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DEAR READER

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THE UNAUTHORIZED
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
KIM JONG IL

MICHAEL MALICE

“When the word leader, or leadership, returns to current use, it connotes a relapse into barbarism. For a civilized people, it is the most ominous word in any language.”

Isabel Paterson, 1943

Chapter 1

Korea is Lost

I remember the day that I was born perfectly.

Over the northernmost part of Korea towers Mt. Paektu. Its majesty has fascinated mankind for centuries. The mountains around Mt. Paektu are covered with whitish pumice stone, giving them a snow-capped appearance even in summer. Mt. Paektu itself is topped not by a peak but by Lake Chon, enormous and mysterious. Though many artists have captured Mt. Paektu's solemn and noble image, none have been able to communicate its soul. When the sun rises on Mt. Paektu, the entire expanse of Korea becomes full of vitality.

This ancestral mountain of the Korean people encompasses the entire nation's spirit—and it was also where I was born. Mt. Paektu is located at 42 degrees north latitude, and I was born in 1942. The mountain known as General Peak stands exactly 216 meters away, and I was born on 2/16. There are too many significant facts associated with my birth for them all to be a mere coincidence.

There was something mysterious about the weather on the day of my birth, like a wonder from heaven. Normally, violent snowstorms accompanied the mid-February temperature of around -40 degrees. But on the day that I was born, snowflakes began dancing like flowers on the summit of General Peak. The morning sun shone so strongly that the thick ice covering Lake Chon began to break. The cracking sound resounded through the mountains, as if the great fortune of Korea was gushing out from the bottom of the lake.

The greatest wonders of Mt. Paektu were at the base, where stood the

secret base camp of the Korean revolution's central leadership. It was in that humble log cabin that I was born. My name came from my parents: The "Jong" is after my mother, anti-Japanese heroine Kim Jong Suk, while the "Il" came from my father. Father was not there to greet me on the day of my birth, for General Kim Il Sung was leading the Korean revolution. The labor that he was engaged in that day was part of a process far longer and more difficult. He was giving birth to a free, liberated Korea.

At the time of my birth, there was no "North Korea" or "South Korea." There was Korea and only Korea, and the idea of such a nation being split in half was an absurdity. Korea had been one unified nation for over 5,000 years. The ancient Koreans had lived on the same Korean peninsula since the Neolithic era. At the beginning of the third millennium B.C., the Korean state of Chosun was established by King Tangun in Pyongyang—the very city which remains the capital today. Indeed, Chosun was the first political state in the world.

Each state on earth has undergone a complicated formation process. Some were formed by merging two or more clans or races. Others were founded by a foreign conqueror. Still others were dominated and reigned over by foreign invaders, who were either repulsed or assimilated as history progressed. All of the other states in the world merged multiracial communities into one nation over a long period of time. Only Korea went through a course of steady growth as one single nation, maintaining her unity since the dawn of history.

The nation had a long and proud history under the Chosun dynasty, one of the longest-lived monarchies of all time. Not once in Korea's 5,000-year history did the Korean people commit aggression against any other country. Unfortunately, the same could not be said for her neighbors. Korea suffered innumerable acts of aggression from foreign forces over and over again throughout the centuries, with varying results.

As time went on, Korea's feudal government grew increasingly oppressive. The peasantry began to revolt by the end of the nineteenth century. Terrified, the authorities called in their Qing Chinese allies for assistance. Seeing an opportunity to strike, the Japanese invaded Korea under the pretext of "helping" and "protecting" the Korean people against the Chinese. They drove out the Chinese—but they never left.

In 1895, Japanese mercenaries raided the Royal Palace. There, they found Queen Min hiding in the corner of her bedroom. The Jap bastards slashed her repeatedly with their swords before burning her to death and taking King Min hostage. Now it was Russia, Japan's ardent enemy, who saw an opportunity. They rescued and reinstated King Min. The two states' growing conflict led to Japan unleashing the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, in an attempt to seize total control of both Korea and the northeast Chinese area of Manchuria.

The Japanese imperialists plundered Korea in the military's name. The Korean people were reduced to no more than slaves, forced to carry supplies and lay railways for the imperialist Japanese army. In the process, thousands upon thousands of Koreans were killed by Japanese soldiers. Those who weren't worked to death were instead shot at the slightest provocation.

