe it's time you come with me to church service."

"Maybe," Tubert had nodded. his voice flat, without even a slight trace of interest in such a proposal.

Poor Timothy, thought Buferd, the guilt overwhelming the barkeeper as he turned towards the door to the bar and the foreign sailors and merchants inside that night. Nobody ever thought you'd a' gotten as far as you did, not after we turned our backs from you over in Shanghai as a babe. No, but I'll make it up to you, when the time comes. For maybe I'll never leave Asia, not ever, and you're like a son to me. I've got my savings, eighteen hundred dollars, and it's yours, when the time comes, if I can just stay away from the gambling of that old bitch next door. Now a grown man, and the sight of you bein' crucified is scorching my very soul. Yup, you got a friend, Timothy, my penance be your *jes-u*.

Inside of the settlement, Hiram Parker directed his bearers and the squad of marines to make for Tubert's home.

"Mister Tubert! I heard you're back from China. Are you in?"

The door to the house opened. The black female appeared in the doorway.

"I wanna talk to the *honcho!*" called Parker from the palanquin, shaking with unsteadiness as he debarked from the sedan chair with the aid of the marine sergeant. "I wanna buy some of his beer."

Tubert replaced the woman in the doorway.

"Evening, Mister Parker. What can I do for you?"

"Long weekend coming up, Mister Tubert," said the envoy, groping blindly for the steps to Tubert's porch. "Wanna buy one of those small kegs of Jap beer to take back to the cottage with me. Jus'a small keg."

Tubert walked down the steps just in time to prevent the drunken diplomat in the top hat

and sweat-soaked, crumpled suit from stumbling backward.

“You’re drunk, Mister Ambassador,” he said with disgust, lowering the man to a wooden step. “You don’t need any more. Just go home before you cause everyone more embarrassment.”

“I’m the `Merican representative to this land,” snarled Parker, adjusting his top hat lopsided and hiccuping. “Can’t embarrass no one in a land where men piss openly on the streets, and the dead never die. A man can’t even breath here, don’t you smell the air? Drunk means nothing, tryin’ to be friendly, is all. You jus’ get me some beer `n I’ll be on my way.’

“All right,” said Tubert, rising, starting toward a godown. “It’ll be compliments of the house. Wait here.”

When Tubert had disappeared into a distant storage shed, the coolies and marines watched the besotted American suddenly crawl up the steps, then blindly make his way on all fours through the doorway of Tubert’s home. There were screams and shouts and the sounds of a scuffle from inside.

“I’ll teach you to bite a white man, nigger bitch!”

The envoy’s party saw Tubert streak past them, up the steps and into the house. The marines instinctively unshouldered their rifles as footsteps sounded around them. The American envoy was propelled through the open doorway, rolling down the down the wooden steps to land in a moaning heap at the foot of the marine sergeant. Tubert charged from the building as the legation guards rushed to the steps and pointed their weapons at Parker’s attacker.

“Halt!” shouted the marine sergeant nervously, helping the gasping but uninjured legation head to his unsteady feet. “You’ll be arrested for this, Mister Tubert.”

Tubert froze, his face livid, fists at his side clenching with rage as two Americans began to easing the moaning wretch towards the palanquin. Pearl flew from the doorway to his side.

“Timothy, what have you done?” she wailed, both hands grasping his right arm. “Don’t you know who he is?”

“You men, get him,” ordered the non-com. Four men started for the stairs.

Two metal arrows from the darkness tore crisply, suddenly, into a porch post beam before them, instantly halting the marines. They spun around, facing a group of hide-clad Coreans, two with fuses sizzling on ancient matchlocks, seven others with bows taut, arrows ready to fly.

“Fall in, back here!” called the sergeant. The men hastily made for the door of Tubert’s home.

“Get out of here, while you’re still alive,” growled Tubert. “And take that drunken disgrace out with you.”

“We’re goin’, sir,” said the NCO softly, motioning the frightened coolies with the dazed minister in the sedan chair to make for the gate. “He’s a mean one. Sorry, Mister Tubert. But expect us back for you, with the whole platoon, in the morning.”

Tubert watched the party disappear through the gate.

“Thank you,” he told the hunters. “Relax now. It’s over.”

“Not when you manhandled the American envoy,” said Pak, grimly. “Your plentiful enemies won’t overlook this. The Chinese and Japanese will agitate to their Korean lackeys now, until the court of puppets drives you from Chaoshien, or deports you. This is serious.”

More serious than you know, thought Tubert, sweat suddenly cold on his back. It squeezes Queen Min into defending the indefensible. She can’t afford to let me be deported and lose both the bullion down-payment as well as the arms. I need to quickly defuse this, get out of the limelight. But how?

“I’ll join you in the men’s quarters later, we’ll talk about it,” said Tubert. “Double the sentries. Let me know of the first sign of Chinese, Corean or American troops coming this way.”

He wrapped his arms around the black girl at his side.

“It reaches out at us again,” she wailed. “The world won’t let us be happy together. I love you, truly I do, but if I stay with you longer it will kill you. Don’t you see? I need to leave.”

“Come in here, Joo,” he said, placing his arm around her shoulder, guiding her back into the house and closing the door. His arms encircled her. “I know how you feel, dear, and you have the funds in your possession to do as you please. I must vanish for a few weeks.”

“The whole world isn’t big enough to hide in,” she said, adamantly. “Don’t you see? You’ll never stop having to save me?”

“You’ll be surprised what I’m going to do with the whole world, and with what I can get

away with, Joo. I'm going north, to Paektu Mountain, then to Vladivostok, to discuss with a Russian I know our prospects of moving there. A secret, no one but you to know where I am. I don't want to lose you, don't want to be alone anymore. I need you to wait here, until I come back."

"Must you go all the way to Paektu Mountain? The viceroy's business advisor, Mister Mao, once called it a place of danger."

"It's along the path to Vladivostok, a route where no one will follow me, and the remoteness of that area is exactly what I need now. Will you wait?"

"I don't know," she said, her forehead against his shoulder. "There's nothing for me back in America, but no one would be trying to kill us." She shuddered. "I'm having dreams about dying here. I don't want to die here, and I'll never belong here. I don't know, Timothy."

"I am talking about dignity and face, woman. And a future worth fighting for, yours, and mine. I'll never tire of fighting for you, Joo. Look at me; you know where I'm going, and you must trust me that I'll find a place for us. There are business things I cannot tell you about right now that will let us have a brighter world before the year is out." He kissed her tenderly, his hands starting to roam over her. "You're safe here, my hunters will defend you with their lives. Will you wait for me to return, Joo?"

"I'll try," she said, her tears drying, returning his kiss, other emotions replacing the terror. "But no promises."

Later, Tubert entered the lantern illuminated hunters' bay. Pak and the other northerners were visibly shaken.

“You’ll lose this settlement now,” said the lead hunter, ruefully. “You and your temper. And your women!”

“You’re right about the temper, never mind about the women,” said the Soldier Brother. “But I’ll lose nothing. It’s best I disappear for some weeks, wander the land like we did in the old days. Allow this incident to blow over.”

“I’m more than ready to return to the old trails,” Pak said, instantly. “But it will solve nothing. No barbarian can hide in Chaoshien if the Yi Court wants you found. What happens if officials with troops appear before the gate while you are gone to announce you are under arrest and that this ground is no longer yours?”

“They’d wait until I return to do it. No Corean officials will do that, just believe me, Old Brother. And you must stay here.”

“For what? Since when am I important here?” demanded Pak, miserably. “What would you have me do, give advice to the walls? What new tricks are you up to?”

“A disappearing trick, as I’ve told you. As long as you’re here, no one will doubt that I’ll return.”

“I would not want to see you go alone,” said Pak sadly, but unable to counter the argument that night. “I so badly miss the old days, when we wandered freely, and before the world came between us. I’d stay out of Sinuiju and Manchuria. Where will you go?”

“I will, I promise. And it’s best no one knows.”

Before the sun rose the next morning, when Chemulpo and the land still slept, Tubert slipped quietly out of the gate, his pouch bulging with money, a weapon and rounds and extra clothing. Scrutinizing the dirt road on both sides and the areas beyond, and seeing

no one, he turned towards the northeast, glancing backward frequently to insure he was not being followed, determined to go overland to the northeastern port of Wonsan. By the second day after his departure, when no officials appeared in Chemulpo in search of him, the anxiety levels of Pearl and the settlement's Coreans began to subside, even as rumors spread that the Americans had quietly apprehended and chained the indomitable Soldier Brother and had already secretly sailed back to America with him.

Five days after Tubert's departure, when it appeared that there might be truth to the rumors that the foreign devil would never return, Madam Ahn sent instructions to Chrysanthemum to have overripe fruits dipped in the cholera-ridden Chonggyechon Stream in Seoul. The *kisaeng*, just back from a lusty, lucrative and secret hiatus bedding a wealthy Suwon grain merchant to the south, appeared early that afternoon at madam's Chemulpo establishment.

"In here, quick, daughter!" whispered madam, pulling the woman through the gates of the old walled wine-house and brothel reserved for Asians. "It must never be known that you visited here. Do you have the contaminated fruit?"

"I do, madam," said Chrysanthemum, motioning towards the silken sack containing the fruits. "It wasn't easy. The fruits are bursting with ripeness, as you ordered. I don't understand..."

"Come now, child! You're no more chaste of mind and spirit than you are of your bodily openings! Mihashi-san is somewhere in Japan, and it is said he will return soon to Chaoshien. Have you forgotten the promise we made after you so unabashedly dismounted him in the hot tub? Even if washed, cholera will lurk in the broken skin of such fruit. And the fruits will discharge our promise."

“*Iii-gu*. So brilliant, mother!” So, the young woman thought, madam seeks influence over the squat little Japanese savage that would surpass my own influence and security? Well, well, she thought, from now on, when I mount Mihashi-*san*, those fat buttocks shall leave imprints on the mats and no one will have greater hold over him than me. “No, I had not forgotten,” said the *kisaeng*, smiling demurely.

“Yes. A neighborly act, these fruits a gesture of kindness towards a foreign woman so sadly abandoned by the same long-nosed hellion who also spurned your own incomparable charms and talents. May crows even now be picking the eyes from his grotesque head! I will yet have the property that round-eyed Soldier Bother robbed from me, and the facility will house one hundred girls to pleasure the Japanese! Rest now, as I render a kindness and kindle our auspicious future.”

Touching the fruits with a cloth, madam attractively arranged the fruits on a serving tray. A top-knotted sentry at the settlement tower watched with little interest as madam passed through the gate below.

“Where is that poor abandoned black girl?” called Madam Ahn. “I bring her a gift.”

“Over there in the barnlike, exotic building that is their home,” said the hunter, pointing.

Wordlessly, the middle-aged Corean woman entered the compound and quietly placed the tray of fruits on the wooden porch of the Western-style home. Knowing that eyes were upon her, and sudden movements would be remembered, she turned slowly and appeared to be in no hurry as she walked back out of the compound.

* * * *

In uneasy segments, Kyoto became the place where the bandy-legged man from

Tsushima discovered that his dreams might coincide with those of Japan. The gunboat panache that had opened Chaoshien's ports, so heartily cheered and supported by Tsushima people, had also helped stem Nippon's runaway inflation and held promise, Gunjiro learned with rapt fascination, of becoming the cornerstone of a grand cartel system, the *zaibatsu*, vigorously embraced by school officials, both academically and spiritually.

"The gold hoarded by our wealthy merchants is being drawn upon, establishing public confidence in Japanese currency and bonds. And that reopens chances for the old dreams of expansion, the quest for resources and space," lectured a political affairs instructor. "Yes, token civil war with Tokugawa partisans still flares, but there is an idealism and self-sacrifice sweeping Japan. All the feudal clan lords have voluntarily relinquished the fiefs, which they ruled for centuries, giving back their patrimonies to the emperor. The samurai who constituted five or six percent of the population are, for the most part, actually giving up their special rights to kill and to be fed without touching money or doing work. And the commoners of Japan are at last being freed of long-held prejudices."

"As samurai status goes down, my hopes for a prosperous future rise," meditated Mihashi while seated next to Kyoto's Mound of Korean Ears, trophies brought back by Hideyoshi's armies centuries before. The student visited the site frequently, pondering its significance. "What if Hideyoshi had won, and the garlic eaters had become Japanese subjects? Face and equality for me, within sight and possible to at last win. But only if I succeed at this school.'

'Ah, yes,' Mihashi thought, whenever the theme of adventurism was discussed, in or out of class, 'we will indeed economically and militarily outgrow the accursed *gaijin* who

even centuries ago inflicted their presence on the peace-loving people of my barren but beloved Tsushima. They were animals, just as the foreigner who slaughtered my older brother still is. *Hai!* He shall be cast out, but only after I first break him and, in the process, fulfill Japan's and my own destinies. Have my three Coreans found the means to destroy the *gai-jin's* black mistress, but not yet the barbarian I need to hate for motivation?"

As he worked through the discipline and academic rigors of the Kyoto academy, both instructors and sons of upper-crust families began viewing the rough, iron-willed Tsushima man as something of a celebrity. Rumors grew that he had distinguished himself with grisly feats in distant Chaoshien, embodying the very essence of Japan's quest to achieve a place for itself among modern world nations. As the first year in Kyoto passed and graduation neared that late spring, the students and most of the faculty began to accept the coarse adventurer as an authority on Chaoshien, who made no comment when queried about exploits that served Japanese interests on the peninsula, but also made no effort to stifle his growing reputation and acceptance.

In a nation where anyone who counted gave the earliest years of formative life trying to making the archaic system work, the fifty-two other, younger students in his class, groomed in classical characters since infancy, readily demonstrated their hands at delicate, disciplined *tanka*. After editing, these *tanka* expressed their state of mind on ceremonial occasions, being read aloud at national poetry contests each new year.

"Mihashi astonished us and earned the respect of our arrogant young students by acquiring the fundamentals of *tanka* in a matter of months, *sensei*," a Satsuma clansman instructor informed the head of the academy. "With indescribable suffering and humility

and exemplary dedication, the rudiments of class and culture and *bushido* are acquired by Mihashi. Although he needs to be reminded not to walk around before downtown's *geisha* parlors in the loincloth of a coolie when he's drunk, which he frequently is. All he talks about is exploiting Chaoshien. He is an inspiration to them, almost an icon of the future we hope to instill here."

"I still think he has the spirit of a pirate," replied the headmaster. "Are you all in agreement that this once nearly illiterate plunderer's spawn should be allowed to graduate?"

"As if we have a choice. He is already a member of the ultra-right Black Dragon Society, which is even now extending its influence as far as the Amur River," noted the political instructor. "He swills *sake* with society members regularly. They're very impressed with him. They seem to think they're getting their money's worth from funding our school."

"*So-desu-ka?* Is that so? That is indeed a consideration. But the foreign office wants us to produce a student who can return to the Japanese of Chaoshien with some semblance of class, traditionalism, leadership and, however deceptive, a seemingly simple lifestyle."

"Mihashi-san is learning all the right patriotic whistles to make our fierce former *samurai* wolves obedient dogs," the tactics instructor told the headmaster. "With utmost, perhaps unconscious skill, he represents, no matter how tacky or brutal, everything as an effort of patriotism for service to Japan, whether he is politicking with officials and aristocrats, or mounting newly arrived whores in a drunken stupor."

Three days before graduation, a Western-clad man from the foreign ministry visited him

in Kyoto.

“We’ve heard of your mental and physical attributes,” the smooth, clean-shaven official said quietly to the islander. “You project an impression of explosive strength. Your opponents, we believe, will often capitulate to you. You are to return to Seoul, and join a special projects staff in a paid, salaried position as a special persuader, with your own budget. And, of course, you are free to pursue interests to enrich yourself.”

“*Domo aritgato gozi mas.* Thank you,” said Gunjiro, his heart pounding inside the silken *kimono* of an aristocrat. “I am unworthy of such trust and honor.”

“Here are orders assigning you to our Seoul legation, rail passes to Shimonoseki, and a first-class steamship ticket to Chemulpo. You will organize the masterless *samurai* who gravitate from the city slums of Japan to Chaoshien, and who otherwise are embarked on wastrel careers as poets and cutthroats. Still scornful of money, still dedicated to the strict code of honor and wearing two swords, they are hopelessly unprepared to earn a living by normal means. The headmaster and your instructors assure us you now have the learning and credibility to communicate with them, lead them, and use them. For the day is coming, *Mihashi-san*, when an obstinate Korean magistrate or even royalty may need to be, shall we say, eliminated, for simply slurring the name of the imperial family. And if a Japanese in Chaoshien needs to be disciplined, you will have the needed funds and talents.”

“*Hai!* I shall not fail. But might I stop by Tsushima for a wife?”

“By all means, and we know you won’t disappoint us. In your hands, the art of silent intimidation is to be raised. Other times, without any actual violence or lapse in the

subtle, smiling conventions of Japanese etiquette you have learned here at the Peers' School, you shall go unarmed into a home of, say, a uncooperative Mitsubishi business *honcho* in Chaoshien, or to the house of a high Korean official, and make men tremble for their lives. And the society shall pay for your wedding."

"*Mansei, mansei!* To winning!"

As he stepped onto the steamship at Shimonoseki for his return voyage to Chaoshien via Tsushima some days later, dressed in the trendy Western suit of a new-style government employee, a porter carrying his bags, Mihashi's spirits were soaring.

So much to do! he thought. A quick marriage, then I shall visit the whore on the hills of Yongsan and learn whether my orders have been carried out.

* * * *

The sight of Yong Bae, the Korean youth standing perpetually next to the wharves of Chemulpo, was the first friendly familiar face the Soldier Brother had seen in over a month. It cheered him inwardly, confirming to him that he was home. As the steamer waited for the tides to return in the light monsoon rains, Tubert opted to go ashore early. He hailed a small sampan, waving back to the boy on the shore. He did not realize that Yong Bae was now fifteen, no longer twelve. Nor was Tubert aware that he was venerated among Chemulpo's poorer Korean classes. The small monthly stipend paid to the youth had been meticulously managed, enabling the boy's family to have adequate food and shelter and, at last, to invest in a larger fishing boat and hope for a future.

Now and forever, home at last, thought Tubert, with welcome resignation. He had largely confined himself to the small six-by-six-foot cabin of the steamer, resting,

emerging only to take an occasional Japanese meal of rice, soup, broiled fish and fried *tempura* during the four-day voyage around the peninsula from Vladivostok. The pilgrimage, and escape from the Tsarist port, had clarified and simplified all things: Home for me and Joo, two souls who grew up without a home, without parents, among people racially different than us. With her at my side, we'll make our stand against all the uncertainties and dangers of the world.

Tubert climbed a wooden ladder up to the wharf. Yong Bae's usually exuberant face had tears instead of the usual smiles.

"Soldier Brother! Pak has had me watching for you for two horrible days! Thank *jes-u* you have returned, if it is not too late."

"What's amiss, boy? And where are my barbarian newspapers?"

"Soldier Brother," said the youth gravely, with difficulty. "Your black woman lies deathly sick at your station. Pak says you must rush there in great haste as soon as you return."

"Sick? What do you mean? How sick?"

"Very sick. Please, hurry."

