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Thus Ended My Days of Watching Over the House

Asian Studies Institute Translation Paper 1

By Pak Wan-sô

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ASI translation papers are a new series of translations into English of works of literature, history etc., from east and south Asia. This first Paper consists of a translation of a short story by the Korean writer, Pak Wan-sô. Pak Wan-sô (1931-), although little known in the West, is the most well known woman writer in Korea today.

I left the tea for a moment to nudge open the living room door and peek inside. Facing me was my husband, Professor Min, looking as gently dignified and nonchalant as ever. I could see only the back of the visitor I had just let in. I hadn't noticed it when I viewed him straight on, but from behind, his old-fashioned crewcut definitely made him look like someone from the authorities. My heart began to pound all over again.

I was sorry I hadn't turned him away at the front gate. My husband had occasional visitors, but it never occurred to me to ask whether he liked being called on at home. Most of his guests were current or former students dropping in for a friendly chat rather than on vital and pressing business. For this reason we had long held a tacit understanding: when he was busy or looked as though he didn't want to be disturbed, I could pretend he was out. Although I have to admit to a minor satisfaction in wielding this power, I never abused it to suit my own moods. Nor was I so arbitrary as to turn anyone away just because I didn't like the impression he made.

School was currently in the middle of the long winter break, and I knew my husband had finished up the previous semester's grading a few days earlier. With no manuscript or article in urgent need of completion, he seemed blessed with a rare amount of free time. I had no real excuse to refuse a guest.

But the moment I confronted this visitor at the gate, my pulse began to race. I thought I should tell him my husband was away on a trip. There wasn't anything particular in his manner to criticise; on the contrary, he seemed unusually friendly and polite. His ordinary looks gave me the illusion that I had met him somewhere several times before. Still, like an infant troubled by an unfamiliar face, I somehow sensed that his business was entirely different from that of other visitors. That's what frightened me. I was about to send him away, when he looked over my shoulder into the house and a flash of recognition crossed his face.

Ours was a small house. Between the front gate and the porch was but a narrow space - no wider than an alleyway, really - that served as our yard. The living room, which doubled as my husband's study, was right beside the porch. It was morning and I could picture, as easily as if I had eyes in the back of my head, my husband drawing the curtains to let sun in for his bonsai trees. To refuse the visitor now had become impossible.

Thus Ended My Days of Watching Over the House

Pak Wan-sô

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"Should I make the two of you breakfast? Or should I just bring some tea?" I asked.

I felt a little relieved that my husband looked so unperturbed, but, to be honest, this was a silly question on my part. I did not as a rule go to the trouble of cooking except for specially invited guests. Besides, it was already quite late; my husband was the only one in the family who hadn't eaten. But I had an instinctive dread of this stranger, a fear that I couldn't get over. What I said was a pretext, plausible enough to excuse my having sneaked into the living room.

"Oh, no, thank you. We have to go right away."

The visitor, turning my way, answered instead of my husband. His use of the word "we" rubbed me very much the wrong way.

"I haven't eaten yet. I usually skip breakfast during the semester. Maybe that's why I wind up eating brunch instead of breakfast or lunch during vacations."

My husband smiled at the visitor.

" 'Brunch.' Quite an interesting word, indeed. I make do with brunch too, and I don't have a day off all year, much less a vacation. In fact, I haven't had breakfast myself."

"Well, in that case, why don't we go after we've eaten?"

"Oh, no. Please let me treat you to a meal somewhere."

"I usually don't like to eat out in the morning."

"I'm terribly sorry to upset your daily routine with such a trivial matter, professor..."

I had no idea what the two of them were getting at or how well they knew each other. I grew a little more afraid.

"Dear, please get my things ready for a trip." These were the first words my husband had spoken to me. "A change of underwear too."

"Underwear, too?" I asked, wondering if this mention of clothing held a special meaning.

Without answering, my husband turned to the visitor. "I should pack long underwear, too, don't you think?"

