

# Landscape with Patrolman: A Sketch from 1923

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## Part One

Like an oyster to its shell, the carcass of a frozen cat stuck to the pavement; above it the red, tattered banner of a chestnut vendor fluttered in the wind.

White steam billowed from several food stalls that huddled together on the street corner. Standing in front of one of them, a woman blew away the steam and slurped down *udon* noodles covered with bright red peppers while her dark red-hardened breasts peaked out over the top of her dirty *turumagi*<sup>1</sup>.

On his way home from work, patrolman Cho Kyoyōng<sup>2</sup> gazed at the woman distractedly as he waited for his train to arrive. Two Chinese laborers in pale yellow work smocks rushed past him balancing poles on their shoulders with baskets at both ends. Unsold *daikon* glimmered whitely in their baskets. Crowds swarmed into the streets at this time of day with the regularity of the tides. The bell in the French Church echoed through the frigid air of the twilight sky that seemed to shiver like a thin sheet of ice.

Sniffing from the cold and hunching up his shoulders, Cho Kyoyōng adjusted the stand-up collar of his uniform and gazed at the pale sparks flickering over the railroad tracks. After one train left, a tall man strode toward him along the tracks: it was the section chief of his bureau. When Cho bowed to him respectfully, the chief deigned to lift his hand slightly in reply and then disappeared into the crowd.

He boarded the train (as an on-duty officer, he was allowed to ride free of charge) and moved to his usual position against the window by the conductor's seat, his hands thrust in his pockets. Whenever he rode the train, he couldn't help recalling an incident that involved a certain Japanese middle school student. . . One summer

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<sup>1</sup> *Turumagi* is a long, gown-like overcoat worn by both men and women in Korea (Japanese: *tsurumaki*).

<sup>2</sup> I have given Korean readings for all place names and the names of Korean characters in this story.

morning, he was standing in his usual place beside the conductor's seat when a middle school student boarded the train. Rather than move further inside the car, this student planted himself right beside the conductor's seat apparently so that he could feel the cool breeze. The conductor barked out, "Step inside the train," both because the boy was making a nuisance of himself and because passengers were not supposed to stand there.

"Is that so? And what about this other guy?" he retorted arrogantly, pointing straight at the patrolman who was standing nearby. "If he doesn't step inside, I won't either." (Naturally, he knew that the conductor was a Korean, too.) And the student just stood there casting a mocking glance back and forth at the embarrassed police officer and at the conductor .... Even now Cho was annoyed whenever he recalled the look in that student's eyes.

The train was jam-packed: a student with a pair of ice skates dangling from his shoulder, a red-nosed man who looked like an office worker, a housewife carrying her shopping bags, a Korean mother with a baby tied to her back, and a few *yangban*<sup>3</sup> buried to their necks in heavy fur coats.

All of a sudden, one could hear the sound of angry voices in the back of the train. All the passengers looked instantly in the direction the voices were coming from. It turned out to be a quarrel between a shabbily dressed Japanese woman seated in the train and a young student who was wearing white Korean clothes and stood holding onto a leather strap in front of her.

The woman was grumbling: "Well, I never! I go out of my way to offer you a seat . . ."

"What do you mean calling me "*yōbo*?" What on earth is a "*yōbo*?"

"But I said 'Mr. *Yōbo*', didn't I?"

"It's all the same to me. What a nerve!"

"I didn't call you *yōbo*. I said 'Mr. *Yōbo*.'"<sup>4</sup>

The woman had no idea what was the matter. With a look of bewilderment, she turned toward the other passengers in an effort to win them over to her side.

"Mr. *Yōbo*, please have a seat. Why are you so angry when I take the trouble to offer you a seat?"

Snickering could be heard throughout the train. Realizing there was no point in arguing with this ignorant woman, the young man fell silent and glared at her. Cho Kyoyōng felt depressed once again. Why did this young man get caught in such a quarrel? And why did this woman who protested her innocence take such pride in the fact that she was an outsider? And why did one always have to feel ashamed of who one was? . . . And then he recalled an incident that had taken place that same afternoon.

That afternoon, he and Takagi, a Japanese patrolman from the same department, were sent out to monitor a political meeting at a kindergarten in which candidates for the

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<sup>3</sup> *Yangban* refers to the hereditary ruling class who dominated the civil and military branches of the bureaucracy during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910).