"Thank you, boy," he said, taking off at a run, paying no heed to a particular Chinese and two Japanese men marking his return, shadowing him. He made the settlement and bounded through the gates as a northerner sentry shouted his return. A handful of *posang* were in the station. Pak and Kwan Il stood before the steps to his home, where a horse with a Western saddle stood tethered next to the porch. Nearby, a familiar din arose from gongs, cymbals and drums, played by Coreans. They watched a shriveled, witchlike

mudang sorceress in a trance as she performed loud *kut* exorcism rites.

“What has happened?” he said, gasping for breath, preparing to spring up the stairs.

“What has happened to her?”

“Cholera,” said the lead hunter, grabbing their barbarian brother’s shoulders. Shock and bewilderment crossed the exhausted face of the soldier brother. “She’s over there, in the servant’s quarters with the *ondol* floor, tended since yesterday by Allen *sang-nim*,” said the hunter, softly. “She is unable to swallow any of the potions the old Korean herb doctor has boiled and attempted to force down her throat. You must not enter...”

Tubert wrenched himself loose, bounding toward the servant’s quarters. The door was open. Black Pearl lay on the floor, as Horace Allen covered the emaciated woman with a thick blanket. She was emaciated, shaking, delirious with chills. For a week, she had been unable to keep food down. Tubert saw the whites of her eyes had turned yellow, her facial color deadly ashen.

“Timothy, she collapsed unconscious two days ago,” said Allen. “It’s best, safer, if you wait outside. She has only minutes left.”

“Leave us!” ordered Tubert, ignoring the warning, instantly sinking to his knees at her side, gently taking the dehydrated woman of the West in his arms.

“Joo, I’m back, Joo,” he said softly. Her breathing was very faint. Cold chills wracked her, her shudders weak. “You’ve got to get better. Our future is before us, forever together. Can you hear me?”

The sound of his voice caused a nearly imperceptible movement of her eyelashes, as if she was taking a tiny, but temporary step back from the Great Void. Voicelessly, her lips

tried to form the words, “Timothy, happiness has been loving you.”

He sat motionless, cradling the Chinese Viceroy’s onetime cultural advisor in his powerful arms, not noticing the final notes of the deafening exorcism, nor the sunset. She was in his arms. They were together, which was all that mattered, even though he knew her breathing had stopped. Silently, Tubert put his head to her still warm shoulder and began to weep. Some time later, there were movements at his side.

Pak, Horace Allen and Walter Townsend pried his arms from her body.

“She’s gone. Nothing further can be done, Timothy,” said Allen, softly. “We must scrub and sanitize this area immediately. We’ll give her a Christian burial.”

“You will not,” said Tubert, spirit dying, his voice filled with rancor. “No burial before a white Western God that wouldn’t save her, not by barbarian missionaries who refused to accept her. I’ll bury her properly, my way.”

* * * *

Threats poured in from all directions, and the security and assurance of continued operation of the trading station grew ever more precarious. One week following the black woman’s burial, the Soldier Brother had moved to the floating firebox. Suspecting the grieving barbarian was evading him, Pak stood on the deck, intending to have an overdue discussion with the shattered Younger Brother. He had transported the eunuch to the junk. From the deck above, the hunter overheard that morning’s conversation between Tubert and the contemptible eunuch, who prostrated himself below on the deck in the hold of the *Sea Angel*. Yi started by squirming, whining, hoping to placate, yet mock and manipulate, the grief-numbed foreigner.

“So unworthy, yes! I’ve failed, and I should die! I have been inept, Soldier Brother. See how I quail before your righteous wrath, your wealth, your power?”

He watched Tubert leap to his feet, heard the eunuch being kicked. Hard, bone-jarring kicks.

“Other Westerners were informed about this idea for new deeds to Chemulpo properties! The hammers of builders are now heard from dawn to dusk. New structures are springing up like mushrooms in this foreign settlement! This very proposal is spawned by the greed, hate and power enjoying free play among a half dozen foreign powers and their businessmen seeking to run Chaoshien! I pay you well to be informed!”

The eunuch bounced from a cabin corner, cringing once more in sudden, genuine terror at the barbarian’s unbridled, towering rage.

“You weren’t here!” Yi whined accusingly, summoning one last, desperate attempt to deflect the wrath. “You vanished, and no one knew where you went to! Am I to blame that deeds to foreign property may be reexamined? That an excess of wisdom was built into the treaties and regulations allowing for this treaty port?”

“Twenty thousand Mexican dollars as bribe to insure my settlement stays above such bickering?” growled Soldier Brother, readying another kick at the trembling eunuch. Terrified, Yi darted on his knees for the hold’s stairs. Pak, from the deck above, had gasped at the figure, and the threat, knowing that it was impossible for his foreigner, or any of them, to produce such an amount. Below, Tubert slumped into the chair near the Chinese eating table. “Wait,” he said, gesturing to Yi to rise and seat himself on the edge of the Western-style bed. “Tell me more of this problem.”

The Foreign Office clerk halted at the foot of the stairs.

“No more violence, please, Soldier Brother,” pleaded the eunuch, gasping, turning, blood and a front tooth flecking his robes, the secret elation from receiving praise, a yen bonus from *Mihashi-san*, and sharing in Japanese's celebration for Madam Ahn's cunning means of destroying Tubert's sultry foreign mistress evaporating.

The blow and the lost tooth could yet be worth five thousand of those Mexican dollars to be funneled into his own pockets, Yi struggled to remind himself, if this round eyed hellion can come up with the amount, which is doubtful. *Iii-gu*, if he cannot, the lost tooth and blood will be worth it to be rid of him, once and for all! “You, yourself, introduced the West to Chaoshien, did you not? Instead of laying down broad and sound principles to be fitted to circumstances as they arrive, the incredibly stupid attempt was made to anticipate circumstances. Thus, the elaborate court procedure was spawned by your Western treaties, with little regard to the consequences for barbarians demanding the system.”

“Stop talking in circles, eunuch. From exactly where comes the threat?”

“In your absence, the dust-defecating German and Russian and other envoys caviled at the court of Seoul,” said Yi, moving his hand to his jaw, wondering if it was broken. You're still dangerous, thought Yi, but you won't be for much longer, not with that insidious schemer and your onetime protector, Von Mollendorf, at last banished, and Lord Min, the queen's nephew, a pitiful shell, and your own legation about to deport you. Even though the American envoy has been removed, still roaring drunk, by the American

Legation's young naval lieutenant and other Americans.

Yi made no mention of the intense Japanese interests in the settlement. "They malign Chaoshien's ministers, cry for your banishment from Chaoshien for manhandling a Western envoy, and they lust for your station property."

"Prong all of them! And the treaty provisions were not my doing. Shufeldt only tried to prevent the absentee landlordism that allows extortion of barbarian traders in the foreign settlements in China," said Tubert, aware that the Japanese and great Western trading companies now in Chemulpo, having purchased land at a nominal fee under the treaty provisions, were seeking to evade, when possible, inevitable attempts at increasingly excessive squeeze. "Nothing wrong with that."

"Soldier Brother, the thought has no fault, only the reality. Speculators holding land in this treaty port now insist on prices thirty-fold the original cost, and one foreign devil even refuses to pay rent because the kingdom nominated the wrong officer to collect it which, through a considerable bribe, a court has sustained! Such costs and pressures prompts the kingdom to eye a recession of contracts, and causes jealous eyes to be cast upon your property. Twenty thousand Mexican dollars will spare your property from scrutiny."

Above deck, the hunter strained his ears. Pak's heart sank and he knew all would be lost when Soldier Brother responded.

"Done. But the amount is to be paid for from your personal savings, eunuch, which I'll repay with ten percent interest in two months, only if the bribe successfully protects my property. Your loss, if we lose. Get back to work for me. I'll want to be closely informed.

Now move!”

The battered eunuch cast a venomous look at the hunter on deck, as he limped toward the rowboat next to the junk.

“Wait in the rowboat,” the hunter called to the court clerk. “I’ll be with you in a few minutes.”

“What are you doing?” he asked Tubert, descending into the junk’s hold. “We’re hunters turned merchants, but not men of the sea. Unhealthy to live on the water. Come back and live at the settlement. And the amount you promised that court chameleon is beyond what we can hope to come up with.”

“Buying time, if it’s needed,” sighed Tubert heavily, warmed by the presence of the hunter. He wished he could tell Pak of the pending arms shipment, but did not dare to. “We’ll get by, I promise you that. And I’m not ready to occupy that house without the black woman. Not yet. How are things at the settlement?”

“Well enough,” said Pak, brushing aside small talk. “Hiding out on this cork log won’t mend the loss of the woman, nor protect you if *Miguk* troops reappear to apprehend you. I want you back, where we can watch after you.”

“I don’t know how to come back,” said Tubert, his voice beaten and emotionless. The older brother saw the anguish in his eyes. How quickly Soldier Brother had purchased the top of a knoll, where, in secret lest the Chinese defile it, Black Pearl’s Korean-style burial mound overlooked the treaty port.

“Old Man Song had a space made for you next to his burial site at the northern village,” said the hunter, wondering where their devious barbarian intended to get hold of twenty

thousand dollars. And nothing, Pak thought with suspicion, eases a man's grief at the loss of a woman like a new woman. "You are not considering being planted next to that foreign woman, are you?"

"So many things changed, so many people lost, so fast," sighed Tubert evasively. "Tell Kwan Il I'll come ashore to make a bank deposit in the morning, then accompany him with the wagon to our Seoul *posang*. I need to learn if the legation still plans to have me ousted from Chaoshien, need to figure out a way to shake those damned Japanese and Chinese who dog my every step. Then, with *jes-u*, I will be back."

* * * *

"I thought we were estranged," said the *kisaeng* after she had proclaimed her unworthiness of the small wooden box with a gold chain and pendant, then immediately suspended the necklace around her long delicate neck. "Even after I lost you to the black woman of the mandarin, I have waited here faithfully, pining for your return. So sorry about your loss of her, Soldier Brother. Dismount, please. For old times sake, bathe and have a meal."

"I'm just passing by," said Tubert, wishing to be certain that the followers behind him were connected to this cottage and the *kisaeng* dressed in a Japanese kimono. He had accompanied Kwan Il, with a wagonload of matches, tobacco and kegs of beer to the downtown Seoul *posang*, where the settlement compradore now awaited him. "Just respects from an old acquaintance, who would be a friend. And yes, the loss is deep."

"I will help ease the hurt and loss," said Chrsyanthemum, her thoughts instantly lighting with the prospect of providing Gunjiro-*san* with his closest-held dream. "Please, seat

yourself and I'll have my maid prepare a light meal. We'll have *cha*, or, if you prefer, *sake*. Then a bath."

"Perhaps tea. I can only stay a few minutes, Beautiful Flower," said Tubert, removing his boots, moving onto the once familiar sitting room, happy to be out of the heat of the scorching July sun.

Quickly, the prostitute walked to the kitchen and told the servant to hurriedly prepare rolled rice with diced meats and vegetables wrapped in paper-thin sheets of dried seaweed, to lace the food with arsenic and quickly serve it, then alert the henchmen of Mihashi that Tubert would soon be in a compromising position for an attack that would at last eliminate him.

"You've aged, Soldier Brother," she said, joining him, carrying a tray of barley tea. She poured a cup, handing it to him, then poured herself a cup and pretended to drink. She failed to notice that, like her, he but pretended to sip the brown liquid, and did not swallow. The old female servant arrived with another tray of rice rolls, then quickly left them. "Of course, so have I. I am twenty-seven, and the beauty that caused me to be named after the flower shall soon wither." Her eyes fluttered, and she cast her gaze downward. "How well I know what I may never aspire for."

"Not too late, even if you have not exactly been reared to cook and sew. Someday, some aristocrat or wealthy Japanese merchant will take you as concubine, perhaps even as wife."

"Sweet talk from one who visits as a diversion to forget a dead black foreign whore of a Chinaman," ruefully chided the *kisaeng*, feigning anguish. "Was she that good? Even

now, you wish not to talk of us. Of our future relationship.”

“You have beauty, and talent, to spare. Flawless. Ageless,” he said, waving away a cylindrical rice roll, noting the woman’s eyes continually moving toward the open gate. “The gift, this visit, is in memory of happier times past.”

“Ah, you remember them?” she said in a husky voice, marshaling all of her seductive charm, softly placing both hands on his left shoulder, removing the heavy leather pouch across his shoulder and placing it to the side, pushing him backwards onto the floor, her soft hands moving over his body, knowing that no man was born who could resist her. “When you left me, I thought of suicide, thought I would die,” she said rising, disrobing, wearing only the new necklace and pendant, her erotic sensuality even greater than before. She saw the lust rise in the barbarian’s eyes and knew she had him. “We’ll talk more later,” she whispered, herself wildly aroused. Then she was astride him, mixing his heat with her own. “No man ever made me feel like you did...”

Suddenly, the barbarian’s body rolled convulsively, propelling the naked woman from him, his right hand darting for the pouch as two Japanese stalkers rushed through the gate, screaming, flashing swords uplifted.

They hesitated in the open area for a second. Then a loud shot filled the air and the foremost *ronin* fell backwards with a bullet through his chest. The Korean woman screamed. The remaining assassin paused in confusion for a moment at the sight of his slain companion. Tubert’s mount whinnied, rising on both legs to the right of the room. The Japanese fled back out the gate.

Tubert was on his feet, smoking revolver in his right hand, tucking his trousers with the

left hand, moving with his pouch towards the porch where he began to put on his boots.

“It almost worked,” he said, glancing back at the trembling female whose eyes were wide with horror. He shook his head, his sadness genuine, suspicions confirmed. “I had to know.”

“You kill and kill!” screamed the Korean woman behind him, tearing the necklace from her neck, throwing it at him. “Do you think I am thrown away so easily? There are those who are stronger, more savage, than even you! Death to you, son of a cur. I want you dead!”

“Keep the gift,” said the *kojeng-ii*, mounting the nervous, snorting horse. “You’ve earned it. But never darken my path again.”

* * * *

“Strange. The Japanese legation has not mentioned a word about the man you shot,” said George Foulk from the office of the American envoy in Seoul. Very strange, considering how they hate you, and it being an opportunity to clamor even more loudly for your deportation.

“Maybe not strange, George,” said Tubert. “I shot him in self-defense, after all. We’ll see. And this is the first chance I’ve had to drop by and said thanks for defusing the tussle with old Parker.”

“The outcome would have been much different had he not been a drunken derelict, Timothy. We worked up medical papers on him as he deteriorated even more after you disappeared. No choice but to ship him back to America, leaving me with this,” said the harried young ensign. By default, he was America’s representative to the kingdom, now

operating the legation with his own salary. Few expenses would ever be repaid to him for the legation that was temporarily going to be withdrawn. Happily, almost, there had been no need to apologize for Tubert's manhandling of the besotted Parker, not with the loud opposition the queen of Chaoshien herself had raised at just the hint of removing the onetime ward of the kingdom.

True, Foulk thought, Tubert had translated for William Aston and King Kojong, helping the British to move onto those three islands down south. And although the royal couple had denounced the ill-fated occupation that had taken the British and Russian confrontation to the brink of war in Chaoshien, not a word of dispersion was heard about Timothy's pivotal role in it. But then neither nations nor people in Chaoshien were usually what they appear to be, myself included, thought the thirty-two-year-old junior naval officer. All the same, Komun-do had been William's Waterloo, and it was good to have that cunning, sinister Englishman out of Chaoshien, back to his work as a Japanese translator in Tokyo.

He saw the tired, worn look on the face of the once-feisty Caucasian and forced himself to feel sorry for Tubert. At least, Foulk thought, he cared about the controversial black woman, and it shows. He might be misdirected and racially confused, but Timothy is not a rake, like King Kojong himself, who has three hundred concubines, but only sees them when approved by the queen. The ensign handed Tubert a glass of cognac, hiding the revulsion at the odor of garlic and hot pepper that exuded from the eccentric outcast.

"And I'm so sorry about Pearl. Is there something the legation can do? After all, she was an American citizen."

"Nothing left to do," said Tubert, wearily. "I've buried her on a plot of ground in the

hills above Bupyong. A modest mound and unmarked tablet, so as not to attract robbers, or Yuan's men. Each Korean thanksgiving, I'll tend the mound, remove weeds and underbrush. It's as if I lost my world, George. Everything... coming apart."

Pak and Kwan Il had accompanied Tubert to a simple graveside ceremony. The young comradore had swiftly coordinated for the burial of the body. All of them were fearful that the epidemic, still largely confined to Seoul, might erupt in the settlement and the treaty port. Townsend, Satchiko, and Aaron Buford were present as Tubert grudgingly allowed Townsend to say a few words over the side.

"Dear God, we stand here next to you today to say farewell to a woman we could never have known in the United States," said Townsend, an especially pained, somber expression on his face, his voice thoughtful and precise. "A slave woman, born on my own family's plantation, blood of my blood, who shared a part of her remarkable life with Timothy, and with us. Take her into thy bosom, Lord. Heal the loss of those of us who loved her. Please hear our thanks for allowing her to exist on earth." Immediately afterwards, just before taking up residence on the *Sea Angel*, Tubert ordered Kwan Il to have the servant woman gather all of Joo's possessions and burn them.

"You're not the only one who fell in love with a woman who can never be taken home," said Foulk, seating himself behind the desk with a cognac. He told Tubert of how he had become an ardent student of Japanese art and culture immediately after graduation from the naval academy and attached to the Asiatic Squadron.

"At Nagasaki, there is a quiet teahouse in the hills. The teahouse is kept by an old man and his wife, with a lovely daughter who, to the surprise of myself and other midshipmen, spoke English well and fluently. An orderly house, almost austere. But I noticed that the

old couple treated their daughter with great deference, wouldn't allow any foreigner who was not everything a gentleman should be, to enter, much less speak to her. The place became sort of a club for us young middies, who tripped over one another to have conversation with her. She and I, however, spoke only Japanese together. I've decided to never leave Asia. To never lose her."

"You've lost a lot of your starch, George," said Tubert, surprised, sipping the cognac and staring at the young American officer. "Maybe you've been out here too long."

"She speaks to no one else now. Know why? Last month, I married her. Back in the days of the great war between the Satsuma and Choshu clans, a noble Choshu family was wiped out, all but their baby girl, who was rescued and carried away by the two upper servants. They moved to the port, supported themselves and her by keeping that exclusive teahouse for people who will never recognize her. She's my reason the very sun rises, Timothy. I hope to God someday you can find that."

"Why don't you bring her here, like Walter and Satchiko?"

"Too unstable. If the legation does actually close, I'll resign from the navy, settle in Japan, hopefully become as Japanese as you've become Korean. Not as flamboyant as you, of course. Tell me, do you think killing one of the Japanese who has trailed you has ended their shadowing you? Why the shadowing?"

"Too early to tell," said Tubert. "But there's often been two or three Chinese right behind me, watching me. You'd think Viceroy Yuan would call his dogs off, now that Joo is buried."

"Maybe, maybe not," said Foulk, carefully watching Tubert's face for expression.

Strange how the only person taken by Cholera in the treaty port so far was the black woman. And hadn't Viceroy Yuan noted to von Brandt that a foreigner had frozen the feet off of his business advisor's merchant son up along the border while Timothy had disappeared into Chaoshien's highlands? "Captain Jewell was here for a port visit last week, down from a Shanghai. Jewell says The Bund is buzzing with a rumor of a huge fire-arms shipment soon to be sent to Korea. Everyone is watching everyone else here. No one is acknowledging any scheme to import arms, of course. Have you heard anything?"

Tubert rose and turned toward the door.

