

# The Wings

YI SANG

*Translated by An Chông-hyo*

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN a *stuffed genius*?  
I am happy. At a time like this, even love is pleasant.

Only when the body sways from fatigue does the soul sparkley like a new, shiny coin. As nicotine seeps into my stomach infested by round-worms, a sheet of white paper opens in my head. I put down witty and paradoxical thoughts like checker pieces on that white sheet of paper. It is an abominable disease of common sense.

I again plan a life with a woman. So to speak, I am a spiritual straggler who has been, after a momentary peep at crystalized intellectualism, alienated from the strategies of love. I am planning a life granting only half of the woman—half of everything, that is. One foot planted in that sort of life, a half of myself chuckles at the other half, like two suns. I might have given up the life, bored to the bones by its ordinary events. Good-bye.

Good-bye. You may indulge in the absurdity of hogging for the food you hate most. Wits and paradox...

It is worth trying to counterfeit yourself. Your creation would be sublime and conspicuous among the ordinary products you have never seen.

Close down the 19th Century, if at all possible. The spirit of Dostoyevski can be easily wasted. Wise was he who compared Hugo to a loaf of bread for France. You must not be deceived by life or its phantom because of its details, right? Be out of harm's way. I pray you...

(When the bandage is cut, it bleeds. The gash will heal soon, I believe. Good-bye.)

Sentiment is a certain posture. (I may only refer to the ingredients of that posture.)

If that posture develops to a stagnation, sentiment ceases to dispose of itself.

In retrospect to my extraordinary maturity, I regularized my view point of the world.

A queen bee and a widow—among the countless women is there any one who basically is not a widow? Pardon. Is it an

insult, my theory that the whole of every woman in real life is a widow? Good-bye.

The structure of House No. 33 is just like that of a house of pleasure. At this house eighteen households live side by side—, their papered lattice doors identical and the cooking holes identical, too. And the residents are as young as blossoms. There is no sun for they look away from the sun. They block the sun's way into the rooms under the pretext of airing their stained bedding quilts on the washline under the eaves.

They take naps in the dusky rooms. Don't they sleep at night? I do not know. I never know because I sleep both day and night. In the daytime, House No. 33 of eighteen families is very quiet.

It is quiet only in the daytime. At dusk, they take their bedding quilts in. With the lights on, the eighteen rooms are brighter than they had been in the daytime. The sound of opening and closing the sliding doors continues to the late hours. They get busy. All sorts of smells start wafting around. . . the smell of roasting fish, the smell of waste water, the smell of soap. . .

The name plates are the most fascinating of all. There is a gate representing the eighteen households, though set apart at a corner. But it is always open, like a pathway. Any peddler could freely pass through this gate at any time of the day. The dwellers buy bean curd cakes at the door of their rooms, not out at the gate. To have all the name plates of the eighteen households put together at the gate of the house No. 33 makes no sense at all. Somehow, it has become a custom that they put their name plates above each door beneath the tablets showing the pompous names of the rooms; such as, "Eternal Perseverance Pavillion" and "Auspicious Pavillion."

We surely were fashionable enough to stick to the custom; at a corner above the door, we tacked my wife's name card as large as a train ticket.

I play with nobody, nor do I ever say hello to anybody. I do not want to exchange formalities with anybody but my wife. For me to play with or say hello to anybody won't do any good for saving my wife's face. I regard my wife as that precious.

I cherish my wife so dearly, because among all the women of the eighteen families at house No. 33, my wife is the most beautiful, and, like her name card, the most petite woman. In the shaded world under the tin roof, she radiates as the most beautiful among all the blossoms of the eighteen households. I cause an ignominious, cumbersome existence for her, looking after . . . just hanging around the flower.

My room— it is not a house, because we never had one—suited me by all means. The temperature of the room pleased me and the duskiness of the room comforted my eyes. I did not want any other room cooler or warmer than my own, nor a room darker or more comfortable. I thanked my room all the time because it seemed to maintain itself to please me, and I was glad that I might have been born to the world for that particular room. But I did not consider happiness or unhappiness. I never needed to wonder whether I was happy or unhappy.

Everything was all right as long as I was allowed to loaf day after day.

That I could idle in the room like fitting a well-tailored suit to my body and soul was a convenient and comfortable situation to be in, an ideal atmosphere far apart from the worldly speculations of happiness or unhappiness. I like that environment.

