



Korea Lit

Summer Edition 2016

Stories by:

Elizabeth Lee

Lydia Clack

Rabia Ramzan

Poetry by:

Jo White

Allen Jones

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Hannah Carson, Editor

Emily Slagel, Assistant Editor

Ralston McAllister, Assistant Editor

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Korea Lit

We are proud to publish the fiction of Korean writers and non-Korean writers who have lived in or experienced an aspect of Korea (even in countries other than North and South Korea). We seek to give new writers a voice and established writers another place to present their work. Our hope is that all the stories published on the pages of Korea Lit will give readers some glimpse of Korean culture, no matter how small. This may come in the form of mystery, romance or even alien invaders.

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GLASS COFFINS
By Elizabeth Lee

"I can tell you what it is to want, but love is a phantom."

This is what Gyeoul chose to scratch into the ice. She smiled to herself at the thought of her sad monologue being stumbled upon by innocent skaters and ice-fishermen.

With arctic fingers she quickly erased her poetry and blew icy breath over the lake surface, returning it to its mirrored glory. Gyeoul knew she had to be careful in her poetic expressions. Although she was a visible reality to the world around her, she knew that she must remain a silent one. The world was too small

and incapable of understanding her desires. She could play her tricks and write her stories but they must always become invisible when witnesses were near. This must remain tradition.

She was a being trapped in the endless cycle of time, a silent observer of humanity at its finest and at its worst. She chose to mostly ignore the worst.

She spent her life traveling the globe, willing chill and watery glass on surfaces neatly dying. She would, however, always return to this lake.

If she was awarded the luxury of a home, she would choose this clearing, nestled among angry withered trees and hibernating mammals.

She had selected this lake because of him. He had made his first appearance when he was a child, awkward and beautiful. He came to the lake that day to skate and she had watched him curiously. He had galloped through the heavy snow like a joyful rabbit, bounding in and out of drifts, occasionally disappearing into the white.

Exchanging boots for skates, he stepped tentatively out onto the surface of the lake, tiny

hands tucked safely into woolen mittens and a shock of black hair sprouting from the rim of his matching woolen cap. She felt certain that he was rebelliously alone in the clearing, escaping punishment for some sin he had committed at home. Gyeoul had giggled at the sight of him, bundled and ridiculous with no ounce of bravery on display. Then, she felt the first glide of his skates.

They were smooth and agonizing, moving neatly across the ice in misshapen patterns. They cut into her flesh and left tracks of careless scars along her perfect waterscape. Gyeoul could not understand how this child, on this lake, caused her so much pain. She had experience the feel of others throughout her lifetime, but this boy was different.

He was not skilled and he stumbled often, creating pock marks in the ice, blemish after blemish haphazardly decorating the surface of the lake.

Gyeoul felt a peculiar sort of anger welling up within her. He was destroying her artistry, the perfection of her creation and her being. She felt the urge to bring icy breath down on him and cover his body with an avalanche of snow. Perhaps she would allow him the same watery

grave as others in the past.

The boy stumbled again and sat silently near the edge of the frozen lake brushing off the knees of his pants and examining a tattered hole just at his ankle. She watched him.

He leaned over and using a mitten encased hand, brushed the fresh snow from the surface of the lake, peering down at the opaque ice. She felt his gentle touch smoothing away her white covering. She watched him and waited silently.

“Thank you,” he whispered to the ice. “May I come again tomorrow?”

Gyeoul began to heal of the wounds he had inflicted, and her restrained breath sent a frigid breeze across the clearing, rustling the angry trees and stirring tiny blizzards across the lake’s surface.

She willed him to stay, to skate and spend an eternity slicing away at her layers of ice. But, he left the ice and cantered clumsily into the woods. She watched him scamper over fallen trees as he made his way home and she slowly surrendered and lost sight of him.

Gyeoul returned to the lake and mournfully examined the absent ice. She ran her fingers over the patterns cut into the surface, a constellation of mistakes carefully created just for her. She pressed her cheek to the grooves and felt them transfer to her skin leaving creases across her otherwise perfect complexion. She took all the marks left by the boy's skates into her. Each one burning like fire as her body absorbed them one by one.

Gyeoul returned to the clearing every day in anticipation of her visitor. She dreamed of him as she hibernated through the year with her brothers and sisters. As they slipped in turn in and out of their hibernating states, they pitied her. She slept fitfully through Yeoleum and envied her brother's time on the earth. He mocked her infatuation with the human but she silently coveted the chance of the next encounter.

It would be several years before she would see him again, and even then she did not recognize him.

He walked as a man, with three foot strides across the snow. There was no tentativeness in his steps this time. The mittens were replaced with black gloves and the wild black hair had

lightened and taken on a sheen, like satin.

