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碩士學位論文

**The Great Merchant Mandeok Kim**

**The Savior of Jeju People**

(제주 백성을 살린 구원의 여인 김만덕 翻譯論文)

濟州大學校 通譯大學院

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李 美 眞

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**The Great Merchant Mandeok Kim**  
**The Savior of Jeju People**

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## Chapter 1 - A Twelve-year-old Orphan

Mandeok Kim was born in Dongbok Village, about 24 kilometers east of Jeju County in 1739, the 15th year of King Yeongjo's reign. It was a small village with half of the villagers working on farms and the rest of them catching fish.

"Let me come with you."

Mandeok was following her mother, holding a sickle in her small hand.

"Gosh, you are so diligent anyone could tell that you are a woman from Jeju Island."

Whenever her young daughter offered a helping hand in field work, Mrs. Kim, Mandeok's mother, felt proud yet sorry for her.

"In Jeju, there is a saying that having a baby girl allows a family to have rice. You are really a great help to our family's livelihood."

"You mean my family can have rice because of me, right?"

"Of course, a daughter brings wealth to a family, enabling the family to have rice and throw parties."

"Did you have rice after you gave birth to me?"

"Actually, I had rice mixed with barley. Your father and I had two boys before you. Therefore, you would never imagine how excited your father was when you were born."

"I miss Dad."

"He is coming home soon."

Mrs. Kim was staring at Mandeok with a smile on her face, but it couldn't keep her from hiding her anxiety.

Eung-yeol Kim, Mandeok's father, was a merchant selling items produced in Jeju including seaweed, abalone, and tangerines in Naju, Jeolla province and selling rice he brought from Naju on Jeju Island.

However, she hadn't heard anything from him since he left home 15 days

ago. Worrying about him, Mrs. Kim was looking at the high seas.

"Mom, hurry up."

"Sweetie, where are you?"

Mrs. Kim turned around.

Her daughter stuck out her face, like a pale full moon, from the unripe, green barley. Mrs. Kim hunkered down beside her.

"I wish we had our own sweet potato field," said Mandeok.

"But we still have the barley field, which allows us to plant some sweet potatoes in furrows. We should be thankful for this even though it is not much."

"You're right, Mom. A lot of people would gladly take such a humble lot."

Mandeok skillfully broke the soil into small pieces with her hands; she then made small mounds of earth between the sweet potato stalks. In order to spare her little daughter from hard work, she hoed without ever stretching her back.

Upon finishing the field work, the sun was high up in the sky. Mandeok patted her back which had become tough and stiff from working for a long time. She felt great about being of help to her family even though she had a backache and was sweating like a pig.

By the seashore, some of the haenyeos (diving ladies) — who had just finished catching seafood — were walking out of the seas with wet towels on their heads, iron knives for fishing and harpoons in their hands, and net baskets on their shoulders. The net baskets were filled with seaweed and different kinds of shellfish.

"Hey there, you are not working in the sea today?" asked one of the haenyeos.

"We were afraid you might be sick because you have been worrying about your husband."

Fellow haenyeos greeted Mrs. Kim first.

"We can see that you have been working in the field."

Mrs. Kim couldn't respond. She knew she couldn't support her family with whatever she would get from her small field. However, she didn't even dare to go into the sea until her husband came home safely from the mainland.

"My father will come back home before long, and I will join you in the seas tomorrow, ladies," Mandeok wisely responded for her mother.

"Mandeok, you should make sure that you leave something for us to catch, okay? Your mother must feel proud of having a daughter who is already good at a lot of things at such a young age."

"I'm pretty sure she will be a great help to her family when she grows up."

"She already is. She can easily finish work requiring several people to work together."

With their compliments, Mandeok felt her face blushing.

As soon as Mrs. Kim got home, she prepared lunch.

Mandeok had lunch with her two brothers, Manseok and Manjae.

"How come you are not having lunch?" Mandeok asked her mother.

"I think I have an upset stomach, so I'm not in the mood for lunch now."

"You should eat something since you worked so hard."

Saying that, Mandeok put her spoon on the table.

"You worked harder than I did. I will take your brothers to mow in the afternoon. Why don't you stay home and clean the house, honey?"

Her face was filled with much anxiety. Thinking about her father, she probably lost her appetite. Mandeok felt something warm in her heart with her eyes full of tears. Her father and mother made one happy couple, so the villagers respect and envy them.

Jeju Island is also called Samda-do which means the island is abundant in three things: stones, wind, and women. A long time ago, a lot of men from Jeju died in storms while fishing in the ocean or left Jeju to settle in the mainland once they became grown-ups. Therefore, men were heavily



outnumbered by women, which made it natural for men to have two or three concubines even for the men of low status. However, Mandeok's father loved his wife so much that he couldn't imagine having another wife himself. Now Mrs. Kim hadn't heard anything from him for more than 15 days already; anyone could imagine how desperate she was to find out what had happened to him.

"If you are not having lunch, then I'm not either," insisted Mandeok.

It seemed that she crossed her arms to show her mom how determined she was. Only then did Manseok and Manjae lay their spoons on the table, looking at their mother.

"Mother, have lunch with us, please," said Manseok. Manjae put her spoon in her hand.

"You had me there, you little stubborn bastards."

Mrs. Kim grabbed her spoon and had a spoonful of cooked barley. Her mouth was so dry that she couldn't even chew the tough barley properly. She just pretended to eat.

Mandeok felt sad, staring at the back of her mother who was taking her two sons to work.

After washing the dishes and cleaning the house, she took the laundry to the stream. Some of the women who were doing laundry suddenly jumped to their feet as soon as they saw Mandeok.

"Poor girl, are you here for the laundry?"

Mandeok was puzzled by their question.

"You probably haven't heard the news."

Mandeok's heart started pounding like a hammer.

"What are you talking about?"

"Well,…… the merchants who went out to sea 15 days ago……. Geez. I can't do this. How can I tell that little kid the truth?"

"What about them?" Mandeok yelled at the women.

'Nothing has happened to my father. It can't be possible!'

She felt dizzy.

"Mandeok, where is your mom?"

"In the field."

"Go there and find her."

She didn't dare to ask further.

"That's why he adored his wife passionately. Maybe he knew he would be gone like this," said one of the women.

"Mrs. Kim has been given so much love ordinary women like us could never imagine for our entire lives."

Leaving what the women said behind her, she dashed to the field, staggering. Since she tried hard not to cry, her face turned red. She ran so hard that she didn't notice that she tumbled over a jagged stone and fell into a ditch on her way to the field.

"No! It cannot be true! Dad is coming back home soon!" Mandeok shouted.

It was as though it were not her voice and everything appeared so bleak. She couldn't find her mother and brothers who were supposed to be there. Now she couldn't hold her tears anymore, so she burst into tears. She almost tripped and fell several times, for she was blurred with tears. She ran home without stopping.

'Someone must have lied to me, right? It is all bullshit!'

It seemed as though her father's hearty laughter was ringing in her ears, and at any moment he would say, "Sweetie, come and have a look at what I have brought for you from the mainland," in his gentle voice.

Her mother and brothers had already got back home. She wiped her tears with her hands.

"Mandeok..."

Manseok called her in a tearful voice.

"What happened to Mom?"

She approached her mother who was lying like a corpse.

"I'm alright."

Mrs. Kim barely managed to say a word — her two eyes were fluttering.

"She collapsed in the field when she heard about what had happened to Dad."

Upon finishing his words, tears began trickling down from his eyes. Mrs. Kim also had tears rolling down her eyes, biting her lips softly.

"This is the destiny of the Jeju women. There is nothing we can do."

Her forced smile made her face look distorted.

After that, Mandeok's mother fell ill and became bedridden. Mandeok — fearing she might lose her mother rather than being lost in grief — didn't leave her mother's side. She neither ate nor slept. Mandeok got some rice from one of her close neighbors and made porridge as well as tried to cheer her up with a smile; her mother was getting weaker and weaker day by day.

That year cholera was prevalent throughout the country, so Mandeok gave her extra attention. She boiled water and cooled it down when she cooked rice and gave it to her mother for drinking. However, nothing could help her get better.

"You have a fever."

Mrs. Kim kept vomiting even though she didn't eat anything. She was too weak even to go to the toilet — she had diarrhea with her clothes on. Every time her mother had loose bowls, the little girl undressed her mother, wiped every single spot of her body, and changed her into new clothes.

"I'm awfully sorry for making your life much harder."

Mrs. Kim grabbed Mandeok's hand firmly. Her hand was very hot because of a fever.

"I want to go back to where I am from."

"Mom, don't leave us."

"I wish I could see you grow up. I'm sure an adorable child like you will

make a beautiful lady! I'm afraid I won't be able to see that……."

Mrs. Kim passed away that night.

In 1750, the 26th year of King Yeongjo's reign, the deadly disease which claimed the lives of 70,000 people across the country – 900 on the island – took a beloved mother from a 12-year-old poor girl. Her mother passed away exactly half a year after her father died in the storm.

However, the girl's misfortune didn't stop there. Together with her two brothers, no matter how hard she worked both in the waters and in the field, it was difficult for them to have a bowl of porridge a day. It was unthinkable to fish in the sea because of violent storms, and a series of typhoons ruined their field work.

"Mr. Boo asked me to marry his daughter. He said he needs someone to help him."

Manseok couldn't look at his little sister.

"Uncle said that he can spare a place for me to stay," Manjae told his sister in a very low voice, with his head hanging down, feeling sorry for his sister.

"What about me?" Mandeok boldly asked. She was still buried in grief of losing her parents and the thought of her brothers leaving made her sink into deeper despair.

"He said he cannot afford to raise you. As you know, he barely makes ends meet and he doesn't need a girl."

Mandeok swallowed her tears.

"We have no other options, do we?"

Manseok seemingly indifferently spoke to his little sister, but leaving that poor little girl with no one to depend broke his heart.

"I will try to drop by once every day. If I work hard, I can afford one meal for you."

Manseok squeezed his eyes tight not to shed his tears.

"I asked uncle to share some food with you, as well."

Talking to his sister, Manjae's eyes were brimming with tears.

'I don't want any food. I just don't want you guys to leave me. How am I supposed to live without family.'

It was at the tip of her tongue, but she couldn't spit it out.

'Well, this is the reality. There's nothing we can do. I don't want to be a burden to you in your lives.'

Mandeok breathed heavily to calm herself down and then talked to them with a smiling face.

"You know, I'm a Jeju woman by blood, so I think I can support myself without anyone's help. Brothers, don't worry about me and don't even bother to ask for any food for me. You take care of yourselves."

The next day, Manseok and Manjae left home — carrying only old sacks on their backs.

"I want to walk with you a bit to see you guys off."

She frowned at them so that they couldn't notice that she was crying. The farther the two boys went in the distance, the more her eyes were filled with tears.

'They are far away enough to not know that I'm crying.'

Only then did she shed large drops of tears, waving her hands to Manseok and Manjae who kept looking back.

Manseok, who had promised to drop by once a day, visited her 10 days later.

"Has Manjae ever come?"

Mandeok shook her head in denial.

"How have you been? Have you been eating?"

Manseok unpacked his bundle and took out some potatoes and barley flour. Suddenly, tears welled up in her eyes. He probably went through a lot of trouble for this meager food over the last 10 days, and she felt sorry for all that trouble.

"What about your work? Did you finish it before you came here?" asked Mandeok.

"I told them to leave something for me to do. I will finish it when I get back."

"So you are not staying overnight, are you?"

Feeling sorry, Manseok turned away his head.

"When you left me, I set a goal," said Mandeok with limpid eyes.

"We had to separate all because of this damned poverty! I am determined to be a wealthy person. Then all of us can live together again. Until then we just need to live apart from each other."

"So you want to be rich? On Jeju Island? How? You are probably aware that it is very hard for women to make a lot of money. Even though you work very hard in the seas and the field, you can barely keep the wolf from the door."