<sup>4</sup> Japanese used the derogatory term *yōbo* to refer to Koreans during the colonial period (1910-1945). In this semi-comical scene, the woman displays her ignorance when she insists that by referring to the young man as *Yōbo-san* she intended to be polite to him. In Japanese, the suffix *-san* is added to people's names and titles and implies respect.

legislative assembly were giving speeches. Several candidates from the homeland<sup>5</sup> spoke first, then the one and only Korean candidate stepped up to the podium. Well-regarded even in Japanese circles, this former head of the Chamber of Commerce set forth his program in fluent Japanese. Right in the middle of his speech, a boy sitting in the front row got up and shouted. “Shut up, you pretentious *yōbo!*” Probably still a teenager, he was wearing dirty clothes. Officer Takagi rushed up to him, seized him by his shirt collar and dragged him out of the hall. At that moment, the candidate, raising his voice a notch higher, shouted out:

“We have all heard a most unfortunate word uttered. However, come what may, I am still one who firmly believes that all of us here belong to the glorious Japanese people.”

These words were met with hearty applause from certain quarters of the audience.

Now Cho thought about this incident. In his mind he compared the candidate with the young man. And then he tried to think about a country called Japan and then about a people who were Korean. And he thought about himself. Last of all, he thought of his job and imagined his wife and his only child waiting for him at home.

In fact, recently he had fallen into a state of vague disquiet. He was never free from the oppressive sense that he had left some duty unattended to. But he did not even try to ask himself where this sense came from—or rather, he was afraid to ask. He was afraid of opening his eyes and getting upset.

But what was he afraid of? And why was he afraid?

As if in reply, he thought of his sickly wife and child. If he were to lose his job, what would become of them? Still, when he reflected further, he concluded, “Of course, that must be the reason. But it is not the only one. Could that be the only thing that I am afraid of?”

Terrified, he lowered his head and quickly gazed out past the windowpane at the flickering city lights and at the throngs drifting under them. Ringing bells heralded the evening edition of the newspaper amid the claxon of automobiles. Bright street lights were reflected on the frozen pavement while the fur-clad crowd skidded along under them. A laborer with a red beard loitered at a dark street corner. Manure and the garbage carts were unhitched from oxen and abandoned by the wayside.

He got off the train in front of Ch’anggyōngwōn<sup>6</sup>

In the glaring light of the acetylene lamp, he saw the face of a consumptive fortuneteller floating up from the dark alley. An old man with trembling hands stood and read aloud from a book written in *hangŭl*<sup>7</sup> in front of a used-book store.

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<sup>5</sup> I used this term to translate the expression *naichijin*, the designation used to refer to Japanese living in the colonies. The word *naichi* was used by Japanese to refer to the main islands of Japan in distinction with *gaichi*—colonial possessions such as Korea, Taiwan, Micronesia, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Ch’anggyōngwōn was a new name for Ch’anggyōnggung, originally a royal palace of Korea during the Chosōn dynasty, which had been burned down during Hideyoshi’s invasion of Korea (1592-8) and was redesigned into a zoo and a playground by the Japanese colonial government in 1911.

<sup>7</sup> *Hangŭl* is the phonetic script for writing the Korean language which was created under the leadership of King Sejong (r.1418-1450) of the Chosōn dynasty in 1443.

When he turned at the corner, a man coming from the opposite direction suddenly bowed to him. Inclining his head in reply, he realized that the man in front of him was a splendid gentleman wearing an overcoat with a fur collar made of sea otter.

“Please pardon me for disturbing you,” the gentleman addressed him in the politest speech. He was looking for the residence of Mr. X, a high official in the bureau of the Governor General. (The man must have been a high official himself since he was paying a visit to Mr. X.) Unaccustomed to being addressed so politely by gentlemen, he was flustered at first but managed to give him directions to Mr. X’s residence. After hearing his reply, the man bowed a second time courteously then walked away in the direction indicated.

And then, at that moment, something happened inside him. He was shocked to make a major discovery. “Wow,” he thought, “just now I felt very happy almost in spite of myself!”

