

Princess of the Night by Han Junghyun

What's something you can only see when it gets dark?

Ghosts?

There's also spies, infiltrators.

But spies move during the day, too.

Do they?

In that case, light.

I turned to look at Joohee. Something you can only see when it gets dark? I repeated.

When asked if Hee was his father or mother, Joohee had only this to say: Manshin, Great Shamaness. So, mother then? No, simply the Great Shamaness of ten thousand spirits. Hee was a second-generation Manshin who continued the lineage after his mother, Yoo Soon-ok, the first Manshin.

Soon-ok was a rising talent who graduated from the finestgisaeng academy in Gyeongseong, as Seoul was known during the Japanese occupation. She then boarded a ship to Tokyo with Bae Gooja, future star of the revue craze in Joseon, and Kwon Samcheon, founder of the Keumsung Opera Ensemble, and Kwon Iknam, member of Suzuranza, the multinational girls' theater troupe.

Hee was born around the time that Soon-ok, enthralled by shamans' ritual dances, decided to go back to Joseon to become a Manshin. When Joohee asked, "From Japan to Joseon. You mean Soon-ok crossed the Genkai Sea, between Busan and Kyushu?" Hee is said to have mumbled, "The sea. Sea of seas, the middle."

However, at the time, becoming a shaman was considered one of the harshest punishments that could befall a woman. Perhaps it was because most ghost stories were of innocent women unjustly killed. But Soon-ok's fate was passed on to the only man of the household, Hee.

On that day when Hee stepped onto the ritual blade, dressed in Soon-ok's most cherished garments, all Soon-ok said was, "Those clothes suit Hee better than me." Indeed, Soon-ok was hardly surprised as she watched Hee dance. During her studies in Tokyo, the theaters of Asakusa often starred actors dressed as women and actresses as men. Even Bae Gooja's ticket to fame had been her role as the protagonist in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. *Denkaisujicha*, the all-female talent troupe she was part of, toured China, Europe, and the States. Theaters in Gyeongseong back then were packed day after day with young girls clamoring to see actresses in men's clothing. The men of the dance and music troupes that travelled with a

Manshin put on women's clothes to heighten the mood while the shaman channeled her deities. The role that made Kwon Geumseong the talk of the town had also been that of a countryside woman. So the assumption that a shaman must be a woman may have been too simplistic.

"Well, think of how much sorrow women carried. Only after death could they be free of their grief. They couldn't say a word while they were alive. That must be why people assumed only women could become shamans," Joohee would say.

Even so, how could one's occupation be called a punishment? How could one be doomed to tell only the truths of life through the voices of gods? Yet it seems what Joohee said wasn't untrue. From a certain point, people began to fear the voice of shamans. With the onset of colonial rule, shamans became superstitious fools who spewed falsehoods. When liberation came, their oration became the coded language of Communists. For the stories the shamans told were not of the Empire, nor of the South or North. And so it came to be that the same day the Communist partisans swept south into Namwon Valley close to Mount Jiri in 1948, Great Shamaness Hee, the Manshin, was the first to be buried alive.

Ghosts, spies, and grandmothers. Shamans heard the voices of gods, spies relayed the messages of the North, and grandmothers remembered for far too long what people had done. That year, Joohee's older brothers, Joohyuk and Jooyool, were singled out as leaders of the Communist partisans. Why had the two brothers been there on that day in the first place? Back then, Joohee was not in a position to keep worrying about his brothers' safety. At the time, Joohee was not in Namwon or even Gyeongseong; s/he was in Tokyo. Unlike his brothers, who had graduated from Mokpo Commercial High School and were admitted to Gyeongseong Imperial University on scholarship, Joohee was a failing, maladjusted student.

"There wasn't any beauty there."

Joohee told me the uniforms at his school looked distinctly military. In fact, the teachers wore the same uniforms as soldiers and even bore swords in class. When they spoke of Nietzsche or Kafka or Gombrowicz, Joohee felt ashamed. While the school uniform tormented his spirit, Joohee's body suffered due to his unusually small physique. Before entering school, Joohee's appearance had never been a problem. On the contrary, the shamanesses who assisted the Manshin would clothe Joohee in colorful garments and praise him, marveling at the sight. But at some point, Joohee stopped going to school and read books at home instead. It was probably after the day s/he was humiliated by a classmate who pulled down his pants with the taunt "You sure you aren't a girl?" When Joohee appeared in a skirt, Hee took a long look and then told him to pack his bags for Gyeongseong.

That day in 1942 when Hee and Joohee boarded the train to Gyeongseong, sixteen girls who had just arrived in Joseon after touring Japan, China, and the United States also stepped onto the same train. They were none other than the girl entertainers of the Takarazuka Revue, well-known for their choreography that was likened to flowers blooming all at once. The first thing that caught Joohee's eye at Gyeongseong Station was an incredible shower of brilliant light. Camera flashes illuminated the girl entertainers. But what shook him even more than the flashing cameras were the voices coming from the

dark opposite the light. Voices of Joseon girls, fans feverish with unbridled adoration, lavishing all sixteen girls of the Takarazuka with love.

Joohee, were you also part of the Takarazuka fans? I asked her. Joohee shook her head. "But there was beauty there." Who was beautiful? You mean the sixteen girls? "Yes, of course the girls at the center were radiant. But you see, the girls in the dark offering them words of love—they were stunning." Perhaps Joohee was talking about herself then, the Joohee who wanted to wear women's clothes.

Shortly after, Joohee looked up at Hee. "Why have we come to Gyeongseong?" Hee smiled and pointed to the Takarazuka theater troupe.

