

THE SONG BAG

(혹부리 영감)

A Play with Songs, in Two Acts by John Holstein

“Firewood” music and lyrics by John Holstein

“Way Back Wen” traditional melody, lyrics by John Holstein, piano arrangement by Kim Min-jin

“When I begin to Sing” music and lyrics by Gary Rector

“An Unreformed Country Bumpkin” melody and lyrics by John Holstein; arrangement by Gary Rector

“With a Song on Your Cheek” music by Gary Rector,
lyrics by John Holstein and James Cunningham

Copyright © 1991 John Holstein

Scenes and Songs

ACT ONE

Scene 1 A village street in old Korea
 “Firewood”
 “Way Back Wen”

Scene 2 The Goblins’ shack
 “When You Begin to Sing”

ACT TWO

Scene 1 Grandpa’s new house
 “An Unreformed Country Bumpkin”

Scene 2 The Goblins’ shack
 “With a Song on Your Cheek”

Running Time:

60 minutes (without intermission)

Cast of Characters

GRANDPA LOPSIDE	a poor woodcutter with a wen
GRANDMA LOPSIDE	Grandpa Lopside's friend (male or female), also with a wen
WIFE	of Grandpa Lopside
DOKIE	a 19-year-old male rice cake peddler
OKIE	the rice cake peddler's sister
GGGANGPAEGI	the goblins' leader
GOLCHI	a goblin
GGAEBI	a goblin
SERVANT	in Grandpa's new house
TOOTH FAIRY	

Pronunciation

The gg in Ggangpaegi and Ggaebi has an explosive quality, like the g following the k in black-guard.

The Song Bag

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A village street. Grandpa Lopside, lugging a batch of wood on his A-frame, approaches the stage down the theater's center aisle, through the audience. His load is heavy, but he's energetic enough. MUSIC: "Firewood."

GRANDPA: *(Sings)*

Firewood! Firewood!
Lucky you, come and get your firewood!
Firewood! Firewood!
Don't be shy, come and buy!
Firewood!
Firewood...!

He puts his hand to his ear, then turns back to a female in the audience.

(Speaks) Yes, madam, at your service! ... Popcorn? That's outside, my dear. But it sure was nice meeting you!

He walks on, singing his song. Then he approaches a male in the audience.

How about you, sir? The best firewood in all the land! ... Beg your pardon? Sorry. If you have to ask, you can't afford it.

He returns to his song, jumps up onto the stage, takes off his A-frame, and wipes the sweat from his brow.

Whew-ee! Am I getting old, or are those trees getting bigger? *(Considers.)* Well, couldn't be me. I feel as young as a spring sapling... *(Sings)* Firewood! Firewood! ... *(Speaks)* FREE! *(Putting his finger up to his lips to warn the audience not to tell.)* with a small service charge *(and winking)*.

GRANDPA: *(Sings)*

Firewood...

OKIE AND DOKIE: *(joining the song from offstage, distant. Sing)*

Firewood!

GRANDPA: *(Sings to the audience)*

Works just fine!

OKIE AND DOKIE: *(from offstage, closer. Sing)*

Grandpa Lopside!

GRANDPA: *(Sings)*

Lights so quick you'll wonder
what's the trick.

OKIE AND DOKIE: *(ENTER. Sing)*

What's your trick? Hi, Grandpa!

ALL THREE: *(Sing)*

Firewood! Firewood!
Burns so hot, melt your pot...
Firewood!

GRANDPA: Yes sir, and madam. How much would you like today?

OKIE: (*as Dokie, with his rice cake peddler's tray, looks around to make sure no one is watching and then takes off his blind man's glasses*) Sorry, Grandpa, but you know how much money we've got for firewood. (*She turns out one of Dokie's empty pockets, and lots of dust comes out.*)

GRANDPA: Oh well... It's nice to see you all the same. There you go, Okie — have a rub!

Both Okie and Grandpa squeeze their eyes shut as Okie rubs Grandpa's wen, mumbling something to herself as she makes her wish.

DOKIE: Easy there, Okie! You're going to wear it out for me.

OKIE: Just warming it up for you, Dokie.

GRANDPA: Don't fret over this old boy (*indicating his wen*). Still got a few good years in him... Okay Dokie, rub away! ... So, what's your wish, young man?

DOKIE: But Gramps, you told us it won't come true if we tell.

