

THE STORY OF CZANGNANG

by Yu zu-o

I

“When the sun has set, nostalgia surges in my heart like the salt waves of the sea,” wrote the poet. And in truth longing for one’s native place is a little salty and at the same time sweet, beautiful yet painful, happy yet sad. Though we have it in ourselves, its true nature we cannot fathom. Yet when disappointment or failure weighs heavy on our minds, this longing pervades our whole being like the waves of the sea and imparts a rosy tint to our memories. It is an emotion which has the strange power of making us sigh deeply for the house in the country, so dear to us, with the hill behind it, thickly clothed in pine trees, and for the friends of our childhood, with whom we learned our letters in the same room and with whom we cooked chicken in winter.

Yet it is not true that nostalgia inevitably unsettles our minds.

If there is room in our minds, it may neatly comb our most confused emotions or lead our scattered thoughts into a single course again. For instance, we have here the case of a man who went far from home when he was young, fired with the burning ambitions of youth. As the years passed, decade by decade, the wrinkles lined his brow, and the silver hairs grew daily more numerous. If on a moonlight night he cannot sleep for longing for his native place, tossing this way and that, nostalgia might seem to be a messenger of melancholy, eating away his heart as a moth eats clothes. If he has failed to realise the ambition of his youth or if, having attained his goal, he has found that it is nothing but a fleeting insubstantial dream and not a profound and lofty aim which would bring eternal peace to body and soul, as it had seemed in his youth when he had beheld all life through a rosy tinted veil, then his nostalgia might seem to him to be the sacred hand of his mother softly stroking his wandering mind and leading him to the great rest. Nostalgia is the final emotion of every man, whether he has attained his ideals or whether he has failed.

Long ago the poet sang, “Birds have the wisdom to return to their nests when they are weary,” and Goethe, the man who never grew old, wrote, “There is rest on the summit of every mountain,” So we see that to these men intuition or perception brought true understanding of the profound significance of nostalgic longings.

It is in this sense that they are happy who passed their childhood at home in the country amid beautiful surroundings, for there they have the warm bosom of a mother whither they may turn, whenever they are assailed by weariness of mind or body. But those who are born and grow up in a city and have moved from this street to that, perhaps for a year or two, perhaps several times in one year, they are the most unfortunate, for however much they may wish it, they have no true native place. Some may say that, if one has no dear home in the country, one will look only to the future, undistracted by any longings; but a man’s mind is so strong that it will not collapse if it is pricked, and regrets will surely follow after strain, and regrets can be said to be the result of the strain.

At all events, nostalgia may be said to be an emotion common to all men. It is true that a man will long for his home in the country, and if he has no home in the

country he will still long for something when he feels happy or sad. The man who has no true home may focus his nostalgia on some mountain or river of which he might have dreamt one night when he was a child, or of some imaginary little girl whom he never met even in his dreams. Of course a religious man might point out that such longing is really longing for the bosom of Holy God, the longing that man was forever fated to have from that day when he was driven from the Garden of Eden for eating the fruit of wisdom. But whatever the religious man may say, it remains an incontrovertible truth that man always longs for something and feels thereby that there is some meaning in his existence.

I was born in Seoul and I grew up in Seoul, and so I have no beautiful native place such as others often languish after in their hearts. I have been told that I lived from my birth until I was two years old in a house at the top of Gahwoe-dong, but soon after I left, it vanished without trace, and modern houses in western style, of no spiritual significance to me now stand on the site. Yet I have not completely lost the memory of two native places whither I may turn my weary mind. One is the house in Gye-dong where I lived between the ages of five and thirteen, and the other is Czangnang-zông, which I describe here.

II

Czangnang-Zông is the name of the villa where my great-grandfather, Gim Zong-Ho, who had been a minister in the reign of King Dêwôn and was usually known as the 'Minister at Sô-Gang', spent his declining years. His isolationist outlook was at variance with the spirit of the age, and so when King Dêwôn no longer exercised the Royal power, he retired from his office and bought a villa on the banks of the Sô-gang, or West River, which had belonged to a former high government official. It was in the district now called Dang-in-li, and there he lived, and called the house Czamgnang-zông.