My room, this absolute shelter, is the seventh from the gate—lucky number seven. I loved that number like a medal of war. But no one notice that the sliding door dividing the room symbolized my destiny.

The front part of the room has a little bit of the sun. The sunshine, as large as a wrapping cloth in the morning, shrinks to the size of a handkerchief later, and then slips out of

the room. My den is the other part of the room without sunshine, of course. I do not remember who decided that the room with the sunshine was for my wife and the other without sunshine belonged to me. I have no complaints, though.

It has become a major recreation of mine that I promptly go to the front room in the morning when my wife goes out and watch various bottles on her make-up chest brilliantly glimmer with the sunbeam trickling in through the eastern window I opened.

I have fun scorching the tissue paper, which only my wife can use, with a small magnifying glass. The straight rays of the sun are refracted to gather at a focus, and that focus gets warmer and hotter until it starts scorching the soft paper, a feeble thread of smoke wriggling up, leaving a tiny dark hole; I am so thrilled by this short spell of anxious waiting that it almost kills me.

When I am tired of this, I play in many ways with my wife's handled looking glass. A mirror is a practical thing only when it reflects one's own face. At other times, it is only a plaything.

Soon I am tired of this fun, too. My mischievous mind evolves from the physical level to the spiritual one. I put the looking glass down and crawl on my knees to the make-up chest to watch the cosmetic bottles in various colors. They are the most charming things in the world. I pick one of them, open its stopper, draw the bottle to my nostrils and slowly inhale. As an exotic, sensual scent seeps into my lungs, my eyelids heavily hang down, despite myself. Definitely the scent is a segment of the smell of my wife's body. I replace the stopper and begin to think. Which part of her body did I smell this from...? I am not sure. Why am I not sure? Because my wife's smell is the collection of all the smells from the bottles here.

My wife's room was always luxuriant. While my room was so untrimmed that not even a single hook to hang the clothes on could be found on the walls, in her room, colorful skirts and vests hung in billowing

bundles down from the numerous hooks nailed into the walls just beneath the ceiling. Various, colorful patterns fascinate me. I think I am not so dignified because I used to try to visualize her body and the possible shape her body might take inside those clothes.

However, I had few clothes. My wife seldom gave me new ones. The only corduroy outfit I wore served as pajamas, common wear, and outing attire, as well. The turtle-neck was my underwear in all seasons. They were all dyed in black. I suspect that the dark color had been chosen for me so that my clothes would not look too bad if not laundered for a long time. Wearing shorts that had rubber bands at the waist and the thighs, I played meekly like a good boy.

The sunshine that had been as large as a handkerchief had already slipped out, but my wife was not in yet. Somewhat exhausted by the trifles I had been engaging in, and knowing that I had to be back to my room before her return, I retired to my room. My room is dusky. I pull the bedding quilt over my head to take a nap. The quilt that had never been removed from its set location, seems to be a welcome part of my body. Sometimes I can fall sleep promptly. Some times I simply feel sandy all over my skin. Then I conjure up a theme and meditate about it. Under the limp quilt, my imagination invents many things and writes many treatises. I compose a lot of poems.

But at the moment of falling asleep, every product of my imagination would dissolve into the damp air in the room like soap bubbles melting in the water, and, waking up, I find myself a mere congestion of a nervous system, a lump like a pillow stuffed with buckwheat husks or cotton shreds.

I hated bed bugs very much. But several bugs managed to survive in my room all the time, even in winter. If I had any worries, they derived from my hatred for those bugs. I scratched the itching parts bitten by the bugs until my skin bled. It was sore. It certainly was an act of profound pleasure. I

fell asleep luxuriously.

In my contemplating sessions under that damp quilt, I never engaged in positive thinking. For me, that was not necessary at all. If I discovered something positive, eventually I had to discuss it with my wife and she would scold me and... that was bothersome, although I am not afraid of her scolding. I would rather be lazy like a loafing beast than to be a respectable, individual social being and be scolded by her. I hoped I could somehow freely retire from the meaningless existence of mine as a human being.

For me the human society was autonomous. Life was self-providing. Everything was strange to me.

My wife washes her face twice a day.

I wash myself not even once a day.

I usually go to relieve myself at three or four o'clock in the morning. If the moon is bright, I will linger outside absent-mindedly for some time before returning to my room. So I rarely come across anyone of the eighteen households. Still, I recognize most of the women in the eighteen families. None of them was a peer to my wife in beauty.