The Jap devils successfully achieved their goal, driving out all the Chinese and Russian forces from the Korean peninsula. Japan then proclaimed a "treaty" with Korea in 1905. The king of Korea refused to sign the document, but there was nothing else that he could do. The Japs took control of Korea's internal affairs and imposed their own rule, depriving Korea of any diplomatic rights. Korea was no longer an independent nation, but instead a colony completely ruled by Japan.

The following decade was a period of ordeals, darkness and starvation for the Korean nation. The country was reduced to a huge prison, with

a terrorist administration unseen since the medieval era. As the popular saying goes: “ruined people are little better than a dog in a house of grief.” The people were forced into absolute submission and deprived of all their freedoms, including freedom of speech, assembly and association. The natural beauty of the Korean homeland was mercilessly downtrodden by the military jackboots and cannon wheels of Japan. Korea became a hell on earth.

Internationally, Korea was regarded as a weak nation and mocked as a backward feudal state. In 1907, for example, the world community held their second international peace conference in the Hague. The Korean envoy was refused the right to participate, which drove the man to commit suicide by disembowelment. If any salvation was going to come for Korea, it wouldn't be coming from abroad. It would have to come from the Korean people themselves.

The Korean people attempted to fight back under the auspices of the anti-Japanese Righteous Volunteers movement. The Righteous Volunteers successfully demonstrated that the patriotic spirit of the Korean nation still thrived. But they were unorganized and lacked weaponry, tactics and strategy. They couldn't withstand the Japanese offensives, and their struggle ended in failure.

Learning from such mistakes, my grandfather Kim Hyong Jik and several other independence campaigners organized the Korean National Association on March 23, 1917 in Pyongyang. This underground revolutionary organization drew its membership from people from all walks of life: workers, peasants, teachers, students, soldiers, merchants and artisans. In order to maintain secrecy, the KNA only admitted carefully selected and well-prepared patriots. Its documents were compiled in cipher, and they used code words for communications between its members. Yet despite all these precautions, the Japanese imperialists managed

to conduct a crackdown on the secret organization in the autumn of 1917. More than 100 people were arrested, including my grandfather—and though he was only five years old, Father was there to witness the whole thing.

It seemed as if the Korean people were doomed to an eternity of torment. Later uprisings, like those of March 1, 1919 and June 10, 1926, were also brutally suppressed, with many Koreans bayoneted in the street. The Korean people couldn't win, because a mass of people without a leader is no more than a crowd. They desperately wished for an outstanding revolutionary leader to come, someone who could lead them to victory over the Jap bastards.

The answer to the Korean people's most heartfelt wish came in the form of my father: Kim Il Sung.

I didn't fall asleep to bedtime stories when I was a baby. No, I was raised on my mother telling me all about Father and his upbringing. These weren't mere family tales intended to increase bonds between father and son. What Mother wanted to do was to foster my conscious and purposeful loyalty to Father as a political leader. She taught me about the validity of the revolutionary cause and its inevitable victory. She described the glory and happiness of fighting for the cause. She inculcated in me a sense of devotion, a self-sacrificing spirit and a sense of responsibility, qualities necessary for the attainment of the cause. Most importantly, she wanted me to follow in Father's revolutionary footsteps when I grew up

"Your father was born as Kim Song Ju on April 15, 1912 in Mangyongdae, Pyongyang," she told me. "One day, when he was a very little boy, he climbed an ash tree outside his house. Then he reached his arms out as far as he could so that he could catch the rainbow. That's how ambitious, good-hearted and virtuous the General was, even as a child only several years older than you."

It had always been clear to Grandfather that Father was not a regular child, for even in his youth he was full of revolutionary consciousness. Father honed his marksmanship skills by shooting Jap policemen in the eyes with a slingshot. Father despised the landlords who were oppressing the Korean people, and he resented the Christian missionaries who preached “turning the other cheek”—a surefire way for a nation to fall. Father always gave a hard time to the children of such types, never passing up an opportunity to shove them into the Daedong River.

