

Poor Man's Wife

By Hyun Jin-geon

Translated by Sora Kim-Russell

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About Hyun Jin-geon

Hyun Jin-geon (1900-1943), pen name Bing-heo, was born in Daegu in 1900. He debuted as a writer in 1920 with the publication of his short story “Sacrificial Flowers” (*Huisaenghwa*) in the literary journal *Genesis* (*Gaebyeok*).

In the 1920s, Hyun participated in the New Literature Movement as a member of the literary coterie journal *White Tide* (*Baekjo*), with Hong Sayong, Yi Sanghwa, Na Dohyang, Park Jonghwa, and others. He earned critical recognition for his short story “Poor Man’s Wife” (*Bincheo*), published in *Genesis* in 1921, and established his reputation as a major realist writer, ranked alongside Yom Sang-seop, with his publications of “The Corrupt” (*Tarakja*) and “A Lucky Day” (*Unsu Joeun Nal*) in *White Tide*. Some have described Hyun as one of the pioneers of modern Korean short fiction, along with Kim Dong-in.

“Poor Man’s Wife” explores the conflict between art and daily life. A heavily autobiographical work, the story is told from the point of view of an aspiring novelist who has chosen a life of poverty and hardship in order to focus on his writing. One day, after witnessing the contrast between their situation and that of the narrator’s much more affluent relation, referred to as T, the novelist’s wife pleads with him to “find a way to make a living.” By presenting the wife’s position of wanting to support her artist husband while also being unavoidably bound to the desire for wealth and stability, and the husband’s observations of his wife, the story vividly portrays the conventions and hardships faced by the artists who lived under Japanese colonialism.

Poor Man's Wife

1

“Where could it have gone?”

My wife was muttering to herself as she rummaged through the armoire.

“What are you looking for?” I asked. I was sitting idly at my desk, browsing my bookshelf.

“I thought I still had a jacket left, the one made from Chinese silk...”

I didn't say anything. I knew why she was looking for it. She was going to ask the old woman next door tonight to pawn it for her.

I hadn't been bringing in any money for the past two years, and since we couldn't just starve to death, she'd had no choice but to cart all of our furniture and clothing to the pawnshop or leave it standing in a corner of the scrap yard in exchange for cash. And now she was searching for her one remaining silk jacket so she could procure tomorrow's breakfast.

I smacked my lips, turned over the book I was reading, and sighed.

Though spring was half over, cold damp air was still creeping into the corners of the room at night and wrapping around us, and I don't know if it was on account of the rain, but there didn't seem to be anyone out and about despite the fact that the nights were growing shorter. The whole world seemed emptied out, and the constant drip-drip of the rain filled me with sad thoughts.

“Damn it. To hell with it all.”

Unable to bear the sadness, I muttered curses to myself and combed my disheveled hair back with my fingers. But cursing only made me more miserable. I sighed again, rested my head on my left arm, and closed my eyes.

The day's events flashed through my mind.

I had just finished a late lunch and was lighting up a cigarette when T, who works at Hanseong Bank, came to visit. He'd said he had the day off.

Though our families didn't live far away, I didn't like for them to see what we'd been reduced to, and despite the fact that we never badgered them for help or scrounged for scraps when we did go over, they were always ready with a frown and their shields up for fear we might start begging, and so I'd stopped visiting, and accordingly no one came to see us, either. T alone dropped by often, perhaps because we were closer in kinship.

T was a gentle, faithful soul who found joy and sorrow in the little things. Being of about the same age, he and I were always compared to each other. And I always came up short.

"T is a good person, honest, and knows his way around money. That kid knows how to save! But K (that's me) is good for nothing. He thinks he's going to be some famous writer of Joseon just because he can throw a few fancy words together and scribble a little nonsense! That fool!"

That's how the family talked about us. For some reason, if I so much as mentioned literature, they got bent out of shape. Plus, while I never had any money to contribute when it was someone's birthday or when there was some other big event, T, with his so-called steady earnings, could always be trusted to help pay for the rice or noodles such events called for.

"It won't be long before T is living high on the hog and K is begging for scraps. Just wait and see!"

My paternal first cousin once removed said that about us. And even if he hadn't said it out loud, my parents, and probably my siblings as well, were already thinking it. Nevertheless, my parents were different. They would get angry and tell me, "If you don't start making money soon, you'll wind up on the street!" But then they would add, "Sometimes fortune finds you later in life. Your luck could turn." They said this to console themselves, and to console my wife. I understood that while they'd given up on me, they still hoped and prayed that I would do well.