'Oh, no. You needn't worry about anything like that. This shouldn't take more than a few days, and I'll do my utmost to ensure that you're quite comfortable. Ah - ma'am, please let the professor change his clothes here."

"Here?" My voice was quaking with fear in spite of myself.

"Yes, right here in this room ... My, quite a few books you have. I'll just do a little browsing while you change. Don't mind me." His voice was gentle but charged with a strange force that pre-empted the slightest objection. I could feel the strength slowly seep from me, like air from a balloon.

This feeling of helplessness persisted as I got my husband's clothes ready in the bedroom. Though terrified, I lacked the energy to figure out what was frightening me. My hands shook continuously, making it very difficult to get the clothes ready. It was like being forced into heavy labour after illness has sapped your strength so much you can't lift a feather. But fear, tension and a sense of compulsion drove me on.

When I returned to the living room with my husband's clothing, he looked calm and indifferent, as before. The stranger's back was turned. Had I been worrying for no reason at all? I felt annoyed.

But just as I was about to help my husband change his clothes, the visitor spoke.

Thus Ended My Days of Watching Over the House

Pak Wan-sô

translated by Stephen Epstein

"Pardon me, ma'am, but would you be so kind as to bring me a cup of tea?"

I turned toward him to protest because this seemed to be nothing more than a request for me to leave. Now I really should find out who he is and why he's being so pushy, I told myself.

At the moment, he was flipping through a family album and happened to be looking at a colour photograph taken last spring - the five of us were gathered by the cherry tree blossoming in front of the house, smiles on our faces. I had no idea why this man had suddenly appeared here and was bossing us around, but it certainly seemed his primary goal was to take our happiness hostage.

I slunk off to the kitchen and returned with the tea. My husband had finished changing except for his necktie.

"Could you help me with this?" My husband was as matter of fact as he normally was when going out. I looked over at the visitor first. He was pretending not to have heard, so I hurried to my husband. I suddenly found myself hoping he would be affectionate toward me in front of the stranger. No chance of that, though; my husband, with his proper upbringing, never ever showed me physical affection outside the bedroom. Still, I thought he really should touch me lovingly. There was no other way for us to make a combined show of resistance as a couple against such tyranny.

But my husband stood up stiffly and did nothing more than raise his chin a bit for me. It was all I could do to take the two drooping halves of the tie and match their lengths. "It's nothing", my husband said in a measured tone. "Don't worry." He stole a glance at the visitor for some sign of support.

The man was still looking at the photo album, but chimed in as soon as he saw an opportunity to speak up. "Of course, ma'am. Nothing is going to happen to the professor. Just look at it as though we're travelling for a few days."

"Really, that would be best. Please tell Mother I'm on a trip. The same goes for the children. You know how sensitive Mother is. Take special care that she suspects nothing. See that she gets her meals at the right time, of course, and do all you can to seem unconcerned. You, too, should just think of this as though I've gone on a trip. Oh - and please keep an eye on the bonsai for me. Make sure they get sun and don't forget to water them. Watering them can be tricky, you know. Remember not to fill the pot until you've dampened the soil on top with the vaporiser ..."

As I struggled feebly to help him with the tie, I felt a sudden urge to strangle him with it until he cried out like a wounded beast. The impulse passed in a moment, but it was very intense while it lasted.

As I finished knotting the tie for him, my husband patted his collar and looked at me. I gazed right back at him. Here I was, hoping for a caress so much I could barely stand it, and he was lecturing me on how to take proper care of his mother and his plants. The thought of all the time he and I had lived together turned my stomach.

"May I say goodbye to my mother before we leave?"

In asking for the visitor's permission, my husband's expression took on a servile cast for the first time. The visitor again acted as though he hadn't heard. I hoped that he would continue the pretence for a while so I could see how far my husband was willing to degrade himself for his mother.