"I think I will be a merchant like Dad."

"How could a woman become a merchant? That doesn't make sense at all. You are probably out of your mind cause you haven't been eating enough."

Manseok took a close look at his sister. She must have been starved for many days — both her cheeks and big eyes were sunken. Her face looked dark but the eyes were sparkling, which made him even more worried.

Mandeok said in a clear ringing voice, "I didn't move because it made me hungry. And I didn't talk because it also made me hungry. I lay down in my room, doing nothing and talking to nobody. What I did was only thinking. So it came to mind that I should be a merchant to be rich. It is decided."

Manseok wanted to say something to his sister, but he chose not to; he had done almost nothing for her, so he was not in a position he could tell her what to do.

After her brother left, Mandeok made porridge with barley flour he brought for her.

Jeju is known for Samda which means it abounds in three things: stones,

wind, and women. But at the same time, it is also known for Sammoo meaning Jeju lacks three things: thieves, beggars, and gates. Since the people living on Jeju Island had to cope with harsh conditions, frugality was a guiding principle in their lives – they could manage in tough times by working hard and saving up for a rainy day. Moreover, they would rather die than beg for food. Jeju spirit ran in her blood. Even though she was starved, she didn't want to beg for food – she had survived only with water for several days already. Therefore, eating a bit of rough barley porridge could take the edge off her appetite. She divided the leftover barley flour into a serving. She thought she could support herself at least five days by eating two meals: a potato in the morning and barley porridge in the afternoon.

"I can catch some seafood once the wind and waves die down.……."

"It will take some time until they subside. Perhaps you'll die of hunger before that."

Hearing a familiar voice, Mandeok lifted her head up. It was Woljungseon, a retired gisaeng.<sup>1)</sup>

"Woljungseon!"

She smiled after a long time. Everyone had a hard time making ends meet; whenever seeing Mandeok, even those who had a close relationship turned away, clicking their tongue out of sympathy. Thus, Woljungseon's visit made her very excited.

"Look at this scrawny little girl. Your pretty face has disappeared. Poor thing."

She squeezed her two hands with eyes filled with tears.

"Why don't you come to my house and live with me? You can help me with some housework, can't you?"

"Are you sure?"

Mandeok hesitated for a moment; she knew Woljungseon was trying to help

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1) a type of Korean traditional entertainer who is designated and reserved specifically for government officials who live nearby

her, but she was a gisaeng. Back in those days, it was not a honorable thing for a person born into the noble class to do the household chores for a gisaeng who was of low class. However, she had no other choice.

"I'm more than willing to accept your offer," Mandeok said briskly. Just like her brothers did, she left the house nearly empty house and followed Woljungseon, carrying only a small bundle.



## Chapter 2 - Mandeok's Life as a Gisaeng

Woljungseon, who lived in Mugeunseong castle, felt affectionate to young Mandeok all the time. Not because she was diligent and filial to her parents but because she had a beautiful appearance — she was about a handspan taller than the kids of the same age with fair skin and her eyes stood out with her thick double eyelids. Woljungseon felt sorry to see that a sweet girl like Mandeok who was good-natured and exceptionally good-looking became an orphan overnight and had to support herself on her own.

"Now that you have decided to live with me, I don't see you as a maid. You lost your parents and I don't have any child even though I'm over 50 years old, so we should rely on each other.

Woljungseon wanted to adopt her. Mandeok was already aware of her noble determination that she wouldn't have a husband and would live as a gisaeng for the rest of her life. Moreover, she was attracted to her simple and humble lifestyle; it was different from that of other gisaengs.

"I will follow your decision," said Mandeok.

Mandeok, forced to live all by herself, appreciated Woljungseon for turning her hand to Mandeok. Therefore, thinking that the only way she could repay her kindness was to work hard, she worked her ass off without any break, except for sleeping. Because Mandeok worked around the house without sparing herself, the house was shining now. As soon as she finished with the house chores, she made her way to either the seas or the field for extra work.

Woljungseon in her later years could live in comfort because of Mandeok, but her face was still full of worries all the time. Mandeok, always caring about how others felt, could easily recognize her anxiety.

"Is there anything that makes you worried?" asked Mandeok. "Though you

smile, you don't seem to smile at all."

"Not really," replied Woljungseon.

Woljungseon was persistent in not answering her question. Seeing that Mandeok was already sweet seventeen and had blossomed like a flower in front of her eyes, after contemplating for quite a while, she decided to tell Mandeok what was on her mind.

"Sweetie, how do you feel about being a gisaeng?"

Just as Woljungseon expected, Mandeok's response was resolute.

"Well, should a person of low class be a gisaeng? As you know, I am from the respectable noble class."

Woljungseon had no choice but to keep her mouth shut. As Mandeok said, she couldn't deny the fact that people in those days looked down on gisaengs because of their humble unprivileged background. However, if looking from different aspects, being a gisaeng didn't seem to be a bad thing at all. In Jeju, what kind of women could escape from working in the field work and in the ocean? How blessed are the women who can meet other men freely in Joseon Dynasty other than their husbands? Almost all the women in the country had pretty much the same doomed faith — the difference was whether the pain came from seeing their husbands have concubines, becoming widows, or being forgotten as retired gisaengs, just like weathered flowers.

Mandeok having willingly determined to follow her and become her adopted daughter at the tender age of 12 without asking anybody, Woljungseon knew how discerning she was, so she decided not to press her to make a decision.

Waiting patiently for several days, Woljungseon asked her again with care.

"Well, in Jeju it is very sad to live as someone's wife. Even though many wives work in bare feet all year round, there are not many husbands who appreciate their wives' hard work; rather a majority of them are flaneurs, keeping concubines. However, it would be fortunate if they could grow old with their husbands until their hair turns gray; most of them die at a young age,

fishing in the sea or doing business in the mainland. If not, only a few men come back once they settle down in other provinces. Compared to the life of ordinary housewives on the island, living as a gisaeng is comparable to that of gentry women."

It was hard to tell whether Mandeok was listening to her, for Mandeok seemed to concentrate on wiping the floor with a cloth. However, Woljungseon didn't care — she went on talking.

"If chosen as an official gisaeng, you can enjoy an affluent life, dealing with only rich and noble men. You can also have opportunities to learn tone and rhythm and paintings and calligraphy from excellent teachers, so I'm pretty sure in many ways we are in a much better position than those women of noble class. It might be the best way for women to take because we can talk about the things happening around us with a host of noblemen and government officials. Four sure!"

Only then did Mandeok stare at Woljungseon, pausing for a moment. Taking advantage of opportunity, she took a rag from Mandeok's hand and put it aside. Mandeok knew exactly what Woljungseon meant, so she could give her opinion clearly.

"If you insist on my becoming one, I have no choice but to obey you. You adopted me and have provided me with food and clothes. So I should do whatever you ask me to do."

Just then, Woljungseon saw resentment in her two eyes.

Mandeok's appearance, which was outstanding enough to make her qualified to be an official gisaeng, wasn't the only reason why Woljungseon wanted her to be one. Woljungseon, having already passed the age of 50, wasn't able to get her name off 'the gijeok,' a list of those with gisaeng status. At that time, there were two ways available for those on the list to remove their names: one was to find someone who could pay a ransom for them and be their concubine. The other was to put another person's name on the list before

they reached 50.

With Mandeok's name listed on the gijeok, she could live comfortably for the rest of her life. In fact, it wasn't that difficult for Woljungseon to do that. If it were not her when Mandeok became an orphan, somebody else would have taken her only to put her name on the list.

When families dispersed due to a poor harvest, it was fairly common to see that even the children born to high class parents become gisaengs; nevertheless, she wanted to be respectful of Mandeok's opinion. The longer Woljungseon had her nearby, the more obvious it became that Mandeok had something that didn't allow people to ignore her. Woljungseon stared at her still.

"So, would you become a gisaeng?"

"I would, but at the time you make me a gisaeng, I won't consider you as my mother any more."

Mandeok looked very determined. For several days Woljungseon was on the lookout for an opportunity to bring up the same issue again, while Mandeok had prepared what to say to her.

"Nowadays, it is true that merchants don't get a lot of respect from others, but I always think about my father who was an excellent merchant and still feel great respect for him. Several times every day, I chew over his teachings that I should do my utmost whether I am well or sick and that I must pay close attention to what's going on around the world and be able to read the times. In addition, I engrave in my mind my mother's teaching who followed my father."

Mandeok told her the story of Cheon-deok Kim, a virtuous woman, her mother had used to tell her frequently. Cheon-deok was a wife of a servant and one day her husband was swept away by a storm and got killed. Since then, she had spent three years holding memorial services for him – with her hair down in mourning. When she finished honoring her late husband, her

parents forced her to get married again. To remain faithful to her husband, she tried to hang herself, whose attempt resulted in her maintaining her integrity until she died.

"My late mother wanted me to devote my life to only one husband just as Cheon-deok did. I decided to live up to her expectation, thinking my mother is always watching over me."

Having heard what Mandeok had to say, Woljungseon realized it would be impossible to break her will so she wanted to give up on the one hand. However, on the other hand, she couldn't completely give up on Mandeok. Woljungseon, whose discerning eye allowed her to penetrate human nature dealing with people from all walks of life by living as a gisaeng, thought over the predicament with Mandeok. And all of a sudden, she shouted.

"That's it!"

Woljungseon's eyes opened widely – she had found her weakness.

From that day on, Woljungseon stopped eating.

"Mother, is there anything wrong with you?"

"I think I need to have my body examined by a doctor."

Woljungseon had already made a scenario with the doctor. Mandeok, with her face full of worries, waited until the doctor finished checking her body and said, "She has barely drunk water, which makes me anxious."

"The illness is from her mind."

"It's from her mind? What do you mean?"

"Having lived as a gisaeng for a long time has devastated her mind. Most of those who worked with her are now free. However even though she is this old, she still has her name written on the gijeok. And that's what has eaten up her mind."

The doctor intentionally sighed deeply and said, "I don't think she has much time to live."

Woljungseon gave a sad look, shedding crocodile tears.

To evoke sympathy from Mandeok, she pretended to be sick and depressed. Burdened with a lot of housework, Mandeok always labored without ever taking a break; whenever she had time, she kept herself busy taking care of the sick and helped with the field work for nothing. She felt rather uncomfortable when those who had received help from her showed appreciation, and she never told anyone about her good deeds.

That was her weakness — feeling sorry for not being able to help all those in need, and Woljungseon saw that in her. Her scheme worked; the next day, she finally got what she wanted.

"Mother, I will be a gisaeng."

"What are you talking about? You don't have to do that."

"I can't let you die because of me. Even though you didn't give birth to me, I'm still your daughter."

"Didn't you say that I will not be your mother anymore as soon as I make you a gisaeng?"

"Your saying that makes me feel bad. I had no idea how distressed you have been."

Woljungseon felt a tug at her heart.

"Thank you. Thank you so much. I bet that you will make a great gisaeng. And then you will become a concubine of a wealthy nobleman and live comfortably for the rest of your life."

"I don't want a comfortable life. I made the decision because you adopted me, a poor little orphan who had no one to turn to, and raised me. And I think it is one way to repay your kindness."

Worrying that she would get hurt, Mandeok deliberately put a smile on her face while talking.

"I was 12 years old when my brothers left me, and I made a firm promise. Mother, I was going to be a merchant and make a lot of money, knowing poverty was the main reason why my brothers and I had to stray apart.

Therefore I promised myself that I would be a rich merchant to have my family together. Now that I have decided to become a gisaeng, should I abandon my dream of becoming a merchant?"

Hearing that, Woljungseon laughed broadly.

"I made a right judgement about you. In this country, what kind of woman would dare to become a merchant? I guess there would be no men who can understand and support you."

Woljungseon grabbed her hands tightly and said, "The truth is that you cannot change your gender. You were born a woman, so rather than dreaming of becoming a merchant, why don't you make your name as a gisaeng. You will make a fortune."