When Grandfather was released from prison in 1918, he took Father with him to live in Manchuria, then the seat of revolutionary activity. After several years, it became clearer and clearer to Grandfather that a great destiny awaited his son. “The wealthy landowners are sending their sons abroad to study,” he told Father in 1923. “They believe that the United States or Japan are the places where one should seek modern civilization and education. But I believe in Korea, and that a man of Korea should have a good knowledge of his nation. You must experience the misery that the Korean people are living. Go study in Korea from now on. Then you will know what you need to do.”

Only eleven years of age, Father walked 1,000 *ri* (250 miles) back to Mangyongdae. This journey of learning taught him much about how the Korean people were being exploited. After two years of study, he heard that Grandfather had been arrested once again, and felt that enough was enough. Standing at the gate to his family home, Father took one last look at the place where he’d been born. “I won’t return,” he vowed, “until my country has been liberated from the Jap bastards!”

In early 1925, Father began a 1,000 *ri* journey for national liberation back to Manchuria. Much of his trip was through steep mountains, where wild beasts roamed freely even during the day. But though he was not yet thirteen years old, Father had no fear. Eventually he came to the

Amnok River that bordered Korea and Manchuria. Without a moment's hesitation, he crossed the river by walking on fallen leaves and officially began his quest to liberate his motherland. When Grandfather passed away in 1926, Father was more determined than ever to complete the mission that his own father had begun.

Once in Manchuria, Father discovered that the Korean revolution was under the command of the communists and the nationalists. To his

ON REVOLUTION

Dictators often use the word "revolution" to justify their acts. But suppressing and even murdering honest people cannot be justified by the term. Regardless of their form and character, any historical acts pervaded with a disregard for man can only be counter-revolutionary. Westerners don't like to speak of revolution, understanding it to mean overthrowing and destruction. Yet revolution isn't simply a violent struggle. It's a historical movement designed for the love of the popular masses, a process of constant reform on their behalf.

dismay, both groups were more interested in trying to control a tiny movement than in uniting the people. Father knew that it was the masses who were the masters of the revolution, not some faction. For a revolution to work, revolutionaries needed to go into the masses to educate them, organize them and arouse them into revolutionary struggle. Mother always stressed this last point repeatedly. Some thought revolution was inevitable, but it was very clear that

Mother felt otherwise. Without Father, she insisted, it would have been the same failed rebellions over and over again.

On June 30, 1930, after years of organizing, Father was finally ready to set out his strategy for reclaiming Korea from the evil Japanese. He

convened a meeting of leading cadres in Kalun and mapped out what he foresaw as the precise course of the Korean revolution. Father emphasized that the revolution had to be carried out on one's own responsibility and with one's own conviction, without asking for approval or directives from others. To suit the Korean situation, the Korean revolution needed to be carried out by Koreans themselves at all times. This was a great idea, and it was an unprecedented idea.

It was the Juche idea.

"Korea has been conquered through Japan's force of arms," Father went on, "and that is how she will be freed. Rioting and demonstrations are all well and good, but the Japanese oppression calls for armed struggle. Violence should be countered with violence, and arms should be countered with arms."

Many of the cadres were concerned. The Japs had far more men and far greater technology. They pointed out that armed struggle seemed like suicide—and they were right. Direct armed struggle *would* have been suicide. Yet there was one method by which a small number of men could defeat a larger, more powerful foe: guerrilla warfare.

In 1932, at the age of twenty, Father organized what would become the Korean People's Revolutionary Army. At that time, there was no liberated zone anywhere in Korea, nor was there any foreign assistance. No rich man offered war funds. Not a single missionary provided support. Yet none of that mattered. Father believed in the Korean people, and so he and his guerrillas organized the masses themselves. They helped farmers, sweeping their backyards and splitting firewood. They worked on the farms, conducting political education in plain words. Activists carried mimeograph machines on their backs, printing publications. Wherever they went, the guerrillas actively developed political work among the people. And whenever they could, they fought the Jap bastards.

Under Father's leadership, the KPRA became a powerful force in a few short years. His brilliant knowledge and indomitable iron will were unprecedented in the history of world military affairs. His Juche-oriented strategy and superb command were wholly original, with nothing like them to be found in any book on military science anywhere in any era. The guerrillas wrested weapons from the enemy and armed themselves with them. Making the most of their familiar terrain, the KPRA frustrated the Japanese imperialists at every turn. Father's men grew so fond of him that they renamed him "Kim Il Sung," meaning "the sun to come." His new name reflected the people's desire that he become Korea's savior, shining across the entire peninsula.