"She isn't feeling well these days. She's always had high blood pressure and a few months ago when she heard I needed an operation to have a gallstone removed, she fainted in shock. She's been in bed ever since. I'm concerned that this might deal her another severe blow. Please let me say goodbye to her as if I'm going on a trip."

Thus Ended My Days of Watching Over the House

Pak Wan-sô

translated by Stephen Epstein

The visitor lifted his head and smiled with extreme modesty, a modesty more effectively humiliating than arrogance, I thought; I waited to hear what he would have to say. Uncertainty briefly played upon his face, but then he said, "Fine. I have elderly parents out in the country myself."

"Thank you."

Naturally, I followed after my husband as he went to say farewell to his mother.

"Please stay here, ma'am", the visitor said softly.

"Do as he says."

My husband gestured for me to stay, making no pretence of hiding his fear that he might be prevented from seeing his mother if I followed. I stayed behind in the living room with the stranger, who went on looking through the album as he tried to make small talk with me.

"Your family truly looks happy. I envy you."

"Why are you taking him into custody?"

"Custody? Oh, nothing of the sort."

"Well, then?"

"Just a polite request for the professor to come with me. I'm his escort."

"So he could have turned you down?"

"Fortunately, it was easy to convince the professor that we require his cooperation and he didn't refuse."

"He's been a straight arrow all his life. Those dwarf trees are the only vice of his I know about. I can't think of any place outside the campus where his cooperation could be needed."

"I realise all that. That's why he has so many devoted students. But, as you know, among them are some troublemakers who have been disrupting the social order."

"Can that be a crime on his part?" I flared up.

"Please calm down, ma'am. I never said anything about anyone committing a crime."

"Who in the world are you? What right do you have to come over to someone's house first thing in the morning and..." My lips were trembling.

"I've already explained that to the professor. And it's not first thing in the morning; it's already eleven o'clock. Time for brunch." His tone was gentle but frosty.

My husband returned.

"I told Mother I'd be gone a week or two."

"That long?"

"Better to err on the safe side. Same goes for you, too, so go on as you always do. Maybe this will turn out to be a more valuable experience for me than any trip could be."

All of a sudden my husband was making awkward attempts at talking tough, like a frightened boy putting up a brave front. The merest shadow of compassion passed over the visitor's face. I averted my eyes so I wouldn't have to look at the contrast between their expressions. Choking sorrow welled up within me. I felt a desperate urge to cling to

Thus Ended My Days of Watching Over the House

Pak Wan-sô

translated by Stephen Epstein

the stranger and beg him not to take my husband away. Oh, if only I were younger and prettier, I thought.

"Well, let's go." My husband took the initiative. With a shrug of his shoulders, the visitor followed.

I had intended to see the two of them off down the alley to the thoroughfare, but at the front gate the visitor stopped short. In a businesslike voice that seemed to belong to someone else, he said, "Please go back".

"But when my husband sets off on a trip I always see him to the end of the alley."

"Your husband is not going on a trip."

His voice was low but clear; his expression, stiff and icy. I might as well have been shoved violently aside.

"Please come back soon. Dear." I barely got the words out.

"I will. Just be sure to stay calm. Remember, act naturally, everything is normal."

The two strode off and disappeared out the alleyway. I waited until I was so frozen that I couldn't stand being outside any longer.

Calmly, I cleared away the visitor's tea cup, straightened the scattered books and washed the underwear my husband had changed out of.

I wanted to flop down wearily, but recalling my husband's parting remark about acting normally, I set to work at a busy pace, like a student overwhelmed with homework.

'Hey you, bring me some food! I'm starving to death. My tummy's burning up. What are you so busy with that you haven't even thought about bringing lunch? Do you know what time it is?' It was my mother-in-law, calling from her room in the back.

I had been walking a tightrope in a precarious attempt to maintain my sense of day-to-day calm, and her sudden outburst - an iron mallet beating on a metal drum -was so tremendously raw and horrible I shuddered.