Facing the Takarazuka stars, Hee found herself transported back to the night streets of Gyeongseong in 1929. That day, Soon-ok and Hee had seen the Joseon Theater revue performance of Suzuranza, the multinational girls' musical theater troupe founded in 1921 in Dalian, China. This group that drew inspiration from sources as close as the Tokyo Girls' Theater Troupe to those as far off as American variety shows, had eight Joseon girls among its members. Suzuranza wasn't the only girls' ensemble that Gyeongseong theatergoers welcomed with keen interest back in 1929. Denkaisujicha, the group Bae Gooja had entered at age nine, and Nangrangjwa, which ambitiously declared itself a female musical theater troupe based in Gyeongseong and not Tokyo, were also rounding up audiences.

Hee was completely mesmerized by the play in which young actresses from China, Japan, and Joseon dressed in men's clothes and mingled affectionately regardless of nationality. Upon exiting the show, s/he saw a poster that covered the entire wall of the theater announcing an upcoming performance by the Bae Gooja Arts Group. Looking at it, Hee was reminded of an article s/he'd seen a while ago in the Maeil Shinbo. It said the tremendously popular Bae Gooja had founded an artists' collective, and was bringing to stage not only American revues such as Mon Paris, but also plays from Joseon such as Arirang reinvented as girls' musical theater shows. Bae Gooja had been adopted by a Japanese family when she was a child, and required an interpreter when she was invited to give a lecture at the Geunhwa School because she couldn't utter even the simplest greeting in Korean. Many theatergoers enjoyed Bae's performances, but even so, they would mock her at every turn, pointing out her inability to speak Korean. They called her a Japanese woman, a Modern Girl who was head over heels for Western culture. But from Hee's perspective, Bae Gooja was the one who'd put a Korean dance performance on stage at the International Exhibition teeming with Japanese audiences—this Japanese Modern Girl who couldn't speak a lick of Korean. *Now there is no need to go all the way to Asakusa to see the performances of girl entertainers. As Hee read Bae's interview, a thought crossed her mind. Perhaps the girl entertainers and the girls who adored them were crossing borders by the fastest, safest means available: through dance, song, and a love that could not be dimmed.*

"I don't want to go back to that school."

At Joohee's words, Hee was brought back to Gyeongseong, 1942. Hee stroked Joohee's shoulder. "I know." Hee's voice was small, but it held a steadfast promise.

So Joohee, where did you go? I asked Joohee.

Joohee ended up back in Gyeongseong. So six years later, Joohee, who had been sitting in a philosophy lecture at Keio University, was grabbed by the scruff of hir neck during class and thrust onto a ship bound for Joseon. Joohee trembled when s/he said, "By the scruff of the neck" as if a spasm had run through hir body.

"They're killing everybody—ghosts, spies, grandmothers. Young women are being dragged away." Hearing this talk on the ship, Joohee thought of what she'd heard of Hee's final moments, how s/he had been buried alive. The villagers had known that Hee was a man. But why didn't anyone say so until Hee died? The villagers sought out the Manshin first whenever something happened. And yet, on their way home they would look at the Shamaness with pitying eyes. But Hee's traveling troupe, couldn't they have at least . . . Joohee shook hir head at the thought.

S/he'd remembered the faces of the villagers whispering when they learned that Hee had not given birth to Joohyuk and Jooyool. Hee was buried upside down for being Joohyuk and Jooyool's mother. Hee's corpse followed Joohee everywhere. Joohee wanted to break away, to go far, far away from upside-down Hee. But the only place to go adrift on the endless seas was the ocean. That is, where Hee was born: the middle. The middle of the sea. Of course, this thought never became reality. Instead, someone else grabbed Joohee by the scruff of hir neck. This time, Joohee did not shiver as s/he spoke; instead, a light smile rose to hir face.

"Yi, thehaenyeofrom Jeju."

As far as I can remember, Joohee only had one friend—haenyeoYi. The person who'd grabbed Joohee by the nape on that ship taking hir to Joseon; the one who'd appeared deep in the night, in the middle of the ocean. At the time, neither Joohee nor Yi had names. There, they were just a couple of commies. Joohee, you were linked to Joohyuk and Jooyool, but why was Yi on that ship? I asked Joohee. Wasn't Jeju island on the opposite side of the commies? This was true. But Yi was a woman who'd survived the bloodshed on that island. When half the population of Jeju was killed during the April 3 incident, Yi didn't even have time to search for her family before escaping to Fukuoka on a smuggler's boat. She worked at a pachinko parlor illegally for a while, but was caught and put on the ship heading to Joseon. Joohee looked straight up at Yi, who was about a head taller. Joohee abhorred being touched. It was a reflex that came from classmates who would pull hir pants down and slap hir chest, taunting hir by asking if s/he had breasts. I was surprised that Joohee tolerated Yi touching hir neck, but then it turned out there was a good reason.

"Hey, switch clothes with me," Yi said, pointing at Joohee's shirt.

Joohee's gaze fell to the floor. The moon, shining over the dark night sea, cast an especially stark light on the tattered hem of Yi's skirt. Joohee was reminded of Hee's skirts, always folded neatly at the hem. Yi tilted her head, puzzled. "Is he Japanese? Did I speak in Jeju dialect?" Only much later would Joohee come to understand Yi's mumbling. At the time, Yi could not speak Japanese at all. In any case, the two were able to escape from the ship unscathed. They'd only switched their clothing, but no one recognized Joohee in women's clothes and Yi in men's garments. "Who knew men's clothes would be so powerful?" Yi murmured, looking giddy, and though earlier Joohee had wanted to die, a smile crept over hir

face.

The night they safely reached land and left the ship, Joohee and Yi settled down below the awning of the Dongyang Theater. The bars in Gyeongseong stayed lit long into the night, but Joohee soon fell into a deep sleep for the first time in a longtime. Sensing some movement, Joohee opened her eyes a sliver to find Yi placing a ball of rice in front of her while she herself only gulped down water. The next day, while folding the hem of Yi's skirt with care, Joohee worked up the nerve to ask her a question.