GRANDPA: So I did, so I did! These trees are getting so big these days (*looking around to make sure no one's watching*) I can't remember things like I used to (*taking out a long-stemmed pipe and preparing a smoke*).

DOKIE and OKIE: Trees?

GRANDPA: Trees? What trees... ? Oh, *those* trees! Well, that's a long story. (*He lights up his pipe.*)

OKIE: A story!

DOKIE: Great! Tell us the one... that one...

OKIE: ... about how you got your story bag!

GRANDPA: Young whippersnappers, always asking how I got this thing. (*He pointedly eyes Dokie's rice cakes.*) And how many times have I already told you?

OKIE: And it gets better each time you do.

GRANDPA: I don't know about that. Last time I told you was (*speech drifting with his thoughts*) the absolutely beautiful rice cakes... I mean absolutely true version. You wouldn't want me to lie to you with a new one, would you now?

Okie gets Grandpa's hint, and gets a rice cake from Dokie's tray.

OKIE: (*giving the rice cake to Grandpa*) Okay Grandpa, here you go.

GRANDPA: (*satisfied, looking up and reaching back into his memory as he eats*) On the other hand, maybe I didn't tell it *exactly* as it happened. Who knows if I didn't leave something out?

DOKIE: Now you're talking, Gramps! So, how did you get that thing?

GRANDPA: All right all right, just hold your Mongolian ponies there. Well, years ago, way back in the good old days...

DOKIE: But why do you always say "the good old days"? Was it really better then?

GRANDPA: Of course it was!

OKIE: How was it better?

GRANDPA: Well... You know... I mean... But that's what everyone says, isn't it?

DOKIE: Sure, but...

GRANDPA: Listen kids, you can say the same thing when you get as old as me... So, where were we?

OKIE: Your story bag.

GRANDPA: Story bag? Ah yes, my wen, of course! Now then, when you were little kids and a tooth fell out, what did you do with it?

DOKIE: Same as you... We took it outside, and threw it way up on the roof of our house, and we...

OKIE: And we sang as loud as we could for the next bird coming by...

OKIE AND DOKIE: "You can have the old one, I'll take a new one."

GRANDPA: Sure did. Well, one day my kid brother's tooth fell out, and we went out and threw it up on the roof. And then I got this bright idea: later I'd take his old tooth and get me a nice piece of taffy with it.

DOKIE: But birds only do teeth.

GRANDPA: Exactly! So I had to try something else — like a tooth fairy.

OKIE: *Tooth* fairy?

GRANDPA: A tooth fairy. What else? So my next step was to do what any supremely logical person would do — put it under my pillow and dream with all my might about this tooth fairy, and she'd bring me a piece of taffy.

DOKIE: *She*?

GRANDPA: Ever heard of a *male* fairy? Well, that tooth fairy came all right... *MUSIC*: "Way Back Wen.")

Sings

Way, way back when,
way back in them good old days,
took my kid brother's tooth,
put it under my pillow. (*Grandpa puts an imaginary tooth between his hands, and lays his wen cheek on his folded hands.*)
"Tooth Fairy come (*The Tooth Fairy appears from Stage Left...*),
pick up your tooth (...*and takes the tooth, surreptitiously removes Grandpa's wen...*),
and by the way,
bring a nice taffy
for this nice young fellow." (*The Tooth Fairy puts a piece of taffy between his hands, then starts back toward Stage Left.*)

OKIE: (*Sings*)

Grandpa told a lie, a bold and blatant lie.

A Goblin appears and signals Tooth Fairy to stop.

GRANDPA: (*Sings*)

No! No! No! It was just a joke!

The Goblin whispers in the Tooth Fairy's ear, pointing at Grandpa. Tooth Fairy shows shock, then anger.

DOKIE: (*Sings*)

Lie, fib, trick, jest or joke —

OKIE and DOKIE: (*Sing*)

Gramps' Fairy got provoked.

TOOTH FAIRY: (*Sings*)

Shame on you, Grandpa.

GOBLIN: (*Sings*)

Hee-hee, hoo-hoo!

TOOTH FAIRY: (*Sings*)

(*to Grandpa, pointing*) Now you're gonna pay,
(*to Audience, pointing*) like all your type will pay.

GOBLIN: (*Sings*)

(*to Grandpa*) Naa-naa-naa,
(*to Audience*) yaa-yaa!