Mandeok sighed deeply, unbeknown to Woljungseon.

Feeling proud of and grateful for her at the same time, tears were rolling down Woljungseon's face unknowingly.

### Chapter 3 - Mandeok, the Head Gisaeng

As Woljungseon expected, Mandeok had no problem being chosen as an official gisaeng and her name was on the gijeok.

"There are three types of gisaengs: ilpae (first-class), ipae (second-class), and sampae (third-class). All those belonging to ilpae are top-class gisaengs who should practice singing and dancing and are privileged to attend all sorts of events and banquets. Ipae is lower than ilpae and is supposed to give bed services to public officers behind the scenes while sampae is the lowest ranked gisaengs who cannot even sing or dance at drinking parties."

"Then I must be ilpae."

Her voice was carrying her firm will.

Mandeok began to learn tunes and melodies as well as how to dance and play musical instruments. Mandeok, with her clear and sweet voice, was outstanding at singing and she was an excellent geomungo (six-stringed Korean zither) player with deft fingers; however, she was especially an extraordinary dancer.

In those days, Jeju gisaengs who could dance well while riding a horse were regarded the best, and Mandeok, when dancing on horseback, looked like either a bird soaring into the sky or a butterfly jeering flowers, enough to melt the hearts of those watching her.

"She is well deserved to be called the reincarnation of one of Ureuk's best disciples. What a coincidence that she has the same name as his."

The newly-appointed governor couldn't take his eyes off her while beating out a rhythm with his fingers.

Mandeok, in red chimajeogori (a skirt and jacket) with a purple danggi (a traditional ribbon) on her skillfully braided hair, was indeed a blooming flower. Her body movement flowed perfectly with no room for error, and her



restrained hand and foot motions made the hearts of the beholders fidgety.

"Now, why don't you come here and fill my glass with alcohol."

"I can sing well."

"All right. Then I should listen to you sing."

Mandeok started singing in a mellow voice, playing the gayageum, Korean zither with 12 strings.

Apricot flowers, spring is coming with an old stump.

Spring snow is capricious, making you wonder whether to blossom or not

Station officials coming from Beijing, let's lure girls with five-colored thread

"The song of apricot flowers. I love it. Well, now it's time for you to pour drinks," said the governor, chomping at the bit.

"I'm good at playing the geomungo."

"Stop, I've had enough. Then when are you going to serve me drinks? I have a pretty damn good idea about how smart you are, but don't forget you are a gisaeng. Should I remind you of Myeong-haw, a gisaeng who was beaten to death for rejecting a bed service for Jik-ji Choi, the justice of the Naju district?"

Just then, Mandeok bent her head down to the ground.

"I didn't want to say this, but……."

"Is this another trick? I've waited enough. Now my patience is thin, so you better pour drinks this time."

Mandeok said with a sobbing voice, "Last night, your father appeared in my dream."

"What are you talking about? It's been three years since my father passed away. There is no way you could know him."

"You couldn't imagine how startled I was when I saw your face today. You two look so alike with well-defined features and an outstanding appearance.

Therefore, my heart was pounding so rapidly, thinking that the one I saw in my dream last night has revived."

Even though it was just a dream, the governor couldn't help but feel uncomfortable because Mandeok claimed she had met his father in her dream.

"Your father told me to show no affection towards anybody as he cherished me so much. I already promised him that I wouldn't do that. So what can I do now?"

The governor didn't know what to do.

"Then I have no choice but to follow what he said. I shouldn't cross his will."

"However, I will still be wherever you ask me to be and I will sing and dance for you."

Mandeok, just like that, could manage to save her neck. She was a sweet lady with charming quick wit, so she knew how to reject without hurting the person asking.

As Mandeok had an extraordinary appearance and was outstanding at dancing and singing, whether she participated or not decided the level of the party, proving how popular she was. The noblemen from Hanyang, the capital of the Joseon period at that time, desperately wanted to see her on their visits and found every means to bring her in as a concubine.

As ilpae, her songs and dances were impeccable, but the roles of gisaeng didn't end with adding amusement at parties, making it hard for her to refuse the continuous calls from noblemen.

Mandeok, just having turned 20, became the hangsoo gisaeng, the head of gisaengs. The reason why she became a hangsoo gisaeng leading a lot of ordinary gisaengs was she not only was beautiful and had excellent dancing and singing skills but also she was respected by others for being hard-working and living an abstinent life.

Gisaengs in those days were bound to go to government offices for call checks twice a month; in addition, they had to get permission even when they

were not able to attend banquets due to sickness or when they wanted to go somewhere far to take care of some business. Feeling pity for their lives deprived of freedom, Mandeok — although she was hard on herself — was understanding and flexible to other gisaengs.

Having a life on a tight schedule with managing and supervising other gisaengs and attending parties, she still managed to find time to pay a visit to Woljungseon, her foster mother, and look after her.

Gisaengs in the Joseon period had a different dress code from ordinary women. Whenever tying her skirt, pulled to the end of her jacket, to the right, Mandeok once again realized she was a gisaeng.

"Mother, I'm home," Mandeok greeted Woljungseon.

"You are blooming like a flower."

"How's your health?" asked Mandeok.

"I'm fine but feel a little lonely. Without you, it would have been a lot worse."

Woljungseon grabbed Mandeok's hands firmly.

"Have you heard of the saying that by the time a gisaeng grows old, three precious things fade away but only one thing is left."

Mandeok shook her head in denial.

"It means that talent, beauty, and fame disappear but eloquence still stays with her. The reason why I'm telling you this is that I know your nature."

Mandeok smiled bashfully.

"Once a well-known gisaeng myself, I had affection for a man and he promised to come back when he left for Hanyang. For my entire life, I have been waiting for him, and now I am an old woman with no beauty, no talent, and no fame. All I have left now is only eloquence. Mandeok, you should keep this in mind because I'm afraid you might have the same fate as mine."

"Mother, do you know why I practiced so hard to be ilpae?"

"That's because you always work hard in everything."

"As you know, even noblemen cannot treat ilpae as they please. I won't

hurry to get wherever they tell me to be; I won't smile because they make me do so; I won't throw myself in their arms as they want."

Startled, Woljungseon spoke to her.

"But, Mandeok, that is what gisaengs are supposed to do."

"You're right! I'm a gisaeng. Pretending to be happy or pleased even when I have a hard time, I ought to dance and sing with a big smile on my face. But, Mother, I won't let anybody control my mind. I will be the one who controls my will."

Mandeok's eyes became tearful.

"Recently, I hear people saying you recite poems and you're pretty good at calligraphy. Spending time with noblemen has made you stronger."

After a long time, Woljungseon laughed hard.

Mandeok broadened her knowledge and experience while entertaining noblemen from Hanyang. Whoever met Mandeok — even once — was charmed by her personality, wanting to see her again when they had a chance to visit Jeju Island; therefore, she had a lot of people she felt quite open with.

Besides, it was already quite a well-known fact that Mandeok wouldn't attend any occasions if not accompanied by several people and that she wouldn't do bed services. Now, there were few noblemen threatening her to do that. They wanted to see her dances and listen to her songs so badly, scrambling to have her wherever they were having a drink.

"She really is a peerless beauty."

"Traditionally, a gisaeng is regarded as a talking flower, and Mandeok is as pretty as a piece of painting."

"What did I tell you? We've got Mandeok to represent all the gisaengs in Jeju."

Praising Mandeok to the skies, government officials from Hanyang went into the gibang, a traditional Korean brothel. Mandeok, having heard them praising

her, didn't change the expression on her face.

"Bring the gyojasang, a large dining table with a variety of dishes," Mandeok ordered.

Donggi, young novice gisaengs, brought the table full of gourmet meals. On the table were many different dishes, from abalone porridge, fried damselfish, grilled tile fish, fried shiitake, fried buckwheat jelly, and meat wrapped in raw seaweed to dalddeok (nonglutinous rice cake), omegiddeok (millet cake), yagwa (cookies made with flour, sesame oil, honey, rice wine, cinnamon and ginger juice), and kkwong-yet (pheasant taffy).

"What a feast!"

"Now I really feel like I'm on Jeju Island."

"Wow, isn't this the famous tile fish?"

"This is what I'm talking about, shiitake mushrooms — hard to find in the wild."

Every government official was fascinated by the flavor of each dish, uttering an exclamation.

"Did you say shiitake mushrooms are rare?"

Mandeok asked this since shiitake mushrooms were everywhere all over the island, so she was curious.

"They are certainly hard to find. Even noblemen in Hanyang cannot have them whenever they want."

"They are also used as medicinal ingredients."

"Of course, they are very useful herbs — when decocted and extracted, they help people not feel hot in summer, stop coughs and diarrhea, take bad blood away, and stimulate appetite."

"On top of that, if you accidentally have poisonous mushrooms, boiled shiitake will be effective."

Hearing it, Mandeok was so surprised. She usually had them for food, so she had never imagined they would work as medicine.

'If I can find ways to sell them in markets in Hanyang, it will be just a matter of time before I make a fortune.'

It came to her mind just like that.

When the party was at the peak, she called other gisaengs and left the gibang. She didn't forget to tell fellow gisaengs to take the gyojasang out and put aside the leftover food that was still edible. With the leftover from the parties, she always fed hungry kids. People felt thankful for the food even though it was leftover, for there were a lot of people who couldn't have enough barley porridge.

After she became a gisaeng, she didn't have to worry about food, but she still kept that frugal mindset. Mandeok had only two meals a day — breakfast and dinner — just like ordinary people in those days. For notbob (lunch in Jeju dialect whose meaning is to put a dot on a stomach) she had only humble food. In those days, rice was scarce on Jeju island; while a majority of the local people barely managed to stay alive with cooked millet or barley, wealthy ordinary citizens had oily rice three times or as many as five times a day. The gap between the rich and the poor was huge.

'Those of high standing squander money and gallivant around town on the pretext of working for the nation; meanwhile, common people work hard merely to keep the wolf from the door. What a pathetic reality to beat a chest in grief!

Mandeok, worrying about hungry kids having an upset stomach from scarfing down food, had them take a sip of water first to ease their empty stomachs. She didn't put all the food all at once on the table and saved the greasy food for last. She tried to get the children to talk to slow down the eating speed, and sometimes told them some stories.

The story most favored by kids was obviously the story of Grandmother Seolmundae, who was believed to have created Jeju Island. Mandeok told the kids the story of Grandmother Seolmundae she had heard from her mother in

her childhood. Though it was the same story, by fleshing it out with more details and modifying it a little, it sounded like a new story, making kids nag for more with eager anticipation.

## Chapter 4 - Restoration of Her Status

As a head gisaeng, Mandeok only went about supervising all the gisaengs under her control, seldom showing up at drinking parties. As always, she continued with her simple and restrained life, so a slew of noblemen who had a crush on her started lining up to propose to her.

"No one knows what her name is. Does she even have a husband?"

There were several noblemen begging her and trying to lure her with all sorts of jewelry and dazzling silk on a daily basis.

"It would be wise to be a concubine of a wealthy nobleman when still popular."

"Take Chunhyang Seong for example. It can be said that she has enjoyed the best life possible as a gisaeng. I can promise to make you another Chunhyang Seong.

However, no man was befitting her.

"I'm just a flower — once blooming but withering soon. For now, you adore my beauty, but once my youth and beauty have gone, you would eventually abandon me. Please, don't attempt to pick the flower. Leave me like a wild flower on the road."

Mandeok not only coaxed those trying to make her their concubine but also bawled them out.

"How come an important person like you who is supposed to work for the nation cling to gisaeng's apron strings? Do you ever feel compassionate towards people?"

Some of the noblemen, overwhelmed by her determination, couldn't bring that up, but there were still others who bore themselves haughtily and persistently asked her to be their concubine — it was time for her to make a decision. Moreover, she was completely tired of serving men at drinking parties.