"I've no time for rumors, George," he said, hoping that Foulk had not seen his shocked expression. "I've got to do something to get these damned spooks from tailing my every move. See you at Chemulpo's Foreigners Club this weekend."

* * * *

Truly, thought Horace Allen as he wiped sweat from his brow in the sweltering July heat, if hell has ever manifested itself on earth, it is this cholera epidemic now sweeping Seoul. An afternoon shower had drenched the capitol. The great summer rains had ended, the heat and humidity maddening and very much like that of Ohio, although some evenings the weather grew surprisingly cool and it was impossible to keep victims of the epidemic warm. The lack of heat for the shivering, nearly lifeless patients, helped to cause an eighty-percent fatality rate.

The lanky, red-haired American with a goatee glanced down Mo Ha Kwan's row of makeshift sheds and huts serving as hospitals and way stations and once again swore to

be more persuasive in convincing King Kojong to expand the tiny Western hospital and medical school.

How many days now? Six? Seven? And now a thousand people die each day in Seoul alone. It was last week when Timothy's black woman died, wasn't it? Wondered the exhausted, disheartened and dehydrated Westerner. Why, this is Sunday. I've even missed Sunday worship. Of course, prayers of the Western community, even those of the Roman Catholic priests, were being said each evening for the ignorant, dying masses of Chaoshien. A few of the evangelist missionaries were still backing him. But he was no longer in mission favor because most of them were jealous of his ever-growing influence with King Kojong and his non-medical interests.

Throughout Seoul sounded incantations, drums, cymbals and a trumpeting barrage to shoo the fiery demons from the suffering poor. Native *impyung* doctors and shamans were at work throughout the dying in the city, moving from house to house. More noise was made for the dead, and by those near dead, than for the living.

In the shed with Allen were twenty moaning, twisting patients. They repeatedly fouled themselves. He had feverishly worked with them for the past two hours. Diarrhea signaled the start of cholera. Since relieving his colleague, Doctor J. Hunter Wells, at the makeshift Mo Ha Kwan shelter near the stream of death that morning, Allen had worked frantically with more than one hundred new patients. They, along with a handful of Japanese doctors working desperately over at South Gate, treated patients using salol, supplemented by high irrigation of the bowels with salt or tannic acid solution and stimulation and food.

It'll take more than prayers to end this scourge, and my influence with His Majesty is

not enough for the needed measures to be taken, thought Allen, gloomily watching the work force of two thousand sullen coolies ordered to Chongyechon Stream that morning now standing idle, refusing to enter the fetid waters that were the source of the epidemic. The land at this end of Seoul was low and marshy, the periodic overflow of the stream spreading the illness. Sediment and human excrement layered and clogged the streambed, increasing the problem, raising the water level even further. More than two hundred years earlier, in Sixteen Sixty, two hundred thousand men had spent seventy-five days dredging the stream, diking it with stone, but the ministry in charge of periodic dredging had been neglectful in recent decades. Flowing from west to east through the center of the circular valley and later pouring into the Han River, Chongyechon meant “clear, clean stream.”

Chongyechon Stream was the only possible drainage for the entire valley.

And the lack of dredging since then, with this indescribable filth in the midst of a city, is astounding. We’ve determined that the cholera’s breeding grounds are here. The death and carnage are beyond imagination, and about to grow worse, thought Allen miserably, helplessly, noting the exhaustion of the Korean work crew next to him in the shed.

Gone from Seoul were the oxen and other animals carrying loads of brushwood, jostling with occasional rickshaws and carts of all descriptions. The normally sleepy city of one-story thatched houses, with only an occasional tiled roof, the most imposing structures those of the large halls of the palaces, was immobilized. Even the traditional night market at Chongno, Seoul’s main avenue, had ceased to function as the cholera’s toll spiraled upward. The gates of the city now remained open for the unceasing procession of the living from the ancient capital, even though all too many Koreans remained obstinately in their hovels, and were dying in them.

But, sighed Allen to himself, I can't help admiring the Koreans for their friendliness compared to what I experienced during my year in China before coming here.

Some, of course, were unwilling to learn or even try new ways and will not change even as this darkness ravages them and their entire families.

Yet, they are hospitable to a fault among themselves. A Korean allows indolent friends and relatives to impose on him, virtually to eat him out of house and home. And the street beggars seen in Japan and China are absent here because even the humblest Korean has a family place of refuge from starvation, no matter how harshly their own officials repress them.

A nation with practically no beggar class within their cities, thought Allen absently. Unheard of among all other nations in Asia. And the prospect of bringing light to their darkness; isn't that what draws me ever closer to this land and her incredible people? Yes, our great tasks have only just started. We'll provide the transition from the mists of a glorious past now in ruins, get through this horrid present where even the brightest Koreans are unable to clearly focus on a future. Not like the Catholics, who lost tens of thousands of heads here blatantly grabbing at souls. No, the Protestants so far had largely listened to Allen's call for orphanages and medical stations, not town-to-town evangelizing, to win the hearts of these people to the church.

We will bring them the good things of the West. That is, we will if I live, and if enough of these powerful people, too hard-headed and strong to quickly change, survive, Allen told himself, returning to the present. He spotted Timothy Tubert leading yet another coolie crew with more victims toward Mo Ha Kwan. Tubert had arrived the day before, unexpectedly plunging into the inspection, disinfecting and removal efforts, railing,

coaxing, physically intimidating and driving work teams. He entered homes himself, personally carrying out bodies, ignoring the howls and thrown stones of relatives. No foreigner knew the city, or Koreans, better than the so called Soldier Brother of the northern hunters, and with him the disaster relief effort had received a sudden bolt from heaven. At the foot of the conical northern Flourishing Benevolence Mountain bounding Western Seoul to the hills below Namsan Mountain, from Camel Back Nakta-san Mountain starting at East gate and running north, Chaoshien's eccentric white renegade was tirelessly driving inefficient work parties into functional units.

The greatest problem was removing corpses from the homes in Seoul. The Korean work parties were understandably fearful of handling the dead, hesitant to enter homes in the face of hostility of the still-living relatives who insisted on burying their dead with due ceremony at ancestral burial plots. Tubert was constantly on the streets, aggressively cajoling work parties, galvanizing the all-important rapid removal of the dead to the mass graves at last being dug outside the city walls.

It is as if he's waging a one-man war against the demons that claimed his black mistress, Allen realized, gratefully. At last, the dead within Seoul are being cleared. Without these thousands of men entering the stream of hell, even that will not be enough to stem this.

"Here's some more," said Tubert, his clothing soaked with filth and perspiration. He spotted the three ever present Chinese glaring at him from a distance. The Japanese no longer shadowed him. How to shake the Chinese? "Did the order from the king arrive to get these crews into the stream?"

"I wouldn't hold my breath, Timothy," said Allen, pointing out spots on the floor for his laborers to place the stricken victims. "It's difficult for his majesty to understand the

concept of quarantine to try to prevent further spread of this scourge. He fears my recommendations would cause riots.”

Tubert’s tiredness left his face. He cast an impatient look at the well-intentioned medical doctor.

Damn those Chinese shadows and these indolent coolies! He thought. And damnation to this horrid pestilence. And damnation to Kojong.

“Doctor, I want you to walk with me, over there.” Allen accompanied Tubert down an alley that took them along the odoriferous upper reaches of the drainage stream where the two thousand disgruntled coolies of the sullen workforce lay idle along the one eighth of a mile stretch. The last of them had halted next to a five-arched water gate exit, part of the city wall that spanned the foul stream. In normal times, the amount of water in the stream was not overwhelming, but it turned into a raging torrent in the rainy season, each year during the monsoons destroying many of the hovel homes along its banks.

“Good God!” cried Allen, suddenly vomiting, then holding his nose. Three corpses were floating under the bridge. Nearby, children were playing near the stream, their mothers washing clothing. An hour earlier, the stench had driven a woman temporarily insane.

Behind them, at the opening of the alleyway, watched the three Chinese surveillance men, scowling in disgust and revulsion.

“Now, you’re sure flowing water would end this?”

“It’s the only hope,” said Allen. “But look at them.”

“Then hold this instead of your breath, doctor,” said Tubert, unslinging the weather-beaten pouch suspended from his shoulder, handing it to the physician.

“*Ya!* Hey, you there!” cried Tubert to a nearby Korean ministry official squatting on his haunches among the disgruntled coolies. The barbarian’s angry voice pierced the air, instantly bringing the man to his feet. “I want six hundred men formed into three-man shoveling teams in ten minutes, the remaining fourteen hundred ready to haul away silt on their backs using their wooden A-frame *chee-jae* devices! *Bal-ee, Bal-ee!* Move quickly!” Then the white man of Chaoshien, raging, snarling, was moving among them.

The teams reluctantly formed, standing along the stream, but with no intent to enter it.

“Who can blame them?” sighed Allen. “It’s a stream of death.”

Tubert strode impatiently to the banks. He put the straps of an A-frame around his shoulders. He snatched a long-handled shovel from the hands of a nearby coolie.

Suddenly, only the buzzing of insects could be heard.

“I don’t advise that, Timothy,” Allen said quickly. “Pointless to...”

But the unique outcast that Allen suspected was only Western on the outside sloshed into Chongyechon, wading thigh-high into black filth, securing the A-frame in the sludge. Tubert began shoveling slime onto the carrying device. Then he shouldered the burden, wading back to the banks. He strapped another empty nearby A-frame to his shoulder. With grim determination, he repeated the task, then reentered and carried one of the bodies from the deadly ooze. He returned, shouldered a third loaded carrying device. Then shame swept the silent ranks of the coolie work crews.

By the hundreds, they waded into the stream with him, and set to work. Slowly, the deadly, stagnant waters of Chongyechon began to flow.

Late that afternoon he led a recovery team through Huam-dong, then partway up a

Namsan Mountain path to remove a dozen corpses from Hanmyo Temple. Too tired to move, he ordered the crew to take the bodies away. In front of the temple's central alcove, before an image of the dark, red-faced War God Kwan-u flanked by two pairs of soldiers. Tubert stared at his favorite deity. Woo the monk had once related to him the fable that the spirit of the ancient Chinese soldier and general had settled on the Korean Peninsula during the horrendous Japanese invasions four hundred years earlier. The temple faced the east. Within were ceremonial drums, old battle flags, bladed spears and various paintings depicting battles in which Kwan-u had fought.

As dusk fell, Chaoshien's Soldier Brother bowed, dropping to his knees on *tatami* mats covering the floor.

"Oh, Kwan-u," he began reverently, in Chinese. "Thee who brought me to these shores, after all the hurtful losses, challenges and agonies, grant me the strength and *joss* needed to overcome the perils and challenges of the weeks to come, if I am intended to survive, I beseech thee."

Outside, the illiterate Korean foreman and removal team's sunburned, superstitious coolies bearing the dead away in litters, heard the barbarian's supplications in the language of the Middle Kingdom, and shuddered, paying no attention to the three Chinese at the entrance.

When Tubert later emerged from the temple, the Chinese were gone.

* * * *

"Our barbarian brother has become like a boat without a rudder," Kwan II told Pak upon their return from the two-day visit to Seoul. "At all times, we were shadowed by Chinese

and two yellow dwarves. The Chinese and the Japanese following us sometimes almost bumped into each other. After we delivered the tobacco and matches at the *posang*'s stall at the market in downtown Seoul, leaving the wagon there, he insisted on visiting the *kisaeng*'s quarters on the hill over at Yongsan."

"He what?" said Pak, his anxiety soaring. "She's become the plaything of a Japanese! *Iii-gu*, not her again. Truly, his trek north and the loss of the black female has addled his brains. Did they...?"

"I know not, only that one Japanese of those who do constant surveillance of him lay dead behind him, having tried to attack him in her hillside home."

"*Iii-gu*, I remember the home," moaned Pak, glancing at Mun. "He disappears to the north, returns exhausted after a month, and hardly says a word about what happened to him there. His misplaced grief at the loss of his ill-acquired Western woman clouds any judgment he had left and jeopardizes this settlement, which has become vital for the prosperity of our homes to the north. And I know damned well when he's avoiding me. And those Mo Ha Kwan? His living on that floating wooden crate? All a ruse to distance himself from us as he concocts his next stunt! It's got to end, I say."

And it will end, thought Pak. Just as the growing depredations of tax collectors and other Chaoshien officials, and growing starvation and poverty among this kingdom's subjects, will end. The night before, Chon Pung Jun, a charismatic, radical *Tonghak* leader, had reappeared after a period of years in the settlement, disguised as a petty merchant. Well into the night at a quiet, remote country wine-shack outside of the town, the penniless firebrand drank with the hunter, pleading in whispers for support for the fledgling Eastern Learning Movement.

“As you know, hunter, we are divinely inspired, some of our leaders with the ability to leap from one mountaintop to the other. But next to our mysticism is the misery; in Kaesong, many farmers are suffering because Seoul has blithely promised away much of this year’s ginseng crop to the Japanese to help defray repayments of a loan! Worse yet, in your own far northern province, government forces threaten to move against farmers refusing to harvest the soy crop sold to Japan below costs, as reparations payment. No more hedging, Pak *sang-nim*,” the top-knotted insurrectionist said, staring straight into the eyes of the northerner. “Opening Chaoshien to outside forces places new diabolical tools into the hands of oppressors to grind all Coreans into the dust! Only we have the faith, the divine mandate. But we need cash, and soon, guns and blood.”

“Not that simple, Chon,” said Pak, feeling trapped, as Soldier Brother was trapped by the double-edged graces of Yi Chaoshien. Gone was the thatched-roof shanty that had housed his northern family. In its place was a newly erected tiled-roof home and fifteen hectares of fine, lowland ground that yielded more than enough to feed his aging mother, wife, children and relatives. Even a hint of being a *Tonghak* sympathizer would cause province officials to cease all efforts to approve the purchase of another seven hectares of land a short walk from the hamlet! “The barbarian here limits our smuggling of modern weapons to hunting and recreation users, keeping careful track of who purchases our firearms. And some us cannot afford to be identified with the *Tonghak*.”

“Sergeant Kim’s rebellion was recreation, indeed. Are you saying the foreigner has a leash on you? See here, hunter! The Westerners, and their influences, shall be driven into the sea. Your white devil, who so readily laps the milk and honey from the royal court’s dung buckets, will be among the first to be driven out. Or killed.”

“I said no such thing!” Denied Pak hotly. The fear of losing the new prosperity he provided to his family through the barbarian’s business operation, conflicted with the clear need to erase, once and for all, the corrupt system of rule and the presence of outsiders. “No one has a leash on this neck, and no one ever will. Secretly, the brotherhood has our full-fledged support, but I mean quiet cash contributions. I will not imperil the well being of my family! I will not. And when the day of reckoning comes, you will not touch our Soldier Brother. You won’t have to; for with the dynasty gone his soul will be scourged, purged. And there will be made a place for him in this land he loves. We’ll watch for the day when we can slip modern firearms to the *Tonghak* brethren. Until then, only significant, but secret, cash contributions. *Hadda-so?*”

Now Pak looked around at the faces in the hunters’ quarters and his nerves frayed. There was not hope for a better eventual Corea without a strengthened *Tonghak*. But equally there was no hope for the continued security and prosperity enjoyed by the northern families if the Chemulpo settlement was lost from their barbarian’s lust for savagery and female companionship.

“With women, he’s got the judgement of a rabbit,” observed Mun, shaking his head. “Of course, there’s the hair-covered Western wenches next door. We might match him up with one, except for the influences of Ahn Madam that would go with such an arrangement.”

“You’re one to talk,” said Pak haughtily. “But I think you’re right, and it’s time for us to protect our interests. Remember that landed *yangban* gentry, Pae Song Ip, and his offer to search for a suitable woman for our hot-blooded brother? Why don’t you get your flapping mouth and buttocks quickly to Taesong-dong, north of the Imjin? Tell him I beg

him to locate for us quickly a Korean female, the most innocent and decent one he can find. One that I can control. It's the only answer to our problems.”

* * * *

Tak Cha Mao observed the rickshaw with the old sea pirate approach the restaurant on the avenue next to the headquarters of the Chinese garrison in Seoul. He was pleased that Captain T'ang was a few minutes early for the summons, cloaked in an invitation, to dine with the businessman.

Let that old raider of Korean cattle and ponies be my instrument of revenge, for surely there must be atonement for what happened to First Son on the heights of Mount Paektu, thought the harried opium overlord. Now Second Son is newly arrived from the comforts of Shanghai. With much less drive and energy he struggles pathetically, with no enthusiasm, on the slopes of that cursed hill, frightened by the fate of his brother and the enormity of our undertaking.

The frail, pigtailed skipper of Small and Crazy's junk entered the filthy restaurant. The smell of cooking grease permeated the air. The cooking itself added to the heat and humidity of the post-monsoonal August afternoon. T'ang nodded as the restaurant owner's son welcomed the spry old coastal raider, then escorted the seafarer in black cotton pajamas to Mao.

“Thank you for accepting the offer to dine, captain,” said the tired, quasi-official head

of Chinese commerce in Chaoshien, knowing that no Chinese employee of a barbarian, however loyal, would dare ignore such a secret invitation. “At last, I can have the meal together with you that I’ve been hoping to for years.”

“The pleasure is entirely mine,” said T’ang, unsmiling, bowing, feeling his urine freeze. He was fully aware that he had no choice but to be here. He hated what he knew was official interest, the facade of socializing but a tool of manipulation. A corner of the eatery had been rearranged with only one table and two chairs, to prevent anyone from hearing their conversation. “How could I pass up the opportunity to finally meet the most famous merchant in Asia?”

“Yes, success. But the costs and demands of success are proving very high, captain,” said Mao. He led the *feng-qua*’s lackey to the table, gesturing to the visitor to be seated. “Join me in a simple meal. The food here is modest but adequate. A feature so hard to find in Chaoshien, don’t you agree?”

“Entirely true,” replied T’ang, wondering what subtle meanings were in Mao’s words. “Corean food is tangy, spicy, filled with extremes, so hard to prepare. Even after all these years, I am only now acquiring a taste for some of it.”

“For Chinese here, some say it is a matter of reacquiring the taste, that in times of old, even before M’ing China and the long-past Koryo Dynasty, a great Chinese army swept down this peninsula. The destruction was complete. When the Chinese forces withdrew, one out of three Corean women were supposedly taken as bounty to China, some as wives, others as female slaves. This accounts for the spicy tastes of certain Chinese provinces. Only a fable, of course, but it speaks of reacquiring tastes, don’t you think?”

For twenty minutes, well into the multi-course, delicious meal, both men prattled pleasantries, until at last the Shanghai businessman surprised the illiterate, visibly uncomfortable junk captain.

“Let me be frank, captain. Calamity has befallen my family. My first-born is destroyed, turned into a human shell without feet, while furthering business interests in the north which coincide with those of our Mandarins. I understand you knew my First Son?”

“Yes, a magnificent young man. He spent time aboard the *Sea Angel*, when neither the owner or his brutish Korean hunters were present. The north is such an unsettled area, honorable Mao. It grieves me to hear that misfortune has befallen him.”

“A curse hovers over my interests and those of the Celestial Empire,” said Mao, emotion and tears filling his eyes. “Weeks ago, a lone *feng-qua* fell upon my son, forcing him into a stupor, then freezing his feet in the cold waters of the lake atop Mount Paektu. Very bad for any Westerner to know of our operations there! The entire resources of my house have been thrown into the Paektu opium venture. And there is only one *feng-qua* on earth who could, and would, do such a thing to a member of my family.”