Today was hardly the first such outburst I had heard. Plagued by diabetes and high blood pressure, my mother-in-law was always famished. Not only that, she was now quite old and senility had taken her into a second childhood. When my husband, her only son, had a gallstone removed, we had not kept anything from her; after all, it was not a particularly dangerous procedure. But as soon as she heard the word "surgery", she fainted dead away. She'd been in bed ever since, and as her senility grew progressively worse, the only thing she was making clear was her voracious appetite. She'd start demanding breakfast at dawn and lunch well before noon: "I feel as if my tummy's burning up", she'd say, or "My innards are shrivelling up and sticking together". She still had a way with words.

Her ears remained quite sharp, and so, in addition to her three regular meals, she would pipe up whenever the sound of eating was anywhere to be heard. And then she would shriek like a baby ejected from the womb: "Now don't be sneaking food, children. Give me some! Eating in secret when there's an old woman around! You'll get yours!" Still, her shrieks never struck me as being out of synch with the daily rhythm of our respectable, peaceful household. They had never even seemed an intrusion.

Just as everyone in the family took after my husband in his love for the dwarf trees, we all followed his lead in caring for my senile old mother-in-law. We worked together with as much devotion as we could muster and felt a certain moral superiority about this in our hearts. If her cries about her stomach burning up came even slightly later than usual, my heart would beat fast and I would peek into her room to check if something

Thus Ended My Days of Watching Over the House

Pak Wan-sô

translated by Stephen Epstein

was wrong. When she slept, I would prick up my ears in concern. Not until I heard the sound of peaceful breathing could I relax. That's how deeply all of us in the family felt.

I felt guilty that my mother-in-law's voice had been irritating me and prepared her lunch in a hurry. As for me, I had been planning to eat brunch with my husband. I hadn't eaten a thing all day, but I had absolutely no desire to - and when you're not hungry, nothing is more unpleasant than someone else's appetite. My mother-in-law kept yelling about the pains in her stomach. By the time I had prepared her lunch tray, her complaints had aggravated me almost to the point of snapping at her.

Her special diet for diabetes and high blood pressure meant extra time preparing food. My husband was more concerned with his mother's abnormal appetite than anything else. Although she enjoyed meat, I generally served her fish. To get her to be satisfied with vegetables instead of rice I had to coax, trick and threaten her. Today I was in no mood for any of that, however. I just set the tray down and waited in silence for her to finish.

I watched as she grabbed the fish with her fingers and chewed it down to the bone with her pearly-white dentures. As she spat chewed-up bones onto the corner of the tray, then licked bits of fish off her fingers, I couldn't help but be aware of a loathing toward her which was lodged within me. This emotion occupied but a small part of my feelings towards her, which for the most part were appropriately high-minded and moral; nonetheless, that hatred was like a pocket of compressed air. Firm. Dangerous.

The children returned in the evening. Our daughter was in her final year of high school and her brother was in the ninth grade. Even though it was vacation, they came back home late. Both were taking supplementary classes at school in the morning and had tutors in the afternoon. I told them their father had gone on a trip but, worn out with their own work, they didn't look particularly interested in what we grown-ups were doing. I once more felt proud that they were already taller than I was.

I didn't want to lie to them, and I found myself hoping to tell them what was going on so that they could share my concern. My children were no longer so young. And precisely because they weren't toddlers, they wouldn't be satisfied with merely hearing what had happened to their father. They would want to understand it as well. It would be important for them to know why their father had been taken into custody, not just the simple fact of it.

I was not, however, in a position to tell them why - I didn't know myself. If I couldn't make them understand this, then learning that their father had been taken away would be as traumatic as hearing that he was a shameless criminal. Best not to share my anxieties with them, I decided.

My husband and I had a good relationship, but there was a line between us that was not to be crossed. He didn't care what I did for the house once he turned over his salary to me. Likewise, I pretended not to know anything about his field of sociology or what he was thinking. We had grown quite used to this system and were comfortable with it in several ways. None of this had ever caused me any doubt or dissatisfaction.