Anyway, that should be enough for you to understand the kind of person T was. Whenever T came over, I would force myself to laugh and make an effort to tell him funny stories. For my wife and I, eking out our lonely living, his visits were more than welcome.

Today, as well, he swept through the gate, set a long package wrapped in newspaper on the porch with a flourish, as if to say 'Lo and behold!', and busily untied his shoelaces.

"What's that?" I asked.

"That! That is a new parasol for my wife," he said as he took off his shoes and stepped up onto the porch. "She's been complaining that her current one is already worn out and the ribs all broken." He smiled brightly, unable to hold back his cheer. Then he looked at my wife and said, "Madam, would you care to have a look?"

He unwrapped the paper, slipped the case off, and opened the parasol. It was white silk embroidered with two plum blossoms.

"They had a lot of nice ones in black, but they looked too drab... She was really hoping for gray or orange, but they were out, so I bought this one."

He was defending his purchase, but his tone seemed to say, 'Could I have picked a finer parasol than this?'

“It’s a handsome choice,” my wife said. As she examined the parasol, turning it this way and that, as if bewitched, her eyes clearly stated, ‘I want one, too.’

I felt put out all of a sudden and stood and went inside. I said to T, as he continued to smile at my wife as she gazed at the parasol, “Hey, come inside where we can talk.”

T followed me in and spoke at length about inflation and the raise he got at work and the profit he’d made from purchasing a few stocks and the outstanding scores he’d received in athletic events at the bank’s employee picnic, and so on and so on, before returning home.

After seeing T off, I had returned to my desk and was pondering how to finish the story I’d been working on, when suddenly...

“Honey?”

Her trembling voice was right next to my ear. My wife had crept up next to me at some point and sat down. Her pale face was ever so slightly flushed.

“Can you please find a way to make a living?,” she said.

I thought, ‘Here we go again,’ and immediately became annoyed. But there was nothing I could say to her, so I kept quiet.

“We need to live like others do!” she said.

T’s parasol had really gotten to her. Given her unusual determination to fulfill her role as the wife of an artist, she ordinarily never uttered a word of dissatisfaction. But with the right push, she could be made to say the things she would normally have bitten her tongue on. Whenever I heard it from her, I thought, ‘I don’t blame her,’ and I was not without sympathy. But nevertheless, it fouled up my mood. This time, as well, I wasn’t unsympathetic and didn’t blame her, but it was still difficult to suppress my displeasure. After a moment, I frowned and said, “I can’t just start making money because you suddenly order me to. It’ll happen eventually!”

“*Aigu*, stop talking to me about eventually. You mean, a thousand years from now...”

My wife’s face flushed deep red, and there was an anger in her voice that hadn’t been there before. I looked more closely at her and saw that her eyes were brimming with tears.

I sat there, my ears ringing. A blaze of anger flared up inside of me. I couldn’t take it.

“Who asked you to be my wife? You should’ve married a day laborer! Some wife of an artist, you are!”

I bellowed vapidly at her.

“Oh!”

Her face changed color, and she stared at me aghast. Then she slowly lowered her head, and first one tear, and then another tear, and then drop after drop fell to the linoleum.

When I thought about how my wife must feel, carrying all of this inside of her even as she scrounged for clothes to sell so we’d have something to eat in the morning, an indescribable sadness seemed to sweep over me like an autumn breeze and crack my heart in two.

The melancholy sound of the rain grew louder and then softer and sounded all the more desolate on the lonesome night air, and the light from the oil lamp, its glass coated in soot, glowed as dimly as moonlight from behind a cloud and illuminated the gilt letters on the cover of the few Western books that I had purchased with such difficulty.

2

My wife, who had been standing worriedly in front of the armoire, started nodding as if something had just occurred to her and muttered under her breath.

“Ahh... that’s right! That day...”

“You found it!” I said.

“No, I already... The day my sister came up from Incheon to visit...”

“Ah.”

So the jacket that my wife had been searching so vainly for was already covered in pawnshop dust! When I saw how my wife, who took such great care with our possessions, down to the tiniest soy sauce dish, had forgotten whether or not she still owned that jacket, I realized just how much our poverty had been gnawing away at her spirit.

