CHAPTER XV

I was once Adam Strang, an Englishman. The period of my living, as near as I can guess it, was somewhere between 1550 and 1650, and I lived to a ripe old age, as you shall see. It has been a great regret to me, ever since Ed Morrell taught me the way of the little death, that I had not been a more thorough student of history. I should have been able to identity and place much that is obscure to me. As it is, I am compelled to grope and guess my way to times and places of my earlier existences.

A peculiar thing about my Adam Strang existence is that I recollect so little of the first thirty years of it. Many times, in the jacket, has Adam Strang recrudesced, but always he springs into being full-statured, heavy-thewed, a full thirty years of age.

I, Adam Strang, invariably assume my consciousness on a group of low, sandy islands somewhere under the equator in what must be the western Pacific Ocean. I am always at home there, and seem to have been there some time. There are thousands of people on these islands, although I am the only white man. The natives are a magnificent breed, big-muscled, broad-shouldered, tall. A six-foot man is a commonplace. The king, Raa Kook, is at least six inches above six feet, and though he would weigh fully three hundred pounds, is so equitably proportioned that one could not call him fat. Many of his chiefs are as large, while the women are not much smaller than the men.

There are numerous islands in the group, over all of which Raa Kook is king, although the cluster of islands to the south is restive and occasionally in revolt. These natives with whom I live are Polynesian, I know, because their hair is straight and black. Their skin is a sun-warm golden-brown. Their speech, which I speak uncommonly easy, is round and rich and musical, possessing a paucity of consonants, being composed principally of vowels. They love flowers, music, dancing, and games, and are childishly simple and happy in their amusements, though cruelly savage in their angers and wars.

I, Adam Strang, know my past, but do not seem to think much about it. I live in the present. I brood neither over past nor future. I am careless, improvident, uncautious, happy out of sheer well-being and overplus of physical energy. Fish, fruits, vegetables, and seaweed--a full stomach--and I am content. I am high in place with Raa Kook, than whom none is higher, not even Abba Taak, who is highest over the priest. No man dare lift hand or weapon to me. I am taboo--sacred as the sacred canoe-house under the floor of which repose the bones of heaven alone knows how many previous kings of Raa Kook's line.

I know all about how I happened to be wrecked and be there alone of all my ship's company--it was a great drowning and a great wind; but I do not moon over the catastrophe. When I think back at all, rather do I think far back to my childhood at the skirts of my milk-skinned, flaxen-haired, buxom English mother. It is a tiny village of a dozen straw-thatched

cottages in which I lived. I hear again blackbirds and thrushes in the hedges, and see again bluebells spilling out from the oak woods and over the velvet turf like a creaming of blue water. And most of all I remember a great, hairy-fetlocked stallion, often led dancing, sidling, and nickering down the narrow street. I was frightened of the huge beast and always fled screaming to my mother, clutching her skirts and hiding in them wherever I might find her.

But enough. The childhood of Adam Strang is not what I set out to write.

I lived for several years on the islands which are nameless to me, and upon which I am confident I was the first white man. I was married to Lei-Lei, the king's sister, who was a fraction over six feet and only by that fraction topped me. I was a splendid figure of a man, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, well-set-up. Women of any race, as you shall see, looked on me with a favouring eye. Under my arms, sun-shielded, my skin was milk-white as my mother's. My eyes were blue. My moustache, beard and hair were that golden-yellow such as one sometimes sees in paintings of the northern sea-kings. Ay--I must have come of that old stock, long-settled in England, and, though born in a countryside cottage, the sea still ran so salt in my blood that I early found my way to ships to become a sea-cuny. That is what I was--neither officer nor gentleman, but sea-cuny, hard-worked, hard-bitten, hard-enduring.

I was of value to Raa Kook, hence his royal protection. I could work in

iron, and our wrecked ship had brought the first iron to Raa Kook's land. On occasion, ten leagues to the north-west, we went in canoes to get iron from the wreck. The hull had slipped off the reef and lay in fifteen fathoms. And in fifteen fathoms we brought up the iron. Wonderful divers and workers under water were these natives. I learned to do my fifteen fathoms, but never could I equal them in their fishy exploits. On the land, by virtue of my English training and my strength, I could throw any of them. Also, I taught them quarter-staff, until the game became a very contagion and broken heads anything but novelties.

Brought up from the wreck was a journal, so torn and mushed and pulped by the sea-water, with ink so run about, that scarcely any of it was decipherable. However, in the hope that some antiquarian scholar may be able to place more definitely the date of the events I shall describe, I here give an extract. The peculiar spelling may give the clue. Note that while the letter s is used, it more commonly is replaced by the letter f.

> The wind being favourable, gave us an opportunity of examining and drying some of our provifion, particularly, fome Chinefe hams and dry filh, which conftituted part of our victualling. Divine service alfo was performed on deck. In the afternoon the wind was foutherly, with frefh gales, but dry, fo that we were able the following morning to clean between decks, and alfo to fumigate the fhip with gunpowder.

But I must hasten, for my narrative is not of Adam Strang the shipwrecked

sea-cuny on a coral isle, but of Adam Strang, later named Yi Yong-ik, the Mighty One, who was one time favourite of the powerful Yunsan, who was lover and husband of the Lady Om of the princely house of Min, and who was long time beggar and pariah in all the villages of all the coasts and roads of Cho-Sen. (Ah, ha, I have you there--Cho-Sen. It means the land of the morning calm. In modern speech it is called Korea.)

Remember, it was between three and four centuries back that I lived, the first white man, on the coral isles of Raa Kook. In those waters, at that time, the keels of ships were rare. I might well have lived out my days there, in peace and fatness, under the sun where frost was not, had it not been for the Sparwehr. The Sparwehr was a Dutch merchantman daring the uncharted seas for Indies beyond the Indies. And she found me instead, and I was all she found.

Have I not said that I was a gay-hearted, golden, bearded giant of an irresponsible boy that had never grown up? With scarce a pang, when the Sparwehrs' water-casks were filled, I left Raa Kook and his pleasant land, left Lei-Lei and all her flower-garlanded sisters, and with laughter on my lips and familiar ship-smells sweet in my nostrils, sailed away, sea-cuny once more, under Captain Johannes Maartens.

A marvellous wandering, that which followed on the old Sparwehr. We were in quest of new lands of silk and spices. In truth, we found fevers, violent deaths, pestilential paradises where death and beauty kept charnel-house together. That old Johannes Maartens, with no hint of

romance in that stolid face and grizzly square head of his, sought the islands of Solomon, the mines of Golconda--ay, he sought old lost Atlantis which he hoped to find still afloat unscuppered. And he found head-hunting, tree-dwelling anthropophagi instead.

We landed on strange islands, sea-pounded on their shores and smoking at their summits, where kinky-haired little animal-men made monkey-wailings in the jungle, planted their forest run-ways with thorns and stake-pits, and blew poisoned splinters into us from out the twilight jungle bush. And whatsoever man of us was wasp-stung by such a splinter died horribly and howling. And we encountered other men, fiercer, bigger, who faced us on the beaches in open fight, showering us with spears and arrows, while the great tree drums and the little tom-toms rumbled and rattled war across the tree-filled hollows, and all the hills were pillared with signal-smokes.

Hendrik Hamel was supercargo and part owner of the Sparwehr adventure, and what he did not own was the property of Captain Johannes Maartens. The latter spoke little English, Hendrik Hamel but little more. The sailors, with whom I gathered, spoke Dutch only. But trust a sea-cuny to learn Dutch--ay, and Korean, as you shall see.

Toward the end we came to the charted country of Japan. But the people would have no dealings with us, and two sworded officials, in sweeping robes of silk that made Captain Johannes Maartens' mouth water, came aboard of us and politely requested us to begone. Under their suave

manners was the iron of a warlike race, and we knew, and went our way.