After the children went to bed and I was alone, for the first time I thought about this invisible wall between my husband and me. Which of us had first erected it? I went over our relationship in detail. He had often made disparaging remarks about men who wanted to know every last detail about what their wives did at home. Had this been an indirect way of telling me not to get too curious about his work? If so, I concluded, then he was the one who first established these boundaries.

I'm not sure why I was picking on him. Maybe it was because I felt inferior at my inability to help my now almost grown children to understand what had happened to their father. He had begged me to go about life normally, but without knowing where he was or what ordeals he might be enduring I couldn't bring myself to prepare elaborate meals, so I just cooked whatever was easiest.

Thus Ended My Days of Watching Over the House

Pak Wan-sô

translated by Stephen Epstein

"Tell me, is this how you're going to treat me when my son is gone? Where's my fish? Not even a fish tail on this tray! How dare you! It's not right. Not right at all. Just wait till he comes home. Don't think I won't tell him everything." Such were my mother-in-law's protests every time I set down her food. She'd pull the tray towards her, push it away again, hurl her silverware down and make every sort of racket.

The visitor appeared once more and relayed the news that my husband was healthy, satisfied with his surroundings and would be home soon. The real reason he had come, however, was to search the study.

Given all this, I found it pure torture to put up with my mother-in-law's unbelievably raucous shrieks. I had no will to whip up meals to suit both her finicky diet and her insatiable palate. Oh, grumble she did, but her enormous appetite didn't diminish in the least. She would lap up every last bit of food on her meal tray and then right away begin cursing and clamouring that she was still starving. It was only with great difficulty that I put up with her bawling. This, I thought, is not conducive to day-to-day peace in our family. Well, what was the everyday peace we were blessed with, anyway? That her fits previously didn't clash - and even seemed in harmony - with the family's sense of calm was truly miraculous.

Gradually I began to consider her an outsider. If, as they say, it's a family duty to bear up together when one member is going through hard times, then neglecting this responsibility was equivalent to renouncing one's qualifications to be in the family. In my mind, I already had ostracised my mother-in-law from the family and marked her as an enemy of the rest of us. What was hard to put up with now was not so much her outbursts, but the idea of harbouring an alien in our midst. Waiting on a parasite day in and day out - that was true hardship.

In spite of all this, every morning I opened the curtains in the living room to make sure my husband's beloved bonsai trees were getting their ration of warm sunlight. I watered them the way he had showed me. I even got up in the middle of the night to make sure the charcoal stove was still burning and keeping the living room warm. I felt no love for those plants, however. My husband was enthralled with the bonsai, as though Mother Nature's essence had been distilled into them, but I had no interest in those forcibly stunted trees beyond a touch of pity.

One day, though, I received a strange jolt as I examined the pot containing my husband's most prized pine. The tree's branches spread above as gracefully as those of a lone pine standing on a cliff, but the trunk had coiled around itself like a snake. These agonised twists and turns were almost certainly the result of the tree's being forced to grow artificially. Had my husband also been grooming his family into a showpiece of calm and respectability as nothing more than a hobby?

Why couldn't my husband hurry up and return? Please let him come back before I get to the point of mistreating his plants too, I prayed; I had to come up with my excuse beforehand, because I knew I would end up ignoring them before long.

The more I neglected my mother-in-law's meals, the more frantic she got. She hadn't shown this much energy since being confined to her sickbed. Oh, she still had to use a bedpan, but she would stride into the kitchen and rummage through the cupboards, flinging open the doors and slamming them shut.

