

Kapitan Ri

Chŏn Kwangyong

A writer of the immediate post-Korean War period, Chŏn Kwangyong (1919–1988) made his debut in the *Chosŏn ilbo* in 1955 and flourished in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. He was also a noted scholar of early-modern Korean literature and a professor at Korea's top-ranked Seoul National University. This strong and commanding figure was revered by generations of students, who recall his booming voice with its Hamgyŏng accent echoing down the halls of his school office building.

In 1962 Chŏn's story "Kapitan Ri" (Kkŏppittan Ri) brought him the coveted Tongin Literary Prize, established by the intellectual magazine *Sasanggye* to honor contemporary writers while commemorating a pioneer of modern fiction, Kim Tongin (1900–1951). The prize citation referred to "Kapitan Ri" as a work that "sets historical consciousness into bold relief as it also shows the possibilities of satirical characterization."

Chŏn Kwangyong was born in Pukch'ŏng, South Hamgyŏng Province, on March 1, 1919, a date that still stirs an emotional reaction in Koreans when they recall the millions who arose that day in unarmed rebellion against Japanese colonialism. By the time of Liberation from Japan, Chŏn was already twenty-six and had been educated in the Japanese-operated educational system. Then in 1947 he entered the Department of Korean Language and Literature at Seoul National University. A member of the first generation of Koreans to receive a college education in their own language, he graduated in 1951.

Having lived through these changing times and being imbued with a strong sense of national pride, Chŏn was particularly well prepared to create the character Yi Inguk, M.D., who energetically collaborates with whatever power there is—Japanese, Russian, American. The biting satire of "Kapitan Ri" captures the feelings of those who, after Liberation from Japan, were sworn to "liquidate" the "colonial vestiges" represented by people such as Yi Inguk, M.D.

"Kapitan Ri" was first published in *Sasanggye* in 1962.

Yi Inguk, M.D., emerged from the operating room and buried himself deep in the reception room sofa.

Dr. Yi lifted away his platinum rimless glasses and mopped his forehead. As the sweat on his back dried, fatigue began to sink into his body. Two hours and twenty minutes in surgery, removing an abdominal abscess. The patient had not yet recovered consciousness.

He would feel a presentiment the moment an operation was over, a revelation of the chances of success. But today, for some reason, he came out of it feeling leery.

He recalled the time he had set a record for the shortest abdominal operation since Japanese colonial days, when antibiotics weren't so advanced.

Appendicitis or circumcision—such surgery is a simple matter. It can be turned over to the young doctors and forgotten. But one cannot be so casual about major surgery. The patients feel that way, too. Most allow themselves to be hospitalized on the condition that the director himself operate. For Yi Inguk, M.D., this was a matter of pride, and he felt a real sense of pleasure in wielding the knife.

His clinic was in a neighborhood so busy and crowded that it seemed nearly every second building was another clinic or hospital. But this nameless modern facility actually waited in empty leisure for its clients, like a country shop between market days.

When he received his clientele—the overflow emergency cases passed on to him by a busy, first-rate university hospital—Yi Inguk, M.D., would take his time, exercising as much concern as each patient's appearance recommended. He was perhaps like an innkeeper who takes one look at a new arrival's clothing and instantly decides which room to give him or unhesitatingly turns him away without stirring from his seat.

The clinic of Yi Inguk, M.D., had two characteristics. The interior was kept spotless, and the fees were at least twice as high as at any other place. His examination of a new patient began with an inquiry into his ability to pay, followed by questions about his disease. If the patient didn't seem such a good prospect, the doctor would offer some excuse. Not personally, of course—his nurse would show the person out.

In all but the most serious cases, younger doctors conducted the preliminary examination. The Director then had only to make a final diagnosis—based on a judgment of the patient's physical condition and economic status, which had been duly recorded on the examination card.

Except for very close friends and the socially prominent, there was no such thing as credit here. Even admitting the little credit given, his twofold diagnosis was the secret of his practice, the guiding principle of thirty-some years of medical life that had seen neither penny lost nor penny uncollected.

Hence, his clientele had been mainly Japanese during the occupation and now had to be among the ruling political circles or the great business magnates to qualify at his door.

His daily routine began with an appearance in the examination room, where his first act was to draw his fingertips along the window frames or table tops and peer, with sunken eyes through rimless glasses, at what he had found. If this inspection revealed any dust he erupted in a thunderous rage, and the nurses faced another day of bad temper from the Director. His regular clientele, however, were full of admiration and respect for such spotless integrity.

This was Yi Inguk, M.D., who had fled to southern Korea during the January Retreat in 1951, carrying only his black bag with a stethoscope in it. Then, as soon as Seoul was recovered, he had quickly rented a room that he outfitted as a clinic. But now he had a two-story Western-style building in downtown Seoul where land was extremely expensive. In addition to his own specialty, surgery, this private hospital also offered departments of internal medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics, and so on. While the profit and loss of each department was its own concern, the directorship of the general hospital resided in his dignified person.

Yi Inguk, M.D., drew an eighteen-carat-gold pocket watch from his vest and checked the time.

Two-forty.

Only twenty minutes until his appointment with Mr. Brown at the American embassy. His watch had seen a lot of history and could tell many tales. Whenever Yi Inguk, M.D., consulted it, he recalled one or another of the near-miraculous turns his life had taken. He had taken the watch when he crossed the thirty-eighth parallel as a refugee with only his black bag in hand. And now that he had replaced the old bag with a new one given to him by an American army doctor, the watch was the only remaining object that had escaped with him. It was, in a sense, his life's companion.

When he went to bed at night, he never placed it by his bedside or even left it in his vest pocket. He would always be sure to take it out and tuck it away inside the steel safe where he kept his registration papers, bank book, and other valuables. Indeed, he had good reason to do so. The watch was a prize of honor he had received on graduation from the Imperial University. His name was engraved on the back.