“Beneath heaven, you must avenge such an act, take any action to protect your interests. How can I help you, esteemed Mao?”

“Your *feng-qua* was raised from a babe in my very house. The fact that we did not cause him to perish has been a dark cloud over our heads until this very day. Small and Crazy mysteriously disappeared for weeks last month, did he not?”

“He did,” chuckled T’ang. “He foolishly manhandled the besotted American envoy, who since has been removed from Chaoshien. All because of the dark-colored trollop he

stole for Viceroy Yuan, and who has, thankfully, died. The Soldier Brother had no choice but to disappear. As you must know, he's of a highly volatile nature. Very emotional."

"He is the one who has made my first-born a human vegetable, a consumer of opium to dullen the pain and awareness of what has happened to him, his devastation total! Almost as bad, your long-nosed gargoyle has knowledge of our opium production. If reported to Western authorities, this could prove disastrous. There is high-level interest and involvement, captain. Yes, he offended the viceroy by taking the Western female, but he now has become a grave threat. China needs him eliminated, as I do."

"He doesn't kill easily," said T'ang, uncomfortably. "Have you heard? He killed another Japanese? Besides enjoying special status from the court, and, seemingly the gods of Chaoshien, he has friends among the Western powers. Then, too, there are the vile, skin-clad northern Korean savages who loyally serve and protect him even to the death."

"We're not asking you to destroy him. But the power, might, and resources of the Middle Kingdom shall now be marshaled to his destruction. Viceroy Yuan, even the Northern Ports Trade Superintendent, now urgently directs this. My own vengeance weighs heavily in it. This is to be carefully done, away from the eyes of foreign and Korean powers. We ask that you but watch for an opportunity to deliver him to us. Reliable old sources in Shanghai, who share an interest in his downfall, have sent word to me that he is to obtain a highly secret arms shipment for the Korean kingdom in early September."

"I am not opposed to that," said T'ang in earnest, deciding not to trifle with this broker of life and death. "But the risks to my own interests, and my own life, would be enormous, Esteemed Mao. My livelihood would end."

“Your livelihood would just begin, seafarer! As soon as this so-called Soldier Brother exists no more, you shall head our river operations, with your own fleet of boats. You shall transport equipment and supplies up the Yalu, bringing down the fortunes in opium from Paektu for sale in Chaoshien and distant areas as far away as Hong Kong. You’ll gain security and wealth such as you cannot imagine.”

T’ang placed his eating utensils on the table, waving aside flies. The meal was ended. He sat and thought for some seconds.

“He now lives aboard the junk, refusing to reside in the settlement house he and the black woman occupied, except when I make short delivery trips up or down the coast. He is reckless, but close-lipped. Even his hunters are never aware of what he may do next. Still, yesterday he informed me that in weeks to come I should stock enough supplies to feed the crew and ten men for two weeks for a voyage somewhere along the East Coast. I know not where or why, and I may not have chance to tell you when we sail. But should you see that the junk has not returned to the treaty port for two or three days, then you will know his mission has begun.”

Tak Cha Mao nodded, pouring clear Chinese liquor into two cups, handing a cup to the old seafarer, and raising a cup in a quiet toast.

“To another vital step in ridding Asia once and for all of Westerners, and then the Japanese, by amassing wealth and power at Korean expense. To prosperity, captain,” Mao said, his eyes shining. “With vengeance!”

* * * *

In her world, the young Korean widow knew it was hopeless to attempt to resist the

inhuman, tormenting abuses of her Korean mother-in-law. How many weeks had passed since her *nampyon*, her husband by an arranged marriage, had feverishly floated into the Great Void after the incurable illness?

Six, perhaps eight weeks?

In the coming darkness of that hot summer night, nineteen-year-old Yun Su Ga was too sore and exhausted to recall. As the slender girl arrived from the fields and hurried to set the tables with bowls of rice, broiled fish, *kimchi* and other *bongchon* side dish delicacies, she had no tears. The well of tears had dried, not so much from the cruel fate, which so contrasted with her happy upbringing at the home of her modestly affluent parents who grew ginseng on the hills of Kaesong to the north, but rather from a grim resignation to her fate and future.

No tears, and she marshaled her courage that night with an awareness that everyday for the rest of her life, she could look forward to enduring the depredations of her deceased husband's mother, who hated the sight of her. It had been a properly arranged marriage, her husband five years younger than herself, barely beyond puberty and still clinging to his domineering mother, still even wetting his bedding, and now dead after but five months of marriage and before any conjugal relations had ever been consummated.

No tears, for in accord with the time-honored customs of Chaoshien, a new wife was to expect to be treated with the same concern and affection as a husband treated his oxen. Dolls and toys were unknown, and it was unthinkable for Su Ga to ever allow her in-laws to hear of the vibrant laughter or stimulating conversations that her own beloved mother and father in Kaesong had secretly allowed her. *Oma-nee's* hatred of her was normal, at least for the first years of a marriage, for mothers of Chaoshien poured into and, in turn,

demanded from their sons, all the love and attention that was unattainable from any other channel.

It would have been so different, had I borne a child, thought the newly widowed Korean woman, biting her lip, willing away tears, dabbing sweat from her brow as she watched the sun disappear behind the hills of Munsan, but a few miles south of the Imjin River, many miles south of Kaesong, where her family lived. At nineteen, the opinionated and outgoing Korean girl had intimidated many matchmakers, and her parents in desperation had married her to the son of this grain merchant family south of the Imjin River in Paju Township.

“*Ya!* Where’s my barley tea?” came the crackling, unhappy voice of her husband’s mother from the sitting room of the country home.

“Coming, *Oma-nee!*” cried Su Ga, rising quickly, feeling the welt rise on her back from the fiery matriarch’s switch from earlier that day, knowing that the *cha* prepared by the servant woman had cooled, and whatever temperature she served the tea at would meet with disapproval.

I shall not disgrace my family, resolved the young woman, bracing to passively submit to all degradations from her former rival and now unquestioned owner. After all, the measure of personal education and character lay not in what was outwardly expressed, but what was held in. And I shall never give *Oma-nee* reason to criticize the Yun family. Korean wives retained their maiden names, although children took the father’s name. The erect young widow, tall for a Korean, respected but did not love nor expect to be loved by the woman’s son, and the supreme misfortune of her childless status could be made bearable only by enduring the unbearable. Returning to her parents’ home would have

been unheard of, a total loss of face. ‘How different, had I been blessed with the birth of a son, for that and the passage of time would have mellowed this mother-in-law. I shall live a miserable life, even more wretched than that of peasants and this house’s servants, at the hands of my husband’s mother-in-law.’

Now she rose before the sun each morning, quickly cleaning, marinating and roasting fish over open wooden embers, cooking rice and setting the breakfast table for the foul-tempered mother-in-law who blamed the northern woman for the stresses that had claimed the life of her son. Then she began the first of four morning trips, each a distance of more than a mile over hills and paths, carrying fifty pounds of drinking water in a vase balanced on her head to this country home. The rest of the day, until near nightfall, would be spent transporting forty pounds of food for the lunch meal and the evening meal to the eight peasant squatters who tilled the fields and harvested the crops for this feudalistic merchant family, daring only to quickly eat whatever was left over before joining them in back-breaking labor in the squalid heat and sun.

The mother-in-law, with her deceased husband's brother, son his wife and two small daughters, were seated in the sitting room, scowling as the barren hussy, who would have taken from *Oma-nee* the attention of her precious youngest son, gracefully entered the room with a serving tray. The sister-in-law had confiscated the dresses of silk and satin sent south from her parents. Now Su Ga had but her soiled cotton blouse and skirt.

“Both the rice and this tea are cold! Give it to the servants, but none for you!” screamed the middle-aged woman, herself a widow. She threw her bowl of rice at the inattentive, unwelcome woman. “How my poor son would have suffered at your hands, you barren wench.” The women of Kaesong, in the previous dynasty known as Song Do and once

the capital of Chaoshien, wore a peculiar large hat and rarely married outside of the Kaesong region. *Oma-nee* had destroyed Su Ga's hat made of straw, wide, pointed and umbrella-like, resembling the hats worn by Buddhists, a holdover from centuries before, and a deliberate gesture of contempt for the Seoul dynasty upstarts of Yi Chaoshien. "I should have known better than to let that honey-tongued matchmaker trap me into marrying my precious child to the likes of you. Go out there and prepare proper rice, and make it quick!"

Su Ga moved quickly to the outside earthen-floor kitchen, aware of the flicker in her brother-in-law's eyes, knowing it was only a matter of time before he assaulted her. She shooed aside the nervous slave woman, and washed and began to cook a new pot of rice, seating herself on the small, polished wooden porch next to the kitchen, her back against the mud wall, listening to the chorus of rickets. The Munsan villagers treated her differently now. Men eyed her, taunted her. Children mocked and teased the young widow, the village women going out of their way to make caustic remarks. Even the farmhands were beginning to make obscene utterances.

If one of them comes at me, I will cut out my own heart with the jangdo knife that still dangles from the rawhide string around my neck, thought Su Ga, feeling the outline of the concealed traditional knife worn suspended by a leather band from the neck. She soon arose from the tiny, narrow porch and walked for more firewood outside the walls of the country home. Later, when the heat cooled, she would take one of the water containers and wash the family clothing by beating them with a wooden stick. Then, after everyone else was asleep, she would bathe, pouring cold water over herself, rubbing the day's sweat and grime from her perfectly proportioned body before sleep such as that known only to

those near ultimate spiritual, physical and emotional exhaustion, embraced her.

‘If I’m lucky, I shall fall ill and die early,’ she thought, rising with an armful of twigs and dried wood, not noticing the movements of several figures silently running toward her in the darkness. ‘For I’ll never survive the winter here.’

* * * *

“I wonder if they’ll *he-da he-da* their first night together,” chuckled Mun. The band of five hunters strode silently, single-file and armed with lances, along the moonlit country path toward Munsan. A sixth hunter remained with horses in a cove of trees to the east.

“Soldier Brother may reject her,” said Kwan Il. “Westerners have strange ways about such things.”

Three hours before, they had left Pae Sung Ip’s house with directions to the newly widowed girl.

“He won’t reject her,” said Mun, confidently. “He likes good-looking females. They say if a Kaesong woman marries, or moves away from the old capital, she expects to return and finish life’s journey in her birthplace. Imagine a big-butted Kaesong woman for our wayward barbarian? They say if a Kaesong woman dies before she can retrace her steps, a Kaesong woman ends her life with her face turned to Kaesong.”

Although hundreds of years had passed since the Yi Dynasty had taken the place of the previous dynasty whose capital was in Kaesong, lingering contempt and resentments withstood the passage of time. Kaesong people aloofly called pigs *Syeng Kyei*, also applying the name of the founder of Yi Chaoshien.

“It could be an interesting match,” agreed Kwan Il. “Whereas the whole kingdom eats rice, the Kaesong people persist in mixing their rice with other cereals. They even have their own way of measuring and handling grains, common grain merchants and our *posang* disdainfully keep telling me ‘That’s the way the rustics of Kaesong do it.’ No choice, since Soldier Brother doesn’t want any of Madam Ahn’s round-eyed whores. I hope this works.”

“Shhh! It’ll work,” said Pak, at the head of the band. “He’s as randy as a tiger in heat, his own lust rivaling Mun’s. If it doesn’t work, Soldier Brother will dredge through the Alleys of Blood and bring a tramp female viper home. I’m taking no more chances. Pity we have no young widow for him at Kanggye. Quiet now, or the townspeople of Munsan will be stoning us before we can get our hands on the girl.”

The quest for a mate for Tubert had quickly escalated to a scintillating effort, the country squire of Taesong-dong also enthusiastically committed to seeing to it that a suitable female companionship was located for the special barbarian.

“I have received word of a Munsan widow, the daughter of a modestly comfortable Kaesong farming family,” Pae told them, conspiratorially and in hushed tones, over a hurried meal at his country home north of the Imjin River. “She is childless, her younger husband reportedly dying before connubial bliss was performed. Of course, she is an ever-present reminder of their loss, and her in-laws detest her, and would put up only the façade of resistance should she be stolen from the village. As you know, anyone who can take and keep a village widow, but at their own peril.”

“I want a woman of quality for him, mind you,” said the crusty northern tiger hunter. “But also one that is submissive, and will do as I order her.”

“It is said that she is tall, of erect bearing, and that her father indulged her and she can read and write,” said Pae, with a shrug. “As far as submissive goes, I don’t know. Look what happened when the regent selected Queen Min, the parentless bride of an obscure noble family, for King Kojong. Is your own wife submissive?”

“My own shrew is why I took to the trails of Chaoshien with Soldier Brother many years ago, and stay here in the south,” laughed the hunter, ruefully. “Not to worry; I’ll dominate this Kaesong woman. A thousand thanks, Pae *sang-nim*. And she’ll be our means to regain control of our errant brother.”

The hunters made their way southward, crossing the Imjin River, watching for the farm on the southern outskirts of the village situated in the ancient geographic invasion route toward Seoul known as the Western Corridor, a historical geographic invasion route. Now, only miles north from the village of Paju-ri, where ancient Chinese envoys bound for Seoul to receive tribute had traditionally been welcomed by Korean officials, they saw in the darkness, from a quiet rice paddy, the farmhouse in which the widow supposedly lived.

“Even though her in-laws might be glad to get rid of her, the villagers of Munsan may demand a fight, on principle,” whispered Pak. “Expect to be pursued in our flight back to the horses. Use stones to repel an attack if you can, maim if need be, but don’t kill. The settlement has enough headaches.”

“Shhh-sh! Look, Older Brother,” said Kwan Il, barely audibly, pointing toward a female figure emerging from the walls of the home, stooping to gather firewood.

“Get her!” Growled Pak hoarsely. Quickly, he and four hunters bounded over the

seventy paces to the female next to a stream before she was aware of their presence. Two of them grabbed the woman, who instantly came alive, screaming, struggling.

Dogs began barking.

“Don’t let her reach that knife around her neck! Bind her wrists!” cried Pak. Kwan Il held the struggling woman as Mun reached for her neck, grasping the small knife, ripping it from the leather thong. Then Mun threw the protesting female over his shoulder and began running eastward along the edge of the rice paddies. Shouts of alarm were sounding from the home, and from the neighboring homes of Munsan villagers. The tall hunters scurried for one third of a mile, then Kwan Il took the squirming female from the gasping older hunter as a stone whizzed past Mun’s face, striking the shoulder of a hunter ahead.

“Motherless dogs!” shouted Mun, wheeling with his lance, struggling for breath as a shower of stones landed around them, accompanied by excited shouts from village men-folk running toward them. Corean villagers were expert stone throwers who used slings with great accuracy at long distances. In Chaoshien’s remote countryside, stone fights were an occasional sport between villages until the first death or serious casualty on either side. “Come and get it! I’ll teach you short, round-assed, soft-bellied southerners...”

“We’re not here to make a stand!” Cried Pak, nervously shoving his neighbor before him in the darkness. “Move! There must be two dozen of them on our tail!”

The lead hunter took the human burden from the settlement compradore for the final one third of a mile, roughly dumping their captive in the waiting horse-drawn light cart

borrowed from Trader Townsend the day before. Her right foot caught brother Mun in his groin.

“Aye-yahh! Why am I always the one to get hit in the seeds!”

“Move, move!” shouted Pak, leaping into the cart with the writhing Mun and the sobbing young widow. “Stop fooling around. Bind her wrists and ankles, and quickly!”

“Uh,” Mun moaned in agony. “She’s just what Soldier Brother needs!”

The raiding party of northern hunters began galloping down the dark trail as figures with cudgels and slings appeared behind them, hurling another shower of stones, which fell short. One white-clad Munsan farmer bounded after them and managed to grasp the wooden sides of the moving cart.

“Stop, *toe-doong-dum!* Thieves! You’ll not make off with the woman every one of us has been lusting after!”

Pak brought the shaft of his lance down on the sweat-banded head of the fellow, who dropped to his knees and grabbed his head in shock. For some minutes, they galloped along the trail westward. Hearing no sounds of pursuit, they slowed to a trot.

“Done!” shouted Pak exultantly, jumping from the bed of the jostling cart to the back of a horse. “At last, the means to slip reins on the wildest stallion in the kingdom! We’ll be in Chemulpo by morning.”

“What is this?” came the irritated voice of the female in the bed of the cart. “Free me, instantly, you thugs! How dare you...”

“Silence, widow,” said Pak, like the others, eyeing the lush, slender form of the woman, momentarily tempted to take her himself. Even bound, her demeanor was one of face, her

voice disdainful, devoid of fear. "You do as I order and I'll give you'll keep the gift of face, and a new life. You're a gift to our special brother."

* * * *

The foreign devil stepped ashore and handed pieces of cash to Yong Bae.

"Purchase what our house's new lady has ordered in the market, then hire a sampan and transport it before nightfall to the junk. Above all, don't forget the dozen chickens Kaesong woman wants."

"Yes, Soldier Brother," said the youth, recently married to a Kangwha City girl five years his senior. He handed the barbarian newspapers to the settlement honcho, racing ahead of Tubert to the nearby open-air market for the fowl.

Tubert headed into the treaty port, glad to be away from the confines of the junk. This night, like last night, T'ang would lay off Kangwha Island until he boarded, although tonight the hunters and the girl would be aboard. No meetings required his attendance. The balmy late summer evening sunset and the prospect of sailing for the arms rendezvous with Kider weighed heavily upon Tubert. He spotted a Chinese in a shop staring at him and knew that a report of his arrival ashore would be delivered somewhere shortly. He felt other eyes watching him.

'The girl?' Tubert wondered, seeing a loin-clothed Japanese dock coolie dart down an alley. Should I make her the first Korean mistress of a barbarian? For almost two weeks, the attractive female had occupied the empty settlement house, the hunters treating her

deferentially, their intent obvious. Within days after Pak, Mun and Kwan Il had implanted the woman from Kaesong in the trading station, Tubert had noted that the settlement's Korean meals had become tastier, more varied, the interior of the home spotless, devoid of dust, clothing frequently laundered, the blanket-beds the hunters slept on aired regularly in the sun. He had taken to entering the home daily to briefly change clothing, and to sit in the stuffed Western chair next to the fireplace conferring with Kwan Il and laboriously attempt to read the Western newspapers placed on the great table by the boy Yong Bae. With grace and elegance, the tall Korean woman would greet the settlement Master, never pushing or so much as mentioning the role so clearly intended for her by the tiger hunters. Miss Yun invariably brought a cup of ginseng tea mixed with honey to his side at the table, served quietly, and then followed by a sumptuous Korean meal with a complete array of freshly prepared side dishes. The Korean girl did not flaunt herself and was calm, at least outwardly, seemingly accepting her fate.

Kwan Il praised the woman for her shrewd purchases of food stuffs in the marketplace which resulted in the quality of meals increasing, yet the costs of purchases were reduced thanks to her combination of haggling and efficient management. It was the young northerner, who would be left behind with only three hunters, who had suggested that Yun Su Ga accompany the party on soldier brother's mysterious two-week voyage to an unannounced destination, in order to cook for Tubert, Pak, Mun and seven other hunters, all of them now aboard the *Sea Angel*.