We crossed the Straits of Japan and were entering the Yellow Sea on our way to China, when we laid the Sparwehr on the rocks. She was a crazy tub the old Sparwehr, so clumsy and so dirty with whiskered marine-life on her bottom that she could not get out of her own way. Close-hauled, the closest she could come was to six points of the wind; and then she bobbed up and down, without way, like a derelict turnip. Galliots were clippers compared with her. To tack her about was undreamed of; to wear her required all hands and half a watch. So situated, we were caught on a lee shore in an eight-point shift of wind at the height of a hurricane that had beaten our souls sick for forty-eight hours.

We drifted in upon the land in the chill light of a stormy dawn across a heartless cross-sea mountain high. It was dead of winter, and between smoking snow-squalls we could glimpse the forbidding coast, if coast it might be called, so broken was it. There were grim rock isles and islets beyond counting, dim snow-covered ranges beyond, and everywhere upstanding cliffs too steep for snow, outjuts of headlands, and pinnacles and slivers of rock upthrust from the boiling sea.

There was no name to this country on which we drove, no record of it ever having been visited by navigators. Its coast-line was only hinted at in our chart. From all of which we could argue that the inhabitants were as inhospitable as the little of their land we could see.

The Sparwehr drove in bow-on upon a cliff. There was deep water to its sheer foot, so that our sky-aspiring bowsprit crumpled at the impact and snapped short off. The foremast went by the board, with a great snapping of rope-shrouds and stays, and fell forward against the cliff.

I have always admired old Johannes Maartens. Washed and rolled off the high poop by a burst of sea, we were left stranded in the waist of the ship, whence we fought our way for'ard to the steep-pitched forecastle-head. Others joined us. We lashed ourselves fast and counted noses. We were eighteen. The rest had perished.

Johannes Maartens touched me and pointed upward through cascading salt-water from the back-fling of the cliff. I saw what he desired. Twenty feet below the truck the foremast ground and crunched against a boss of the cliff. Above the boss was a cleft. He wanted to know if I would dare the leap from the mast-head into the cleft. Sometimes the distance was a scant six feet. At other times it was a score, for the mast reeled drunkenly to the rolling and pounding of the hull on which rested its splintered butt.

I began the climb. But they did not wait. One by one they unlashed themselves and followed me up the perilous mast. There was reason for haste, for at any moment the Sparwehr might slip off into deep water. I timed my leap, and made it, landing in the cleft in a scramble and ready to lend a hand to those who leaped after. It was slow work. We were wet and half freezing in the wind-drive. Besides, the leaps had to be timed

to the roll of the hull and the sway of the mast.

The cook was the first to go. He was snapped off the mast-end, and his body performed cart-wheels in its fall. A fling of sea caught him and crushed him to a pulp against the cliff. The cabin boy, a bearded man of twenty-odd, lost hold, slipped, swung around the mast, and was pinched against the boss of rock. Pinched? The life squeezed from him on the instant. Two others followed the way of the cook. Captain Johannes Maartens was the last, completing the fourteen of us that clung on in the cleft. An hour afterward the Sparwehr slipped off and sank in deep water.

Two days and nights saw us near to perishing on that cliff, for there was way neither up nor down. The third morning a fishing-boat found us. The men were clad entirely in dirt white, with their long hair done up in a curious knot on their pates--the marriage knot, as I was afterward to learn, and also, as I was to learn, a handy thing to clutch hold of with one hand whilst you clouted with the other when an argument went beyond words.

The boat went back to the village for help, and most of the villagers, most of their gear, and most of the day were required to get us down. They were a poor and wretched folk, their food difficult even for the stomach of a sea-cuny to countenance. Their rice was brown as chocolate. Half the husks remained in it, along with bits of chaff, splinters, and unidentifiable dirt which made one pause often in the chewing in order to

stick into his mouth thumb and forefinger and pluck out the offending stuff. Also, they ate a sort of millet, and pickles of astounding variety and ungodly hot.

Their houses were earthen-walled and straw-thatched. Under the floors ran flues through which the kitchen smoke escaped, warming the sleeping-room in its passage. Here we lay and rested for days, soothing ourselves with their mild and tasteless tobacco, which we smoked in tiny bowls at the end of yard-long pipes. Also, there was a warm, sourish, milky-looking drink, heady only when taken in enormous doses. After guzzling I swear gallons of it, I got singing drunk, which is the way of sea-cunies the world over. Encouraged by my success, the others persisted, and soon we were all a-roaring, little reeking of the fresh snow gale piping up outside, and little worrying that we were cast away in an uncharted, God-forgotten land. Old Johannes Maartens laughed and trumpeted and slapped his thighs with the best of us. Hendrik Hamel, a cold-blooded, chilly-poised dark brunette of a Dutchman with beady black eyes, was as rarely devilish as the rest of us, and shelled out silver like any drunken sailor for the purchase of more of the milky brew. Our carrying-on was a scandal; but the women fetched the drink while all the village that could crowd in jammed the room to witness our antics.

The white man has gone around the world in mastery, I do believe, because of his unwise uncaringness. That has been the manner of his going, although, of course, he was driven on by restiveness and lust for booty. So it was that Captain Johannes Maartens, Hendrik Hamel, and the twelve

sea-cunies of us roystered and bawled in the fisher village while the winter gales whistled across the Yellow Sea.

From the little we had seen of the land and the people we were not impressed by Cho-Sen. If these miserable fishers were a fair sample of the natives, we could understand why the land was unvisited of navigators. But we were to learn different. The village was on an in-lying island, and its headmen must have sent word across to the mainland; for one morning three big two-masted junks with lateens of rice-matting dropped anchor off the beach.

When the sampans came ashore Captain Johannes Maartens was all interest, for here were silks again. One strapping Korean, all in pale-tinted silks of various colours, was surrounded by half a dozen obsequious attendants, also clad in silk. Kwan Yung-jin, as I came to know his name, was a yang-ban, or noble; also he was what might be called magistrate or governor of the district or province. This means that his office was appointive, and that he was a tithe-squeezer or tax-farmer.

Fully a hundred soldiers were also landed and marched into the village. They were armed with three-pronged spears, slicing spears, and chopping spears, with here and there a matchlock of so heroic mould that there were two soldiers to a matchlock, one to carry and set the tripod on which rested the muzzle, the other to carry and fire the gun. As I was to learn, sometimes the gun went off, sometimes it did not, all depending upon the adjustment of the fire-punk and the condition of the powder in

the flash-pan.

So it was that Kwan-Yung-jin travelled. The headmen of the village were cringingly afraid of him, and for good reason, as we were not overlong in finding out. I stepped forward as interpreter, for already I had the hang of several score of Korean words. He scowled and waved me aside. But what did I reek? I was as tall as he, outweighed him by a full two stone, and my skin was white, my hair golden. He turned his back and addressed the head man of the village while his six silken satellites made a cordon between us. While he talked more soldiers from the ship carried up several shoulder-loads of inch-planking. These planks were about six feet long and two feet wide, and curiously split in half lengthwise. Nearer one end than the other was a round hole larger than a man's neck.

Kwan Yung-jin gave a command. Several of the soldiers approached Tromp, who was sitting on the ground nursing a felon. Now Tromp was a rather stupid, slow-thinking, slow-moving cuny, and before he knew what was doing one of the planks, with a scissors-like opening and closing, was about his neck and clamped. Discovering his predicament, he set up a bull-roaring and dancing, till all had to back away to give him clear space for the flying ends of his plank.

Then the trouble began, for it was plainly Kwan Yung-jin's intention to plank all of us. Oh, we fought, bare-fisted, with a hundred soldiers and as many villagers, while Kwan Yung-jin stood apart in his silks and

lordly disdain. Here was where I earned my name Yi Yong-ik, the Mighty. Long after our company was subdued and planked I fought on. My fists were of the hardness of topping-mauls, and I had the muscles and will to drive them.