No matter what changes had swirled about him these past thirty-odd years, his watch had always shown him a constant face. It wasn't only his surroundings—hadn't he himself changed, too? The proud and rosy-cheeked youth in his twenties had somehow disappeared, leaving this graying man with deepening wrinkles. The Japanese occupation, imprisonment under the Russians,

the Korean War, the thirty-eighth parallel, the American army—how many crucial moments had he faced?

Waltham. Seventeen jewels.

It was nothing short of marvelous that this watch could have managed to keep time through so many tortuous years. He would often look at the time only to find his ear drawn to the ticking of his watch, as if by habit. He would then begin to see, with narrowing eyes, a miniature of his bygone life. He couldn't escape the renewed vision he would find there of himself on the day he first put on the coat and tie of a gentleman in place of the familiar high-collared uniform and angular cap he had worn as a student.

Dr. Yi Inguk's thoughts turned to a letter he had tucked away in a drawer just before the operation.

His daughter, Nami, was in America. Her name had once been typically Japanese—Namiko. But he had dropped the "ko" for good when he filed his residence papers after Liberation, since such names had begun to sound awkward then.

Dear Nami, little Namiko! Thoughts of his daughter called back visions of the warm family circle of yesterday.

Nami, the charmer, the pet of the family, was now fully grown. Though it was natural for her to have left his side now and to live within a new affection, Yi Inguk, M.D., could not hold back the flood of loneliness that overcame him from time to time.

His wife had died in the wartime internment camp on Kōje Island, and he still had no idea whether his son was living or dead.

Hyesuk, whom he had met again in Seoul, was his second wife. He strained to deny the difference the twenty years between them made, though it was a generation. But when he compared Hyesuk's resilient good health and firm, glowing skin with his own coarse and wrinkled flesh, there were times he felt the physical withering of age upon him.

Their year-old baby, with its remote, unclear future, was the only blood kin that Yi Inguk, M.D., had left by his side.

Yi Inguk, M.D., tore open the air mail envelope, his heart full of expectation and curiosity. This was the reply to his advice to think things over and not to leap to some sudden, irreversible decision.

Is that the way it's going to be, after all?

He slid the letter onto the table. The thought struck him that maybe this whole business had begun even before his daughter had left the country. It couldn't have been an accident. She chose to major in English at the school where the man had been a foreign visiting instructor. He must have found her the scholarship and then offered to be her sponsor. Of course. But hadn't

he, her own father, encouraged this overseas study as being in keeping with the times?

And when the visiting instructor, a student of the East, had confessed he might like to marry a Korean girl, hadn't he actually given his unintended approval by suggesting it would be a boon to the instructor's studies? Shouldn't he have caught the hint? Yi Inguk, M.D., bit down firmly on the ivory mouth-piece of his ozone pipe and closed his eyes. He felt like a squanderer, angry and desolate.

A big-nose for a son-in-law!

His whole body shuddered with aversion at the thought, as if his blood had suddenly run backward.

That little vixen.

He coughed heavily and spat.

His thoughts leaped back to all the fuss they had made over Japanese-Korean marriages during the occupation. Then such things weren't the makings of slander and humiliation. Rather, they were thought quite natural by many, if not possibly even a mark of distinction. But, then, in his daughter's case . . .

He read his daughter's letter over again.

"Can love know any national boundaries?"

A cheap, time-worn platitude. Daddy had mastered all those fashions, too, when he was a student. Impertinence. Taking this fresh, preaching tone with her own father. Couldn't she be more open about it? So she, an only daughter, expects to experiment in international marriage?

"Anyway, since you said you could easily come overseas sometime, Father, I certainly want to hear your views before making any final decisions. However . . ."

So if Daddy doesn't go, she'll do as she pleases!

Yi Inguk, M.D., shook his head as he called to mind the laws of heredity for a first hybrid generation. A white grandson—the very thought disgusted him.

He picked up the discarded letter once again.

A large stone building on a landscaped campus and, in the background of the picture, boys and girls strolling in pairs; in the midst of this, his daughter and that foreign instructor standing side by side, smiling, with their arms around each other's shoulders.

Hmm. They certainly seem to be enjoying themselves.

He moaned and got up from the sofa. He had to hurry to avoid being late to Mr. Brown's. His anxieties were heightened as he thought how important the State Department invitation had become for him now.

He went back into the living quarters where his wife, Hyesuk, was waiting.

"Dear, it seems Nami has her heart set on getting married."

"Oh, really?"

Yi Inguk, M.D., quickly sensed the lack of any real concern in her voice. He was as careful as possible of what he said in front of Hyesuk about the children of his first wife. He really had to reproach himself for the atmosphere at home, which had been part of the reason for Nami's decision to study in the United States. Nami, of course, had never once called Hyesuk *Mother*. And Hyesuk, for her part, had quite fairly avoided asserting herself as a mother in front of Nami. Inexpressibly subtle and delicate feelings lay hidden in the relationship between Nami and today's mother, who was yesterday's nurse.

"I'm ready to help you in any way I can."

It was with these words that Hyesuk had opened up her heart to Yi Inguk, M.D., when they had met again in Seoul. At first, Hyesuk did not know of his first wife's death; nor did Yi Inguk, M.D., pry into Hyesuk's marital status. Hyesuk soon quit her job at the university hospital and came over to the clinic.

For Nami, it was a revival of old affections, and she clung to Hyesuk as to an older sister. When Yi Inguk, M.D., found himself on the brink of a new marriage, thoughts of his daughter's reaction made him seek out her opinion first.

She had sympathy for the loneliness he felt. And she was quick to sincerely praise his choice of a wife, since she knew that he needed more attention than she alone could give and also that Hyesuk had actually been doing much to raise his spirits. But as time passed, Hyesuk and Nami became more distant, and Hyesuk began to feel that Nami stood in the way of a normal family life for herself and her husband.

Hyesuk had found it impossible at first to feel at ease with Yi Inguk, M.D., in her new role as his wife. But with Nami's departure, the birth of the child, and other things, she reached the point where she could just manage to be a wife to him. Yi Inguk, M.D., for his part, even learned to become a familiar, joking husband.

