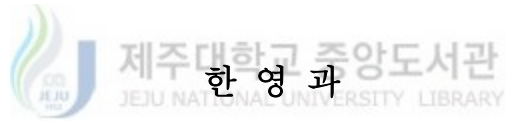


석사학위논문

Aunt Suni (順伊삼촌)

-Hyeon Ki-yeong-

제주대학교 통역대학원



송 종 도

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이 논문을 통역번역학 석사학위 논문으로 제출함

2005년 7월

송종도의 통역번역학 석사학위 논문을 인준함



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Abstract

On the very spot of massacre, Aunt Suni collapsed on a pile of dead bodies and survived thick and fast bullets. Her survival continues to devastate her mentality throughout her life incessantly. She suffered from hallucination and couldn't adjust herself to ordinary life. She committed a suicide on her small crop field. Her tragic death represents the pangs of Jeju people due to after-effect of the April 3rd Uprising.



I. Preface

The Jeju Local Government has been trying to attract domestic and international attention to designate Jeju Island as World Peace Island. In this situation the top priority is to let people all over the world easily understand the people, culture and above all, recognize the tragic history of Jeju Island.

The significant aspects of Jeju are well permeated into the works of Hyeon Ki-young. In particular, 'Aunt Suni', dealt with the most tragic chapters of Jeju history and culture. That's the very reason I chose to translate his most famous novel 'Aunt Suni' into English. My personal humble belief is that people should come first before every other ideology. No more bloody tragedies should be repeated on this beautiful planet.

II. Profile on the writer, Hyeon, Ki-yeong

Hyeon Giyeong was born on Jeju Island in 1941. He graduated from Seoul National University. He majored in English Education. Through his works, he has probed deep into the tragic modern history of Jeju Island, with particular emphasis on the April 3rd Uprising. His works make readers think deeply about the meanings of present life. His profound and stark literary style is reverberating in feelings of readers long and deep.

He was awarded the 5th Sin Dong-yeup Creative Works Prize in 1986, the 5th Manhae Literary Prize in 1990 and the 2nd Oh Yeong-su Literary Prize in 1994.

His works include 'Aunt Sunie' (1979), 'Asphalt' (1986), The 'Last Cowherd' (1994), 'A Crying Bird on the Border'(1983), 'Windy Island' (1989) and 'A Spoon on the Earth' (1999).

He is now the president of the Korean Arts & Culture Foundation

III. About the Jeju April 3rd Uprising as a Backdrop

The April 3rd Uprising took place on the 3rd of April in 1948 throughout Jeju Island. The South Chosun Labor Party took advantage of the social disorder right after the August 15th Liberation and began to establish an underground organization on Jeju Island. The Jeju People's Liberation Army found the weaponry and ammunition which the Japanese Troops had hidden. They armed themselves and underwent guerilla tactics training. Meanwhile, the police and right wing organization were committing terrorism against Jeju people because Jeju people had protested against the May 10th South Korea Only General Election. The Election meant the division of the two Koreas: North Korea supported by China and Russia and South Korea under UN control. When the right wing North West Youth League was dispatched to Jeju, the left wing force led the people's uprising. They engaged in guerilla warfare under the slogan of 'Protest against the South Korea Only General Election and the South Korea Only Government, including Anti-America, Anti-Police and Anti-Northwest Youth League.' In response, the US Military Government Office dispatched the police to suppress the uprising. When the situation got worse, the US Military Government dispatched an army throughout the island. During the scorching operation, around 30,000 victims were claimed by the police, the military and the North Korean guerillas. The May 10th Election couldn't be held in Jeju. Though the Jeju April 3rd Uprising ended in May of 1949, the suppression continued through 1954 with the Korean War (25th of June in 1950-27th of July in 1953).

IV. Acknowledgements

Those were the days. I was blatantly ignorant in my college years. While a few students were talking about the Jeju April 3rd Uprising and Kwangju Resistance for Democracy, those words were gibberish to me. In my college days, my interests lied only in blind dates and hanging around with female students.

I am one of the four brothers from the mother out of wedlock. My mother used to talk about seeing piles of dead bodies during the April 3rd Incident. My father did not speak much of the incident. Was my mother left wing? Was my father right wing? Absolutely not. They were not educated in ideology. They were just ordinary people. However, they were the most precious to me because they gave me life. I am still here now alive. Back then, survival alone mattered. Morality can be discussed only when peace prevails.

Now we are in peace time. The writer Hyeon Ki-yeong taught me the tragic meaning of the yellow canola flowers and the red camellia blossoms in Jeju. Through his heart-rending stories, I could understand the sad song of the cawing of crows and the chilly bite of the wind on this island. My respects and thanks always run toward the writer of 'Aunt Suni.'

I'd like to thank Professor Kim Jae-won, Professor Kim Won-bo and Professor Park Kyeong-ran for helping me to translate this work. I am also deeply indebted to Heather Fisher and James Williams, who proofread my English translations.

Above all, and as always, my profoundest thanks to my dear, helpful, incomparable wife, Ko Hee-ja.

Aunt Suni

I managed to have two days off to take part in the memorial service for my grandfather on the 18th of lunar December in my hometown. I have never been to the hometown for 8 years - since the day the mourning period for my grandmother ended. I have never participated in the annual memorial services for my grandparents making the excuse of a heavy workload at the office. So my elder uncle and Gilsu, my elder brother, must have talked behind my back though they didn't express their anger in their letters. Father, who resided in Japan, would wire money to help with preparation for the memorial services. Though the amount was enough to be used for my uncle's other household expenses, my psychological burden remained heavy because I hadn't done my duty of taking care of ancestors' tombs and participating in the memorial services. Meanwhile a few days ago, my elder uncle asked me to come back to my hometown by letter. In his letter, he asked me to arrange my visit to fall on the day of the memorial service. He wanted to talk about the problem of purchasing a family graveyard. Through his writing style, I could easily see that his intention was to force me to take

part in the memorial service.

The clattering noise from the airplane engine assaulted my eardrums. I sat restlessly in the seat, my mind blank. I didn't realize I had arrived at the Jeju Airport until the plane landed on the ground with a heavy thud. Compared to the 8 long years of absence, the 50 minute flight from Kimpo to my hometown of Jeju made me realize that my hometown was not far away. Abruptly, I found myself sent to the middle of my hometown. I felt as if my hometown had visited me instead of me visiting my hometown. I felt myself dumfounded and awkward. I could hardly find appropriate words to express my feelings. I faced my hometown without examining my preliminary feelings. I regretted spending the 50 minutes mindlessly during the flight. I thought I had no reason for boarding the plane. I should have got on a train or a ferry boat. A homecoming in 8 years shouldn't have ended in 50 minutes like a commuting time span.

What has my hometown meant to me? The place has left me only with chronic hypochondria and a poverty-stricken life. While Jeju Island was busy being developed into a tourism region, the western part where I was born has neither tourist attractions nor profitable tangerine orchards. A strong west wind didn't permit farming. At least in my memory, my

hometown has always been a dead village. The village was burnt to ashes by the military scorching operation 30 years ago. Whenever I think of my hometown, the devastated scene emerges in my traumatized memory. That is the very reason I have lived in Seoul, far away from my hometown for 8 years. I approached this place hesitatingly and nervously. To arrive at my hometown, I should have taken a slow train, suffered from motion sickness, travelled to the end of the Korean peninsula, boarded a ferry boat and spent the night by drinking cheap Korean whisky and getting sick. That might be the right way to visit my hometown after 8 years. Though my hometown is not far from Seoul, I feel as if it were on the opposite side of the planet.

The two days off from the office didn't permit me to take such a long trip to my hometown. The memorial service for my grandfather fell on that day. I had no choice but to travel by airplane. I stepped down the airplane stairs hesitatingly as if I were pushed down by a flight attendant.

The gloomy clouds hung low in the sky. The top of Halla Mountain was covered by thick clouds. I felt the familiar winter weather typical of Jeju. When I was young, I would often see these type of gloomy clouds which hung low and stayed long in the winter sky. The overcast sky made the

stone fences look darker and harder. The snow which covered the flat ranches on the foot of the mountain looked drab. The west wind hit my ears and the whipping sound didn't die out. A lock of my long hair on my forehead continued to dance wildly before my eyes. Abruptly I felt frustrated. The winter weather which I had experienced visited me again.

At the Dongmoon traffic circle, I boarded a bus which would go by way of Seochon(western village), my hometown. The village-bound bus was noisy with village dialects.

"Granny, what is this?" asked a bus conductor as he pointed to a dark brown glazed pottery used for carrying water in a bamboo basket, which was laid in the bus entrance stairs.

"Why, It's red bean porridge. I am making a call of condolence to Samyang with this porridge." answered the old lady. She wore a cotton cloth towel on her head and was holding the shoulder pack strap to the basket. Her eyes were blistering.

It has been a long time since I heard my hometown dialect. The dialect was on the tip of my tongue unconsciously.

The bus continued to run shakily on the bumpy road along the seaside, which encircled the whole island. My eyes scanned the wind-stricken fishing villages, the thatched roofs tightly tied with torn fishing nets to protect them from wind

and the evergreen trees with red fruit rubbing against the stone fences by the wind. Since I was from Jeju, I tried not to show such curiosity on this outlandish landscape as a tourist from the mainland would have.

A small black basalt headland was sharpened into the drab sea. It was called 'Kozi' in a Jeju dialect. 'Demboognool,' a pile of reddish brown seaweed, sat on 'Dolbille,' a flat rock floor. 'Taewaks,' globular floats used by the women divers to swim around were floating on the sea. Millet straw was burning in a wide opening in a basalt rock. The place where women divers would warm their body was called the 'Booltuk.' Whenever those dialect words sprang out of the depth of my consciousness, I somehow felt excited. The deeper my consciousness went into the abyss of my memory, the more dialects and things of my hometown my head was filled with.