To my joy, I quickly learned that the Koreans did not understand a fist-blow and were without the slightest notion of guarding. They went down like tenpins, fell over each other in heaps. But Kwan Yung-jin was my man, and all that saved him when I made my rush was the intervention of his satellites. They were flabby creatures. I made a mess of them and a muss and muck of their silks ere the multitude could return upon me. There were so many of them. They clogged my blows by the sneer numbers of them, those behind shoving the front ones upon me. And how I dropped them! Toward the end they were squirming three-deep under my feet. But by the time the crews of the three junks and most of the village were on top of me I was fairly smothered. The planking was easy.

"God in heaven, what now!" asked Vandervoot, another cuny, when we had been bundled aboard a junk.

We sat on the open deck, like so many trussed fowls, when he asked the question, and the next moment, as the junk heeled to the breeze, we shot down the deck, planks and all, fetching up in the lee-scuppers with skinned necks. And from the high poop Kwan Yung-jin gazed down at us as if he did not see us. For many years to come Vandervoot was known amongst us as "What-Now Vandervoot." Poor devil! He froze to death one

night on the streets of Keijo; with every door barred against him.

To the mainland we were taken and thrown into a stinking, vermin-infested prison. Such was our introduction to the officialdom of Cho-Sen. But I was to be revenged for all of us on Kwan Yung-jin, as you shall see, in the days when the Lady Om was kind and power was mine.

In prison we lay for many days. We learned afterward the reason. Kwan Yung-jin had sent a dispatch to Keijo, the capital, to find what royal disposition was to be made of us. In the meantime we were a menagerie. From dawn till dark our barred windows were besieged by the natives, for no member of our race had they ever seen before. Nor was our audience mere rabble. Ladies, borne in palanquins on the shoulders of coolies, came to see the strange devils cast up by the sea, and while their attendants drove back the common folk with whips, they would gaze long and timidly at us. Of them we saw little, for their faces were covered, according to the custom of the country. Only dancing girls, low women, and granddams ever were seen abroad with exposed faces.

I have often thought that Kwan Yung-jin suffered from indigestion, and that when the attacks were acute he took it out on us. At any rate, without rhyme or reason, whenever the whim came to him, we were all taken out on the street before the prison and well beaten with sticks to the gleeful shouts of the multitude. The Asiatic is a cruel beast, and delights in spectacles of human suffering.

At any rate we were pleased when an end to our beatings came. This was caused by the arrival of Kim. Kim? All I can say, and the best I can say, is that he was the whitest man I ever encountered in Cho-Sen. He was a captain of fifty men when I met him. He was in command of the palace guards before I was done doing my best by him. And in the end he died for the Lady Om's sake and for mine. Kim--well, Kim was Kim.

Immediately he arrived the planks were taken from our necks and we were lodged in the beet inn the place boasted. We were still prisoners, but honourable prisoners, with a guard of fifty mounted soldiers. The next day we were under way on the royal highroad, fourteen sailormen astride the dwarf horses that obtain in Cho-Sen, and bound for Keijo itself. The Emperor, so Kim told me, had expressed a desire to gaze upon the strangeness of the sea devils.

It was a journey of many days, half the length of Cho-Sen, north and south as it lies. It chanced, at the first off-saddling, that I strolled around to witness the feeding of the dwarf horses. And what I witnessed set me bawling, "What now, Vandervoot?" till all our crew came running. As I am a living man what the horses were feeding on was bean soup, hot bean soup at that, and naught else did they have on all the journey but hot bean soup. It was the custom of the country.

They were truly dwarf horses. On a wager with Kim I lifted one, despite his squeals and struggles, squarely across my shoulders, so that Kim's men, who had already heard my new name, called me Yi Yong-ik, the Mighty

One. Kim was a large man as Koreans go, and Koreans are a tall muscular race, and Kim fancied himself a bit. But, elbow to elbow and palm to palm, I put his arm down at will. And his soldiers and the gaping villagers would look on and murmur "Yi Yong-ik."

In a way we were a travelling menagerie. The word went on ahead, so that all the country folk flocked to the roadside to see us pass. It was an unending circus procession. In the towns at night our inns were besieged by multitudes, so that we got no peace until the soldiers drove them off with lance-pricks and blows. But first Kim would call for the village strong men and wrestlers for the fun of seeing me crumple them and put them in the dirt.

Bread there was none, but we ate white rice (the strength of which resides in one's muscles not long), a meat which we found to be dog (which animal is regularly butchered for food in Cho-Sen), and the pickles ungodly hot but which one learns to like exceeding well. And there was drink, real drink, not milky slush, but white, biting stuff distilled from rice, a pint of which would kill a weakling and make a strong man mad and merry. At the walled city of Chong-ho I put Kim and the city notables under the table with the stuff--or on the table, rather, for the table was the floor where we squatted to cramp-knots in my hams for the thousandth time. And again all muttered "Yi Yong-ik," and the word of my prowess passed on before even to Keijo and the Emperor's Court.

I was more an honoured guest than a prisoner, and invariably I rode by Kim's side, my long legs near reaching the ground, and, where the going was deep, my feet scraping the muck. Kim was young. Kim was human. Kim was universal. He was a man anywhere in any country. He and I talked and laughed and joked the day long and half the night. And I verify ate up the language. I had a gift that way anyway. Even Kim marvelled at the way I mastered the idiom. And I learned the Korean points of view, the Korean humour, the Korean soft places, weak places, touchy places. Kim taught me flower songs, love songs, drinking songs. One of the latter was his own, of the end of which I shall give you a crude attempt at translation. Kim and Pak, in their youth, swore a pact to abstain from drinking, which pact was speedily broken. In old age Kim and Pak sing:

"No, no, begone! The merry bowl
Again shall bolster up my soul
Against itself. What, good man, hold!
Canst tell me where red wine is sold?
Nay, just beyond yon peach-tree? There?
Good luck be thine; I'll thither fare."

Hendrik Hamel, scheming and crafty, ever encouraged and urged me in my antic course that brought Kim's favour, not alone to me, but through me to Hendrik Hamel and all our company. I here mention Hendrik Hamel as my adviser, for it has a bearing on much that followed at Keijo in the winning of Yunsan's favour, the Lady Om's heart, and the Emperor's

tolerance. I had the will and the fearlessness for the game I played, and some of the wit; but most of the wit I freely admit was supplied me by Hendrik Hamel.

And so we journeyed up to Keijo, from walled city to walled city across a snowy mountain land that was hollowed with innumerable fat farming valleys. And every evening, at fall of day, beacon fires sprang from peak to peak and ran along the land. Always Kim watched for this nightly display. From all the coasts of Cho-Sen, Kim told me, these chains of fire-speech ran to Keijo to carry their message to the Emperor. One beacon meant the land was in peace. Two beacons meant revolt or invasion. We never saw but one beacon. And ever, as we rode, Vandervoot brought up the rear, wondering, "God in heaven, what now?"

Keijo we found a vast city where all the population, with the exception of the nobles or yang-bans, dressed in the eternal white. This, Kim explained, was an automatic determination and advertisement of caste. Thus, at a glance, could one tell, the status of an individual by the degrees of cleanness or of filthiness of his garments. It stood to reason that a coolie, possessing but the clothes he stood up in, must be extremely dirty. And to reason it stood that the individual in immaculate white must possess many changes and command the labour of laundresses to keep his changes immaculate. As for the yang-bans who wore the pale, vari-coloured silks, they were beyond such common yardstick of place.

After resting in an inn for several days, during which time we washed our garments and repaired the ravages of shipwreck and travel, we were summoned before the Emperor. In the great open space before the palace wall were colossal stone dogs that looked more like tortoises. They crouched on massive stone pedestals of twice the height of a tall man. The walls of the palace were huge and of dressed stone. So thick were these walls that they could defy a breach from the mightiest of cannon in a year-long siege. The mere gateway was of the size of a palace in itself, rising pagoda-like, in many retreating stories, each story fringed with tile-roofing. A smart guard of soldiers turned out at the gateway. These, Kim told me, were the Tiger Hunters of Pyeng-yang, the fiercest and most terrible fighting men of which Cho-Sen could boast.