"She really seems to be getting serious about that foreign instructor."

Yi Inguk, M.D., avoided direct contact with his wife's eyes and repeated his words as if grumbling to himself.

"That can happen. I suppose she should do as she likes."

To Yi Inguk, M.D., her voice sounded as though she were talking about a stranger.

"Well, she's doing that all right, but . . ."

He clicked his tongue and couldn't continue.

He was aroused by the sight of his wife's young body as she gave her breast to the crying baby, who had just woken up. But at the same time he felt overwhelmed by an obsessive sense of guilt toward his daughter, Nami.

He still had some twenty years to wait before this child would be old enough to talk with as he could talk with Nami or his son, Wönshik. Come that day, he'd be an old man in his seventies. Modern medicine had extended man's life span and, except for things like cancer, even eliminated sudden death; still, a doctor couldn't guarantee his own life.

Didn't I let my wife die in front of my eyes as easily as I would let a bird take flight?

At any rate, he had to live until that child made it through college. Indeed, if he lasted long enough he'd have to see the boy through to study in the United States.

When he thought of things in that light, getting started early as a member of an American family did not seem to be such a bad idea. No question that they live better than Koreans do. It's just that it's difficult to keep from losing face with others.

So he mulled his problems over—whether he was consoling himself or simply resigned, he didn't really know.

"Dear, would you wrap that up for me?"

Dr. Yi Inguk's voice had taken a gentle turn.

"Wrap what up?"

His wife turned her head toward him, letting the child nurse undisturbed at her breast.

"That vase, there."

He pointed to an antique standing on his wife's dressing table.

"Where are you taking it?"

"To that Mr. Brown at the American embassy. I'm so indebted to him now."

Yi Inguk, M.D., carrying the package neatly wrapped by his wife, stepped out into the front hall. The evening paper had already been delivered.

No matter how you look at it, his survival had to be a miracle. The confused recollection could still whip up alternating feelings of fear and gratitude—so vivid that the event always seemed like yesterday to him.

Late August 1945. Strong emotions were sweeping over the world and churning up whirlpools as they spread. The dog days were nearly over, but the weather was as hot and sultry as ever. For some days, Yi Inguk, M.D., driven by feelings of anxiety and impatience, had found normal sleep impossible. He could only quiver with tension as he waited for the coming of whatever was approaching.

No sign was left of the many patients who used to come and go, and the once restless telephone now waited silently. All the rooms were empty and echoing, now that the last patient—a Japanese section chief from the provincial administration who had been ill with peritonitis—had been taken away.

The assistants and pharmacists had all given in to anxiety and left, saying they would return after visiting their hometowns. Only the Seoul-born nurse Hyesuk remained to watch over the empty clinic.

In the ten-mat tatami room upstairs, Yi Inguk, M.D., clad in Japanese breechcloth and kimono, could toss and turn no more. He finally threw aside his fan and got up.

He went into the bathroom. He scooped up cold water by the basinful and poured it over his head, letting it flow down the length of his body. A chill traveled down his backbone, and he felt lighter. But while he could wipe his body with the washcloth, he could not wash away the uncertain and oppressive disquiet in his heart.

He glanced out the window at the streets below. Swarms of people were still surging back and forth, engulfed in their own noise. From across the street, a poster pasted on the tightly closed iron doors of a bank appeared only as a square of white to him. But what they'd written there . . .

"Destroy Pro-Japanese and Betrayers of the People!"

All he could see clearly from where he stood were the red circles that marked either end of the slogan. He felt once more the shiver that had gone through him the previous night when he saw it for the first time. Yi Inguk, M.D., instantly turned his head toward the room again.

Why, they certainly wouldn't touch me.

He repeated this to himself as he picked up the fan again. But he had been made extremely uneasy by something that had happened while he was down there, looking at the poster. As he withdrew his intent gaze from the slogan, his eyes met those of that troublemaker Ch'unsök, who looked him up and down, sneering with that distorted look that could have meant contempt or delight, for all he knew. The unnerving image of that encounter had taken to attacking his memory without warning, like a spider web that entangles you in the dark of night.

As much as he tried to wipe that Ch'unsök out of his thoughts, the fellow would always be there, clinging like a leech.

It had happened six months before.

A critically ill patient was carried in from a prison, freed temporarily for treatment, they explained. The helpless youth was but a gaunt, emaciated frame punctuated by a pair of vacant eyes. He could hardly shift his body for the examination without help from the nurse.

As he moved the ivory tip of his stethoscope from the patient's chest to his back and tried to make out the sound of breathing through the rubber tubes, Dr. Yi Inguk's mind wandered to thoughts of the Last Judgment.

Should he be taken in? Should he be turned away?

A glance at the patient's appearance and at the clothing of the man who had carried him in easily revealed his economic status.

But this time something else disturbed him. Not only did it seem improper for him, as a government-appointed City Assemblyman, to admit this political criminal to a clinic patronized by leading Japanese officials; but he also feared that the monument of his good works, for which he was officially recognized as a model citizen of the Empire, could come crashing down overnight because of something like this.

As was his style, he weighed the facts and, in an instant, rendered an immediate and incisive decision. He gave only emergency treatment and sent the supplicant on his way with the very reasonable and proper excuse that there was no room for him at the clinic. He learned later from the nurse that the patient's house was in an alley across the street from the clinic. But since such things were common for him, he dismissed it as a trifle.

Then, just a few days earlier, caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment, he and Hyesuk had stepped out front of the clinic to watch the parade following a mass rally to celebrate Liberation. His eyes happened to meet those of a young marcher wearing the armband of the Self-defense Corps. He felt as if the young man were shooting sparks with those relentless eyes.

The bewildered Yi Inguk, M.D., had no idea of the reason for this until Hyesuk told him that the marcher was Ch'unsök, the political offender who had once been turned away from the clinic. Hearing this, he looked furtively from face to face around him and slipped back into the clinic. After that, he had avoided going out into the streets as much as possible, only to run into Ch'unsök again in front of the poster the previous night.