ALL: (*Sing*)

Me-oh, my-oh, what a sorry guy, oh!
Try to trick the Fairy? Well,
better eat your taffy — *fast!*

The Fairy gives the Goblin the wen, points to Grandpa.

GRANDPA: (*Sings*)

What could I do? I was asleep
when that goblin came (*laying his wen-less cheek on his folded hands*),
sent by my fairy
to teach me a little lesson. (*The Goblin takes the taffy...*)
Planted this bag (*...and attaches the wen to Grandpa's cheek*)
and gave me my claim to fame.
Left me a sausage
from Baek's delicatessen.

The Goblin gives the Tooth Fairy the taffy, and she gives him a gold coin.

DOKIE: (*Sings*)

Soon the word got out, round and roundabout.
Gramps' wen got famous far and wide.
So he got appellafied...

ALL: (*Sing*)

Old Grandpa Lopside.

TOOTH FAIRY: (*enjoying this immensely with the Goblin, sings*)

Gramps learned his lesson.

GOBLIN: (*Sings*)

Oh-ho! Yo-ho!

TOOTH FAIRY: (*Sings*)

Straight from out of a delicatessen yet!

GOBLIN: (*Sings*)

Hee-dee-haw! Yaw-haw!

ALL: (*Sing*)

Oh me, oh my! What a way to beautify!
But that's just why we all love Grandpa Lopside.

The Goblin snatches the taffy from the Tooth Fairy and runs offstage; the Tooth Fairy chases after him.

DOKIE: Well. Now don't that beat all!

GRANDPA: Don't that beat all.

Silence as all three reflect on this, shaking their heads in unison. Grandpa comes out of it first.

Don't know if I'll ever top that one. But it all goes to show: Once you tell a lie it's awful hard to take it back... (*feeling his wen*) or *give* it back... or whatever. Well kids, guess we'd better get back to business. Take one more rub now, then along with you.

DOKIE: (*to himself*) But don't that...! (*Rubs.*) You know what, this time I didn't make a wish. I made a real big thank-you.

GRANDPA: And who would you be thanking now?

DOKIE: That goblin.

GRANDPA: (*scratching his head*) I guess I must be getting a little slow...

Grandpa's Wife appears Stage Left, spying on them.

DOKIE: There's nobody in this town doesn't like Grandpa Lopside, and you wouldn't be the same old Grandpa Lopside if it wasn't for that goblin, would you now?

GRANDPA: Ain't that about the darndest thing I ever did hear...

WIFE: (*stomping up to them*) And ain't this about the longest pipe I ever did see! Grandpa, how many times have I told you that pipe's for gentry?

GRANDPA: I guess about as many times as I've told you the long pipe tastes better...

WIFE: And as many times as I've told you what they do to a commoner who doesn't know his place. (*She pulls out a short pipe.*) Here you go.

Grandpa rubs his wen hard, glaring playfully at his Wife.

DOKIE: What are you wishing, Gramps?

GRANDPA: It won't come true if I tell. And if somebody (*looking at Wife*) found out, I wouldn't live long enough to enjoy it anyway...

WIFE: Humph! He's just wishing you kids would be off and about your business, so he could be off and about *his* business. (*She begins to shoo them off Stage Left.*) Come on, time to make some hay while the sun shines!

DOKIE: Halt! (*putting on his dark glasses, pointing grandly offstage.*) Proceed... See you, Gramps!

All except Wife think this corny old joke is great and laugh themselves silly. Wife grimaces, then shoos the kids offstage.

OKIE: Bye, Grandpa!

GRANDPA: Bye, kids...! See you! *(He laughs again, then shoulders his A-frame, sticks his pipe in his mouth, and ambles off Stage Right, singing his firewood song.)*

WIFE: *(from offstage)* Gra-a-a-andpa-a-a-a-a! *(She rushes on-stage holding out the short pipe.)* You forgot something! *(She runs off Stage Right after her husband.)*

Scene 2

In the woods twilight is descending, and the birds are singing. Grandpa is Stage Left, humming the Firewood song as he gathers his last few twigs and branches from the forest floor and piles them on his A-frame. He stops and listens briefly to the birds, then starts tying up his bundle. As he is doing this the stage dims and the birds stop singing; shortly there is an ominous rumble of thunder. Grandpa stops humming and looks up at the sky. He gets smacked on the nose with a big drop of rain. He hurries to finish fastening his load, looks up again, and gets smacked again, this time on his forehead. Then the skies let loose with everything they have — furious thunder, wind and rain.