"Should I look for a man? And then become his concubine?"

Mandeok was recalling those who proposed to her. However, she turned down all of them for various reasons: some of them were highly literate but they were spendthrifts; some of them were men of high principles but lacked generosity; some of them seemed to be broad-minded and affable but turned out to be addicted to gambling and drinking; others with a lot of fortune were playboys who just wanted to enjoy themselves.

"When can I be free from being an object for men?"

Mandeok's train of thought moved to the life of all the women in Joseon Dynasty.

"Indeed, men are looked up to as the sky and women are treated as the land which is bound to support the sky. Therefore, few women can stand against their fate; no matter how smart and wise the woman is, it is almost impossible for her to pursue her own destiny, not caring about men."

She kept sighing, lamenting her fate. As a gisaeng, however, who was obliged to hurry to where she was requested to be, she couldn't enjoy the luxury of dwelling on her own misfortune.

"You are being called."

Mandeok got dressed up in a jeogori and a chima. Jeogoris for gisaengs at the time were so short that gisaengs had to put on a band to cover their armpits. Every time she wrapped her waist with a band and put powder on her face, she became keenly aware of her low status; powder was an essential item for gisaengs to look charming by making their faces fairer, but it was also to remind them of their humble status and to keep them from revealing their faces in public – she was well aware of that.

"Do you feel at ease?"

It was a common practice exercised at a gibang not to expose one's identity. However, it was Sang-cheon Lee, a local, 6th ranking civil servant, and Injae Park, a local, 4th ranking governor, with whom she had an acquaintance

several times; she wanted to take advantage of the moment.

"How do you feel today?" asked Mandeok.

"Something worrisome is cast all over your face today."

"Even though your eyes smile, you still look sad."

"You have piercing eyes. I've been trying to have control over my mind, but it doesn't work. What should I do?"

"Even Mandeok Kim, a woman of iron will, has something to worry about?"

Mandeok deliberately poured drinks slowly.

"This is cheongju (refined rice wine)."

"It truly fills the air with the scent of five grains: rice, barley, foxtail millet, beans, and millet. So tell me what's bothering you."

"I will do anything to make you laugh."

Sang-cheon Lee and Injae Park urged her to talk.

"I'm originally from an ordinary family."

"Jini Hwang who dominated one era in the Joseon Dynasty also had her origin in an ordinary family."

"She herself decided to become a gisaeng to enjoy free life."

"That's what I heard."

"But becoming a gisaeng wasn't what I wanted."

Mandeok explained to them in detail how she became an orphan after both her parents died and after she parted with two brothers and how she met Woljungseon and become a gisaeng.

"Heavens! What a tough life for a woman to have!"

Sang-cheon Lee and Injae Park had no clue why she was in so much pain.

"You were born with extraordinary beauty and talents for dancing and singing. There shouldn't be anything you are envious for. So why do you want to be an ordinary citizen?"

"You don't like others to point a finger at you because of your low status? Although you don't like your circumstances, what kind of women in the Joseon

Dynasty could be much loved by men and enjoy affluent life like you? Don't even bother yourself with that thought."

Mandeok spoke to them, looking at Sang-cheon Lee and Injae Park squarely in their eyes.

"Just like Jini Hwang who become a gisaeng to live a free life, I want to break from this fetter of being a gisaeng to be free. Please help me, masters"

"What does freedom mean to you?"

"It means I can do whatever I want to do, and isn't that the real meaning of being free? I don't have to do things I don't want to do. That's how I perceive the pursuit of freedom," Mandeok answered.

Mandeok's voice was resonating through the gibang.

The two noblemen, not knowing what to say, just cleared their throats. For a moment, there was an awkward silence.

"Why don't you become somebody's concubine?"

They knew about Mandeok but said this because they felt frustrated.

"I want to break away from this gisaeng status to live at my will. For that reason, I don't think I want to go under some man's protection."

"But you still need to choose a man to guard you in the end. No women are allowed to live on their own unless they remain a gisaeng."

"Mandeok, how brilliant you are, you will never be able to take your name off the gijeok without becoming somebody's concubine or putting another poor girl's name on it for you. And I have never heard of any case breaking from this practice. As a gisaeng, you would be punished for having such a thought."

"Gisaengs are property of nation; as such, they would never be allowed to walk away like that."

Mandeok smiled bitterly.

"Since you think that way, I have no choice but to find somebody else to do my favor."

Hearing what Mandeok had to say, Sang-cheon Lee's face turned dark.

"Well, I kind of overreacted. However, this is the first time you have asked me to do something for you, so I should give a lot of thought to the matter though it sounds absurd."

Injae Park, too, tried to console her.

"On Jeju Island, there are few people who have the authority to do such a thing. So Mandeok, it is likely that there are no other means available for us to try. Even so, please don't consider us cold-hearted."

Mandeok, with a strained smile on her face, filled the glasses and sang a song. And then she left there early.

'Right, this is something I must do on my own. Without my own endeavor, how am I supposed to change my life?'

Mandeok, to solace her mind, visited Manseok, her brother, with a bundle full of food for ancestral memorial rites she had prepared beforehand. Her father's memorial service was in a few days, but Manseok was so poor that he couldn't afford to prepare proper food for the memorial rite. For her brother, not only did Mandeok send enough rice for the whole family to survive but also she never forgot to provide meat and vegetables for side dishes every month. Despite all she had done for her family, she didn't get the respect she deserved to have from them; rather, her family members were ashamed of Mandeok.

"Sister, don't bother to come for the next memorial service."

"Excuse me, what did you say?"

To her surprise, Mandeok asked again.

"Uncle doesn't want to see you."

"I've kind of noticed how he thinks about me, but that doesn't matter. If it is okay with you, I would like to continue what I am supposed to fulfill my filial duty."

"But, you know what……." Manseok slurred his words at the end.

"He is not the only one to feel that way……."

At the moment, she felt a sudden surge of anger welling up in her.

"So you, too, are ashamed of me?"

"It would be better if you were not a well-known gisaeng."

Mandeok, blinking her two big eyes, held back her tears, and then she quietly stood up.

"This is food for the memorial services."

"Thank you."

It didn't sound sincere to her ears.

"Brother……."

"So what will you do from now on?"

"When I step into this house next time, I will come back as an ordinary citizen rather than as this humble status. You will feel proud of me then," Mandeok said, looking Manseok squarely in the eye.

Then she turned around and went outside. Childhood memories she had with her brothers flashed through her mind. She recalled the time when she didn't realize how blessed she was to live with her family — due to extreme poverty. And it was Woljungseon, a retired gisaeng, who helped 12 year-old Mandeok who was struggling to make ends meet.

'No one was there to protect me! This low status! Gisaeng! Of these things, I wanted nothing, but even my own brother pointed a finger at me. Now I'm determined to quit working as a gisaeng. However, I'm doing this not because of what others say about me.'

Mandeok recalled the promise she made with her brother. She heard her 12-year-old voice clearly saying she would become a merchant and wealthy woman and then she would have the whole family live together again.

"Once I become an ordinary citizen again, I will become a merchant. Like other women in this country, I don't want to spend the rest of my life serving men. I will live a free life — having my own way!"

She clenched her fist with determination.

A few days later, Judge Yu-chu Han, told Mandeok to attend a banquet. She purposely went there late, making an excuse that she was sick. With Mandeok present at the banquet, the party got more exciting. Before attending the party, Mandeok told a young gisaeng to bring a note to the banquet around midnight; in fact, she wrote it herself.

"What is the thing on the note making your face long?"

Yu-chu Han, normally having a high opinion of her behavior, asked her in a tender voice.

"Well……."

Mandeok slurred her words at the end.

"My father's memorial service is today, and it says I should be there."

"Then why don't you go there?"

"Since I am serving dignitaries like you, there's no way I can leave here."

"Even so, you still need to ……." Governor Sang-cheon Lee was there at that moment.

"Mandeok is originally from the noble class," said Lee.

"Is that so?" asked Han in surprise.

"As a descent of the Kims of Gimhae, I've grown up, being taught that worshiping ancestors is the most important in the world. However, with my humble status, I cannot fulfil my duty as a descendent, which cuts right to my bone."

Teardrops streamed down Mandeok's face.

"You may leave now."

"How can I confront the ancestors for a mere gisaeng status? However hard I try, it is already too late to make it to the memorial service. I would rather not show up because the ancestors would be embarrassed to have me there."

She started to weep aloud on purpose. Watching her crying loudly, the judge sympathized with her.

"The life of a woman born into such a prestigious family has been ruined, for she lives in the wrong era……."

"Are there any ways for us to help her?" asked Sang-cheon Lee, kind of hoping that Yu-chu Han could lend a helping hand.

"Why don't you drop by the district office?"

As soon as hearing what he said, Mandeok was extremely joyful, feeling she was already free from the fetters of a gisaeng.

However, they were just words floating at the drinking party. The very next day, she hurriedly went to the district office but Yu-chu Han was nowhere to be found. Even though she was told that he was out on business, it was obvious that he didn't want to see her. Mandeok, signing her name in the attendance book, searched for him every day. Fifteen days had passed since then, and Han, realizing he could no longer avoid her, finally came face to face with her.

"I'm troubled with you coming for me every day."

He couldn't hide his uneasy mind.

"Didn't you tell me to visit you?"

Her voice was rather calm. After all, she had found a breakthrough; therefore, she decided to remain relaxed, thinking she would never step back that easily.

"But there has been no precedent of a gisaeng being reinstated in her rank, so I can't assure whether there will be anything I can do to help you."

Han gazed at her carefully. Though she was a gisaeng, Mandeok was graceful and had class, no less than daughters of any respectable family. Mandeok — in plain cotton clothes without any accessories on — still looked neat and chaste.

"Go back home and wait."

"Excuse me?"

"Leave here for now."

She could read his mind. The judge told her to wait when he could have put his foot down and said, "No." Mandeok bowed down to the ground and left there.

Even so, she could not just sit in her house, waiting for his call. The following day, therefore, she paid a visit to Moksa Gwang-ik Sin, who was in charge of Mok, a small unit of a regional district. Gwang-ik Sin lived a thrifty life and was a diligent man. She saw him only once when he started his post as a Jeju Moksa, but she knew about his noble character fully well. He, nevertheless, couldn't help but get angry at her request.

"Do you think that makes sense? How could a gisaeng put her name on and take it off from the gijeok at will?" You are not the only one who was born into a noble family but became a gisaeng."

Mandeok sat on her knees right where she was.

"Without a dream, I can ride with the tide. Without a dream, I can live as a gisaeng for the rest of my life, not giving a damn about what happens to me."

"Did you say a dream? What would a gisaeng dream of?"

Not expecting to hear such a thing from a gisaeng, he became very curious.

"When I was young, I lost both my parents and had to be separated from my brothers. This was all because of the poverty that struck my family. Right now, how many people on the island have enough food to fill their empty stomachs just for one meal a day? Imagine that if someone can get rid of poverty, how many lives can he or she can save and how many people would praise the king?"

"So you are saying you can relieve people from poverty, right?"

"I will devote the rest of my life to that cause."

"I have heard you've helped those in need in many ways. It is something that should be spoken highly of that you want to become an ordinary citizen



again to help poor people."

Gwang-ik Sin had her stand up.

"But, as a woman how can you make a lot of money? Anyway, it's not a decision I can make by myself. I should consult with the judge."

Without wiping rivers of tears running down her face, she made a deep bow and left.

Gwang-ik Sin, with Judge Yu-chu Han, discussed the reinstatement issue of removing the low class status from Mandeok. Since Yu-chu Han was actually on the lookout for an opportunity to talk to Jeju Moksa on the matter, he actively consented to Sin's decision.

At the age of 23, Mandeok eventually got her ordinary citizen status back.

She ran straight to Woljungseon. Holding Mandeok, she cried loudly,

"Now, I finally feel like I have paid all the debt I owed you."