"What's your name?"

"My name? I dunno, I was called Number Four. I was the fourth of five daughters."

Then, clearing her throat, Yi said the rice ball was simply to repay Joohee for the clothes.

"If that's the case, may I give you a name?"

Joohee used to name the young shamanesses who trained with Hee. Most were nameless. At the time, translations of novels by writers like Tolstoy and Prosper Mérimée were directly brought in from Tokyo to Gyeongseong, and gained great popularity as stage adaptations. Foreign-sounding names like Anna, Elena, and Sonya also came into vogue. Joohee called the young shamans by the names s/he found in these books. "I feel like I've become a person now," the young shamans would say, happy with the names Joohee gave them. Joohee had a feeling Yi would like hers, too. And if Yi would allow it, Joohee wanted to give her that name—Yibona. Of Witold Gombrowicz's play *Princess of Burgundy*. The princess who was despised because she would not smile in front of her fiancé. The princess killed for destroying the hierarchies of the nation and familial order, the established rules of the world. Later on, Yi would tell her she'd thought to herself, "Maybe not all commies are the same. Joohee is so kind, I want to pat her on the head." But in that moment, she burst into tears. Startled, Joohee turned her pockets inside out and handed Yi a handkerchief at which she blurted out, "Hey, you want me to help you make money?"

With that, Yi took Joohee to a theater troupe. That is, a theater troupe looking to hire girl entertainers.

The Council of the Arts, founded in 1921, put out a call for "upstanding single actresses, graduates of elementary school at minimum and between seventeen and twenty-two years of age." But musical theaters and women's opera troupes that hired girl entertainers did not take this approach. One's educational background or marital status was irrelevant there. Joohee and Yi sought them out without hesitation.

Three years later, Joohee and Yi had to leave the women's opera troupes. In 1959, the Council of Arts established by the new government released a new announcement.

Recruiting: Dignified actors who meet the educational requirement.

Men who had returned from war were hired first. The all-female operas starring women in male roles and girls who hadn't graduated from college gradually disappeared. After much deliberation, Joohee suggested to Yi that they try out for the Theater Council's auditions. In reply, Yi told her the story of her Jeju years as if recounting a past life.

"I left my child to go to Fukuoka. A newborn baby."

It was the first time Joohee learned that Yi had had a baby. Yi smiled, despite Joohee's shocked expression.

"I'm not a dignified woman in this country. I didn't go to school, either."

But you ran away because you would've been accused of being a commie and killed for no reason. You couldn't have snuck your baby onto the ship—if the baby cried, everyone on board would've been thrown into the ocean. That's why you left the baby. You couldn't die and have everyone else die, too. That's all. Joohee didn't say any of this. Because s/he knew—as a biological male who'd been to Keio University, s/he might be able to join the Theater Council, but Yi, ahaenyewho'd left behind the child she'd given birth to and survived on her own, never could.

"Come to think of it, my child didn't have a name, either. I wish I could call the baby by name when I miss it . . . Would've been nice if I'd known you back then. Then the baby would have had a name too, huh?"

Yi had finished putting on her stage makeup, and turned to Joohee as a war general.

"Princess Seonhwa, at least you gave me a name."

To tell you the truth, I haven't heard much about how Joohee and Yi spent those three years in the theater troupe aside from what I've shared. Joohee played Princess Seonhwa, and Yi the general who'd fallen in love with the Princess; they were much beloved by the audiences. This is as far as I've heard. Weren't there some other interesting moments? I would ask, and Joohee would reply, "See, I liked that the audience loved me regardless of whether I was a man or a woman."

Then s/he would begin recounting other episodes. For example, about the Sweetheart Cocktails s/he would drink at Café Lady's Country in Seodaemun, where Yi took Joohee after the show, or the konnyakuthey ate, made from devil's tongue roots. The Sweetheart Cocktail was a sugary drink popular among Modern Girls and Boys. The first day Joohee had a Sweetheart, s/he downed several glasses thanks to its syrupy sweetness, so many that Yi had to carry her home. Joohee's landlord tut-tutted on seeing her strewn over Yi's back. "My goodness, what kind of young lady drinks so much? Is she trying to become a Modern Girl?"

I'd never seen Joohee drunk, so this story felt disorienting at times. The Joohee I knew liked to peruse the morning paper while waiting for her coffee to brew every morning, and ate scones with seasonal fruits in the afternoon. When I made a puzzled face while listening to her story, Joohee said it wasn't so much the drinks that s/he enjoyed, but rather the music that played at the café: American jazz and foxtrot, from which the Japanese enka was said to later evolve. Another day, s/he said s/he liked watching the Modern Boys stay out late on rowdy nights, squabbling with their wives who'd come to

retrieve them. S/he also talked about the hangover soup restaurants lining the streets toward Cheongjin-dong—places that had been there since the early 1900s—on their way home from Lady’s Country. “Yi and I would stop by for a late meal at one of those restaurants, called ‘A Glass Under the Moonlight.’ Yi would clear out her bowl, but I was always busy counting the rice grains in my soup.” Chuckling at this, Joohee would cover her mouth with her hand.

Come to think of it, all of Joohee’s stories—whether about the women’s opera or the Gyeongseong of those days—circled back to Yi. Yi was also the reason Joohee stopped visiting Lady’s Country, despite how much s/he loved it. One day, checking her thinning wallet, Joohee began to listlessly grumble at Yi for introducing her to the café. Unfazed, Yi turned to Joohee with a blank look. “That teahouse started in Osaka, you know. There was a branch in Tokyo, too, I heard. You must have been really poor as a student.” Then she patted Joohee’s head.

“Is that why you’re so reckless with your money now? I guess reading Nietzsche or whoever doesn’t matter.”