That day, we had two memorial services. After the memorial service for my grandaunt in early evening at the house of my father's elder male cousin, we gathered at my elder uncle's place to have the memorial service for the grandfather. I was glad to meet Gilsu. He was just one year older than I, but the color of his partly bald forehead showed that he was fully middle-aged. He said he was spending half of his pay to bring wild land under cultivation for a mandarin orchard. He worked

for a junior highschool.

As I had expected, all of my senior relatives attended the memorial service so that I could save the trouble of making courtesy calls to each of them. My paternal aunt's family living in Jeju City arrived late at night by bus. When I saw their faces getting on in years, the time and tide of eight years proved my absence at my hometown. Time-weathered dark spots on my elder uncle's face, which some people would call 'flowers in the other world,' contrasted with his whitish hair. My father's elder male cousin had wrinkles round his eyes in which tears were standing. I had already braced myself for being blamed by them. I dropped down my head before them obediently. I took out three envelopes with 30,000 Won and five envelopes with 20,000 Won in them respectively. I had saved the money without being noticed by my wife in order to satisfy my relatives' expectations since they knew I was working as department chief for a big company in Seoul. Distributing the envelopes, I asked them to understand that I was giving money instead of bringing things for the memorial services. I didn't know what would be needed for the services. In the cash-stricken village, the cash was satisfying to their hearts. But it was not so satisfying to the husband of my paternal aunt. He was working as a junior

official at the Jeju Provincial Office. He also owned quite a large mandarin orchard. As I expected, he made me blush, wearing an air of innocence. He said, "What is this? You are using money to evade being scolded? Boy, I have accepted a calculated favor many times, but it is the first time from my nephew."

My paternal aunt's husband was proficient at the dialects of this region. He used to speak the dialect of Young Gang at Pyeongyang in North Korea. But now he has become a total Jeju man. It is no surprise because 30 years have passed since he came to Jeju as a member of the NWYL(Northwest Youth League).

The old men in the village would doze off on the memorial service night because they usually go to bed early. On that day, however, my presence let them enjoy chatting until late at night.

The decision on the purchase of the family burial place was completed. While casually chatting on the way, a thought about Aunt Suni came to me. Strangely I couldn't see her until a little while ago. When I was young, I would see her bring a basketful of bread which was made from yeast-fermented flour on every memorial service day. Though she was distant in kinship, she was unusually close since she lived a few

doors away from my elder uncle's and attended each other's memorial services. That is the very reason Gilsu and I called her 'Aunt' and obeyed her faithfully. (In my hometown, when it is not easy to trace the degree of kinship about someone, it is a common practice to call him or her uncle or aunt.) I couldn't wait to see her. She had stayed at my house in Seoul for almost one year. She came back here around two months ago. So I was wondering how she was doing. "By any chance is she sick?" I asked Gilsu about her.

"Gilsu, I can't see Aunt Suni. What happened to her?"

The moment I asked the question, everyone stopped talking. An awkward silence hung between them for a time. Gilsu put on an awkward facial expression. When my elder uncle saw my eyes, he turned away his eyes and smacked his lips. Again for a while a painful silence lasted. What happened to her? She has been a widow for 30 years since she lost her husband at the age of 26. Has she gotten remarried by any chance? After a while, my elder uncle flicked the ashes off the cigarette into the brazier, raised his head and gazed at me.

"I was too busy to let you know she died a few days ago."

"What? What are you talking about?" Are you telling me she is dead?"

It was unbelievable. I was dumfounded. Wasn't she healthy and active only two months ago? I couldn't possibly believe it so I looked around them. My father's younger male cousin gently nodded at me.

"I didn't know that, either. Why didn't you let me know that?"

While my paternal aunt's husband persisted in asking for the reason, my elder uncle didn't say anything. Cigarette smoke suddenly rose in the air. He must be in pain since he treated her as if she were his blood sister. The whole assembly was silent. Ssaruraag, Ssaruroog. I heard the sound of the snow pellets hitting against the rice-papered windows.

After a while, my elder uncle opened his tightly closed eyes and looked at me.

"If you didn't know about her death, it would be better. Once you came to know her death, though, visit and present your condolences to her before you go back to Seoul. Her mortuary tablet is set up at her daughter's house in Jeju City," said he, and then he paused a moment. Inhaling his newly lit cigarette smoke deeply, he continued.

"Whether she died this way or that doesn't matter after all....."

His faltering story might be summarized as follows.

The exact date when she died was not clear. The day when

she left home must have been the day when she died, but no one knew when she had left home. If she didn't tell something personally, no neighbor knew what was happening to her because she was living alone after her daughter got married.

Seeing the closed outer door for the first few days, neighbors thought she must have gone to her daughter's house in Jeju City. Whenever she visited her daughter's house, she made it a rule to come back home on that day. When she didn't come back home for about two weeks, an ominous presentiment began to pervade the thoughts of the family of my elder uncle. Had she gone to her nephew's house(my house) in Seoul again? If she went to Seoul, she must have told him that. Increased anxiety forced them to contact her daughter. At the news of her disappearance, her daughter and son-in-law hurried up back to Aunt Suni's house and searched for her wherever she should be likely to stay. They tried the Buddhist temple on the foot of Halla Mountain. She used to take a rest there for her health when she was suffering from a nervous breakdown. They also searched the crevices of the coastal rocks in case unexpected bad luck could have claimed her while she was gathering sea lettuce or other seaweed.

Finally, she was found dead in a grain field near the elementary school. It was located just a little apart from the

belt highway around Jeju Island. The degree of decomposition of the body indicated that she must have been dead for at least 20 days. Her body wasn't easily found because the field was sunken and the stone fence didn't allow people to see the dead body. As well, her maroon overcoat avoided meeting the eye. With the coat on and a muffler made of rabbit fur around her neck, she looked as if she were sleeping on her side . She wore the coat when she came to my place in Seoul. On the cold soil beside her were scattered a few pills of cyanide used for catching pheasants. Only 8 days ago was she found dead.

"I went to the place, but what a strange thing it was! The whole area was covered with snow. To my surprise, only the site in which she had lied down dead was not covered with snow." said the second cousin, Hyun mo. My elder uncle responded.

"It must be blessed land. She found a nice site for her to be buried."

"What's the use of the blessed land? She has no relatives. She may have relatives on her mother's side. However earnestly I persuade her to adopt a son, she didn't listen to me. Poor woman!" the elder male cousin of my father clicked his tongue several times.

While I was listening, my back was soaked with cold sweat. For a while, I was deafened and couldn't hear a word. How could she silence herself at the age of 56 when she had almost completed her life? She found her way to the grain field where she used to harvest crop, and then chose the sunny site to die there without leaving her written will. Seemingly her death had no clear reason. That's it. My elder uncle concluded that she had died from her mental illness. He might be right since she had suffered from chronic nervous breakdowns. But why was her nervous breakdown aggravated? There must have been something that drove her untimely death. By any chance, was her illness suddenly aggravated due to the one-year troublesome stay at my place in Seoul? No, that should not be the cause. She must have experienced something shocking here when she came back home. According to some relatives' explanation, there was nothing shocking that could cause such a death. To my anxiety, the mishap happened before a month had passed since she came back home from Seoul. Conscience and remorse pricked my heart.

Thinking back on her one year stay at my place in Seoul, Aunt Suni, my wife and I were uneasy and unsatisfied one another. If my wife had closed the unprofitable clothing store

earlier, she needn't have come to Seoul. My wife had to be tied to the store. That's the reason she came to Seoul to give a hand with the household chores. Before she came to Seoul, several girls were hired one after another to do the chores, but they didn't stay long. Hiring people was not easy. So I asked Gilsu to find a woman to do household chores by mail. Just then, Aunt Suni volunteered to do the job for about one year since she wanted to see me and go sightseeing in Seoul.

She came to my home with a backpack strapped across her chest. The handles of the backpack were worn and torn. An unhappy event happened just 10 days after she had come to Seoul. While my wife was out at work, she came cross to my room to talk something wit me wearing a hardened face.

"Hey, nephew, how can you treat me like this?" Tears welled up in her eyes. I felt something eerie in my heart. "Well, what happened? Come over and tell me what is the problem."

I felt something awkward to find myself using the Seoul standard language in spite of myself since I feel relaxed and comfortable in talking with Aunt Suni in Jeju dialect.

"Neighbors are gossiping about me. The rumor that the granny kitchenmaid from Jeju eats too much cooked rice spread all over the neighborhood."

I couldn't believe this nonsense since it was so groundless.

"Well, who told such nonsense?"

"In fact, I am in the habit of eating a bowlful of cooked barley after doing hard chores back home in Jeju. Even though I try to eat less, I cannot help eating more than you or your family members. Even so, how can the bad rumor spread all over the neighborhood?"

At the moment, tears welled up in my eyes. Who dared to say my aunt is a kitchenmaid? What a humiliating rumor! I became furious.

"Who backbit you? Where did you pick up this nonsense?"

But she didn't answer. She only wiped off the tears with the tip of her skirt.

"Did Min-gi's mom (my wife) say so? Tell me, please. Or did Hiya, who is a neighbor running a penny candy store, tell you about this rumor? Never will I fail to find the person who spread these lies. Tell me who spread the rumor, please."

She still didn't answer. She seemed to get some comfort from my fury for her. She didn't try to vent her anger at me and silently returned to her room.

Did my wife spread the bad rumor? Could my wife be vainglorious enough to behave so frivolously? That can't be. My son Min-gi may have spread the rumor when he happened to drop by the store to buy some candies. Well, could my shy

5 year old boy use such a blunt language? No one must have expressed like "a Jeju kitchenmaid eats a lot of boiled rice." But it is possible that someone would say that she eats boiled rice a lot. I was constantly wondering who told such a humiliating rumor. When my wife came back home in the evening, I came to talk with her. She was surprised to see me grinding teeth with vexation. It was the first time she had cried before me since we got married. I severely scolded her in an outraged voice, "You have the fortune to lead an easy married life without parents-in-law. But you are rude enough to be inhospitable to your in-laws." I taught her a strict lesson on the acceptable treatment of Aunt Suni that night even though I was not sure whether she had spread the bad rumor or not.