But enough. On mere description of the Emperor's palace a thousand pages of my narrative could be worthily expended. Let it suffice that here we knew power in all its material expression. Only a civilization deep and wide and old and strong could produce this far-walled, many-gabled roof of kings.

To no audience-hall were we sea-cunies led, but, as we took it, to a feasting-hall. The feasting was at its end, and all the throng was in a merry mood. And such a throng! High dignitaries, princes of the blood, sworded nobles, pale priests, weather-tanned officers of high command, court ladies with faces exposed, painted ki-sang or dancing girls who rested from entertaining, and duennas, waiting women, eunuchs, lackeys, and palace slaves a myriad of them.

All fell away from us, however, when the Emperor, with a following of intimates, advanced to look us over. He was a merry monarch, especially so for an Asiatic. Not more than forty, with a clear, pallid skin that had never known the sun, he was paunched and weak-legged. Yet he had once been a fine man. The noble forehead attested that. But the eyes were bleared and weak-lidded, the lips twitching and trembling from the various excesses in which he indulged, which excesses, as I was to learn, were largely devised and pandered by Yunsan, the Buddhist priest, of whom more anon.

In our sea-garments we mariners were a motley crew, and motley was the cue of our reception. Exclamations of wonder at our strangeness gave way to laughter. The ki-sang invaded us, dragging us about, making prisoners of us, two or three of them to one of us, leading us about like go many dancing boars and putting us through our antics. It was offensive, true, but what could poor sea-cunies do? What could old Johannes Maartens do, with a bevy of laughing girls about him, tweaking his nose, pinching his arms, tickling his ribs till he pranced? To escape such torment Hans Amden cleared a space and gave a clumsy-footed Hollandish breakdown till all the Court roared its laughter.

It was offensive to me who had been equal and boon companion of Kim for many days. I resisted the laughing ki-sang. I braced my legs and stood upright with folded arms; nor could pinch or tickle bring a quiver from me. Thus they abandoned me for easier prey.

"For God's sake, man, make an impression," Hendrik Hamel, who had struggled to me with three ki-sang dragging behind, mumbled.

Well might he mumble, for whenever he opened his mouth to speak they crammed it with sweets.

"Save us from this folly," he persisted, ducking his head about to avoid their sweet-filled palms. "We must have dignity, understand, dignity. This will ruin us. They are making tame animals of us, playthings. When they grow tired of us they will throw us out. You're doing the right thing. Stick to it. Stand them off. Command respect, respect for all of us--"

The last was barely audible, for by this time the ki-sang had stuffed his mouth to speechlessness.

As I have said, I had the will and the fearlessness, and I racked my sea-cuny brains for the wit. A palace eunuch, tickling my neck with a feather from behind, gave me my start. I had already drawn attention by my aloofness and imperviousness to the attacks of the ki-sang, so that many were looking on at the eunuch's baiting of me. I gave no sign, made no move, until I had located him and distanced him. Then, like a shot, without turning head or body, merely by my arm I fetched him an open, back-handed slap. My knuckles landed flat on his cheek and jaw. There was a crack like a spar parting in a gale. He was bowled clean over,

landing in a heap on the floor a dozen feet away.

There was no laughter, only cries of surprise and murmurings and whisperings of "Yi Yong-ik." Again I folded my arms and stood with a fine assumption of haughtiness. I do believe that I, Adam Strang, had among other things the soul of an actor in me. For see what follows. I was now the most significant of our company. Proud-eyed, disdainful, I met unwavering the eyes upon me and made them drop, or turn away--all eyes but one. These were the eyes of a young woman, whom I judged, by richness of dress and by the half-dozen women fluttering at her back, to be a court lady of distinction. In truth, she was the Lady Om, princess of the house of Min. Did I say young? She was fully my own age, thirty, and for all that and her ripeness and beauty a princess still unmarried, as I was to learn.

She alone looked me in the eyes without wavering until it was I who turned away. She did not look me down, for there was neither challenge nor antagonism in her eyes--only fascination. I was loth to admit this defeat by one small woman, and my eyes, turning aside, lighted on the disgraceful rout of my comrades and the trailing ki-sang and gave me the pretext. I clapped my hands in the Asiatic fashion when one gives command.

"Let be!" I thundered in their own language, and in the form one addressee underlings.

Oh, I had a chest and a throat, and could bull-roar to the hurt of ear-drums. I warrant so loud a command had never before cracked the sacred air of the Emperor's palace.

The great room was aghast. The women were startled, and pressed toward one another as for safety. The ki-sang released the cunies and shrank away giggling apprehensively. Only the Lady Om made no sign nor motion but continued to gaze wide-eyed into my eyes which had returned to hers.

Then fell a great silence, as if all waited some word of doom. A multitude of eyes timidly stole back and forth from the Emperor to me and from me to the Emperor. And I had wit to keep the silence and to stand there, arms folded, haughty and remote.

"He speaks our language," quoth the Emperor at the last; and I swear there was such a relinquishment of held breaths that the whole room was one vast sigh.

"I was born with this language," I replied, my cuny wits running rashly to the first madness that prompted. "I spoke it at my mother's breast. I was the marvel of my land. Wise men journeyed far to see me and to hear. But no man knew the words I spoke. In the many years since I have forgotten much, but now, in Cho-Sen, the words come back like long-lost friends."

An impression I certainly made. The Emperor swallowed and his lips

twitched ere he asked:

"How explain you this?"

"I am an accident," I answered, following the wayward lead my wit had opened. "The gods of birth were careless, and I was mislaid in a far land and nursed by an alien people. I am Korean, and now, at last, I have come to my home."

What an excited whispering and conferring took place. The Emperor himself interrogated Kim.

"He was always thus, our speech in his mouth, from the time he came out of the sea," Kim lied like the good fellow he was.

"Bring me yang-ban's garments as befits me," I interrupted, "and you shall see." As I was led away in compliance, I turned on the ki-sang. "And leave my slaves alone. They have journeyed far and are weary. They are my faithful slaves."

In another room Kim helped me change, sending the lackeys away; and quick and to the point was the dress-rehearsal he gave me. He knew no more toward what I drove than did I, but he was a good fellow.

The funny thing, once back in the crowd and spouting Korean which I claimed was rusty from long disuse, was that Hendrik Hamel and the rest,

too stubborn-tongued to learn new speech, did not know a word I uttered.

"I am of the blood of the house of Koryu," I told the Emperor, "that ruled at Songdo many a long year agone when my house arose on the ruins of Silla."

Ancient history, all, told me by Kim on the long ride, and he struggled with his face to hear me parrot his teaching.

"These," I said, when the Emperor had asked me about my company, "these are my slaves, all except that old churl there"--I indicated Johannes Maartens--"who is the son of a freed man." I told Hendrik Hamel to approach. "This one," I wantoned on, "was born in my father's house of a seed slave who was born there before him. He is very close to me. We are of an age, born on the same day, and on that day my father gave him me."

Afterwards, when Hendrik Hamel was eager to know all that I had said, and when I told him, he reproached me and was in a pretty rage.

"The fat's in the fire, Hendrik," quoth I. "What I have done has been out of witlessness and the need to be saying something. But done it is. Nor you nor I can pluck forth the fat. We must act our parts and make the best of it."

Taiwun, the Emperor's brother, was a sot of sots, and as the night wore

on he challenged me to a drinking. The Emperor was delighted, and commanded a dozen of the noblest sots to join in the bout. The women were dismissed, and we went to it, drink for drink, measure for measure. Kim I kept by me, and midway along, despite Hendrik Hamel's warning scowls, dismissed him and the company, first requesting, and obtaining, palace lodgment instead of the inn.