Whenever I came in, holding her meagre dinner tray, she would kick up an enormous fuss. She was a one-woman riot. "Oh, what a wretched lot I have. See how horribly my daughter-in-law treats me the minute my precious son is out of sight! If there's a kind soul in this neighbourhood, come, come quick and see how I suffer through this miserable life of mine. Ohhhh, I can't stand it, I can't stand it. I know you're starving me to death, but I won't die. Never. I refuse to die. Not until I see my son. I'll stick it out to the end, no matter what." Such were the recriminations she shouted aloud for the neighbours to hear.

Thus Ended My Days of Watching Over the House

Pak Wan-sô

translated by Stephen Epstein

And then, after showering me with a round of this abuse, she would wolf down every last bit of food on her tray. The longer her tirade, the more difficult it was to put up with - it wasn't so much her words as that horrid voice. Honestly, it was as bad as having to put up with someone banging on tin cans.

Finally, I lost control. Something inside me snapped. My feelings - passionate, human emotions - had been suppressed too long within me, coiled and hardened. If I hadn't allowed them to explode at last, I'd have gone crazy. Well, I thought, it's about time to let my mother-in-law see what is really going on. Time to apply the coup de grace and show her just what I think of her appetite.

"Mother, you shouldn't be grumbling about your food. Our circumstances don't allow it. Do you have any idea where your precious only son is at this very moment? He's been arrested."

"Arrested?"

"Yes, arrested - like this."

I imitated someone being handcuffed and shoved my two hands right in front of her face. Of course, my husband hadn't left like that at all.

"Like this?" She made the same gesture with her own hands, her face growing pale with terror. It was the same look she wore upon hearing about my husband's surgery. Then she collapsed.

I waited. My mouth was dry. I swallowed hard and waited some more. It was obvious enough what I thought would happen by telling her what was really going on and making that horrible gesture: I was waiting for her to faint again.

The first time had been very hard, for I'd had to help my husband recuperate from the operation and care for her at the same time. I'd accepted her condition then as an appropriate response - after all, she believed her only son to be in a life-and-death situation - and didn't allow the trouble it caused me to affect our relationship. It was a miserable thing to have happen, but because we all loved each other, it was something that we could live with.

But to have to put up with her collapsing a second time ... I had no confidence that I could endure a situation that would be much worse. And yet to me it seemed nothing in comparison with the emotional agony of having to embrace an outsider into our family.

But she didn't faint. Instead, she began to screech and wail at the top of her lungs. "Oh no, oh no! Am I dreaming? Is this real? My poor son, honest to a fault. Who could believe such a malicious story? Oh god, oh god! He must be so cold in this brutal weather! He must be so hungry!"

Thanks to her cries, my children also learned what was going on with their father, and we became like a house in mourning. It must have been an extra burden for them, I told myself, what with their entrance exams coming up.

When my mother-in-law's wailing petered out, she immediately set upon her food. She practically licked her plate clean, just like before. By the next meal she had begun complaining about her food again. "Since when did you become such a skinflint? Your husband comes first and you think nothing of your mother-in-law, eh? The older you get, the more you need meat to keep your strength up. I'm going to eat to keep up my strength so I can see my son. I'm not going to die, not before I see him. Go ahead, pray to the gods for my death, and see if it works. I refuse to die."

Laying particular stress on the words "I refuse to die", she glared at me. I glared right back at her without flinching. "Sure, sure, you should live a long, long life! Live long, eat to your heart's content, get back all your strength and then some, and raise hell, yelling all you want! Outlive your own son and your daughter-in-law! Do that!"

Thus Ended My Days of Watching Over the House

Pak Wan-sô

translated by Stephen Epstein

My mother-in-law hurled an empty bowl and shoved the table aside. My children came running to console me and scowled at their grandmother. Nothing of the sort could ever happen in a respectable household, but how could I scold my children? We were no longer a respectable family.

I felt I had lifted a weight off my chest, but at the same time feelings of pity for my mother-in-law crept up on me. I began to prepare the foods I had previously denied her - thick beef broths and grilled meat. At each meal I brought her a heaped bowl of white rice without mixing in other grains. I even bought her cakes as sweet as honey for snacks. These foods were all equally catastrophic for her diabetes and high blood pressure. Never once had I dreamed of giving her such things when my husband was around and we were still a respectable, peaceful household. One reason we had moved her to a back room and fed her there was to keep her far away from such temptations.