How could it be the subject to blame for eating a lot of cooked rice, eating anchovies picked up by others from the bean-paste soup, or using the Jeju dialect which is a little hard to understand? Aunt Suni had a grain field in Jeju just large enough to line her life independently and a small house that was rented to a neighbor. She did not have to entirely depend on us. She came over to help us and to see me. I really hated the way my wife treated Aunt Suni. My wife couldn't easily understand what my aunt said and she didn't

even try to understand her. Every time my wife turned away from Aunt Suni and looked at me when she couldn't understand what Aunt Suni had said, I blushed because I felt looked down upon by my wife. This feeling of humiliation was the same kind that I had felt at the beginning of our marital life. Even though the practice of changing domicile of origin was natural, she was unsatisfied with the change in the registration of her domicile of origin into Jeju on the copy of my family registration. Aunt Suni had a hard time because my wife didn't understand the Jeju dialect. Aunt Suni couldn't help obeying my wife passively by refraining herself from talking a lot.

My hometown was something I had shun from. I made up my mind to change my prejudice about my hometown on a large scale. The presence of Aunt Suni had kept me conscious of my hometown. After almost 15 years, I began to use the Jeju dialect when I talked with Aunt Suni. I also taught a lot of the dialect to my son, Min-gi. That was right. My wife was a Seoul city slicker who was nice and fair. I loathed the thought of my son becoming a shrewd person like her. He wore eyeglasses though he was only five years old. Watching too much TV might have contributed to his bad eyesight. My wife wanted to teach him how to play the piano, but I wanted

to teach him the Jeju dialect. How could a son forget his father's hometown? That was right. How hypocritical and unnatural would it be to only speak the Seoul standard language? I felt I was not leading my own life. My life seemed to be totally plagiarized.

Aunt Suni usually wore a long face. Her feelings must have been hurt because of previous arguments. She hardly talked. Though I apologized to her many times, she couldn't vent her anger. At last she argued with my wife face to face.

One day when I came home from work, Aunt Suni and my wife were wrangling furiously. On seeing me, Aunt Suni sat down plump on the floor. I glared at my wife with anger. I asked what was going on. This time my wife shed tears all of a sudden. Damn it.

When Aunt Suni said it was time to buy rice because rice was running low, my wife responded by saying 'have we eaten up the rice already?' My wife didn't intend to cast doubt upon the quickly consumed rice; she said it just as a sign of understanding her suggestion. Aunt Suni was not familiar with the Seoul accent so she didn't understand that my wife was not doubting her. Aunt Suni protested furiously to my wife. "Do you mean I have eaten a lot of rice or I have sold out rice secretly?" She began to cry. How helpless this situation

was! I had no idea how to help them make peace. When I saw my aunt expressing her feelings by becoming obsessed with a trivial thing, I found tears welling up in my eyes.

On that day my wife and I tried hard to clear her misunderstanding and comfort her. Our efforts were useless because of her exposed extreme fastidiousness. She seemed to conclude on her own that the cause of quickly consumed rice was due to the thick crust of overcooked rice from the bottom of the rice cooker. She began to be obsessed with cooking medium-cooked rice in order not to produce the thick crust of overcooked rice. Though I liked well-cooked rice because of my unusually weak stomach, I was not in the position to complain about the medium-cooked rice. Aunt Suni frequently measured the rice with a wooden measure bowl to see how much it was left even though it had been bought less than 10 days before. The feeling of the scene changed from harrowing to even gruesome. She must have been traumatized by the argument with my wife.

My wife was all nerves and tried not to be drawn into misunderstandings and arguments with Aunt Suni. My wife was extremely careful about her even to the point of nervous breakdown. I also perceived my wife's attitude to her had changed a lot. But I could only see Aunt Suni's long face. She

began to stop talking with me. When I gave her some pictures which had been taken in a park, she insisted on paying for them. When I offered her tomato juice, she abruptly refused it by saying it was a luxury for a kitchenmaid like her to drink the juice. Then she left for her room.

One evening Aunt Suni quickly went to the kitchen right after she set the dinner table for me. She brought a grill with some pieces of fish burnt black and stuck on it. She tried to prove that she didn't eat the missing parts of the fish. I couldn't find a word to respond with. Though I hadn't even asked about the missing parts, her extremely morbid feeling of self-accusation forced her to behave like that.

I tried so hard to make her feel relieved. She built an imaginary impregnable castle wall around herself. Her misunderstanding and self-accusation began to grow rampant. In the end I gave up. And then her misunderstanding vehemently changed into hatred. Meantime, she received two letters from her daughter. My wife sneaked a peek into the letters. The letters said that the aunt should come back home because her granddaughter wanted to see her. I was afraid she could leave my house with this misunderstanding unresolved if she returned to her hometown soon. Contrary to my expectations, she didn't show any intention to return

home.

One day her son-in-law came to Seoul. His family name was Jang and he was 7 years younger than I. He was on an official trip to the Agrarian Development Office in Suweon as an agrarian advisor. He stole the official trip from his colleague to take his mother-in-law back home. He said he couldn't let his old mother-in-law suffer hardship away from her home because she had no one to turn to except her only daughter. Above all he was afraid neighbors would blame him of not taking care of her faithfully. When she came to Seoul, it seemed that she didn't let them know about it since she was afraid they would object to coming to Seoul.

When her son-in-law asked her to come with him, she refused. She insisted on staying until she had completed one year as she had intended to. I thought she would gladly go back home with her son-in-law since she had been in conflict with my wife and me. I appreciated her staying not because it was hard to hire a person to do the household chores but because she was considerate enough not to flatly turn away from us even though she had grudge against us. She might have decided she would stay with us until that grudge and misunderstanding would disappear. Perhaps she had it in mind that she would resolve her grudge and misunderstanding by

staying longer.

Mr. Jang, Aunt Suni's son-in-law, told the whole story.

At that night, Mr. Jang stayed at my place at my insistence. When I told him many reasons why she was not in good terms with my wife, he said that he understood the situation. He also said that he was worried about leaving her at my place. He whispered to me that she was suffering from a severe nervous breakdown. He also added that her hallucinations caused her to persist in hearing something that had never been told and to pick a crow with one who had never gossiped about her. He said that all of her misunderstandings about us including the false rumor that she was a kitchen maid who devoured boiled rice must have come from her hallucinations. That must have been the reason. My wife, who was listening to our talking, frivolously heaved a sigh of relief. Part of her nervous breakdown was shown in her severe fastidiousness. All of the symptoms had begun to get worse gradually since she was falsely accused of stealing 35 liters of beans 4 or 5 years ago. One day a neighbor spread beans to dry for bean paste on a round straw mat by the roadside, but they vanished completely. The neighbor accused Aunt Suni as being the thief since they were on bad terms each other. They argued with each other. Pulling her

by the arm, the neighbor woman insisted on going to the police station together to prove Aunt Suni was guilty. On hearing the word 'police station,' she lost heart and plumped down on the ground, saying she couldn't go there. It was the crucial moment when she was wrongly accused of the theft and the false rumor spread around the village. People knew she avoided the police like the plague, but this didn't help to prove she was innocent once she had been wrongly accused. In 1949, she was traumatized when she saw the police evacuating the village by setting fire on the houses. Even the smallest sign of policemen or soldiers appalled her and made her shrink back as the proverb goes 'once bitten twice shy.' Her mental illness began to develop. She was too traumatized again by the incident and she had to stay in a temple to heal her mental shock. She began to suffer from the abnormal fear that someone would gossip about her. She was obsessed with extreme fastidiousness. Hallucinations led her to demand explanation about something that had not been told. She used to be a good woman diver, but around the time when she came to my place in Seoul, she stopped working as a woman diver because she was afraid of water.

After her son-in-law returned to Jeju Island, she stayed at my place for about three months. Contrary to my

expectations, she added more misunderstandings instead of clearing them up. She eventually came back home before completing one year. And then this mishap happened in less than one month. So I couldn't help feeling some qualms about her death. Why on earth should I feel qualms of conscience since I didn't do anything wrong? Didn't I make an all-out effort to treat her well? She was impossible to please. Nevertheless, I felt sorry for the mishap. It was difficult for me to face my relatives since they believed that she had had a hard time at my place in Seoul.

While I was thinking about all those things, my splitting headache forced me to sit leaning against the wall with my eyes closed. I braved the shame to lie on the floor behind Gilsu facing against the wall for a while because of my persisting headache. The cold wind that rattled the weatherstripping relieved me of the headache. From time to time, the gust would strongly drive snow pellets against the windows. The sound was wretched as if a cat was scratching the rice paper. Why does my hometown have more snow pellets than other places? Could the strong wind be the cause? It couldn't be. They looked like rice grains. Rice grains were a luxury for the people in my hometown because they usually ate sweet potatoes or millet. They called the boiled

rice 'Gonbab,' which meant pretty boiled rice. The color of the boiled rice was white and fair compared to that of barley or millet. The boiled rice would be served on a special day such as a memorial service day. When I was young, I tried hard not to fall asleep in order to eat a few spoonfuls of boiled rice at the end of memorial service which would end around midnight. Gilsu and I would sleep all curled up behind our adult relatives. While the village was being evacuated, the table used for the memorial service was burnt to ashes. On a rough raw pine plank smelling of resin, were only a head of dried sea bream, a trayful of buckwheat pancakes, edible ferns, and a small porcelain bowl of cooked shredded radish. Even though it was hard to get rice, they made every effort to serve boiled rice because it was considered an essential part for a memorial service. When it was past midnight, my elder uncle would wake us up and tell us to wash our faces and come back because it was time to participate in the memorial service and then eat memorial service food. When I went outside, I would see those white snow pellets carpeting the yard. By that time, I used to hear neighbors wailing in an ominous sorrows from house to house and the dogs' barking soaring into the night sky. Around at the same hour on the same day were there memorial services from house to house

because many people in the village had been slaughtered on the same day during the April 3rd Uprising incident. On that day, the memorial service for my grandfather used to begin with the crying of my paternal aunt. Then, my elder uncle's wife would stop working in the kitchen, come outside, and burst into tears. Then father's cousin's wife would cry. On the 18th of December by the lunar calendar, we could hear crying from house to house. In the daytime, the village would be in an uproar with the high-pitched screaming of pigs being hung from melia trees to be butchered. At night when over 500 departed souls would come down from the other world, I could hear mourning cries in every house. We innocent children, however, would be in festive mood. We would get a bladder from a pig and inflate it by blowing air into it through a barley straw. It would reek with pig urine. But when it was blown up, it would serve as a perfect soccer ball for children to play with. We were fed up with those mourning cries at night and those graphic stories describing the village while it had been destroyed. We used to hear those stories while waiting for the end of the memorial service. Why did adults tell such horrible stories to us repeatedly? We were sick and tired of those stories.