Next day the palace was a-buzz with my feast, for I had put Taiwun and all his champions snoring on the mats and walked unaided to my bed. Never, in the days of vicissitude that came later, did Taiwun doubt my claim of Korean birth. Only a Korean, he averred, could possess so strong a head.

The palace was a city in itself, and we were lodged in a sort of summer-house that stood apart. The princely quarters were mine, of course, and Hamel and Maartens, with the rest of the grumbling cunies, had to content themselves with what remained.

I was summoned before Yunsan, the Buddhist priest I have mentioned. It was his first glimpse of me and my first of him. Even Kim he dismissed from me, and we sat alone on deep mats in a twilight room. Lord, Lord, what a man and a mind was Yunsan! He made to probe my soul. He knew things of other lands and places that no one in Cho-Sen dreamed to know. Did he believe my fabled birth? I could not guess, for his face was less changeful than a bowl of bronze.

What Yunsan's thoughts were only Yunsan knew. But in him, this poor-clad, lean-bellied priest, I sensed the power behind power in all the palace and in all Cho-Sen. I sensed also, through the drift of speech, that he had use of me. Now was this use suggested by the Lady Om?--a nut I gave Hendrik Hamel to crack. I little knew, and less I cared, for I lived always in the moment and let others forecast, forfend, and travail their anxiety.

I answered, too, the summons of the Lady Om, following a sleek-faced, cat-footed eunuch through quiet palace byways to her apartments. She lodged as a princess of the blood should lodge. She, too, had a palace to herself, among lotus ponds where grow forests of trees centuries old but so dwarfed that they reached no higher than my middle. Bronze bridges, so delicate and rare that they looked as if fashioned by jewel-smiths, spanned her lily ponds, and a bamboo grove screened her palace apart from all the palace.

My head was awhirl. Sea-cuny that I was, I was no dolt with women, and I sensed more than idle curiosity in her sending for me. I had heard love-tales of common men and queens, and was a-wondering if now it was my fortune to prove such tales true.

The Lady Om wasted little time. There were women about her, but she regarded their presence no more than a carter his horses. I sat beside her on deep mats that made the room half a couch, and wine was given me and sweets to nibble, served on tiny, foot-high tables inlaid with pearl.

Lord, Lord, I had but to look into her eyes--But wait. Make no mistake. The Lady Om was no fool. I have said she was of my own age. All of thirty she was, with the poise of her years. She knew what she wanted. She knew what she did not want. It was because of this she had never married, although all pressure that an Asiatic court could put upon a woman had been vainly put upon her to compel her to marry Chong Mong-ju. He was a lesser cousin of the great Min family, himself no fool, and grasping so greedily for power as to perturb Yunsan, who strove to retain all power himself and keep the palace and Cho-Sen in ordered balance. Thus Yunsan it was who in secret allied himself with the Lady Om, saved her from her cousin, used her to trim her cousin's wings. But enough of intrigue. It was long before I guessed a tithe of it, and then largely through the Lady Om's confidences and Hendrik Hamel's conclusions.

The Lady Om was a very flower of woman. Women such as she are born rarely, scarce twice a century the whole world over. She was unhampered by rule or convention. Religion, with her, was a series of abstractions, partly learned from Yunsan, partly worked out for herself. Vulgar religion, the public religion, she held, was a device to keep the toiling millions to their toil. She had a will of her own, and she had a heart all womanly. She was a beauty--yes, a beauty by any set rule of the world. Her large black eyes were neither slitted nor slanted in the Asiatic way. They were long, true, but set squarely, and with just the slightest hint of obliqueness that was all for piquancy.

I have said she was no fool. Behold! As I palpitated to the situation, princess and sea-cuny and love not a little that threatened big, I racked my cuny's brains for wit to carry the thing off with manhood credit. It chanced, early in this first meeting, that I mentioned what I had told all the Court, that I was in truth a Korean of the blood of the ancient house of Koryu.

"Let be," she said, tapping my lips with her peacock fan. "No child's tales here. Know that with me you are better and greater than of any house of Koryu. You are . . ."

She paused, and I waited, watching the daring grow in her eyes.

"You are a man," she completed. "Not even in my sleep have I ever dreamed there was such a man as you on his two legs upstanding in the world."

Lord, Lord! and what could a poor sea-cuny do? This particular sea-cuny, I admit, blushed through his sea tan till the Lady Om's eyes were twin pools of roguishness in their teasing deliciousness and my arms were all but about her. And she laughed tantalizingly and alluringly, and clapped her hands for her women, and I knew that the audience, for this once, was over. I knew, also, there would be other audiences, there must be other audiences.

Back to Hamel, my head awhirl.

"The woman," said he, after deep cogitation. He looked at me and sighed an envy I could not mistake. "It is your brawn, Adam Strang, that bull throat of yours, your yellow hair. Well, it's the game, man. Play her, and all will be well with us. Play her, and I shall teach you how."

I bristled. Sea-cuny I was, but I was man, and to no man would I be beholden in my way with women. Hendrik Hamel might be one time part-owner of the old Sparwehr, with a navigator's knowledge of the stars and deep versed in books, but with women, no, there I would not give him better.

He smiled that thin-lipped smile of his, and queried:

"How like you the Lady Om?"

"In such matters a cuny is naught particular," I temporized.

"How like you her?" he repeated, his beady eyes boring into me.

"Passing well, ay, and more than passing well, if you will have it."

"Then win to her," he commanded, "and some day we will get ship and escape from this cursed land. I'd give half the silks of the Indies for a meal of Christian food again."

He regarded me intently.

"Do you think you can win to her?" he questioned.

I was half in the air at the challenge. He smiled his satisfaction.

"But not too quickly," he advised. "Quick things are cheap things. Put a prize upon yourself. Be chary of your kindnesses. Make a value of your bull throat and yellow hair, and thank God you have them, for they are of more worth in a woman's eyes than are the brains of a dozen philosophers."

Strange whirling days were those that followed, what of my audiences with the Emperor, my drinking bouts with Taiwun, my conferences with Yunsan, and my hours with the Lady Om. Besides, I sat up half the nights, by Hamel's command, learning from Kim all the minutiae of court etiquette and manners, the history of Korea and of gods old and new, and the forms of polite speech, noble speech, and coolie speech. Never was sea-cuny worked so hard. I was a puppet--puppet to Yunsan, who had need of me; puppet to Hamel, who schemed the wit of the affair that was so deep that alone I should have drowned. Only with the Lady Om was I man, not puppet . . . and yet, and yet, as I look back and ponder across time, I have my doubts. I think the Lady Om, too, had her will with me, wanting me for her heart's desire. Yet in this she was well met, for it was not long ere she was my heart's desire, and such was the immediacy of my will that not her will, nor Hendrik Hamel's, nor Yunsan's, could hold back my arms

from about her.

In the meantime, however, I was caught up in a palace intrigue I could not fathom. I could catch the drift of it, no more, against Chong Mong-ju, the princely cousin of the Lady Om. Beyond my guessing there were cliques and cliques within cliques that made a labyrinth of the palace and extended to all the Seven Coasts. But I did not worry. I left that to Hendrik Hamel. To him I reported every detail that occurred when he was not with me; and he, with furrowed brows, sitting darkling by the hour, like a patient spider unravelled the tangle and spun the web afresh. As my body slave he insisted upon attending me everywhere; being only barred on occasion by Yunsan. Of course I barred him from my moments with the Lady Om, but told him in general what passed, with exception of tenderer incidents that were not his business.

I think Hamel was content to sit back and play the secret part. He was too cold-blooded not to calculate that the risk was mine. If I prospered, he prospered. If I crashed to ruin, he might creep out like a ferret. I am convinced that he so reasoned, and yet it did not save him in the end, as you shall see.

