

PEACE CHILD



DON
RICHARDSON



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Bethany House edition published 2014
ISBN 978-0-7642-1561-2

Third Edition, 1976
Fourth Edition, 2005

Previously published by Regal Books

Printed in the United States of America

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The Library of Congress has cataloged the original edition as follows:

Richardson, Don.

Peace child / Don Richardson.—4th ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-8307-3784-7 (trade paper)

1. Sawi (Indonesian people)—Missions. I. Title.

BV3373.S3R5 2005

266'.009951—dc22

2005013901

Photos on pages 236 and 238 by Don Richardson.

Other photos by Fred Roberts.

Readers interested in assisting World Team's international work force in their spiritual, medical and educational labors in developing countries should contact:

World Team

1431 Stuckert Rd.
Warrington, PA 18976
U.S.A.

P.O. Box 217, Ringwood East
Victoria, 3135
Australia

7570 Danbro Cr.
Mississauga, ON L5N 6P9
Canada

www.worldteam.org

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

DEDICATION

*To the men, women and children
who prayed and shared their earthly substance
that the Sawi might hear—
we gratefully dedicate these pages.*

Also by Don Richardson

Lords of the Earth

Eternity in Their Hearts

Peace Child is also published in these languages:

Chinese

Italian

Dutch

Norwegian

Finnish

Portuguese

French

Russian

German

Spanish

Indonesian

Swedish

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Thirty Years Later: An Update on the Sawi Tribe

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My special thanks to Dr. Myron Bromley,
noted linguist and translations consultant
for the United Bible Society;
to Rev. George Lazenby,
author and mission leader;
for their helpful criticism
of this manuscript.

My gratitude also to my wife, Carol,
for the many hours she spent
typing this manuscript.



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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Sawi people of the former Netherlands New Guinea are one of an estimated four hundred tribes in the western half of New Guinea now called West Irian or Irian Jaya. Each of these tribes is distinct and unique, a little cosmos to itself with its own world view, its own set of legends, its own sense of humor.

In 1962, Carol and I went to live among the Sawi. As we studied their language and probed into their legends and customs, we found that we were living and working among a people who honor treachery as an ideal. In many of the legends that the Sawi people tell to their children around the campfires, the heroes are men who formed friendships with the express purpose of later betraying the befriended one to be killed and eaten. The Sawi expression for this practice is “to fatten with friendship for the slaughter.”

In recognizing that the idealization of treachery was a part of the Sawi view of life, we understood why we felt a certain culture shock in living among them. Yet we had been sent there by God to win them, to overcome within a few short years this idealization of treachery which had been part of their way of life over centuries, possibly millenniums, of time.

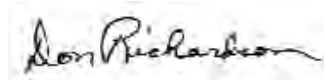
The key God gave us to the heart of the Sawi people was the principle of redemptive analogy—the application to local custom of spiritual truth. The principle we discerned was that God had already provided for the evangelization of these people by means of redemptive analogies in their own culture. These analogies were our stepping-stones, the secret entryway by which the gospel came into the Sawi culture and started both a spiritual and a social revolution from within.

As Carol and I ministered to the Sawi by means of the “peace child” and other redemptive analogies, we watched in suspense to see if the Spirit of God would actually use this means of communication for the regeneration of these cannibalistic, head-hunting people. He did!

In an age when all of mankind is rapidly becoming interdependent

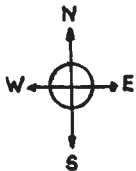
within a single global community, cross-cultural communication unavoidably becomes one of man's highest priorities. *Peace Child* chronicles the agony—and the triumph—of our attempt to probe one of the world's most violent cultures to its foundations and then to communicate meaningfully with members of that culture.