GRANDPA: DUCK!

He hurries a few steps this way and that, trying to decide where to run, though he is not worried and, in fact, thinks it's fun. The spotlight travels with him to the other side of the stage, where both he and the spot find a dilapidated shack. Grandpa literally tears open the door, falling back on the ground with it in his hands. He gets up, rushes inside the shack, laughs as he brushes the water off his clothes, comes to the doorway to look back outside.

Splendid! Oh BOY, what a show...! What a display you do put on for us every now and then! The power! And the glory! *(Considers.)* Hmm... Might make a good title for my next book...

The cloudburst subsides to a steady downpour. Grandpa turns back into the shack.

Yes, we toil and sweat, and then you wash us down nice and clean and cool. Then we get all hot and dirty again, and you come right back and shower us down again. Not bad, these free baths of yours.

He eases himself down to a sitting position on the floor.

Ah-h-h... Those trees definitely are getting bigger...

Then he leans back against the wall, stretches out his legs, and gets drowsier and drowsier as he talks himself to sleep.

Not bad at all... Course, whoever made it so we have to go and get hot and dirty in the first place... *(A tremendous clap of thunder startles him, then he laughs.)* Okay, okay — your business...

Lights out for a while, and we hear the sound of Grandpa's snoring along with the drumming rain. Then the sound of the rain fades out, to be followed by the sound of frogs croaking. Lights up just a bit inside. Soon Grandpa wakes, with a snort.

GRANDPA: (*He gets up and takes a refreshing stretch, then goes outside.*) Ah-h-h, what a night! What a sweet night! (*He inhales the sweet air deeply.*) Well, we're not going home tonight, no sirree. We're sleeping out — and let the old lady get a good sleep while we're at it.

He goes back inside, finds a place on the floor to sit and brushes it off — lots of dust. He sits down. MUSIC: "When You Begin to Sing."

(Sings)

When I was a little boy,
nights like this were scary.
It seemed the stormy darkness had no end.

Then I figured out a way
to get me through the bad times,
and it's proved to be an everlasting friend.

The boom-biddy melody heralds the Goblins' appearance. They hear Grandpa's song and sneak up to the shack.

I finally cheered up when I began to sing.
Songs soon banished my gloomy ways.
I never gave up once I began to sing.
Music's with me for all of my days.

GOLCHI: (*indignant*) What's that human doing in our shack?

GGANGPAEGI: *Sh-h-h-h!* If you go and scare him he'll stop singing. And he is not bad. (*They all chitter and gabble in agreement; throughout, they do this at various levels of raucous enthusiasm, as appropriate to the situation.*) Okay... You know how we goblins love to sing. And you know how *bad* we sing. (*More chitter, a little louder.*) *Sh-h-h!* (*They shush immediately.*) So, we've got him cornered in there. We'll just walk in the door and sit right there, so he can't get out. And we'll make him teach us how to sing... Or else... (*He makes a mischievous gesture, and they all chitter-cackle in mischievous agreement.*)

GOLCHI: Right! I'm sick of listening to us sing!

They walk through the door. When Grandpa sees them he's horrified and loses his voice. Lights down outside.

GGANGPAEGI: What are you stopping for, old man? Sounds great!

GGAEBI: Yeah, keep singing!

GOLCHI: All night long!

GGAEBI: Till the sun comes up!

GOLCHI: Till the moon goes down!

GGAEBI: Till the stars...

GGANGPAEGI: All right all *right!* Well Gramps, we're waiting.

GRANDPA: F-f-f-for...?

GGANGPAEGI: (*sticking his face in Grandpa's*) ...y-y-you t-t-to...

GGAEBI: (*pushing in front of Ggangpaegi*) ...s-s-start s-s-singing...

GOLCHI: (*pushing in front of Ggaebi*) ...ag-g-gain.

GGANGPAEGI: NOW!

Grandpa continues his song, tentatively, shakily, with fear in his voice. But he gradually warms to it.

(*Sings*)

Life's bright and happy when you begin to sing.

Songs will banish every care and woe.

Music will bless you if you begin to sing.

Joy will follow wherever you go.

Wild applause.

GOBLINS: Bravo! Beautiful! Encore!

GGAEBI: How can an old geezer like you sing like that?