"*Iii-gu*," said the young compradore, secretly suspecting that Tubert's orders for two weeks' provisions, to be purchased and stored aboard the junk, meant the pleasure cruise was headed to somewhere in Japan, or perhaps even distant Hong Kong, even though the

fighting junk was not intended for deep-water voyages. “So very well advised that you take that girl with you to prepare meals. Our men will mutiny if they are forced to eat the greasy, tasteless and filthy Chinese food so poorly prepared by Captain T’ang’s crewmen.”

Soldier Brother nodded, without comment, not yet showing any of his northern associates any trace of emotion or interest in the Pae woman. It was September One, the worst heat of summer behind them. In five days, six at most, Tubert would take the weapons from Kider at Ullung Island, the future made.

Or smashed.

The night before, off Kangwha Island, royal coastal boats had delivered the bullion to the *Sea Angel*. There was ten boxes, each filled with a gold ingot based on the Chinese tael based system of two and one half ounces, and as per O’Neil’s demand, each specially minted ingot weighing precisely two hundred and ten ounces. Tubert had informed T’ang and his crew that death would be immediate should any of them attempt to come ashore, or communicate with anyone. He smiled, knowing that his fidgeting Chinese fully believed the threat.

I’ll decide what to do with her when we return, if we return, Tubert thought, noting that *Sea Angel* was already sailing to a deserted cove five miles to the south where he would board the vessel after darkness. He slowly turned, making his way toward the Foreigners’ Club, keeping the eyes on him, hopefully diverting any attention from the departing junk.

Tiny Korean children chirped and played hopscotch in the streets, no longer paying much heed to foreigners. Once on the piers and past the huge red brick storages of

foreign firms now growing just behind them, Tubert ambled with calculated nonchalance.

Chemulpo was growing up around some of the old districts, while other areas with hut structures remained unchanged. There were still straw-thatched rice wine houses, many converted into Japanese *saki* houses with *toriis* before them, and plenty of fish food houses, mainly seafood but also several freshwater catfish restaurants, patronized by Chinese and Koreans. There were a dozen petty to spacious, open-air vegetable stalls and hardware stands, and vendors pushing carts and hawking an astounding variety of wares. Three small shacks operated by Japanese were selling pornographic prints of Madam Ahn's Western, Japanese and Korean girls in obscene activities.

You've grown up around me, Chemulpo, thought Tubert, leisurely seating himself on one of the wooden steps to the Foreigners' Club and unhurriedly opening one of the two-week-old editions of the Hong Kong newspaper from Yong Bae, wanting all attention diverted from *Sea Angel* to him. If I survive this voyage, I will catch up with you.

It was near dark, the red, yellow and green lanterns of Korean eateries and wine shops already illuminating the streets and alleys. The port city was alive with humanity. Five foreigners walked toward him, ignoring the native quarter with no thought of even attempting to eat the spicy unknowable foods of Chaoshien. Missionaries and diplomats who had the wherewithal were returning from spending vacations in cabins at Chefoo, with more moderate temperatures and more Western amenities, over along the Chinese Coast across the Yellow Sea.

He glanced over the page of the newspaper and saw small groups of French, Russian and British sailors making to the shore for a few hours of liberty and perhaps sex. Nagasaki, Shanghai, Hong Kong or Manila were much preferred, since Korean women

were not openly for sale, although the lower-level *kisaeng* of the cheap grog houses were available to any barbarian who dared to drink in them. But any Korean woman who openly consorted with a foreigner risked being publicly stoned to death, even in the supposedly cosmopolitan treaty port.

From within the Foreigners' Club, Aaron Buford watched the captain's son lounging on the porch steps.

He looks old 'n tired, Buford told himself. Aged ten years, in just months. The death of that black woman took his heart out, and that ridiculous trip north drained him. Maybe not ridiculous, since we all know he can't keep his business going much longer. Who wouldn't want to run? Now they've got that stunning Korean female for him, and, by all accounts, he's ignoring her. Did the hunters really steal that woman? Poor bugger, but his own fault for wantin' to do everything his way. Burnt all his bridges, he has. Oh yes, Timothy's a whipped man. Maybe tonight's the night I'll offer him all my savings. We could still be partners in a match factory of our own. Partners.

Buf walked out to the porch.

"Evenin' Timothy," he called. "Sure good to see you back ashore. Quiet night, not so hot. Can I get you a beer, or some *sake*?"

"Maybe a cup of hot *sake*. Just think I'll sit a spell, Buf, then walk over and see how business was at the station did today."

The Caucasian motel manager went to the door and ordered the *sake* from Samurai.

"Ya gotta get over the loss of Pearl, Timothy. She was a good girl, an' all that, but she's gone. Don' be lovin' the dead, like these Coreans. Not when you gots a gal like that new

Corean gal yore hunters found you.”

“She’s proper, all right,” agreed Tubert, rising and seating himself on a porch bench. Vital that he be seen. “Good breeding and all that. What’s the latest gossip in port?”

“Wally Townsend had lunch here today, says the Japs are floodin’ Corea with all kinds of imitation Western goods, especially canned goods like milk. And poor Ensign Foulk was by tonight for dispatches. I worry about him, Timothy. George is worryin’ bout Washington not sending the military advisors, after the treaty with the States gives America complete favoritism over all other foreign treaties. He’s even operatin’ the legation partly from his own salary.”

“None of that’s new, Buf. The United States has no idea what it wants to do out here.”

“Yeah,” said Aaron, seating himself on the polished wooden porch bench next to the Western odd-man of Chaoshien, and thinking to himself: No one generates more tongue wagging than you, Timothy. The way you live, kill, and pray to Asian war gods, even your quirky political beliefs of propping up the old dynasty here while at the same time preying on it. Never at peace, and yet, as Teddy Jewell says, you always survive. “Well, Horace met with newly arrived missionaries here at lunch. They’re headed down country, to Taegu. Gonna evangelize ‘n plant apple seeds there, they say.”

“Hot place. They won’t like the heat of north Kyong-sang Province.”

“Maybe not. But what’s most interestin’ is a report a German crew just in from Wonsan was talkin’ about. Seems the two Western Protestant missionaries there ain’t there any more. All hush-hush, of course. But they heard that the senior missionary has committed suicide, and the younger American has fallen in love with a Corean girl and is being

shipped out of country before they can marry.”

“Really?” laughed Tubert. The exhaustion slipped from his face momentarily as he sipped the *sake* that Samurai had placed on the bench. “Had to happen sooner or later. What hypocritical bastards are your Americans.”

“I reckon so. Some of them, maybe. But the biggest gossip is this word of an arms shipment bound for Corea. Comin’ down from China, word has it. British don’t believe it, but the Chinese and Nips `r like mosquitoes on cow’s dung about it. That Jap battleship just came into port, `cause of it.”

“Not much hope for that rumor, Buf. The last thing China or Japan wants is for Korean troops to be holding modern firearms.”

“Germans and Italians and even Americans, too, Timothy. But the rumor got `em all nervous, `cause of the money such a contract would involve. You’re not lookin’ well,. Been meanin’ to tell you to come back on shore to live.”

“Busy summer, Buf. Lousy summer, and business is lousy. The loss of Joo eats at me, but I’ll soon start living in the settlement again. Without a miracle, the station will go bankrupt by winter.”

“You won’t goes bankrupt, Tim. You gots friends, with money.”

“What are you saying, Buf?”

“I knew yore Dad, Timothy. Never told you, but I saw you as a babe when they all thoughts you was marked for dead. I gots three thousand dollars in the Hong Kong Bank. It’s yours, Timothy. Today. Tomorrow. Whenever you needs it. Somethin’ I owes, after all these years to the captain, yore Dad. Make up for what I didn’t do, but should have.”

The revelation and offer by Madam Ahn's barkeep startled Tubert. He peered into the round, quiet face of his American neighbor, detecting utmost sincerity. By Kwan II's reckoning, the settlement would owe more than ten times that amount before the start of winter. But Tubert looked straight into the face of his confidant.

It's not how much you've got, it's how much that you have that you'll give, he realized, the man's offer touching him deeply. And that's all you have to give, Buf. Tubert knew he also was the nearest Buferd had to family, and the rotund Western manager who lived in an upstairs room of the hotel was getting older, his presence here under the precocious madam at all times precarious.

"One day, we'll discuss terms, and interest, even a place for you, Buf," said Tubert, rising. It was dark and he walked toward the steps, noticing that Samurai was observing them closely from behind the entrance to the motel. "Much appreciate. I'll keep it in mind. Better get over to the station. Meanwhile, don't let that old hag you work for shake your beams."

"All I got, Timothy," Buferd called after him. "Yours, when you need it."

It was dusk.

Yong Bae had a Mongolian pony saddled and ready for him in the settlement.

Within minutes, Tubert galloped in the darkness from the trading post toward the channel where *Sea Angel* awaited him between Kangwha Island and the peninsula.

* * * *

She heard the groans of the junk, the sound of the lapping seawater and the occasional movement of feet on the deck above. At first, each sound, each movement, terrified her. The door to the cabin opened. Outside, she saw two tall, lance-toting north Korean hunters led by Pak, who entered the room uninvited.

“It is time, *aga-shee*, for you to know why you are here,” said the hunter, seating himself in the chair next to the stationery desk, motioning her to seat herself upon the cabin’s Western sleeping contraption. “Your unheard of good fortune doesn’t come without a cost.”

“I don’t understand, *sang-nim*.”

“The master of this junk and the settlement is a lonely man, and the loneliness, and his temperament, has made him reckless. You are here to fill his heart, but only as I direct you to.”

The seasickness left her eyes, an almost imperceptible look of defiance taking its place.

“I will serve, but cleanly and honorably, Pak *sang-nim*,” she said, glancing out the cabin window, feeling death beckon from the salty waters. “Your soldier brother has not attempted to so much as touch me, nor I him. I have no influence upon him.”

“You will, for he’ll get around to touching you, *aga-shee*. You will be my agent, my tool, henceforth informing me of his thoughts and whatever he may do next that would jeopardize our well-being. You are to use thy charm and elegance to bend him to whatever guidance I provide to you.”

“What you suggest would be dishonorable, a disservice to your foreign brother,”

said the girl, making no attempt to mask her revulsion. “Should he choose to take me, I have no means to resist. But I will be no one’s toy, *ada-shee*. And what manner of brother are you?”

“One that is closer than blood kin, and who would trim his wings so that when the day arrives that he plummets from the sky, his fall is not fatal. He’s joining us here after nightfall,” said the hunter, uncomfortably, rising, for the first time realizing that his long-held plan might backfire. The hide-clad hunter held his temper with difficulty, the girl’s scruples complementing her poise. “We’re going to be together on this wretched piece of floating timber for two weeks, wherever he’s taking us. You are not here for debate! From now on, you’ll tell us in advance just what he’s up to. Become as a wife to him, under my control and direction. In return, be treated with generosity and kindness, respect and honor. A new life. A new world.”

The Kaesong woman rose and walked close to the open window, peering at the seawaters.

“I could serve, wholly and gratefully, but not use love to manipulate his heart. No honor, no respect, would come from that. It is my fate to be striped of status and future by *jes-u*, but not face. I will choose whether to live in a new life and new world.”

“Move away from that window, *aga-shee*,” remarked Pak, realizing that further pressure might cause this obstinate, high-strung Kaesong widow to fling herself into the sea. He walked to the door. “It is not solely by our sinews that you are here, but also from the very winds of fate you prattle about! We’ve gone to much trouble to obtain you, and the role you must play is far too important for you to burrow into his soul guided only by *jes-u*, with the continued prosperity, indeed the survival of our families to the north, rests

upon our barbarian's shoulders. There is no stopping it, and but one path."

"Then slay me," she said. "Or return my *jang-do*, and trust me to find the path."

* * * *

Off the coast of Pusan, Tubert ordered T'ang to proceed up the eastern coast. Three days after leaving Chemulpo, off the coast of the quiet fishing village of Pohang, he went to his cabin housing the woman and returned to the deck with a map.

"We're going here, to the island known as Ullung," he said to T'ang in Chinese, then repeating it to Pak and the hunters in Korean. His finger pointed to a location one hundred and ninety miles up the coast from Pusan, one hundred and seventy miles down the Eastern Sea from Wonsan, and sixty-three miles from Chaoshien's East Coast. "We're picking up arms to deliver to the soldiers of Chaoshien."

"I don't know the waters off the East Coast," protested T'ang, the color draining from his face. "Such contrary winds, strong, dangerous currents! And that's a Western map. How do you even know such an island exists?"

"Western navigators have called it Dagelet Island, others Argonaut. Whatever its name, it appears on more than one foreign chart. It's there. The only ones known to visit Ullung-do are occasional Japanese junks for camphor and teak they cut in convenient lengths, then take to the markets of Kobe and Osaka. If we're lucky, the gun merchants from Shanghai will be the only humans on the island. We'll see it tomorrow."

"Then the crates you've slept on down in the cargo hold contain payment for

arms,” said Pak. “And the rumors are true. So that’s why we visited China last spring! What dark voyage have you tricked us into? Your enemies will be scouring the sea, searching for us. I want no part of a guns shipment for the corrupt southern dynasty to turn loose on our own people. Set us ashore, immediately!”

“No one goes ashore, hunter,” said Tubert, voice lashing, his eyes locking at last in the overdue and inevitable test of wills with the hunter. “This mission will rescue the settlement, or mercifully end it, and the prosperity of our northern families, from a slow, withering financial death. It’s the only way for me to regain the needed cash we lost up on the Yalu. The arms will go only to the royal army garrisons in Seoul. I’m doing this by royal request, just as you answered a royal request that sent your arrow through my leg, understand? The risks are why I chose the island; my enemies won’t quickly find us, the Shanghai arms people won’t easily betray us, in these eastern waters. Neutral waters, Old Brother, less easy for the Shanghai arms merchants to attempt treachery. We are committed.”

“You can ‘Old Brother’ Pak as much as you wish, but not me!” cried Mun, suddenly grasping the side of the junk. “Here we are vulnerable, defenseless, bobbing around in a foreign sea, while thy powerful enemies with great ships and guns seek us. All of Chaoshien whispers about an arms delivery, the Chinese and Japanese buzzing like angry wasps! Oh, yes, you were born on the sea, I know. You came from the sea when Pak’s arrow pierced thy leg, sadly not thy heart! Another underhanded blow, worse than a kick in the balls. How can you do this to us? I hate, hate, hate deep waters!”

“You don’t hate the proceeds that flow north from the trading station, Mun,” said Tubert coldly, feeling very old and tired, inwardly hating himself, but knowing there was

no choice, no going back. “And without me, there is no station. When I deliver the weapons, I’ll be in position to increase the commission rates from the business at the settlement. It’s for the good of all.”

Morale slumped. The Chinese and Koreans aboard each pursued their own thoughts. But all suddenly hated the barbarian, the sea, and fate.

If only I had known! thought T’ang, steering *Sea Angel* into the wind, driving northward. *But by now, old Mao’s spotters must have reported that this junk has vanished from port. Oh, yes, the job on the Yalu will be fine, but what if I can turn on these hunters and their feng-qua? How to destroy them, and make off with the bullion, or the guns, somehow perhaps both? Then, no need to chew upon Mao’s droppings.*

For the first time, they watched the Soldier Brother go below decks to his cabin, occupied by the girl.

“*Iii-gu!* Now that we’re the worms on Soldier Brother’s rusty hook, he decides to frolic with the Kaesong wench!” cried Mun, sinking dejectedly to the deck, heaving the last meal. Breathless, he turned to his old neighbor. “Even so, should we not post a guard on his bullion?”

There was a shout behind them. T’ang’s oldest nephew bore down on the nauseated hunter with loud, angry shouts, rudely pointing at the mess and at Mun. There was a blurred movement. The Chinese youth stopped shouting and froze. The edge of a sixteen-inch-long, razor-sharp hunting lance pressed firmly against the crotch of his black pajama trousers. One wrong move and the blade would slash through the tight fabric and sever one, perhaps both, of the precious satin sacks!

“No guards, the Chinese have no place to hide anything they steal,” said Pak, his eyes locked inscrutably on the boy’s face, not showing his intense pleasure at the terror there. The lead hunter relaxed the tension of the blade and the youth did an about-face leap backward, right into the backhand of a six-foot-tall northern hunter. Pak turned back to Mun. “And our Soldier Brother has always frolicked as death nears. But as certain as taxes and death, there are great ships out here searching for us, I sense them. Damned if he hasn't dragged me into another disaster! But if we get trapped, we’ll dump that bullion, or his damned weapons, over the side before we’re boarded.”

* * * *

Ullung Island was ten miles long from east to west, about six-and-one-half miles wide from north to south at its widest point. To the people aboard the *Sea Angel*, from a distance it looked like a dark, towering and menacing rock as they approached in the late afternoon light. Drawing closer, they saw the island was composed of a collection of conical hills, with a peak three thousand feet high rising from the center with the appearance of being supported by smaller peaks.

The shore was steep and rugged. On all sides, the water very deep, seemingly bottomless. A number of detached rocks, some towering to three hundred feet in height, lay offshore. On the southeast was an islet called Wosan, about five hundred feet high, a quarter of a mile from the main island with a shallow passage between. Tubert ordered the *Sea Angel* to anchor in the seaward approach to Wosan, two days before the deadline when Kider and the weapons from Shanghai were to arrive

Tubert and Pak climbed the islet's high peak to spend the night on lookout.

"Aren't you going back to the ship?" Pak asked. "My eyes have always been keener than yours. Let me watch the sea for sight of the gunrunners. Or others. A woman awaits you."

"I prefer the mountain," replied Tubert, resentful at the hunter's reaction to the expedition. "A mountain doesn't change direction whenever you do what's required. As for the woman, I know what you're up to. She'll be furnished some cash and then sent on her way when we return to Chemulpo. There's no time or place in my life for her, though she is a beauty, also a lady. Besides, she's terrified of me."

"Everyone is terrified of you," said Pak, cynically. "The distances we've come from our early years of wandering ought not be measured by economics. Any day, you'll figure a way to put relationships on that damned foreign weight scale at the station, and measure them! You've moved far away from those who adopted you."

"I change with the times to survive, and count on good *jes-u*. Don't tell me about right and wrong, darkness and light; in this time and this world and this culture, I'm doing what must be done to survive. Out there on the sea, en route to us, are wolves from Shanghai, and by now, other wolves, are seeking our spoor. Any of them will devour us if they can. I'll spend the night up here."

"Suit yourself. Even after this mindless pursuit of guns for wealth, these clever plans, built on extreme risks, you'll need a woman if we survive. And before you wrap yourself too warmly in the pampered role you think fate and the worm-ridden hierarchy has given you, be mindful that the very lives of our northern families are also floating here on these

waters with you. How can you prop up a regime that must, and will, topple, with firearms that might suppress a movement that..."

"Don't talk to me about *Tonghaks*! What the hell would they do with this land if Yi Chaoshien ever topples?"

"And now you would spurn the gift of the woman we have given you," said Pak, curling up in a blanket. "As if you are a god. But you are not a god. Give some thought to that."

"I didn't say I didn't like her, I mean only that she deserves freedom," said Tubert hotly, the hunter's words clanging like maddening bells in his head. Soon the hunter was snoring. Tubert fought off his tiredness that chilly night, remaining watchful. There was no sign of any approaching vessel, but he was alarmed to see torches being waved from both ends of Ullung-do after midnight. The beacon torches on the main island were not visible from where the *Sea Angel* lay anchored below, and he knew instantly they were signals beckoning to the vessel carrying Kider and the arms. Within a few minutes, the torches were extinguished. Tubert instantly sensed treachery.

