

The Birds' Tale

Chong An Sunim

"Did you see them?"

"No. I am tired of humans."

"Please look. These are doing something weird. They hardly begin to walk when they just stop and start looking for something on the ground. Together. All of them."

"Hmmm, let me see. Ouch, careful. They put us into these cages pretty tight..."

"They are up again. Hands together, walking, one step, two, three, but here they stop again and crouch in this funny way."

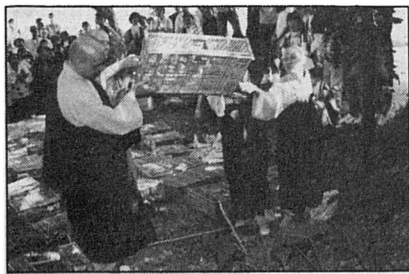
"I know what they are doing. Before they got me in China, I had flown over many places where humans were doing the same thing every morning, except that they never walked, just stood in one place. They were bald and outside they looked the same."

"Well, these beings have been walking and bowing uphill for over an hour and a half. Apparently, they cannot fly. For us, going up this mountain wouldn't be a problem."

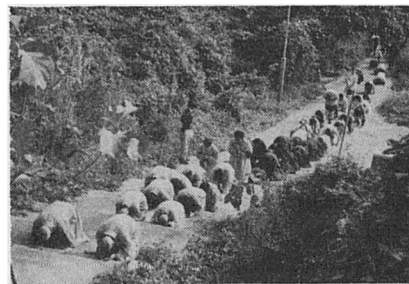
"Have you lost your senses? How could we fly, locked up in these cages?"

"Now somebody is carrying us. We are passing by this group of almost two hundred people. I should say they're having a rough time."

"I never asked them to do this. Also, I have seen humans being escorted and locked up in buildings by other humans. What about those guys, walking along the line with striped, shiny skin, with the black things in their hands?"



"They seem to guard these bowing people, just like our elders in the flock did when we migrated. Also, what they have in their hands are much shorter than those black, long branches that spit fire and make us fall from the sky. The striped ones are talking into these things. I am saying this is something different."



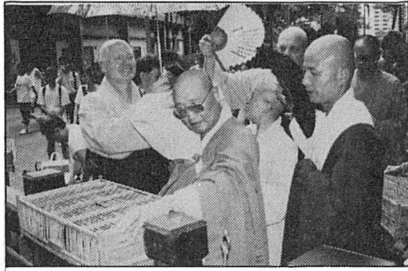
"You're young and trust them too much. A cage is a cage, no matter whether it's moving or standing. On the way here, I have seen many tall and big cages. They are taller than our forests, thicker than the oldest of the trees. Many, many humans live in them. My nephew had to coexist with a family in one of those cages. He suffered a lot, but eventually got free by mistake."

"How?"

"A child opened the cage to clean it and forgot to lock it afterwards."

"Do you think this could happen to us? I have seen at least forty youngsters here."

"I don't think so. This activity seems to be organized all too well. They got up early and met in town. Then they came over the water, to the foot of this mountain. All of them. The children, the adults, the black ones, the gray ones, some of them with bald head, and the striped ones. They started walking and bowing together. A tall gray one began to hit a split branch, and everybody was following that horrible sound. I'm telling you, these people won't make mistakes easily."



“Uncle, you have picked more seeds from the ground than the amount of breaths I have drawn in my life, but I feel under my feathers that this is something different. Look, we have arrived.”

“Indeed, we have. This is like one of the places I visited in China. Many brown ones around, all bald. They never keep us in cage and never hunt for our eggs. Some of them used to give us food. Though I remember, a young one once threw a stone at me.”

“Don’t think badly about these people. Look, they are bringing us water and food. They also eat and drink. Do you hear their laughter? They must be very happy.”

“I don’t understand them. They have gathered and will disperse, they have come up to the mountain and will go down, back to their own cages. Now they laugh, just watch them cry the next moment.”

“Uncle, I have never seen this before! They give presents to each other, clap their hands, and are happy for each other.”

“This is fairly unusual. Hold on, they are carrying us.”

“One of the bald ones is speaking. I wonder what she’s saying.”

“I am not interested. Humans’ way and birds’ way are different. We don’t walk, they don’t fly. They bring us down from the sky with long branches that spit fire—we do not harm them. They lock us and themselves up in cages—we just nest and fly. We gather only to migrate at winter and spring solstice, they form groups at all times for purposes I could not see. When we meet with other groups, we keep distance if it is not of our kin. When they do, they mingle, shout, sometimes fight. Many of them remain lying on the ground and never get up. Then the ravens eat them. There are many things about them I could never understand.”

“Uncle, if we ever get free, you’ll surely be the wisest of the elder. I am young and know very little about human beings’ job. But just now, can you hear this? It’s like our relatives, the woodpeckers. It comes from that round, wooden thing.”

“Yes, it sounds like that. And the humans are chanting together. I don’t like that.”

“Why? We say ‘cheep-cheep’, they say ‘Kwan Seum Bosal’. What’s wrong with that?”

“I don’t know what they mean. They caught me with a net, gave me food, put me into a cage a long time ago, and smiled all the way through. They are happy to have me in their homes, and do not realize that I am not happy to be with them. They don’t understand us, yet rule us, and we suffer. That’s why I don’t like them.”

“But these humans are not like that. Look, look! They opened up a cage in front! Old Tony, Pat, Jonathan, Matthew - all flying!”

“This must be some mistake. There are eight hundred of us. This cannot happen to everyone.”

“No, no! They are coming closer, opening up all the cages! Cynthia, Susan, John, Henry—all gone!”

“I hope they’ll have the mind to gather somewhere close. I am stiff and want to hold council on a comfortable, big tree nearby.”

“Uncle, please! Our door is open! Come and fly! We are free!”

“Fly, nephew. But don’t forget the council.”

“I’ll be there. Cheer up and fly!”

“May you never fall from the sky.” ☉