I do not remember exactly when I visited the Villa Czangnang for the first time, but I must have been about six or seven at the most, for it was some twenty-seven or twenty-eight years ago. It was in spring, and, the green buds were swelling on the shepherd's purses, so no doubt it was the middle or end of March. I went there with my father, and we stayed there a few days. The memory of what I saw and heard during those days impressed itself deeply on my mind, and to this day I often recall things that happened then, though nearly thirty years have passed, and sometimes nostalgic longings wrench at my heart.

The Villa Czangnang was a large house of more than thirty gan which stood on the edge of a cliff. This cliff was on the side of a small hill that stood among the pine trees on the river bank at Dang-in-li., beside Sô-gang. When we came out on to the river bank after passing through the village of Sô-gang, we saw it on the hill to the westward on the other side of a dried up stream, with its lofty central gate flanked on both sides by a string of houses.

"Well, here we are at last," my father said. "That's the Villa Czangnang over there, where your great-grandfather lives." Holding my right hand in his left, he pointed out the big house in front of us with the stick he was carrying in his right hand. The big house gleamed in the rays of the afternoon sun and made so deep an impression on me when, my father pointed it out as the residence of my Sô-gang great-grandfather that to this very day it often appears before my eyes, as indeed happened a few days ago.

When I came nearer, however, it was quite different from the first distant

impression. It was very old and ruinous and looked a hundred years old or more, and some of the pillars of the house that flanked it leaned drunkenly. The lower walls were on the point of collapse, and here and there were great gaping holes big enough for an ox to get through. We went up the hill and in through the gate, and there in front of us was a great black ginkgo tree, blocking our way as if in some horrible dream. I heard the story of the tree later, it was said to be haunted, and whenever the villagers prayed to their gods, they had first to make an offering to the tree. If any happening of ill omen occurred in the village, they used to say the tree had caused it, and so they were very afraid of it. Another hill stretched up beyond the tree, and on the hill stood the middle gate, which led to the reception house. Within the middle gate was a level garden, to the right and left of which stood small guest rooms, and between them at the far end stood the big reception house facing the river. It stood on the highest part, and 'Minister Sô-gang' used to live there. On one side of the garden was a low fence, not more than two or three feet in height, and by standing on a stone, one could look over and see the deep blue waters of the river rolling by far below.

'Minister Sô-gang' was lying ill in bed. Bright beams of afternoon sunlight shone on the corridor of the big reception house, which faced south west, but when I opened the door and went in the room was so dark that I could not see a thing. My father crossed the room and kneeled and bowed to the ex-Minister as he lay in bed. Then he told me to kneel and bow too. I kneeled on the floor and bowed as I was told.

"This is my son," said my father.

"He's a fine lad, isn't he?" ex-Minister Sô-gang sat up and stroked my head. "How old are you?" he asked me.

"I'm six, sir."

"Well, a man should have a clever son ... "

Now I could see things in the room more clearly. Minister Sô-gang was over eighty at the time, and for years he had been bedridden, and so he looked very weak, but his rather long face, his pale skin, and his silvery beard gave me the impression that he was a noble man who must have had many interesting experiences.

While my father and the Minister were talking I looked round the other rooms one after the other. They seemed most wonderful to me, for all that I had seen until then was the half-gan reception room in our house in Gye-dong. Not only the fixed doors but also the sliding doors that faced the outside had dark purple curtains hanging before them. Opposite there stood a large screen bearing the picture of a genii riding on a cloud and flying over water. It stretched out in front of three of the walls of this big three-gan room. There were square tables in each of the four corners, and a low chest of drawers, and on each of these big old books were piled high. There was a stand for writing brushes, with a dragon carved on it standing on a black ink-box, a marble seal with a tiger on it in relief, scrolls with the writing of famous calligraphers of olden times hanging on the walls, and there was a long duster made of the tail of a white horse—oh, I can still see in my mind's eye all the gorgeous and mysterious decorations of the room.

III

Meanwhile the door opened and a young man of about twenty came in. He

wore his hair braided in a knot.