Suddenly a clamor arose outside. Yi Inguk, M.D., who had been lost in aimless reveries as he lay with his hands clasped behind his head, sat up and turned an ear toward the street. The commotion grew even louder. Unable to suppress his anxiety any longer, he rose and, squatting by the window, looked down into the street. Outside, the seething crowds were waving Korean and Russian flags as they raised great shouts of joy.

What could this be?

He cocked his head in wonder as he sank down to a sitting position. Hearing the sound of footsteps, he rose as someone came hurrying up the stairs. It was Hyesuk.

"I think maybe the Russian army's coming into town! Everybody's out there carrying on.

Yi Inguk, M.D., gave no response to Hyesuk's breathless report. He only blinked and sat back down. For some time now the radio had been predicting that the Russians would enter the city today. So it seems they're really here.

For some time after Hyesuk had gone back down, Yi Inguk, M.D., sat there looking numbly out the window.

Stirred into action by a passing thought, he suddenly got up. He then slid open the door of a small closet. He reached deep into its recesses and drew out a framed Japanese document.

National Language Family.

He had completely forgotten about this award since taking it down and putting it away in the closet on the day of Liberation from Japan.

He opened the frame from the back and, removing the heavy vellum sheet, which looked like a restaurant license, carefully tore the document into such fine shreds that not one letter was left legible. This one sheet of paper could demonstrate how honorable his relationship with the Japanese was. An odd melancholy flashed through his mind.

Few of his patients had ever come from the groups that couldn't speak Japanese. Not only had he always spoken the national language in the clinic and throughout his social life, but he had also insisted on using Japanese exclusively at home, too. So unfamiliar had he become with Korean that he had found it awkward to express himself in it after Liberation.

His wife had contributed a great deal toward winning this award by her efforts to set an example for others. Even the children had done their part in maintaining the spirit. On the day of the award, the entire household celebrated the occasion as joyfully as it might a birth or another happy family event.

"You use the national language so faithfully that you must surely speak it in your sleep! How else could this honor have come to you?"

The sound of those complimentary remarks, made that day by the smiling officer from the local branch of the Citizens League for Total Effort, came floating back to him. Hadn't he at that moment even reflected on how fortunate it had been for him to have given his children a Japanese education from elementary school on?

He heaved a long sigh. He had just recalled with gratitude the helpful branch manager of the bank who had let him withdraw the entire balance in his savings account. What if he didn't have that with him now? He felt a chill creep down his spine. Whatever became of the government, as long as he had the cash in hand half the people in the city could starve to death before his family was touched. He mumbled to himself as he thought of the cashbox in the bedroom closet. Yi Inguk, M.D., mulled over his vague concern that, somehow, he had to survive, come what may.

The day around him grew darker.

As a distant rumble approached, the earth itself seemed to shudder on its axis. The crowds outside exploded into round after round of cheers. His wife came back in from the street.

"Dear, there's a tank unit in town, and the streets are just packed with people! Whatever are you doing here all alone in the house?"

"What am I doing?"

"Come out and see, dear! The *Russkis* are here!"

In the darkness he couldn't tell why his wife's voice seemed to tremble, whether from emotion or bewilderment. *Can women really be so silly and yet so fearless at the same time?* Yi Inguk, M.D., peered in his wife's direction across the dim room and clucked.

"Why, you haven't even turned the light on yet!"

His wife snapped the switch on the lamp. The brightness of the 100-watt bulb was too much for Yi Inguk, M.D.

"What are you turning the light on for?"

"All right, leave it off and sit in the dark, then. Come on now, come along outside!"

Yi Inguk, M.D., had no choice but to follow his insistent wife, feigning indifference as he went.

Blazing headlights dazzled the eyes of the onlookers as the endless column of tanks rumbled by. Yi Inguk, M.D., leaned against a wayside tree, avoiding the glare. The tanks rolled on slowly like a rising tide between two heaving banks of cheering, clapping, shouting people. The Russian soldiers, standing waist deep in the hatchways of their tanks, waved and called "*Urra*" from time to time.

Yi Inguk, M.D., stood staring blankly and awkwardly, unable to clap or cheer as he nursed the illusion that these foreign soldiers had nothing to do with him or his life. He glanced at the crowd around him, wondering if perhaps his behavior had attracted attention. But no one seemed to be taking any interest in him; all eyes were on the passing tanks as the onlookers cheered themselves hoarse.

What's to come of this?

He repeated this question, to which there was neither end nor answer, as he went slowly back into the house.

On the radio, the folksongs and marches were over now and the commander of the Army of Occupation was making a proclamation. Yi Inguk, M.D., sat down in front of the radio and brought his ear up close to the speaker.

The army guaranteed the lives and property of the populace, announced a strict prohibition on the possession of swords and firearms (which had to be turned in), and requested all citizens to remain calm and conduct business as usual.

He suddenly thought of the hunting rifle he kept in the bedroom closet. Would he have to turn it in? It was the newest model, a double-barreled British shotgun that bore the sweat of his own hands. Did he really have to give up this beloved treasure, which he had never once even loaned out?

Yi Inguk, M.D., turned the radio dial. What could they be doing in Seoul now? Same story there, too. If not folksongs, then marches, followed by speeches by someone or other from the Preparatory Committee for National Foundation.

How on earth was this all going to end? There seemed to be no relief from the anxiety this question stirred up in him. He had been calm and composed for two or three days after Liberation, but then, after the announcement of the arrival of the Russians, even those friends who used to pop in and out all the time stopped appearing. And he was growing less and less interested in the idea of running around to ask after them.

It wasn't until late at night that his middle school son and primary school daughter had come home, bursting with talk of the *Russkis* and their tanks, as if they had seen something quite colossal. Their father didn't seem at all interested in listening, but their stories flourished and multiplied as they shared them with their mother and Hyesuk.