"What are you talking about, Mother? I have got a lot of lessons through the life as a gisaeng."

Woljungseon kept rubbing Mandeok's hand over and over again.

"Now you must live your own life."

"Of course, I will, Mother. I will stand up by myself."

Mandeok's two eyes were sparking more brightly than ever before.

## Chapter 5 - The Man Mandeok Chooses

The news that Mandeok became an ordinary citizen again spread quickly all over the island.

"There hasn't been any gisaeng like Mandeok. Now who can succeed her?" said those who missed her while most of the people felt happy for her.

"She was different as a child. She is a real woman. Who could have thought about breaking out of that humble status?"

"While she was a gisaeng, Mandeok led a exemplary life, which must have moved the heavens."

Mandeok, who wanted to escape attention from noblemen, was proposed to by more men. Now a number of men lined up to make her their wife rather than their concubine, which made her realize how difficult it was for a woman living in Joseon Dynasty to remain single.

"In order to show others that you are no longer a gisaeng, you should marry into a very prestigious family."

It was the first thing Manseok, her oldest brother, said.

"If you want to remain single out of inferiority complex, you should change your mind first."

Manseok reasoned with her.

"You should fulfill your duties as a woman, so you should marry a man and be obedient to him while regarding him as the heavens. And also you should bear his son so that he can carry on a family line. These things are what every woman in this country is bound to do. If you neglect your noble duties, how would you confront our ancestors and how would you be considered as a woman?"

Mandeok felt frustrated.

'I didn't strive to reinstate my status for this!'

However, there was no one she could talk to about her troubled mind.

'In this society, women whose husbands die are forced to remain faithful to their deceased husbands while it is impossible to remain single unless they are gisaengs. Women are not treated as human beings in this society!'

As Mandeok's thought was unthinkable in the social norms of those days where Confucianism prevailed, she couldn't speak out what was on her mind.

She was quick in making decisions.

"Well, if being single is a problem, then I can solve that problem."

Now, as an ordinary citizen, she began looking for a husband without considering what others thought.

She didn't accept the proposals by those who were attracted to her beauty and artistic talents — not to mention the guys who frequently visited gibangs. She wasn't attracted to the men who ran amok on drinking. She also didn't feel drawn to men with either fortune or high standing. She had seen enough of such men while she was a gisaeng. She was fed up with their showing off, and that was the reason why she preferred someone trustworthy, frugal, and honest.

"It would be better if he is highly educated."

Lying with her arms under her head, she tried to recall everyone she had had an encounter with — even if only once.

"Right! Seon-heum Go. He is the man."

Seon-heum Go was a 31-year-old Jeju native. He got married at the age of 19 and had two daughters, Bong-ok and Bong-sim. Unfortunately, his wife had passed away a few years ago, and ever since then he hadn't brought in a wife; in fact he was a real scholar who didn't even cast his eye on women. Seon-heum Go had a low government post but was well-known for being knowledgeable.

The next day, Mandeok paid a visit to him. Living in the same neighborhood, he knew about her though he had no interest in women.

"What has brought you here?"

Surprised by her visit, he still greeted her.

"I feel ashamed because I have little food to offer," he said.

Having met all sorts of men as a gisaeng, she could tell a lot about a man's character by the way he talked.

"I'm Mandeok Kim."

"Well, I know who you are. I heard you've become an ordinary citizen again. You should be proud of yourself."

She was attracted to his voice which was resonating so clearly in the air in that it seemed to tell his personality.

"I won't beat around the bush," she softly said.

"I have heard a lot about you. I'm here to propose to you. You don't have to give me an answer right now. You can tell me when you become assured after we spend some time to get to know each other."

Absolutely gobsmacked, he couldn't shut his mouth. At that time, it was inconceivable for a woman to propose to a man directly.

"I will pretend that I didn't hear this. Please leave now."

"Excuse me?" She was in confusion.

"I told you to leave!"

The scholar looked very unwavering. The former gisaeng who had never been refused by men was deeply ashamed of his unexpected response.

"You turn down my proposal because I was a gisaeng?"

Mandeok saw his face change.

'So it is! He doesn't want to take a woman, who was once a men's plaything, to his wife.'

"That's is not the reason. I have learned you maintained your chastity as a gisaeng."

'Even though he says so, it is hard to believe,' she thought to herself.

She felt bitter.

"For now, I'm leaving. I'll be back next week."

Feeling that he was staring at her, Mandeok went outside. On her way back home, for some reason, she smiled.

"Right, I have acquired nothing easily in my whole life. The harder it is to get something, the more precious it is. He is just as I expected. I've chosen a right man."

Thinking he might need time to think, Mandeok visited him again a week later. She herself became more convinced after she met him, but no one should be forced into marriage.

"Did you think over what I said?"

"I thought I already gave you my answer."

There seemed to be no change in his attitude.

"Can you spare some time with me to figure out what kind of person I am?" asked Mandeok with a gentle smile.

"Why do you want to marry me? I heard a lot of men are proposing to you."

"If I have to take someone as a husband and look up to him like the heavens in this country, I want to have someone who I can respect with my whole heart."

"I've got nothing."

"I'm well aware that."

"I have two daughters to take care of."

"Then I will become a mother of two daughters."

"I still miss my late wife."

"You need not erase the memories you had with her. Do you know what a noble thing it is to keep someone you gave yourself to for the first time in your heart? That's something that not everyone can do."

"But you deserve a man who is much wealthier than me."

"Being rich can make a man arrogant."

"You could probably have a noble man with a high standing as your

husband."

"In my opinion, a noble man should pursue not a high position but knowledge itself."

There was no hesitation in sharing her thought, which made Seon-heum speechless. He realized he couldn't beat her with words.

"I want you to go back home today."

To conceal he became attracted to her, he hurriedly finished talking. Walking slowly, Mandeok suddenly looked back. Seon-heum, keeping his eyes on every movement of hers, met Mandeok's eyes. Seeing him avert her gaze quickly, she was even more sure that he had feelings for her.

'On the island on which women outnumber men, it is very hard to find a man of high character like him.'

Since then, Seon-heum spared time for her. The more time she spent with him, the more fascinated she became.

"I'm poor while you're rich. What a shame!" said Seon-heum.

"Once we become a couple, mine is all yours and yours is all mine. Then it will no longer be a shameful thing to be poor."

"Being a gisaeng, you probably met a lot of fine men. I'm neither good-looking nor wealthy, which makes me worried."

"All I met were those who just wanted to enjoy themselves."

Seon-heum, confident in her unchanging character, finally accepted her proposal.

"Now I've decided to make you my wife, I feel like I've got the whole world."

Beginning to trust her, Seon-heum wholeheartedly cherished her. He was not the kind of guy who asserted his authority – meeting her expectation.

From the day the two decided to get married, she started to look after his two daughters, Bong-ok and Bong-sim. Three women worked around the house together, cleaning every corner of the house, changing the bedding, and washing and hanging the laundry by the brook. They also patched torn clothes

and sewed worn blankets. It had been long since she last labored physically, so she felt like her life was full of energy.

However, her happiness didn't last long. A few days before their wedding, Seon-heum collapsed with a contagious disease. She became dumbstruck.

"My mother died from an illness, and now it's taking the life of my husband-to-be."

Whenever she attended to Seon-heum who was suffering from a fever, she couldn't help crying, thinking about her mother. Although, she cared for him with her heart, Seon-heum, just like her mother, passed away.

"I'm leaving you like this. I haven't done anything for you. I should have accepted your proposal earlier. I was foolish. I hope you have a happy life with the right guy."

Before his death, she was unable to melt into tears. Watching his two daughters reminded her of her childhood.

'They must be very frustrated by now.'

'They must be very scared.'

Mandeok held his daughters tight. The tears from the girls' eyes wet her clothes.

After the funeral, she called Bong-ok and Bong-sim, Seon-heum's two daughters.

"From now, I'm not someone you know," said Mandeok.

"What do you mean?"

Noticing fear emerging in their eyes, she told them quickly.

"Can you call me Mother?"

Bong-ok and Bong-sim flew to her arms at the same time.

"We will live together, relying on each other."

She was actually repeating to the girls what Woljungseon told her when she was 12 years old.

"Mother!"

"Right. I'm your mother, and you are my daughters," said Mandeok, patting their heads.



## Chapter 6 - The First Jeju Woman to Be a Merchant

Bringing the two girls home, she made a firm determination.

'To bring up the girls well, I should make a lot of money! Marriage doesn't make me rich! I will remain single, raising two daughters.'

If Mandeok got married, Bong-ok and Bong-sim would have no choice but to become orphans. Recalling her childhood, she decided, without hesitation, not to get married. Manseok and Manjae, watching her suffering from Seon-heum's death, didn't even mention marriage in front of her for a while.

She quickly moved ahead with what she had had in mind for a long time.

Living frugally while she was a gisaeng, she had saved quite a lot of money. Mandeok built an inn near the Hwabuk port at which a number of boats frequently docked and started her new life as a manager of the inn. The news that she opened an inn spread like wildfire, so numerous merchants came from apart to drop by her inn and to see Mandeok, who used to be a celebrated gisaeng. Mandeok paid attention to what the vendors travelling between Hanyang and Jeju said and found more about what was going on around the country.

At that time, horses and gots (Korean traditional hats for noblemen) made of horsehair were Jeju's only specialties known to people in other provinces. Thus, there were more things from Jeju to put on the market for sale. Mandeok purchased local products including seaweed, abalones, shiitake mushrooms, Indian flatheads, deer antlers, tangerines, and more from local people and sell them in the mainland. Since Jeju had to depend on other areas for rice, Mandeok made sure they brought rice on their way back to the island.

In addition, while she was a gisaeng, she learned that some things common

on Jeju Island were rare in Hanyang, and ox bezoars were one example. Ox bezoars, a unique substance resulting from a disease in cow's gall bladder, are more valuable than deer antlers or ginseng in Hanyang, but they are medicinal ingredients which could be found easily in Jeju. Likewise, something rare on the island was abundant in the mainland, such as cotton; hence she bought cotton grown in many provinces across the country except Hamgyong-do and Gangwon-do.

The inn was a place which was always crowded with a host of merchants – day and night, so Mandeok didn't have time to sleep comfortably on the floor. By the time she began to fall asleep, she had to wake up again to thoroughly check the goods vendors brought, serve them meals, and make the bed for them. Furthermore, she led a very busy life traveling around the island to purchase items to sell in other provinces in her spare time.

Despite her hard work, however, fewer and fewer merchants visited her inn.

"The person who is running the place is a woman? What kind of world are we living in?"

"It really annoys me to see a woman running around."

"The manager, once men's plaything, is so stuck-up."

People regarded Mandeok as a woman who used to be a gisaeng rather than the manager of the inn. Since few traders stayed at her inn, she was not able to earn money. However, she didn't change the way she ran her business; she bought products from locals at high prices but sold goods from other provinces at lower prices.

"Sister, you are never gonna make money if you do business like that," said Manseok. He was helping her around at that time and was displeased with the way she did business.

"Brother, doesn't my making less money mean someone else is benefitting from it? As long as someone is making profits, isn't it great? After all, we are all from Jeju Island."

Manseok clicked his tongue in dissatisfaction.

Mandeok had three business principles she always tried to follow while doing business: first, selling large quantities for a low margin of profit; second, buying and selling at reasonable prices; last but not least, maintaining integrity. This noble woman didn't want to be better off by causing harm to others. The path she chose was for everyone to be well off altogether. Nonetheless, those who stopped visiting her inn never came back. Due to lack of money, she wasn't able to buy decent products at the right time, which made her worried.

"Right! I can get money from wealthy people with a high standing."

Mandeok gathered vendors and told them to buy accessories and cosmetics from Hanyang.

"For accessories, you should select the ones that are not too fancy but delicate and elegant. For powder, you must make sure to smell it first and buy it if the fragrance is not too strong."