As soon as the dawn broke, flocks of crows would fly down

on the roofs to eat the pieces of sacrificial memorial food thrown onto them with wine for departed souls. Those crows would trigger an ominous foreboding not because they were believed to be departed souls or messengers from the other world but because the glossy and bluish black of their wings were similar to the color of uniforms of policemen who used to belong to the NWYL. The birds seemed to look down on people. Even though people tried to drive away those birds by shouting, they would not fly away. Sometimes whole barley fields would be covered with those birds eating into dead bodies. When they were tired of eating into those bodies, they would fly high into the winter sky and enjoy riding the west wind. By that time the dead bodies were piled up here and there on those five fields along the belt highway around Jeju Island. The fields were sunken like Aunt Suni's field. Crows would rest on the stone fences, roofs, piles of sea weed for fertilizer, mellia trees, and everywhere else. Crows were not the only creature that would eat dead bodies. Dogs in the village would also tear up and eat the dead. Some dogs would walk around the village with a piece of a leg from the dead body in its mouth. Other mad dogs which had eaten into dead bodies were shot to death by the police. Where are those huge flocks of crows? I couldn't see any crows, and Gilsu

merely shook his head in doubt. Flocks of crows used to seriously damage farm produce. I had heard that they couldn't see those birds for four or five years.

All of a sudden, my father's elder cousin's hoarse voice woke me up. I sat up straight.

"Aunt Suni could have been killed far earlier. Wasn't it a miracle that she survived a shower of bullets on the field without a scratch on her whole body?"

"She must have fainted right before the shooting. She told that she had been awake to find herself covered with piles of dead bodies. From that very moment, she has had a slight mental disorder." answered my father's younger cousin.

"What a coincidence that the field happened to be Aunt Suni's!"

"The piles of dead bodies contributed to making the field fertile, so the next year's sweet potatoes were as thick and heavy as a wooden pillow."

"We had a bad harvest that year except for the sweet potatoes from that field, so we ate porridge mixed with barley chaff. Village folks didn't buy the sweet potatoes from that field because they knew that dead bodies had fertilized it.

"In the long run, Aunt Suni died on her field. What a pity!"
While I was listening to this discussion, I came to be

obsessed with the illusion that Aunt Suni was dead not 15 days ago but 30 years ago on that day on the field.

Aunt Suni became the first step to the story. The ominous flocks of crows disappeared. It was time to forget the heart-rending memories of what happened 30 years ago. The village folks, however, couldn't forget this horrible incident. They instead tried to keep it in mind by talking about it on a memorial service day in order not to forget about it

I have repeatedly heard this story on every memorial service day so that I am already sick and tired of it. Again the story began to bloom in my memory.

The incident was a great shock to me, a seven year old boy at that time. My mother died from a lingering pneumonia right before the incident. My father would live a life of an escapee hiding under the floor as he was branded as a fugitive. He went to Japan in a smuggler boat. Suddenly I began to live with my elder uncle as an orphan. I used to shed tears easily whenever I was reminded of my dead mother. Never have I ever wept since the incident shocked me deep inside. I was so severely traumatized that I became immune to crying. When I saw scattered dead bodies on those sunken fields, I realized my mother's death was merely one of those many deaths and I was not the only ill-fated boy. Even if my

mother had not died from pneumonia, she couldn't have survived that killing incident, either.

"When I was weaving a straw bag on that day, soldiers came and told me to come and listen to a speech.", said my father's elder cousin. He began to tell the story first.

On the 18th of December by the lunar calendar, it was unusually cold and windy day. The women couldn't even conceive of the idea of diving into the sea to pick the brown seaweed. They chose to spin thread out of cotton on a spinning wheel to make socks, spread urine manure on the cabbages on the kitchen garden, or help their fathers-in-law with the work of twisting band-plant ropes to tie over the thatched-roof to prevent damage from the wind. By that time, youth used to lead a life like a bat by going up towards Halla Mountain , hiding in a natural cave in the daytime and coming down to the village at night because they were hunted by the military and police and wrongly branded as fugitives.

On that morning, Gilsu and I were helping my elder uncle collect and pile up Deumboogi and Gamtae, the types of seaweed used as fertilizer, which had been swept upon the beach. Then we came back home. While we were eating cold cooked sweet potatoes offered by my grandmother for lunch, we suddenly heard whistling and cries from outside.

"Come out and listen to the speech! You all must come to the school ground! No exceptions!"

A few policemen and members of the Daedong Youth Group would usually come around and call together the village people, but this time I could sense something unusual because dozens of soldiers wearing helmets and carrying rifles scattered and promptly drove people to the school ground. Some soldiers pried a window open with the bayonet and even threatened sick old folks to hurry up. On the May 10th Election Day in the previous year, they also threatened and drove people promptly to the school ground because there was an important speech. Though I felt something ominous looming ahead, I thought there just would be an important speech again.

Gilsu and I, preceded by grandmother and my father's elder cousin, went to the elementary school. The village children who had come earlier were stationed in front of the school ground drill platform. The lecture meetings about the current situation were quite popular among children. The then popular new tone speeches were very exciting. At the end of speech, the gallant songs, ending with the lyric: Let's shatter the rebellious Southern Labor Party, and the resounding three cheers made our hearts throb. Leaving grandmother behind,

Gilsu and I moved toward the children and squatted close to them. The sleet made the school ground muddy. Muddy water seeped into our muddy shoes whose soles were worn out. My feet got wet and I felt chilled. I had to be patient and wait.

"How many people were there on the school ground at that time?," asked Hyunmo, my second cousin. Fortunately he wasn't on the spot. He had been chased by the military and police because he was also branded as a fugitive. He was then 15 years old.

"Well, considering there were over 300 households, around 1000 people would have been on the school ground, right? Even those sick and old women were forced to turn up there with their arms held by others," said my father's elder cousin.

My father's elder brother added, "The number must have exceeded 1000 because other people who had been evacuated from Sunheul-ri and Nonheul-ri joined them."

After a while, a military officer carrying a side arm stepped on to the school ground drill platform. He ordered people to squat on the muddy ground. I thought a speech would start, but to my surprise, the officer called out Mr. Park, the chief policeman, and Mr. Kang, the civilian village head, onto the drill platform. He announced loudly that he would pick out military families.

"Military families, come out! Only the families in direct line of soldiers should come out. If cousin or more remote relative families should come out, they will be punished severely."

In front of the drill platform were standing two policemen from the Hamdeok Police Box, who would patrol around the village to track down fugitives. Several members of the Daedong Youth Group were standing at attention holding a bamboo spear with its sooty tip, behind whom were around twenty armed soldiers positioned in two rows widthwise. Their stern faces made people begin to feel uneasy. The village people couldn't think of any reason for this situation. They would look at each other, whisper and look around. What happened? Were they going to give rice to the military families? Even the military families were actually hesitant about whether to come out to the front or not. The officer shouted out, "Be quick!"

The military families hesitantly came out to the front studying the officer's face carefully. They were investigated by the village headman, the police and Daedong Youth Group members, guided to the back of the platform, and then seated separately.

"I sensed a grave turn of the situation, so I found my mother and mixed in among the military families with her. We were

not family members in a direct line with the military, but the village headman let us pass given that my sister's husband was a soldier," said elder uncle.

"You see now, brother? Do you still think you have made a mistake of marrying your sister to me? You've desperately objected to the marriage because I was from North Korea," said the husband of my father's sister, laughing aloud.

By the time the government employee's families followed the police families to the front, a commotion began. The crowd sensed something amiss. When the leading members of the Daedong Youth Group and National Association were coming to the front, the crowd tried to get ahead of others and clung to the village headman and the Youth Group members.

"Father of Jungsook, you know my younger brother joined the army last year, don't you?"

"Village headman, you know my cousin brother is a policeman at the Gimnyeong Police Box, don't you? His name is Kim Gab-jae."

"Stay back. Your family is not in the direct line of the military, the police or the government employees. Step back!" The village headman said no by waving his hand.

"What on earth is the family in direct line?"

"Village headman, please let me pass."

All of a sudden in the hustle and bustle, there was a sharp cry among the crowd.

"Fire! Fire in our village!"

Surprised people stormed toward the school fence and began to climb up.

"Fire! Fire!" "Oh dear! Oh dear!" In all directions of the school ground, wailing whirled up into the air. Without even going to the fence, I could clearly see fire, ash and smoke in the east sky. A smoky smell began to be driven toward us by the wind. At the very moment, the school stone fence collapsed with a crashing sound because it couldn't sustain the weight of crowd hanging on to it. When the crowd stormed through the opening of the collapsed fence, a shot was heard. The crowd thronged into the center of the ground again. On the collapsed stone fence, an old man fell on his face motionless. He wore an unlined summer cotton jacket and persimmon dyed pants. He must have been killed. A few soldiers leaped onto the fence and aimed their rifles downward. Just then, the 20 soldiers who had stood in front of the drill platform, rushed with the position of port arms and surrounded the crowd. The military officer on the platform pulled out his pistol above his shoulder and threatened the

crowd. When he firmly lifted his chin, his helmet shone in the sun.

