

**LEE Jang-Wook**  
**POEMS**

**Invisible Man**

A day is coming when I shall suddenly be unable to feel myself. Face-washing. Meal. A woman's telegram: How beautiful a place this is; I have no idea when I shall go back to Seoul. I leave your news behind and go out. Behind my back the door shutting off the time allotted to me. Am I outside the door here? Objects indicating absolutely nothing. Casually beautiful things. Cigarette butts, for example. Paving blocks. Leaflets advertising 'instant loans' handed out by middle-aged women.

Maybe it is only possible to explain an age by several deaths. The roadside trees at Jong-no 2ga. The wind at Jong-no 1ga. It is not true that Prince Kropotkin became an anarchist because he could not endure a meaningless world. The wind at Kwanghwa-mun. Roadside trees. Wind again. Psychoanalysis is repulsive. In a Baum test more than ten years ago, I deliberately drew broken trees. The doctor said: Let's think of a method of treatment. What he gave me was a placebo.

And the things that are still close to me are dying things that connive together. Signboards, for example, desperately lined up pointing at something. Flesh simmering alone in October sunlight. Between my shading hands, the sunlight is suddenly indifferent. A paper plane flying beside Yi Sun-shin's statue, heading for the Mediterranean. I recall: there was a moment like this; at that time maybe I folded red paper into a boat that I sent floating off down a slow-flowing river, that boat has maybe run aground somewhere in the Gulf of Mexico by now.

The automatic sensor fixed to the urinal in the Kyobo Building toilet. Flashing a red light as I approach, the only proof of my existence. I do not send a telegram saying: Since you're not in Seoul, I feel deadly lonely. Come back, come back. The signboards lined up in the streets are quiet like deliberately broken trees. As I mutter, Oh, another placebo, a paper plane lightly passing through my body. With things that very gradually erase themselves, some day, in the transparent sunlight of the Mediterranean, just a stroll, at least.

**Missing**

I was gradually delivered to you.  
I was born outside of myself.  
I could recall nothing, yet  
without the least error  
I began to vanish.  
As I walked along the street  
the memory of someone  
made my hair stand on end.  
Passers-by watched the sight  
of my feet leaving the ground.  
When my eyebrows and lips and even my shoulders  
were vanishing impetuously yet quietly  
someone suddenly  
in some utterly remote place  
looked back.  
In the sunlight  
I stretched both arms wide.

**Killer's Love**

1. There is never any alibi. In the moonlight streaming down outside the window, the white birch tree is bright. But I wonder why sleep only comes for the body, not for the heart. I wish I owned a nice rifle. Dawn moonlight. There was a time when my soul was full of a vanished popular song. Then several police cars went hurtling recklessly through the night streets, sirens howling. Outside the window, sirens, sirens, streaming moonlight.

Streaming moonlight. Shall I recall the days when I went around with a dead guy's song packed in my bag? In the end, what raised me was complex, so I still remember the phrases of such things as the sandstorm blowing into the fallen sunlight. I don't give a damn for alibis. I just wish I could sleep well. Sirens, sirens, into multiple layers of time. Moonlight streaming down.

2

Old photographs, they are like a previous life. But you there in the mirror, what life does that face come from? An early morning somewhere with a sound of music full of hostility. The reason the blade of my razor can conceal itself so well is because it's turning at a fearful speed. So ultimately what I abhor are people who regret their whole lives. The invisible blade gliding over the cheeks. There is never any alibi. But will someone be able to turn on some music for me?

My love's music. The white birch tree is still, losing the moonlight. Just as every tomb needs rituals, I spend long mornings in veneration of clattering spoons and bowls. On such a morning is there anything that can never ever be got rid of? But will someone be able to turn on my love's music? My ears, that indifferent sound of the shoes of people hiding long-lasting hostility, and my ears.

3.

Wind blowing toward some distant spot. New placards in the streets flapping. Did I ever scowl at the eyes of the old politician smiling on a page of the evening paper? Did I ever see a purple bus with various posters flapping and flowing, a woman's white legs dangling? An afternoon walking along the wind's long corridors, there is never any alibi. Wind blowing toward some distant spot.

Wind blowing toward some distant spot. Until twilight falls I browse the roster of names in my dark bag. The only mark on the roster, my name is an infinitely long labyrinth. Again a sound of shoes echoing down that corridor, so has my impatient foot walked along empty streets? And there did I meet the eyes of an old silent dog? Wind blowing toward some distant spot. Moonlight streaming down again. My love's music. Ultimately, my life is a quest for infinite silence. All for the sake of an alibi.

**Guerilla**

Maybe it's going to snow soon.

I long to walk once again with snowdrifts above my ankles.

Just as someone used to stand there endlessly  
the apartment's windows are drenched in long silence.

And I lean forward to hear distant sounds,  
the slope a damp mist is once again climbing.

The cold gradually growing stronger, did my lips  
mutter: I want to put a stop to this? Or was it:  
Mother's face as she lay dying was beautiful, but  
it did not snow.

If I hold my breath and look back, thinking someone has just gone past,  
a wind that blew long before is there.

One street light close to the vanishing point quietly goes out.

While the parched darkness is passing through me,  
I remember several letters.

Was it that sweetheart with the too vague shoulders,  
or maybe it was some old friend, but

I do not think that some kind of stubborn obsession  
made me do this. Only with this languid tension

just aiming a black gun barrel at the gradually approaching dread.