In 1936, General Kim Il Sung and the KPRA built their secret headquarters at the foot of Mt. Paektu. Now they had a base from which to launch attacks, which they constantly did. On a localized level, such successful skirmishes destroyed the myth of Japanese invincibility—which was replaced by the myth of General Kim Il Sung. The people began to say that he was gifted with second sight, that he applied a magical method of contracting space, that he was a commander sent from heaven to liberate Korea. But due to the strict news blackout imposed by the Japs, his military successes were never established as the truth. In fact, the Japanese censorship was so successful and pervasive that no contemporary accounts of General Kim Il Sung's activities exist.

Though the people believed in General Kim Il Sung and desperately wanted the KPRA to win, after three decades of Japanese rule many still believed that victory was impossible. The Japanese were simply too strong. The guerrillas needed to demonstrate that they could actually accomplish what they had set out to.

Then came Pochonbo.

Whenever Mother mentioned the town's name, her entire body tensed

with excitement. To hear her discuss the battle was to actually be there on that historic day. On June 3, 1937 the main KPRA unit broke through the enemy's border guards outside Pochonbo. They organized and planned and waited, watching the town from atop a hill. The following night, at precisely 10 p.m., General Kim Il Sung fired his pistol into the air. The gunshot was a greeting to the Korean motherland—and a challenge to the Japanese imperialists who were about to be punished.

At the sound of his signal, the KPRA soldiers started their attack. In an instant, the police substation was destroyed and set ablaze. The raging fire quickly spread, consuming the Japanese edifices of oppression one after another. The subcounty office fell first, followed by the forest protection office, the fire station and the post office. Soon Pochonbo was a sea of flames.

The Pochonbo victory shook the colonial ruling system to its very foundation. Prior to that night, the Japanese imperialists had bragged that there wouldn't be any more "disturbances" in Korea. They believed that they had everything under complete and utter control—until the large KPRA force brazenly swept away the enemy's ruling machinery. The haystack that the Japs had been carefully building for decades went up in flames in a single instant. The light it gave off—the light of national liberation—blazed over the Korean peninsula.

After Pochonbo, everyone in Korea knew that General Kim Il Sung and his army had come to set the nation free. The people looked up to him with unbounded respect and reverence, while the Jap imperialists trembled with uneasiness at the mention of his name. The Korean revolution was no longer a mere guerrilla struggle. This was war, and it was the first national-liberation war in colonial countries in world history. Publicly humiliated and running scared, the Japs responded with ever-increasing brutality. A bounty was placed on General Kim Il Sung's head,

one that grew larger and larger as the Japanese desperation grew.

Then the crafty Jap bastards changed their plan. It was no longer enough for them to simply rule, exploit and enslave the Korean people. Now they tried to destroy the very idea of Korea itself. Korea has always been a homogenous nation that hated assimilation with alien countries and took pride in her pure blood. The Jap propagandists began to spread the lie that Koreans shared the same ancient progenitor and bloodline as the Japanese themselves. They claimed that both peoples belonged to one “imperial” race. Their dominant slogan was “Japan and Korea as one body!” The Japs forced every Korean to take a Japanese name, and introduced the alien religion of Shinto into the Korean nation.

In a final humiliating attempt at domination, the Japs even outlawed the Korean language itself. Schools became taught exclusively in Japanese, and a nationwide campaign was launched to “encourage” the Korean people to abandon their language of thousands of years. Korean newspapers were outlawed. Mass media, literary works and music: all were subverted for the purpose of disseminating Japanese. Those who studied Korean were arrested, imprisoned or killed. The Japs’ scheme to exterminate the language was an unprecedented threat to the Korean culture.

Sensing a final victory in their grasp, in late 1938 the Japanese sent an unprecedented number of their men to find General Kim Il Sung and the KPRA—and to exterminate them once and for all. As the Japs threw everything they had against the guerillas, the men began an Arduous March to safety. During this hard trek, the guerillas fought tight battles against the enemy almost every day, sometimes more than twenty battles a day. Worse, an unusually heavy snowfall completely covered the mountains and made travel near-impossible. In some places the soldiers rolled on the ground to make a path; in others, they had to tunnel through. The guerrillas’ boots grew so worn that the soles began to come off. Their torn

uniforms exposed their bodies to temperatures that often hit -40 degrees. Yet the KPRA could not stop even for an instant, or else they would be set upon and killed on the spot.