The result, we believe, is an adventure in human understanding which will infuse the reader with an even greater and more compassionate regard for the earth's endangered minority peoples.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don Richardson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

RBMU, Sentani, Irian Jaya
Indonesia

*IRIAN JAYA INDONESIA
formerly Netherlands New Guinea*

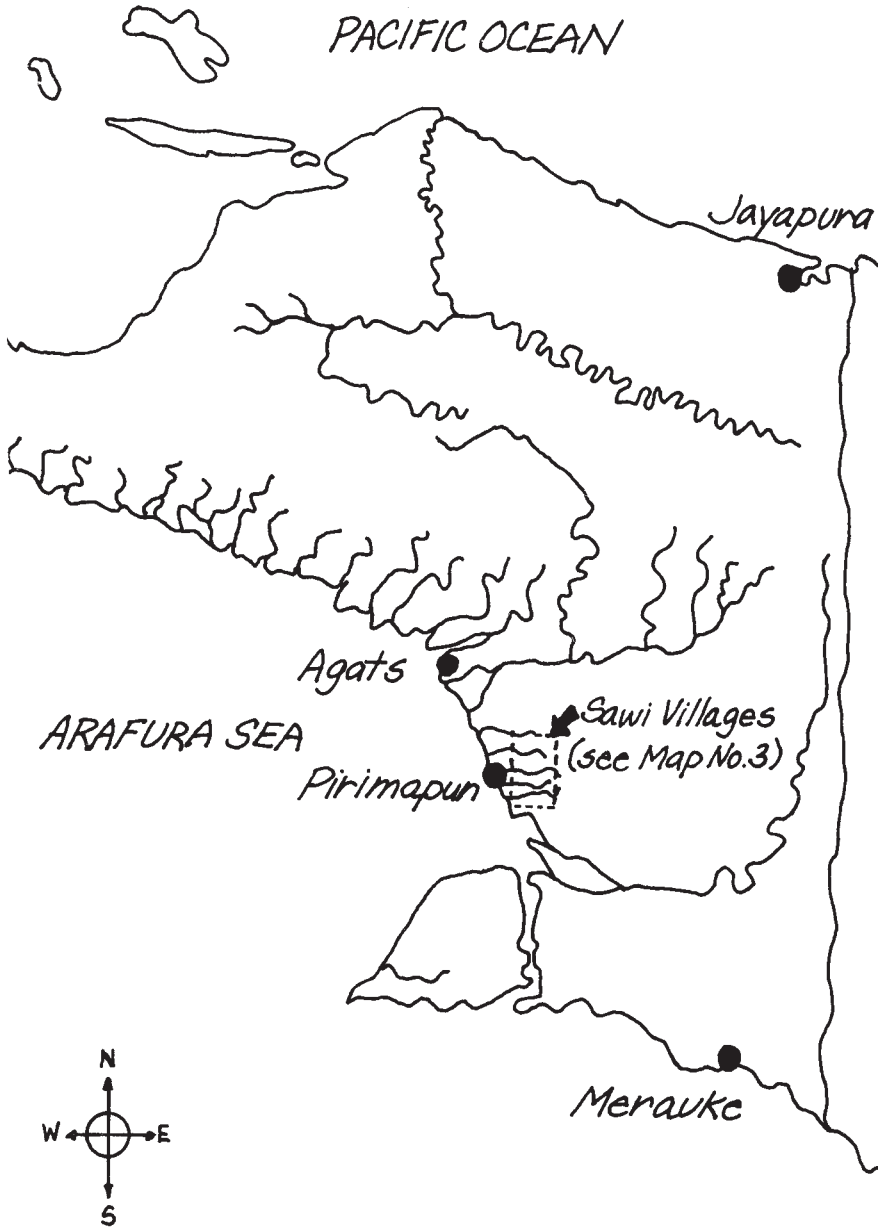


MAP NO.1

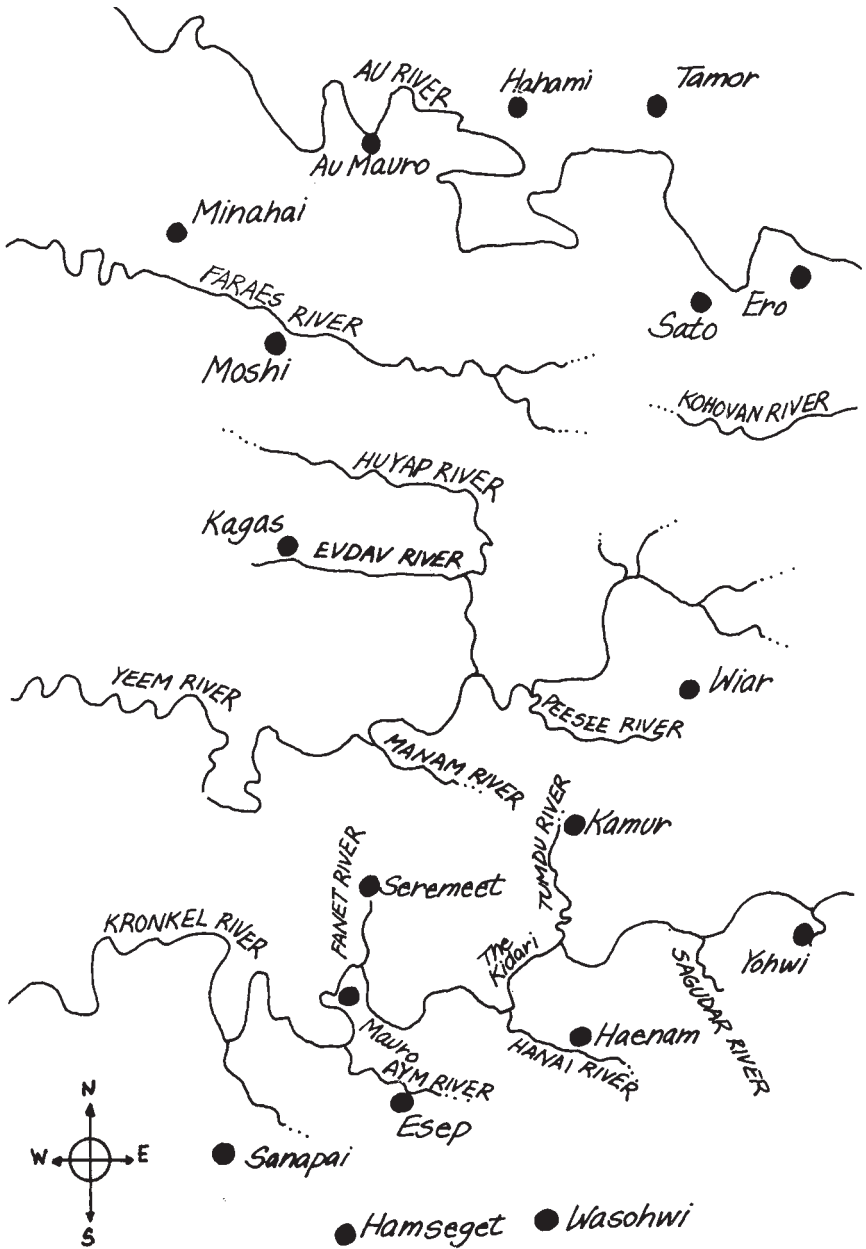
Irian Jaya in relation to Australia

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MAP NO. 2
Irian Jaya formerly
Netherlands New Guinea



MAP NO. 3
*Approximate Location
of Sawi villages in 1962*

*Kawem and the
Cook River* 



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Part I

WORLD OF THE SAWI



AMBASSADOR TO HAENAM

Chapter 1

AS THE SUN ROSE, YAE GAZED DOWN THROUGH THE FLOOR SLATS OF HIS MAURO VILLAGE TREEHOUSE AT THE DARK SURFACE OF THE KRONKEL RIVER FORTY FEET BELOW. His calm, black eyes studied the slow drift of leaves on the waveless surface. The leaves were drifting downstream, but at a decreasing rate, evidence that the rising tide of the Arafura Sea, twenty-five miles to the west, was beginning to stay the seaward crawl of the Kronkel.

Soon the tide would reverse the river's current completely. For a few hours it would force the black, algae-stained Kronkel back into the immense womb of the south New Guinea swamp which had spawned it. Yae had been waiting for this moment to begin his journey upstream, aided by the current.

Yae's wife, Kautap, sat cross-legged by the central cooking place inside the treehouse. Her youngest child, still unnamed, lay asleep on her lap, cradled in the tresses of her heavy grass skirt. Leaning over the baby, Kautap sprinkled water from a bamboo cruse into the white sago flour scattered on the bark pallet before her. Slowly she kneaded the flour and water into a paste, while smoke from the smoldering fire bothered her eyes.