Gyeoul did not recognize this man invading the sacredness of her lake. She hated him and plotted ways to destroy him if he touched the ice she had reserved for her wild haired boy.

The man stepped gently onto the ice and began gliding one foot in front of the other. His familiar touch overwhelmed her. She felt all of the pain she had experienced years ago from the blades on his boots. Her skin bled white and silver as his weight bore down on her long abandoned surface.

She longed to cry out in ecstasy but felt shame at her initial unfamiliarity. Tears rested on the edge of her eyelids threatening to spill onto her cheeks and run through the creases and scars left there by the boy's skates years ago.

She hurt, a physical pain eating at her dead heart. She felt at once the urge to make him stop and ease her pain but the pain made her feel as close to humanity as she ever would.

The man had become skilled at his movements across the ice. The clumsiness of his childhood feet had disappeared and been replaced by

confident strokes. Gyeoul wondered where he had spent time for so many years and felt anger toward the manmade surfaces that he surely practiced on for all the years he had been gone.

She swore to herself that she wouldn't care because he had returned to her, and in her imagination he remembered her and loved her.

The man grew weary as the daylight faded and the sluggish moon crept to the sky. He made his way to the shore and slipped his skates off, replacing them with sturdy boots.

The man knelt on the shore of the lake and brushed the broken surface with his gloved hand. "Thank you," he whispered, in a voice much different from the one Gyeoul fell in love with so many years ago. "May I come again tomorrow?"

He chuckled softly and Gyeoul felt a wave of panic wash over her. He had asked that same question once before and she remembered with pain her expectation of that event.

She would lose him again and be forced to linger in hibernation for years, longing for the cutting and splendid pain of his skates.

She watched as he headed for the trees, quickening his pace as the sky became dark. She followed him, hovering just behind his neck, breathing in the scent of his sweat. He smelled of her ice and she imagined that he had taken a piece of her into him.

Forgetting her proximity to his body, she let out an icy breath. The man flinched as tiny flakes of ice rippled across the back of his neck. He pulled his jacket tighter around him and Gyeoul felt her heart break at the small action.

She would never have him. She was too cold. She let him go ahead through the trees, disappearing from her sight.

Gyeoul returned to the lake and glided across the ice covering her body with the tracks the man had left. She felt each wound, a new torture to her skin.

Alone in the clearing, Gyeoul cried out. It was an intoxicated scream, and she didn't allow herself to hold back. The trees shuddered and whipped about in the breath of her scream. She didn't care if it was heard. She would gladly face whatever consequences were required by whatever gods existed in her universe.

Having used all of her breath, she smoothed the surface of the lake. It would be perfect for its visitor, should he return the next day. And she willed him to her.

At night she hid from her brothers and sisters, not willing to share her secret torment with them. They would chastise her and imprison her if they knew her secret. Instead, she spent the night on the lake remembering each stroke the man's skates had made and dreaming of the possibility of more. The man did return the next day but he did not come alone. He brought with him a young woman. Gyeoul watched them from a distance, unsure of the feelings grasping at her.

The man and woman held gloved hands as they approached the lake shore. They slipped out of their boots and laced up skates helping each other secure the knots on the skates.

Gyeoul watched as the man skillfully darted forward on the ice turning circles as the woman laughed on the shore tossing long, black tresses back and purposefully whipping them about in the still air, demanding his attention. Gyeoul would not provide wind to assist in the

spectacle.

Gyeoul immediately began to writhe in the pleasure the man's skates created as he expertly commanded the ice beneath his feet. She closed her eyes and became lost in the rhythm not wishing to see the dark haired woman waiting for him. She had all but forgotten the unwanted visitor when she was jolted back to consciousness by an unfamiliar touch.

The woman had stepped onto the ice. Gyeoul could feel the unnaturalness of her strokes. Unlike the man's pleasure filled strides, the woman's motions were ugly and cruel. Gyeoul hated her. She hated her dark hair fluttering wildly as she crossed the ice to her partner. She hated her tinkling giggle as she stumbled into his waiting arms.

The couple skated across the ice in each other's arms and Gyeoul felt herself dying in the ache of each of their combined steps. The man's rapturous strokes were overwhelmed by the woman's accursed ones.

Gyeoul's skin bled and she held in sobs of excruciating pain. Pain mixed with heartbreak at the sight of the couple's enjoyment of each other. She felt betrayed and angry.

Hours ticked by and Gyeoul willed them to leave her lake but they stayed, picnicking on the shore and then returning to the ice to torture her again.