“Stand up and bow to your brother,” said my father. I got up and kneeled and bowed to him. He was the ex-Minister’s eldest great-grandson, Gim Zong-Gûn by name, an elder cousin to me in the 12th Korean family relation. The ex-Minister’s sons and grandsons had all died, and only this great-grandson was left, on whom he lavished all his care, for he was the sole heir to the family name.

My father and the ex-Minister returned to their conversation and kept it up for a long time, with Zong-Gûn sitting beside them. I could not understand what they were talking about, but to judge from the number of times that I heard the word ‘school’, I guessed that the ex-Minister was asking my father’s advice on whether he ought to send Zong-Gûn to the new Western style school. Most probably there were many others whom he might consult on other matters, but of the whole family my father was the only one who knew anything about the ‘New Civilisation’. The government had sent him to Japan to study. On his return he had been appointed to a post in the Communications Department, which he retained even after the Japanese occupation.

As the talk went on it became even more clear that the subject under discussion was whether or not they should send Zong-Gûn to the new school, for I heard my father chiding the old man for his obstinacy in refusing to send him there. The ex-Minister had always categorically demanded the expulsion of the ‘Western barbarians’ in the days of King Dêwôn. When he realised that times were changing in a direction of which he did not approve, he felt that his only surviving descendant should receive the modern education. So he discussed it with my father, but in the end he held to his principles to the last and would not send Zong-Gûn to the new school.

They talked endlessly and I was very bored. I got up quietly and opening the sliding doors went out into the corridor. There were windows all along this corridor, and it gleamed bright in the afternoon sunlight. It was quite devoid of decoration, but my curiosity was aroused by a pile of books and the board inscribed with the name ‘Villa Czangnang: which hung from a beam. I gazed up at the board for a while. I was very happy and proud at being able to read the three characters, ‘czang’ meaning ‘to fill’, ‘nang’ meaning ‘waves’, and, ‘zông’ meaning ‘villa’. The ex-Minister himself had written them and had signed at the end his pseudonym ‘Do-Am’, or ‘High Waves Cottage’.

I looked at the board for some little time, and then I went to the far side of the corridor and pushed open the outer door that faced the river. The door opened more slowly than I had expected, and then there stretched before my eyes the great view that the Villa Czangnang commanded. Oh, what a view it was that met my astonished gaze! I can see it still, the dark blue waves beneath my very eyes. Down there beyond the waves I could see a vast expanse of sand. In the distance, far beyond the sand, the mountains stood in a line on, the horizon like the waves of the sea. I stood there drinking in the glorious scene till my head reeled.

After a while, a beautiful colour began to steal over the landscape, and I realised that it was the glow of the evening. Though it crept upon one gradually, one could in this way suddenly become aware of it. It was March, yet there floated in the sky a vast array of clouds of every conceivable shape. There were long streams of cloud stretching out like tails, great masses of cloud just like bundles of cottonwool, their edges silvered by the sun, clouds that looked like fierce animals, that thrust up sharply like mountains but that suddenly broke into pieces like waves, motionless

clouds riding high that looked as thin as the scales of a fish—some were yellow, some were red, or pink, or purple, or orange. They formed a truly kaleidoscopic pattern with the patches of blue sky that showed between them. This glorious sky was reflected upside down in the water and made a truly enchanting scene, just like a magnificent garden of flowers, a sight that no one who saw it could ever forget, not even a grown man. How much more unforgettable it was then to a boy of six.

But the very next moment something even more unforgettable than the glories of nature happened to me.

I was quite absorbed in the beauty of the evening, and so I took no notice of who might come or go in the garden in front of the door. At last I chanced to look down, and there in the garden there was a girl of eleven or twelve smiling at me. She had come into the garden without my noticing her. She wore a yellow jacket and a crimson skirt, and she smiled at me with her back to the glowing colours of the evening.

I felt attracted to her at once and smiled back at her quite involuntarily, and then she beckoned to me to come to her.

IV

I nodded and went into the big reception room to go out into the garden. But my father asked me where I had been and scolded me. He told me to wait there in the room because I was to greet my great-grandmother in the other inside room. I was very anxious about the girl in the garden, but I was obliged to kneel and wait beside Father.