"Listen carefully! We are now in the military operation. The army are setting fire on your houses under the operational command. Our next mission is to evacuate this village and lead you to Jeju-eub(now Jeju City). If you disturb order during the evacuation, you will be shot to death without mercy like the dead old man on the fence. Don't forget what I said."

The officer's shrilling North Korean dialect, unfamiliar to their ears, roaring above the village people. The crowd were reading the soldiers' faces in doubt about the remark that they would be led to Jeju-eub in accordance with the evacuation order. Then they were lost in the thoughts of their own burning houses. They were in total despair. They couldn't be any more threatened by feelings of foreboding. The sea wind drove the smoke toward us, and the ash waved in the dark sky. We could hear rifles firing away.

"On that day, I was on my way home from the west village where I had been to make a deal over a cow. The moment I reached the rocky hill covered with low pine trees and looked down the village, I saw fire engulfing the previous section headman's house and Jong-joo's house. I hid myself under

some small pine trees and watched soldiers pulling out sheaves of millet straws and setting fire to them. They used them as kindling in order to set fire on the eave of every house." The crowd began to line up toward the school main gate according to the order from the soldiers. The sudden cry penetrated through the crowd like electric current: "Soldiers are taking us so that they may murder us all!" Then some of the crowd at the front close to the school main gate began to scatter and storm towards the back. Wielding his pistol, the military officer on the platform threatened in a loud voice: "Keep in mind I will shoot to kill whoever would withdraw!" At this warning, the crowd hesitated for a moment. But soon they began to move backward again.

Just then, my elder uncle said with a deep sigh.

"I can tell you now. At that time, how desperately I moved around to find Gilsu and Sangsoo(me). However loudly mother and I called their names, they didn't answer us. Where on earth did they hide themselves?"

Though we heard our grandmother and elder uncle calling us at the top of their lungs, we couldn't get out of the utter confusion because we got stuck in the crowd. We two were shoved around by the crowd. We were crying. Our rubber shoes were taken off.

We held each other's hand firmly so we would not get separated. The school ground turned into scene of utter confusion with the soldiers' frantic cursing and families' crying out.

In the midst of the chaos, a gun shot burst out like a thunder above my head. The crowd suddenly stormed to the school fence at the west side and together cried out 'Oh, dear!' They joined together as one. All of a sudden, a profound silence reigned on the school ground. On the empty spot where the crowd left, a woman fell flat on her breast with a suckling baby thrown down beside her. In the midst of the perfect silence, the baby was crying its heart out in desperation.

"Youngbae's wife is shot to death!" whispered a person. Blood permeated all through her white unlined summer jacket.

"The then two-year old baby, Jang-sik, is now the owner of the mill. His grandmother raised him. His family was on the brink of extermination, but he's gotten married and now has two sons. His dead mother's soul might have protected him." said my father's younger cousin.

When I saw the dead woman, I was horrified. After the crowd stormed away back, we had enough open space through which we could run away. Gilsu and I didn't dare to run

towards the back of the drill platform because the army officer was standing with his pistol held up in his hand. If we run away, he would pull the trigger. We were at a loss, not knowing what to do in frustration.

The crowd would not come out, and clung to the school fence. Soldiers brought two long bamboo poles which had been hung under the eaves of the teachers' lounge. The poles were used to hang a huge papered bamboo basketball which was made by joining two bamboo baskets with doves inside it. At every sports festival, how exciting that game was! We were divided into the blue team and the white team. We would throw cloth balls with sand inside them (called Ojemi) at the opposite team's papered bamboo basketball. The moment the opposite team's papered bamboo basketball first burst open, doves would fly up into the sky, strands of colorful paper tapes would stream down and pieces of color papers would fly around. Who could imagine such poles would be used in this horrible situation? The two poles now served as a tool to tear the crowd off the fence and drive them along. Two soldiers at each tip of the pole thrust into the crowd, separated about 50 people and drove them toward the school main gate. The soldiers waiting there with rifles held across their chest surrounded them and drove them out of the

school.

Seizing this opportunity, Gilsu and I slipped out of the crowd and fled in all haste toward the back of the platform where grandmother was waiting. The Daedong Youth Group members threw their bamboo spears at us. Fortunately, we were not hit. When we reached the back of the platform, right-wing families welcomed us and let us go inside. Grandmother opened her skirt and hid us like a hen would cuddle its chicks. The two Youth Group members who were chasing after us gave up. A few children and around 10 housewives followed us. While the youths were wielding their bamboo spears fiercely at them, they were driven out.

The two poles were alternately used to drive the crowd along. Whenever the pole fell on the heads, some people screamed and fell on their back while others, who were stuck under the pole, pawed the air to get out. When soldiers wielded their clubs at people struggling to get out of the pole and fired blank shots, the crowd hesitantly walked out of the school main gate driven by the poles. At last the crowd was driven to the outside of the school, which was immediately adjacent to the belt highway around Jeju Island. They dropped on their knees in tears and implored soldiers to spare their lives. Some grandmothers held on to the crotch of the

soldiers' trousers and begged. Some housewives were stabbed by the muzzle of a rifle and fell headlong. Soldiers were stabbing the crowd with the muzzle of their rifles and wielded the gun-stock around mercilessly. Afraid of being hit by the gun-stock, the crowd was crawling on hands and knees. How could they move on foot while they clearly knew that they were being taken to be killed? Soldiers would fire at the heel of people who were falling behind.

A few minutes after the soldiers drove some people as if they were pigs, there was a burst of crackling shots. The sound of wailing filled the air. Grandmother, grandfather, elder brother Gilsu and I cried. The dumbstruck right-wing families also cried their hearts out. People were not the only ones crying. I could hear the miserable howling of cows and horses that were being burnt to death because they had been tied to the bar inside the stable. The horrible scene lasted long from the noon up until nightfall. Gilsu continued.

"I heard the story from Aunt Suni: Soldiers pushed the crowd into a sunken field which was adjacent to the belt highway around Jeju Island. They struggled to cling to the stone fence in order not to go into the field to be slaughtered. They pleaded with the soldiers for their lives while bleeding on their forehead."

"Tut, tut, the rubber shoes that were taken off and scattered on the school ground would fill a huge straw sack to the full. Would the number of dead people amount to several hundred?" said my father's younger cousin. Gilsu spit out words flatly, frowning.

"The township office secured the statistics about how many sweet potatoes and canola oil each household reaped, but it didn't even try to collect statistics on the number of the victims. Damn it! In my opinion, the number of the victims would amount to over five hundred. Couldn't it be around six hundred considering that they drove and took around fifty to sixty people over eleven times?"

The eleventh group of the crowd were really fortunate. In the very nick of time, a battalion commander arrived in a jeep and ordered the soldiers to stop shooting. The supposition of 'if' could be applied to this bloody massacre. If the jeep hadn't broken down on its way to the village, it would have arrived an hour earlier, so three hundred to four hundred villagers could have been saved from the absurd slaughter. As a result, the number of the victims would be less than one hundred. If the soldiers had killed only around one hundred villagers who had been proved to be red ore to help the communists, it could have been tolerable. The very number of six hundred

victims clearly proved that they were slaughtered indiscriminately.

"Uncle, didn't the battalion commander come late under the pretext of some problem in the car? How could a mere company commander commit such a dreadful massacre without letting the battalion commander know?"

The uncle didn't know the full details of the massacre because he stayed at Aewol as a punitive force member. He used to belong to a troop, composed of NWYL members alone. The troops were stationed at a neighboring village, Hamdeok. Before a few months before the massacre, he just happened to be transferred to Aewol. His wife followed him there since they were newly-married.

"At that time, the company commanders had the summary jurisdiction. In addition, even if they obeyed the operational orders from combat headquarters, they had a fair chance of misinterpreting them. I couldn't get the whole picture of the operation because I served in the army as the lowest rank, but it might be part of the operation of "Gyeon Byeog Cheong Ya." In other words, it was the operation of evacuation. The operation of "Gyeon Byeog Cheong Ya" means 'building up firm wall screens and clearing the field.' This military operation comes from Chinese Sonja military tactics. You

know it was impossible to guard the whole remote mountain villages. So they intended to secure a certain area as a stronghold and evacuate other areas of personnel and supplies so as to prevent the communist guerrillas from establishing a foothold. But there was something wrong in the process of evacuating personnel and supplies. The order that they should safeguard personnel and supplies into the safe area was unfortunately distorted into the order that they should shoot all of the personnel to death and destroy all supplies by fire."

"Well, uncle, do you still believe that rumor? Including our village, there were many other villages in which that kind of massacre happened around the whole island. Could it be possible that there was misinterpretation of the orders? It is inexcusable. I am sure the headquarters ordered that they should shoot to death all people within the operational region."

"Well, I participated in the evacuation of the residents in the villages, halfway between the sea and the mountains, into the sea area...."

Well, after the decree that they should evacuate at a certain time on a certain day was issued, we got another order that we should regard anyone remaining in the operational area as a communist guerrilla or a sympathizer and should shoot them. When we arrived at a village within the operational

area, we saw notices of declaring evacuation which were posted at a few houses interval, torn off, shredded, and fluttering in the wind. It suddenly occurred to me that the village must be a den of communist guerrillas. There was, however, no decree to evacuate this village in advance"

Most of the victims, however, were old people and housewives. They were not even the fugitives whom the military and the police were chasing after. How could they shoot away at those innocent people? Those young people, who had been fleeing from the military and the police and had the fortune to escape the cruel calamity, could be fugitives. But they didn't belong to the communist guerrilla for sure. In fact, they were literally fugitives chased after by the military and the police and the communist guerrillas at the same time.