Yi Inguk, M.D., had gotten up and slipped out of the room. He went upstairs to the tatami-matted second floor, where he tossed and turned alone. How were things going to work out? The future seemed to spread out before him like a vast ocean that he could never cross. His thoughts were a tangle of string that wouldn't yield up a free end—he could only stare dumbly at the ceiling, nursing vague hopes as if blowing on a dying ember. Guilt or regret for bygone acts was simply beside the point.

Inside the car, Yi Inguk, M.D., opened up the evening paper he had taken from the house. After glancing over the headlines, he folded the paper back to have a look at the miscellaneous items on page three.

North Korean Students in Russia Defect to West Germany.

Type as large as the pieces in a game of go topped a foreign dispatch that monopolized a full column at the left of the page. It was accompanied by a picture as big as the palm of your hand. He pushed his glasses back up on the bridge of his nose, from where they had slipped, and strained to read the text. His eyes dug through the fine print as a vision of his son rose to his mind's eye.

It seemed to him that his son's study in Moscow was the direct result of his own insistence. But was there any other way to overcome the limitations of his social origins and ideology? It was the year of his son's graduation from high school, the year he entered medical college. Yi Inguk, M.D., then as now, was quite confident that he knew how to run his son's life.

"You'd better work hard on your Russian, young man!"

"What for?"

The boy's only response to his father's sudden and suspicious comment was a question.

"Now, Wõnshik! There's no magic formula, you know. During the Japanese occupation you had to speak Japanese to get anywhere in spite of yourself. Today, it's Russian. Since a fish can't live out of water, he's got to think about surviving in the water, doesn't he? You've got to apply yourself to Russian."

The son didn't seem to be particularly inspired by his father's words.

"Here I've managed to pick up a smattering of conversation, even at my age. There's no reason why a youngster like you can't do it."

"Please, Father, don't worry about it any more."

The answer sounded convincing enough to him. But Yi Inguk, M.D., continued to speak with an expression of grave concern on his face.

"Do you think there's anything special about them, except for their big noses? If you can just speak their language well enough to get your point across—they're the same as all the others."

Yi Inguk, M.D., had finally decided on a Russian education for his son when he happened to obtain a letter of recommendation from one of Major Stenkov's powerful connections in the Party leadership.

"Dear, let's live quietly, the way others do. In a world like this it's safest to keep a low profile. Here we have just barely managed to escape the threat of death, and now you want to push our boy into the middle of that 'Raise the Red Flag' business. If you succeed in this, what will become of him?"

"Listen, now. You can't catch a tiger without entering his lair. Whatever comes of the world, let's get what we can out of it."

"You mean to send the boy all the way to Russia?"

"Well, no. But lots of other middle school children are bearing down on their studies right now, even though they can't go abroad yet. Even college students don't find it all that easy."

"But still, how can you be so sure about the future?"

"Don't talk nonsense. Once that boy comes back with his Russian education, we won't hear a peep out of all those people who like to jabber so much about me. Let's live again as we did before, second to no one."

He browbeat his wife into agreement—in spite of her worries over such a venture—and then went on to complete the arrangements for his son's Russian education.

Hmph. The son of that pro-Jap Yi Inguk got in where even the survivors of revolutionaries find it difficult! Just wait and see!

Full of hope, he crowed to himself, beaming with high spirits.

The Korean War broke out the following year.

The flow of reassuring letters from his son was cut off by the upheaval, leaving a silence that continued until the January Retreat. Yi Inguk, M.D., feared that the cause of his wife's death lay ultimately in the melancholy with which she had watched her only son being sent into the jaws of death.

He carefully read every last word of the newspaper dispatch. But there wasn't any reference to his son's case.

What's that kid dragging his feet for? Can't he get in with these people? When the times are changing, you've got to keep your eyes open and take the initiative. That featherhead!

He folded up the paper and rolled it tightly in his hands.

They say that dragons appear even from creeks, but this boy can't keep up with his old dad.

He clucked with disapproval.

He probably doesn't even know that the family has already defected to the south and is himself just hesitating. But news should have gotten that far by now—the meaning of our silence should have gotten through. He's always been too stupid and honest for his own good.

As he got out of the car he spat thickly on the pavement.

Doktor Ri, I will take the responsibility, I give you my guarantee. Send your son to study in our fatherland, the Soviet Union!

Stenkov's voice seemed to reverberate on his eardrums.

It was the day after the Self-defense Corps became the Public Security Corps. Yi Inguk, M.D., had been taken into custody.

He knelt on the concrete floor—lips blue, legs numb, sides aching. This seemed to him the most painful experience he had yet endured in his life. But even worse, he was swept with fear of an approaching, unpredictable future. As he listened to the footsteps coming and going and to the torrents of abuse being heaped on him, it was beyond his power to lift his head, which drooped like a broken flower.

As time passed, thoughts he had forcibly suppressed began to creep back into his mind, one by one.

If I had only known it would be like this, I could have hidden somewhere or fled to the south right off. Who can help me now? Anyone who could protect me must be in the same boat or soon will be. The Japanese! That fortress I staked so much on has crumbled and left me defenseless. All the same, something might turn up.

That vague sense of hope had not wholly deserted him even at this crucial moment.

I was lucky at least not to have been caught up in the first round of people's trials. No one seems to know anything about what happens to the ones who are taken away. They say they're judged and executed on the spot. Three more days and I might well have left the city. But in the end it's all a matter of fate. No, not all. There ought to be some way—

"Hey you, Jap-lover! Lackey . . . ass-kisser!"

Startled by the sudden shouts, Yi Inguk, M.D., raised his head defensively. A youth in a spotless Japanese army uniform with an armband on the sleeve stood glaring down at him. It was Ch'unsök. Yi Inguk, M.D., hadn't the strength to stare back. He could guess it all now. "This is the end for me," he murmured to himself.

"You doormat, son of a bitch!"

A Japanese army boot caught him in the ribs.

"Let's watch you die, dog."

Kicks landed all over his body, front and back alike. As an abrupt shock hit his spinal cord, Yi Inguk, M.D., collapsed with a scream of pain. He slipped into a stupor. He was hauled into a sitting position by somebody pulling at his shoulders but was unable to control his own body and fell over sideways.

