

Letter from an Orchard Farmer's Wife

New Ch'ongu, you wandered through our courtyard
in my thirteenth year; I still see
your shoulders squared in army dress,
steel buttons dashing coins of light
across our kitchen walls. My pulse leapt
when you muttered, *Water, woman.*

Remember when I lowered bridal sleeves
from my pink face? How I shook as you
gulped water from our wedding cup.
Jostled on a braying donkey,
parading home, you brayed too.
How I laughed in the palanquin!

I recall your fear when I birthed our first.
You chopped kindling, killed three chickens,
pulled their feathers as I screamed.
Now I ache at the memory of you
lifting Soon Ja to the stars,
crowing your triumph in air.

How we cried when you re-enlisted
and left for Manchuria! With our second
daughter tied to my back, I walked past
armed Communist soldiers to gather roots
and tend your favorite vegetables. I pickled
lotus and kimchi, awaiting your return.

Two years have passed since you left
for the train station. Your cart's tracks
have married dust in the courtyard.
Riding my shoulders, Soon Ja gathers
pale globes in the orchard, our peaches
for supper. They taste sour without you.

If you should travel near the village gate,
no need to send me word. I will hold
your dipping gourd ready.

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