Joohee became speechless at the mention of Nietzsche. S/he refused to step foot inside Lady’s Country again, and poured all her energy into reading the philosopher for a while. What exactly is amor fati? s/he would ask herself. Even so, the Sweetheart Cocktails, the Modern Girls and Boys who drank them, and Yi’s large hands lingered in her mind.

After leaving the troupe, Joohee and Yi did not meet again for a long time. Joohee heard that Yi occasionally showed up in Busan. Rumor was that the Zainichi husband she’d met after moving to Fukuoka was devoting his all to Joseonhakgyo—Korean schools in Japan sponsored by North Korea. So Yi was busy making ends meet instead. But it was difficult to raise the children she’d become stepmother to through diving work alone, so she’d begun trading on the black market. *A Zainichi Korean in Busan? one might wonder, but it wasn’t unheard of. Busan residents could watch Japanese TV shows at home. People in Fukuoka watched Korean pop music programs, and those in Busan listened to Japanese enka music the way they listened to Korean trot music. Sounds over the airwaves had no boundaries. On top of this, products like Japanese rice cookers and instant coffee were popular. But apparently, Yi’s primary selling item was American powdered milk. “How can she live with a Zainichi Korean when she nearly died because of the Communists?” People would say this despite knowing Joohee and Yi were close. Joohee did not respond. It was the 1970s, when people couldn’t even trust their own family. And Joohee knew what people really wanted to say: that Yi had abandoned her own child but was making money raising another’s. That’s why she’s a Commie! In those days, “Commie” was an all-purpose term.*

Ghosts, spies, and grandmothers. One day, Joohee invoked these words in front of the people who whispered about Yi. In 1987, KBS news reported that Suji Kim, a Hong Kong resident killed by her Korean husband during an argument, was in fact a North Korean spy who’d attempted to kidnap a South Korean citizen. Of course, soon after, she was found to be an innocent woman, abused and murdered at the hands of her husband, but the masses for whom television news was the be-all and end-all could not know the truth. Joohee gazed at Suji Kim’s name and face on the TV screen in silence. Then s/he spoke those words—ghosts, spies, and grandmothers—as if reciting a spell. This wasn’t the only time. In 1990, there

was the case of that infamous infiltrator, Lee Sun-sil, an elderly woman ranked twenty-second in North Korea's political hierarchy, who returned to the North through Ganghwa Island. By then, people watched the news at their homes in the evenings after the daily soap opera, so Joohee wasn't privy to his neighbors' opinions on Lee Sun-sil. So his reaction was a bit different this time. "What? Can't a grandmother be a spy? Do they always have to be kind and warmhearted?" Why did Joohee get so angry then? Looking back, his words seem to follow the same train of thought: A girl doesn't always have to be female. Just as Joohee had once been Princess Seonhwa.

But wait. If Joohee had remained in Gyeongseong, how did s/he know about what happened to Yi in Busan?

To tell this story, I have to explain how Joohee ended up in Busan from the very beginning. Not long after Yi left, Joohee learned that s/he could not join the Theatre Council, either. Joohee, as the younger sibling of Joohyuk and Jooyool, was guilty by kinship and placed on the government's blacklist. Despite this, Joohee did not immediately leave Gyeongseong. S/he worked at a brewery, a newspaper office, a bar, and a bathhouse. At the brewery s/he took orders in Japanese and at the newspaper office s/he translated articles. At the bar, s/he received Japanese tourists looking for Korean gisaeng. At the time, gay Japanese men often traveled to Korea to tour male brothels, so there were a few Japanese businessmen who flirted with Joohee. Joohee didn't become involved with them, but s/he would guide them around palaces like Gyeongbokgung and Changgyeonggung for tips. On his days off, s/he worked at the bathhouse, scrubbing the patrons' backs. With the money s/he saved, s/he would go see plays. And every once in a while, s/he would let himself say Yi's name. A name could be called when you missed someone, Yi had said.

Not even the blacklist was able to stem Joohee's love for theatre, but an unexpected guest entered Joohee's life and shifted his focus. That is to say, one day, Joohee found himself with child. Marriage? No. Since s/he'd learned that s/he was on the blacklist, Joohee had no desire to marry anyone. Those on the blacklist were required to report any activities beyond a designated perimeter around their residency to the government. Joohee lived with the sense of being constantly under watch, and had to prove his innocence at each and every turn. Joohee had no intention of passing that burden onto anyone else. From a certain point, Joohee began to treat the officers surveilling him like neighbors.

S/he shared watermelon juice with them on summer walks, and would pull out warm soymilk packs from his pocket in winter. When the officer assigned to him passed away, s/he attended his funeral. I asked Joohee angrily, Why did you have to sympathize with those people? Even if they were just following orders, you didn't have to try to understand their position. But all s/he said in reply was, "Well, at least when he died, I knew for certain that he was human."

Anyway, back then, Joohee was a young contract worker for whom finding work was enough of a challenge on its own. One had to make a living and stay alive, first of all. Perhaps that's why s/he had to keep a quiet peace with the people who watched him every move. The situation became even more curious, then. How, in such circumstances, did Joohee have a child? "You don't need to get married to have a kid," Joohee would say with an annoyed look. Maybe it was because s/he'd heard the same question countless times.

Joohee met the child at a café in Myeongdong, at the newly built Prince Hotel. It was a bright night, lit by the full moon.