One by one, the Goblins sit down, ending up in a circle with Granpa.

GRANDPA: Shucks, that's not so good. Just like to sing, that's all... But let's do one together!

GGANGPAEGI: (*testily*) You know goblins can't sing. You don't have to rub it in.

GGAEBI: Come on, Gramps, stop stalling.

GRANDPA: Nonsense. Let's do one together — before I get scared again and can't sing any more.

GOLCHI: Okay, okay. But remember, you asked for it.

GRANDPA: I sure did. Now, Mr. ... Mr. ...?

GOLCHI: Golchi.

GRANDPA: Golchi?

GOLCHI: (*offended, threatening*) That's right, Gramps. Golchi. *Mister* Golchi. Maybe there's something you don't like about my name?

GRANDPA: (*placating*) On no, Mr. Golchi. I'm sure your name suits you just fine! Now, Mr. Golchi, how about trying this after me? (*Sings*) Boom biddy ding dong...

GOLCHI: I don't sing.

GRANDPA: You don't?

OTHER GOBLINS: He *can't*!

All the Goblins except Golchi howl with laughter.

GOLCHI: Won't!

OTHER GOBLINS: Couldn't!

GOLCHI: Wouldn't!

OTHER GOBLINS: Shouldn't!

GOLCHI: Shouldn't SHMUDN'T!

GRANDPA: Okay everyone, settle down! Come, Mr. Golchi. *(Sings)* Boom biddy ding dong...

GOLCHI: Who are you trying to kid, Gramps? That sounds like those Howlin Hollow goblins' talk. *(with disgust)* Boom biddy!

GRANDPA: Come, come, Mr. Golchi, music is music, whatever it says, wherever you go, whoever sings it. Open up and have some fun. *(Sings)* Boom biddy ding dong...

Ggangpaegi: Give it a try, Golchi!

GGAEBI: You got nothing to lose!

GOLCHI: You think I can't?

Ggangpaegi: We been over that...

GRANDPA: *(Sings)* Boom biddy ding dong...

GOLCHI: *(glaring at the others, daring them to laugh. Sings off-key)* Boom biddy ding...

The other Goblins laugh hysterically, infuriating Golchi.

GRANDPA: Sensational, Mr. Golchi! Now, once more, with no interruptions, please. *(Sings)* Boom biddy ding dong...

GOLCHI: But those tone-deaf oinkers...!

GRANDPA: ...*think* you can't do it. Sounded great to me. But who knows? Maybe you were faking it. Or could be just beginner's luck.

GOLCHI: Faking! Beginner's luck! Hit me with that boom biddy again, Gramps.

GRANDPA: *(Sings)* Boom biddy...

GOLCHI: *(Sings)* Boom biddy ding dong...

GRANDPA: Ho-ho! *(Sings)* Scatty wack shack bing bong...

GOLCHI: *(getting interested, his spirit compensating for his awful voice. He jumps to his feet. Sings)* Scatty wack shack bing bong...

GRANDPA: Splendid, sir! *(to the others)* And you said he couldn't sing. *(The other Goblins chitter in hesitant agreement with Grandpa's appreciation.)* Now, try it again, and keep on going. *(getting up)* I'll show you something.

Golchi does his boom-biddy and breaks into a simple dance step. Grandpa accompanies him in song, then in dance.

GOLCHI: *(Sings)*

Boom biddy ding dong
scatty wack shack bing bong
Boom biddy ding dong
scatty wack shack bing bong.
Boom biddy ding dong
scatty wack shack bing bong.

GRANDPA: *(Sings)*

Songs soon banished
my gloomy ways.
I never gave up
once I began to sing.
Music's with me
for all of my days.

Cheers from ALL.

GGANGPAEGI: All *right!* Let's have some Q-U-I-I-I-E-T! Now you're going to see how it's really done. Ready? *(Sings)*

Beskattle lee dot doo loppa deeta
petittle teetle locka diddle um beeta.

scootely dooppee doowey...

ALL: (*One by one, getting in step with the dancing. Sing*)

...doopy diddledy dum
shoobedy boobedy bambalon beedle um bum.

Grandpa launches right into the third verse of the song, and the Goblins accompany him with the boom-biddy and the skat. The sky begins to brighten with a hint of dawn.

ALL: (*Sing*)

You'll find you cheer up when you begin to sing.
Songs will banish your gloomy ways.
You'll never give up once you begin to sing.
Music's with you for all of your days.