At dawn, after the sun burned the morning mist from the sea, there was still no sight of another vessel. Keeping two hunters on the jagged peak as lookouts, he returned to the junk and led a hunting party ashore. They quickly encountered thick vegetation, wild flowers abounding among cedar, pine, teak, camphor and fir. The cedar, pine and teak were numerous and immense, the pine and teak from three to four feet in diameter, the grain of the teak presenting exquisite patterns when sawed. The party walked cautiously, discovering that the rocks of the island were of granite formation, with veins of quartz and gneiss. Gold, cinnabar, the Dragon's Blood called red sulfur or mercury, were among precious minerals on the island. Late that morning, as Tubert knew they would, the crack

hunters detected the spoor of four men.

“Chinese,” said Mun. “I can tell from their weight, and the way they walk. Also others, but I'm not sure what kind of men they may be. Are they pirates, or men of the arms merchants?”

“Both,” said Tubert, softly. “I can feel their eyes upon us. They could be customs officials. Whoever they are, regard them as pirates.”

“Let me take our hunters, and fall upon them.”

“No pursuit or search in daylight,” said Tubert. “We can't afford to lose any of our people in a firefight. But return to the island, under the cover of darkness tonight. Slaughter them, then bring their heads to the junk. Leave their bodies where they drop.”

Cautiously, lest they be ambushed, they returned to the *Sea Angel*. Tubert called Pak, T'ang and Mun to his quarters. The girl silently served lunch. He ordered Pak to have half the hunters armed and on the alert at all times and the others to rest.

When they had left, he shaved and changed clothes. The girl placed a container of warm rice tea on the cabin's small table, her face colorless.

“You didn't ask for this,” he said, kindly. “Do not be frightened, I will not allow anything to harm you. You'll be provided with money, returned to Chemulpo unmolested, when this is done. And you shall be free.”

“In our world, what would a widow do with freedom, Soldier Brother?” asked Su Ga, no longer apprehensive about the barbarian who had slept on the cabin floor, making no attempt to touch her. She was awed by his size and savagery, power and authority, but noticed the lines of stress etching ever deeper on his face, sensing both anguish and

desperation within him. Why, she wondered, is he perspiring on such a moderately warm day?

He did not reply.

She became aware that, for the first time, the barbarian was looking at her closely. The Korean woman, who stood only as high as his chest, blushed and smiled, surprised at her own sensation of pleasure at the attention, her perfectly formed teeth and expression, highlighted by a dimple, breaking the tenseness caused by the talk of killing, and of freedom.

Tubert sipped the cup of tea and wished she would not be flawless.

“Sleep now so that you can be strong,” suggested Yun Su Ga. “I will stand outside of your cabin door and not allow anyone to disturb you.”

He shook his head.

“I’m going up on that peak again tonight. My Korean hunters are edgy, not happy with this expedition. Terror, mixed with thoughts of heisting the bullion below, is all over the face of T’ang and the Chinese crew. I would ask that you be my eyes and ears aboard this vessel, but move very cautiously.”

“I will hear all, and see all.”

Tubert had himself rowed to the island where he joined Mun and another hunter on lookout duty watching for any sign of vessel movements on the sea or on the island.

“The Chinese have taken to malingering before the cargo with your boxes of bullion, whispering in hushed tone,” Mun told him. “The mood aboard your junk grows ugly.”

“I know,” said Tubert, taking a final look at the sea approaches as dusk fell, knowing that Pak and a team of hunters even then were preparing to slip stealthily onto the island as soon as darkness arrived. “But we’ll deal with the threat on the land first. Hopefully, Pak will return before the crew can mount a threat on *Sea Angel*.”

“Could it be that the Chinese peacock in Seoul, Viceroy Yuan, has turned your own crew into his own instruments?” asked Mun. Soldier Brother's back was to him, and Mun did not see the focused look in his eyes. At first glance, a landing seemed impossible on Ullung-do. Between the islet and the point projecting from the main island was a small beach. There, close to the shore, medium-sized vessels could find anchorage next to the *Sea Angel* in sixteen to twenty-five fathoms of water during high tide. But the harbor was available only in fair weather, and only to those familiar with the route into it.

“Guns, gold and power, Old Brother,” he said, evenly, an edge to his voice. “I’d be very surprised if T’ang doesn’t have a secret covenant with one particular Chinese on Yuan’s staff, perhaps even with the Japanese. And there’ll be blood-letting before this is over. Anything is possible. Right now, I’m more concerned about the four men hiding on this island. How long have they been here? It means the Shanghai people have already been here. There’s mischief in the air. How did they arrange to have people here before us? Why?”

“The four men hiding from us are already as good as dead,” Mun assured him in the darkness, knowing that Pak even now was moving into the island. The killing would be swift and silent with lances, arrows and war axes. “They are not woodsmen, but fools. They were dead when they watched us pick up their spoor and failed to open fire on us. No mystery about these men. While you were on your northern pilgrimage, the Chinese

opened that telegraph office down near the customs office. Easy to send messages to and from China, and perhaps to the moon and to hell also.”

“True, Older Brother. I hadn’t thought of that. Go back to the junk and keep a watchful eye on our Chinese.”

Mun departed. Tubert bid the remaining hunter to sleep, and maintained a vigil until two hours before sunrise. It had been three days since he had slept, yet he rested only fitfully. When he awakened, he saw the Korean girl making her way toward them in the morning light with a tray of food balanced on her head and a knapsack on her back.

“Good morning. The hunters and crew are already eating, and so must you,” said the girl, serving them warm rice, soup, and *kimchi*. They sat some distance from the Korean hunter who had spent the night with Tubert. The food helped push some of the exhaustion from Tubert. He tried to will the soreness, fatigue and the start of fever away.

“I awaited you in the cabin, hoping that you’d come and rest,” said Yun Su Ga, producing a tin of warm coffee from the sack.

“This coffee is life-giving,” said Tubert, his eyes bloodshot, gratefully slurping the aromatic drink, genuinely regretting not spending the night on the junk. “Black. Just as I like it. Thank you.”

“I learn very fast, Soldier Brother. Please, do not sleep on the open ground again. Very unhealthy.”

“Barbarians are different,” said Tubert with amusement, captivated by her growing impertinence, strangely cheered by her concern. “Have you not noticed my oversized eyes and nose? Even with our eye-folds closed while asleep, we are always watching.”

“*Iii-gu*,” said the girl and she laughed, recalling the horrible stories circulating about foreigners, for a second wondering if what this one said could be true, then promptly dismissing it. Her hand quickly covered her mouth, as much to hide the unexplained melting in her heart as it was not to offend with a laugh. “That’s nonsense!”

“Yes, it is nonsense,” agreed Tubert, grinning, joining her in laughter, his first in months, ice temporarily breaking inside of him. “With this food, I’ll be fine. Tell me, how are things aboard the junk?”

“Your northerners quarreled last night, after Pak *sang-nim* returned from the island with his party. One of your hunters is badly cut.” Her voice lowered, her eyes widening in revulsion. “They hunted down, then fell upon the men on the island, killing them! I don’t understand; what do you want with their heads?”

Tubert waved his hand.

“Never mind that for now. You said they quarreled?”

“Yes, violently. The Chinese keep going to the cargo area, as do the hunters, and there was a tense standoff. Your northerners believe the Chinese crew has secretly communicated with the men killed ashore. Mun wanted to attack the Captain T’ang’s crew during the night.”

Tubert exhaled, softly.

“That’s very bad. So sorry that you are in the midst of all this. Today the arms will arrive. Soon you’ll be back in Chemulpo, free of all this.”

“This is *jes-u*, Soldier Brother. No need to be sorry. And there is nothing to go back to. Returning to the Kaesong home of my mother and father would strip them of face.

Perhaps I can hawk vegetables on Chemulpo streets, or pour drinks for customers of that evil Madam Ahn's brothel. Maybe I can even become a sorceress."

"You'll do none of those," said Tubert intently, suddenly comparing the fine features of this girl with the painted face of the *kisaeng* and the dark, sultry looks of Black Pearl. And he knew he had to be free of her. "Please understand, the old yokes of tradition are lifted for thee. You will like freedom, being free of this, and free of me."

"You've taken nothing of me, or from me. You owe me nothing. And you are both a foreign devil, and the brother of dreams. It shall be as you wish."

They were silent then, contemplating the most magnificent sunrise they had ever seen, each waiting for the other to speak.

"*Ya!*" cried the hunter near them, pointing southward, toward the sea. "I see sails approaching!"

* * * *

Tubert, with armed hunters at his side, met Kider and the four Malay crewmen midmorning on the small beach of Ullung Island. On a table at his side was a cask of chilled beer, mugs, bottles of wine, tinned meats, rice, marinated venison steak strips and *kimchi*, a bulging canvas sack beneath the table.

"It's us, Tubert! Right on the mark!" cried his Shanghai tormentor of old, stepping carefully from the rowboat. Kider's gaze wandered the woods behind the beach, his armed crew instantly fanning out behind him, two men easing the scale ashore to weigh the bullion. Behind him too, the *Tai Tai*, the junk from Shanghai, had dropped anchor one hundred feet from the ready twenty-pounders aboard *Sea Angel*. While both were

Chinese fighting junks, larger than the fishing junks of Corea, the *Tai Tai* had three forty-pounders mounted on either side, her girth three feet wider than Tubert's craft.

"I thought you had forgotten our rendezvous, Kider," said Tubert, gesturing to the food and drink on the table. Like Kider, he did not offer his hand. He felt weak, the months of strain telling. With a struggle to conceal the stirrings of malaria, Tubert said, "Welcome to Ullung-do. My back's not to you this time. Eat and drink as you wish, but let's get our business done quickly and be gone."

"We agrees," said Kider, helping himself to the beer, squinting. He was trying to detect some sign of the men who had slipped aboard this lush island four days earlier, and wondered why he had seen no beacon fire during the night from sea. Easy enough to get the map to this God-forsaken island from the Korean monk who waved from a *sampan* in the mouth of the Whampoo River, all in a few short hours. Then to swing back to the city and send a dispatch over to Corea, where they had placed selected men to receive it and have a chartered Korean fishing boat drop them off here. When Kider shouted "Now!" at the top of his lungs, they were to commence firing on the captain's son and his people. Kider sat with the full mug on the smooth surface of a large rock.

"No hurry needed, mate. Not at the God-cursed spot you've chosen to do business at. We be aweighing each bar as the Mausers be sent over to your junk. Don't like these foreign waters!"

"Of course not. They're waters to my advantage. The first ingots are coming off my junk now, to be weighed by your people. Bring your compradore forward. That Korean lady and my hunters will be counting and inspecting rifles and ammunition. Then you can transport the gold to your vessel. Two hundred rifles at a time for each gold ingot.. We'll

be done in less than an hour.”

Kider indolently seated himself on top of a nearby piece of driftwood and barked staccato orders in pidgin English to his Malay navigator, ordering a return to the vessel for the first shipment of two hundred rifles. The Malay boarded the rowboat and was taken back to the *Tai Tai*.

“As you please, yer majesty! Just like yore old man, sonny. We be watchin’ each other. Ships’re watchin’ each other, too. Hey, boy, thinks you can hold that many guns, with ammo, `board that piece of cork of your’n? Looks a little light, n’ those little popguns won’t help you none. I was first to pop a can of milk, pour it down your gullet day you was born, wishin’ I coulda tossed you into the sea! You’ve always been a pest.”

“Our score can be settled today, if you want it to be,” said Tubert. “And yes, you have us outgunned, but *Sea Angel* can turn faster than your craft. Her guns can still blow holes in you. And you have a lot further to sail home than we do.”

“Means nothing,” said Kider, staring coldly at the captain’s boy, the man’s deliberate movements and aura of menace bringing back the pain and hatred of the flogging of nearly thirty years earlier. “Old Mao, Buferd, O’Niel and myself has watched you dodgin’ death since you was birthed on *The Trojan*, but there be no dodgin’ the forty-pounders of the *Tai Tai*, yore craft not be that nimble, I says!”

“You mentioned Buferd. You know Aaron Buferd? And Old Mao?”

Sweating in the early noonday sun, Kider rose, refilling the beer mug at the table, noticing that the crews were near to completing the first exchanges of bullion and arms. The ten small, heavy boxes with bullion, guarded by two Korean hunters, stood fifty feet

away as large boxes of weapons and ammunition were lowered into the harbor. Soon time to turn to turn on this upstart from hell, as planned. No problem that the edgy Malays were forgetting to watch for his cue, the size and demeanor of the tall Korean hunters unnerving them. They were vicious enough to react and slaughter young Tubert's Koreans once Kider sounded the shout for the four armed and hidden men to begin the crossfire ambush from which there would be no escape.

You be already and at last good as dead, thought Jackson Kider, looking toward the sea and the Chinese man-of-war he knew would appear. For the Chinese be handin' you to Old Man Mao, dead or alive, after our ambush. He told O'Niel he's anxious to have you, after what you've done to his first born. Ambush, then we takes our guns back, then sails back to Shanghai along with the Korean gold. The Chinese once again will owe us favors for delivering you to them!

Kider nodded.

"Same one. Buford was a gambler. Way back when, he made no mention of yore birth in dispatches to the American company's home office, only that the captain and yore ma was dead, so nobody of family ever came a-lookin' fer you. Mao's our longtime business associate."

The rowboat from the *Tai Tai* returned to the *Sea Angel*. The Malays rowed the remaining boxes of rifles to the vessel. Pak and Mun quickly pried the tops from the wooden crates to allow Yun Su Ga to make a rough count of the number of weapons in each. Tubert observed as two of the four Malays almost indifferently pried the top from a small wooden box of heavy bullion and glanced at the content. The royal bullion was stacked as if Kider and his party were in no rush and had plenty of time to transport it to

their junk. Tubert noted that the Malays' gazes were fixed upon Kider and the precious metal that glistened in the topless crate before them.

"The last two hundred rifles, Kider. Business is done."

"I wuz about to get to that, son," said Kider, rising from the smooth driftwood tree trunk, raising his left arm straight into the air, a revolver in his right hand suddenly fixed on Tubert. "Price `o guns gone up. There be my personal squeeze fer sailin' all this ways! No tricks, you son-of-a-bitch! Four men in those trees be aimin' rifles right at yore cursed head. Now!" screamed Kider. His four Malays instantly turned their weapons toward Tubert's Korean hunters, finding two hunters with lances and two Koreans with two long muskets also aiming at them, ready. The Korean woman in the flowing gown stood frozen behind the hunters, her eyes unblinking.

"Now!" screamed Kider, in the direction of the foliage near shore. "Open fire, goddammit!" For long moments, there was no movement, no sound, from the underbrush.

Tubert bent very slowly, reaching under the food table, his icy stare locked on Jackson Kider.

He rose, emptying the canvas sack.

Four heads rolled from it.

"They're not there, Jackson," he said, softly, allowing the bloodlust to spread over his face. "The price just went down. Call your men off, or you're crab bait. And the bullion now stays with me, as my squeeze. Signal now, Kider."

The Shanghai gunrunner stared for some seconds at the severed heads. He blanched. His right hand with the weapon dropped to his side. Then he broke into a twisted smile.

“Ain’t over, son,” he said, nodding towards the harbor’s seaward approach behind Tubert. “You gots other things to be thinkin’ about. Look!”

An obsolete, three-masted Chinese man-of-war was bearing down hard toward the channel. The imperial battleship, with a formidable array of guns protruding from positions along the high sterns, was already trimming sail. The imposing Chinese vessel flew a multicolored flag with two tongues, representing the rank of the Chinese commodore who commanded the imposing ship. Tubert heard shouts of alarm from the crew aboard the *Tai Tai*, and from his own Chinese on *Sea Angel*, and knew that he was hopelessly trapped.

Tubert barked orders in Korean. Suddenly Pak’s tiger lance was against Kider’s throat, other hunters with bows quickly stringing iron arrows aimed at Kider’s cut throats.

“Drop all weapons now!” The Soldier Brother ordered, first in English, then quickly in Chinese.

“I measure my father’s greatness by your hatred for me, Jackson. And like my father, I may face a watery grave. But the guns and all of bullion will now own with me. Get back on your junk and survive, but empty handed.”

“Not empty-handed,” said Kider, voice quivering, Malays dropping weapons and backing away. Jackson stepped aboard the rowboat with them. “Because you be the last Tubert. The straits between these two islands be treacherously shallow, even with the tide in. You ain’t escaping.”

Tubert called to the shaken hunters and woman to take no more time to inspect or count the final boxes of Mausers and ammunition. They scrambled to load the bullion and the

last of the weapons on the rowboat and transport them to the junk. Kider and his nervous Malays reached the *Tai Tai* as Yun Su Ga and four Koreans rowed to the *Sea Angel* and the boat returned for Tubert, Pak and Mun. They heard arguments aboard the larger junk, as the Malays and Chinese confronted Kider about the total loss of both the weapons and the bullion. The white man screamed for them to turn their weapons on the outlaws from Korea, and for the *Tai Tai* to maneuver into a position to turn her cannon on the trapped *Sea Angel*.

“We’re lost,” said Pak, his voice empty. “That Chinese ship blocks our passage from Ullung-do, and you could not out-sail it, even if we could flee. How I wished not to die at sea!”

Tubert saw the slumping shoulders of the hunters aboard the junk, their gaze riveted on the approaching, menacing warship. T’ang and the Chinese were next to them, petrified, watching figures scurrying to battle stations next to the great cannon of the warship, knowing that at any moment the Chinese could make splinters of them. The crew of the *Tai Tai* was scrambling desperately to set sail and clear a field of fire. It was then Tubert realized that Kider’s vessel was directly in the line of fire between the Chinese man-of-war and *Sea Angel*.

“We’ll flee through the straits, T’ang!” he cried from the rowboat, halfway to the junk, fighting dizziness and weakness. “Hoist sails! Quickly!”

Two minutes later, as a breeze caught the canvas sails, they handed four crates of bullion and the last boxes of weapons and ammunition to waiting hunters, then boarded the side of *Sea Angel*. They realized that the movement of the enemy junk had placed the *Tai Tai*, just one hundred feet from Tubert’s junk, in a position to momentarily open fire

on the *Sea Angel*. Then the reverberations caught them, the concussion tearing them to the deck. Six Chinese guns fired in rapid succession, three mistakenly catching the *Tai Tai* broadsides, the din deafening, destruction swift and complete, debris landing on the humans aboard *Sea Angel*, as other Chinese rounds landed close to them, causing terrifying geysers of salt water to rise perilously close to them, showering the deck of the *Sea Angel*. The *Tai Tai* was a smoking, broken, sinking hulk, human figures writhing piteously on it and in the sea next to it, crying, moaning. Fragments of wood, metal and bullion showered the *Sea Angel's* deck and the waters around the junk.

“T’ang! Get that goddamned anchor up!” cried Tubert in Chinese, dazed, swaying on his feet. He toppled backward but the Korean girl caught and steadied him. He lurched forward toward the stunned captain and crew. “Through the shallows before the Chinese open fire again! Our only hope!”

“Let us off,” pleaded Pak, rising from the deck, his voice hollow. “Better to die on that cursed island.”

“No can!” T’ang babbled, trembling helplessly. “No tide, water too shallow! We don’t have enough fresh water to make the voyage back. We are lost.”