Just like that time when Joohee had seen the sixteen girls of the theater troupe. The person who brought the child to Joohee was the gong player in Hee's traveling band. He simply introduced the child as Joohyuk's. Joohee thought back to Joohyuk's age. Sure. It wasn't impossible that he'd fathered a child. But throughout the conversation, Joohee had to keep gulping down water to stop himself from blurting—But all this aside, what were you doing when Hee was dying? You knew the longest that Hee wasn't a woman. Why didn't you save Hee? Why not? After a brief silence, the gong player said that he wasn't able to care for the child anymore because he had to go to Hawai'i. He was worried because he'd stopped hearing from his daughter after she'd left for the island with her American soldier husband. When Joohee kept drinking his water instead of saying anything, he glanced at the child and said:

"Manshin was the one who refused to take off his dress to the very end."

At that, Joohee put his cup down. S/he felt s/he might drop it, that it would shatter across the floor. When Joohee finally caught his breath and raised his head, s/he saw the gong player had lowered his head. Tears slid down his face.

"Manshin said she wanted to be herself. If not at birth, then at least in death."

The shadows cast under the full moon were sharper than usual, and the child clung to Joohee as they walked. Glancing at the child's shadow, Joohee slowed his pace.

The way Joohee saw it, many things had disappeared from his life regardless of his will, and s/he had endured such losses well enough. But that day at the Prince Hotel café, s/he realized s/he hadn't fully accepted those losses. Yi had filled the absence from Hee's death, and after Yi had walked out of Joohee's life, this child had come to him. Gazing at the child's shadow, Joohee mumbled Yi's name without realizing it. The day of Yi's departure, Joohee had said these words to her, trying to find something to hold on to in the dark:

"The Zainichi Koreans send money to North Korea, to Kim Il-sung. They even send their children. Are you really going to go?"

When you, because of those people in Jeju—Of course, Joohee could simply have said s/he felt desperate and alone. Instead, it was anger that kept rising to the surface. Do I have the right to say such things, when I'm linked to Joohyuk and Jooyool? But what crime did I commit? It felt as though someone other than himself was there in a dark pit tangled with anger, guilt, and despair. Yi continued to wipe away her makeup with a steady hand. Once her face emerged from beneath what had been the General's, she said, "Joohee, the Jejuhaenyecom up to the water with a sound called *sumbi*. . . *Ever since April third of that year. It's a sound that proves they're alive.*"

Startled, Joohee looked at himself and Yi in the mirror.

"Inhales and exhales. They're the only sounds left for women who have survived. Not words, but breaths."

This time, Yi did not look at Joohee but kept speaking.

"I heard that in North Korea, there isn't any class division between high or low, and people don't draw lines between who's family and who's not. I might be able to be a good mother there."

Yi's words brought back the memory of Joohyuk and Jooyool talking to Hee. When Hee had tried to dissuade them, they'd replied, "Mother, under socialism, everyone can live as equals in a big family." Joohee sometimes resented Hee for not trying harder to stop her brothers. But hearing Yi's words, s/he could understand why Hee hadn't, though the reality awaiting them in North Korea was life under a despot.

A few weeks later, Joohee got on a train to Busan. The scenes s/he'd seen with Hee at Gyeongseong Station all those years ago passed before her mind's eye. The girl entertainers who stood in the light and the Joseon girls who shouted their love still seemed to be there.

Even so, you picked Busan out of all places, I said to Joohee. You could have gone to Namwon. Wasn't there some unspoken motive there? Some hope of meeting Yi as she traveled for her black-market goods? Joohee only chuckled at my question. But I didn't miss this chance.

Then what about Jane's name? I asked.

This time, Joohee didn't smile but tilted her head as if to recall something. Jane was the name Joohee's child had chosen for herself. She'd loved jazz and reading English literature from a young age, so Joohee simply thought this was a name that fit those tastes. Only after Jane had entered university did Joohee learn that her child had bought wigs and miniskirts with the pocket money she made from tutoring. S/he learned that Jane sang at a bar in Itaewon while doing her laundry.

Jane was the one who broached the subject first. This was right after Jane, who was a biology student, had passed the exams for the state-sponsored study abroad program which would send her to the Soviet Union. "People who love people of the same sex, people who are transgender—they aren't sick. I'm going to go study that." This was the only reason Jane, who liked American jazz and English literature, chose to go to the Soviet Union. But she smiled, saying she would keep her name since she'd live abroad anyway. Somehow, Joohee felt as though Jane were saying, I understand you—I always have. In reality, however, what Joohee managed to say after all her pondering was, "Isn't Jane an American name?" S/he felt sheepish after those words escaped her lips.

Of course, at that time the Soviet Union and the United States were threatening to send nuclear bombs flying across the ocean, so Joohee's concern about Jane's name wasn't unfounded. On top of all this, Joohee thought that both America and the Soviet Union had nothing going for them. When I think back to the 1960s, I don't blame her. The US used to fly in flour to Korea and sell it for cheap, which reminded Joohee of how the Japanese wouldn't allow Koreans to eat rice and made them eat wheat noodles during the Pacific War. It was as if the same situation was repeating itself, with only a change in countries. For Joohee, America, Japan, and the Soviet Union were not very different from each other. But it's up to Jane, Joohee thought, and turned pages in the dictionary instead of letting worry take over her mind. S/he thought/he should at least know how to write "Jane" in the Cyrillic alphabet. Of course, s/he would learn in just a few months that there would be no need for her to learn how to write Jane's name. And s/he'd face this realization right here in Seoul, not

Moscow.