Being treated politely by that Japanese gentleman just now gave me a real, if slight, feeling of pleasure. I was happy without really knowing why just as a child is delighted when adults show signs of taking him seriously.... But he was in no laughing mood when he recalled the young man earlier that day, not to mention the candidate for the legislative assembly.

He thought, “This is not merely my personal problem. For a long time, our people have been shaped by history so that we eventually acquired this national character.” Turning to the side, he noticed a man crouching by the roadside to urinate. It occurred to him that the Korean people know nothing of the custom of standing when they take a leak outdoors. He felt as though he had discovered hidden in this trivial custom an index to the perennially servile spirit of the Korean people.

## Part Two

The copper-plated sun passed over the frozen December road and then with a shiver dropped behind the bald and reddish mountains. Pale Mount Pukhan, saw-shaped, was frozen against the backdrop of the gray sky. Winds blew down from its summit as fast as light and the sharp cold stung the cheeks of the passersby. It was bone-cracking cold.

Every morning several corpses were discovered under the Namdae Gate<sup>8</sup>. One man died with his hands lifted as if to grab a vine of ivy stuck to the wall. Another, lying on his back, his face covered with purplish freckles, looked as though he had fallen asleep there. On the frozen surface of the Han River, a group of old men had opened holes in the ice and were poking for carp as they smoked their long pipes. In the wood on the opposite bank, poor people were stealing all the firewood they could carry to heat their

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<sup>8</sup> Literally, the great south gate. It was one of four gates in cardinal directions constructed during Chosŏn dynasty in the central part of present-day Seoul.

*ondol*.<sup>9</sup> An ox pulled a cart full of ice as pale blue as the mountain; icicles formed from frozen saliva that hung from its chin.

There was practically no snow on the ground but the roads were frozen solid. Many people fell after slipping on the icy surface of the road.

A Korean shod in boat-shaped wooden boots. A Japanese miss in her shiny *zōri*. A Chinaman in cloth shoes that resembled bear paws. A Japanese student in wooden clogs who looked as if he might fall over at any moment. A Korean student of aristocratic birth wearing polished shoes. A Russian refugee who had crossed over into Wōnsan in her red high heels. A bare-legged porter, a Korean with a bundle on his back and shabby shoes. Occasionally, one saw a beggar whose legs had been amputated at the knees dragging himself along the ground. His legs looked swollen and reddish in the lamplight because of the cold.

It was 1923. Winter lay frozen over the filth.

Everything was dirty. And things had frozen just as they were, covered in dirt. This was particularly the case in the vicinity of S gate.<sup>10</sup> Chinese reeking of garlic and opium, Koreans smelling of cheap tobacco and red peppers, the odor of crushed bedbugs and lice, the stench of pork intestines or skinned cats thrown in the street: everything seemed to have frozen in its place without giving up its foul odor.

But it was early in the day and the air was still pure. One could breathe in a little fresh air at dawn when the magpies started to cry from the withered branches of the acacia tree. At this time, men were always returning from town, looking about with vacant eyes and rubbing their hands from the cold.

Many women were gathered there, Kim Dongnyōn among them. She was still new to the trade and had not yet made any close friends. Only one woman, Fukumi, befriended her. No one knew Fukumi's family name. None of the women could be described as robust, but Fukumi was exceptionally pale in color. An old woman from the neighborhood spread gossip about her, saying, "That one is really from a distinguished family." Yet no one had any idea in what way she was distinguished and she never let the other women in on her secret. And every day at 4:00 sharp, she would roll up her sleeve and give herself an injection.

Dongnyōn was puzzled and wanted to know how this woman made her money. And once she asked her to find out. The other woman answered with a bitter laugh, "You're still a novice here so there is no way you can earn as much money as I do."

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<sup>9</sup> *Ondol* is a heating system under the flooring traditionally used to heat Korean homes.

<sup>10</sup> S district is probably a reference to the red-light district called Shinchō. Most of the women who worked in Shinchō were Korean while the majority of their customers were Japanese.

## Part Three

A gun carriage raced across the bridge over the Han River, clattering loudly as it went. The bayonets of soldiers of the Yongsan Division<sup>11</sup> cast bluish reflections on the ice-covered inlet of Yōngdŭngp’o in the cold winter light. Every night the soldiers pitched their tents on the sand and practiced maneuvers against the red blaze of the bonfires.