“I said move!” Screamed the Soldier Brother in Chinese, breathing heavily, leaning against the Korean woman. He turned towards the stirring hunters. “I’m ordering T’ang to escape through the shallows. We’re not sitting here so the Chinese can take their leisure blowing us apart. If our crew doesn’t start moving, begin to kill!” The hunters turned sullenly towards the *Sea Angel's* Chinese and stringed arrows.

“Sail this junk or I’ll have you and your crew arrive in hell before us.” The threat

mobilized the Chinese. The Manchurian vessel was adding sail, seeking to move left, hoping to get a range of fire clear of the burning *Tai Tai*. A stronger surge of the wind caught the sails, toppling Tubert to the deck, the girl cushioning his fall.

“Make for Masan,” he said weakly in Chinese, repeating it in Korean as dizziness overcame him, unable to stop the approach of unconsciousness. “We deliver the guns, at Masan.” Then he was unconcious, unaware that *Sea Angel* miraculously passed through the shallow northern straits of Ullung-do and Wosan. The same shoals ripped the bottom from the pursuing Chinese battleship, which settled helplessly into the channel.

For two days, the girl allowed no one to enter the cabin of the Soldier Brother Within, the barbarian tossed and raved in delirium. During brief spells of calmness, the Kaesong woman forced hot soups and tea down him. When the horrendous fevers racked him, sweat pouring from him, she stripped and warmed him beneath blankets, trying to quell the freezing shudders, wiping away the perspiration, changing blankets daily, willing him to live. Then the fever broke and Tubert lay emaciated in the cabin on the third day, no water left to drink. Su Ga heard shouts and movements on deck as they passed by the coast miles from Pusan Harbor, the sea traffic heavy.

“Warship!” On deck, T’ang made out the flag signals from the new Chinese destroyer, the *Chen Yen*: “Halt. Prepare to be boarded.” The frayed Chinese skipper began to babble incomprehensibly to the edgy Coreans.

There was a tug at the cabin’s locked door, followed by knocks.

“Open!” cried Pak. “We’re being traileed by a Chinese warship that wishes to board us! I must know that to do!”

Yun Su Ga glanced at the unconscious barbarian.

“He says to ignore them. To continue sailing towards Masan.”

Less than an hour later, there were more frantic knocks at the door.

“A steam-driven Japanese battleship now approaches us!” wailed T’ang, a young nephew quickly translating in rough Korean. “We will not make Masan! Our only hope is to throw the shipment over the side, then give them the vile *feng-qua!*” The woman of Kaesong remained silent as the Chinese beyond the door kicked at the door, screaming hysterically. Then hammer blows began smashing the door.

“Give us the *feng-qua!* Stupid for all of us to die for him!”

The door to the cabin swung open. T’ang and two burly Chinese crewmen found themselves facing the Korean woman, the Soldier Brother’s revolver raised in double-handed greeting, barrel centered on the old Chinaman’s face.

“Masan!” Hissed the woman, advancing, driving them backward through the hold. “He said take us to Masan!”

Twelve miles off the coast of Masan, Gunjiro Mihashi’s patience snapped. He shouted at the commander of the warship, “The *gaijin* aboard that junk is not to be allowed to reach shore, *Wakari-mas?* His cargo of weapons are expressly for Koreans to use to resist our interests in Chaoshien.”

The Choshu clansman, in the uniform of a Japanese naval commodore, turned in disgust to the political Tsushima thug who had clambered aboard in Chemulpo six days earlier with urgent written orders from the Japanese legation for the commodore to hunt the waters between Pusan and Chemulpo, and, short of provoking an incident with third-

party powers, to prevent a weapons shipment from reaching Chaoshien's shores.

"Don't you see the Chinese ship just behind us?" Snapped the commodore, correctly suspecting that this Tsushima yokel had instigated this hunt and chase. "They undoubtedly would also blow that junk from the water, but not with us present. What you suggest would be an international act of war, especially with that American destroyer steaming fast to catch up to the side of us, all three of us at full battle stations. So sorry, Mihashi-san!"

"That *gaijin* flaunts a hide pouch, fashioned from the skin of one of our countrymen, as a trophy!" Howled Gunjiro, losing all restraint. "He is a sworn enemy of Japan! If you allow him to deliver his cargo to shore, it will set back our timetable for Chaoshien a decade. Don't you understand? He must not live."

"No timetable yet allows for an open act of war off the seas of Chaoshien, Mihashi-san! There's time to destroy them. We'll give the filthy Chinese, or the rapacious *gaijin* destroyer, every opportunity to open up on them."

Before the advancing warships, the junk at last turned starboard, toward the islands that dotted the seaway into Masan.

"If you won't turn your guns on them, then have an accident!" cried Mihashi, who had sent secret word to his old smuggling associate, China Kang, to locate any concentration of Korean military forces along the southern coast, thus pinpoint the delivery location. The Tsushima man had contacted the Korean underworld as a last resort to destroy the barbarian and prevent arms from reaching the hands of Korean troops. He held little hope in the ability of Kang's coastal junks to actually accomplish anything. Even though the

maritime forces of Chaoshien were pathetically primitive, the Korean army and navy being one, China Kang's people would be hesitant to face either Korean forces waiting to receive arms, and especially hesitant to expose themselves to modern warships, let alone visibly place themselves in vulnerable positions between both elements. Only one thing would prompt the head of the southern coastal smugglers to be stupid enough to place junks and *sampans* in the way of the so-called Soldier Brother's vessel: greed, and the slim chance of acquiring an unimaginable fortune. "Ram the junk, commodore!" Gunjiro cried at the Choshu man. "We'll apologize it away. Ram it, ram it!"

Two miles behind them, in waters to the right of the Japanese ship, Theodore Jewell watched through binoculars as the Japanese ship veered hard to starboard, steaming directly for the tiny junk making for Masan Harbor, the Chinese vessel trailing behind. The American commander calmly ordered the speed of the *USS Essex* increased.

"Junk's sailing low in the water, ccommander," remarked his young executive officer, glancing at Jewell. "Gotta be the rumored arms shipment on board. Intervention would cause hell-up in Washington, sir."

Jewell nodded and smiled.

"Every American commander in the Asiatic Squadron is playing nerve games with the Japanese, Chinese and Russian fleets, ensign. We're going to block those Japanese from ramming the *Sea Angel*."

"It'll be close, sir. And dangerous. They've got technology we don't have."

"To hell with technology, and to hell with Washington. Long ago, we left Tim Tubert for dead out here, son. Not again. Its battle stations, and full steam. We owe him at least

this much.”

The gusts blowing over the sea that early afternoon were refreshing as Yun Su Ga emerged from the cabin below. Pak and Mun had staggered shifts to watch the bleary-eyed, dehydrated Chinese. Without water for two days, T’ang and the crew were in dreadful condition. The air of hostility on deck was palpable, the potential for violence between the tiger hunters and T’ang’s crew needing but a spark to explode.

“Is Soldier Brother alive?” Pak asked grimly.

“Yes. He awakened after we passed Pusan,” she said

“Better had the malaria taken him than this.”

“It won’t,” came a hoarse voice behind them. Tubert, pale, hardly able to stand, struggled weakly across deck, his eyes unfocused, still glazed by fatigue. He squinted to make out the cove in the harbor of Masan where royal troops, he prayed, were to be waiting with the rest of the gold, and to receive the Western firearms. “The sickness won’t kill me, thanks to this Kaesong female.” He gestured behind them and the hostile, multi-national armada suddenly bearing down fast on the *Sea Angel*. “But they might.”

T’ang was voiceless from exhaustion, no drinking water or tea and from driving his all but motionless cousins and crew. He now turned from the wheel, knowing that nothing could prevent the oncoming Japanese ship from ramming the junk. T’ang sank dejectedly to his haunches, certain that they would not reach the channel between the islands to the harbor. In minutes, they would be able to make out some of the faces of the Japanese.

“We must go over the side, all of us,” he whispered miserably. “Before they are upon us. The only chance any of us have to survive.”

“Get up and steer the junk, or I’ll feed you to the fishes myself,” cried Tubert, turning from the steaming vessels behind. His voice sounded weak, but with an edge to it, as he moved unsteadily towards the defeated Chinese.

T’ang reluctantly, slowly, rose and returned to his station.

“Ah, so much for mortal efforts,” Pak remarked, sinking tiredly to a seating position, turning his back to the massive hulks nearly colliding near them. Even though he knew the differences between them and their barbarian brother were by no means resolved, the hunter smiled, his tones of casual conversation. With destruction clearly at hand, what point in shouting that they had been manipulated? Now all was in the hands of the gods. “Soldier Brother, do you remember that island ahead of us? It’s where you got your hide pouch. Good, simple days, were they not?”

“The very best of days, brother,” agreed Tubert serenely, nodding, pulling one of Yun Su Ga’s clucking chickens from a nearby cage.

“More trouble!” cried the Chinese navigator, pointing toward shore, aghast at the nonchalance of the barbarian and hunters. In the shallow waters ahead, deployed in front of the channel, four fighting junks and nine *sampans* of the Kang family blocked the approach to the shore. “Corean pirates! We have no chance.”

“Keep on course, captain. Sail into them.”

Immediately behind them, the *Essex* veered boldly left, directly into the path of the oncoming Japanese ship. The imperial navy’s commodore sounded alarms, frantically steering, cursing, praying that the great vessel would not collide with the insane Yankee ship. With less than seventy feet to spare, a collision was avoided. Then, without

warning, the guns of the *Essex* fired five quick rounds broadside into the pirate junks, in seconds decimating two of the huge junks, instantly turning them and three *sampans* into smoking, splintered hulks. The carnage was instant and total, clearing the way for the *Sea Angel* to enter the channel to the wharves and royal forces at Masan village. The remaining smugglers' craft and crews scrambled to beach themselves in the shallows of the nearby islands.

The battered humans aboard *Sea Angel* heard cheers from the waving American crew behind them as they sailed triumphantly into Masan Harbor. The *Essex* veered sharply, just in time to avoid the shallow waters.

"You do the honors," said the Soldier Brother softly.

"My pleasure," agreed the hunter, bowing and smiling contentedly, lopping off the head of the chicken as a sacrifice to the spirits, coating the nearby deck with blood.

From the shore, royal vessels were moving to meet them.

* * * *

Three days later, escorted and protected by royal Korean coastal seacraft, *Sea Angel* sailed into the harbor of Chemulpo. The royal escort junks with the arms continued toward the Han River and Seoul. The gaunt northern tiger hunters, their iron arrows stringed and bristling, stood guard while others manned the tiny cannon in a show of bravado, ready to open fire should any of the Western or Asian seacraft in the sea lanes attempt to board the junk and seize the fortune in bullion it contained.

Tubert, sallow-faced but freshly shaven and in clean clothing, slowly climbed down to a

waiting rowboat where Mun awaited him. Every second counted in having the gold transported to the Chemulpo Branch of the Bank of Hong Kong.

“Quickly, Soldier Brother, let’s get to shore,” said Mun, relieved at the prospect of his feet touching dry land, and vowing never again to leave it. “I’ll rush to the station and get Kwan Il and the other hunters, and some modern rifles.”

“In a moment, brother,” Tubert said, glancing up the junk. “The girl,” he called to Pak. “Would you get her? She is to return with me.”

Silently, Yun Su Ga came down the side of the junk. She did not look at the land, did not enjoy returning to it. After the terror of Ulung-do and the seachase, freedom, and emptiness, lay ashore. In little more than a month, she had tasted more exhilarating fright, adventure, exhaustion and intoxicating emotions than in all of her previous existence.

“Sit down, Miss Yun,” said Tubert, indicating the space beside him in the rowboat. Quietly, her eyes downcast, she sat next to the victorious barbarian who, like a shining, unstoppable human beacon, lit the fuses of all sensations, emotions and dangers. Never mind that he would have died without her on the voyage. It was but her duty.

Is he a man, she wondered, or a fiend, both a god and devil?

The Chinese oarsmen began to row them toward shore. The Korean woman stared into the waters, and contemplated throwing herself into them.

No, Miss Yun thought. I’ll not spoil his moment. My end can wait until later.

Ashore, Mun took off running toward the settlement. The Soldier Brother ordered the young newspaper boy, Yong Bae, to quickly locate two sampans to transport the bullion ashore. Before heading to the settlement, Tubert glanced at the harbor, feeling the looking

glasses from Chinese and Japanese and Western ships upon him, and eyes from Flying Fish Channel Street before them. He savored his triumph.

Alone with her at last, Tubert turned to the girl.

“Let’s go home,” he said.

“Yes, you go to your home, Soldier Brother,” she said, her voice clear. “Accept my congratulations. And my thanks. And farewell.”

“Unwise for a decent Korean female to be alone in port,” said Tubert. “Never mind the thanks, and this isn’t farewell.”

Her eyebrow arched. The Korean widow pointed towards the foreigner’s settlement.

“But you said freedom.” There was abject misery in her voice. “Released, you said.”

“Freedom to do as you please,” clarified the barbarian. “To dream. To go, or to stay and share life with me. All this bullion is as dead as a stone, as cold as ice. The true treasure is not aboard that junk, and I don’t wish to lose it. But you are free to do as you please.”

Tears flowed from the eyes of the young Korean widow. She was weeping openly as Tubert cast aside all convention and drew her into his arms.

“You are the Brother of Dreams,” she cried, her hand caressing his powerful forearm.

“My yobo, and my rebirth.”

* * * *

“Quinine, Miss Yun,” said Horace Allen in careful, still awkward Korean, his voice grave and authoritative as he took the small paper bags of medicine from his black leather

carrying bag. “Whenever the malaria attacks him from now on, I want you to feed him this Western medicine, in the quantities I have shown you.”

“Yes, Allen *sang-nim*,” said Su Ga, mindful that she was talking to one of her man’s foreign friends, and an elder. She was horrified at the emaciated, deathly pallor of her barbarian. “I shall take very good care of him. I promise you.”

“Timothy is very stubborn about certain things,” observed the *kojeng-iii* doctor, his voice rueful. “Heroic and very generous, but very self destructive. He needs total rest. Call me if he resists.”

“The Soldier Brother takes risks only so that the settlement, and those closest to him, can survive,” said the woman, defensively. “But he is never foolish, and he is not self destructive.”

For three days after the bullion had been deposited in the bank, Tubert slept, accepting only Korean soups and the miraculous foreign medicine, which the tall American physician had taught the Korean woman to administer.

Now with face and status, the first thing Su Ga did at her new home was to summarily dismiss the Korean woman who had lethargically served the settlement when the barbarian’s black mistress had ruled this home. The middle-aged woman from South Cholla Province prepared the frequently tasteless and half-cooked, sometimes burned, communal meals for those who dwelt in the settlement. Those first days following the weapons delivery, Yun Su Ga observed the secretive, taciturn servant procuring food, preparing and serving meals, and pocketing change. She determined that the servant was embezzling at least one third of the settlement’s food expenditures provided to her,

almost without question, by Kwan Il, the settlement's otherwise sharp but entirely too good-natured, new-style compradore and day-to-day manager. Then, too, she noted that the servant at least once a day visited the old lady who owned the brothels across the street. Kwan Il had told her of old lady Ahn's hatred of Tubert and the settlement. That was clearly sinister, Su Ga detected that servant was making daily stops next door at the vile brothel to render accounts of all settlement activities to the unpleasant and unscrupulous Madam Ahn, who Su Ga instinctively and instantly despised.

'The old woman is an embittered enemy of this business place and the man who will soon be my husband,' she surmised. 'Another enemy is the *kisaeng* woman in Seoul I keep hearing about. Should I ever be assaulted, it will come from her.'

That third day, just before the return visit of the lanky, red-haired foreign doctor, she presented the disloyal, wailing servant woman with a small sack of cash, then imperiously expelled the sulking female from the settlement, watching the female immediately join the servants at the nearby brothel. Before the end of that day, Su Ga brought a stout, politically reliable Kaesong peasant girl from a downtown market fish stand to work for her.

As Tubert's health and energy returned, she felt his eyes following her. For the first time in her life, she welcomed the gaze of a male. But he did not force himself upon her. The fifth night after the return to Chemulpo, Tubert bathed with hot water, shaved, and silently joined her on the Korean-style bedroom's heated floor where she rested on a thick mattress. Very gently, the foreign devil turned the unresisting girl around and stroked her thick, silken black hair. That night, to his astonishment and delight, he discovered that she was chaste. At first, she was petrified at his intimate caresses, but his manner was

incredibly gentle, unhurried and experienced, and caused her body to quiver with undreamed-of sensations.

Afterwards, they remained in embrace, her fingertips lightly touching the skin where his scalp had once been torn, touching his mangled ears, then traveling to the hideous scar in his leg. Asking him how he acquired such injuries, the graceful Korean female stared at the missing toes on his feet. He saw the tears flowing down her sculptured cheeks.

“You’ve given me gifts no other human being has,” Tubert said, delicately touching her cheek, wiping the tears, kissing the moisture. “No one ever cried for me before.”

“Yobo, when we are like this, together, I do not know if you are Korean, or Chinese, or a foreign devil,” she said. “I will never let anyone or anything hurt you again.”

“I am all of those. It is my *jes-u* to also fight all of them. And I did not expect to find you chaste. The most precious of gifts. Thank you.”

“We must thank *jes-u*. The Korean boy-husband was barely out of puberty, and ill. He might have grown to be a good man. but we will never know. I never knew him well. That, of course, is why I can never go home again, even if the entire world would believe I was chaste. In Chaoshien, widowhood soils a woman. It would be said that my mother-in-law sent me back to my family, my family’s loss of face would be insufferable. In all of Chaoshien, no one would have me, at least not as wife. *Iii-gu*, you are very experienced on a mattress.”

“I’ve had some of practice,” said Tubert absently, amazed at the lightness of her lithe body, and the cleanness he had never felt after touching any other woman. “Now hear what I say. Tomorrow, I want you to go to the market and have at least half a dozen top

quality dresses made of the finest silk, the first of many for a wardrobe that shall rival the Queen's."

"*On-ee-yo!* Oh, no, Soldier Brother. That would be foolish extravagance."

"In two days we will marry. Corean -tyle. No point is asking any foreign missionaries to wed us. They won't consider an interracial marriage."

"I think your older brother, Pak *sang-nim*, does not approve of me," said the girl, worriedly. "He will not concur with such a marriage."

"He never approves of anything, especially my selection of women. The ceremony will be public, in the middle of the settlement."

"Yes, Soldier Brother," said Su Ga, struggling to conceal her sudden elation. "You, too, shall need the finest of new Corean clothes. I will have your clothing made."

"And tomorrow, will you start handling my household and budget?"

"We already have a new servant."

"So I noticed. After the Western holidays, and after Lunar New Year, we are visiting Kaesong. I will not have your parents believing you are dead."

"*Iii-gu*, yobo! They must never know that I am a foreigner's woman! That will hurt them."

He shook his head.

"Foreigner's wife, not woman. My first, and my only. And they, and you, are already beyond such hurt. So you won't need that tiny *jangdo* knife that dangles from your neck. Tell them that you are my compradore, if you wish. Or wife, or woman, as you wish.

We're going to begin a business relationship with your father's ginseng fields."

"I foreswore all hope of ever seeing them again," said the woman, her soul as naked as her perfect body, tears again flowing. "Truly, you are the brother of dreams. I shall make you the finest wife on earth. I swear it, by all ancestors since time began. But the *jangdo* stays, for defense should I ever be attacked, and to destroy myself should I be incapable of defense and be dishonored."