Even though Mandeok gave them very specific instructions for things they had to buy, half of the items they brought had to be discarded.

"Didn't I tell you to spare no money on goods?"

"I spent all the money you gave us……."

"These ones are too shoddy, and those look cheap. The colors of these will wear out soon, and people will get fed up with those ones any minute."

"I know nothing about women's accessories," said one of the merchants.

The merchants looked sorry. Although people pointed a finger at the vendors for doing business with a woman, there was no one like Mandeok. The goods they bought from her were of an excellent quality, so they could sell them at high prices in other provinces. Moreover, unlike other businessmen, she usually made a payment on time; their faces turned red and black out of embarrassment as they wanted to be of a bit help to her.

"Take a close look at these hair ornaments. These ones are what housewives of high-standing government officials like. Rub these with your

hands. Smooth, huh? These make their black hair look elegant, while not standing out. For a *norigae* (a Korean traditional accessory hung from a woman's *jeogori*), you should make sure that tassels are neatly arranged without getting tangled. The ones that are glittering like this are fragile, requiring extra care when you carry them."

After picking out ones she could sell, Mandeok laid out the leftover accessories in front of the vendors.

"Give these to your wives."

"What about money?" asked one of the vendors with surprise.

"They are presents," said Mandeok.

"Holy cow! They are all very expensive. Our wives would love to have them."

"For cosmetics, you guys bought right ones," said Mandeok.

"I made certain to smell them before the purchase."

"You didn't buy any items after drinking?"

"Of course not."

"You probably need to go to mainland once again in the near future. Then don't forget what I told you."

Mandeok, right after packing up the accessories and cosmetics, paid a visit to some ordinary citizens known for being rich. As those accessories were usually worn by *gisaengs* in Jeju, they were real eye-openers for the housewives. Even *gisaengs* were fascinated by the things Mandeok brought, which made it possible to sell them all at high prices. With the money she earned like that, Mandeok paid high prices to those in need for the products that would be sold in other provinces. As Mandeok paid more generously than others, those who looked down on her — because she was a woman — turned their mind to her one by one.

"Hearing you are coming, I singled out only the good ones," said a merchant.

She didn't get a lot of guests just like when she first opened the inn, but the number of vendors who wanted to do business only with Mandeok was slowly

rising. However, her business didn't seem to get any better, for she needed to sell large quantities for a small margin in order to make some profit. Yet, Mandeok had neither money to buy a lot of goods nor vendors to sell her merchandise.

Then, one day a merchant from Jeolla province who dropped by once in a while visited her.

"Could you buy my cotton?" he asked.

"What did you say?" Mandeok responded in puzzlement.

She was confused because it had been more than ten days since the New Year, so people no longer needed cotton to make new dresses for the New Year.

"You should've got here before the New Year. Who's gonna need cotton?"

"On my way here, we were met by storms. Since my son is getting married at the beginning of February, I have to go back home soon. Now I'm in trouble. Please buy all the cotton so that my son can get married."

Mandeok felt sorry for him; he would never be able to sell even a roll of cotton.

"So how much do I have to pay?"

"For the principals of both wooden rolls and cotton, they are 1,200 nyang."

"All I have is one thousand nyang."

"I will take it."

The merchant got the money before she changed her mind and hurriedly left there.

Giving all her money to him, she had to be satisfied by simply cooking some small potatoes and making the beds for vendors. Looking at the rolls of cotton stacked up against the wall, she let out a sigh without realizing it.

"Did his son's wedding go well?"

"You say this, watching what he had left you?" said Manseok out of anger.

"I'm not coming back here any more."

"Please do so, Brother."

Since Mandeok stopped buying and selling things, merchants seldom visited her inn; therefore, there were not many things for her brother to do and she felt sorry for that.

However, her good deed brought her good fortune. In the winter of that year, cotton became scarce, for it was a bad year for cotton farming. Thus, the price of cotton skyrocketed. Manseok ran straight to her without stopping.

"How much more would you sell it for? Ten times? Twenty times? Thirty times? People would be willing to buy it even if they have to pay fifty times."

Knowing her personality, Manseok was anxious to talk her into selling it at the highest price she could ask for.

"I'll just ask for 10 times more."

"Are you out of your mind? You make me crazy!"

"I'm earning 10,000 nyang from 1,000 nyang, and that's more than enough. If you wish for more, you will be punished."

So she became a rich woman possessing 10,000 nyang.

Mandeok wanted to expand her business with the money.

"I will make the Hawhuk port part of my property," said Mandeok.

"How?" asked Manseok in astonishment.

"I'm thinking about buying ships and hiring merchants to take care of all the things around the inn for me."

"Did you say you would buy ships?"

Manseok had never imagined purchasing ships of his own.

"Once we buy ships and hire merchants, it will make my business a lot easier."

"Don't I know that? But no merchants own ships……."

"Why is that?"

"That's because ships are very expensive. Moreover, when they meet storms, it is like dumping a fortune into the sea."

"Then I will order ship builders to construct very strong ones. You shouldn't spare money on materials and you have to make sure the best ones are used and workers are always well fed."

"I got it, I got it."

Surprised at her boldness, he just nodded his head.

"I'll choose the merchants myself," said Mandeok.

"What should we do if the business doesn't go smoothly?"

Mandeok laughed broadly.

"All you do is worry about everything; what if ships sink into the sea? What if the business doesn't go well? What if the goods are damaged? You would spend your life worrying about things."

Manseok's face turned red in embarrassment.

"Spread the word that Mandeok is hiring some merchants. Then people with talents will gather. I'm going to the district office."

"Do you still have some business to take care of with them?"

"To make profits at a low margin, we must sell goods in large quantity."

"You mean you're going to have the district office buy from us?"

"A lot of people are working there, so there should be plenty of things they need. Besides, they don't have to pay for shipping."

Mandeok was full of energy.

At first, Manseok got his sister wrong; she never asked for a discount when buying goods from locals, so he thought she knew nothing about business. In addition, he thought she would become penniless when she spent all her fortune on the cotton that she didn't even need. Now Manseok, however, did everything his sister told him to do, giving full support.

Mandeok was a real entrepreneur who didn't cling to trivialities and planned a big enterprise. As she was well aware that right people were the biggest asset in doing business, Mandeok traded fairly all times and kept up her credit. She didn't pursue immediate gains and made decisions based on long-term gains

even if she suffered a loss at the moment.

As soon as she began to supply the district office with commodities, Mandeok's Hwabuk port came to life. Vendors flocked to the port and it overflowed with a variety of goods.

"Doing business with Mandeok, you will never lose anything."

"We can trust whatever Mandeok offers."

"She's got all the products we need. Thanks to Mandeok, it is very convenient to do business now."

At last, people started to see her as a great merchant rather than a former gisaeng. She had a number of merchants and servants working for her, and she accepted anyone who was talented and diligent and taught many things regardless of gender. The women who were working under Mandeok were extremely proud of themselves, and some of them dreamed of becoming a great merchant like her.

She drew up a sharp line between official and private affairs, paying a compliment to the ones that did an excellent job but scolding the ones that made a mistake. Mandeok with good nature and humanity had a lot of followers. One time, a man whose surname was Ma lost his footing and broke one of his arms while carrying goods.

"The accident happened after he had been drinking," people squealed on him.

"Since he can't work with a broken arm, this is probably your chance to get rid of him."

"It will be good for you."

Mandeok called Mr. Ma. Admitting it was his fault, he kept bowing down to her and didn't say anything.

"Did you get treatment?"

"Excuse me? Ah, yes."

He was confused because he thought he would get scolded roundly.



"Why did you do that?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why did you drink on the job? No one is allowed to drink while working at the Hwabuk port and you've constantly been told."

"That's who I am. I have nothing to say even if you fire me."

Mr. Ma was a notorious drunkard in town and single father with a daughter and a son.

"How long will it take to heal your broken arm?"

"About three months."

"You know some items are damaged, right? They are very expensive ceramics. You will never be able to pay them back."

His face turned pale. He suddenly seized her by the collar.

"I will pay you back. Definitely I will! I know you smile outwardly but you are evil inside. You dirty bitch!"

She could smell alcohol on his breath. She shook off his hands without batting an eye.

"Of course, you should pay me back. If you don't, I will report you to the district office."

Having already known how generous she was, he immediately knelt down.

"I was out of mind for a moment. How dare I did such a thing……. I will do anything you tell me to do, so please don't report me to the district office. My kids, they are waiting for me at home."

With his head bowing to the ground, Mr. Ma didn't see her smile on her face.

"With your broken arm, I don't think you will be able to carry things around. You will be in charge of bookkeeping. If you don't drink, you can have the bandage removed in two months, but it will take more than six months for your bones to heal if you start drinking again. If you have a fight after drinking, you will have to lose your arm forever. Then you won't be able to

pay for those expensive ceramics and will have to spend several years in prison because I will report you to the district office. Do you get it?"

"Thank you, Thank you."

He left there with his head still down. However, as soon as he went outside, he spat on the ground and swore at Mandeok.

"What did you do?" asked Manseok.

"You fired him, right? He went completely insane outside. That's good."

"When he sobers up, teach him how to do the bookkeeping."

"What?"

"I will pay him a wage when the time is right. Instead, send some rice and ingredients for side dishes to his house. He may buy some alcohol by selling rice, so send as much for his family to survive one day directly to his daughter."

"Your doing so can break the order here. You yourself should follow the rules."

"I didn't establish the Hwabuk port the way it is now just for myself. What I hope is only one thing — finding ways for all the people on the island to eat well and live better."

"You've already done more than one can offer. There is no place like here which pays a fair wage."

"If we kick him out, he's got nowhere to turn. Then what will happen to his still young children? Brother, the reason why we had to part from each other was all because of poverty, and you know that. We should save people first."

"I see. Who can stop you?"

"You should keep it a secret to him. He thinks he has to work to pay for expensive ceramics."

"They were not even ceramics. They were just ordinary bowls, weren't they?" asked Manseok.

"You're right. They were cheap bowls. I threatened him that I would put him

in jail, so you should watch your mouth. Let's work together to change the man entirely. Since he is a father of two children, he shouldn't be that irresponsible."

Mr. Ma was not able to refrain from drinking completely, so it took almost four months for the bandage to be removed.

"How many times did you drink?"

"Once. Maybe three times……. Well, it doesn't matter whether I still drink or not. You are not my wife, are you?"

"You owe me a lot of money. And you know we have provided you with some rice and ingredients for the last four months? I will have you pay for all of them, so you'd better work your ass off."

"I heard you help the needy a lot, but I've found it a total lie cause you don't feel pity for a person right in front of you. You are helping no one, right?"

"You are right. What you heard about me is a lie. Go out and do your duty. I'm going to the district office now."

On hearing the 'district office,' he went outside, feeling discouraged. He had already been many different places before he ended up working at the Hwabuk port. There were a slew of talented people while a few of the workers there were someone like Mr. Ma, a real debauchee; they could work there because Mandeok felt sympathy and took them. Mr. Ma, who thought he could take advantage of her good heart, felt regretful on one hand but worried on the other hand.

"She really means it. She is going to have me pay for everything. Alcohol should get all the blame. It's all because of alcohol!"

The drunken man had changed little by little; he didn't want to make his two kids orphans. Once he quit drinking, he became so reliable and courteous that people changed their attitude towards him.

Mr. Ma, who finally broke his habit of drinking, started to worry about his

future. Though Mandeok still provided him with food enough for one day at a time, he had no idea about when he could pay for all his debt. Moreover, thinking he might end up in prison made him feel as if he were walking on thin ice. Mandeok saw through his mind. She thought the time had been ripe."

"Did you want to see me?" asked Mr. Ma.

"People say you don't drink any more these days."

"After quitting drinking, it's a whole new world to me."

"You should have a lot of worries, watching your kids growing up."

Mandeok laid out a bunch of money in front of him.

