

## Shower

THE boy stood by the stream and saw the girl and placed her as old Yun's great-granddaughter. She had both hands playfully in the running water, as if she had never seen such a clear stream.

For several days now she had been playing by the water on her way home from school, and until yesterday she did her water-stirring by the bank. To-day she was squatting on one of the stepping stones in mid-stream.

The boy decided to sit down on the bank to wait for her to return. Soon a farmer happened by and she stood up to make way for him to cross the stream. The boy crossed over too.

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The next day he came to the bank a little later and there she was at the same rock, washing her face. She was wearing a pink sweater, both sleeves rolled up, and her wrists and the nape of her neck were a glistening white.

Washing done, she looked intently into the running water, at her reflection, no doubt. She scooped water up—oh, that must be a tiny fish she has spotted.

*This story, which has been translated from the Korean by Yu E. Sang, won a prize in our recent Authors' and Translators' Story Competition (organised in association with International P.E.N.). Hwang Soon Won is a Professor in the Department of Literature, Sinhung University, Seoul, and a Member of the Korean Academy. He is author of several novels and collections of stories and poems.*

Perhaps she noticed him on the bank, perhaps not. She just went on scooping up the water, absorbed in her game, and apparently not budging unless someone came by.

Now she picked something up out of the water: a white pebble. She jumped to her feet, started to hop across the stones to the other side. One step short of the bank she turned back: "Oh, silly boy!" and the pebble came flying towards him.

He started up. Her pigtail flapping on the back of her head, she made a dash for the reed bushes. The reed tops swished silkily in the autumn sunlight.

She could only come out over there at the other end of the reed bushes. Quite a while, but no sign of her yet. He tip-toed, then a wisp of reed tops stirred, and she was back in sight with an armful of reed tuft, walking away leisurely. The bright sun was on the tassels that rose high over the girl's head and it looked as if a tuft, not a girl, was slowly moving down the path.

He kept on standing there until the reed tuft was out of sight. Then he looked down and saw the pebble she hurled at him. It was almost dry now. He picked it up, put it into his pocket.

The next day he came out to the bank much later. She was nowhere to be seen, and it was a relief. She was not there the next day, or the next. As days went by without her showing up at the stream, a strange emptiness began to form deep down inside the boy, and with this, a habit of reaching down to finger the pebble in the pocket.

One day he tried to squat on the stepping-

stone where she used to play with the water. He dipped his hands in. He washed his face. He, too, looked into the water. The water's surface mirrored his dark tanned features. He cupped his hands and tried to scoop the image up. Then he started to his feet. Wasn't she coming his way across the stream?

She must have been watching him, hiding. The boy started to run. One foot missed the stone, and there was a splash. He ran on, unmindful of the wet foot.

A quick look around, but there was nowhere to hide on this side, not even a small reed bush: only several buckwheat patches, too low. The smell of the flowers seemed to sting his nostrils. For a brief second he felt faint, then some lukewarm, salty liquid was on his tongue. His nose was bleeding.

He kept running. "Silly boy, silly boy!" seemed to tail him closely behind.

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**S**ATURDAY came. When the boy reached the stream, there she was, again playing with the water. He negotiated the first stepping-stone, pretending she was not there. He watched his step across.

"Oh, you." He pretended not to hear and walked on to the other bank.

"Oh, boy, what is the name of this clam?"

He turned around in spite of himself. His eyes met hers, clear and dark-brown, and he shifted his eyes down to her palm.

"A silk clam."

"What a lovely name!"

The boy and the girl were now at the fork of the path. She had about three li to cover, he about ten, along separate paths.

"Ever been on the other side of that mountain over there?" She pointed to the far end of the plain.

"Oh, no."

"Why not go there together? I'm bored to death ever since we came to the country. Nobody to play with."

"That's a long way, you know. Farther than you think it is."

"Maybe, but it can't be too far for me. When I was going to school in Seoul we used

to go long distances on trips, farther than that."

"Silly boy!" seemed to be right in her eyes, ready to come out aloud.