The inner house was higher and on a coarser scale than the reception house. There was an outside verandah of about six gan and altogether it must have been all of eighteen gan in area. On the west side was the inner sitting room, then in the east the opposite room, next to the sitting room a room with a wooden floor, and another room as an annex to the opposite room, then the back room beside them, and two rooms in the detached house—no doubt it seems an enormous house, but in fact it was very old, and so the impression it made was one of gloom, and some of the cross beams were rotten, so that the eaves drooped just like the ruined temples in fairy tales. Here and there last year's hay was hanging in disorder to dry.

When I went in the front gate, a delicious smell of cooking met my nostrils. There was a great crowd of people on the verandah and in the kitchen. Some were carrying big earthenware pots for cooking rice cakes in and out, others were frying food, others again chopping up beef ribs with cleavers, and some were preparing bell-flower roots, or bean sprouts, and some were putting spices on roast meat. Thus all was bustle and activity in the gloomy old house.

"Tomorrow is the birthday of Lady Zông-Gyông, your great-grandmother," my father said to me. "I am going home after supper, but you will stay here tonight with your cousin Zong-Gûn, and you can stay here for a few days more. Mother will be coming tomorrow." Then he took me into the inner room where my great grandmother was lying. He coughed to show that we were there. Some of the people on the verandah made way for us, and we found the room full of elderly persons who spoke to my father when we went in. Some spoke with honorifics, and some without, treating Father like a child. "I am very pleased to see you," they each said. Great grandmother, Lady Zong-Gyong, was reclining in their midst, and when Father and I kneeled and bowed to her she inclined her head just a little but made no other movement. Then Father and I had to go round in the room and bow to each of the

elderly ladies who seemed to be grandmothers or aunts or something.

After we had paid our respects to them all, I sat down to rest. I looked up at the brightly painted ceiling, called sora banza, and then the buzz of conversation grew louder, the door opened, and in came a young bride, radiant as the moon—Indeed to me she looked just like the bright full moon. She came into the room with downcast eyes and bowed respectfully to my father. He was surprised and, half standing, acknowledged her greeting. As I looked at her, clad in a neat blue skirt and yellow jacket, she put me in mind of the girl I had seen only a few moments before. Perhaps that one was her younger sister or niece.

“Bow to your aunt,” someone said to me. She was my cousin Zong-Gûn’s wife.

After supper Father left me alone as he had said he would and went home to the city. I had never spent a night away from home before, and I would have liked to go home with him. But then, young and innocent as I was, I realised that, if I stayed there, I might next day meet the girl I had seen, which of course I wanted to do, and so I did as Father told me. I was filled with the curiosity of one setting out on a great adventure, but at last I fell asleep.

All next day, from the early morning, guests thronged to the house. Nearly all were women relatives, including some elders and aunts whom I had seen before.

Mother came to the house. “Did you sleep well?” she asked me.

“You had better wash your face, hadn’t you? You didn’t mind not coming home, did you? Have you had anything to eat?”

Mother was very glad to see me, and I was glad to see her too, and I forgot all about the little girl. I tried not to be separated from mother.

When I went into the inner house with Mother, it was crowded with young brides whom I did not know, wearing yellow jackets and long blue skirts. There was less noise than on the previous days, but nevertheless the young women had so far forgotten the rules of etiquette as to shout noisily, “Give it to me!” or “Put this there, please!” They chattered to one another in whispers just like a crowd of sparrow that had long been confined in cages, then they burst out laughing and dug each other in the ribs with their fingers. Some of them slipped into their mouths the food they were preparing and chewed and swallowed it.

The rooms were thronged with guests who had come to the feast, and there was scarcely room to sit down. Not one of them was silent for even a minute. When women get together, they always chatter their heads off. I was almost out of my mind with boredom and impatience. So, the minute I finished my breakfast, I got out of the noisy crowd and went out into the back yard.

v

There was a garden in the back yard, and beyond it was the hill.