Her older offspring, two-year-old Miri, was playing contentedly beside her on a woven mat. His only toy was a human skull whose sad

eyeholes gaped vacuously at the smoke-blackened ceiling as it rolled about. Already polished to a bright ochre sheen by years of fond handling, the skull was kept as a memento of Yae's long-dead father, and also as a fetish to ward off evil spirits. But to little Miri it was only a shiny toy.

Yae spoke to Kautap without turning to her. "*Uvur haramavi maken; du famud, es!* The tide is about to turn: cook my sago at once!"

Her deft black fingers quickly worked the damp sago paste into a long, slender shape, wrapped it in *yohom* leaves, and laid it among the hot coals. Yae meanwhile donned his ornaments in preparation for the journey. He covered his naked loins with the kind of narrow grass skirt which, in the Sawi tribe, could be worn only by men who had slain an enemy in battle. Yae had slain five. He had taken heads from three of his victims, and this was indicated by the three bracelets of gleaming wild boar tusks which hung around his left elbow.

His prowess in hunting was displayed next by his *sudafen*, a six-foot-long necklace of animal teeth which he draped in two loops around his neck. Each wild pig, crocodile, dog or marsupial he had killed had contributed one tooth to the necklace. Bands of finely woven rattan also were fitted tightly above and below the muscles on each arm and just below his knees. Into the pierced septum of his nose he proudly inserted a six-inch length of hollow bone carved from the thighbone of a pig and sharpened to a point on each end.

If he had been journeying to attend an all-night dance, there were other ornaments he could have worn as well—a flame-colored bird-of-paradise plume, a headband of gold and brown marsupial fur, a splay of white cockatoo feathers, as well as white and red body paint made from powdered sea shells and red earth. But Yae's mission was purely diplomatic and not festive, so he was content simply to adorn himself with the white and gold of polished bone and braided rattan.

Kautap used a pair of tongs to remove the sago loaf from the coals, brushed off the charred leaves, and handed the steaming "swamp bread" to her husband. Yae ate half and placed half in his small sago bag made of woven fibers, along with a chunk of pork which Kautap had earlier



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smoked over the fire. Hanging the bag from his shoulder, he drew his six-foot-long bow made of black palmwood down from the overhead weapon rack. One end of the bow was tipped with a needle-sharp cassowary talon, so it could be used as a spear in close combat. Yae also selected a handful of sharply barbed, bamboo-shafted arrows. Grasping both bow and arrows in one hand, he took lastly his paddle which, along with his war shield, drum, stone axe, spear, canoe and bow, completed the main hierarchy of his earthly possessions.

The paddle was a striking example of Sawi artistry. Fashioned from a single nine-foot column of dark red ironwood, it featured a wide rectangular blade engraved with exotic designs, and at the upper end of its shaft, a boldly carved ancestral figure. Above the ancestral figure, the characteristic wooden barbs and cassowary talon warned that Yae's paddle, like his bow, could also double as a spear.

Yae stepped out onto the porch of the treehouse. Around him the six other treehouses of Mauro village seemed to float in the morning's golden haze, awkward, humpbacked, loaf shaped. They were all about forty feet in length, and ranged from thirty to fifty feet in height above the ground, soaring over the tangled underbrush on long spindly treelegs. In addition there were four longhouses at elevations of less than twenty feet.

Not all Sawi families had the incentive to build treehouses, choosing to leave themselves more vulnerable to surprise attack than were the treehouse dwellers, who commanded an easy view of all their surroundings. In a tall treehouse, women and children could cower in relative safety while their husbands, fathers and brothers rained arrows down upon an encroaching enemy, or even descended to the ground to engage the enemy in *waru mim*, "spear play."

As Yae began his descent of the long, vine-fastened ladder, Kautap raised her voice in complaint. "Why do you go so often to visit Haenam? Doesn't your skin feel uneasy going there?"

Yae continued his descent. "If I had no friends there I wouldn't go," was his only reply. The ladder sloped back under the treehouse for shelter from tropical downpours and for shade. Yae descended the entire

length without once touching a finger to the ladder for support, balancing perfectly on each precarious rung.