My wife's first session of face washing at eleven in the morning is rather simple. Her second session around seven in the evening takes much time and care. She dresses herself better and cleaner at night. She goes out at daytime and she goes out at night, too.

Did she have a job? I could not tell what her occupation was. If she did not have a job, she did not have to go out, as I did not have to—but she did. She not only went out but entertained many guests at home. When she had many guests, I had to stay under the bedding quilt in my room all the time she was with them.

I could not play with the magnifying glass. I could not sniff at the cosmetics. On those occasions, I pretended to be sorrowful. Then she would tip me a coin.—It was 50-Won silver coin. I liked it. Since I did not know what to do with those coins, I used to throw them to the head of my bed until the silver coins formed a small pile. My wife saw the

collection of coins one day and bought me a coffer-shaped savings box. After I put all my coins in the box one by one, she locked the box and took the key away. I remember I kept dropping a coin now and then into the box even after that. And I kept being lazy. When I found a trinket like a pimple on her forehead, I understood why the saving box was lighter than before. I stopped paying attention to the box. I was too lazy to alert myself against such incidents.

When my wife was attending the guests at night, however more deeply I might burrow into the bed, I could not fall asleep on the rainy nights. At such times, I meditated on why my wife always has money, much money.

The visitors seem not to be aware of my presence at this side of the partition of the sliding door. They would frequently utter such reckless jokes to my wife that I myself would not dare to share with her.

However, some of her guests were well-mannered; they usually left a little later than midnight. Some others were rather uncultured, and those personalities would order foods from nearby restaurants and would enjoy themselves.

At first, I started research to identify my wife's occupation, but I failed to verify her vocation due to my limited knowledge of and short-sighted observations on life. I may never be able to discover what her profession is.

My wife wore white cotton socks all the time. She cooked rice, too. As a matter of fact, I have never seen her cook, but she never failed to fetch me something to eat at meal time. At our home, there are nobody but my wife and me. So, she must have cooked the rice.

Yet my wife never invited me to her room. I always ate and slept alone in the hidden room. The rice was so tasteless. The side dishes were so miserable. Although I kept taking the fodder like a puppy or a chicken without complaints, I regretted the dreadful

food now and then. Naturally I was emaciated, my complexion growing paler and paler. I could notice my health failing me everyday. The bones stood out here and there as a token of undernourishment. I could not stand the pain at the joints of my bones in the bed, so I tossed to this side and that tens of times a night.

During my research about the origin of her money, I investigated what kind of food was being served at the other side of the sliding door from the smell drifting in through the chinks of the sliding door. I had a troubled sleep.

I found out. I realized that the money she spent had been given by the strange visitors, whom I considered very silly. However, I could not understand the ethics of the guests leaving the money and my wife taking it.

Could it be out of sheer courtesy? Or was it a sort of price, a reward for something? Did my wife look to them to be a pitiful woman in need of alms?

As I tried to untangle such riddles, my intellect would whirl in chaos. The final conclusion I reached before falling asleep was that I did not like the whole business, but I did not ask her any questions about it. That questioning might have been trouble some, and, anyway, I would forget it all by the time I woke up.

After the guests left, or when she returned home from her outing, she would change to common clothes and then drop in at my room. Lifting the quilt, she would whisper several unreal words into my ears to console me. With a smile that is neither a sneer nor a cheer, I look up at her radiant face. She smiled. But I did not miss a ghost of sadness hovering about her countenance.

She would certainly notice that I was hungry. Yet she never offered me the left-over foods in the other room. That was out of her respect towards me, I thought. Although I was hungry, it satisfied me. I did not care what she whispered into my ears before returning to her room. The silver coin she left at the head of my bed glittered in the

electric light.

How many of those coins could have gathered in the savings box? I did not lift the box to measure the weight, though.

I merely dropped new coins into the narrow slot that looked like a button hole.

The reason why my wife had to leave me silver coins was as much a mystery to me as the reason why the visitors offered her money. Though I did not disapprove her of tipping me the coins, it offered me no more pleasure than the short happiness lasting from the moment my fingers touched the coin until it disappeared into the miniature coffer's slot.

One day I threw the savings box into the toilet. I did not know exactly how many coins were in it, but the box was quite heavy.

I felt despondent when I recognized my existence on an earth that was dashing with lightening speed across the limitless space. I wanted to get off the earth promptly lest I should feel giddy on that busy globe.