Why did the military and the police regard them as communist guerrillas? Some errors, committed by some ignorant villagers, might have invited the mishap. On the May 10th election day, a few bone-deep communists instigated some villagers to blindly boycott the election. This incident must have been the main culprit of the absurd slaughter. Who could know that this boycott would give a convenient pretext under which the military and the police used to brand the villagers as communist guerrillas whenever they pleased? No

matter what effort the villagers tried to make to wipe out the brand of communists, it was of no use. To prove their innocence, the villagers expelled the wife whose husband, Kim Jinbae, had masterminded the May 10th election boycott and hidden himself in Halla Mountain. They even dug out in the middle of his field and made a pond which would be filled with water whenever it rained. The absurd misunderstanding from the military and the police, however, showed no sign of letting up.

At night, communist guerrilla members came down to the village where they had been brought up and killed menfolks with a bamboo spear. They regarded the village men as reactionary elements just because they hadn't come to the mountain to join the communist guerrillas. In the daytime, the police from the Hamdeok Police Box came to the village in the Three-Quarter Truck in order to round up fugitives. As a result, those village men had to hole up. Jongchul, a pneumonia patient, had been chased after by the police. On the night when the communist guerrillas attacked the village, he hid himself behind a wooden chest. But he couldn't hold back his coughs from his pneumonia. At last he was detected and killed with a bamboo spear by the guerrillas. Wansik's father had also led a fugitive life. He holed up behind a rolled

straw mat set upright on end. He was also caught and faced the same fate as Jongchul. Three months before the slaughter, my granduncle was lanced to death with a bamboo spear by a communist guerrilla member who was born at the same village. At that time, my granduncle was a headman of the first section. He rejected the guerrilla's demand to collect food from the villagers.

"I can't do that. Why don't you rob us of rice rather than demand it? If the police notice that we obeyed your demand by giving rice to you, what would they do against us? It will invite another calamity. So, please, deprive us of rice instead of demanding it."

At this remark from my granduncle, they became enraged and stabbed him on the chest with the bamboo spear. On the same night, Chuldong's family had the fortune not to suffer the looting. However, the police suspected the family might have helped the communist guerrillas. The family were all slain to death by the police next day.

At midnight, a few guerrilla members stuck bamboo spears through the rice paper window and threatened in a hoarse voice. "Wake up all. We've come." A shiver runs through my whole body at the mere thought of the flashlight beam cast on my father's horrified face.

As the village turned into a killing field by the two opposite forces, some of the men including my father went to Japan as a stowaway on a steamer at night or sought refuge in the Cholla province in the mainland. Some families sent their sons to other villages because of the ominous premonition that they would meet with death. The eldest son was sent to aunt's house in Jeju-eup, the second to an elder cousin's, and the last to another relative's in a different area. That was a typical way to preserve their family line from extermination.

Most of the men remained in the village. As they continued to be chased after by the police and the guerrillas, they had no choice but to move up to a pasture area at the foot of Halla Mountain and to seek refuge in a cave by a dry stream bed. Aunt Suni also followed them. She had been tortured and investigated just because her husband had been missing. Jeju Island had been formed through a series of volcanic activities, so it had many lava caves throughout the whole island. The lava caves were the most suitable places for innocent people to hide themselves in and to give the slip to the police and the guerrillas.

Rice cookers and coverlets were brought to the caves. They would burn cat briars for cooking because the plant didn't produce smoke, which could make them easily detected by the

police and the guerrillas. The plant was the perfect firewood for cooking because it didn't get wet easily even if it rained. After cooking, they would lay firewood in a disorderly heap on the charcoal to make a bed for sleeping. They had to be stingy with rice. They would pick up a little rotten horse meat scattered around the field for an alternative meal. Crows also would eat the meat. Even though it was winter, some cows and horses couldn't be driven to the village because of the battles. The military and the police would shoot cows and horses lest they be used as food for the communist guerrillas. They would bring the beef with them, but leave the horse meat behind.

Dripping water from the ceiling of the caves added another element of hardship to those innocent people. Bed clothes got wetter and wetter, and a few people began to freeze to death.

After three years of fighting and murder, peace was finally established on the island. The communist guerrillas were driven away. I followed my grandmother to pick and collect edible ferns in the fields. When we were caught by rain, we entered a cave. I was terribly surprised to see white human bones and white rubber shoes here and there.

As the men began to leave the villages, the military and the police came to believe that they had joined the communist

guerrillas. To be sure, that very misunderstanding caused the horrible massacre on December 8th by the lunar calendar. The heinous slaughter had been committed in nine days since the men began to live in the caves. On that ill-fated day, Aunt Suni came down to the village to take her son and daughter who were left in the care of my grandmother. Her ill fate started from that moment.

Gilsu's voice suddenly rose up inside the room.

"Anyhow, this incident should not be overlooked. Light should be shed on it. The cruel incident should be fully accounted for to help prevent a recurrence as a warning. It should come to light whether the slaughter was carried out under the operational command of the headquarters or by the troop commander's own decision. We should know who was to blame. But we still don't even know the troop commander's name, do we?"

At this remark, my father's elder cousin shook his head.

"What are you talking about? What's the use of knowing his name? No one should be to blame except the absurd situation. We shouldn't ask for trouble."

My paternal aunt's husband threw in words of agreement.

"Anyhow, as long as the main criminals are still alive on two strong legs, it may be almost impossible to get the true

picture of the incident. Would these guys just sit back and relax while we try to shed light on the incident? In addition, because 30 years have already passed, the statute of limitations for the incident has expired.

But Gilsu didn't agree.

"I don't agree with you. If we ignore the incident, it will be buried deeply forever. What will happen to this incident in 20 years? The accused will have died. Eyewitnesses such as my father and father's cousin will have gone. Then every effort would be useless, wouldn't it? The incident may remain merely as a legend."

My paternal aunt's husband must have been angry at Gilsu's words. The Pyeongan-do dialect abruptly came out of his mouth.

"Well, my nephew, what's the use of digging up the past again and again? That's the way the war goes, isn't it?"

At the moment, from his face in his 50's, I could sense the brutality of a hot-blooded NWYL member on the right side of thirty. I was taken aback. A mysterious antipathy rose up deep inside.

Some policemen, who used to be members of NWYL, would entice children of my age with western-style cakes to tell where their elder brothers or fathers were hiding. Innocent

children would point their fingers at their elder brothers or fathers hiding in a bamboo forest, under a floor, in a stable or in a deep hole under piles of millet straw. A policeman tortured an old man to find out more about his fugitive son. When the old man didn't answer while sitting on his knees, the policeman threatened the man's grandson with his rifle. He also slammed his rifle butt into the grandfather's face. Firing blank shots, the police would threaten villagers into cooking chickens . They would arrest an innocent woman and lay the blame on her for joining a women's association which she knew nothing about. They stripped her naked and feasted their eyes. Aunt Suni was also such a victim. She was taken to the police box, stripped naked and tortured to tell the whereabouts of her husband. They had the impudence to give a ridiculous excuse for the stripping. They insisted they had to examine her body closely to see if her husband came to sleep with her or not last night. One day Aunt Suni was threshing grain in the yard. A policeman came to question her. When she couldn't answer, he snatched the flail from her and began to beat her with it. I still remember this violent act vividly.

At one time there was a prevailing rumor that the police would attack young women who were rooting out weeds on a

crop in the fields by themselves. So the families with daughters of marriageable age were greatly worried. My grandfather took the initiative and married off his daughter to a young NWYL member before she could be violated. He was smart enough to trick the young and innocent soldier into the hurried marriage. The uncle was two years younger than my aunt.

At that time, fugitive families would depend on this kind of marriage of convenience to survive the hard times. Whenever a regiment of soldiers moved to the mainland, many children had to be brought up in unceasing sorrows under the widow-mother's care because of the broken marital relationship.

However, my uncle was carefully chosen by my grandfather. After the armistice between the two Koreas was established, he came back to the village to live with my aunt. He was completely assimilated into the village culture and has lived there for 30 years. It was not common for him to use the North Korean dialect. When they heard the dialect, it reminded them of the horrible massacre. An oppressive silence would ensue among them.

A smoky smell from the burning dried pine tree twigs stimulated my nose. It might have been the smell of cooking

rice for the memorial service. I could hear murmuring from a narrow alley where some people were passing by. They might have been visiting another relative's house to hold another memorial service after finishing the previous one.

The uncle continued without noticing his dialect was offensive to their ears.

"Jeju people might have bad feelings about the NWYL. My nephew, think about it. Why did they come over to South Korea leaving their parents and houses behind? They couldn't tolerate communists' atrocities. We were grinding our teeth against every communist. Anticommunism is the very reason for the existence of the NWYL, isn't it? We were dispatched to this island in LST's(Landing Ship and Tank) in order to form an anticommunist front against the Souther Labor Party which was prevailing here. We joined the army on the spot. Some of us joined the army and others the police. But at that time, the military and the police were in disorder. Military discipline was extremely lax. There were also the Southern Labor Party communists here and there. It was almost the same situation in the local military units throughout the nation, but it was known that the Jeju military unit was especially vulnerable to communism. The military unit was mainly composed of youth from Jeju, but its regiment commander was

assassinated. What was worse, a rebellion broke out and around 100 people went to the mountains and joined the communist guerrillas. The vacancy had to be filled with our NWYL members. That's the reason we came to have extremely bad preconceptions about Jeju people from the start. The NWYL was not the only unit which treated the Jeju people atrociously. The mainland local unit, which took the place of the NWYL, was cruel, too. At that time, almost all of the mainland people thought of Jeju people as communists. The April 3rd Uprising happened and then there was a boycott to obstruct the May 10th election. Only on this island in South Korea was the election not conducted. Anyhow this island was totally in tumult...