Her heart broke over and over again, and when the couple finally traded their skates for boots and trudged through the snow, she felt no desire to follow them. She only watched them from a distance and after they disappeared she cautiously cleaned the surface of her lake, erasing any reminder that they had existed. The man had not spoken to her before he left and she felt glad for it. There was no unwanted probability of a future encounter.

Gyeoul spent her night flying through the trees surrounding the lake. She blew ice on the branches weighing them to the earth and breaking them from their homes. The trees shivered in their nakedness. Her rage and sorrow was transformed into storms and she covered the ground in thick drifts of bitter snow. Snow covered her heartache.

The next morning, she hovered above her lake examining the surface, making sure there were no remnants of the previous day's events.

She would erase the man from her memory and return to her routine. She would become regimented and remind herself of her position and place in the world. She would never let another human engage her affections as the man had. It was dangerous and painful.

As she finished perfecting the surface of her lake she noticed movement on the edge of the woods. The man was coming across the clearing, skates hanging from his gloved hands. His hair was uncovered, wild and free in the wind of Gyeoul's leftover rage.

When the man reached the lake shore, he knelt by the ice and brushed a woolen hand across the surface clearing the fresh snow.

"I forgot to say thank you," he whispered. "I hope you don't mind if I spend time with you again today."

Gyeoul felt her anger dissolve at the same moment as her heart broke. She remembered his first words to her as a child with wild hair and mittened hands. His steps had been tentative and weak but she had loved the new feeling of them

Now he stood as a man, whispering to her. Promising her the world. How could she entertain the thought of his skates again and remember the pain of yesterday? How could she keep this moment? The man stepped out onto the ice and sailed forward. Gyeoul held her breath. The pain she felt in that first motion as his blades cut into the perfect surface she had created was enough to entrance her again.

She followed him across the ice and blew wind against his back, pushing him quickly across the ice. She saw him smile as his speed increased and he bent his body low, letting the air ride over his head and neck. He painted designs onto the surface of the lake and held his breath when a misdirected icy gust caught his face. Gyeoul blushed silver at her mistake. She only wanted perfection for him.

He skated until the sun escaped behind the trees and the sky burned red. When the night set in, he crossed the lake and retrieved his boots. He laced them up and beat the ice off the blades of his skates.

Gyeoul watched him tenderly throughout his routine. When he had gathered his things, he began his march across the clearing toward the

dark trees. Gyeoul felt sadness overwhelm her and tears threatened to spill across her scarred cheeks once more. The man stopped and turned back.

He shuffled slowly through the thick snow and reaching the surface of the lake he stepped cautiously onto the ice and walked a few steps out onto the slippery surface. He brushed the surface of the ice smooth with his hand.

“Thank you,” he whispered. “May I come again tomorrow?”

She had no choice. She could not risk the possibility of his leaving for another set of endless years. She could not bear the thought of his returning to mock her with the foolish dark haired woman. She knew she must keep him forever on her lake, retracing the patterns in her flesh that he had started so many years ago.

Her fingers reached out to the ice and like a silent sledgehammer forced the surface to divide, breaking in two like arctic plates shattering.

The man panicked and weaved erratically finally losing his footing and clambering to hold onto

the glassy sheets around him. His efforts were useless and he plunged into the murderous water, sputtering and kicking wildly.

Gyeoul watched calmly as he cried out in fear and pain. She wasn't certain what he was feeling as he began to slip below the surface. She watched as his pink skin turned blue and his eyes lost their humanity and froze in a stare, looking up at her.

As he sank into the lake, Gyeoul carefully pushed the pieces of ice together, reconnecting the patterns her boy had made. She carefully glued each piece together in a puzzle of broken glass.

Gyeoul exhaled long and violently, erasing any evidence of the tomb she had created. The lake was once again perfect and beautiful, a coffin that only she was aware of.

And she smiled at her secret.

END

Elizabeth Lee is an American writer living in Daegu, South Korea. Along with writing, she enjoys hiking and camping. Her husband is native

Korean and regularly makes fun of her terrible southern accent. Elizabeth hopes to continue her short fictions series, "Seasons," on the pages of Korea Lit.

The Pushcart Man

By Lydia Clack

You've all seen him. He is one of those elderly men that you see pushing carts piled high with cardboard. The government doesn't give him enough to live on so he can either collect cardboard or sit on the steps that lead down to the subway, asking for handouts. He did try that once, but discovered that the box of coins he collected didn't keep his belly full of rice. He would prefer noodles, but rice is cheaper.

He isn't a handsome man, and he was never a pretty boy. He is fast though. He was always fast, even as a baby. His birth was fast. His abandonment was fast. His adoption was fast. He hoped his cardboard boxes would be fast too.

He arrived at the idea from watching a foreign movie on t.v., through the window of an electronics store. He didn't own his own t.v. so he had to catch glimpses on free ones, as he

pushed his cart down the sidewalks.