As the march progressed, General Kim Il Sung employed a variety of tactics suited to the rising challenges. He combined large-unit action with small-unit operation. He concentrated and dispersed forces, using both zigzag and telescope tactics. As the KPRA battled the elements and the demon Japs, another foe emerged: hunger. Marching through deep forest, the guerrillas' meals consisted of handfuls of corn or a few spoonfuls of parched-rice flour. When those reserves were consumed, they choked down grass roots and the bark of trees. Soon even those were not available; there was only snow to allay their hunger. The men collapsed one after another, exhausted from fighting ceaseless battles without food or rest.

General Kim Il Sung did what he could to inspire his men onward. "Please think of the homeland at every step!" he implored. "Never forget that you bear the destiny of the country on your shoulders. Brace up, a little more. Just a little more!" His warm care gave the soldiers the conviction and strong will they required to overcome this most severe trial.

After one hundred days, the men finally broke through to safety. The Arduous March was over, and victory was on the horizon. Rather than regarding the Japanese as invincible, now it became clear that it was the guerrillas who could not be stopped. It was no longer a boast that the KPRA could handle everything that the Japanese had. Each of the men had personally handled it—and they had survived. This filled them with great morale and a firm conviction to see the revolution through to the end.

Though the worst was over, there was never a moment where danger was eliminated; it only differed in degree. No one felt this danger more than General Kim Il Sung, for the Japs and their lackeys knew that defeat-

ing him would end the revolution and crush the spirits of the Korean people, possibly for good. During one skirmish, the General suddenly found himself tackled by one of his own men. Then, a shot was fired in the direction behind where he'd been standing. General Kim Il Sung was stunned, for he knew that he'd been seconds away from death. He moved to thank the soldier and compliment him on his marksmanship.

Yet when General Kim Il Sung turned around, he saw not a rugged guerrilla but a beautiful woman. "Are you all right, General?" she asked, scanning the trees for any other snipers.

"I'm fine," he said. "Thank you, Comrade Jong Suk."

Mother always claimed that she took no particular pride in saving General Kim Il Sung's life, but the fact that she repeated this same story so frequently and in such an animated fashion told me otherwise. In fact, it was probably the story about herself that she told the most. She was always far more interested in telling me about the General than in discussing her own upbringing.

In her own childhood, I learned, Mother had lost both her parents to the hands of the enemy. She soon joined the revolution, and venerated General Kim Il Sung as did all the other guerrillas. On the one hand, Mother was extremely traditional and deferred to Father in everything. She used to cut her hair, for example, and line Father's shoes with it. Another time, she washed his clothes and found it far too cold for them to dry outside—so she put them on herself and walked around in an effort to dry them out.

Mother insisted such behavior was a revolutionary following her leader, not a wife simply obeying her husband. She wasn't the weak submissive type that a stereotypical "dutiful wife" brings to mind. Known for her marksmanship, Mother was as comfortable holding a pistol as she was cradling a baby. She was just as much of a guerrilla fighter as any of

the men in the KPRA.

Mother always discussed her relationship with the General in terms of revolution, not romance. But sometimes she couldn't help herself and the truth came out. The two were married in 1941, at the height of the revolution. Most newlyweds look forward to a peaceful beginning to the rest of their lives. But by the time they said their vows in the Paektusan Secret Camp, the war in Korea had spread to engulf the entire world. The Nazis and the Italian fascists were battling in Europe. In Asia, Mao's revolutionaries were marching against both the nationalist Chinese and the Japanese forces. Russia and the United States were in the mix as well. It was truly a world at war—and this is the world into which I was born.

On February 16, 1942 the cry of a newborn was heard from the log cabin at the Paektusan Secret Camp, like a baby giant's yell piercing through the ancient stillness of the mountains. That night, a new star emerged in the sky over Mt. Paektu. This lodestar was special in its significance. When a beam of light from that star passed by a place, the land turned out to be fertile. If the beam shined over a region, all kinds of treasures gushed out from beneath the soil in torrents. The scene into which I was born has never been told in any of the myths of any hero in history, both on this earth or elsewhere.