On the hillside where was an area fenced off with a brick wall, and inside the wall was the orchard, with beeches, apricots, plums, cherries weeping willows, evergreens, golden ball, and all sorts of others, growing tightly packed. I played for a while in the reception house and then I climbed up the narrow path through the orchard, meaning to get to the top. Then suddenly somebody behind me called me.

“Hullo, boy!”

I turned round and saw the little girl in the yellow jacket and the crimson skirt whom I had seen the previous day. She came round the back of the house and ran

towards me. I was very glad to see her.

"What do you want?" I replied and stood there without moving. The little girl came up to me. She stared at me and pointed up the hill. "Let's go up there, shall we?" she said.

I nodded. "Yes, let's."

She took my hand and we started to climb up the hill together. She looked closely at my face. "What is your name?" she said.

"Gim Si-Gûn."

Where do you come from?"

"Gye-dong."

"Where is Gye-dong?"

"A long way away."

We talked, and I began to feel rather happy. I wished I could walk hand-in-hand with this girl for ever. I thought I would like to know her name.

"What is your name?" I asked her.

She smiled as if she had not expected to be asked that by an innocent little boy like me, and then she answered, "I'm Ûl-Sun."

I wanted to know more about her. "Is the bride in the house your sister?" I asked her.

"No, she is my young mistress," she replied.

I didn't quite understand, and so I repeated, "Your young mistress?"

"She's a bride now, but-"

I still did not know what she meant, but I did not pursue my questioning any further. I gathered afterwards that Ûl-Sun was the maidservant who had walked before the palanquin when my cousin Zong-Gûn's bride had been brought to her husband's home.

Before long we came to the wall at the top of the hill. There was a wide grassy patch beside it. "Let's rest here awhile," said Ûl-Sun. She made me sit down and then sat down beside me. From there we could look down on the buildings of the great house, the inner house, the reception house, lying there like the backs of whales, and beyond them the river with its white sand, and the landscape that had brought me such ecstatic enjoyment the previous day.

Softly Ûl-Sun stroked my hand, and I felt rather shy. She pointed at the river. "Why is the river so blue?" she asked me.

"Of course it's blue," I replied. "Rivers always are, aren't they?" Then Ûl-Sun drew very close to me and asked, "How old are you?"

"Six."

"Have you got a sister?"

"Yes."

"How old is she?"

"Fourteen."

"She's pretty, of course?"

Until then I had not thought of my sister being pretty, but I did not like to tell anyone that she was not, and so I answered, "Yes."

"Any brothers?" I've got one."

"How old is he?"

"Eleven."

"Is he 'handsome like you?"

I was on the point of answering that he was, but all of a sudden Ûl-Sun lunged

at me and gripped my cheeks tightly with trembling hands. A feeling of ecstasy filled me, though at the same time I felt a certain horror, for she seemed to be hitting me and pinching me.

"I don't like it, ÔI-Sun. I don't like it!" I cried, and shook my head, the tears welling in my eyes. Then ÔI-Sun relaxed her hold and said, "No, no, you silly boy. I did it because you are so nice."

She paused for a moment, gazing at my face. Then she went on, "Don't tell anyone what a good time we've had here, will you."

I nodded and promised to keep it a secret.

After a few minutes she jumped up as if a thought had struck her and said, "They may be looking for me. Let's have another game later."

She ran away down the path.

I looked at her retreating back and felt very lonely. I was afraid that she might perhaps have left me because I had shaken my head. So I made up my mind to say nothing next time she did it. Before long I forgot about it and went skipping about all over the hill.

VI

I stayed at the Villa Czangnang for a few days more, and ÔI-Sun and I became very friendly. Whenever we could, we went and climbed up the hill together. I had never before left the centre of the city, and it was a new and strange experience to take a basket and pick shepherd's purse or dig up wild morning glory and eat it.

One day I had a most striking, never-to-be-forgotten experience that I always remember when I think of the Villa Czangnang. One afternoon I followed ÔI-Sun up the hill. She got me to dig up some wild morning glory. We dug the soft soil and turned it over with a stick here and there and picked out the soft fragile roots. When we had shaken off the soil, we put them in our mouths and chewed them. They tasted sweetish, with a tang of soil. They tasted better than the two rice cakes or the sweets that could be bought for one zôn. At first I made mistakes and tried to chew other roots, but I found them sour and soon spat them out, but before long I learned to distinguish the wild morning-glory from the other roots. ÔI-Sun was so clever at digging it up that she would collect quite a handful and bring it to me to eat when she had shaken off the soil. She even filled my pockets with it so that I would have some to eat when I got home.