"You pig! A bastard like you who sells out his own people and fatherland deserves to die in front of a firing squad. A firing squad!"

The voice sounded faint, as if it were deep within a dream. But he could manage no response to the words.

More time seemed to have passed. He became aware of a rustling sound in the front of his clothing and could hear a light metallic tinkle as he began to regain consciousness.

A hand covered with yellow hair was pulling at his watch chain. He instinctively grabbed for his watch pocket and stole a look up at the owner of the hand. It was a blue-eyed, closely cropped Russian soldier with a toothy, sheepish grin. The watch chain was in his hand. The doctor closed his hands with all his strength over the watch pocket of his European-style suit.

"Urgh. Yaponski!"

Anger began to show in the soldier's eyes.

"No, anything but my watch!"

But neither could understand the other, and their confrontation was only one of eye and hand. With a hand as large as a water scoop, the soldier flung Dr. Yi Inguk's arms aside and jerked the watch free. The chain broke and hung dangling from Dr. Yi Inguk's fingers—with only a large open ring at its end. The soldier went out.

Death and a watch.

Yi Inguk, M.D., repeated his lament over and over. He could only lie there calling forth again and again the picture of that soldier—not satisfied with the two watches on each of his wrists, he had to snatch away a pocket watch as well!

As packed as the prison cell was, the system of seniority by which old-timers outranked more recent arrivals was quite clear. Within about a month's time, Yi Inguk, M.D., had been gradually promoted from his original place

over the toilet deep within the cell to a position two-thirds of the way up the seating order.

He spent his days in silence. The day after an informer among them had been released, the noisiest complainers in the cell were called out and then later sent back half dead. But when only one or two days more had passed, the atmosphere of the cell had returned to normal—complaining about prison and talking about food were the favorite pastimes.

But Yi Inguk, M.D., said nothing. Though, of course, he disliked divulging the details of his crime, he was heeding the advice given him in the old days by an informative acquaintance in the Japanese secret police that silence is the first commandment. He just spent his time diligently studying a Russian conversation book left behind by a student who had been released one night.

He often felt a stinging sensation up and down his back, and his sides were painfully stiff, a condition, he feared, that could easily turn chronic. The temperature in the mornings and evenings would drop extremely low. No matter how he tried to resign himself to these conditions, he could not suppress a feeling of anxiety over his health.

Even while studying his Russian conversation book, he listened carefully to the talk that went on every day inside the cell, never missing a word. Judging from what the others were regarding as heavy penalties for their cases, his crimes loomed monstrous in comparison. Secretly selling rice from a grain cooperative, seven years; pressing innocent citizens into the National Service Corps, ten years. They claimed their trials would lead not to emotional snap decisions but to judgments based on law. Still, what was law in these days of chaos? A momentary lapse could lead to the firing squad.

Pro-Japanese clique, betrayer of the people, refused treatment to anti-Japanese fighter, spied for Japanese imperialists.

These crimes were enormous. If judged and sentenced on all the counts they had listed against him during the investigation, he could easily get life imprisonment or even the death penalty.

He looked around the cell and heaved a long sigh.

In through a ventilating window just under the eaves fell a patch of sunlight no larger than a handkerchief. It lengthened into something like a bamboo measuring stick but soon thinned into a thread and quickly disappeared. The distant autumn sky he could see through the latticework of the vent brought back a host of forgotten memories. They stabbed at his heart.

An eternal separation from the outside world. He closed his eyes. His wife, son, daughter, Hyesuk . . . And when he came to the person of Yi Inguk, M.D., acknowledged authority in the field of surgery, he choked as his throat seemed to burn. He coughed dryly and swallowed.

What do they expect of a person, anyway? There's no other way out for the

people of a colony. They had no place for you, no matter what your talent. Who didn't cater to the Japs at one time or another? Only a fool rejects the proffered cake. None of us is clean.

Now that Yi Inguk, M.D., had rationalized his behavior and vindicated himself a bit, he felt a sense of relief.

What's more, there was something he had caught in the expression on the face of a Russian adviser at his final interrogation two days earlier, something that offered a straw of hope. Of course, he couldn't be sure he wasn't fooling himself out of desperation.

What did they call the man? Something like Major Stenkov. The one with the growth on his face who peered across for a moment with that expression on his face as he repeated "*Doktor, Doktor,*" when the matter of occupation had been clarified. It seemed to presage a miracle of some sort.

Yi Inguk, M.D., opened his eyes with a start at the sound of moaning next to him.

The thin glow of the hallway light fell through the iron bars and cast a striped pattern across the interior of the cell. He looked up toward the ventilating window. It was still black outside, well before daybreak.

The stench of fresh excrement stabbed at his nostrils. One leg of his trousers felt damp. He touched the wetness and lifted his fingers to his nose. Definitely excrement. He was nauseated. It had come from the young man next to him, who continued to groan in pain. He took a long, careful look at the youth. His buttocks were thoroughly soaked.

Looks like diarrhea.

He rattled the barred door and shouted for one of the guards.

"What do you want!"

He could hear the thick voice of a guard just aroused from his sleep.

"Something's wrong with this man. . . . Look—come take a look!"

As the guard looked in between the bars, his face was nothing but a roundish outline, topped by a cap and brim, against the light. Yi Inguk, M.D., had pointed in the general direction of the youth's buttocks and was now studying his raised fingers.

"This is blood. Blood!"

He had only now discovered the redness on his fingers and was crying out in surprise.

"He's passing blood. This boy's got dysentery!"

His loud voice carried the confidence of his professional knowledge.

"What? Dysentery?"

The voice outside didn't sound fully convinced yet.

"He's passed blood in his stool. Bloody diarrhea. . . . Take a look, here."

His voice climbed in pitch.

"Hmm. Bloody, you say. . . ."

At the shouting, other inmates opened their eyes one by one and added their startled cries to the din.

"Dysentery. It's contagious. Dysentery's a contagious disease."

"What, contagious?"

The guard finally opened the door and came into the cell.