The guerrillas at the camp swiftly exchanged the news of my birth. They'd been wishing from the bottoms of their hearts that another hero of the nation would be born, someone who would embody the General's character, genius and virtues. As if by mutual consent, the guerrillas gathered around the revolutionary flag and pledged once more to fight for the speedy liberation of our fatherland.

The news of my birth spread rapidly, like a legendary tale. Political workers throughout Korea grew so overjoyed that they inscribed messages on trees everywhere they went. This didn't make the Japs happy, to say

the least. The idea of a heaven-sent boy destined to bring independence to Korea gave lie to their myth of “one nation” unified forever under “one blood.”

Several months after my birth, in June 1942, I was finally able to see General Kim Il Sung for the first time. The soldiers at the camp welcomed him in

BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT, KPRA STYLE

“Twenty million fellow countrymen, the lodestar has arisen above Mt. Paektu, an auspicious sign for Korea’s independence!”

delight, as he updated them on recent small-unit actions. Then he came up to Mother, cradling me against her bosom. The General took me in his strong arms, holding me close to his heart and gazing into my lovable face.

“We shall bring him up to be an heir to the revolution,” he told Mother. “I want to see my son carry forward Mt. Paektu’s red flag.”

Mother couldn’t agree more, and raised me accordingly. The battlefield that was Mt. Paektu had no blankets with which to wrap up a newborn. Instead, it had camaraderie. The KPRA women tore cotton out of their uniforms, each contributing a piece of cloth to make me a patchwork quilt. When Mother had duties, she handed me over to other women in the camp for safekeeping. I was even breastfed by other guerillas on many occasions.

Some children spend their boyhood days pampered, living in an environment that nurtures in them a vague, poetic yearning for an unknown world. I grew up in an era of violent upheavals unparalleled in the thousands of years of Korea’s history. Due to the revolution, my childhood was replete with ordeals. My young mind was dominated by the stark and solemn reality of war, destruction and violence. Day in and day out, fierce battles raged on. Any breaks in combat were filled with

military and political training sessions. Everybody had to tighten their belts because of the training camp's supply shortages. Though the soldiers tried their best to obtain food for me, I often had to eat army rations or even flour-gruel as I got older.

The image I grew most familiar with was that of Mother in her military uniform, and the sounds I grew most accustomed to were raging blizzards and ceaseless gunshots. My childhood friends were battle-hardened guerrillas, my nursery a secret military camp deep in a primeval forest. My playthings were ammunition belts and rifle magazines, and my clothes were always impregnated with powder smoke. In those days, suffocating hot winds, biting snowstorms and strong rainstorms were more frequent than clear skies and warm spring breezes. I grew up amidst cold, hard reality: the reality of a fatherland which could be rebuilt only through struggle.

The world knew no one like me, bred on the field of fierce and grim battle, with so many family members devoted to the cause of the motherland and the revolution. I couldn't have grown up otherwise, being born on patriotic and revolutionary soil without parallel in the world. Can't we call this the will of history?

From my very infancy I was precocious and full of guts. In part, I was fortunate enough to be endowed with such qualities. More importantly, I learned the truth of life from fighters who had the strongest sense of justice in the entire world. The guerrillas' noble feelings became rich nourishment for my young mind; their mettle, as soaring as the height of Mt. Paektu, added flesh and blood to my manly personality. These brave men and women were the greatest that mankind had to offer—the precise opposite of the craven Jap bastards.

THE NAZIS OF THE ORIENT

Wherever they went, the Japanese troops engaged in murder, plunder and destruction. The Japanese committed every atrocity and every crime against humanity that their German counterparts did. Like their Nazi brethren, the Japs also experimented on live, human subjects. The notorious 731st Unit conducted such work in secret, tying prisoners to surgical tables and quartering their bodies without anesthesia. Those who weren't dismembered were subjected to germ-warfare experiments—once again, exactly as the Nazis did.