"Stand by me," I told Kim, "and whatsoever you wish shall be yours. Have you a wish?"

"I would command the Tiger Hunters of Pyeng-Yang, and so command the palace guards," he answered.

"Wait," said I, "and that will you do. I have said it."

The how of the matter was beyond me. But he who has naught can dispense the world in largess; and I, who had naught, gave Kim captaincy of the palace guards. The best of it is that I did fulfil my promise. Kim did come to command the Tiger Hunters, although it brought him to a sad end.

Scheming and intriguing I left to Hamel and Yunsan, who were the politicians. I was mere man and lover, and merrier than theirs was the time I had. Picture it to yourself--a hard-bitten, joy-loving sea-cuny, irresponsible, unaware ever of past or future, wining and dining with kings, the accepted lover of a princess, and with brains like Hamel's and Yunsan's to do all planning and executing for me.

More than once Yunsan almost divined the mind behind my mind; but when he probed Hamel, Hamel proved a stupid slave, a thousand times less interested in affairs of state and policy than was he interested in my health and comfort and garrulously anxious about my drinking contests with Taiwun. I think the Lady Om guessed the truth and kept it to herself; wit was not her desire, but, as Hamel had said, a bull throat and a man's yellow hair.

Much that pawed between us I shall not relate, though the Lady Om is dear dust these centuries. But she was not to be denied, nor was I; and when a man and woman will their hearts together heads may fall and kingdoms

crash and yet they will not forgo.

Came the time when our marriage was mooted--oh, quietly, at first, most quietly, as mere palace gossip in dark corners between eunuchs and waiting-women. But in a palace the gossip of the kitchen scullions will creep to the throne. Soon there was a pretty to-do. The palace was the pulse of Cho-Sen, and when the palace rocked, Cho-Sen trembled. And there was reason for the rocking. Our marriage would be a blow straight between the eyes of Chong Mong-ju. He fought, with a show of strength for which Yunsan was ready. Chong Mong-ju disaffected half the provincial priesthood, until they pilgrimaged in processions a mile long to the palace gates and frightened the Emperor into a panic.

But Yunsan held like a rock. The other half of the provincial priesthood was his, with, in addition, all the priesthood of the great cities such as Keijo, Fusan, Songdo, Pyen-Yang, Chenampo, and Chemulpo. Yunsan and the Lady Om, between them, twisted the Emperor right about. As she confessed to me afterward, she bullied him with tears and hysteria and threats of a scandal that would shake the throne. And to cap it all, at the psychological moment, Yunsan pandered the Emperor to novelties of excess that had been long preparing.

"You must grow your hair for the marriage knot," Yunsan warned me one day, with the ghost of a twinkle in his austere eyes, more nearly facetious and human than I had ever beheld him.

Now it is not meet that a princess espouse a sea-cuny, or even a claimant of the ancient blood of Koryu, who is without power, or place, or visible symbols of rank. So it was promulgated by imperial decree that I was a prince of Koryu. Next, after breaking the bones and decapitating the then governor of the five provinces, himself an adherent of Chong Mong-ju, I was made governor of the seven home provinces of ancient Koryu. In Cho-Sen seven is the magic number. To complete this number two of the provinces were taken over from the hands of two more of Chong Mong-ju's adherents.

Lord, Lord, a sea-cuny . . . and dispatched north over the Mandarin Road with five hundred soldiers and a retinue at my back! I was a governor of seven provinces, where fifty thousand troops awaited me. Life, death, and torture, I carried at my disposal. I had a treasury and a treasurer, to say nothing of a regiment of scribes. Awaiting me also was a full thousand of tax-farmers; who squeezed the last coppers from the toiling people.

The seven provinces constituted the northern march. Beyond lay what is now Manchuria, but which was known by us as the country of the Hong-du, or "Red Heads." They were wild raiders, on occasion crossing the Yalu in great masses and over-running northern Cho-Sen like locusts. It was said they were given to cannibal practices. I know of experience that they were terrible fighters, most difficult to convince of a beating.

A whirlwind year it was. While Yunsan and the Lady Om at Keijo completed

the disgrace of Chong Mong-ju, I proceeded to make a reputation for myself. Of course it was really Hendrik Hamel at my back, but I was the fine figure-head that carried it off. Through me Hamel taught our soldiers drill and tactics and taught the Red Heads strategy. The fighting was grand, and though it took a year, the year's end saw peace on the northern border and no Red Heads but dead Red Heads on our side the Yalu.

I do not know if this invasion of the Red Heads is recorded in Western history, but if so it will give a clue to the date of the times of which I write. Another clue: when was Hideyoshi the Shogun of Japan? In my time I heard the echoes of the two invasions, a generation before, driven by Hideyoshi through the heart of Cho-Sen from Fusan in the south to as far north as Pyeng-Yang. It was this Hideyoshi who sent back to Japan a myriad tubs of pickled ears and noses of Koreans slain in battle. I talked with many old men and women who had seen the fighting and escaped the pickling.

Back to Keijo and the Lady Om. Lord, Lord, she was a woman. For forty years she was my woman. I know. No dissenting voice was raised against the marriage. Chong Mong-ju, clipped of power, in disgrace, had retired to sulk somewhere on the far north-east coast. Yunsan was absolute. Nightly the single beacons flared their message of peace across the land. The Emperor grew more weak-legged and blear-eyed what of the ingenious deviltries devised for him by Yunsan. The Lady Om and I had won to our hearts' desires. Kim was in command of the palace guards. Kwan Yung-

jin, the provincial governor who had planked and beaten us when we were first cast away, I had shorn of power and banished for ever from appearing within the walls of Keijo.

Oh, and Johannes Maartens. Discipline is well hammered into a sea-cuny, and, despite my new greatness, I could never forget that he had been my captain in the days we sought new Indies in the Sparwehr. According to my tale first told in Court, he was the only free man in my following. The rest of the cunies, being considered my slaves, could not aspire to office of any sort under the crown. But Johannes could, and did. The sly old fox! I little guessed his intent when he asked me to make him governor of the paltry little province of Kyong-ju. Kyong-ju had no wealth of farms or fisheries. The taxes scarce paid the collecting, and the governorship was little more than an empty honour. The place was in truth a graveyard--a sacred graveyard, for on Tabong Mountain were shrined and sepultured the bones of the ancient kings of Silla. Better governor of Kyong-ju than retainer of Adam Strang, was what I thought was in his mind; nor did I dream that it was except for fear of loneliness that caused him to take four of the cunies with him.

Gorgeous were the two years that followed. My seven provinces I governed mainly though needy yang-bans selected for me by Yunsan. An occasional inspection, done in state and accompanied by the Lady Om, was all that was required of me. She possessed a summer palace on the south coast, which we frequented much. Then there were man's diversions. I became patron of the sport of wrestling, and revived archery among the

yang-bans. Also, there was tiger-hunting in the northern mountains.

A remarkable thing was the tides of Cho-Sen. On our north-east coast there was scarce a rise and fall of a foot. On our west coast the neap tides ran as high as sixty feet. Cho-Sen had no commerce, no foreign traders. There was no voyaging beyond her coasts, and no voyaging of other peoples to her coasts. This was due to her immemorial policy of isolation. Once in a decade or a score of years Chinese ambassadors arrived, but they came overland, around the Yellow Sea, across the country of the Hong-du, and down the Mandarin Road to Keijo. The round trip was a year-long journey. Their mission was to exact from our Emperor the empty ceremonial of acknowledgment of China's ancient suzerainty.

But Hamel, from long brooding, was ripening for action. His plans grew apace. Cho-Sen was Indies enough for him could he but work it right. Little he confided, but when he began to play to have me made admiral of the Cho-Sen navy of junks, and to inquire more than casually of the details of the store-places of the imperial treasury, I could put two and two together.