After I meditated in my bed about such things, even such acts as dropping the coins into the box seemed to be annoying, too. I hoped my wife would manage the saving business herself. I hopefully waited for her to take that box to her room, if she had a mind to at all, because my wife alone needed money which never meant anything to me from the beginning. But she did not take it with her. I almost decided to take it to her room myself, but there were so many guests for her those days that I found no opportunity to deliver it to her room. So, I had to take it to the toilet.

I sadly waited for her reproach. But she did not ask or say anything to me about it. That was not all; she kept giving me the coins. Soon, there was a new small heap of coins by my pillow.

Lying in bed, I started new research leading to the conclusion that there was no reason but simple pleasure that might have

prompted my wife to tip me and the visitors to offer her money. I continued my research to determine what kind of pleasure it was, if pleasure had been the motivation for such charities. However, I could not discover it all from my research in bed alone. Pleasure... pleasure... I found myself unexpectedly engrossed of that joy.

My wife in a way confined me all the time. I, of course, had no complaints. Yet I wanted to learn from experience if that pleasure existed or not.

I sneaked out of my room while my wife was out. Outside on the street, I did not forget to change my coins for bills. They amounted to five won. With that money in my pocket, I loitered around as I pleased so that I could get lost.

The wonderful outside world, that I had not seen for a long time, did not fail to arouse my nerves. I was tired out immediately, but I endured. Until dark, I sauntered aimlessly here and there not knowing why I was doing this. I did not spend a penny, of course. I did not dare to spend any. It seemed I had a long time ago completely lost the faculty of spending money.

I could not stand fatigue any longer. I somehow got back to my house. Since I had to pass through my wife's room to reach mine, I hesitantly hemmed before the sliding door to notify her of my presence, in case she was with any visitors suddenly the door whacked open, and her face, along with a stranger's face behind it, peeked out at me. I faltered a little, dazed by the blinding light flooding out of the room.

I saw her vicious stare, but I simply had to pretend that I had seen nothing. Why? Because I had to pass through her room and...

I pulled the quilt over my head. Above all, my legs ached unbearably. In bed, I was going to faint any moment, and my heart pounding heavily. I had been unaware of it while walking, but I was out of breath. Cold sweat stood out on my back. I regretted that I had gone out. I wanted a long, sound sleep, forgetting all this fatigue. I wanted a good,

long sleep.

As I lay on my side for some time, my thumping heart eased down. I felt much better. I tossed myself to lie down flat, look up at the ceiling—and stretched my legs.

My heart was destined to keep on thudding for some time. Through the slit in the sliding door, I overheard the hushed whisper shared by my wife and her man guest at the other side of the partition. I opened my eyes wide to further concentrate my auditory senses. I held my breath. Then I heard them rise. The man put on his coat and hat. The sliding door opened, and his heels slipped into his shoes. He thudded down to the yard, and her rubber shoes dragged down the stepping stones. The sound of their unhurried feet went afar towards the gate.

I had never known of such behavior on the part of my wife. To the best of my knowledge, she had not whispered to any of her guests in such a manner before. I never missed any words spoken by my wife in that particular voice, which was neither too loud nor too quiet, although I sometimes ignored the warbles of the drunk, tongue-twisted guests. Some of the unsavory remarks made by the visitors got on my nerves, but I used to forgive them because they were behaving themselves, comparatively. I disapproved of that sudden change in her attitude towards her guests, probably because of some certain unavoidable reasons, I wondered, but I resolved not to engage myself any more in such kind of research because I was tired that night, so I tried to sleep. I could not fall asleep. Nor did she return from the gate quickly. Somehow, in the mean time, I fell asleep despite myself.

My dream drifted along the strange, labyrinthine streets.

I was shaken violently. My wife was shaking me after she had seen her guest off. I opened my eyes wide to look up at her. No smile could I see in her face. I scrubbed my eyes and studied her expression more closely. Anger was in her eyes, her thin lips trembling. It was an anger that would not

thaw away easily. I closed my eyes, waiting for her to explode. But she gasped a while, and then I heard her long skirts swish away as she went back to her room. I tossed myself to squat like a frog wrapping my back with the bedding quilt, and again, I regretted that I had gone out.

In the bed, I apologized to my wife. That it was of her own misunderstanding. . .

I had believed that it was late enough for my homecoming. But really I did not know that it was earlier than midnight. I was too tired. I was foolish that I had walked too much. If it really was my fault, that was it. What had I gone out for, anyway?