Just about sunset ÔI-Sun was digging a little way off when I struck something hard with the end of my stick. At first I took no notice and pushed the stick in a different place, and again it touched something. So I dug this way and that, and I dug up some rotten wood, and when I had dug a little further I could see a brown object. "What's this?" I wondered.

I called ÔI-Sun at once, and she came running. "What is it? she cried. Then she bent down and scratched away at the soil until the hole was wide enough for her to see what was in it. Then she straightened herself up and shouted, "It's a sword!" It looked like a sword to me too. We had dug a hole about the middle of the blade.

"Wait a minute," she said. "I'll go and get a hoe." She ran off down the hill.

When she came back, we both dug with might and main and found a big sword, longer than I was tall, and so heavy that I could not hold it up by myself. The scabbard had almost rotted away, and pieces lay scattered on the ground, for we tore it to pieces while we were digging it out. The sword itself, however, was still

bright and shiny when we wiped the soil off, as if it had been buried only a few days. The hilt and guard were richly carved and brightly gilded, so that our eyes were dazzled by the sight. "Look at that!" I cried in my amazement. Then I tried to lift it up to brandish it in the air by the light of the setting sun. The point gleamed in the rays of the sun.

"Don't do that! Don't do that!" cried Ûl-Sun. I took no notice of her cries and lifted it up again and waved it about my head. I have never forgotten the exhilaration that I felt. It was just as if I had become a general with a big sword in some old tale.

How valuable this sword was or what became of it later I do not know. But that it was indeed a famous sword was evident from the fact that after all its years in the ground the blade was untouched by rust, though the scabbard had nearly rotted away. I can still remember the emotion on the face of ex-Minister Sô-gang when he saw the sword before his eyes.

"General Zông lived here in days gone by, so--", the ex-Minister murmured to himself and seemed to fall into a reverie. I no longer remember who this General Zông was or why the sword had been buried there secretly. Ex-Minister Sô-Gang's expression, however, seemed to suggest that there was some deep secret associated with it.

That is the sum of my memories of the Villa Czangnang. Yet, if that were all, the villa would hardly have remained so clearly in my memory, nor would I have written so long a story here. A man misses something that is no more far more than something that still exists. The villa has disappeared, leaving not a trace behind; and as I miss it so much, the stronger do my nostalgic memories become.

The later history of the Villa Czangnang is somewhat long, and so I do not propose to bore my readers with a detailed account of it. In brief it may be summarised as follows. The old lady, Lady Zông-Gyông, died in the same year that I was there, and some five or six years later the ex-Minister himself passed away, not far short of ninety years old. Before the first memorial service his daughter-in-law, Zang-Gûn's grandmother, died too. Not only did the members of the family die one by one, but the family itself, which had flourished for so long went into a steady decline, and in a few years was utterly ruined, battered by the rude waves of the ever-changing world. It seemed that the old tree that had stood up against the storms of a century was no longer capable of putting forth new buds in the spring that followed a severe winter.

VII

The ruin of the Villa Czangnang was hastened by the decadence of my cousin Zong-Gûn. The older people all died one after the other, and then Zong-Gûn, who had hitherto been confined to the house and had studied nothing but the Chinese Classics, suddenly cut his hair and put on Western clothes. Then he gave himself up to a life of debauchery and frequented dancing girls. By the time that the third memorial service was held to the memory of the ex-Minister Sô-Gang, the villa-Czangnang, site and all, had passed to other hands. Many years later I went there again with my father, feeling that once more I was visiting a beloved native place, and I was astonished to see the changes that had taken place. I could not find the shadows of its lively past. The buildings were falling into ruins and were being abandoned to the weeds. And only ten had come to attend the service. No longer were there any trees on the hill at the back where I had played with Ûl-Sun. In the reception room where the young women had thronged, my cousin Zong-Gûn's poor

wife was setting out the service table with only one old woman who looked like a little black mouse, to help her. I could hardly believe my eyes. Surely this could not be the dazzlingly beautiful girl whom I had compared to the moon in my admiration.