Near the foot of the ladder his younger brother, Sao, sat hunched on a log trembling with malarial chill, trying in vain to eke enough warmth from the morning sun which now glared into the village, causing steam to rise from dew-wet foliage. Yae spoke comfortingly to him, but Sao could hardly answer, his teeth were chattering so hard.

A few yards downstream Yae's cousin, Wasi, and Wasi's three wives were loading their sago-cutting instruments into a canoe for a trip to the jungle. Yae called to Wasi. "I'm going to Haenam. I'll return just after dark. I'm going to invite my friends there to come to our *bisim* dance when the new moon appears."

Wasi wished him well in his mission as he stepped onto the stern tip of his sleek dugout and pushed out into the channel. His three wives stood well forward in the thirty-foot craft, two of them with babies secured to their backs in small carrying bags fashioned for the purpose. The three wives raised their paddles simultaneously and plied downstream toward the mouth of the small tributary which would lead them back into the sago swamp. A reserve of hot coals trailed smoke from a little bed of clay near Wasi's feet. With these they would later kindle a fire to cook their afternoon meat from the fresh sago they would harvest in the swamps.

Yae laid his bow and arrows in his canoe and embarked. With a strong, deliberate stroke he aimed the needle-nosed craft upstream, just as the leaves on the surface came to a full stop in their seaward drift. By the time he vanished around a distant bend of the river, the leaves were moving upstream after him.

Kautap watched her husband vanish, a frown of concern on her smoke-darkened face. Then the baby on her lap began to stir and cry. She held the child to her breast and gave suck, wishing that Yae would forget his ambition to form an alliance between Mauro and Haenam.





A flourish of screaming cockatoos took flight as Yae's canoe suddenly appeared from under the screening foliage at the river's edge, still bearing upstream. A crocodile dozing on the tip of a sunken log awoke at their shrieking, gaped open-mouthed at Yae, and then belly-flopped into the water, waving his massive tail up to a vertical position as he plunged into the depths.

Yae glided on to the next bend and rounded it, reflecting once more on the series of events which had established him as Mauro's only ambassador to the upstream Sawi village called Haenam. Seven months earlier Yae had unexpectedly encountered a party of five men from Haenam, while he was hunting wild geese near the source of the Aym tributary. Yae had immediately crouched in his canoe and reached for his bow, but the tallest of the five strangers had quickly greeted him.

"*Konahari!* Don't take your bow! I know you—your name is Yae, and I am related to you!" said the tall stranger.

Yae raised his bow anyway, but did not fit an arrow to the string. Instead he asked, "What is your name?"

“My name is Kauwan. I am the youngest son of your mother’s step-father,” was the reply.

“Why have you come to the Aym River? No doubt you and your friends are spying,” Yae challenged.

“Not so,” said Kauwan. “This morning I wounded a wild pig and we have followed its trail of blood this far. See, there is a fresh blood mark on the grass and here are the tracks where the pig floundered in the mud not long ago.

“Come let me embrace you! We are relatives!”

Yae had heard his mother speak of Kauwan, but still he hesitated. Kauwan then took a small piece of sharp bamboo from his satchel, cut off a lock of his stringy black hair, wrapped it in a leaf and offered it to Yae.

Reassured by this generally accepted token of sincerity, Yae paddled closer, took the gift from Kauwan and dropped it into his satchel. By this offering Kauwan had demonstrated that he desired more than just a passing acquaintance with Yae.

The two men embraced each other while Kauwan’s four companions voiced their approval. Then it was that Kauwan made his proposal.

“Yae, listen to me. For a long time the Kayagar people from the east have been raiding us and we have lost many to their spears. Thus we want peace with Mauro so that we can come freely in this direction to cut sago on our western borders.

“I have persuaded the men of Haenam that we need one man to act as a go-between who can travel freely between your village and mine. Surely you are just the man we need. I am now appointing you as that go-between. If you accept, come to our village three days from now. I will be waiting to assure your safety when you arrive.”

Kauwan’s four friends added that they also would protect Yae’s life with their own if necessary.