The patient was removed a while later, and the inmates raised such a ruckus trying to scrub away the mess that they were unable to get back to sleep again.

Two days later, two or three cases showing the same symptoms were discovered in another cell. As the days passed, the number of victims seemed only to increase. Yi Inguk, M.D., felt himself in the grip of a new menace. In these conditions, he estimated, nine out of ten would die if they caught the disease.

After supper, Yi Inguk, M.D., was called to the adviser's office.

"Comrade, for the time being you will treat patients in the first-aid room."

What sort of miracle was this? Like lightning from a clear sky. He doubted the interpreter's words. His eyes lit up as he stared first at the Russian officer, then at the interpreter, and back again.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Yi Inguk, M.D., struggled to mask the elation he felt and managed to answer with composure.

Like I say. The roof may fall in but there's always a way out.

He clenched his teeth to suppress any expression on his face that might betray him.

When Yi Inguk, M.D., saw the corpses being wrapped up and shipped out like so much cordwood, he felt as if it were his own doing. "Medicine is my mission in life," he would murmur over and over with strong feeling. He threw himself into the work of serving the patients assigned him. And these duties also happened to attract the particular interest of the Russian adviser with the growth on his face.

Not until much later did he finally learn that serious censure awaited those responsible for the death in prison of an ideological criminal like himself.

Yi Inguk, M.D., recognized by the Russian medical officer for his technical skill, was now allowed to continue his duties at the hospital itself. But still he had no knowledge of the final disposition of the criminal charges against him.

He vowed, however, to make the best of this remarkable opportunity. Even

death itself could not deter him now. Shouldn't there be some way to work free of the invisible shackles that held him here?

While he treated his patients each day, his only thought was of the duck-egg-sized lump on Stenkov's left cheek. With such a deformity—for one could call it that, he thought—how could Stenkov have risen to such high rank without some powerful influence in the Party or particular heroism on the battlefield? No doubt about it. It seemed he would gain salvation if only he sank his teeth into that growth and hung on for dear life.

Yi Inguk, M.D., had progressed in his Russian to the point where he could exchange halting pleasantries when Stenkov came by on his occasional rounds. Though reading matter was generally prohibited here, Russian-language texts and Party histories were allowed as exceptions. Yi Inguk, M.D., nearly memorized his Russian primer, as if it were the key to his very life.

Several opportunities presented themselves around Christmas time, when the officers were having their holiday celebrations. A slightly tipsy Stenkov came by on his rounds. This time, Yi Inguk, M.D., promised himself, he would not miss his chance.

Several days before, a Russian officer had been hospitalized with acute appendicitis complicated by peritonitis. Stenkov came up beside Yi Inguk, M.D., as he was removing the stitches from his patient. He turned to the major and proposed, half in words and half in gesture, that he operate to remove the growth.

Stenkov responded enthusiastically with a volley of *khorosho's*.

After that, he had a number of occasions to present his opinions in detail on the proposed surgery when they talked it over through an interpreter. Yi Inguk, M.D., was persuasively reassuring as he spoke confidently of having removed a lump for the Japanese mayor.

Didn't I lop that growth off neat as you please, even after Keio University Hospital said it couldn't be done?

Silently asking and answering his own questions as he went along, he prepared, with a gambler's heart, to stake his life on this one opportunity.

The Russian medical officer was brought in for consultation, and they conducted a number of preparatory examinations.

The day of the operation arrived. Yi Inguk, M.D., had them bring in all his own surgical equipment, with which his touch was sure.

Though three medical officers assisted him, it was Yi Inguk, M.D., himself who held the scalpel. These young field hospital doctors were no more than novices to him. In the course of the operation, he used them as he had used the assistants in his own hospital. The thought came to him that once the incision had been made the operating room became his absolute kingdom.

From time to time, however, the fact of the pledge signed just before the operation invaded his thoughts. In the case of failure, he would accept the firing squad.

Stenkov lay on the operating table looking tense though composed. It was not yet three minutes since the hypodermic needle, full of anesthetic, had pierced his spine.

The nurse continued to wipe away with a wad of gauze the drops of sweat that formed on Dr. Yi Inguk's forehead. Only the metallic clink of instruments and the sound of breathing cut through the oppressive silence of the room, which was illuminated by the rays of an intense overhead reflector light.

The operation was over sooner than anticipated. When Yi Inguk, M.D., removed his operating gown, his entire body was drenched with sweat.

On the day his recovery was complete and he was released from the hospital, Stenkov took Dr. Yi Inguk's hand in his crushing grip and roared as he squeezed.

"Kapitan Ri, *spasibo!*"

Dr. Yi Inguk's mouth fell open and he could only laugh. It was as if he had been released from a spiritual prison.

"*Ochen, ocheno. . . . Ochen khorosho!*"

Stenkov gave a thumbs-up gesture to express his high regard for Yi Inguk, M.D., and clapped him on the shoulder as a sign of praise.

The following day Stenkov called Yi Inguk, M.D., to his room. He offered his hand to the doctor in the first formal gesture of real courtesy he had shown him.

Can one confront one's enemy and manage such a complete conversion as this? Maybe even these yellow-tops are human, too, at heart.

"Starting tomorrow you may commute to work from your home."

Yi Inguk, M.D., gulped and sighed like a chimney that had just come unblocked. This time it was he who grasped Stenkov's hand.

"*Spasibo! Spasibo!*"

"But don't you perhaps have anything to ask of me? A favor, maybe?"

Yi Inguk, M.D., suddenly thought of his watch. But then he hesitated for fear that dragging that story in so abruptly here and now would actually seem rather shabby. Still, no matter what, he'd never lose his feelings for that watch. Yi Inguk, M.D., decided to reveal honestly all he felt about the watch even though there might be no chance of recovering it.

With the aid of an interpreter, he established what he could of the time and place and gave all the details he could recall of the theft. Stenkov listened tensely as he fingered the spot on his cheek where the lump had once been.