That night, in the main room of the reception house, where the ex-Minister Sô-Gang had lived, there were gathered some seven or eight men. My father was among them, and they talked over the past in low voices, soft as the drizzling rain.

I was now fifteen years old, and so I could form some idea of what my elders were talking about. My father told the story of the villa Czangnang, He started by saying that it had been in the front line during the Imzin war, the war between Korea and Japan. He went on to tell how the French Admiral Rose had sailed up the River Han from Ganghwa island in his flagship Primoque accompanied by two other warships, because in the reign of King Dêwôn there had been a massacre of missionaries. The ships had lain at anchor for many days just in front of the Villa Czangnang, throwing the Court and the Cabinet into utter confusion, and the man who had been most outspoken against the 'Western Barbarians' had been none other than ex-Minister Sô-gang himself, who was Chief of Staff at the time. In this way my father talked on until daybreak.

I listened in deep emotion to my father's story and looked at my cousin Zong-Gûn, ex-Minister Sô-Gang's great-grandson. He sat with bowed head and kept squirming about because the robes he was wearing for the memorial service made him uncomfortable. My father spoke serenely on, his words like rippling waters, and outside in the night all was still. I looked over at the service table on the far side of the room, and watched the yellow candle flames rising high towards the ceiling in the motionless air and then shrinking back again.

Twenty years have passed since then, and my father has been dead these many years. While I have been making my way along the road of life, the villa Czangnang has vanished utterly, leaving not a trace behind. Years ago my cousin Zong-Gûn left Seoul and went to live with relatives in the country. In all these years I never forgot the Villa Czangnang, but at the same time I never thought much about it. Yet this year, strangely enough, I dreamt of the Villa Czangnang three nights running. In my dreams I was always a little boy of six, and I saw the evening glow in the sky in front of the house, the silvery beard of the ex-Minister Sô-Gang, the yellow candlelight, my father pointing out the villa with his stick, and myself playing with Ôi-Sun in the afternoon sunlight.

When I woke up in the morning after the third dream, the memory of the dream was unbearably fresh and clear. In all the twenty years that had elapsed since the last memorial service (which was on the third anniversary of the ex-Minister's death) I had never been to the Villa Czangnang, though I was living not far from it. Fortunately it was Sunday, and in March, and so after lunch I slung my camera from my shoulder and left my house.

For the first time in my life I took a gasoline train for Dang-in-li, and searched for the Villa Czangnang, as I remembered it from days gone by. But strange to say, I could nowhere find the hill or the house when I got there, though it had all been so clear in my dream. I did find a likely place, but the hill at the back was quite barren, and in front, where the villa had most probably stood, there was a big factory that I had never seen before with a great chimney, that seemed to pierce the sky, belching forth black smoke.

I was very disappointed, and walked for a while on the clinkers that were strewn on the yard in front of the factory, trying to remember my dream. The blue

ripples of the river beneath the steep cliff in front of the garden still rolled on as they had always done. But for all that it was spring, a chilly wind blew under a sullen wrinkled sky. The unceasing roar of the rolling machines threw my thoughts into confusion as I struggled to recall the past.

Could the Villa Czangnang have some existence beyond the visible world, or was it just a dream wrapped up in clouds and smoke? I had indulged my memories long enough, and I slowly awoke to the harsh reality.

Suddenly I heard the noise of an aeroplane on the sandy wastes beyond the river. In the far distance I could see a black aeroplane of the most modern design, with one wing on each side, taxi-ing along the Yôûido aerodrome preparatory to taking off. As I watched, it took off and rose with a terrifying roar high above the ground, fifty metres, a hundred metres, two hundred metres, five hundred metres, a thousand metres. It was an aeroplane of the most modern design that could fly over rivers and mountains, the very frontiers of the country, far into the sky across the continent, in the time it takes to draw a breath.