As they all cheer wildly the morning cock crows. Ggangpaegi suddenly raises one hand, then puts his other to his ear. Abrupt silence. We hear the cock crow again.

GGAEBI: Oh-oh, time to go!

GGANGPAEGI: No, wait! Sit. (*All sit except Grandpa.*) You too, Gramps. (*when Grandpa sits*)
Gramps, I know how you sing so good. It's that thing you got hanging there on your cheek, that song bag.

GRANDPA: Thing on my...? Song bag...? Oh, this. No, this has nothing to do with singing. I'm just a great singer, that's all!

GGANGPAEGI: Nonsense! We'll give you a real nice present for it. Worth ten of that.

GRANDPA: No, no! This thing is useless...

GGAEBI: Come on, Grandpa! What's it doing there if it's useless? You just wear it to look sexy?

GRANDPA: To be perfectly honest, sir, I don't really need this thing to look sexy. No, I mean... Well, you see now, if I pull it off and give it to you, I'll just keep bleeding and bleeding, till there's no blood left! And there's not a lot you can do without blood, is there? This thing I don't need. Blood I *do* need.

GGANGPAEGI: (*looking out the window anxiously*) We'll give you a sack of gold, right here on the spot. Just hand over that song bag.

GRANDPA: What good will a bag of gold do me if I'm dead?

GGAEBI: What good will your song bag do you if we don't let you go?

GGANGPAEGI: Okay, Golchi, get the sack. Quick! (*Golchi runs out.*)

Ggangpaegi reaches out and snatches off Grandpa's song bag.

GRANDPA: EEEYYYYEEEEOOWWWWW!

His eyes pop. He cups his hands to his cheek to catch the blood. But when he looks there's none there. He inspects his clothes. No blood there, either. He stares straight ahead awhile, trying to figure out what's going on, then feels his cheek. Smooth as can be! In the meantime, Golchi has come back with the sack of gold and dumped it on the floor.

GRANDPA: Well, I'll be...!

GGANGPAEGI: (*mimicking Grandpa*) Well, I'll be...! (*The others start cackling.*) So where's all that blood you promised? Maybe if I try his nose...

Ggangpaegi makes a feint to snatch Grandpa's nose and Grandpa falls over backwards. The other Goblins hoot and holler. Then they get up to go. As they leave the shack they sing the song Grandpa taught them. Grandpa gets up and starts posturing with his new cheek.

GRANDPA: What a day! No more lugging that useless wen around with me anymore. Song bag. Ha!

Grandpa starts to leave the shack, but trips on something. The sack of gold! He opens it and pulls out one gold coin, bites it.

GRANDPA: Hmm... Should I take it? That was no song bag I gave them... No, better not. (*He starts to walk away, but reconsiders.*) Then again, I didn't give it to them, did I? They took it!

He drags the gold out of the shack and somehow manages to get it on the A-frame.

GRANDPA: Phew! (*He starts to struggle off with his load.*) Song bag! Ha!

He walks a couple more steps, then starts up again, exuberantly, with part of the song he and the goblins sang together. But he's a bit off key. He notices, stops and tries the line again, and he's still off key. He shakes his head once, wondering.

GRANDPA: (*fooling himself, and half-knowing it*) Yep, that night air'll always get you if you don't watch out...

Then he continues offstage, still singing, still off key, with less spirit.

CURTAIN

Afterword

The story

In Grandpa's Wen (Hokbburi Yeonggam, the title of one of this story's versions) non-humans teach a human how to be more human. The setting is nineteenth-century Korea, in the countryside. The characters all start as impoverished members of Korea's *sangmin* class — farmers, craftsmen and merchants. We have no yangbans in this story; Grandma Lopside does become as wealthy as the wealthiest yangban, and he is a real gentleman, but he hasn't got yangban lineage.

Koreans use the word *byeorak buja* (lightning-stroke millionaire) to describe one who lives the unrefined ostentatious life of the nouveau rich. This description fits Grandpa Lopside's wife. She has a problem with vocabulary that she should know after they become rich, in her "exalted" station. In those days people who were not of the yangban or *jungmin* class¹ did not get any education. Public education became available only after the official system of class hierarchy was abolished at the end of the nineteenth century.