"Nothing to worry about, Doktor Ri. We do not condone such things in

the Great Red Army. And even if something like that happened, it could only have been a misunderstanding of some sort. I will take responsibility and see that you recover your watch."

Yi Inguk, M.D., who was watching Stenkov closely, saw a serious and determined expression cross his face.

Have I blundered by bringing up this needless business, just when everything was going so well?

He tried to suppress the hidden feelings of misgiving and regret.

"Rest assured, Doctor Ri . . . ha, ha, ha."

Stenkov interrupted himself with his own booming laughter, leaving his implication in the air.

Yi Inguk, M.D., had been rescued from the brink of death and was headed home. He could still hear the interpreter relating Stenkov's exclamation.

Where did he ever learn to express himself like that in Russian?

The car pulled up in front of Mr. Brown's residence. The sight of the Stars and Stripes made Yi Inguk, M.D., think of the red flag he had received along with his watch the day it was returned.

Yi Inguk, M.D., was shown into the living room, and he had time to look around while he waited for his host to appear. Though he had called on Mr. Brown a number of times at the embassy, this was his first visit to the man's home.

His indebtedness dated back three years, to when his daughter had gone to the United States.

The bookcase along one wall was jammed with Korean historical works written in Chinese, such as the *Veritable Records of the Yi Dynasty* and the *Taedong Compendium of Private Histories*. The bookcase across the room held neatly wrapped sets of classic texts. On a desk, around a small gilt-bronze Buddha, a number of antique curios were grouped for display. In front of a twelvefold screen of ancient Chinese calligraphy stood a small wine table on which rested a patina-filmed white porcelain bowl, serving here as an ashtray.

All of these must have been gifts brought by various callers. Yi Inguk, M.D., felt his face suddenly flush at the thought of the Koryō inlaid celadon vase he had brought. Actually, he was giving it up with some reluctance. He really hadn't thought it reprehensible to send these things out of the country. Rather, Dr. Yi Inguk's main question was why a man would want so many of these things. Where was the value, the satisfaction, in having them?

As soon as Mr. Brown came in, Yi Inguk, M.D., presented his gift with a smile. When Mr. Brown had unwrapped the parcel a smile spread across his face, too. He thanked the doctor over and over, unable to conceal his pleasure.

"This is quite a valuable piece, indeed."

"Oh, it's really nothing, just an expression of goodwill."

A sense of relief became a flush of satisfaction as Yi Inguk, M.D., joined in Mr. Brown's pleasant mood. As he listened to the American's mixed English and Korean pleasantries, he felt suffused with a warm feeling of accomplishment.

"Dr. Yi, where did you learn your English?"

"I learned it during the Japanese period, in Japanese style. You know, '*Zatto izu ah katto*' for 'That is a cat' and so on."

"But your pronunciation is so good now. And your grammar's quite accurate, too. Standard English."

These words suddenly called to mind what Stenkov had said about his Russian.

It seemed to him that Mr. Brown, who said his ancestors came from England, didn't pronounce his "r" sounds fully.

"I have had a private tutor for some time now."

"Oh, is that so?"

Yi Inguk, M.D., felt a restrained pride in his linguistic abilities.

Mr. Brown disappeared for a moment toward the kitchen and returned with a tray of various foreign liquors.

"Do have whatever you wish."

As Yi Inguk, M.D., looked at Mr. Brown, the American's face was replaced by Stenkov's, who had seemed satisfied only when he could down his vodka in a gulp, not bothering with food on the side. The doctor, whose high blood pressure and general constitution forced him to moderate his drinking, only sipped at his scotch, warming his palate as he waited to hear what Mr. Brown had to say.

"Well, we've received notification from the Department of State."

Yi Inguk, M.D., could have leaped for joy but, subduing the rush of excitement he felt, instead extended his hand to shake Brown's.

"Thank you. Thank you."

It struck him that he was responding just as Stenkov had to him after the operation.

It seems my way of managing the world works even with the Americans, thought Yi Inguk, M.D., in high spirits. True sincerity can move Heaven itself, they say.

Mr. Brown, too, seemed particularly pleased as he caressed the celadon vase and refilled his whiskey glass.

"I am afraid I shall be asking you many favors concerning my visit to America."

"There's no need to worry about that. I'll write you a letter of introduction before you leave."

“Thank you very much.”

“Our history may be short, but America is a wonderful place! I hope your visit will help to promote friendship and goodwill between our two countries.”

“Thank you.”

After promising to meet the next day for a hunting expedition into the Demilitarized Zone, Yi Inguk, M.D., left Mr. Brown’s home. There was a spring in his step as he pictured the deep-blue barrels of his new, double-barreled English hunting rifle. Yi Inguk, M.D., was concerned for a moment over the condition of the patient he had operated on a while before, but that soon passed. New feelings of ambition and hope swelled within his heart.

It had been arranged with the responsible official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that, the physical examination now complete, his exit papers would be issued the day he received the State Department notification. He recalled Mr. Brown’s comment that he could be leaving within a week’s time if all went well.

So many people, fresh out of college with no particular clinical experience, carry on in that unseemly way as if they’d plucked themselves a star—all because they’d made a trip to the United States. Well, I’m going this time. Once I get back, we’ll see!

Suddenly a vision of his daughter Nami and his son Wōnshik came to him. He clenched his fists tightly, and his face tensed momentarily as if he were on the brink of a seizure. Then an odd smile passed across his face.

Hmm. I’ve lived among those warty Japanese, made it out of the grasp of those brutish Russians, and now the Yankees—could they be much different? Revolutions may come and the nation change hands, but the way out has never been blocked for Yi Inguk. There used to be so many who seemed to outdo me from time to time. I’ve made it through, but what about them?

He wanted to shout his heart out into the void.

Shall I drop by the airline office and look into the ticket situation?

With the custom-made California cigar clamped at a jaunty angle in his teeth, Yi Inguk, M.D., hailed a passing taxi.

“Bando Hotel.”

The clear autumn sky outside the car window was bluer and loftier to Yi Inguk, M.D., than others might have realized.

Translated by Marshall R. Pihl