The boy and girl started along a narrow path between the paddies, past farmers cutting rice plants, the kind that ripens earlier. In the centre of the paddy stood a scarecrow. Several ropes reached from its supporting pole across the paddy to the stakes driven at intervals around the bank. The boy bent down, twitched one of the slack ropes, and a few sparrows flitted away. (Oh yes, I'd better get back early and chase the sparrows off the paddy near the house.)

"What fun!" She took hold of the rope herself, shook away, the scarecrow twitching at each pull. She saw another scarecrow in the next paddy and ran for it, and off he went after her (half deciding to drop the idea of sparrow-chasing or helping around the house).

The boy ran past and ahead of her. Grasshoppers kept bumping into his face, so many faint pricks. He felt the blue sky suddenly going in a whirl, dizzily, a blessed eagle circling round and round up there, that's what it was. The girl was busily jerking at the rope, shaking the scarecrow, which danced even better than the first one.

The paddies ended in a stream, where the dry field began, planted with soy-beans all the way up to the foot of the hills, farther ahead. The girl hopped over the stream, one step ahead. They walked by the bend of a bean patch, where bundles of threshed sorghum stalks stood in a shock.

"Oh, what is that over there?" She pointed to the thatched platform raised on four tall poles.

"A watchtower."

"How are the musk-melons here? Are they very sweet?"

"Of course they are, but the water-melons are best."

"I wish I had one right now."

He pulled up two of the radishes planted in a row around the patch, pinching the green tops off the still slender roots, and gave one to her. As if to show her how, he bit off the

top and worked his thumbnail around the edge, peeling off the white skin.

She copied him, chewed a mouthful, then tossed the radish away. "How foul!"

"I can't eat it either. It isn't sweet at all." He threw his radish even farther away.

They were much closer to the mountain now. The flaming reds of the maple leaves were dazzling to their eyes. With a joyful shout, she dashed towards the foothill. The boy stayed behind, picking flowers.

"This one's chrysanthemum, this is a bush clover, and this one's a bellflower. . . ."

"I had no idea the bellflower is so lovely. Oh, I love this lavender . . . and what do you call this yellow one like a tiny umbrella?"

"Mat'ari."

She held it up as she would hold an umbrella, her cheeks a trifle flushed.

He picked another handful, sorted out more fresh ones, and handed them to the girl.

"But don't throw any away!" she ordered.

Down below from the ridge, a few thatched roofs were clustered together. The two sat side by side on a rock by the path. It seemed as if a quiet had descended all around. The autumn sun that still felt hot seemed to carry the smell of drying grass.

"What is the name of those flowers up there?" Her finger pointed to a small steep mound, coiled with kudzu vines, a few tardy pinkish-violet flowers peeping out from the clusters of pods, all sticking upwards.

"They're just like wisteria. There's wisteria in my school yard in Seoul, one of those trellised things. That flower reminds me of the girls I used to play with there."

Slowly she went over to the mound, and pulled at a vine with the most flower clusters. It didn't yield to her twisting, and she strained and slipped. Her hand snatched at a vine and held it.

The boy flew over, seized her outstretched hand, and pulled her up. He regretted that he hadn't offered to get the kudzu flowers for her.

He saw a scratch on her right kneecap, blood oozing through. He suddenly put his lips on the spot, started to suck it, and then leapt up and ran away.

He came running back, out of breath: "Put this on the wound! It will help." And he rubbed on some pine resin.

"You know, there is a calf over there. Let's go see it!"

It was a brown calf, so young it didn't have a nose-ring on as yet. He grabbed the rein close to its muzzle, scratched its back with the other hand, and he leaped up, landing astride its back. The calf started trotting around the stake to which it was tethered. The white face of the girl, her pink sweater, her dark blue skirt and her spray of wild flowers and all, suddenly blurred into one shimmering circle of colours. He was dizzy, but forced himself to stay on because he was so proud of his feat.

"Here, what are you kids up to?" The head of an old farmer emerged from a clump of sword grass. The boy slid off the back of the calf. The farmer surely would scold him for riding on a calf while its back was still tender.

But the man with a long beard only said, "Hurry back home, both of you, before the shower catches you."

**T**H E R E was a huge column of black rain-cloud coming overhead. Things were stirring. A gust of wind scudded through the bushes, rustling, then everything turned into a garish, violet colour.