"This is what you have earned so far. I heard the roof was blown off by the wind last time, right? Have your house repaired and buy new clothes for you kids. Since the New Year is just around the corner, you will need a lot of money to prepare food and so on."

Mr. Ma couldn't shut his mouth.

"The things you broke were not precious ceramics but ordinary bowls, cheap bowls, so you will never go to jail. Start a new life with your kids."

He went weak at the knees and collapsed there.

"Why don't you get married. Do you want me to find someone suitable for you?"

He couldn't help shedding big drops of tears.

"I've resented you not knowing this! Lady Mandeok, I don't know what to say. Thank you very much, I am very grateful!"

"You should thank your kids. I've done it for your children."

With this as his turning point, he became a whole different person. He was the first one to be there whenever she needed some help and the last one to leave work.

Mandeok could predict what the final output would be based on price fluctuation and weather, which made it possible to buy and sell the right amount, neither leaving leftover products to sell nor making her short of

goods.

"Seaweed can be collected in the spring, so let other ports do it. We will concentrate on bartail flatheads (the type species for the *Platycephalus* genus of fish)," she said, generating handsome money as always.

"From now on, stop buying bartail flatheads and start buying high quality pearls at a high price."

"But you told us to buy the fish, didn't you?"

"As everyone is trying to sell bartail flatheads, the price will sharply drop any minute. You will see when the smell of the rotting fish fills the marketplace."

Mandeok was right about that. Other merchants and managers of inns suffered great losses.

Knowing the world and making others trust her with her generosity, she became the greatest merchant on the island in a few years.

## Chapter 7 - The Savior of Jeju people

The famine which began in 1792, the 16th year of King Jeongjo's reign, lasted as long as four years. Now Mandeok reached 51 years old.

"Granny Mandeok, Granny Mandeok!"

Now around the Hawbuk port were more beggars than merchants.

"Jeju has been proud of being Sammoo-do — meaning Jeju Island has no thieves, beggars, and front gates. It's a real shame to that reputation. I wonder what the government is doing to deal with the situation."

Seeing more and more kids suffer from starvation, she was devoured by anxiety.

"Boil potatoes and sweet potatoes in a big pot several times. Prepare enough barley porridge so that the children can have lunch at least."

"These days, you seem to spend more money on feeding villagers than purchasing goods. What's on your mind? Have you decided not to run business?"

"Why do you think so? I need to sell merchandise to feed hungry people!"

"Granny Mandeok! We are starving!" said the children.

"Can't you hear that? Move, move faster!"

Mandeok said this hurriedly and left for the district office to see Cheol-un Lee, the governor of Jeju District Office. Although the sun was at high noon, he hadn't even gotten up yet.

"I will wait for him right here."

Mandeok sat upright on the main floor. It was not until well after noon that Cheol-un Lee showed up.

"What brought you here?"

"I'm Merchant Mandeok Kim."

"Well, is there anyone who doesn't know who you are on the island? I have

heard a lot about you."

"What sound are you listening to these days?" asked Mandeok.

"What kind of question is that? I don't know what your point is."

"What are you smelling?"

"-----."

"What kind of thought do you have in mind?"

Cheol-un Lee — well-aware that not only was she the greatest merchant in Jeju but she had helped people in need with her hard earned money in many ways — couldn't think small of her though Mandeok was a woman.

"These days, I hear children crying in starvation, smell the rotting corpses of those who died of hunger, and think about ways to save the lives of Jeju people."

"Great!" said the governor in a sarcastic tone.

Lee quickly turned his head away.

"Well, according to what people say at the gibang, you enjoy listening to gisaengs' singing and their uproarious laughter and indulge only in pleasure while drinking, which makes me really worried."

"Uh-oh, you wicked bitch! How can you talk so flippantly in front of me?"

"You ought to look after the people in misery. The lives of a multitude of people depend on you."

"I don't have to hear this! Kick this bitch out!"

Mandeok stormed at the servants who came running.

"Alright! I'm finished with what I have to say, so I will walk out on my own two feet."

Realizing there was nothing to expect from him, Mandeok, in cooperation with the director of Gwandeokjeong pavilion, had a dozen of huge cauldrons hung at every street corner of Samseonghyeol shrine to cook porridge; the famished people gathered around.

Owing to the indifference of the heavens, the famine continued. The central

government didn't look on with folded arms. Jeju was exempted from articles and medicinal ingredients to offer to the royal court and supplied with grains to feed its people. Especially, a secret inspector was dispatched to grasp the reality. Inspector Nak-su Sim reported the misdeeds of Cheol-un Lee to King Jeongjo. The governor was only interested in enjoying himself, having no idea how many people suffered from hunger. At that time, the number of those who died of starvation was over six hundred in three counties including Jeongui and Daejeong on the island.

King Jeongjo had Cheol-un Lee arrested, for he took bribes from public officers and snatched Jinhyulgok, grains stored to relieve people in case of famine. Nak-su Sim was appointed the governor of Jeju to replace Lee.

The new governor requested for relief goods from the central government because he couldn't stand watching people dying. However, his request instigated arguments at the court.

"Jeju is not the only province suffering from famine."

"The situation in Yeonhae-eup is not different from that of Jeju."

"We have a limited amount of resources to help people across the country. If we allocate more to Jeju, it is like taking away what the people in other provinces are entitled to. We need to consider people in the mainland, as well."

Nak-su Sim never gave up and kept appealing, which moved King Jeongjo.

"People on the mainland can move to other areas, but Jeju people have no other places to resort to. Thus, it is our first priority to help people in Jeju," said King Jeongjo, and he ordered Seo-gu Lee, the governor of Jeolla province, to send grains to relieve hungry people on the island.

"How generous he is to send more than 10,000 bags of rice! I'm very grateful."

"He is, indeed, a great king."

The people on the island gave a shout of joy, eagerly waiting for the grains



to come.

To make matters worse, however, the ships carrying them sunk into the sea when meeting storms. Of 11,000 bags of grains being delivered, 10,928 bags were submerged into the sea because five ships capsized. What Sim asked for was 20,000 bags, and it was the minimum amount to survive; therefore, the incident basically left no grains for the village where Mandeok belonged.

Governor Sim was no longer able to ask for help, and all the villagers were consigned to misery, waiting to die in fear.

Mandeok had to make a decision.

"Summon every single merchant."

Merchants, who had no idea what they had to do to survive, quickly gathered. Mandeok passed some money to them.

"This is my life savings."

Everyone was staring at her out of curiosity.

"Go to the mainland with this money and buy rice. It doesn't matter whether you get it from Mokpo, Samcheonpo, or Masan. Please, bring it back safely because the rice will save Jeju people from death."

The vendors thought Mandeok was doing business. At the moment, Mr. Ma, who always respected and followed her, shouted.

"Granny Mandeok! What a great cause!"

He understood what she was trying to do.

"The money I gave you was all I've got, so I have nothing to pay you. Please, help me. The lives of your families and friends all depend on you."

People could feel a firm will in Mandeok's voice. There was a silence at that very moment and it was Manseok who broke the silence.

"It is the money you saved for your whole life, isn't it? You have worn neither clothes made of ramie cloth nor a pearl ring. You saved all that money without ever having decent food. Don't you feel regrettable to donate such hard-earned money?"

"Brother, people having more than others should thank the heavens for their blessings and, at the same time, have to lead a frugal life and consider those who suffer. I've come this far and became a great merchant thanks to Jeju people. It wouldn't have been possible for me to make money if the locals had neither provided good products nor bought goods from me, right? I won't regret it because I'm paying back my debts to the people who made me a great merchant."

As soon as she finished talking, sounds of sighs and sobs burst out.

"I don't need any wages. I will help her."

"I will sweep up all the rice from the mainland."

"We should get ready and leave ASAP," shouted all the merchants.

So, she could manage to find two ships with a capacity of carrying 300 bags each and sent vendors to Jeolla province.

It appeared that Mandeok's sincere compassion touched the heavens. Winds had been calm since the ships departed. Three days later after the merchants left Jeju, the ships full of rice came back with a total of 500 bags. Looking at the ships docked at the Hwabuk port, the villagers couldn't believe their eyes.

"What I am seeing right now must be an illusion! I've been starved too long."

"Is that all rice?"

"I heard the people in the mainland are suffering from famine. Where did she get all that rice?"

"No one in Joseon Dynasty would be as rich as Mandeok."

"She is a woman of great caliber."

Everyone in the village said something, lost in admiration of rice unload from the ships.

"How much is it?"

"Why? Do you have money to buy some?"

"I would take a risk of stealing if I can have a bowl of it."

As the people hadn't seen rice for a long time, their mouths were salivating.

Once again, they witnessed something bizarre. One by one, the rice was being carried not towards Mandeok's warehouse but towards the district office. People made lines to get in the district office, following rows of rice — with anticipation in one hand and curiosity on the other hand.

Mandeok ordered 50 bags to be delivered to her hungry relatives and the remaining 450 bags to be stored in the district office. It was truly spectacular to see 450 bags of rice being carried to the district office on strong men's shoulders.

At the time, the governor was U-hyeon Lee. He was surprised to see bags of rice stacked up in the yard.

"Wow, what the hell is all this?"

"This is rice. You should save the people on the island with this rice as soon as possible."

The governor opened his mouth unconsciously. He couldn't believe a woman — neither a noble man nor an ordinary citizen — donated so much rice.

"It cannot be true! How could this happen? Excellent! Extraordinary!"

The district office was packed with people.

"It is said that even the king can't lift people out of poverty, but Granny Mandeok did it."

"She must be the reincarnation of Grandmother Seolmundae!"

"Mandeok saved us!"

"Granny Mandeok! Granny Mandeok!"

The villagers started to shout her name in unison.

Mandeok quietly got out of there, feeling she had completed what she was supposed to do. Everywhere she went, people praised her while making ways for her, but she didn't smile a lot.

Mandeok used all her fortune to feed around one thousand Jeju people, which accounted for more than half of all those dying from starvation. Without her charitable work, it wouldn't be very difficult to guess how many people

would have died and how many people would be buried in grief of losing their family members.

U-hyeon Lee, who distributed rice, submitted a report to the king on the wealthy people offering relief rice to save more people.

In the report, it said: Han-rok Go, a former county governor, donated as much as 300 bags of rice by trading grains. General Sam-pil Hong and Scholar Seong-beom Yang voluntarily offered 100 bags of grains each.

"One hundred bags of rice is comparable to a thousand rolls of cloth. Therefore, Han-rok Go will be appointed head of county and Sam-pil Hong and Seong-beom Yang will be promoted to Sunjang, a high-ranking government position," King Jeongjo ordered gladly.

However, Mandeok's name was nowhere to be found on the report even though she donated 500 bags of rice. She didn't get any government post, either. Her charitable act as a woman was praised by people through word of mouth.

It was one year later when her great act was reported to King Jeongjo.

## Chapter 8 - The First Jeju Woman to Go to the Mainland

It was in November, 1796 when Mandeok's offering relief rice was recorded in Joseon Dynasty Chronicles. King Jeongjo who learned what she did only then was very surprised and praised her.

"She is neither a nobleman nor a man. How could an ordinary woman living on the island do such a great thing? How surprising it is to donate 500 bags of rice to save the lives of people! If she were a nobleman, she would deserve a high government post. Moreover, were she of low class, she would break from her humble status. Since she is an ordinary woman, nothing works for her. I don't know what prize to present," said King Jeongjo.

The king issued a royal command to U-hyeon Lee.

"Whatever her wish may be, grant it with special care. Do not argue over how easy or hard it is."

For that reason, Lee paid a visit to Mandeok to let her know the king's mind.

"I did that neither to be recognized by people nor to win an award from the king," said Mandeok.

"I'm fully aware of that," replied Lee.

"As for money, how to use it is more important. It makes me feel rewarded, for I could use my money on a noble cause."

She flatly refused to receive the award.

"However, it is a royal command. Please tell me your wish."