I wanted to give the money, five won, that had collected by my pillow, to somebody, to anybody at all. That was all. If it was still my fault, perhaps it was so. Was I not sorry about that?

If I had known how to spend that five won, I certainly did not need to return home before midnight. But the streets were too crowded, and there were too many of them. I could not point out a single person out of the crowd, the one to whom I was supposed to give that money away. Eventually, I was tired out.

Above all, I needed a rest. I wanted to lie down. I could not but come back home. I believed it was late enough, but it is too bad that it unfortunately was before midnight. I am sorry. I can apologize as much as you want. But what was all this apology for, anyway, as long as she did not understand how it had happened? It is annoying.

For an hour, I fidgeted like that. I pushed the quilt away, squirmed up, opened the sliding door and shuffled into her room. My head was swimming in half-consciousness. I only faintly remember that, falling over her bedding quilt, I fished out the money from my pocket and crushed it into her hand.

When I woke up the next morning, I was in her bed, in her room. This was the first time that I had ever slept in her room since we moved to House No. 33.

The sun was up high but she was not with

me; she had gone out early in the morning. Well, she might have gone out last night immediately after I had fallen unconscious. But I did not feel like investigating it, though. My whole body was so sore that I found difficulties even in wriggling my fingers. The sun in the window, a little bit smaller than a wrapping cloth, dazzled my sight. In the column of the sunrays numerous particles of dust danced like microbes. My nostrils were stuffy. I pulled the quilt over my head and began working on a nap. But the scent of my wife's body coming from the bedding cloth stirred my nostrils, irritating. I could not fall asleep easily as I, tossing myself time and again, floated amid clouds of various scents popping out in my memory, the perfumes smoking out of the colorful bottles on the make-up chest.

As I could not stand it any longer, I kicked off the quilt and came back to my room. An assembly of bowls containing my cold breakfast was waiting there. Before going out, my wife had prepared that fodder for me there. I was hungry at the moment. The first spoonful of rice felt against my tongue as cold as an iced fish slice. I put down the spoon and wormed into the bedding quilt. The bedding, that had not been occupied the previous night, welcomed me, as usual. With the quilt over me, I slept heartily. Very soundly...

The electric light was on when I woke up, but my wife was not in yet. Maybe she had returned and gone out again. Why should I worry?

I felt better. I recalled what had happened the previous night. I simply could not describe the joy I had felt when I, collapsing, thrust the money into her hand. I was enthralled that I understood, to some extent, the psychology of the visitors leaving money to my wife or my wife tipping me the coins. I simpered. I, who had lived in ignorance of that delight, had been so silly, it seemed. I felt like dancing around.

So I wanted to go out again that night. But I had no money. I resented that I had given

her all of the five won last night. And I regretted that I dumped the savings box into the latrine. I was quite disappointed and listlessly thrust my hands into my pants pocket, where the money had been hidden once, and fished around. To my great surprise, I felt something. It was money, though only two won. It did not need to be much money. What was there was sufficient for me, and I was very grateful for what I got.

I found my strength. I strutted out to the street triumphantly, attired in my only corduroy suit, unaware of hunger and my unmentionable appearance. Going out, I restlessly prayed for the time to flee like a shot arrow so that it would be past midnight in no time. Though I liked that I had given her money and slept in her room, I was afraid to confront her piercing stare in the unfortunate case that I should return home before midnight while she was with her companion. I roamed around until dark, glancing again and again at the street clocks. Strangely, I was not so easily tired out that evening. The only thing that bothered me was the slowness of time flow.

After I made sure by the big clock at the Kyōngsōng Station that it was after midnight, I headed for home. I found my wife talking to her guest at the gate. I passed by them, ignoring their presence, and went into my room. A while later, she came in. She began to sweep the room, in the middle of the night, something she had not done in her whole life. Afterwards, as soon as I heard her lie down to sleep, I opened the sliding door, plunged into her room, and gave her two won—she cast a questioning glance at me, as if she wondered why I had not spent the money that night, either—and she let me sleep in her room without any questions. I did not want to give this joy away for anything in the world. I slept soundly.

The next morning when I woke up, she was not home. Lethargic, I crept back to my room and took a nap.

When she shook me to wake me up the light was on, as usual. She invited me to her room. This, too, was unprecedented. She

pulled my arm, all the while a smile rippling in her face. I was quite restless, suspecting that there might be a secret plot hidden behind such a strange attitude.