The first raindrops came pattering down on the broad oak leaves as the boy and the girl passed over the crest of the hill. Down the slope, a big drop or two of chilly rain on his neck, then it came pouring in sheets, blocking out the view. Then a watchtower loomed ahead through the rain, a dry place. But it was in bad shape, with gullies in the thatch, posts a-tilt, the rain coming through almost as freely inside as out. He managed to find a dry spot for her to stand. Her lips had turned purple, her shoulders were shivering visibly. He took off his cotton jacket and put it around her. She looked up to him once, rain water dripping over her eyes, then began to sort out faded or broken flowers.

The roof began to leak on her, and the place was of no use as a shelter. He ran out

to a nearby rick of sorghum stalks. He ran his hand into it to see if it was dry inside and picked up bundles of tall stalks to set them up on the outside for extra protection. He beckoned the girl.

Inside the rick there was no leak, but it was dark and there was hardly room for both of them. He stood out in the rain, and a mist of steam rose from his bare back.

The girl, almost in a whisper, asked him to come inside. She insisted, and he started to edge in cautiously. His back crushed the flowers she was holding, but she didn't mind. The sudden smell of sweat from his wet body surprised her. But she didn't turn away. Her trembling eased up somewhat from the warmth of his body.

The steady pattering on the sorghum blades stopped, it had grown lighter outside, and they stepped out of the gloom. Just ahead, on the plain, the sunlight was pouring down on a bright, glistening patch.

They walked up to a stream, but the turbid water was high and too wide for one jump.

He turned his back towards her, and without a word she allowed him to carry her over piggy-back. Water was coming half-way up to his thighs, when she, with a shriek, tightened her hold around his neck. Before he made the other side of the stream the sky was blue again without a speck of cloud lingering.

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FOR days she had not been around. Every day he went out to the stream hoping to catch sight of her again, but she was nowhere to be seen.

He looked into the school-yard at play-time. He once peeped into the fifth-grade classroom for girls, but she wasn't there either.

Then one day, he walked towards the stream, his fingers busy with the white pebble, and there, there she was, squatting on the bank, this side of the stream.

"I've been ill." She looked pale and thinner.

"Because of that shower the other day?" She nodded.

"Are you all right now?"

"Not quite yet."

"Why, then you ought to be in bed."

"But it's so boring staying home, and I came out... What fun it was that day, though... I don't know where I got this. This spot doesn't seem to come off." She looked down at the front hem of her pink sweater.

A dark brown smudge, turning greyish. She looked up, and the flush was back on her cheeks. "Where do you suppose I got this?"

He kept staring.

"Yes, I know now. Remember, you carried me across the stream? This must've come from your back."

He felt the blood rushing to his face.

At the fork, she held out a handful of jujubes.

"By the way, this morning they picked some jujubes at home. They're going to use them in the sacrifice on the Moon Festival."

He hesitated.

"Come, have some! They're very sweet. They say my great-great-grandfather planted the tree."

He held out his cupped hands. "My, these are really big!"

"Do you know? We're going to let our house after the festival."

The boy had heard villagers talk about how the Yun family's business went badly in Seoul and how they had to wind it up to come back here to their place in the country. It now appeared the family had to let out that house as well.

"I don't really know what it is all about, but I just hate moving. It's something the grown-ups do and I can't help it."

A sad look came into her eyes, something he had not seen before.

As he walked back home alone after parting, he mulled over the news. Somehow he failed to taste the sweetness of the jujube in his mouth. But after stealing over to the walnut grove belonging to Grandfather Toksoe, and filling his pockets with the best nuts in the whole village—which she would soon be tasting—he suddenly remembered. He forgot to tell her to come out again to the

stream before she left and as soon as she was well again. Silly boy! Silly boy!

**W**HEN he returned from school, on the eve of the Moon Festival, he saw his father dressed to go out, with a chicken in his hand.

"I wonder if this is big enough?"

Mother handed him a straw handbag. "She's been cackling for days now, looking for a place to sit. She may not be quite so big yet, but she's fat all right."

The boy turned to his mother and asked where his father was going.

"He's going over to the Yuns' and that chicken is for the offering on to-morrow's festival."

"Then why not take that big speckled rooster?"

