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North Korean Society
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Synopsis of *The Fate of Kūmhŭi and Ŭnhŭi* 금희와 은희의 운명 (1974)

>from the blurb on the video package

“This depicts the tragedy of division through twin sisters who come to live separated in the North and South right after liberation. Kūmhŭi grows up splendidly under artist parents in North Korea, while Ŭnhŭi is sold to a drinking establishment to sing and falls into destitution.

“The film begins [in P’yŏngyang around 1975] with Kūmhŭi’s meeting Han Ch’ang-sik buying a painting of her dancing in an art gallery. While Han Ch’angsik is buying the painting Kūmhŭi overhears him saying it’s a painting of her twin sister, and she goes to her father Ok Hyŏn-san to ask if she is really his daughter. Ok Hyŏn-sang recalls the time when crossing to the North Han Ch’ang-sik’s father and he each took from the dead arms of Pak Mong-gyu one of the twins Kūmhŭi and Ŭnhŭi and separated to the north and south respectively. However, he had never been able to tell this heartbreaking story to Kūmhŭi.

[There follows a flashback to around 1947 when Pak Mong-gyu was crossing the DMZ at the same time as Ok Hyŏn-san, an art student. Pak explains to Ok and a fisherman (Han Ch’angsik’s father) that he was a school music teacher arrested for writing a song with the words “he, the great star of Paektusan,” and tortured for a month. He is going north to “be with the general” even though he has no family there, but his body is failing because of the torture. He laments the fate of his babies growing up without a father, and then sings his song before expiring:

잘자거라 아가야 내 사랑 아가야 Sleep well little baby, my beloved baby

밤은 캄캄깊어도 잠 잘 자거라 Though night is dark and deep, sleep well

백두산의 큰 별님 밝게 비쳐 He, the great star of Paektu Mountain, is shining brightly

너를 지켜준단다 내 사랑 아가야 They say he’ll take care of you, my beloved baby

Ok Hyŏn-san and Han Pyŏnggho (Han Ch’angsik’s father) split up the twins with Ok getting Kūmhŭi, and Han Pyŏnggho father getting Ŭnhŭi.]

“[Back in P’yŏngyang around 1975 Ok Hyŏn-san decides to go to the sea to paint ships.] There Ok Hyŏn-san meets the two sons of Han Pyŏng-ho who work as a fishery work team head in the place where the painting had gone. Han Pyŏnggho updates Ok about Ŭnhŭi.

“On the one hand, Kūmhŭi who has boarded a deep sea fishing vessel to get information suspects that Han Pyŏngho and his sons know a story that they cannot reveal. [During a performance Han Ch’angsik’s father is reminded of Ŭnhŭi and recalls her following an evil nightclub owner to study singing and dancing, and his being thrown out of the night club when he tries to retrieve her and doesn’t have 80,000 wŏn to pay her debts. When the nightclub owner comes to the island, Han Ch’angsik murders him in a rage, and the father and two sons have to flee to North Korea.] Returning home Kūmhŭi finds out from a letter Han Ch’ang-sik sent to Father that her sister Ŭnhŭi has had a wretched life in South Korea.”

[The letter explains that Ŭnhŭi tried to run away from the night club, but was hit by a jeep and become and cripple, and she, her adoptive mother, and the two youngest children lived a miserable life under a bridge. Kūmhŭi comes to realize that she has led a fortunate life in North Korea where there is no poverty, since she hadn’t realized that everybody doesn’t live this way.

The film ends with a celebration of how wonderful life is in North Korea, and how the nefarious Americans keep the country divided.]