At her request, I dragged myself to her room. Supper was prepared there. I remembered that I had not eaten anything for two days. I had been vaguely wondering if I was hungry at all.

I reasoned. Even if a thunder of wrath would follow this last supper, I would not be resentful. In fact, I had been too annoyed by the boring human world. Everything bothered and troubled me, but an unexpected catastrophe excited me. Peacefully I shared that quiet odd supper with my wife. We never talked to each other. So, after supper, I simply slouched up and shuffled back to my room. She did not hold me back. Sitting against the wall, with a cigarette in my mouth, I waited for the thunder to strike soon, if it would strike at all.

Five minutes. . . Ten minutes. . .

But there was no thunder. Tension gradually eased down. I was already thinking about going out again that night, wishing I had some money.

I had no money with me. There would be no joy I could expect afterwards even if I would go out. I was crestfallen. Angrily, I rolled in the bed. The rice I had just eaten seemed to push up back to my throat. I felt nausea.

I was sad and angry that money bills did not pour down from the sky like a shower. I did not know any other way to get money. I think I cried a little in bed. Sad that I had no money. . .

Then my wife came to my room again. Holding my breath, I squatted like a toad and waited for the violent reproach that I anticipated to fall on me. On the contrary, the voice emitting out of my wife's lips was a tender one. She spoke with affection. She said she understood why I cried. She said it was because I had no money. I was so surprised. I was worried by her ability for such a through understanding of my mind; yet I



was happy because I noticed from the way she spoke to me that she would give me some money. As I waited for her next action, wrapping myself with the quilt, here—she dropped something near my pillow, something that sounded like bill. Then she whispered into my ear that it would be perfectly all right if I would return home that night later than usual. That was by no means difficult. Above all, I was grateful for the money.

Anyway, I went out. I am an early case of nyctalopia, so I chose to wander along the streets illuminated brightly. I went to the Kyōngsōng Station and stopped by a tea room near the waiting hall for the express passengers. That tea room was a great discovery of mine.

First of all, nobody I knew came there. Even if there was one, he would not stay too long there. I decided that I would come to that tea room everyday to pass the time.

What I liked about the place was that the clock there kept more accurate time than any other clocks anywhere. So I did not have to face any misfortune of returning home too early, mistaken by a stupid clock. I sat with nothingness in a booth and sipped a cup of hot coffee. Amid their busy hours, the passengers seemed to enjoy a cup of coffee with relish. They would gaze at a wall as if in deep thought, sipping the coffee in a hurry, and then would leave. It was sad. But I truly loved that sadness about that place, something I cherished more than the depressing atmosphere of other streetside tea room. The occasional, shrill screaming of the train hoots sounded more familiar and intimate to me than Mozart.

I read up and down the short list on the menu several times. The names of foods looked as remote to me as the names of my early childhood friends.

As I was drifting in swimming thoughts, lost in time, customers disappeared one after another and they began to clean the tables and the corners of the room, so it must be the time to close. A little past eleven the tea room ceased to be a shelter for me. I thought

as I shambled out, worrying where I should pass the time, loitering, until and after midnight. It was raining. The rain drops were big enough to harass me, for I did not have an umbrella or a rain coat. In such quaint attire that I wore I could no longer loaf in the tea room, so I left the place, ready to risk the rain.

It was so cool outside that I could not stand much of it. My corduroy suit was soaked, my underwear damp and cold against my skin. I tried to wander in the rain until the last moment I could endure, waiting for midnight to come and go, but I could not stand it too long. I got chilly with fever, my teeth chattering.

Hurrying my pace, I thought, well, she certainly would have no guests on such a night of hard rain. I decided to believe she had no visitors. I had to go home. If she unfortunately had guests, I would beg for her understanding of my situation. She could see it raining so hard, and she would forgive me for anything.

When I hurried back home, she was not alone. I was cold and damp. I happened to forget to knock. And I happened to see what my wife would have preferred me not to. Leaving huge, wet foot prints across my wife's room, I came into my den, took my wet clothes off and covered myself with the bedding quilt. I shivered all over. The fever was growing severe. I felt the earth was crumbling down underneath me. Finally I fell unconscious.

The next morning when I opened my eyes, my wife was sitting by me with a worried look. I had caught cold. I felt cold, my limbs lethargic, and I had a splitting headache.