Flustered, the boy threw down his bundle of books, went out to the barn, and spanked the rump of the bull with a bare palm as if to kill a fly.

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**T**HE water of the stream looked much clearer as the days became cooler. The boy came to the fork in the road, tried walking up the other path, stopped by the reed bushes and looked across towards the village where the girl lived. The village looked very close in the crystal air of autumn.

According to the grown-ups, her family was moving to-morrow to Yangpyong to run a small store. The boy fingered the walnuts in his pocket with one hand, and with the other mechanically lopped off reed tops.

Alone that night, he was still going over the news of the Yun family's move. He tried to decide whether he should go to the departure or not, and if so, would he be able to see her. . . .

He was half dozing off, when he heard a voice.

"What a thing to have happened!"

Father was back.

"My, the Yuns are in a bad way. They had to sell all the estates they had, and then the house they've lived in for generations. And now they had to have that young girl die on them. . . ."

There was only the light of the kerosene lamp, and threading her needle, mother said, "She was their only great-granddaughter, wasn't she?"

"Yes, they had two young grandsons but both died a long time ago."

"How unlucky they are with children!"

"That is just what I was going to say. She's been sick for some time, but I hear they could hardly get as much medicine for her as she needed. But, you know, she must've been a strange child. Believe it or not, just before she died, she said, 'When I die, please bury me in the clothes I'm wearing now.'"

# Perish by the Sword

## *A Memoir of the Military Establishment*

THE Sword is the emblem of military authority. Everyone in the Army has one, though the more important he is the more resplendent and generally impractical his sword will be. Private soldiers have bayonets—token swords, one might say, reminders of the immemorial origins of soldiering and what is even now the occasional necessity of killing face to face. Mounted troopers have crudely fashioned sabres. Regimental Serjeants-Major, being of some grandeur, have proper swords with ciphered hilts—shorter than Officers' swords, however, to remind the R.S.M. of his exact social status. Officers themselves have all kinds of sword: one kind in the Royal Regiment of Artillery, another in the Light Infantry, and claymores, of course, in the Highland Regiments; while General Officers have swords with unguarded ivory hilts, weapons of great beauty and value.

None of these, except for the common soldier's bayonet, ever appear now, save only on ceremonial occasions. But they are still there for all that, kept bright by batmen for the annual parade, worn for the photographs that will be sent to housemasters and mothers. For the sword is the symbol not only of might but of leadership and honour; it denotes the righteous anger of the silver knight who rides against Saladin, the purity of St. George, above all, perhaps, the brave words spoken at Agincourt... So that every now and again the old order still goes out: "Officers will wear swords." It is accepted as a duty and a privilege. But who are the young men who run upstairs to instruct their servants, "To-morrow our swords must be bright—see to the sheaths and buckles"? What kind of man is he, in this year of grace 1959, who thinks to

himself with pleasure as he prepares for bed, "To-morrow, like Hector or Achilles, I shall wear my Sword"?

I BOUGHT myself a sword, one afternoon in the spring of 1953, from Messrs. Wilkinson of Pall Mall. I had had a heavy luncheon and so chose a badly balanced one, which was subsequently about as much use as Excalibur for taking on parades. But that, of course, was not the point. For in a few weeks, having no money and nothing else to do, but anticipating travel and excitement and companionship, I was to rejoin the Army as a Regular Officer in the rank of Lieutenant. As such, I must clearly have a sword. I certainly took it with me everywhere, until, in the autumn of 1957, a series of regrettable and squalid misunderstandings, all entirely due to my own fault, compelled me to tender a very hasty resignation. Thus I served some four and a half years with the Colours—years upon which I look back with pleasure, affection, and even (except of course for the squalid misunderstandings) with pride. So while on the one hand these pages are based on experience in an army from which I was, for all practical purposes, expelled, on the other hand any bias I have is firmly in the Army's favour. (This lest anyone should think that the conclusions I shall later draw are the result of disgruntlement or spite.)

All of which brings me back to the spring of 1953, when I waited eagerly for the word to join the Regimental Depot of The King's Shropshire Light Infantry and meanwhile read *The Shropshire Lad* to put me in good trim.

I was at this time twenty-five years old, had taken a fair degree in Classics at King's College, Cambridge, had travelled a little in Europe, and