Elder uncle then turned his face away, heaving a groan. His wriggling eyebrows, like pine tree larva, showed that his feelings were boiling. Only then did uncle realize that he was speaking in the North Korean dialect and shrank back in surprise. Father's elder cousin and younger cousin were drawing in deep cigarette smoke puffs while wearing dissatisfied looks. For a moment, an uneasy silence continued. Soon the shameless uncle began to talk in the Jeju dialect.

"Brother, I don't mean the NWYL was right. They were to blame. But the group was not the only one that had bad

feelings about Jeju people. As I said before, almost all mainland people thought of Jeju people as communists. The mainland people have always looked down on island people. So the misunderstanding and antipathy became worse and worse.... The absurdity really beats me."

"You are right. At that time the whole island was entirely in the mainland people's hands." Father's elder cousin clucked his tongue.

"At that time the head of the Hamdeok Police Box earnestly requested that his men not shoot fugitives to death without his permission. But those mainland policemen ignored this request just because the head was a Jeju native. They would kill fugitives at will." JEJU NATIONAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

At this remark father's younger cousin expressed disagreement shaking his hand.

"Did Mr. Park, the head of the Police Box, really say so? He might have made an excuse to be exempt from the responsibility."

Brother Hyunmo added.

"I heard Mr. Park committed more atrocities than the NWYL members."

Uncle responded to this remark.

"It is very likely. Some Jeju native policemen were more

determined not to be branded as communists from the NWYL members."

"That's not true. I heard some details from Insoo's father, who was arrested, investigated and then released. He said that Mr. Park had secretly released some fugitives. But his men from the mainland treated them horribly."

Two years after the incident, Mr. Park visited the village one time and then he was severely clubbed. There lived a youth whose name was Ingoo. He lived in a house with persimmon trees. He was on leave as a Marine. He had joined the Marine Corps with elder brother Hyunmo on the same day. He was in the marine corps uniform. When he saw Mr. Park, he cried out to him, wielding a pronged stick, "You killed my father! You killed my elder brother! You murderer! You slaughterer!"

The headquarters reconsidered their scorched-earth policy belatedly. They turned it into a pacification activity. Most of the fugitives who sought refuge in the caves at the foot of Halla Mountain returned to their villages. Elder brother Hyunmo was among them. Just then the Korean war broke out. When there was a draft for soldiers, almost all fugitives volunteered to join the army. It was a perfect chance to erase the absurd communist stigma. They might also waste their

lives if they remained in their hometowns. Elder brother Hyunmo participated in the Incheon Landing Operation as a Marine enlisted in the third draft. The Marine Corps were mainly composed of Jeju Island youth. The corps was so renowned for its bravery that it was often called ghost-catching Marine Corps. But what's the true picture of bravery? Was it a calculated move after all? The Jeju youth have suffered from the dishonor of being branded as communists. They were snatched from the jaws of death several times. They made every effort to remove the infamy by winning the fame of bravery. However, that's not the whole story. A retaliatory mind-set probably permeated the bravery. As they had been persecuted by North Koreans, they sought every opportunity to retaliate. The military and the police would indiscriminately brand every Jeju person as a communist. But the bravery which the Jeju Youth had shown in the Korean War was clear counter-evidence to the mainland prejudice which had caused the calamity.

At the thought of this situation, I felt a surge of anger. If I was allowed to give way to my bad feelings, I would have liked to reproach my uncle severely. I had to contain myself. But I spit out words with anger.

"Uncle, how many genuine communists were there among the

300,000 Jeju people at that time?"

"If we exclude around 10,000 unarmed communist guerrilla members, the number of genuine communists would be as few as 300."

I got angry in spite of myself at his words.

"What on earth are the unarmed communist guerrilla members? How can you call unarmed people communist guerrillas? After the villages halfway between the mountain and the sea were scorched, they lost a place to live in. They were just refugees hiding themselves in caves."

At my unexpected response, he cringed in surprise and then stared at me.

"Seoul nephew, you are right. I saw them with my own eyes. We were on an operation in a pasture area. Upon hearing a baby's crying, we searched inside a thicket. We found around 20 unarmed communist guerrillas hiding in a cave."

"They were not unarmed communist guerrillas but refugees."

I was determined to correct uncle's words.

"You are right, nephew. I admit I made a slip of the tongue. At that time, the people who hid in the mountain were considered to be rioters. The people in the cave were shabbily dressed. Hunger made them bags of bones. They were shivering with cold, trying to shield their bodies with a

light suit of cotton clothes in the depth of winter. Some people lost their toes from frostbite. Considering that the so-called 'unarmed communist guerrillas' were in this situation, the government authorities changed their mind. The government began to apply pacification tactics by setting up a rehabilitation center and distributing relief supplies to those people. They spread leaflets using an L-5 liaison aircraft around the Halla Mountain area, advising them to report to the military or the police. Scores of them in groups every day came down and reported to the military and the police."

"That's it. Why couldn't they apply the pacification tactics? If they had used the tactics from the start, the great sacrifice of life could have been avoided. Those innocent people went up to the mountain area because they were afraid of the police and the guerrilla. Why did they regard those people as communist guerrillas?"

"Well, that's still a mystery. In the anti-guerrilla warfare, politics occupies 70% and military operations 30%. But in this case there was zero politics and 100% military operations. What was worse, it was less than twelve months since the army was established. It was hard to expect rational behavior."

Oh! Our village wasn't the only one that suffered a massacre!

You could stop anyone and ask him. You couldn't meet anyone who hadn't had a victim among his family. At the least he might have a victimized cousin. Except for hundreds of military and police victims, how could there be approximately 50,000 victims? Could the proverb that an important occasion requires cracking some pieces of china bowls apply to this merciless slaughter? That's ridiculous! It couldn't be compared with cracking some pieces of china bowls. Should the Jeju people harbor a grudge against people who came over to Jeju Island from the remote mainland and who suppressed the violence? What an ironic fate!

Regardless of Who presents an explanation of the massacre, it was a stark crime. But the atrocities have not been prosecuted for 30 years until now. No one dared to conceive of the idea because the Jeju people believed the military commanders and high-ranking police officers of that period were still holding on to the power. If they carelessly raised questions about the massacre, there was a high probability of being branded as a communist. Beyond the question of prosecution, they didn't even have the guts to hold a joint memorial service for the victims. They already felt threatened because they had been cruelly traumatized. But what they really want is neither prosecution nor retaliation. They just

wanted repose for the souls of the victims by holding a solemn joint memorial service, and erecting a memorial monument. They have been forced to shut their mouths about the truth for over 30 years. They are really afraid of the ill-fated souls because the souls had to be kept deep inside and couldn't see the light.

By the nightfall of December 18th by the lunar calendar, soldiers set out in two Three-Quarter Trucks. The villagers still remained on the school grounds. They stormed to the back of the school grounds drill platform where the right-wing families were. The survivors hugged one another and held back wailing louder than that of burning cows. I couldn't hold back my screams of terror. Nightfall began to set in on the muddy school grounds which were dented and terribly scratched by the randomly driven Three Quarter Trucks. Hundreds of pairs of Full-Moon brand rubber shoes were scattered all over the ground. The glow from the burning houses in the village was cast on the ground. The school ground turned reddish. The glass windows were also aglow. The villagers were terrified by the raging fire that was spreading wide like the after-glow of the sunset filling the western skies. Their wailing cries went deeper and deeper into their sorrow. No one dared to climb up the school rock

fence and look down at the burning village.

As it got darker and darker, the burning light began to spread in all directions, engulfing the darkness. Could this burning light be an evening glow which temporarily brightens and then vanishes in no time? The burning, however, began to reign over the darkness more ferociously as it was getting darker and darker. Low-hanging clouds tinted by the burning light were wriggling like bloody guts. The glow ran over the ocean to the Dallyeo island as if a wild fire were spreading. The shadows of fire were dancing on the faces of the villagers on the school ground as if their faces were smeared with blood. The exploding and shattering sounds of earthen pots containing rice in the burning grain barns continued from the village.

Father's elder brother was extremely uneasy about grandfather who was in the burning house. When he thought the soldiers had completely withdrawn, he left the school secretly, pretending to go to the toilet. Grandfather was left behind in the burning house because he had been gored in the thigh by the neighbor's cow a few days ago. After a long while, he came back helpless with disappointment. A heavily smoky smell came out of the drooping sleeves of his unlined summer jacket. Grandmother burst into tears and then we

followed. As we guessed, grandfather had been shot to death. But his body was not burnt by the fire. He might have torn off a flap of a door and thrown it off into the kitchen garden. While he was taking the folding screen out, he must have been shot to death under a persimmon tree.

On that night, the villagers stormed into a classroom to keep out the cold, sat close together, and spent the night. During the night, we were terribly surprised twice. First, we thought the cracking sound of the burning bamboo trees were gunshots. Second, Aunt Suni who we thought had been killed turned out to be alive and knocked on the glass window. She had fainted and was buried in a pile of dead bodies until she recovered her consciousness late into the night. When she entered the classroom, she tried not to approach people. When Gilsu tried to take her close to us by holding her sleeve, she shook off his hand and crouched obstinately by herself away from people. Unlike other people, she didn't shed one tear even though she had lost her two sons. The terrible fear might have paralyzed her senses.

The fire lasted until the next morning. At dawn, people, who were totally exhausted from wailing, began to recover their senses all at once. Before the sun rose, we thronged to the village. Thick smoke driven by the sea breeze didn't allow us

to go straight to the village. We came to the village by a roundabout route by the seaside. No one had gotten a wink of sleep the previous night. Heavy smoke had gotten in their eyes, making them red like those of a rabbit. It might be more correct to say that they were bloodshot to survive. There were still a lot of houses burning, so many people stayed near the seaside. Those houses lost their owners. People went to any burnt-down houses to collect any millet and sweet potatoes left after the fire. Some sweet potatoes were burnt black like charcoal, but others were well-cooked and edible. They alleviated their hunger with the sweet potatoes. The villagers had missed two meals on the previous day. Burnt cows and pigs were carved up and then divided among themselves.