A pack of students carrying a roe deer ran along the streets, sliding as they went. The reddish face of a female tutelary deity made of clay smiled gravely from a show window. The sound of hammering resounded loudly through the dry air: the Chōsen Shrine was more than half finished.<sup>12</sup>

In the school grounds of an upper secondary school, a new principal fresh from the home islands held forth in a solemn voice on the virtues of obedience and submissiveness to the student assembly. (He was a bit mortified when he realized that he had always tried to instill his students with the spirit of independence and self-respect in the middle school where he used to work in the homeland).

It was the hour for history class in an ordinary school and the young instructor was having a lot of trouble teaching his students about the conquest of Korea. “And taking this route, Hideyoshi fought his way into Chōsen.” And the sullen voices of the children echoed the teacher’s words as though they were parrots and the country they were speaking of were a different country very far from their own.

“And then Hideyoshi fought his way into Chōsen.

And then Hideyoshi fought his way into Chōsen.”<sup>13</sup>

That afternoon, the weather was cold and clear. The brownish, withered needles of the acacia tree swayed and rustled as a gust of the north wind passed through them.

A crowd stood in front of the Namdae Gate station as a gusty wind blew. Everyone had his attention fixed on the entrance to the station. A car raced to the entrance at a furious pace and a party of officials meeting someone at the station got out.

“The governor general is coming back.”

“I hear the governor general has returned from Tokyo.”

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<sup>11</sup> During the period of Japanese rule, Yongsan was a major military base located nearby a Japanese residential neighborhood; it now houses a large American base.

<sup>12</sup> The Chōsen Shrine was built by the Japanese colonial government to spread Shintoism in Korea.

<sup>13</sup> Toyotomi Hideyoshi, one of the three great unifiers of early modern Japan, led the Japanese army in two invasions of Korea (1592 and 1597) in an unsuccessful bid to conquer Ming China. The school teacher recites this phrase as a kind of mantra in order to drum this earlier precedent of Japanese rule into the minds of his students. Hideyoshi’s invasion and the earlier invasions of Empress Jingu in the 4<sup>th</sup> century were often cited as historical precedents that proved that Japan’s claim to rule Korea was an ancient one.

Rattling their sabers, the police took stringent precautions. Standing in their ranks, Cho Kyoyōng looked out at the crowd. Treading on a sheet of newspaper with his worn out shoes, he recalled the childish face and white hair of this governor general he had seen once before. Like all his predecessors, this governor general was a military man<sup>14</sup> but he was better thought of than any of his predecessors. There were even quite a few Koreans who held him in high esteem. Yet. . .

At that moment, the governor-general, his obese body wrapped in a thick, black overcoat, showed his affable, boyish face at the exit. The officials who had come to greet him mechanically bowed their heads in unison. Magnanimously returning their salutation, the governor stepped into a car waiting for him. Afterwards, the gaunt and unimposing secretary of state boarded the next car. Then both cars turned the corner at the Severance Hospital<sup>15</sup> and glided off in the direction of Namdae Gate.

At that moment the “incident” occurred. A man wearing a hunting cap and dressed in white suddenly rushed out from the crowd and the next moment he was brandishing a pistol. Aiming for the car in front he pulled the trigger. The gun didn’t go off. In a panic, the man fired a second shot.

This time, with a deafening roar, the bullet exploded, smashing through the rear window of the vehicle and tracing a diagonal path through the car. Realizing what was going on, the drivers of both cars suddenly accelerated and raced away from the scene.

For a moment the crowd looked on in amazement. A moment later, the policemen instinctively surrounded the outlaw. But he was still holding the pistol. The policemen and the outlaw stared fiercely at one other. He was a thin, young man about 25 years old. Still holding on to his weapon, he glared at the policemen with bloodshot eyes. He took off his cap and pounded it against the pavement with all his force; next he burst out in a desperate laugh and flung the weapon he had been holding into the crowd. The crowd quickly moved back. Taken by surprise, the police officers also pulled back and then discovered the weapon that had been tossed away. . . And then, an instant later, they were on top of him, pinning him to the ground. He did not offer the slightest resistance. Pale, he looked at the police officers with a contemptuous smile playing on his slightly trembling lips. His long, disheveled hair fell down over his pale forehead. There was no longer a trace of bewilderment and excitement in his eyes; all that remained was an expression of hopeless calm and compassionate contempt.