Eating rich foods again after so long sent her into a state of ecstasy. Every meal I brought her these delicacies, and in her delight, she forgot all about her concern for her only son. At first I may have brought her these tasty morsels out of pity, but it dawned on me that my real motivation might have been to estrange her from the family. Then I could hate her to my heart's content.

I now felt full of energy for the first time since my husband had left. But what was feeding my vitality was hatred. As I watched my mother-in-law devour her rich foods, my true feelings towards her came to the fore: stunted, horribly twisted feelings. The old hatred I had felt ever since I had married the only son of a widow was now allowed to strut and swagger; I trembled with this energising sense of joy. Hate was indeed the surest reward of life. My days, which had been empty without my husband, were now burgeoning with fulfilment.

I even wanted to instil some of my hatred in my children. And so I would nonchalantly say to my daughter, "Do you realise how poorly your grandmother treated you and me when you were born? She was upset that our first child was a girl. For three weeks, the seaweed soup she gave me stuck like thorns in my throat".

My daughter responded by opening up to me as she never had before. She had been in agony because the field my husband wanted her to study in college was not really what she herself wanted. She asked for my help in talking to him about it. She even revealed to me that she had long thought how wonderful it would be if she could get married three different times during the course of her life. She asked for my opinion. "Would that really be so immoral that I wouldn't be forgiven?"

I also drew my son aside and exchanged idle remarks with him. "Don't even ask about how your grandmother treated me when we got married! It was as though I were a concubine instead of a daughter-in-law. If your father and I were getting along well, she became furious. She wouldn't feel better until she saw us arguing. Was she ever unfair to me! I've been so worried I might wind up like her that I've decided to send you off to live on your own the moment you get married. So if you meet a woman you like, don't let her give you a hard time about marrying an only son, okay?"

Since I was so casual in talking to him about things usually left unsaid, he too confided in me. In fact, he confessed he was planning to live as a bachelor because he had no faith that he could be as devoted and filial as my husband and I were if he got married. "Oh, my poor baby", I said, stroking his back tenderly.

Our home truly was no longer peaceful or respectable. Every day I was peeling off another layer of the wrapping that enveloped our former peace and respectability. I was so absorbed in all this that I wound up forgetting to look after the dwarf trees for several days. They hadn't died yet, but they had become unrecognisably withered.

I refused to water them or give them sun again, though. With no feelings of love aimed at them, it seemed the trees would shrivel up and die as a matter of course. One frigid

Thus Ended My Days of Watching Over the House

Pak Wan-sô

translated by Stephen Epstein

day I tossed several bonsai trees that were vulnerable to the cold out into the yard, pots and all.

Finally my husband returned. As if really back from a trip, he even brought gifts for his mother and the children. He looked weary, just as though he had actually been on the road. None of us believed this, but he kept up the pretence.

Perhaps he can even repackage the family peace and respectability torn to shreds in his absence without too much difficulty. They may even look as good as new. I have no intention of stopping him. I may even end up helping. After all, the wrapping is of no great importance; the important thing was that I had seen what actually lay beneath it all.

Maybe I won't be able to bear it if I don't get to see my husband's true face. He wants to wrap; I want to tear away. For the first time in our marriage we may experience conflict. Nothing else will make our lives worth living. Already I am relishing the days ahead.

My husband gathered up the pots I had tossed outside, while I heated water for his bath. In spite of the wrongs I had committed in his absence, I was elated. Why? Because we now would meet each other wearing our true faces; because from now on what we would have to do was to get to know one another; because I had figured this out by myself while he was gone; and because I expected that this would be more worth living for than anything we have experienced till now.

Thus ended my days of watching over the house.