Grandpa's wife introduces an interesting fact about social classes in Chosun dynasty Korea. The strict Confucian rules of propriety (which are discussed in the afterword to Chun Hyang Song) were mainly for the yangban class and were not observed by the lower classes. One of those rules was that the wife should always show submissiveness to her husband. Chun Hyang was quite submissive to her husband Mong Yong. Grandpa's wife, though, is not submissive at all; in fact, she's quite a nag. Chun Hyang considered herself yangban; though her mother was of the *cheonmin* class (even below Grandpa Lopside's class), her father was yangban. Because Grandpa and his wife were born into the sangmin class (just above cheonmin), they weren't expected to follow the rules that the upper classes followed. So it's not such a surprise to find Grandpa's wife getting away with her behavior.

Also related to class are the pipes that Grandpa smokes. When Grandpa was poor he wanted to smoke the long pipe — possibly just because it was forbidden. His wife, though, kept trying to stop him from smoking it. But later, when they became rich and his wife wanted him to smoke the long pipe so that he could put on the airs of a yangban, Grandpa lost his taste for it and insisted on smoking the short pipe of the commoner. In the Chosun dynasty the yangban were so jealous of their prerogatives and social hierarchy was so strict that commoners were not allowed to use many of the things that yangbans used. They were forbidden to wear the yangban's horsehair hat, their clothing could not be of certain colors or have certain features, and they could not smoke the long pipe that yangbans smoked.

Actually, Grandpa could have gotten away with smoking the long pipe if he really wanted to. All he had to do was become a yangban. Around the beginning of the eighteenth century the yangban class began to degenerate. They lacked the flexibility to adapt as society evolved. As the seventeenth century waned, commerce started developing and more efficient agricultural methods were being used. Commoners were involved in both commerce and agriculture, and growth in these two areas helped some commoners become rich. At the same time, there was a growing number of destitute "fallen" yangban. These were yangban who had passed the higher civil service exam but, because they had no family connections with people in higher positions in government, were unable to attain a position in government. Rich commoners found ways of buying yangban status from these destitute yangban.²

Goblins

The goblins in our play were fashioned on the traditional Korean conception of its *dokgaebi*. Dokgaebi are similar in many respects to the Western goblin: as one who knows the personality of a goblin might guess, the word goblin comes from *kobalos*, which is Greek for rogue. That pretty well describes dokgaebi too. Goblins and dokgaebi are mischievous supernatural creatures who have a grotesque human form; they live in dark places in nature but often appear near human settlements and abodes, and they often reward good people and punish bad ones. Like all supernatural creatures, they were invented by humans to explain the phenomena that humans experience in their existence in this world, and they reflect many aspects of human nature. This note from Bullfinch about Western supernatural creatures also applies to Korean dokgaebi: "It was a pleasing trait in the old Paganism that it loved to trace in every operation of nature the agency of deity. The imagination of the Greeks peopled all the regions of earth and sea with divinities, to whose agency it attributed those phenomena which our philosophy ascribes to the operation of the laws of nature."³

Goblins and dokgaebi share one more feature: just as goblins in the form of gargoyles or grotesques show up on many medieval structures in the West, we can see dokgaebi on many buildings of traditional Korean design, particularly in the end-capping tiles on the roof. In the West, the common belief is that the gargoyle was used to protect its building from evil spirits, and we know this as a fact in Korea.

Kim Jong-dae⁴ conducted an extensive survey of old literature and present-day villagers and urban dwellers to give us a true description of Korea's dokgaebi, and discovered some interesting features. Korean goblins come in all sizes, from as big as the towering village-guarding totem to the size of a human arm, but most are the size of small humans. They are mostly male, young, unmarried. There are goblins that have no form but can be heard

("[such scary sounds as] hail, a house being destroyed, pounding on a door, thunder, a dog barking, whistling, or the pounding of a horse's hooves"). Most Korean goblins have a horn or two, and — if you can imagine this — some have one *and* two. Some horns soar upright, some droop; some are sharp, others blunt. Some light up. There are red, blue and brown horns — and some change colors — but they're never bright and Christmasy; even the ones that light up make do with no more than a dull, pulsing glow of minimum wattage. (While the Korean imagination has come up with good-hearted dokgaebi, it has yet to manage a cheery dokgaebi horn.) Many dokgaebi come from thrown-away utensils of daily life (straw shoes, old furniture); these things change into dokgaebi at night.