Now I did not care to depart from Cho-Sen except with the Lady Om. When I broached the possibility of it she told me, warm in my arms, that I was her king and that wherever I led she would follow. As you shall see it was truth, full truth, that she uttered.

It was Yunsan's fault for letting Chong Mong-ju live. And yet it was not Yunsan's fault. He had not dared otherwise. Disgraced at Court, nevertheless Chong Mong-ju had been too popular with the provincial priesthood. Yunsan had been compelled to hold his hand, and Chong Mong-ju, apparently sulking on the north-east coast, had been anything but idle. His emissaries, chiefly Buddhist priests, were everywhere, went everywhere, gathering in even the least of the provincial magistrates to allegiance to him. It takes the cold patience of the Asiatic to conceive and execute huge and complicated conspiracies. The strength of Chong Mong-ju's palace clique grew beyond Yunsan's wildest dreaming. Chong Mong-ju corrupted the very palace guards, the Tiger Hunters of Pyeng-Yang whom Kim commanded. And while Yunsan nodded, while I devoted myself to sport and to the Lady Om, while Hendrik Hamel perfected plans for the looting of the Imperial treasury, and while Johannes Maartens schemed his own scheme among the tombs of Tabong Mountain, the volcano of Chong Mong-ju's devising gave no warning beneath us.

Lord, Lord, when the storm broke! It was stand out from under, all hands, and save your necks. And there were necks that were not saved. The springing of the conspiracy was premature. Johannes Maartens really precipitated the catastrophe, and what he did was too favourable for Chong Mong-ju not to advantage by.

For, see. The people of Cho-Sen are fanatical ancestor-worshippers, and that old pirate of a booty-lusting Dutchman, with his four cunies, in far Kyong-ju, did no less a thing than raid the tombs of the gold-coffined,

long-buried kings of ancient Silla. The work was done in the night, and for the rest of the night they travelled for the sea-coast. But the following day a dense fog lay over the land and they lost their way to the waiting junk which Johannes Maartens had privily outfitted. He and the cunies were rounded in by Yi Sun-sin, the local magistrate, one of Chong Mong-ju's adherents. Only Herman Tromp escaped in the fog, and was able, long after, to tell me of the adventure.

That night, although news of the sacrilege was spreading through Cho-Sen and half the northern provinces had risen on their officials, Keijo and the Court slept in ignorance. By Chong Mong-ju's orders the beacons flared their nightly message of peace. And night by night the peace-beacons flared, while day and night Chong Mong-ju's messengers killed horses on all the roads of Cho-Sen. It was my luck to see his messenger arrive at Keijo. At twilight, as I rode out through the great gate of the capital, I saw the jaded horse fall and the exhausted rider stagger in on foot; and I little dreamed that that man carried my destiny with him into Keijo.

His message sprang the palace revolution. I was not due to return until midnight, and by midnight all was over. At nine in the evening the conspirators secured possession of the Emperor in his own apartments. They compelled him to order the immediate attendance of the heads of all departments, and as they presented themselves, one by one, before his eyes, they were cut down. Meantime the Tiger Hunters were up and out of hand. Yunsan and Hendrik Hamel were badly beaten with the flats of

swords and made prisoners. The seven other cunies escaped from the palace along with the Lady Om. They were enabled to do this by Kim, who held the way, sword in hand, against his own Tiger Hunters. They cut him down and trod over him. Unfortunately he did not die of his wounds.

Like a flaw of wind on a summer night the revolution, a palace revolution of course, blew and was past. Chong Mong-ju was in the saddle. The Emperor ratified whatever Chong Mong-ju willed. Beyond gasping at the sacrilege of the king's tombs and applauding Chong Mong-ju, Cho-Sen was unperturbed. Heads of officials fell everywhere, being replaced by Chong Mong-ju's appointees; but there were no risings against the dynasty.

And now to what befell us. Johannes Maartens and his three cunies, after being exhibited to be spat upon by the rabble of half the villages and walled cities of Cho-Sen, were buried to their necks in the ground of the open space before the palace gate. Water was given them that they might live longer to yearn for the food, steaming hot and savoury and changed hourly, that was place temptingly before them. They say old Johannes Maartens lived longest, not giving up the ghost for a full fifteen days.

Kim was slowly crushed to death, bone by bone and joint by joint, by the torturers, and was a long time in dying. Hamel, whom Chong Mong-ju divined as my brains, was executed by the paddle--in short, was promptly and expeditiously beaten to death to the delighted shouts of the Keijo populace. Yunsan was given a brave death. He was playing a game of chess with the jailer, when the Emperor's, or, rather, Chong Mong-ju's,

messenger arrived with the poison-cup. "Wait a moment," said Yunsan. "You should be better-mannered than to disturb a man in the midst of a game of chess. I shall drink directly the game is over." And while the messenger waited Yunsan finished the game, winning it, then drained the cup.

It takes an Asiatic to temper his spleen to steady, persistent, life-long revenge. This Chong Mong-ju did with the Lady Om and me. He did not destroy us. We were not even imprisoned. The Lady Om was degraded of all rank and divested of all possessions. An imperial decree was promulgated and posted in the last least village of Cho-Sen to the effect that I was of the house of Koryu and that no man might kill me. It was further declared that the eight sea-cunies who survived must not be killed. Neither were they to be favoured. They were to be outcasts, beggars on the highways. And that is what the Lady Om and I became, beggars on the highways.

Forty long years of persecution followed, for Chong Mong-ju's hatred of the Lady Om and me was deathless. Worse luck, he was favoured with long life as well as were we cursed with it. I have said the Lady Om was a wonder of a woman. Beyond endlessly repeating that statement, words fail me, with which to give her just appreciation. Somewhere I have heard that a great lady once said to her lover: "A tent and a crust of bread with you." In effect that is what the Lady Om said to me. More than to say it, she lived the last letter of it, when more often than not crusts were not plentiful and the sky itself was our tent.

Every effort I made to escape beggary was in the end frustrated by Chong Mong-ju. In Songdo I became a fuel-carrier, and the Lady Om and I shared a hut that was vastly more comfortable than the open road in bitter winter weather. But Chong Mong-ju found me out, and I was beaten and planked and put out upon the road. That was a terrible winter, the winter poor "What-Now" Vandervoot froze to death on the streets of Keijo.

In Pyeng-yang I became a water-carrier, for know that that old city, whose walls were ancient even in the time of David, was considered by the people to be a canoe, and that, therefore, to sink a well inside the walls would be to scupper the city. So all day long thousands of coolies, water-jars yoked to their shoulders, tramp out the river gate and back. I became one of these, until Chong Mong-ju sought me out, and I was beaten and planked and set upon the highway.

Ever it was the same. In far Wiju I became a dog-butcher, killing the brutes publicly before my open stall, cutting and hanging the caresses for sale, tanning the hides under the filth of the feet of the passers-by by spreading the hides, raw-side up, in the muck of the street. But Chong Mong-ju found me out. I was a dyer's helper in Pyonhan, a gold-miner in the placers of Kang-wun, a rope-maker and twine-twister in Chiksan. I plaited straw hats in Padok, gathered grass in Whang-hai, and in Masenpo sold myself to a rice farmer to toil bent double in the flooded paddies for less than a coolie's pay. But there was never a time or place that the long arm of Chong Mong-ju did not reach out and punish

and thrust me upon the beggar's way.

The Lady Om and I searched two seasons and found a single root of the wild mountain ginseng, which is esteemed so rare and precious a thing by the doctors that the Lady Om and I could have lived a year in comfort from the sale of our one root. But in the selling of it I was apprehended, the root confiscated, and I was better beaten and longer planked than ordinarily.