Mandeok thought it might put the governor in trouble if she insisted.

"Since you lost all your fortune, why don't you ask for money?"

"Then it will put me to shame."

"How about asking him to make you the only inn operator on the island?"

"Stagnant water is bound to be corrupted. Once everyone is allowed to compete with each other, they can have progress."

"Then what am I supposed to do?"

Mandeok recalled a painting on the folding fan that noblemen from Hanyang brought when she was a gisaeng.

"I heard there is a mountain called Mt. Geumgang on the mainland."

"I've heard it, too."

"I would die here if I can see the face of the king at the palace where he lives and glance at Mt. Geumgang."

"What? What did you say?"

Lee couldn't help but be shocked. There had been no woman from Jeju who visited the mainland.

"You probably know we have the law forbidding Jeju people from setting foot on the mainland."

"But it is my only wish," Mandeok said with a gentle smile.

"Though Mt. Geumgang, known as one of God's three mountains, has a breathtaking scenery, we have Mt. Halla. Will there be much of a difference between the two?"

"I've enjoyed Mt. Halla enough. I would like to visit Mt. Geumgang."

"Huh, looking around a mountain doesn't buy you rice. Do you really have to do this, even violating the national law?"

Lee left there, worrying how to tell King Jeongjo about this. In those days, Jeju women were not allowed to leave the island; therefore, it was a wish that a person like Mandeok, who was not materialistic, would have. Upon hearing it, the King laughed uproariously.

"She is indeed the woman who saved one thousand people. I already promised to grant her with anything she wants, so I have no choice but to break the law. She could have asked for something precious, but she chose not to. What a wise woman!"

In 1796, the year of the red dragon, Mandeok became the first Jeju woman

to set foot on the mainland at the age of 56.

"Granny Mandeok, I wish you a pleasant journey."

The people in the town were happy for Mandeok as if they were going sightseeing.

"Mandeok is probably the only person to get praised for breaking the law."

"She took her name off the gisaeng registry herself and now she is going to mainland. She is a real heroine."

"If she were still a gisaeng, we all would have been dead by now. It is worth violating the law."

"Not everyone can."

People waved their hands until Mandeok's ship completely disappeared from the sea.

It was Yeonguijeong Jae-gong Chae, the prime minister, who greeted Mandeok on the mainland. Yeonguijeong as the highest government position was the leader of all the people except for one person – the king; Therefore, it could easily be guessed how special Mandeok was to King Jeongjo.

At that time, Jae-gong Chae was a 77 year-old man with gray hair while his eyes were still shining and his spirit was high.

"Thank you for traveling such a long distance."

Mandeok looked familiar to the prime minister though it was his first time to meet her. He felt as if she were his sweet sister and friendly old buddy. Mandeok said it was because she deeply respected him, but in part her gentle and mild nature made him feel that way.

"I'm sorry for having you here to greet me," Mandeok modestly greeted him.

Mandeok's story of how he could manage to become a great merchant and save thousands of lives spread in every corner of the nation; thus, on her way to Hanyang, the streets were packed with people who wanted to see her from all over the country including Haenam, Gangjin, Yeongam, Jeongeup, Yeosan, Gongju, and Suwon. Every time she encountered such people, she became

bashful and her face turned red although she was reaching 60 soon.

After arriving in Hanyang, she was told to stay in a house where Sang-guk Yoon's wife lived.

"To have an audience with the king, you need a proper position. Can you think of anything?" asked the prime minister.

"How about this? Jeju has produced talented female doctors such as Saejani during King Sejong's reign and Jangdeogi during King Seongjong's reign — followed by Gwigeum and Hwangeul. What do you think about being introduced as a female doctor?"

In this regard, Mandeok was bestowed with a position of the chief female doctor.

Mandeok — at last being qualified to see the king — entered the royal palace. It was the moment her first wish was about to come true. She made a deep bow in front of King Jeongjo.

"So, you are Mandeok Kim, the great merchant of Jeju. I promised to grant your wish and you said you wanted to see Mt. Geumgang, right?"

"Yes, Your Highness," She quietly answered.

"It is unusual for someone who has only seen the ocean for her or his whole life to want to see a mountain. I haven't been to Mt. Geumgang myself yet. Will you be okay? I heard the mountain is steep."

"I'm seeing you now and will tour the mountain, so I don't think I will have another wish for the rest of my life."

"Is that so?"

The king smiled with satisfaction.

"I've got something to give you."

He awarded Mandeok five rolls of silk. It was an unprecedented case for the king to give an ordinary citizen a prize without going through administrative procedures at that time.

After making another deep bow to the king, she left there to see the queen.



"What a commendable thing it is for a woman to save thousands of lives from hunger!"

The queen awarded her some jewelry and praised her.

As Mandeok was almost 60 years old and it was very dangerous to climb a mountain in cold weather, she decided to go to Mt. Geumgang next May. King Jeongjo ordered Seonhyecheong, a government agency to manage the tributes of rice, cloth, and money, to pay her a monthly salary and pay extra care so that she could live in ease.

While she was staying in Hanyang, well-known noblemen scrambled to see her, many of whom were renowned contemporary writers.

Ga-hwan Lee, the Minister of War said, "I heard you are almost 60, but I can't tell that you are that old. How can you maintain your beauty?" Lee couldn't contain his amazement at her beauty.

"Now, Hanyang is full of songs of eulogizing Mandeok, which could make all the loud sacred ibis leave Hanyang. With your high spirit making the world clear, how many women in this country, where women are looked down on by men, can lead a noble life like you?"

The minister wrote a poem to admire Mandeok's good deeds. Yak-young Jeong, one of the leading scholars who studied practical matters in the Joseon Dynasty said, "What a worthy and rare person!"

"What do you mean by *rare*?" asked Mandeok out of curiosity.

"As an islander, you are loved by many people in the mainland, so how rare is it? In addition, there can be few single women to remain single — maintaining their integrity for their whole life, and you have insightful eyes as a woman. All these are very rare."

Scholar Je-ga Park whose name was known to China wanted to see Mandeok, as well.

"I was curious when I learned you chose to see Mt. Geumgang — even when you could ask for wealth and honor. Now I know why."

The great scholar let out a hearty laugh.

"Your noble spirit is not earthly but heavenly. Besides, it is amazing for a woman to have insightful eyes," said Park.

After Je-ga Park left, she told Jae-gong Chae, "I don't deserve praise for having insightful eyes."

What Je-ga Park and Yak-young Jeong meant by saying that was to highly recognize her extraordinary personality. Having been able to see something invisible, Mandeok — with high spirit — took care of people and even saved their lives. It was not something an ordinary person could do.

"Had it not been for your insightful eyes, how could you have done all the great things as a woman? I've heard a lot about you, and, talking to you in person, I realized I was right about you." The prime minister agreed to what the two great scholars had to say about her.

When Mandeok moved to a new place, she expressed her gratitude to Sang-guk Yoon's wife.

"Thank you for taking good care of me. It is a small thing but take this as a token of my gratitude."

"One thousand and five hundred nyang! No, No. I can't take this. I didn't do it for money. You just keep it."

Mandeok thought it was the right thing to follow her, so she took the money back. A few days later, Yoon's wife paid a visit to her.

"When told that I rejected the money you offered me, my servants said if you were a woman of noble spirit, you should have spent all the money drinking and partying with them."

"Having a noble spirit means to help the weak on the side of justice. How can partying with your servants be justified as justice?"

Upon hearing what Mandeok said, her face turned red in embarrassment. Mandeok talked softly to her who was at a loss.

"A man who is skillful at managing his wealth can save the life of a person suffering from hunger with a bowl of rice while a man who is poor at it wastes a bowl of rice like rotten soil. Furthermore, how can you compare the money worth more than one thousand nyang with a bowl of rice?"

Once again, Yoon's wife was moved by her high spirit.

Next spring, Mandeok headed for Mt. Geumgang.

As, together with Mt. Jiri and Mt. Halla, the mountain was referred to 'God's three mountains', who, including noble men, wouldn't want to visit there?

"Have you been there before?" Mandeok asked the prime minister.

Jae-gong Chae shook his head in denial.

"Seeing that you are about to climb the mountain despite your age, I would come with you if I were 10 years younger."

Mandeok responded with a smile.

"I guess that you've already been to Mt. Halla. Then you will master two of the three mountains if you climb Mt. Geumgang. How many men around the world would have done it? I hope you have a safe journey."

Mandeok began climbing Mt. Geumgang with light steps. Her journey lasted until early autumn and she looked around the mountain for several months.

Mt. Geumgang clearly was a piece of art created by the sky and land. Its 12,000 stone formations had their own unique shapes. For example, Sejon stone formation looked like Buddha overlooking the land, and Ongnyeon stone formation resembled angels standing there.

The water flowing through thousands of valleys was like crystal evoking her spirit and soothing her mind. Guryong falls, scattering in every direction, was like a dragon soaring up to the sky just like its name while she found herself at peace in front of Lake Samilpo that was like a painting. Walking through the paths planted with pine trees, nut pines, fir trees, cherry trees, and oak trees, she could encounter beautiful flowers including rhododendrons, asiaticas, and forsythia ovata nakai.

Whenever she felt exhausted while traveling, she just went into any small temples and made a bow to Buddha. It was the first time for her to find out about Buddhism. At the time, there were 89 thousand temples and small temples in Mt Geumgang, called the mountain of nirvana, showing a deep connection with Buddhism.

Originally, Jeju had a few Buddhist temples. However, in the 28th year of King Sukjong, Hyeong-sang Lee, the governor of Jeju-mok, got rid of all the temples along with shrines, which were main grounds for shamans, in order to break down superstitions, resulting in leaving no temples in Jeju during King Jeongjo's reign.

After going back to Hanyang, she visited the royal palace to have an audience with King Jeongjo.

"Do you really want to go back to Jeju?" asked the king.

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Won't you have more opportunities to experience something new if you stay in Hanyang?"

"I'm a Jeju woman by nature. I was born there and my root is there. Thus I must go back."

The king himself came down and grabbed her hands.

"As you wish, you may go back to where you belong. When you are there, I hope you live up to your noble cause."

She was moved to tears.

As soon as she was done with the audience, she paid a visit to Jae-gong Chae to say good-bye. Hearing Mandeok would leave, his mind was disturbed.

"Once you leave here, we will never be able to see each other again in this life." He was trying to be calm, but he couldn't help feeling empty in one part of his heart. Looking at Mandeok, who was laughing cheerfully like a real woman, he presented her with 'the Story of Mandeok' to soothe the pain of parting.

"Granny Mandeok! Granny Mandeok!"

At the port, a flock of people were waiting for Mandeok. They had been aching for her to come back. To celebrate his sister's comeback, Manseok threw a party and it lasted for a week.

After coming back to Jeju, she had her brother take care of her business and embraced Buddhism, living a simpler and humbler life. She left her last will in 1812, the 12th year of King Sunjo's reign, at the age of 74 years.

"Please, bury me in 'Gaeuni Ridge' where I can overlook all the people on the island."

Gaeuni means 'being out of breath' in Jeju dialect, describing the image of people running out of breath while climbing high hills on their way to the district office through downtown to complain of an injustice. Mandeok, who spent all her life looking after the people on the island, wanted to keep an eye on them even after death, just as Grandmother Seolmundae did.

Everyone in Jeju participated in Mandeok's large-scale funeral.

King Sunjo, who succeeded King Jeonjo, ordered the monument to be built in order to recognize her on November 21; in addition, he granted her father, Eung-yeol Kim, a post of Gaudaebu and Manseok a post of Gaseondaebu to acknowledge his contribution to Mandeok's business.

The story of Mandeok Kim, who was the first female merchant and philanthropist, has been told as the legend of Granny Mandeok. In order to remember Mandeok's virtue, Jeju established 'the prize of Mandeok' and currently offers it to an exemplary Jeju woman at the Halla Cultural Festival held every year.