Cho Kyoyōng had seized the man by the wrist but he could not bear to look into his eyes. These eyes spoke only too clearly. He had the same sense of an oppressive force that he felt weighing on him everyday, but now it was twenty times as heavy.

Who was captured?

Who had captured whom?

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<sup>14</sup> This is a likely reference to Admiral Saitō Makoto, appointed to the post of Governor General of Korea by the Japanese Prime Minister Hara Kei in 1919.

<sup>15</sup> The first Western-style hospital in Korea was founded by an American missionary and Horace Allen, a medical doctor, in 1885. Originally named Kwanghyewōn, it was renamed Severance Hospital in 1904 to honor Mr. Severance who was a rich American businessman and became the greatest donor of the hospital.

## Part Four

Four or five prostitutes stood shivering against a wall in the red-light district, their faces powdered in patches. In the refracted light of the street lamp, the shadow of a man in the government service made them look like a line of prisoners standing in silence.

“How about it, mister?. . . Just a little bit of fun.”

“Not tonight,” replied the man and he jiggled the coins in his pockets and laughed. As he hurried away, the young man’s face, framed by a woolen hood he had on over his cap, vanished from the circle of light cast by the street lamp. When there were no customers passing by, it was as silent as the grave and you could faintly hear the sound of a wall crumbling somewhere off in the distance.

“Who, me? There’s nothing to tell. My husband died and I had no relatives to take me in. I had no other choice since there were no jobs available.”

“And your husband. What did he do?”

“He sold furs at a shop in Chongno.<sup>16</sup>”

A pale complexioned man, probably a craftsman, was speaking as he thrust his feet under the slightly soiled futon spread out on oilpaper above the floor heater in Kim D Dongnyōn’s room.

“When did he die?”

“This past fall. It happened all of a sudden.”

“How did it happen? Had he been ill?”

“There was nothing the matter with him. It was during the earthquake. He died then.”

The man stretched out his hand to grab a bottle of sake and gulped down a swig.

“Really? So your husband was in Japan at that time?”

“Yes, in the summer. He went with a friend to Tokyo. They had a little business to look after but they were planning to come back soon. And then, not long after, it happened. He never returned.”

Startled, the man lifted his eyes and looked into the woman’s face. After a moment of silence, he suddenly blurted out in a sharp tone.

“What? So you have no idea what happened to him. . . ?”

“What do you mean?”

“No doubt about it. Your husband was. . . The poor thing!”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> A major shopping street frequented by Japanese living in colonial Seoul.

<sup>17</sup> The man implies that Kim’s husband was one of the thousands of Koreans who were massacred by the Japanese authorities or by private militias in the wake of the Great Kantō Earthquake that devastated the Japanese capital on September 1, 1923. The Governor General of Korea effectively censored the media and tried to prevent any news of the massacre from reaching the colonized Koreans.



About an hour later, Dongnyōn was lying alone wrapped up in her covers and weeping in the dark. In the light of fires the bloodied face of her husband, exhausted from running, seemed to glimmer before her eyes.

“You had better keep your mouth shut about this. If not, you are asking for trouble,” the man’s parting words were still imprinted in the back of her mind.

Several hours later, Dongnyōn was racing like a mad woman on the pavement grayish in the light of dawn. She called out to the passers-by. “So you all knew about it, didn’t you? You knew what happened during the earthquake.”

In a loud voice she was asking the people around her for information about what she had heard from the man the night before. Her hair was in disarray, her eyes bloodshot and she was only wearing a thin nightgown despite the cold. Shocked passersby gathered around her.

“And so those bastards are going to cover it all up. Everything. Pretend that nothing happened. The filthy bastards!”

Finally a police officer appeared on the scene and seized her.

“Hey, you, keep your trap shut! Do you hear me?”

The woman put up a brave front but she was suddenly overcome with grief. Tears streamed down her face. She cried out,

“And you? How dare you arrest me even though you, too, are a Korean!”

After the woman was locked up in jail, life in the neighborhood near S gate followed its gloomy and depraved course as before.