Neither of us said anything for a while. I felt a great pressure in my chest, and a strange sort of emotion bubbled up inside of me; I wanted to fight someone or scream my head off or weep and wail, and my clothes seemed to stick to my skin like lice crawling over my body until I could not take it anymore.

I made no attempt to hide what I was feeling, and said, “You’re probably fed up with living in this misery, aren’t you?”

My wife paused, lost in thought for a moment, and then her glazed eyes widened, and she said, “What? Whatever do you mean?”

“So it’s true!”

“I’m not fed up!”

The more we went back and forth like that, the more my anger deepened.

Then my wife said, her voice trembling, “What makes you think that?”

I raised my voice at her and said, “Do you take me for a fool?”

She looked me over quietly, a hint of anger shining in her eyes. I cut my eyes at her, as if disgusted.

“Did you think I hadn’t noticed? You’ve suffered patiently so far, but lately your attitude has been changing! I’m not saying I don’t blame you!”

As I spoke, the past flashed through my mind like a movie.

Six years ago (when I was sixteen, and she was eighteen), we had not been married long when I abruptly left home to fulfill my thirst for knowledge in the sea of learning. Like a willow branch fluttering in the gale, I drifted to China one day and Japan the next, but before I could drink my fill from that sea of knowledge, I ran out of money and had to return home a dilettante. My wife, who had been like a delicate bud on the verge of blooming when she married me, had since wilted, the lovely blush faded from her cheeks and two lines already etched into her forehead.

Fortunately, my wife's family helped us out with a single-room house and even furnished it for us, so we had a so-called home of our own. We managed at first, but without any money coming in, life became more and more difficult with each passing month. The sun rose and the sun set, while I read books for no wages and wrote worthless stories, oblivious to whether we had rice or wood. The fact that delicious food nevertheless found its way onto the supper table sometimes and I got to wear clothes that were not altogether shabby was entirely my wife's doing. Having no income herself, she had acquired these things by swallowing her pride and going to her parents to grovel for help. And of course that could only happen once or twice. She couldn't very well keep that up forever. In the end, there was no choice but to sell off the furnishings and clothing that she had brought into the marriage. I pretended not to notice all of that pawning and selling of items. She had gone to great pains to pay the gruff old lady who lived next door to sell our things for us.

Yet despite all of that hardship, she never stopped earnestly believing in and praying for my success. Once, after I had written something and then crumpled it up in a fit of anger because I wasn't happy with it, she became upset and cried and tried to comfort me.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself. I just know that one day your name will be known around the world! The hard times we’re experiencing right now are an investment in our future.”

Back when I was traveling abroad, I had been swept up by the so-called winds of change and decided for no reason that I didn’t like old-fashioned women. I sorely regretted having married so early. Whenever I heard about male and female students freely dating each other, my heart skipped, and I felt both jealous and sad.

But as I grew older, those thoughts went away. I returned home and got to know my wife and, to my surprise, found her warmth and purity appealing. Her love was not a self-centered love, it was a self-sacrificing love. When I eventually understood this, I was so happy! I would gaze at her wan face as she slept, exhausted and slumped over, still fully dressed, having fallen asleep while ironing clothes late into the night, and I would weep, so deeply moved by her, and think, ‘Ah, my angel who comforts and supports me!’

I knew that I had little to offer, but I was nonetheless determined to become a writer and devoted myself heart and soul to reading and writing. Of course, my work was of no value to anyone else yet. As a result, everyday life had become unsatisfying.

Despite having endured hardship for two years, my work continued to be in vain, and the items that had filled our house dwindled, and the clothing that had filled the armoire was nearly all gone.

Consequently, my wife, who’d been so patient, had recently taken to long, dramatic sighs. She would stand on the porch, her hand on the doorknob, and stare out at the distant mountains, or pause in the middle of sewing and sit there blankly, like she’d lost the heart to continue. I often caught sight of her worried, tear-filled eyes reflected in the glass as the day drew to dusk outside the windows.

Once, when that happened, lonely, indescribable thoughts filled my head, and I called out to her, “Honey!”

She startled and turned to look at me, wiping her tears with the hem of her long skirt.

“Yes?” she said, her fragile voice trembling with tears.

I felt like someone had dumped a bucket of cold water down my back, and I shivered, bleak thoughts sending a chill through my heart. My tendency to lower myself worsened, and I thought, ‘It’s my fault for being talentless.’ When I put myself down like that, the situation became even more unbearable. I was not without sympathy for what she was feeling, but I grew upset and muttered to myself, ‘Women are impossible.’

