

**Seo Jung Hak**

**The Cheapest France in Town**

Translated from Korean by Megan Sungyoon



WORLD POETRY

## 시인의 말

이상하게도, 삶은 지속된다. 편집되지도 않고, 축약되지도 않고, 머물지도 않는다. 꽤 세월이 흘렀고, 이상하다고 생각하지만, 이상할 따름이다. 이게 왜 이상한 일인지 가끔 생각해볼 때가 있다. 살면서 이 순간이 이 삶의 하이라이트이란 걸 다들, 어떻게 알아채는지. 여긴, 배경음악도 없고, 특수효과도 없고, 플롯도 없고, 하여간 아무것도 없다. 그저 이상하다.

이 책의 가치는, 지금 현재, 인터넷 최저가 신라면 30개들이 반 박스와 같으나 제휴카드를 쓰면 신라면 쪽이 좀더 싸다.

꼼꼼히 비교해보고 사는 것은 삶에 큰 도움이 될지도 모르겠다.

2017년 5월

서정학

## Poet's Word

Strangely, life continues. Without being edited, contracted, anchored. Quite a few years have passed, and I think it's strange, but it is indeed strange. Sometimes I wonder why it's so strange: How does everyone, realize that this very moment is their life's highlight while living it? Here, there's no background music, special effects, plot, or anything at all. It's just strange.

The value of this book is, at present, the same as the lowest online-exclusive price for a half box of thirty Shin instant noodles, though Shin would be slightly cheaper if you paid with a rewards card.

A careful comparison of prices before buying may be a great help to your life.

May 2017

Seo Jung Hak

## **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.

## Paper Box

They said they had come to perform on stage. Looking like a handful of up-side-down paper boxes, their spaceship was so old that someone would throw it away if they weren't careful. As if aware of this, they said one of them always stayed behind to watch the ship. It looked like some parts with the words "Hot Love" inscribed on them had been recycled already, though they didn't seem to care much. There already wasn't a place they could return to. Their self-proclaimed "beautiful" planet that had been destroyed by the ultraelectronicplanetaryprofessionaldestructive-formidableterrifyingantennalbeam. Their music, despite the pan-cosmic embellishment—the space-rock-groping-hard-for-outer-space-with-its-infinite-sixth-sense—sounded merely like dance music, just adequate for dancing, though the beat was a little off. Saying that a TV show producer had told them to try harder if they want to perform on stage, one of them shed tears. As if realizing nothing could be achieved without an effort like the sorrowful life of the fallen dynasty, they said they wanted to be off to look for a new planet where they could be hotly loved. The paper box made of hot love tumbled in the wind. To practice, they drag their feet around like corpses while mumbling late into the night. Hope they find enough people to board the spaceship and clear out of my yard soon.

## Paper Box Factory

Needed Goods to People Who Need Them! has always been the owner's motto. With proud eyes and a dry cough, the owner is watching the production line. It's possible to produce anything with a few needed materials. Ah, hooray! Mass production! is the only way to survive. The owner pompously inspects the factory. Money! Money is the best! Although it isn't Said! out loud, you can read the lips! Misunderstanding! Customers spitting and parks holding chopsticks, and the owner, the printer is printing Text! while making loud sounds. Fragile! Final Sale! Rise to Crescendo! People of Color! The paper-folder is folding boxes while making loud noises. Beautiful Poem! Quick Glance! Publicly Traded Company! Market Ebb! The boxes will be Neatly! piled up and soon, needed Goods! will be shipped to people who need them. The paper boxes continue to be produced in the factory. The owner recalls the old days in a shaky voice. I glued and folded and stacked them and I got paid Money! There were a few materials needed. In those days we could produce everything we wanted. I guess that's still true. It's not like I have a Problem! with that. You understand? I started it without a plan! Though now it's become an enormous and beautiful and mighty factory like this. What begins with gluing shall end in technology. The owner's eyes glow in deception.

## **Incheon Gourmet Club**

While the excuse for failing the exam was eating seaweed soup the night before, someone said the whole phyllode was in either an ovoid or a lanceolate shape and the way it was lobed pinnately and surfaced with many follicles made it seem precisely, like a bum. The theme of the day was seaweed. One of the members used the term intercalary growth. Because it was true, no one could argue against it though it entailed the comment that the surface of the leaf felt slimy because the mucous gland secreted mucilage. One of the members with a special penchant for sour tastes said because of the slimy mucilage of seaweed it was a foul technique for humans to stick to seaweeds. Thumping, on the table, he cried that Daejanggak was produced from March until May. The superior product was blackish navy and short-woven. Also, the inferior product was blackish yellow with salt crystals and produced later in the season. It was obvious he learned about seaweeds through surfing the web. A member who was splitting the void with a dreamy face said the good ones were soft to the touch and the color had to be vivid green and translucent and complained that it was too contrived and modern that a seaweed would be used as a tool for murder. Therefore, a gathering of people against the over-instrumentalization of seaweeds was determined as the sub-theme of the club. She expressed her de facto approval by noting that she was against such an idea but overripe seaweed was chewy and bad and dried seaweed contained 920 milligrams of calcium per 100 grams. That was the last thing on the club's official agenda.

## **The Cheapest France in Town**

A twenty-pack for just a dollar, the incredible amazing price made everybody run. A price so good it doesn't even cover the production cost! Your loss if you don't buy! The banner filled with red French text was tumbling under the storming crowd's feet. Someone shouted desperately toward the Eiffel Tower, someone cried loudly toward La Défense. The euro bills like red butterflies were flying into the sky showing off their beautiful design. Holding paper boxes in both hands, warning no one should come near. What's made in France must go back to France! The store manager was busy filling customers' arms with freebies. Though everyone worried that the store wouldn't make any profit, the many Frances, sold out eventually. With bloodshot eyes, the store manager rolled up the flyers and thanked everyone in excitedly accented French. Outside the store, someone threw a Molotov cocktail into the parked cars, the sky turned red.

All for beautiful cheap France.



## 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 collec-  
tions; 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) ury (A)rtifices  
                          (B) Heart  
                          (C) Collection

## Elephant High Heel

The phone rings it may be a call for me

Soon there will come a call asking for me an anxious black wireless phone

Comes the sound of ringing phone the sound of something breaking that damned elephant stepped on something again the phone is okay why are you hiding behind my back behind my back is an elephant standing shaking the dirty long trunk trying to hide behind my back with its big body you idiot I can't hide you hurry-scurry the elephant can't understand the wind blows as if to turn the pages of a phone book the broken ivory stabs my back I told you I can't hide you tears in the gunky black eyes, staring at the phone but the call doesn't come go hide somewhere else pawoo pawoo spitting with the useless mouth damn it the phone ringing starts to make my head hurt an elephant is a nocturnal animal the phone rings annoyingly E-L-E-P-H-A-N-T H-I-D-I-N-G-H-E-R-E EL-EPHANT-IS HI-DING-HE-RE the elephant wraps my neck with its long trunk go away don't act like we're friends the call isn't coming the wind is sinisterly ringing the electric cables the elephant is sobbing it's sobbing until its eyes are all red it'll come soon with an indifferent face I pick up the phone the elephant flapping its big ears flying the phone bills all over the entire room as if determined

With its eyes red the elephant starts to run in fierce speed it runs toward the top of the hill where the telephone pole stands

The elephant runs a high heel comes off and rolls, down the hill the elephant's big black high heel