The air was not just cold: it made one ache all over. Every part of one’s body felt frozen to death with the exception of the heart that continued to beat. Abandoned by the wayside, fish gills decomposed, giving off a reddish color and the head of a pig, chewed to bits, lay on a snowdrift in the shade. Indoors, people somehow managed to carry on, filling their sick lungs with air reeking of garlic and leeks like gas welling up from a ditch.

Nothing changed.

Everyday at 4 o’clock in the afternoon, Dongnyōn’s friend Fukumi would roll up her sleeve and give herself a shot. Only at such times did she have a vague recollection of her friend Dongnyōn who had suddenly disappeared. Every evening, a young Japanese man in rags came by to play his violin and a screeching sound like that of a squeaky wheel would drift over the neighborhood.

By dawn, a tall Chinaman<sup>18</sup> who came here regularly would leave under cover of darkness.

“What a terrifying star!” he exclaimed looking up at the sky. Then he put his hands in his pockets to check his money.

“Hmm. What a terrifying star!” And after repeating this meaningless comment a second time, he walked unsteadily home, and the sound of his shoes striking the frozen pavement resounded through the night.

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<sup>18</sup> *Shinajin* in the original.

## Part Five

Cho Kyoyōng was absentmindedly walking past the old, dark American consulate. Without wanting to, he could not help thinking of what had happened the night before.

After he went home from work, he was suddenly summoned back to the department by the chief of police. He rushed off to the department and entered the chief's office with trepidation. The chief handed him an envelope containing a single piece of paper and his daily wages without saying a word. He thought, "What I most feared has finally happened." Four days ago many students from the Kibun Senior High School had been involved in a fight with students from the K Junior High School.<sup>19</sup> He had had a small falling out with his section chief about the disciplinary action taken on that occasion.

He took the slip of paper without uttering a word and left the office. Afterwards he did not return home but simply wandered around for a while under the street lamps. Eventually he walked into the red light district near S. gate still holding the money in his hand. . . And he was just leaving this night, a day later.

Now it all seemed to him like an event that had taken place in the distant past.

A fine mist hugged the ground. The light from the street lamps filtered through the branches of the trees and fell in stripes along the road.

"What on earth is one to do?" At the back of his muddled mind he was thinking of his own condition as though he were another person.

"And what will happen to them?" he thought and the pallid faces of his wife and child began to flicker before his eyes.

And he suddenly pictured to himself a room he knew in a two-story building situated on one of the back streets. Five or six men were sitting on shabby chairs around a handmade table. Two candles were set on the table and their light dimly illuminated the faces of the comrades assembled in the room. A man with a red face pounded the table. Another with disheveled hair was plunged in thought. A third noiselessly scribbled a note on a piece of paper with his pencil. All of these men burned with hope for the future. Presently, one could catch snatches of their conversation.

Seoul---Shanghai---Tokyo

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Distractedly, he pictured the scene in his mind and compared his piteous state with that of these comrades.

"In any case, I must do something."

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<sup>19</sup> The dispute apparently pits a group of Korean students against a group from a Japanese school. This passage may be a reference to the Kwangju Student Movement that started in 1929, the same year that Nakajima was writing "Landscape with a Patrolman." Cho loses his job in the colonial police force because he protests the discriminatory treatment of the students in this dispute: the Koreans are severely punished while the Japanese are let off scot-free. Following this event, there were a series of demonstrations in colonial Korea.

All of a sudden he noticed that he was walking beside the Industrial Bank.<sup>20</sup> A group of porters, their litters tossed aside, sprawled on the ground like so much loose gravel under the pillars of this massive edifice whose cold doors were now locked and bolted. “Wake up,” he shouted and he flung himself in their tobacco-reeking midst and tried to shake one of them awake.

The man opened his bleary eyes, muttered something incomprehensible, and fell right back to sleep. Clearly annoyed, he shifted his thin arm to shake free of Kyoyōng’s grasp and rolled over; the long thin pipe fell with a thud to the ground from his ringworm-infested mouth.

“You guys,” suddenly a strange, unaccountable excitement welled up inside him. Trembling from head to foot, he buried his head in their rags and burst into tears.

“You guys... this land...this people...”

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<sup>20</sup> The Industrial Bank (Chōsen Shokusan Ginkō) was a state bank established by the Japanese government in 1918 to supply long term financing to businesses in Korea which soon dominated the financial world of Korea, thus becoming a symbol of economic exploitation of colonial Korea by Japan.