Renting a Room

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To rent a room in Damyang or Changpyung
to visit like a chipmunk,
I looked in every village I came across.
Walking past a place in Jasil,
I saw common flowers in the yard
between a traditional Korean house and a modern annex.
When I entered through the open gate,
a man was sharpening his scythe on the grindstone
and his wife’s scarf was wet, as if she had just returned from the fields.
“Excuse me, I wonder if I could rent a room.
I’ll stay here two or three nights a week.”
When I pointed at the traditional house
she smiled. “Well, our children moved to Seoul,
so we live in the annex. Yes, the main house
is unoccupied. But in our hearts we still live there,
our family history is embedded in it.”
Listening to her, I saw the clean wooden floor
on which lay the last light of the day.
I left without pushing for a room,
wondering if the couple knew
that I had already rented it, was living in their words—
that in their hearts they lived in the vacant house.