A few months later, Joohee was standing at Seoul Station. On a snowy weekday, the station felt quiet and desolate. Her eyes, which appeared to gaze off into space, were instead transfixed to the news report flashing on the Hyatt Hotel's electronic signboard. *Seoul National University (SNU) student shot amidst protest. The giant letters were vivid and stark. "No . . . No, my Jane doesn't go to protests." As if to answer Joohee, the letters on the board quickly changed to: Elite college student wearing blonde wig, known for erratic behavior. Above that caption was Jane's photo. The board continued to flash its information at Joohee, who was shaking her head. This time, Jane became a pitiable young man raised by his uncle after his parents' early death. In the following slide, a photo of Jane singing on a stage in Itaewon appeared with the caption: Crossdressing men frequent Itaewon clubs.*

That day, Joohee had traveled to Seoul from Busan, demanding to meet the student body president of SNU and the chief of police. Jane was shot by the police at the entrance of SNU where the protest was at its peak. This incident, where a student who had not been part of the protest was shot by police and killed on the spot, led to a great uproar. But the student body president who'd visited Joohee multiple times immediately after the incident stopped coming once the news reports about Jane's crossdressing were released. Of course, Joohee could not chastise him for no longer visiting her. But s/he simply wanted to know. Was there anything s/he had missed? Why was the chief of police silent though Jane had been shot and killed, when she hadn't even been among the protesters? But Joohee wasn't able to meet them.

Did that make you sad? I asked. Joohee said s/he felt puzzled. Jane loved American music, but she equally loved studying biology, which was why she had planned to study in the Soviet Union. And she wanted to become a woman. No, she said she had always been a woman. Back then, Joohee had wanted to tell her, Jane, switching clothes with Yi put me at such peace. But it was as though the moment Joohee was about to speak, the countless wounds of her past were flayed open again. It was as if the contempt and discrimination Joohee had had to face because s/he was a woman, or a person who had to live as woman, were now presenting themselves to Jane. So this was what Joohee ended up saying: "Men my age, we crossdressed a lot as women, too. It was all a passing phase." Jane shook her head. "My desire to be a woman isn't a matter of taste." Jane's words always held an unspoken addendum: Joohee, you understand, if no one else. Joohee replayed this memory over and over in her head, this moment when s/he had turned away from Jane. For a long, long time, s/he sat there in Seoul Station. S/he could not go outside and step into Seoul. Gyeongseong, this city s/he had loved so. Nights that had brought her dazzling lights and whispers of love. Streets s/he had walked with Yi. Stages where s/he'd come alive as Princess Seonhwa. The bright Seoul night when Jane had entered her life. The Seoul s/he'd wandered endlessly in her love for theater, despite being labeled a "commie"—but perhaps, one could not see ahead if the lights were too strong. The streets seemed to light up bit by bit, and then disappear into a white blaze.

Joohee raised her head and looked at the board again. Jane's face was caught in a close-up.

"My daughter, Jane . . . My Jane. So beautiful."

A few days later, once Joohee had returned to Busan with Jane's body, s/he found someone waiting for her at the funeral

parlor.

"Hey, change clothes with me."

Joohee drank in the sight of Yi, who had appeared from the darkness. S/he took one step toward her, then another, then buried hir face in Yi's shoulder. There was a badge of Kim Il-sung's face on Yi's lapel. Joohee's tears slid down Kim's face. Joohee hadn't cried at the news of Jane's death. Just like the times s/he'd received news about Hee, or about Joohyuk and Jooyool, s/he'd felt more confused than sad. Time taught hir that s/he would always feel confused at the news of a beloved's death. Seeing Yi, Joohee realized that Jane had now become another person s/he could only meet in the dark. Only then did Joohee weep. Stroking Joohee's back, Yi said, "Please change clothes with me."

Joohee cried in Yi's arms, clinging to her as if to hold on. "Come on, please. Let me take those clothes." But no matter how many tears were shed, the face on Yi's badge did not change its expression.

Joohee didn't think s/he would be able to live without Jane, but time passed for hir too. Another thirty years flew by, and Joohee's body was full of cancerous tumors. The doctor recommended a hospital in Seoul. But Joohee did not get on a train to Seoul again, though the blacklist was abolished and travel restrictions had been lifted in 1985. Joohee rarely left the house now. After Jane died, people would whisper things about Joohee—when s/he laughed, they said it was because Jane wasn't hir child, or that Joohee's fortunes had turned around thanks to the government money s/he received. Joohee stayed home, especially when it was bright outside, the curtains drawn. S/he acted as though s/he were waiting for the night to arrive. Spending day after day at home, refusing treatment, Joohee developed pneumonia and was finally moved to a nearby hospital. The pneumonia, on top of hir existing illness, meant s/he was in a critical state. It was difficult to encourage hir or to speak of hope. That's why I began to ask about things I usually found difficult to speak of.

Joohee, what would you wish for if you could have anything? I asked hir.

"Me? I want to be reborn."

Born again, after all this pain? You're real greedy about life, I muttered, and Joohee laughed out loud. That day, deep in the night, Joohee died as if s/he had drifted into sleep. "Half hir life, s/he moved in the darkness, and in death too, s/he chose to go at night." That's what my mom, who was staying by hir bed with me, said. Maybe Joohee had been waiting for those s/he could only meet at night. Yi had done so, and so had Jane, who had become spirit; as had Hee, who lived with ghosts.

As had the fans who had welcomed the sixteen girls ensconced in light, the girls whose love shimmered even in the dark.

*

Yibona.

Not long after Joohee passed, I came to focus on remembering. It began with an email from an American woman named Mary. According to the email, Mary's father was an American soldier who'd stayed in Seoul long after the war was over. I thought that Mary, who was a documentarian on state violence, was trying to ask for help in accessing documents only available in Korea. She had contacted me through a Japanese professor I knew. But from the following sentence, I couldn't help but hold my breath.

My father was a huge fan of Ms. Yibona.

Only then did I understand why Mary had reached out to me. Joohee was a member of the theatre troupe of which Yibona, the girl entertainer, had been a part of. Well, what is my relationship to Joohee, then? Simply put, s/he was my neighbor, but our relationship was not that simple. I grew up with Jaesung, that is, Jane, who was Joohee's niece. I was so close with Jane that I ate what she ate, followed her around all day, and would even fall down with her if she tripped. If the adults gave me a new toy, I'd share it with Jane. Whether a doll, a plane or a robot, Jane and I shared what we had without boundaries. This was only possible because Joohee took care of me in my parents' stead. When my parents left for work, Joohee called me over and made sure Jane and I ate our meals.