Yae’s heart began to beat faster. His own clansmen in Mauro had also begun to complain about the overpowering raids they were suffering from the Asmat people to the west. If peaceful relations with Haenam were established, the mature sago palms presently locked away

in the no-man's-land between Haenam and Mauro could be harvested freely, relieving his people of the necessity to venture close to the Asmat borders for food.

In time Haenam and Mauro might even decide to join forces and inflict decisive blows against both the Asmat and the Kayagar, gaining respite for both villages from both directions. As the main engineers of that pact, Yae and Kauwan could both hope to rise to new heights of prestige within the Sawi cosmos. Men with marriageable daughters in other Sawi clans would surely be inclined to promise some of their daughters to Yae and to Kauwan, bringing each of them nearer to the Sawi ideal of possessing a harem of five healthy wives.

Yae had already gained two wives, but to his deep sorrow one had contracted yaws and wasted away with smelly, dripping sores and died, leaving him with only Kautap. Since the death of his second wife, Yae's longing to replace her and gain still other wives had become a constant obsession. Now, suddenly and unexpectedly, the satisfaction of that obsession seemed within his reach, *if* he could bring himself to trust the promise of Kauwan and his four friends.

Yae eyed Kauwan critically. Kauwan's eyes shone with evident sincerity. The fact of his relationship to Yae's mother was a reassuring factor. He had also voluntarily committed a lock of his hair to Yae's disposal. As for his story about Haenam being harried by the Kayagar and driven further west—Yae had already heard by the jungle grapevine that this was true.

On the negative side, Yae knew there were a number of people from the Kangae clan in Haenam who still bore unsettled grievances against Mauro. Could he be sure that Kauwan and his friends would be strong enough to protect him if the Kangae faction should opt for revenge when Yae appeared among them? The four pig-tusk bracelets adorning Kauwan's left elbow showed that Kauwan was a warrior to be reckoned with. But perhaps Kauwan was related to the Kangae faction more closely than he was to Yae's mother.

Slyly, Yae questioned Kauwan to ascertain his relations to the Kangae people. Kauwan immediately guessed the purpose of his questions and

assured Yae that the chief men of the Kangae clan had already said they would accept some token redress in goods as payment without demanding a human life. A few goods would be a small price to pay for all that Yae hoped to gain from this transaction.

Still, Yae delayed his decision for one further test. He invited Kauwan and his four friends to accompany him for a brief visit to Mauro, that they might discuss this matter further. If they were willing to trust him for protection in such a venture, this would be further evidence that their longing for peace with Mauro was truly deep-seated.

Kauwan replied with a broad smile: “We would be happy to go with you, but our wives and children are waiting by the Hanai River, expecting us to return with pig meat. We must find our prey, butcher it, and pack it home before dark.”

This was a reasonable refusal, Yae thought. Now he must make his decision without any further test. If he refused, perhaps later someone else from Mauro would be offered the same honor Kauwan was now extending to him, and would accept it with consequent favorable results. How Yae would chafe inwardly if that happened!

Conversely, if he accepted, perhaps he would walk into a trap and lose his life! Yae’s insides churned with the suspense of the moment, the same kind of existential suspense that formed a key ingredient of the Sawi legends that had fascinated him from childhood. Now *he* was the hero facing the dread-loaded choice!

Suddenly the decision came to him out of the vortex of his uncertainty. He took the little bamboo cutting edge from his sack, cut off a lock of his own hair and handed it to Kauwan, who accepted it with a smile.

Then Yae reached forward, gripped Kauwan’s forearm firmly and said, “*Sarimakon, es!* I will surely come. It is settled!”

“Then if we find the pig we are seeking, be sure I will keep half of its liver and preserve it for you to eat with us on the third day,” said Kauwan.

Yae replied, “*Timin konabari!* Thank you, friend!” and they separated.

Having given his word, Yae had virtually sealed whatever fate was in

store for him. Unless he had strong evidence of treachery, he could not now change his mind without being branded a coward! He must go to Haenam on the third day.

And he must go alone. No one else would dare accompany him without invitation. So much the better; if he bore the risks alone, he would not need to share his subsequent honor with another from his village.