Each person was evacuated to Hamdeok with foodstuffs on his back. I wondered how they gathered the strength to do this after the exhaustion from wailing all night. They all carried a burden on their back. The burden was two times heavier than usual. Aunt Suni might have thought a straw bag of millet would run out soon, so she filled the legs of her thin and loose slacks tied at the end with half-burned millet. We walked six miles to reach Hamdeok, however we were thrown out. There were no facilities for refugees, so we had no place

to stay. Some families fortunately could find vacant rooms or houses which offer fugitive families had left behind. Others had to borrow a horse-driven mill, a storage shed or a house barn. They didn't have coverlets so they laid barley straw in thick piles on the floor of the room. There was no big difference between these rooms and the storage sheds or the barns for them to sleep in.

Fugitive families were locked up in the Hamdeok Elementary School. They were relentlessly interrogated for 5 days and then released. Aunt Suni was among them. Gilsu and I had an alternate errand from grandmother to borrow a sticky millet ball and serve it to her everyday. On her last interrogation day, I met her on the way. Her appearance was miserable. Her rod-like hairpin was pulled out. Her pigtail was untied and tangled. Her thin black loose slacks were plastered with mud. She managed to struggle down to a rock fence on her bare feet, where she sat down to rest.

When she stayed at my place in Seoul, Aunt Suni used to heat her lower back on the heated oil-papered floor whenever the weather was bad. The torture and interrogation must have been responsible for her aches.

It had been less than two months since they came to Hamdeok, when the refugees ran short of food. They managed

to survive for another two months by eating boiled wild vegetables, sea lettuce or other edible seaweed with salted anchovy stock. At last, the evacuation order was lifted and the refugees could come back to their villages.

When they returned home, the first thing they had to do was to dispose of the dead bodies. Rows of bodies were piled up on the four sunken crop fields along the belt highway around Jeju Island. They found the dead bodies and buried them in temporary tombs.

The bodies had been left behind unheeded for over 3 months, so they were pecked apart by crows, weathered, decomposed and pulpy. It was not easy to identify them. They managed to identify them by the clothes on them. A man from the eastern part of the village found his father's corpse and set it aside for a moment to bring an A-frame carrier. He came back to find it taken away by someone else. Mothers lay over their children, proving they had tried to protect their children from the bullets at the last moment of death.

After they buried the corpses in the temporary tombs, they went out to the fields to harvest the barley. Because they missed the harvest time, the stalks and ears of the barley had fallen down and were rotting in piles. The rotting barley seeds had begun to put forth green sprouts. Wild rats were

rampant and were eating away the grain. What was worse, weeds were mixed among the crop because the turmoil didn't permit the necessary weeding. Therefore, the total harvest of the barley was reduced to just a thatched bag of barley grains for each household that year.

The second thing they had to do was to build mud huts. They went out to the field to cut down pine trees and eulalia grass. They tied up rafters with the vines of arrowroot plants. They wove eulalia plants to cover the roof and lined the mud walls with them. They built a mud huts in two or three days. As all bedding had been burnt to ashes, they laid thick piles of barley straw on the floor. The mud huts were no better than pigsties. Their meals were no better than hog feed, either. Owing to the shortage of food, they had to eat mixed-grain porridge with bran, sea lettuce and other seaweed. Human feces and pig dung were almost the same.

They couldn't even eat barley bran to their content. They would serve up boiled barley in a big brass bowl. When they would sit around the brass bowl, they would draw a line in the boiled barley with a spoon to mark their share. If they went to the sea across from Dalryeo Island in a fishing boat, they could catch fat scabbard fish for a meal, but fishing with a reel and long-line as well as woman divers' picking sea

products were forbidden because the fortification work had started.

The villagers had to give themselves up to constructing rock fortifications with a wolf in their stomach under the surveillance of the police from dawn to dusk. It was the so-called construction work for a fortified village. They pulled down the rock fences of burnt houses or fields to use them for the fortification work. They even tore down the rock fences of their ancestor's tombs. Aunt Suni had to carry rocks on her back with a baby in her womb.

Only old men and housewives remained because the men had gone to subdue the guerrillas. So it took almost two months to complete the fortification work. There were double stone walls surrounding the village. Thorny trees or briars were placed between the two stone walls. Young children including Gilsu and I were mobilized for this grueling fortification task. Hunger was so severe. They were too hungry to carry heavy rocks. The rock sometimes would slip and drop on the back of their foot. Many children were suffering from hurt feet. When the fortification task was accomplished, fishing with a reel and the harvesting of sea products were permitted but only during the daytime. At night, the fortification gates were closed tightly and people were sternly forbidden to pass

through the gates. They had to take guard duty in a sentry post hut by turns.

It had been 12 months since Gilsu and I had stopped learning at the elementary school in fourth and third grade respectively. He and I used to go to a sentry post carrying a bamboo spear for our duty. Aunt Suni also used to come to the post on duty with her bamboo spear in spite of it being near time of childbirth. It was next to miraculous for her not to have had a miscarriage in the midst of the killing spree. During the heinous incident, she lost her brother and sister. The baby in her womb was the only hope she could rely on.

She made every effort to find food. She couldn't dive into the sea to pick sea products because she was near her time. She crawled about the seaside picking oysters and sea urchins and eating them raw. She caught crabs and collected spiral shellfish. She would come to the sentry post with a basketful of boiled spiral shellfish on her night duty. She didn't even offer some to us and would eat them ravenously all by herself through the night. I even thought she went mad obsessed with a hunger demon since at the time I didn't know the fact that women stuff themselves with anything to eat when they are pregnant.

This kind of life in the fortified village lasted over a year.

But we hadn't been attacked by the guerrillas for the whole period. One midnight, a rustling sound was heard from the fortification gates. Everyone was terrified out of their senses. But later it was found that a cow had made the rustling sound. Someone lost the cow during the daytime in the field. It had come down to the fortification gates by itself at night. In the end, it was proved that the fortification work in the seaside village was an unjustifiably excessive reaction. The number of guerrillas was reduced to dozens, and they didn't have the capacity to attack the seaside village at all.

The villagers pulled down the fortification walls which had been useless for the whole year. They carried the rocks back home to construct walls and build new houses. Though it was called a house, it was only a hut with a room and a kitchen. They used thick wires instead of nails. We can easily imagine what the house looked like. Aunt Suni gave birth to a baby at our house. She built a small hut on the site of a burnt-down house with the help of father's elder brother. Some of the sites of burnt-down houses were left untouched because the whole family were all slaughtered.

At that time it was popular for children of my age to pick up empty cartridges of bullets in the sunken field by the belt highway around Jeju Island and make a pop-gun. They forgot

all about the tragedy there and collected empty cartridges. That's it. Isn't it a children's trait to easily forget about whatever isn't helpful to their rapid growth? However, adults couldn't forget about it at all. They flinched at the popping sound from the pop-gun that the children were playing with. A boy happened to pick up a gun barrel which was burnt and bent like a strand of taffy. His father noticed him dragging it. He took it away and beat him severely with it. The bluish rusty metal reminded adults of the skin color of dead bodies.

However, no one must have suffered from more severe aftereffects of the incident than Aunt Suni. On Aunt Soni's empty field were two dead bodies no one had claimed. Aunt Suni put them away with the help of father's elder brother and then planted sweet potatoes. That year had an abundant harvest. The sweet potatoes were as big and thick as wooden pillows because the patch was nourished by the rotten corpses.

On hot summer days, she went out to the field to root out weeds with a short-handled hoe carrying her cradle with the baby in it. She couldn't get enough of the cool breeze because the field was sunken. The stalks of sweet potatoes drooped and put down roots into the soil. In the daytime without a stir of wind, silence reigned over everything. From

the heat-scorched turf of the grave-mound under which her brother and sister were buried, there was a strong grass smell. In the shade of a rock fence her baby was sleeping in the cradle. She was weeding the field, frequently glancing at the crows for fear that the birds might swoop down to peck at the baby. She would go far away from the cradle along one furrow and then come near it along another. A rusty lead bullet or pieces of small white bones would bounce back out from the tip of the short-handled hoe. The more silent the daytime was, the more frequent she suffered from hallucinations of crackling gun shots. Whenever she saw the rusty lead bullets and pieces of white bones, she would put them away by burying them under a pile of gravel in the corner. But over the 30 years she would find them whenever she was weeding.

The 30 years of pain and endurance that clung to the sunken field could be possibly forgotten among others, but it was impossible in case of her. She couldn't get away from the field because she was persistently bound to the land where the white bones and rusty bullets happened to be excavated. I wondered if her coming to my place in Seoul without being noticed by her daughter was her last attempt to get away from the sunken field which held her tenaciously and wouldn't

release her.

The sunken field in which her son and daughter were buried was the fate she had to face. She was pulled along to the sunken field as if she were dragged off by the ends of her hair into an unfathomable bog by a water demon. That's it. she didn't die a month ago, she had been killed 30 years before. She was already dead that long ago. The bullet, fired from the rusty gun on that field 30 years ago, stopped the flow of the 30 years until the last day. So the bullet was sent through her heart on that day.

Soon after I made this conclusion, I wanted to smoke. The topic for all present had already changed to farming. They were all busy in talking about farm work except for me.

"I really wish the price of sweet potatoes would not suffer a sharp decline this year. The damned heavy rain in the fall brought about fungi on the drying slices of sweet potatoes...."

I got out of the room, lit a cigarette and put it in my mouth leaning my back against the stack of millet straw. The snow pellets thinly coating the yard were driven about by the wind. Although the moon of Dec. 18th hid itself behind the clouds, the sky was dimly white. I noticed a sign of some people who were passing by the narrow alley. They might have been visiting a relative's house for the last memorial service after

finishing several memorial services.

<The End>

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