Everywhere the wandering members of the great Peddlers' Guild carried word of me, of my comings and goings and doings, to Chong Mong-ju at Keijo. Only twice, in all the days after my downfall, did I meet Chong Mong-ju face to face. The first time was a wild winter night of storm in the high mountains of Kang-wun. A few hoarded coppers had bought for the Lady Om and me sleeping space in the dirtiest and coldest corner of the one large room of the inn. We were just about to begin on our meagre supper of horse-beans and wild garlic cooked into a stew with a scrap of bullock that must have died of old age, when there was a tinkling of bronze pony bells and the stamp of hoofs without. The doors opened, and entered Chong Mong-ju, the personification of well-being, prosperity and power, shaking the snow from his priceless Mongolian furs. Place was made for him and his dozen retainers, and there was room for all without crowding, when his eyes chanced to light on the Lady Om and me.

"The vermin there in the corner--clear it out," he commanded.

And his horse-boys lashed us with their whips and drove us out into the storm. But there was to be another meeting, after long years, as you shall see.

There was no escape. Never was I permitted to cross the northern frontier. Never was I permitted to put foot to a sampan on the sea. The Peddlers' Guild carried these commands of Chong Mong-ju to every village and every soul in all Cho-Sen. I was a marked man.

Lord, Lord, Cho-Sen, I know your every highway and mountain path, all your walled cities and the least of your villages. For two-score years I wandered and starved over you, and the Lady Om ever wandered and starved with me. What we in extremity have eaten!--Leavings of dog's flesh, putrid and unsaleable, flung to us by the mocking butchers; minari, a water-cress gathered from stagnant pools of slime; spoiled kimchi that would revolt the stomachs of peasants and that could be smelled a mile. Ay--I have stolen bones from curs, gleaned the public road for stray grains of rice, robbed ponies of their steaming bean-soup on frosty nights.

It is not strange that I did not die. I knew and was upheld by two things: the first, the Lady Om by my side; the second, the certain faith that the time would come when my thumbs and fingers would fast-lock in the gullet of Chong Mong-ju.

Turned always away at the city gates of Keijo, where I sought Chong Mong-

ju, we wandered on, through seasons and decades of seasons, across Cho-Sen, whose every inch of road was an old story to our sandals. Our history and identity were wide-scattered as the land was wide. No person breathed who did not know us and our punishment. There were coolies and peddlers who shouted insults at the Lady Om and who felt the wrath of my clutch in their topknots, the wrath of my knuckles in their faces. There were old women in far mountain villages who looked on the beggar woman by my side, the lost Lady Om, and sighed and shook their heads while their eyes dimmed with tears. And there were young women whose faces warmed with compassion as they gazed on the bulk of my shoulders, the blue of my eyes, and my long yellow hair--I who had once been a prince of Koryu and the ruler of provinces. And there were rabbles of children that tagged at our heels, jeering and screeching, pelting us with filth of speech and of the common road.

Beyond the Yalu, forty miles wide, was the strip of waste that constituted the northern frontier and that ran from sea to sea. It was not really waste land, but land that had been deliberately made waste in carrying out Cho-Sen's policy of isolation. On this forty-mile strip all farms, villages and cities had been destroyed. It was no man's land, infested with wild animals and traversed by companies of mounted Tiger Hunters whose business was to kill any human being they found. That way there was no escape for us, nor was there any escape for us by sea.

As the years passed my seven fellow-cunies came more to frequent Fusan. It was on the south-east coast where the climate was milder. But more

than climate, it lay nearest of all Cho-Sen to Japan. Across the narrow straits, just farther than the eye can see, was the one hope of escape Japan, where doubtless occasional ships of Europe came. Strong upon me is the vision of those seven ageing men on the cliffs of Fusan yearning with all their souls across the sea they would never sail again.

At times junks of Japan were sighted, but never lifted a familiar topsail of old Europe above the sea-rim. Years came and went, and the seven cunies and myself and the Lady Om, passing through middle life into old age, more and more directed our footsteps to Fusan. And as the years came and went, now one, now another failed to gather at the usual place. Hans Amden was the first to die. Jacob Brinker, who was his road-mate, brought the news. Jacob Brinker was the last of the seven, and he was nearly ninety when he died, outliving Tromp a scant two years. I well remember the pair of them, toward the last, worn and feeble, in beggars' rags, with beggars' bowls, sunning themselves side by side on the cliffs, telling old stories and cackling shrill-voiced like children. And Tromp would maunder over and over of how Johannes Maartens and the cunies robbed the kings on Tabong Mountain, each embalmed in his golden coffin with an embalmed maid on either side; and of how these ancient proud ones crumbled to dust within the hour while the cunies cursed and sweated at junking the coffins.

As sure as loot is loot, old Johannes Maartens would have got away and across the Yellow Sea with his booty had it not been for the fog next day that lost him. That cursed fog! A song was made of it, that I heard and

hated through all Cho-Sen to my dying day. Here run two lines of it:

"Yanggukeni chajin anga
Wheanpong tora deunda,
The thick fog of the Westerners
Broods over Whean peak."

For forty years I was a beggar of Cho-Sen. Of the fourteen of us that were cast away only I survived. The Lady Om was of the same indomitable stuff, and we aged together. She was a little, weazened, toothless old woman toward the last; but ever she was the wonder woman, and she carried my heart in hers to the end. For an old man, three score and ten, I still retained great strength. My face was withered, my yellow hair turned white, my broad shoulders shrunken, and yet much of the strength of my sea-cuny days resided in the muscles left me.

Thus it was that I was able to do what I shall now relate. It was a spring morning on the cliffs of Fusan, hard by the highway, that the Lady Om and I sat warming in the sun. We were in the rags of beggary, prideless in the dust, and yet I was laughing heartily at some mumbled merry quip of the Lady Om when a shadow fell upon us. It was the great litter of Chong Mong-ju, borne by eight coolies, with outriders before and behind and fluttering attendants on either side.

Two emperors, civil war, famine, and a dozen palace revolutions had come and gone; and Chong Mong-ju remained, even then the great power at Keijo.

He must have been nearly eighty that spring morning on the cliffs when he signalled with palsied hand for his litter to be rested down that he might gaze upon us whom he had punished for so long.

"Now, O my king," the Lady Om mumbled low to me, then turned to whine an alms of Chong Mong-ju, whom she affected not to recognize.

And I knew what was her thought. Had we not shared it for forty years? And the moment of its consummation had come at last. So I, too, affected not to recognize my enemy, and, putting on an idiotic senility, I, too, crawled in the dust toward the litter whining for mercy and charity.

The attendants would have driven me back, but with age-quavering cackles Chong Mong-ju restrained them. He lifted himself on a shaking elbow, and with the other shaking hand drew wider apart the silken curtains. His withered old face was transfigured with delight as he gloated on us.

"O my king," the Lady Om whined to me in her beggar's chant; and I knew all her long-tried love and faith in my emprise were in that chant.

And the red wrath was up in me, ripping and tearing at my will to be free. Small wonder that I shook with the effort to control. The shaking, happily, they took for the weakness of age. I held up my brass begging bowl, and whined more dolefully, and bleared my eyes to hide the blue fire I knew was in them, and calculated the distance and my strength for the leap.

Then I was swept away in a blaze of red. There was a crashing of curtains and curtain-poles and a squawking and squalling of attendants as my hands closed on Chong Mong-ju's throat. The litter overturned, and I scarce knew whether I was heads or heels, but my clutch never relaxed.

In the confusion of cushions and quilts and curtains, at first few of the attendants' blows found me. But soon the horsemen were in, and their heavy whip-butts began to fall on my head, while a multitude of hands clawed and tore at me. I was dizzy, but not unconscious, and very blissful with my old fingers buried in that lean and scraggly old neck I had sought for so long. The blows continued to rain on my head, and I had whirling thoughts in which I likened myself to a bulldog with jaws fast-locked. Chong Mong-ju could not escape me, and I know he was well dead ere darkness, like that of an anaesthetic, descended upon me there on the cliffs of Fusan by the Yellow Sea.