These thoughts loomed up one by one in my mind as if through a projector, and I lost the nerve to say anything. Now even my sole comforter and faithful follower had stopped believing in me.

She was probably thinking, ‘I wasted six years of my life, carved the flesh from my bones and sliced it up for him! That hateful man!’

It felt like the flames of her love for me were on the wane. Or rather, it seemed those flames had died out without a trace long ago.

In a flurry of sentiment, I said, “Why would I want you to suffer? Of course I want to give you silk clothes and fancy parasols! That’s why I study all day without rest. Others may think I do nothing all day, but it’s not true! They don’t know!”

I was removing my strong mask inch by inch and revealing my weak inner self, and I even offered up an absurd plea.

“I don’t care if the whole world ridicules me and puts me down, but if my own wife stops believing in me as well, I don’t know what I’ll do.”

Moved by my own words, I let out a long sigh, “Ahh,” and flung myself to the floor. My wife, who was probably hanging her head and biting her lip, called out in a trembling voice, “Honey!” and threw herself on top of me.

“Forgive—” She started to speak, but the sobs welling up in her throat stopped her, and she pressed her burning hot cheek against mine as she cried. The tears that sprang from her eyes felt warm between our cheeks.

Tears spilled from my eyes, as well. My troubled thoughts melted away like spring snow in our warm tears.

After a while, we wiped our eyes. I felt like a burden had been lifted.

“I had no idea you felt that way! Please forgive me!” my wife said, her swollen eyes blinking as if in pain. “No matter how poor we are, I could never be fed up with you! I devoted my life to you...”

I gazed at my wife’s blotchy, tear-streaked face as she quietly pleaded with me, and at last I felt some relief.

3

I was so exhausted by the events of the previous day that I slept late into the afternoon. When I woke up, the rain that had fallen last night had stopped, and cheerful sunbeams were shining high up on the sliding door. My wife had the armoire open again and was rummaging for something else she could pawn when we heard someone open the inner gate and step inside. We both listened carefully to see who it was.

“Madam!”

My wife rushed out of the room. It was the elderly housekeeper who worked for her parents. She reminded us that it was my father-in-law’s birthday and told us to hurry along.

“That’s right! Today’s the sixteenth day of the second lunar month. I completely forgot!”

“Hmph! How could you forget your own father’s birthday? No matter how much fun you might be having...” the impudent old woman said with a forced smile.

The fact that my wife had been so busy dealing with our poverty that she’d forgotten her father’s birthday made me pity her all the more.

“It’s my father’s birthday today,” my wife said to me. “We have to attend...”

“Go without me,” I said.

“You have to go, too. It would be rude, otherwise.” She blushed as she said this.

I loathed visiting my wife’s family. But it wouldn’t be right for me not to go, so I reluctantly put on my long *durumagi* overcoat.

My wife hesitated, the lines in her forehead appearing and then disappearing as she frowned and then cast a sidelong glance at me before finally turning and hurriedly opening the armoire.

‘Hmph, she must not have anything to wear,’ I thought and furtively turned away. Though we stood with our backs to each other, I couldn’t help but picture her, clear as day, rummaging through the all but empty armoire and frowning because there was nothing good for her to wear.

“Okay, let’s go.”

I had been standing there lost in thought, but when I heard her voice, I responded mechanically. She had changed into a cheap cotton dress. She seemed to guess what I was feeling, because she smiled brightly as if to reassure me. I felt even worse.

It was a long way to her family’s house in Anguk-dong from where we lived down by the river. Though I tried to slow my pace and she tried to speed up hers, she couldn’t keep up with

me. I would walk a ways and then glance back to see her far behind me, breaking into a trot now and then to try to catch up. Nearly all of the other women out and about were dressed in silk and wearing fine shoes, but my wife alone was shabbily dressed in rough cotton and trudging along in cheap shoes. It made me so sad to see her!

After a long while, I arrived at the high, wide gate to her parents' house. When I entered, unfamiliar faces looked askance at me. Their eyes seemed to say, 'Who's this? A servant?' When I neared the main hall, I was greeted noisily. Their voices sounded full of criticism and insults, and it made my heart race and my face flush.