Mom balked at Joohee at first because her father had been a partisan during the Korean War. But she grew to love Joohee so much that she was closer to him than with her own mother. Mom would go see Joohee and unload her frustrations about my dad and her boss. She would also tell him about how much she loved me. Right before he died, Joohee insisted on wearing women's clothing and lurched around the hospital room every night as if looking for someone. We had to move hospitals nearly every other day, but each time Mom found him a new place. She bowed to the hospital staff and begged for their understanding. After Joohee died, Mom mumbled, "Like you said, maybe liking someone or becoming close to them doesn't have anything to do with being family by law or blood."

It was true that those definitions did not matter. Joohee and Jane continued to take care of me long after my childhood. After she entered SNU, Jane tutored me for a good while. When I got into the college I'd hoped for, I bought a CD for Jane since I now had an excuse to give her a gift. I only knew that Jane liked American music, so I bought a Guns N' Roses album with the song "This I Love", but it turned out that Jane was into jazz by African American singers like Nina Simone. "Nina Simone sang for black women's civil rights. Oh, but at first her voice was mistaken for a man's. I guess people think even voices must have a gender." Only after I'd bought the CD did I remember what she'd said to me once. But when I gave Jane the CD, she grinned, and said, "You should experience new worlds through people you like." Did that mean I was someone Jane liked? I was aware, of course, that Jane did not think of herself as a man. So if I liked Jane, was that strange? It's not strange at all, my heart said, but the voices surrounding us hissed, You and Jane are freaks. These voices got tangled in my mind for days on end.

In any case, the graduate school I entered was at the center of student protests. Swept up by that wave, I, too, was always on the streets instead of the classrooms. Mom would scream, "Don't you know how your grandfather wrecked our family?" In those days, multiple search warrants had been placed on me so I had to stay in hiding. But one day I decided to

venture outside. Jane had invited me to a US army club, since she would be singing there. A friend who was also on the run because of the warrants sucked her teeth at me. "You're going to listen to music at the home base of our oppressors? But the one place I bet that the police could not catch me was a US army club in Itaewon. Even police officers didn't meddle with US army bases. But my friend jeered, as if to say I wouldn't get the last word. "So what's your pick? Jane, or the revolution?" I didn't think the friend wanted to hear my answer anyway.

Around that time, I started sensing a strange tautness among my fellow protesters. They followed the male seniors' orders to an extreme, as though they were locked into an immutable hierarchy. This stifling weight seemed to evaporate as soon as I saw Jane on stage. Singing Nina Simone, she saw me and smiled.

As I raised my hand and returned her smile, I glimpsed my reflection in the glass wall of the club. Am I doing what I really want? At that question, I felt myself drawing inward. I wanted to run away. I felt so pathetic, unable to give a straight answer the way I used to in the past. I looked too weary, in comparison to Jane's beauty. So I turned to leave. "Why don't you listen to the whole song before you go? Sound crosses all boundaries." I looked up. Jane was standing in front of me. Her dress swayed at the margins of my lowered gaze. Had she been watching me all along? My heart raced and I felt happy, but I stepped back in embarrassment, looking at my dirty sneakers. Jane grasped my arm and slowly knelt down to sit. Rubbing the toe of my sneakers with the hem of her dress, she asked, "Do you want to go? We can go somewhere else, since you're wearing new shoes now."

The place Jane took me that day was a poet's house, a poet I'd loved since high school. But in the circle I became part of in college, I found that her poems were considered shallow works that spoke of personal turmoil, inappropriate for the gravity and severity of the times. I still liked those poems, but after a certain point I only read her work when I was with Jane. As I stood dumbfounded in front of the poet's house, Jane tugged at my shirt and called the poet, shouting over the low wall surrounding her home. "My friend really likes you!" I was fidgeting between Jane and the wall when the front door cracked open. There seemed to be someone standing in that sliver of an opening, in the fuzzy light that leaked from it. Perhaps, the poet herself.

"Here, step on top of me."

Before I realized what was happening, Jane had knelt down next to the wall and hunched over, offering her back. Why does it feel like I can't see? I thought. There isn't any tear gas here. With tears streaming down my face, I looked at Jane's back. "But I'll ruin your beautiful dress." Even as I mumbled this, I stepped onto Jane's back and pulled myself up. I don't clearly remember the conversation I had with the poet with the wall between us. I just know that I kept crying, and the poet asked, "Do you not write poetry?", and Jane's words kept echoing in my head. Step on top of me, step here.

Mary's email tugged these memories from my mind one by one, and my feelings started to jumble. On my way to meet her, my head felt mixed up for another reason. Mary was looking for Yibona, so wouldn't it be better for her to go find Yi, who had left for Japan? Why hadn't Mary, who said she had been to Japan as well, not tried to look for Yi?

Despite my tangled thoughts, Mary and I got along well. Once I returned to the university after several periods of

imprisonment, I'd gotten into studying poetry as cultural history. Of course, the pre-1950s were not part of my research, but our conversation flowed naturally from topics such as the Takarazuka theater troupe or the multinational girl entertainers, Suzuranza. The social standing of New Women, Modern Girls, or of women at large was always precarious, but those who were belittled as "girls" were especially pushed to the margins. Bae Gooja, who established Joseon dance as a formal discipline, or Na Seongyo and Park Okcho, who crossed the Genkai Sea in hopes of debuting as singer-dancers in the Joseon arts scene, for example. They were pioneers of revue stages who had received asystematic arts education from a young age, artists in their own right, but the Japanese empire was intent on using their talents for propaganda. The first thing the Takarazuka troupe did after arriving at Gyeongseong station in the 1940s was to visit Japanese shrines to pay their respects to war generals. The Theater and Arts Hall and the Japanese-only theater Yurakgwan, used as the stage for revue performances, were in Gyeongbokgung Palace.