Yet the Japanese managed to do the Nazis one better. At first, Japan's soldiers raped or gang-raped women in occupied areas, often killing them brutally as well. The Japanese officers insisted that it was good for morale, claiming that "one must be able to rape in order to be a strong soldier." This attitude gave rise to strong anti-Japanese sentiment. Caring more about their reputation than the innocent women that they defiled, the Jap devils decided to draft women into becoming sex slaves—the first and only people to do so in history. Their victims of choice were the daughters of Korea, who made up of 90% of the total number of these "comfort girls."

The young men of Korea didn't have an easy time of it either. Japan did not let any "resource" go to waste in prosecuting the war. Nearly 8.5 million young Koreans—virtually the entire young labor force, a huge percentage of the 20 million total Korean population—were taken away to Japan, Manchuria and overseas areas occupied by the Japanese. The Japs detained such requisitioned Koreans in Nazi-style concentration camps. The Japanese worked the Koreans hard, with little rest, and without feeding or clothing them properly. Once a person was put in such a camp he would never come out.

Sometimes the Korean workers tried to run away, unable to stand the harsh slave labor. If they were caught, they were subjected to unimaginably horrifying tortures. If they became disabled and thereby lost their value as laborers, they were buried alive or burned to ashes. But for General Kim Il Sung and the KPRA, Korea's entire young generation would unquestionably have been destroyed.

One day in August of 1945, I was surprised to hear the guerrillas cheering with excitement outside the cabin. Mother swept me up and put me over her shoulder, dancing around with her comrades. "Jong Il," she said, "the best possible thing has happened today!"

I didn't dare say the words. I couldn't believe what she was telling me. "Can this be?"

"Yes! Korea is free! The day we have been fighting for has arrived at last!"

With the destruction of fascist Germany and Japan's repeated defeats on all fronts, the conditions had finally become right for one last national Korean offensive. The KPRA's all-out attack began on August 9, simultaneous with the Soviet Union's declaration of war against Japan. General Kim Il Sung led his army in a concerted push through the enemy's border strongholds, at the same time ordering secret fighting units to rise up across the peninsula.

The KPRA units advanced like surging waves, working in close contact with the Soviet forces. Due to the fierce attack of the KPRA units and the all-people resistance, the Japanese imperialist troops were annihilated. One week later, on August 15, Japan hastily declared an unconditional surrender. Cheers of joy shook the entire nation. As the victorious KPRA advanced southward, people rushed from their homes to greet General Kim Il Sung. Forty years after its loss of sovereignty, Korea had put an

end to her long dark night of stifling slavery.

Father was so busy attending to his great victory that he sent word for us to meet up with him in Pyongyang. It took two more months until Mother and I were able to make our way there, since so many of the travel routes were fraught with confusion. Finally, we ended up taking a freight car with the other KPRA women. After the hardships of the Paektusan Secret Camp, the lowly freight car still felt like quite a luxury to me. I wasn't sure where to look next as the train travelled through our beautiful motherland. I wanted to see every farm, every tree, every brave Korean that we went past. The villages put a bright smile on my face and filled my heart with joy. It was like I was living inside a fairy tale.

But inside the train car it was a different story. The proud KPRA women seemed more intense than delighted. "Why do they look so sad?" I eventually asked Mother.

She let out a deep sigh. "They're thinking of all our comrades who didn't live to see the homeland liberated. How nice it would have been if they were returning with us to the beautiful nation that the General has won back!"

As we approached Pyongyang the train sounded long, shrill whistles, as if it were to unable to hide its own excitement. When I caught my first sight of the city, I saw both the damage it had suffered—and the potential General Kim Il Sung always said that it had. But I was still a little boy, and seeing Pyongyang couldn't compare to seeing my father again. When we were finally reunited, I sat very quietly on his knee while my parents discussed all the work that had transpired.

"You know," Father said, "I've been meeting with important figures from Korea and abroad. I've been coordinating the transition to a free Korea, but the work has been very difficult. I almost found time to return to Mangyongdae to see my grandparents. I stood there at a fork in the

road, wanting to go back, but I knew that my schedule wouldn't allow it. Family could wait, but visiting the Pyongyang Cornstarch Factory could not. The people must always come first."

"General, they surely know that you're back by now," Mother said.

My parents both laughed at this. "I suppose so," Father said.

"Why are you laughing?" I asked.