In which case the darkness of the front line is excessively familiar. As yet  
the yellow lines on the outer ring road are scattered in all directions  
but very soon thick fog will envelop the city.

The chill of the slopes. I am waiting for some signal.

And I shall mutter: Mother's face as she lay dying  
was beautiful. Like the street light close to the vanishing point  
someone is flickering inside the far-away wind.

*Translated from the Korean by Brother Anthony of Taižé*

**Fish Practice**

I become a fish for a day.  
Water dreams  
and has a premonition.

In the water  
my diet progresses daily.  
I don't distinguish water and air  
or divide the clouds and plankton.

I know that there is even a waterfall beneath the sea  
watch the seasons go by  
and listen to the shadows grow.  
My thoughts shrink  
like a river

My weight halved all at once  
my memories fade all at once  
all at once  
I become an arrested eyeball.  
A fish that understands the fish  
a fresh fish

I think about the numerous nights  
when the fish open their eyes.  
Hungry people swarm.  
A distant day that complements  
the premonition begins.

**Noises**

At eleven a.m. I absorbed the noises.  
At eleven a.m. I was as noisy as possible.  
I opened the window and became numerous voices.  
I was transformed in the speed of the sound.  
I go inside you  
and became the memory of thirty seconds.  
I flowed by my mother's  
raining rotten body.  
I became an endless source  
of random gossip.  
I became carnivores'  
endless appetite.  
The blood passing through the blood vessel  
and its splendid angle,  
the rapid growth of children,  
the sound of milk turning sour,  
I have become the widest open mouth  
of a protagonist in a silent film.  
At eleven a.m. I closed my ears  
At eleven a.m. I shut my eyes  
I was perfectly silent.

**Let's Clean**

As the morning cleaning begins the dust moves elsewhere  
then return  
next morning

yesterday  
and also ten years ago  
become dirty

I have an expiration date.  
You have become spoiled.

A clean nightmare  
a love affair dirtier than all the remaining years together  
cursing alone

we can think sanitarily  
Shake hands  
and shake our heads  
stop breathing

after a while  
cry alone.

Are the shadows clean?  
And your distant sleep?  
As the night approached  
we set out one by one  
and returned  
when the alarm clock went off.

**Misunderstanding**

I will be misunderstood. By you  
by wind  
and also by the calendar.  
I will be misunderstood. At a breakfast table  
in front of a traffic light  
in the end I will  
brush past myself  
inside the train  
that has just emerged  
after making its way through a long tunnel

As the sudden sunlight swirls around my thoughts  
and swarms to the opposite window  
You who were inside my thought,  
the wind,  
the suspect and  
the Vietnamese boat people mentioned in a lower column  
of the international section  
sparkle on the river

I who have not been captured by you, wind, or sunlight  
my leaning becomes fixed  
inside the speed of the eight a.m. train.  
The people who are misunderstood for life  
wander other worlds  
with their heads tilted.

Someone places a hand lightly  
inside my momentary dream.

**The Travelers**

Let's go to Hup'o Go to Hup'o and become the music that falls to the ground  
with the simplest expression A place toward which where the old whales slowly  
head like a swirling mist when small trembles gather to form a horizon  
Finally, let's go to Hup'o

Travel is enjoyable.

Today the ants form a file and march.

Instinct is fragrant, the hot cicada died, and it's summer.

A blinking dot that moves above the navigator. I of the summer  
close my eyes, You of the winter observe all directions forever.  
We leave together, then return in a flash.

But I'm dizzy.

I have traveled a rotating planet at extreme speed.

We reached the future every day like a cat that has turned to jelly,  
for we spun for so long. Where

are you, where is my love?

I'm still traveling and my body keeps getting erased  
like the way meat disintegrates inside a stomach.

I followed my dead woman's morning

and wandered about Russia, India, and Siam.

If I go to Cuba, will I be able to see romantic revolutionaries?

Please take me to Havana's nearest beach.

I'll cup my hands and shout as loudly as possible.

Cuba is Cuba, Havana is Havana.

But today my hair keeps growing in another direction.

Did I love you?

Erasing my boyish expression, my hair forgets numerous barbers  
and grow towards the sunset. As the dream and the bed in which  
flowers bloom disappear, my hair is cheerful, uniquely creative.

When rain falls on me, a strange morning arrives for you and  
when I have nothing precious then you can't help blinking your eyes and  
when I read poetry as a materialist,  
you decide at last on your final journey.

Let's take another spin together around the neighborhood.  
We'll meet. Somewhere.

Have you ever seen the spectacle of the Milky Way blink and disappear  
into the Black Hole? Is that place an intersection?  
That night my we walked along the shore of Ch'õngp'yõng Lake.

**Day of Remembrance**

With so much to commemorate  
between the esophagus and the small intestine,  
we chew deliberately.

We commemorate the stomach  
and the gallbladder  
and the spit that dissolves everything

today too, the anniversary of someone's death.  
A day that there was war.  
The cloud outside the window resembles last year's joke  
and the joke doesn't have enough blood.  
What was a mother yesterday  
isn't a living thing today.  
And the children take pleasure in lying all day,  
while I marvel at the ability of plants to endure.

What can bare its teeth  
will have an esophagus  
and be lonesome.  
While the world circled,  
last year's jokes were forgotten.  
Dozens of teeth emerged above the white rice cakes.  
We chewed what we ate deliberately  
and slowly came to understand  
the speed of the stars.

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