"Even Marilyn Monroe had to perform on the battlefields. Men would go wild over her dancing and singing but always pointed a finger at her too. Of course, even now, people are especially harsh in their gossip about actresses and women singers."

The photos of Bae Gooja and Marilyn Monroe that Mary showed me overlapped in my mind. The way the Empire had lined up girl entertainers at the exhibition hall as if to put them on display, and the way men had shouted at and booed both Bae and Monroe had similarities. In Joseon, also, there were attempts to find a means of escape through revue performances, especially among the members of the Korean Artists' Proletarian Federation (KAPF). However, the revues in colonized Joseon morphed into the Empire's display of spectacles, so these attempts turned into criticism of the girls. However, I wanted to ask how KAPF could erase the historical and cultural context of the times to condemn those young performers so harshly. In a way, I thought women working in the arts were the target of a type of violence that repeated through the 1900s into the present; women artists were so easily turned into targets for hatred. Whether of the Empire or its polar opposite, culture and literature were powerful weapons as well as transmitted propaganda that quickly and easily crossed enemy borders. In contrast to the 1900s, though, K-pop and Korean literature were now crossing borders from Korea into Japan. Now, just as it had back then, certain people refuse to acknowledge that fact.

Mary had chosen to stay in Yongsan during her trip to Seoul. I thought Myeongdong would be more convenient, but Mary said she wanted to visit the War Memorial and US Army base. For our first meal together, we went to Samgakji, where there had been a Japanese neighborhood during the colonial period, forkalguksunoodles. After lunch we crossed the train tracks and walked along the Noksapyeong road, where the US army was based now, to find a café. Looking at the army base reminded me of that night I had seen Jane at the club.

Jane, what does it mean to like something? I'd never mustered the courage to ask her that. The day Jane was shot and killed at the SNU entrance, I was passing Gwanghwamun on a bus, sitting in the corner seat. I still had a search warrant on me, so I was about to slump down and hide my face from the passing cops when I saw a familiar face on a huge billboard and turned my head ever so slightly to look at the screen. And there, I saw her beautiful face. Why was Jane's face there? Before a thought could form in my mind, the huge letters of the caption met my eye. Crossdressing male SNU student

killed during protest. I shook my head slowly. No, Jane doesn't go to protests. Despite all the criticism leveled at her for not attending one, Jane had never attended a rally. That may have been due to Joohee's influence, but Jane said she was simply uninterested in dividing people byisms. Jane had never criticized me for pouring my heart and soul into student organizing, but she had once asked, "Why is femininity so looked down upon and criticized? Does being feminine deserve so much vitriol? Women could be at the center of protests." Jane was talking about the misogyny rampant among leftist students. At the same time, she was asking where she could stand in that midst. Once this memory came to mind, my voice, a low mumbling at first, began to escalate. I pounded the bus window and shouted.

No, not Jane. No, she can't, that's not—please, no, it can't be!

Was I saying that Jane hadn't gone to the protest, or that she hadn't died? I couldn't stop even when my friend tried to shake me. "Are you crazy?"

I was arrested that day.

"Bitches. Sit with your legs open and eyes closed!"

My memories are nil after those words. Stories of someone who licked an officer's boot in fear and shame, someone who lost consciousness when they assaulted her in the name of interrogation . . . Stories of people like me, who have buried their memories because of the pain.

A while after I'd been in jail, Joohee came to see me with some pumpkin porridge. With the porridge in front of me, face bloated from malnutrition, I mumbled some words to no one in particular.

Joohee, please ask Jane when she comes home. About what it means to like something.

Joohee smiled faintly, as if swallowing tears. S/he scooped up a large spoonful of the porridge and put the spoon in my hand.

Alright, but it's hard for Jane to come back now. She went to the US, just as she wanted.

Huh? Didn't she want to go to the Soviet Union? Well, okay. Either way, she must be where she wanted to go.

What it means to like something. Only then did I realize that Jane had been answering that question for a long time. I nodded, my eyes blurred by tears.

But Jane, why, why did you die?

Who could answer this question? The tears I couldn't hold back fell into the porridge. Only after the tears fell could I see the person across from me: not Jane but Joohee, with hir head down, holding back tears. "Sorry, I'm sorry." Why did Joohee tell me s/he was sorry? Whenever I remember hir words, my heart aches as though someone is pounding on it. Until I was released on parole, Joohee continued to visit me, bringing books, clothes and food. Of course, s/he was also there the day I was released, with celebratory tofu in hand. That was nearly twenty years ago. Yet I was still looking at an

US army base in the center of an independent nation's capital. This place still exists, even after so many others have disappeared.

The next day, we went to the War Memorial Mary wanted to see. Mary was very appreciative of the names of US veterans engraved in the memorial.

"We are remembered. My father will be happy to hear that."

What does it mean to be remembered? I couldn't find the words for a response, but while I was choosing my words, Mary pulled out a photo from her bag. In the photo, a woman wearing hanbok and two young men stood together. They looked like Yi, Joohee, and Mary's father, John. Holding up the photo, Mary said, "So, Joohee," to which I thought I would now need to tell her about Yibona. That Yi, the Yibona she was looking for, had passed away in Japan. I paused to catch my breath, then pointed at the photo and began, "So, about Yibona-." It was then that I noticed that both Mary's hand and mine were overlapped in front of the same figure. I looked into Mary's face. "Yibona is a woman," I said. To this, Mary shrugged and pointed at one of the people in the photo. The same person as before. The person standing beside Yi-Joohee.

Translated by Hoyoung Moon