She felt my head and said I had to take medicine. As I thought I would have to take an antifebrile, because I had such a fierce fever as to feel her hands cold against my forehead, she gave me a cup of warm water and four tablets. She told me that I would be all right if I took the tablets and had a sound sleep. I gulped them. A little arid, they tasted like aspirins. I pulled the quilt over me again and fell asleep as if dying instantly.

I ailed for several days, sniffing. I continually took the tablets while I was sick. I recovered from the cold. But my appetite did not return; everything tasted as bitter as sumac bark.

I regained the urge to go out, but my wife forbade me to. She told me to take the medicine everyday and stay in bed. She said I had gone out for no good reason at all but to fall sick and bother her. She was right. So I determined I would look after my health, taking the medicine everyday and not going out again.

I slept day and night, covering myself with the quilt. Day and night, deadly sleep hung so heavily over me I firmly believed it was an evidence of my recovery that I wanted that much sleep.

It seemed a month had passed that way. My hair and beard had grown so long that I felt scruffy, so I sneaked into my wife's room and sat before the make-up chest while my wife was out to see how I looked. It was quite a sight. My hair and beard bristled out in all directions. I made up my mind to have my hair cut today, and I took the bottles, removed the stoppers and sniffed the perfume one by one. The scent I had forgotten for so long stung my nostrils. I called my wife's name in my heart. "Yön-sim. . ."

I played with the magnifying glass, too. I played with the mirror. The sunrays trickling through the window were so warm. It was May already, anyway.

I stretched myself and lay down in my wife's bed, and I wanted to brag to God that my life was so comfortable and pleasant. I maintain no relations with anything in the world. Not even God could perhaps praise or punish me.

Then I noticed a very strange thing. It was a bottle of soporific adaline. I found it under the make-up chest, and I thought it looked like aspirin. I opened it. Exactly four tablets were missing.

I remembered I had taken four aspirins that morning. I slept. Yesterday, the day before yesterday, and the day before that, I had been heavily drowsy. I had recovered

from the cold, but she kept giving me the drugs. Once, a neighbor's house was on fire while I was deeply asleep. I did not know it because I was asleep. I slept like that. Then, I must have taken adalines, believing they were aspirins, for a month. That was too much.

All of a sudden, I felt giddy, and I almost fainted. I left home with the bottle of drugs in my pocket, and I climbed up a hill. I did not want to see anything of the human world. Plodding, I tried not to think anything about my wife. I did not want to faint on the road. I was going to do some research about my wife after I found and settled down at a sunny place. I was thinking about multiplication and breeding of the roadside forsythia, the skylarks, and the stones. Fortunately, I did not faint on the road.

There was a bench. I sat on it stiffly and began my research on aspirins and adalines. But my mind was in such confusion that I could not lead an organized scientific reasoning. I turned gruff and annoyed because astray thoughts would not let my research continue for even five consecutive minutes. I took out the six adalines I had brought with me from my pocket and chewed them. They tasted funny. Then I lay down full length on the bench. Why had I done it? I could not give the reason. I simply wanted to. I fell deeply asleep there. In my sleep, I faintly heard the distant chatter of a stream running among rocks.

When I woke up, the day was already bright. I had slept there one full day and night. The landscape looked pure yellow. A flock of thought about aspirin and adaline passed through my head.

Aspirin, adaline, aspirin, Marx, Malthus, matross, aspirin, adaline.

My wife had given me adalines for a month, telling me they were aspirins. The evidence was only obvious because I found the bottle in her room.

For what purpose did she have to make me sleep day and night?

What did she do all the while I was asleep after she had given me the drug?

Did she want me to die gradually?

What I had taken might have been really aspirins, after all. Mayby, she was the one who had to take adalines herself to help her fall asleep and overcome a certain agony she had. If so, I was sorry. I was sorry that I had suspected her so much.

I hurried my way down the hill. I walked towards home, my legs reeling beyond control. It was almost eight o'clock.

I was going to confess and apologize to her for all my evil thoughts. I was in such a hurry that I forgot to prepare what I was going to say.

Then a really terrible thing happened. It happened to see what I should not. In a flurry, I shut the sliding door of my wife's room and I clung to the door post, hanging my head to get over the dizziness. The next instant, the door opened and my wife, her clothes ruffled, rushed out of the room to clutch my neck. I tumbled down, my head in turmoil. Then she landed on top of me and bit me at random. It hurt. Since I had no strength or intention to resist, I sprawled down meekly and let her do whatever she wanted to do about me. Soon, her guest came out of the room, lifted her and went back to the room, carrying her in his arms. I hated her being so submissively carried away into the room by a stranger. I hated her.