"I'd held off announcing my return to Pyongyang," explained Father. "But due to word of mouth, I couldn't delay the people's desire to see me in the flesh any longer."

The day prior, the General had attended an enormous welcoming rally. As he mounted the platform, the audience had cheered, "Long live General Kim Il Sung!" The entire crowd had been so moved when they saw their adored hero that every single one of them shed silent tears.

Then he had come up to the microphone. "The time has come," the General said, "when we Korean people must unite our strength to build a new, democratic Korea. People from all strata should display patriotic enthusiasm and turn out to build a new Korea. Let those with strength give strength; let those with knowledge give knowledge; let those with money give money. All people who truly love their country, their nation and democracy must unite closely and build an independent and sovereign democratic state."

"Manse Chosun!" they had replied. *Long live Korea!*

"Now we can go to Mangyongdae," Father explained. "You can see where I grew up."

All three of us got into a car and returned to the family home. As we passed the brushwood gate, I could not help but pause to touch it. Here was the same exact gate where Father had vowed to return only once Korea has been liberated—a vow that he had now fulfilled, twenty years later. The modest gate had been transformed from one of tears, expecta-

tion and waiting into a glorious arch of triumph.

My great-grandparents greeted us in their humble peasant home, thrilled to be reunited as a family. We all sat on the floor around the table as Mother filled the men's cups with sake, everyone trying to speak at once. "I've been fully rewarded for the hardships I had to undergo," my great-grandfather said, tears streaking down his cheeks. "I can meet my grandson again, who has returned as a general. I can meet his wife, who is fine like a moon. I can hold in my arms my great-grandson, who shines like the first star of the evening and brightens this house. Thank you so much! Those who have gone before me would be happy in their graves."

As my family began to reminisce, my thoughts turned to when Father had been my age in the very place where I was sitting. I imagined him walking to school, picking fights with the children of the landlords. I imagined him helping around the home. And I imagined his mind brimming with Marxist revolutionary consciousness, visualizing a free Korea.

"General," I said, "do you remember when you climbed the ash tree to catch the rainbow?"

Father laughed, and then so did everyone else. "Of course. I was younger then. It was a foolish thing."

"Is that tree still there?"

He thought for a moment. "I don't see why not," he replied.

"There's no need to speculate," my great-grandfather told me. "The tree, the house, the family: we are all here, just as when your father left us. We are all a little older, but still our roots remain in the same ground."

I stood up and pounded my chest, mustering as much pride as any three-year-old could. "I want to be like General Kim Il Sung!" I announced. "I am going to climb that ash tree myself!"

Everyone in the family applauded. "Go catch us a rainbow," Mother said with a big smile.

With a salute, I left the house and walked down the path outside. Only then did I realize that I'd made a mistake. There were trees in every direction, and I had no idea which one of them was an ash tree. I wandered up and down the lanes, trying to figure it out for myself. Then I came across a bunch of village children playing around a tree that seemed a little different from the others. "Hullo boys!" I said. "That's an ash tree, isn't it?"

"You're right," they answered. "It's an ash tree."

I walked over and quickly climbed to a lower bough. "When my father was a boy," I explained, "he climbed this ash tree to catch the rainbow."

I climbed as high as I could as the children looked on. Then I shaded my eyes with my hand and scrutinized the skies. If I couldn't catch the rainbow, surely I'd at least be able to spot it. But, try as I might, I couldn't see it anywhere. All I saw were dark, ominous shapes.

I scrambled down the tree—almost scraping my knee in the process—and ran back to the house. The children called out after me, wondering what was wrong. But I wanted to be with my family. I needed to feel safe.

As I ran into the house, I hugged General Kim Il Sung as hard as I could and buried my head in his strong, manly chest. "Did you catch the rainbow?" he asked me.

"No," I replied, shaking my head.

"Did you see it, at least?"

"There wasn't any rainbow to be found," I admitted.

"It's all right," Mother said, stroking my hair. "The rainbow isn't always there. You'll see it another time, I promise."

"There wasn't a rainbow," I repeated, "but there were stormclouds upon stormclouds upon stormclouds."

"Where did you see so many stormclouds?" the General said.

I pointed my little finger to where they'd been. "That way," I told him. "They're coming from the south."