One of them was friendly to me. That was my sister-in-law, who was three years older than my wife. At first, she had been awful to me, because I was so young when I married her sister. Back then, I hated and resented her for it. But over time, our animosity actually brought us closer together. She lived in Incheon, and her husband had apparently made over a hundred thousand *won* by investing in rice futures. She seemed to be keen on showing off her wealth, because she was dressed head-to-toe in silk, and her face oozed with affluence. But I noticed at once that she had a black eye, despite her attempts to cover it with face powder.

"You came alone?" she said with a laugh and looked over towards the inner gate. "Of course not! You wouldn't dare show up without your wife!"

I looked over, too, and saw that my wife had just stepped inside. Her already haggard face looked even more haggard, and as she smiled, her eyes seemed to sparkle with tears. I looked back and forth between my wife and her sister. They looked so similar that a stranger would have trouble telling them apart. And yet their complexions were so different! One was like a flower in full, riotous bloom, whereas the other was like a fallen leaf, dried up and crunching underfoot. If I'd said my wife was the older sister and my sister-in-law the younger, no one

would have doubted me. I looked again at my wife and felt smothered by an indescribable sadness. I skipped the food and guzzled four, maybe more, glasses of alcohol, though I usually never touched the stuff. But I couldn't shake the discomfort of feeling like I was on pins and needles. I stood up to leave. My head spun, and the floor beneath me pitched and rolled like the sea during a storm. I nearly collapsed from dizziness.

When my mother-in-law saw this, she jumped up and said, "Where do you think you're going? You're drunk. Sleep it off here and go home in the morning."

I waved her off and slurred, "No, no, I'm going home."

"Oh dear!" she fretted, and called for the elderly housekeeper. "Call him a rickshaw!"

Even in my drunken haze, I thought to myself that if she was giving me rickshaw fare, I'd rather walk home and use the money to buy a book instead. But the rickshaw driver didn't get far before I fell asleep in my seat.

When I awoke, the lamp was already lit. My wife had returned home while I was asleep and was sitting alone and sewing. Something was bubbling on the brazier. When she saw that I was awake, she checked whatever it was that was on the brazier and said, "Sit up and have something to eat."

She hurriedly rose and retrieved a bowl of rice from where it had been sitting on the warm part of the floor, closest to the furnace. She added it to a tray that was already set with food and placed it before me. Then she pulled the brazier closer and added the hot food to the tray.

"There, eat up."

I sat up reluctantly. My head hurt and I was thirsty, so I stuck to alternating between sips of warm broth and water.

"You shouldn't just drink water. Have some food, too."

As she fussed over me, she sat close to the tray and cut up bits of meat and pulled the bones from the fish for me. All of the food had been brought over from her parents' house that day. I ate hungrily, devouring the entire bowl of rice. When I was done, my wife began eating. I realized that she had not eaten and had been waiting that whole time for me to wake up, and I thought about what had happened at her parents' house. The events of the day before had put a wall up between us, but that wall was slowly coming down. I felt pity and love for her. We spoke to each other warmly about this and that. We started with her father's birthday banquet and moved on to her sister's black eye.

After my sister-in-law's husband made that money off of rice futures, he'd been spending his days and nights going around to pubs and *gisaeng* houses and had taken up with one *gisaeng* in particular and was running amok. When he did show his face at home, he tormented everyone and would beat my sister-in-law at the drop of a hat. This time, as well, he had flown off the handle over nothing and hit her with the dinner tray, giving her that black eye.

"See, that's what happens when people have money," I said.

"It's true. Getting along well with your spouse, even when you have to go without a lot of other things, is real happiness," my wife said earnestly.

It was indescribably satisfying to hear her say that, and I felt triumphant, like some kind of victor. I told myself, 'Yes, that's right. This is happiness.'

4

A couple of days later, around sunset, my sister-in-law stopped by our house. I was deep in thought at the time. When we heard the scraping of the forlornly shut inner gate and the whispering of silk, my wife got up from where she was sewing on the colder part of the floor, as the warm spot had gone to me.

“*Aigo*, come in, Sis!” I heard my wife greet her, and then my sister-in-law stepped into the room with a young female servant, who was carrying something.

I greeted her warmly.

“You must’ve been very sick after the banquet! Why did you drink so much if you can’t hold your liquor?” she said, and then grabbed the newspaper-wrapped bundle from the servant’s arms. She pulled a package from the newspaper and handed it to my wife.

“I bought myself shoes today, so I got a pair for you, too. When you came to the birthday party in those...”

She cut her eyes at me and didn’t say anything more.