As for personality, while the most popular idea of a Korean goblin is that of a devilish creature, there are also less dangerously mischievous ones, and on occasion we will come upon a kind-hearted, fun-loving goblin. A male might even assume an attractive human form and entertain a lonely human female the night through. (No, I couldn't find any mention of such a female dokgaebi.) Some dokgaebi are very clever and others are astonishingly dense; some have a great sense of humor and others see nothing funny about life at all. But most dokgaebi, like humans, are schizophrenic creatures of positive and negative characteristics and behavior.

All dokgaebi, though, have a basically *eum* temperament (the Korean word for the yin in yin-yang), which is why they live in dank, dark places and come out at night. Its most popular residence is the forest; other popular abodes are isolated and deserted structures, caves, and in water (a river, a swamp, a well), but it also lives in cemeteries and certain trees. There are many less popular places, and one dokgaebi has even been reported to live in the spot of blood left by an insane person. The most philosophically imaginative dokgaebi yet to be reported is "in the human heart."

The story's origin

As is true of all Korean folklore, this story was handed down orally through many generations. One characteristic of oral literature is that elements of different stories get mixed together to form new versions. The result for scholars of folklore is a taxonomy of genus and species and so on down the hierarchy. We might say that our story belongs to the "supernatural creatures genus" of folklore, and that goblin stories are one species. There are several subspecies (for example, in many stories of one subspecies a dokgaebi rewards a human, and in another species the dokgaebi both rewards and punishes) and each of these subspecies has a sub-subspecies (a wen is used to reward and punish). Our story belongs to the sub-subspecies in which a wen is exchanged, and it shares the same basic development with the subspecies in which a magic mallet is found.⁵

We have not yet found any Korean texts of this story from before the twentieth century, but when we consider the hundreds of stories mentioned above, it's reasonable to assume that our story is of indigenous origin from centuries ago. Professor Kim tells us that we know for certain, from textual evidence, that a very similar story (*Ryu-chwi-ya*, or The Man with the Wen) existed in Japan as early as the twelfth century, and the Japanese brought it to Korea sometime between 1876 and 1910, when they colonized Korea.⁶

The play

The Korean names for our dokgaebi are, in rough translation, Goon (Ggangpaegi), Headache (Golchi), and Gobbie (Ggaebi, the last part of the Korean word *dokgaebi*).

The song "Way Back Wen" is a composite of three traditional *minyo* (music of the people), which villagers and traveling entertainers (*kwangdae*) sang "at work, for entertainment, and at funerals."⁷ It is very difficult now to hear the *minyo* as they were sung in Chosun dynasty Korea; valiant effort has been made to preserve them with their original sound and spirit, but the very act of transcribing and scoring them has somewhat distorted the original quality and shifted them from their course of evolution to a degree. Moving them from the rural setting in which they thrived and adding features to make this music more popular to new generations of Koreans — 90% of whom no longer live in small villages and are more familiar with Western music — distance the music even further from what it once was.

Grandpa's Wen is originally a very simple tale, not as fully developed in plot or style as the pansori stories, so it needed some embellishment to turn it into good theatre. In the original story, for instance, there was no Tooth Fairy (she was put in the play to introduce this Western tradition to my students), Grandpa didn't teach the goblins to sing, he didn't lose his great singing voice, and Grandma didn't get a great singing voice. But Grandma *did* get another wen.

Notes

1. People who served the government in technical and administrative positions were in the jungmin class. Below the jungmin class was the cheonmin class; they were people who did work that was considered contemptible, such as shamans, executioners, gisaeng (Chun Hyang's mother), actors — and Buddhist monks!
2. “[There occurred] the purchase of yangban status and a lapse into tenant status of many yangban. The façade of the rigid social structure of the Yi dynasty had been cracked beyond repair... [F]rom about 1789 to 1859 there was a decline in the number of commoners and a corresponding increase in the number of yangban in the census records.” Henthorn, p. 207.
3. Bullfinch, p. 172.
4. Our description of dokgaebi in this afterword comes from Kim, Jong-dae. Kim investigated literature and interviewed people living in rural and urban areas throughout Korea.
5. Kim, Jong-dae, pp. 144-145.
6. Kim, Jong-dae, p. 145. The English translation of the Japanese title is mine.
7. This and the rest of the information in this paragraph is from Howard. To get a better feeling for this folk music, search the Internet for “Arirang” or “Korean folk music.”