"All danger is past, but have it your way," he said, dismissing the thought, leaning forward, kissing her neck, then shoulder, his excitement returning for round two, her reactions exquisite and responsive. Afterwards, he slipped into a peaceful deep sleep, not noticing that the Yun woman remained awake, wide-eyed in thought, prioritizing, sleep impossible. He was awakened by kitchen noises well after the sun had risen the next morning.

"Yobo!" cried Tubert excitedly, pulling his trousers about him as he ran through the doorway, still half asleep as he caught up with his Kaesong woman and her servant. Su Ga and the servant girl looked like grotesque walking pot hangers, heading for the gate, metal pots and pans clanging. "What are you doing? Those European-made pots are the finest money can buy."

"If you want these, you have them, and I shall leave, Soldier Brother," said his Korean fiancée, simply but firmly. "I am not using hand-me-downs from your black mistress. I will respect her memory; tend her burial ground and burn incense because she consoled you. But her clothes, and all other traces of her in that house, must go. Am I, or am I not, to be your wife?"

“Eh?” said Tubert, perplexed, spotting Pak and Mun peering from the doorway to the hunters’ quarters, resenting their enjoyment of the situation. “You are. Yes. Do as you wish.”

The females turned from him and walked noisily, under the gaze of the hunter sentry out past the huge wooden gate, and began gently placing the dozen pots and pans on the road before the gate.

“Thank you, yobo,” she said, turning her back to the utensils, walking back in the gate toward the house as passersby along the dirt road began carrying away the metal cookware. “Good then. Now go back and rest. I am bringing in stone culinary vessels, some so old they still have Arabic and Sanskrit inscriptions from when Koryo teemed with Arab, Indian and other Western traders, when Chaoshien was ruled centuries ago from Kaesong, my home. Our home shall eat well. Now rest, for I have much to do today and this night to prepare for tomorrow.” Such ancient utensils, thousands of which Tubert’s settlement had sold to foreigners the first year of the kingdom’s opening, were from steatite minerals and assumed a bright black, if polished, from exposure to fire and oil. They had been hewn from solid north Chaoshien rock, then turned by Koryo Dynasty craftsmen on lathes centuries before.

From the steps to the house, he turned and watched passing Koreans before the gate quickly carry off the expensive cookware produced by modern European technology he had purchased for the black woman. He wondered how settlement meals would be prepared and uneasily wondered what other changes the Korean girl might be planning for him. A glance at the outdoor fire next to his home that heated the bedroom floor showed him that the females were already using the black stone cooking vessels. From

that day, the viands cooked in Su Ga's stone vessels proved tastier than the foods the settlement men had known from the modern metal containers. Later that day, the hunters and *posang* shoppers unanimously proclaimed her stew superior to any ever served in the settlement.

Throughout that day, well into the evening, excitement and activity beyond any previous holiday or celebration, mostly orchestrated by the Kaesong woman, gained momentum in the compound.

"Mun *sang nim*, would you care to invite any *posang* friendly to my husband to remain in the compound for the wedding? In fact, perhaps dispatch some of them to get other peddlers? Might we also invite families?" asked Miss Yun, as a Korean tailor fitted a fretting Tubert for a Korean wedding outfit in the main room of the house.

"With pleasure, *Soma nim!*"

"Pak *sang nim*, could you ride fast to Seoul, to this eunuch who supposedly represents my husband's interests at court, and ask him to quickly invite all officials who know Soldier Brother, and especially barbarians, to the wedding? Even though it is short notice, invite them."

The taciturn hunter had barely spoken a word to Tubert since their return to Chemulpo. Now he concealed both his mixed satisfaction at the invitation to help with the preparations, and his reservations about the public spectacle they were hoping to pass off as a genuine wedding.

"It'll be done," Pak said gruffly, rising, heading to the stable. "I shall also dispatch a rider to the House of Pae, north of the Imjin River. And to Lord Min, though there is no

chance for the queen's nephew to attend.”

“Yobo, stand straight and stop fidgeting! The tailor is almost done. When he is done, please stop by the den of iniquity next door and invite Mister Buferd and all people there, even Madam Ahn and her Western prostitutes, to tomorrow morning's wedding. Then, hasten to your trader friend Townsend and ask him and his wife if Satchiko-*san* would care to be my handmaiden? Then return with them, for I must learn what she knows of Western weddings. There's much to discuss with her, and I'll need you to interpret. And what are we going to do with your hair?”

“What's wrong with my hair?” asked Tubert testily. “I've been wearing my hair like this for six years. Western-style, since the kingdom opened. There've been no complaints.”

“Nothing, *yobo*,” she said, patting his head like a recalcitrant little boy, sensing the interest and approval of Kwan Il and some of the *posang* and other northern hunters at the attention she devoted to the Soldier Brother. It was as if they sensed the political face and legitimacy she was attempting to infuse into the pending marriage. “After all, you are still a barbarian.”

The hair style of both unmarried Corean males and females was the same; the hair was divided in the middle of the forehead and braided to hang down the back so that, seen from the back, it could be hard to tell whether one was girl or boy. Single people wore nothing on the head. However, after marriage, the hair styles of a man and woman became different. Men combed the hair up and bound it in a topknot.

“What's wrong with my hair?” asked Tubert, his jaw dropping, self-conscious of the

finer texture of his scalp as compared to the strength of the jet-black Korean hair.

“Eh? Nothing, *yobo*,” she said, sweetly. “From now on, you’ll let it grow, then you’ll wear the topknot of a married man when traveling outside this treaty port, eh? Important that you look married.”

He shrugged and nodded.

“Song *sang-nim*,” she said, turning to the grinning young compradore who, among all of Tubert’s northern hunters, seemed closest to her husband-to-be. “May I call you Younger Brother? You’re next to be fitted for new clothes, and you’ll walk with Soldier Brother from the hunters’ quarters to the wedding altar, which will be on the porch steps.”

“As you wish,” said Kwan Il with a broad smile. His contentment and approval of Tubert’s wife-to-be was genuine, enormous and obvious.

“Then, go down to the wharves and tell our young man, Yong Bae, that he is to be my errand boy, starting tonight at sunset. I’ll want him to bring the freshest fish, mussels and squid, and two female helpers from fish lady’s stand at the market, just after midnight.

Ii-gu! I have so much to do!”

“I’ll do that immediately, *Soma nim*.”

* * * *

“The both of them look like they are about to be raped by a bullock,” observed Pak, spotting the Soldier Brother in baggy, pure white cotton trousers, silken Korean vest and wearing a horsehair *yangban*’s hat. From the settlement house in the opposite direction

came the Kaesong female in an elegant, flowing red gown and a red vest. After the marriage, Su Ga would part her hair in the center, pull it into a large *nangja* knot at the nape of the neck, and insert a long, large hairpin through the knot.

“No point in trying to put any emphasis on Soldier Brother’s lineage for this,” sighed Pak. “And since he’s cut his hair in the Western fashion, there’s no hair left to tie a topknot with. I tell you, when I think of the old days! When we first started wandering, he wore his hair as normal, unmarried young men do, then falsely as a topknot to meet the Miguks in Pusan. He’s never been known for conforming, you know. Or for taking advice.”

“Still,” said Mun, scratching his head thoughtfully, “I really wish they would have listened to me and taken the time to evaluate this mock marriage through *kunghap*, the matching of their dates of birth down to the hour, day, month and year by the lunar calendar. Only then might they, and we, be assured of an auspicious union.”

“That’s true, neighbor” said Pak. “But you know our barbarian. Once he makes up his mind, there’s no restraining him. Yet this impure ceremony, this ridiculous spectacle, nonetheless signifies the joining of this Yun woman to the already existing home of her husband, and thus, even if indirectly, binds her to us. Sad, I agree, the first marriage between a barbarian and a clean Korean woman doesn’t even have a go-between.”

“We’re the go-betweens, you old tiger sticker! Just be glad he’s going through some of the motions, neighbor,” replied Mun, half drunk, clapping Pak on the back. “And even if this is only a public spectacle, rather than a traditional wedding ceremony, this is as close as we’ll get to furnishing him with a mate that also suits us, whom we can communicate and reason with, even if we don’t have the groom’s parents for them to *kowtow* before.

May he mount her each morning as the sun rises, become domesticated, thus spare us from further sea chases. Drink up, neighbor!”

They were in the middle of a group of almost thirty men, a handful of hunters, most of the others *posang* making routine business tops at the settlement, others who had been sent for. Not ten feet from them was a hide-clad northeastern Chaoshien hunter turned *posang*, Kwon the hunter, who spoke the almost incomprehensible northeastern dialect, a hooded hunting falcon perched on his forearm that the backwoodsman intended on giving to Tubert as a wedding present. No time for Pae Sung Ip to make the journey from the north, and impossible for Lord Min, now a human vegetable incapable of even speech and slowly dying, to attend.

“She was worth stealing for him,” conceded Pak, watching Kwan Il emerge with Soldier Brother from the hunters quarters, where the groom had symbolically and, at the Kaesong woman’s request, spent the night. From the settlement house, the Yun woman emerged with Walter Townsend’s Japanese wife at her side. From the side of Tubert’s partially Western house, aromatic scents of food being boiled and fried, soon to be served with rice wine, beer and liquor, wafted in the air. “But, based on what we saw at sea, we’ll never fully control her, and neither will he. Yet she’s still infinitely better than that black barbarian woman, though the Chinese are more incensed at him than ever for his arms shipment. And she’s certainly an improvement over that *kisaeng* hussy. It’s good he now has the woman, for my days with him are numbered. I’m tired of never being consulted, of being out-smarted. I swear, he’ll never use us again to prop up this fly-blown regime. I’ll kill him first.”

There were good-natured catcalls from the Korean peddlers watching the converging

processions.

“Since we can’t stick our fingers through paper-screen doors to make holes and watch you two get acquainted tonight, we’ll drill holes through your door, Soldier Brother!”

“*Iii-gu*, Soldier Brother, stuff yourself with eels and ginseng! This night, you’ll need vigor and stamina!”

Yi the eunuch stood near the entrance of the Western home next to a palanquin and a half dozen weary bearers, exhausted by the sudden forced trip from Seoul.

Impossible to decline this, thought the bald, robed official. And not at all an auspicious occasion, for me. When the overgrown, blood-drenched, lust-crazed foreign reptile slithered atop of the *kisaeng*, now so forcefully ploughed by devil Mihashi, the whore at least detracted from this barbarian’s focus! And the black strumpet was a helpful diversion that he may still, hopefully, lose his life for.

But why, the stern-faced eunuch asked himself once again, does not that Japanese goblin chop to shreds this arrogant, dangerous round-eyed mongrel, and at last rid me of the ties I’ve become so unwittingly enmeshed in? The dark-spirited yellow dwarf has us constantly monitor and report on the movements and activities of the Soldier Brother and other Westerners. How long need I wait for that sword-happy Japanese to turn the earth crimson with the lifeblood of this hideous foreigner, just as he so splendidly did for the nephew of our all too cunning and dangerous queen? *Iii-gu*, a wise man has many masters. If that mousey-looking, newly arrived Russian envoy is serious about meeting with me, it might at last let me distance myself from both Mihashi and this foreign gargoyle!

But this dragon-dung-incubated Kaesong female he's actually taking as wife will now also loyally serve the Soldier Brother, strengthen him, thought the eunuch, his focus returning to the unhappy present, watching the ceremony in the open space before him. Curse this marriage, and curse Queen Min, who ordered me to extend an invitation, no less than an order, for this commoner Corean female to be a guest before Her Highness! Now I've got a new spinning coin to contend with! The first, and surely the last, liaison between a Western barbarian and a Corean woman. Damn all *jes-u*, why in my lifetime?

At one side of the throng of nearby men, T'ang and two of his crewmembers stood apart.

At last, and at least, perhaps this woman will tame the Soldier Brother, thought the frail Chinese with the wispy, white beard. Oh ho, how she was like a tigress defending her cub when we might have been rid of him at sea! So loyal, and a new force to reckon with! But when she tames our *feng-qua*, the corpulent rodent and drug taipan, Mao, shall fall upon him in revenge, or that squat Japanese hoodlum, Mihashi, shall dismember him. And that's when, if I choose not to accept old Mao's offer to work opium shipments on the Yalu, I shall safely bolt home to China in *Sea Angel* and sell the vessel for a sum that shall keep me comfortable for the end of my days. Someday, the gods shall cease to smile upon him. Yes, but not until then, for the savagery of Soldier Brother would reach across the Yellow Sea for me, even into the heart of the Middle Kingdom, should I seize the junk before his death.

Midway between the house and the godowns and hunters' quarters stood a table with two cups and simple foods. At the other side altar was another group of well wishers. Walt Townsend, Aaron Buferd and Jamie Scott stood in the chill, sunny morning

watching the simple marriage ceremony. Buford had invited a newcomer staying in the Foreigners' Club, Brigadier General William McIntire Dye, a white-bearded veteran of the American Civil War and Washington's first military advisor to the Korean Army.

"Been sayin' all along, what Timothy needs is a Korean woman. Someone who can understand him," remarked Buford. "Nothin' against Pearl, mind you. But the only one who will ever understand him's a Korean woman. Feel almost like a father giving his son away. You know I had him, just when he was born? Made promises to watch after him to his Dad. In Shanghai, it was. Almost thirty years ago."

"For me, marrying an Asian woman means never going back," said Townsend, who had spent much of the previous evening with Satchiko as Tubert translated between Miss Yun and Satchiko. He tore his eyes from the old man in the still hated Yankee uniform. "But Timothy's never been back. What's most striking, gentlemen, is who is not here."

"He must be quite a man, from what Buford here tells me," noted the aging American
"Oh, he is, General. And yes, Walt, they invited the entire foreign community, exceptin', of course, the Chinese and the Japanese," said Buford. "He's the richest white man in Korea now. Even old lady Ahn was invited, but the hateful old hag has it in for Timothy from way back. Thinks he stole the ground the settlement is on."

"It was a bit short notice for our new counsel general to come," said the British military logistician, Jamie Scott, apologetically. Walter Caine Hillier, born in Hong Kong, was a Chinese student interpreter who had been rushed to Seoul from the British Embassy in Peking to take Aston's place. Hillier, like other foreign officials, was livid at the royal couple secretly hiring Tubert to supply arms, which allowed them to distance themselves

not only from the smothering protection of Yuan, but also from all other powers in Chaoshien. Of course, the *Essex* was conspicuously not in port, not after supposedly intervening as a Japanese warship had attempted to ram the *Sea Angel* in the last hours of the shipment. The British logistics officer's work crews, now that the Komun Island fiasco was passing, had been scaled back to a skeleton force of a few dozen troops trying to dismantle the guns of the great fortifications. The potential of the southern islands was stupidly lost, simply because the Empire, and Sir Aston, had allowed themselves to be cajoled into backing away from a post that was clearly in the best of British interests in Asia. "And I understand Mister Foulk is on another trip over in Japan."

"What I meant are the Allens, the Appenzellers and Underwoods and others," replied Townsend. He, like the rest of them, was aware that Yuan Shi Kai was ranting at every foreign diplomat in Seoul, particularly George Allen, viciously accusing them of secretly steering Tubert to Chaoshien's king and queen for the illicit arms shipment. The din of the Chinese viceroy, outraged at losing the excuse of protecting the royal couple, was being matched in velocity by howls of indignant diplomatic denials. "Stuffy, holier-than-thou missionaries, and fair-weather friends."

"Timothy's always been a controversial chap, but we had an enlisted man take a Korean girl as wife down on Komun. Poor fellow died, we think from eating the food, and we buried him. Little wonder some people may be frightened to show here today. I know I'll miss him," said Scott, chagrined at the end of all hope for British glory in Korea, and at the thought of soon returning to the endless details and inspections and drudgery of duty in Hong Kong, to be replaced here by uppity Naval logisticians to service ships that would still make port visits to Chemulpo. I don't care if Mister Hillier and the admiralty

learn I attended this wedding, the British supply officer told himself. Helplessly and inwardly he damned all milk-blooded aristocratic diplomats, British, Korean and Chinese, for flushing Her Majesty's interests down the chutes.

"Aww, we don't need any of `em, Walter," said Buford, as a cheer went up. Arm in arm with his new wife, Tubert turned and waved, summoning both Korean and Western groups to follow them to the waiting food and drink at the settlement house. "Not when Queen Min herself sends Su Ga a fine gold necklace as a wedding present last night. That gots more force out here than any Christian wedding vows."

* * * *

Near dusk the evening following the wedding, he walked alone to the Chemulpo wharves, in the fading light watching Korean and Chinese fishermen unload their hauls. He sat alone on one of the thick wooden posts securing the wharves, and glanced in direction of Kang-wha Island and the clouds beyond.

'I've come so far,' he mused. 'Grown so much, survived so much. I have more than I ever dreamed I could, and yet I have just followed the path open to me. Was it me, or *jes-u* that has brought me to now?'

For the first time in what seemed years, he relaxed and attempted to put perspective of his life. A fleeting image of competing for food as a small boy with the dogs in Mao's Shanghai home moved through him, and later images of martial arts sparring with the Kumgang monk starving and the cold of the streets of Shanghai and the first months at the northern village. Memories of fights with Cookie Thatcher and others as a human mascot with the fleet stirred in him. He smiled to himself, chuckling.

‘From a mascot, little more than a slave, to a ward of a kingdom, almost overnight,’ he thought. Thoughts of making money and helping the hunters and families improve their lives, of losing a beautiful and nude Korean girl from Kang’s pirate junk, rendezvous with Henri, meeting and guiding *posang*, meeting Jewell and the fleet in Pusan, the heartbreak of losing Joo, earning the trust of the king and queen and the failing Lord Min, left Tubert with a strange sense of destiny.

‘Not just destiny,’ he thought, patting the human-hide pouch from the senior Mihashi brother. ‘I will wear that until I die to remind them of what, and who I am.

‘I wish Von Mollendorf was still in here.’

He reminded himself that the strings of Korean coins, four hundred coins to each American dollar, needed to be paid to each hunter in the settlement from the bullion he had put in the bank had to be picked up and given to the northerners in the morning. Each hunter who served the settlement would receive enough to buy land and build new homes.

‘I have enough money now that I don’t need to work for the rest of my life,’ he thought solemnly, suddenly noticing the lamps of Chemulpo were shining behind him. ‘I could sell, even afford to lose the settlement now, except it’s the home I swore I would have, and the northern hunters and families, the friends I once promised myself I would find, rely on it for future prosperity. It’s as if it has all come from the mists of other lifetimes.’

He turned and peered back into the sea and the darkness. The vision of his Kaesong wife came to him in a sweep of tenderness and gratitude that Westerners sometimes

called love.

‘Her loyalty is impeccable, and her morals and courage. What an incredibly lucky man I am. A home, a magnificent wife, and a fortune. And magnificent enemies; Yuan Shih Kai, Mihashi, Mao, Henri, Feng and who knows who else to come, to be dealt with when and how I choose.’

Oh yes, there are still enemies, and battles ahead.

He visualized again his penniless boyhood, followed by a surge of gratitude for the wife, fortune and home that *je-su* had given him.

‘*Jes-u* and my own efforts. I was born to walk between both worlds.’

The Soldier Brother rose and exhaled deeply, wearying of sorting his own thoughts and feelings, and heading towards a tiny Buddhist temple on the edge of the port city to give thanks and then to the arms of his wife.

End