

## *Five Poems* from *The Cheapest France In Town*

Seo Jung Hak

Translated from Korean by Megan Sungyoon

### **Instant Love Mix**

Having learned that it could be used in 3 minutes after adding water, I ripped open the packet with shaking hands. It was getting cold, and I was soaked, so there was no other option. Some had excited faces, some had doubt, and some had their backs turned to me as if uninterested, but everyone's eyes were on the packet in my hand. Love flamed up in 3 minutes like the campfire stacked up to the height of a person. Some said, the instant stuff would die out soon, but it didn't die that easily and turned out to be quite useful. Alas, isn't love just that to begin with. Quick to flare, quick to extinguish. Sitting in a huddle, their faces brightened. Luckily, there were a few more bags in the paper box I was supplied with (and barely able to bring). The night is distant, and we open the packets, one by one, and add water. Why, don't ask why we don't love each other. We know love isn't like that. That's why we're well aware that the right answer in this case is to add water to the finely ground love and wait a bit. And we also already know that's that. Aflame, all these sappy faces are for 3 minutes.

## Hot Love

They said they thought Earth was a planet composed only of water. Because their paper-box-like spaceship that lacked even basic waterproofing had always sunk into the deep abyss within minutes of landing on the sea. Shaking even with the blanket over the shoulders, one of them insisted that they were the first, or second, alien who had properly landed here. Another of them insisted, because six billion of their species had taken off in turn to find a new territory, that perhaps, there were some who settled successfully. They said with a lump in their throat that the paper boxes piled in the corners of back alleys proved that. Drinking hot cocoa, they said what they needed immediately, and instantly was hot love, and not stuff like this stomach-filling fast food, this cold-blocking astronautic high-tech blanket, or this comfy massage chair. They said they were all thirsty and hungry and shaking for love. Stroking the soaked paper box, one of them yelled, “love.”

The sound of it was so hot that everyone, ow, looked hurt.

## Adrenaline

The heart was about to explode when the pipe was raised, still bleeding. The length of happiness was inversely proportional to fear, that bold solidity. Disgusting laughter echoed around. I, too, almost cried. Quickly checked the surroundings. Oxygen and glucose suddenly reached the state of saturation. The body gradually shrank and the gulped-down Big Mac froze in the huge stomach. The dull, dim pupil covered in disgusting laughter would grow bigger in this serious-tedious darkness to look particularly cute and charming today. Wouldn't be able to love him. Fear echoed the road like a dull, dim fog. Thirty-two kilometers ahead, the lamplight was shattering. I, too, had reached the limit; as if it overheard the mumble, the limit actually came close. Produced in the liver and the brain, multicolored glycogen was floating around.  $C_9H_{13}NO_3$ , now, the heart is drooping. The sound of pipe-wielding as if to dissipate the fog is gradually slowing down. It's time the disgusting laughter stopped. I, too, am unable to afford that much.

## Secret

Walking with a daughter who turned two as of yesterday. There was a party to celebrate her birthday at a park by the river. Red firecrackers went off and people slowly gathered. Daddy, here, a man holding a red champagne glass came to me and said under his breath. Now, in fact, I happened to have another son who turned four as of yesterday. Drama gets lame without a secret. Wife was drinking champagne. Though I wasn't aware, it's been said there was another daughter who was about to start school. On the subway when I was reading yesterday's paper a woman next to me, putting down her shopping bag on the floor, told me kindly, though in a whisper. Ah, it was then, I thought. Children grow. Like reeds blooming in a wasteland, the secret spread silently. Like a drop of blood in a champagne glass. A text message said the eight children escaped from the basement they were locked in. Only the red daughter with a limp, was caught and the rest ran away. Everyone knew that I whipped. I was drinking coffee at the kitchen table, reading yesterday's paper. The old lady called me, daddy. The secret was still crying. When the bell rang, and the door opened, a woman in a red dress finally, ran into my arms shouting, daddy, in an unfamiliar accent. Now, I'm tying the hair of my daughter who turned two. Last night, daddy, someone whispered in my ear like a secret.

## Perfect Collection (A)

“Having a hobby is entertaining enough  
I can forget how time goes (A)way”

(A) collects things everything is authentic all the collections (A) collected are all  
authentic from Clint Eastwood’s sign-book to Count Dracula’s canine tooth  
(A) collected everything that is an authentic collection from the South American butterfly’s  
teardrop the Persian cat’s wing the red dragon’s claw everything is authentic (A) coughs and  
compiles the list of collections; collects things in  
(A)ll his front yard dates unknown contents unknown millions of questionable bottles old hairs  
you don’t even know whose  
There’s no room for (A)rtifice

In a sandstorm (A) mummy

(A) dusts off the collection a neon sign banner glowing colorfully  
the taxidermied merman and the herbivorous dinosaur’s  
bone a piece of mustache (A)’s endless yawns  
an hourglass that c(A)rries on properly even upside down  
those were authentic collection bottle openers and stoppers and  
countless empty mayonnaise jars in (A)’s house yard all  
piled up (A)’s wish is to collect everything  
even your (R)eal heart

Inventory: (A)iry (A)rtifices  
(B) Heart  
(C) Collection

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