CHAPTER 21

Hallakkungi, the Flower Warden God in the Sŏch’ŏn Flower Garden

Once upon a time there lived two men, Kim Chinguk and Wŏn Chinguk. Kim Chinguk was poor and Wŏn Chinguk was rich, but both shared a common plight: they were childless.

One day, they met a monk from Tonggyenamsangju Temple, who had come to collect offerings. The monk who already knew their anxieties instructed them that if they would make an offering of a hundred kŭn of gold at his temple, a child would be born to each of them.  

Since Kim Chinguk and Wŏn Chinguk were close friends, they decided to go together to give their offerings. Although Kim Chinguk was poor and could not afford to make a gold offering, he brought the best quality rice carefully washed in morning dew. Kim Chinguk bore a son, named Wŏngang, while Wŏn Chinguk had a daughter, named Wŏngangami. On this day they decided their children should get married to each other, and fifteen years later, the two children were wed. 

When Wŏngangami was pregnant and big with child, there came a letter from the King of Heaven with these instructions: ‘Classics licentiate Kim Chinguk is in charge of the Flower Warden in Sŏch’ŏn.’

When the time came for Wŏngang to take up his responsibility as the Flower Warden in Sŏch’ŏn, his wife, who was Wŏn Chinguk’s daughter, said, ‘Even crows have their mates and animals their partners. How then can you go and leave me here alone?’

Wŏngang agreed to travel with her to the Sŏch’ŏn Flower Garden, escorted by the messenger of the King of Heaven. The road was arduous and seemingly without end and soon Wŏngang’s wife was suffering from severe pains in her foot. Finally, they could no longer continue, but decided to pass the night in the mountains. In the morning, the travellers woke to the sounds of roosters and dogs and asked a passer-by, ‘Where are these rooster and dog sounds coming from?’

‘It’s the house of Kim Changja’, replied the passer-by. And the passer-by directed them to the house of Kim Changja.

Wŏngangami addressed her husband, ‘I am too weary to continue on to the Sŏch’ŏn Flower Garden or even to return home. Please sell me as a slave to the household of Kim Changja.’

‘How can you ask such a thing of me?’ replied Wŏngang.
But rather than watch his wife perish on the hazardous journey, he decided to do as she asked. He went to talk with Kim Changja, who then consulted his three daughters. The first and second daughters were against the purchase, but because his third daughter was for it, Kim Changja drew up a slave document.

Wonganami was sent to the kitchen, while Wongang was called into the male quarters to negotiate the terms. Wongang said, ‘I am not familiar with the customs of this place, but our custom is to allow a slave and her master to say their farewells in the same room.’

Kim Changja conceded to Wongang’s request and sent for Wongangami.

‘What shall I do with the unborn child in my womb?’ asked Wongangami.

‘If it is a girl, name her Hallaktōki. But if it is a boy, call him Hallakkungi.’

Wongang left with her a thin thread and pair of combs to be used as proof of identity when the time came.

One night, Kim Changja entered the small hut he had built for Wongangami and attempted to take her as his mistress. She refused him, however, saying, ‘When the child now in my womb is born and begins to sing, can run about on a play horse, and is able to shoulder a plough and plough a field, only then will I consent to such a union.’

Kim Changja had no choice but to wait.

As time passed, the child was born and grew big enough to help plough the fields. Kim Changja returned to Wongangami again with the intention of taking her as his mistress. Again she rebuffed him away, saying, ‘My lord, the relationship between a master and slave is like that of father and child. How, then, can you attempt to lie with me?’

At this second rejection, Kim Changja became enraged and was about to call an assassin to have her killed when his third daughter dissuaded him, ‘Since killing the woman slave would surely bring us bad fortune, it is better to overwork the mother and son. Have Hallakkungi move fifty loads of wood each day, and have him twist fifty feet of rope out of straw every night. As for the mother, have her produce five rolls of smooth silk and five rolls of wide-striped silk every day.’

Kim Changja heeded his third daughter’s suggestions and demanded unspeakable amounts of wood, rope and silk from the mother and son daily. But when Hallakkungi chopped a single load of wood and loaded it upon an ox, that bundle miraculously transformed into fifty loads on fifty oxen. A bundle of rope turned into fifty loads of rope, as well, and a roll of silk into five loads.

Kim Changja then decided to increase the workload. He ordered Hallakkungi to go into the deep woods, clear a field and sow a large sack of millet seeds. Hallakkungi entered the deep woods and was about to fell trees to clear the field in which to scatter millet seeds when a huge wild boar miraculously appeared and finished the task for him in no time. He then decided that the weather was wrong for planting millet seeds and ordered Hallakkungi to go and regather what he had sown. When Hallakkungi returned to the