On her way back to her own room, my wife raved viciously that I had been loafing around night after night making love to women or stealing things. That really was too much. I could not protest about anything, dumbfounded.

I almost started to scream at her that she had been planning to kill me, but I restrained myself. For I did not want to face any consequences by saying anything I was not so sure of.

Believing silence was the best policy at the moment, I shambled up to my feet, quietly pulled out the money from my pocket, and not knowing exactly why I did so, I put it before the sliding door and ran away.

Several times I was almost run over by a

car before I managed to reach the Kyōng-sōng Station. I wanted to sit in an empty booth and get rid of the sour taste in my mouth somehow.

Coffee. Fine. But at the moment I stepped into the station building, I suddenly recalled that there was not even a single penny in my pocket. I felt dizzy. I was at a loss, faltering before the building, roaming here and there like a haunted person. . . .

I do not remember where I had been. Several hours later, when I found myself on the roof of Mitsukoshi Department store. It was about noon.

I flopped down anywhere at random and started recollecting the twenty-six years of my life. No particular subject popped out of my lax memory.

Then I asked myself, "What ambition do you have for life?" But I did not want to answer whether I had any ambition at all. For me, even the concept of my own existence was difficult to perceive.

Stooping, I watched goldfish in a nearby bowl. They looked nice. The bigger ones, as well as the small ones, looked lively. In the showering May sunrays, the fish dropped their shadows at the bottom of the glass bowl. The fins waved like handkerchiefs. Trying to count the number of fins, I kept stooping down. My back was warm against the sun.

I looked down at the littered street below. Down there, the tired life swayed heavily like the fins of the gold fish. They could not free themselves from the glue—the invisible tangle of threads shackling them. I realized that I could not but mingle into that littered street, dragging my body suffering from fatigue and hunger.

Suddenly, I stopped to think. Where was I now going?

My wife's face popped out before my eyes. Aspirins and adalines.

We were misunderstanding each other. How could she have given me adalines instead of aspirins? I would not believe it. She could not have done so, as I did not go around stealing or making love to women

every night. It was not so, really.

We were like a lame couple, destined not to harmonize with each other's gait. I did not need to summon any logic to justify her or my behaviors. There was no need for any defense. We would lame on and on, truth and misunderstanding on their own separate ways. Was that not the usual way?

But I was not so sure if it was right for me to trudge back to my wife. Should I? Or else, where should I go?

The siren wailed, announcing noon. It was a glorious noon, people vigorously whirling

around amid the commotion of glass, steel, marble, money and ink.

My armpits suddenly itched. Ah, it was where my imitation wings had split out. The wings that I had no longer, the deleted phantasms of hope and ambition flashed in my mind like the flipping pages of a pocket dictionary.

I stopped my pace and wanted to shout.  
Wings, spread out again!  
Fly. Fly. Fly. Let me fly once more.  
Let me fly just once more.

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**About the author:** Yi Sang — his autonym was Kim Hae-gyŏng; Yi Sang was his pen name — was born in 1910 and died at 27 in 1937. He suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis and, after being imprisoned by the Japanese police on the suspicion of 'thought offense', he died due to the extreme aggravation of that disease. During his short life under the Japanese colonial rule, he wrought not a few works that caused a sensation at the time. He is called, generally, the first and almost the only 'modernist' in the true sense of the word throughout the history of Korean modern literature. His poems and short stories evince aspects of Dadaism, surrealism and neopsychologism. Though it is difficult to deny entirely that he was influenced by Japanese writing of those days, many of his works uniquely express the frustration and agony of a colonial intellectual who was involved in the conflict between the 19th-century feudal, traditional convention and the 20th-century modernist current energized by the Western impact.

Yi Sang made his debut formally in letters with *Ogamdo* which consists of fifteen poems, through the daily newspaper, *Chosŏn Chungang Ilbo* in 1934. The serial publication of *Ogamdo* was in fact halted by the obstinate protest of feudal readers. The whole of his works comprises 82 poems, 11 short stories and 19 essays.

*Munhak sasang-sa* founded a "Yi Sang Literature Prize" in 1977 in his honor, and has annually awarded the prize to the author who is thought to be the best novelist of the year. This short story *Nalgae* (Wings) was published in the magazine *Chogwang* in September 1936.

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