“You didn’t need to do that,” my wife said, her pale face turning pink.

Her sister pretended not to hear her and continued.

“I gave my husband a good badgering before I left and got a hundred *won* out of him. So I went to Jongno and bought some fabric and some shoes...”

Her face lit up as she unwrapped the rest of the bundle.

“Tada!”

I didn’t know anything about fabric, but it looked like expensive, high-quality silk.

There was silk with patterns, silk without patterns, gray silk, jade silk, bright green silk, pink silk. I was dazzled by all the shiny, colorful things. Unsure of what sort of praise to give, I said, “This looks very fine.”

After I said it, I felt sad again. How did my wife feel to see all of that?

“That’s because she only picks the finest things,” my wife said. Her praise didn’t seem to hint of any jealousy. I was a little surprised.

My sister-in-law started badmouthing her husband. She punctuated each comment about how hateful and stubborn he was with one unsavory detail after another and then suddenly stopped and jumped up.

“Where are you going in such a hurry?” my wife said. “It’s been so long since you last visited. We don’t have much to eat, but at least stay for supper.”

“No, I have to leave right away. I told him I’d be returning on the evening train, so I have to go put my things on board. The train doesn’t leave until late? Even so, I should get to the station early. If I miss the train, he’ll be stuck waiting for me. I already sent him a message that I would be on that train...”

We tried to get her to stay longer, but she rushed off. We bid her farewell at the gate and went back inside. I laughed and said to my wife, “Why hurry home to a man like that?”

My wife laughed.

“But then again, maybe she doesn’t want to keep him waiting since he gave her money for fabric,” I said.

I pitied the fact that, despite her hateful and stubborn husband, material gratification was enough to give her joy and comfort.

“That’s a good point,” my wife said with a smile.

The shoes my sister-in-law had bought for her caught her eye (or maybe she had been suppressing her desire for them for fear of making me feel bad), and she picked up the package and slowly started to unwrap it. But then she stopped, as if it contained something dangerous that might injure her.

“Hurry up and open it,” I said.

When I urged her on, she ripped off the newspaper wrapping in excitement.

“They’re so pretty.”

She spoke with a joy that I rarely got to hear in her voice these days. She set the shoes down gently on the floor, pulled her socks up tight, and slipped her feet delicately into the shoes.

“A perfect fit!”

Her face overflowed with joy as she crowed with delight over and over.

As I watched my wife rejoice over her new shoes, I again thought to myself, ‘Women are impossible!’ And I also thought, ‘Maybe she was just being careful all that time not to hurt my feelings.’ A shadow, dark as night, weighed over my heart.

So she must have felt jealous after all when she saw all the fabric her sister had bought. She just didn’t show it. But one simple ‘hurry up and open it’ from me, and she revealed the thoughts she’d kept hidden.

Oblivious to what was going through my mind, my wife lifted up one foot clad in its new shoe and said, “What do you think?”

“Very pretty!”

I answered her as if everything was fine, but inside, I felt sad. That my wife should find joy and satisfaction in a new pair of shoes given to her by someone else, rather than purchased for her by her husband!

But for some reason, this time, I didn’t feel *that* unhappy. I thought about the way my sister-in-law had spoken ill of her husband only to rush out, worried that he would be kept waiting if she missed her train. When I considered that, I could understand how my wife felt. She had no choice but to try to be satisfied with intangible happiness, but the truth is that it wasn’t enough. All she could do was be patient. I had to keep that in mind. And when I did think about that, I regretted the things I’d said to my wife the day before.

‘Someday, I’ll be able to repay you for everything you’ve done for me!’ I thought.

I decided to be more understanding, and I said to her, “I wish I could hurry up and become successful so I can buy you a pair of silk shoes...”

“What...?”

It was the first time she had ever heard me say anything like that. She stared at me wide-eyed, like she didn’t trust her own ears, and her face flushed a little.

“It won’t be long!” she said with fervor.

“You really think so?” I asked. I felt a little excited.

“Of course. Absolutely.”

She alone appreciated me deeply, the nameless writer whose work no one yet cared about. That was how she had come this far, resisting the powerful instinctive urge for material things and helping me without a frown.

‘Ah, my angel who comforts and supports me!’

I shouted those words inside my head, threw my arms around my wife, and pulled her close to me. Then a warm kiss...

From her eyes and my eyes alike, tears spilled like a kettle boiling over.

Translated by Sora Kim-Russell