The movie was absurd, in the way that aliens are absurd. He knew that aliens didn't exist, but he wondered if that was only because they hadn't been invented yet. Cars didn't exist until someone invented them. Even his daily kimchi was an invention at some point in time. So why not aliens? Or time travel?

He worked on his plans as he pushed his cart across the street, weaving left to right on the crosswalk. People would move for him because he was older and his cart was larger. Sometimes he weaved just to toy with the foreigners. Foreigners always walked in straight, determined lines. They never understood the dance of his weaving cart.

At night he parked his cart below his crumbling concrete room and climbed the stairs. His knees hurt and his legs bowed out like crescent moons, but he was still fast.

He sat at his little table, on his cold floor and sketched his design. He wondered how much cardboard he would need to collect to protect his body from the heat, and then the cold. He picked at the overly ripe kimchi that should

have been thrown out a week ago. Every night, he ate the kimchi. Every other night, the rice. The room reeked of the kimchi and the old man wondered if his little refrigerator was keeping it properly. He didn't wonder for long, though. His sketch occupied his thoughts.

In an hour, he would roll out his bed and lay on his cold floor, dreaming of his departure. He had already picked the hill that he would use, and the cliff that would give him the right speed for take-off. He had hiked the same hill three times a week for the last 20 years, passing the same elderly men and women every time. He had watched them shrink and become bow legged. He had watched the women's hair become shorter and adopt noodle like curls. He had watched their clothing turn from tight and dark to loose and bright. They would go without rice one month to buy those brightly colored clothes.

In the morning, the old man put his bed away and dressed in the clothes that he had worn every day that week. He locked his room with his bed roll and low table inside. His pushcart waited for him under the parking shelter below his room. He unloaded yesterday's boxes and set out with his empty cart.

He weaved across intersections and plowed through busy sidewalks, stopping at garbage heaps to pick up boxes. He knew to go to the large apartment buildings first. Every day someone new would move in and every night they would leave their flattened boxes by the recycling bins. He had to get there early to beat the other cart pushers.

The ajummas were early risers. They were quick and calculated. They devoured the apartment buildings like locusts on a tree. But he was fast. He had watched them, made account of their comings and goings. He knew when they set out each morning, and he made certain that he set out earlier. He hit each building before them and picked through each trash pile before they came with their tiny, withered hands.

At noon, he would stop and buy a sweet potato from the ajumma in front of the train station. Her sweet potatoes were the largest but not the sweetest. He would slip into the convenience store and use the microwave to cook it, and then he would sit at the table outside the store and eat his potato, keeping a careful eye on his cart.

He watched the young people with their impossibly white faces. They wandered down the sidewalk with their eyes glued to their cellphones, playing new games or texting friends they had just left. They were like robots, all programmed with the same daily routine. He made a note, in his mind, that he wouldn't allow cellphones. Things would stay as they were in his youth. People would talk and share information as it was meant to be shared.

He observed a young couple. The boy had his arm draped over the young girl's shoulders and carried her bag in his opposite hand. The girl gripped her phone with both hands and walked head down, with her eyes glued to the screen. The boy did the steering, and the girl lazily plodded along, oblivious of her surroundings.

He saw a group of foreigners, tall and pink. They were hunched from the weight of the backpacks they carried and he wondered what was in them. Drugs or chocolate? Maybe souvenirs from their travels. He never understood the need for travel, or drugs. As a child he had visited Jeju with his parents. That was the farthest from home he

had ever journeyed. The dialect was strange and difficult and he knew, even as a boy, he would never go farther.

Once, during the war, he almost left Korea. He was 18 and his parents had talked of leaving. They never did, though. They lived and died in the small room that he grew up in. His parents and his grandparents before them. Each generation repeating the life of the one before. He would break the cycle.

He had never married. An adopted child, with a wide face, from a poor family was undesirable to the girls of his youth. Perhaps if he had made more of an effort, he might have found a bride. He didn't care, though. He was content to never hear the nagging of a woman's voice or the incessant pounding of her little fists on his shoulder when she was unhappy. He also hated the flowery pants the ajummas insisted on wearing. Every day he watched the flowery pants steal his boxes and snatch up his fat sweet potatoes. He wouldn't allow flowery pants.

When the sky grew dark he returned home and unloaded the boxes from his pushcart. He climbed the stairs to his room and sat on the floor, eating the rotten kimchi. He stared at his

sketch and made calculations in his mind. Tomorrow night he would leave. He only needed to collect boxes for one more day.

He unrolled his bed and lay on his side, looking around his tiny home. He would leave his small table and broken refrigerator. He would leave the advertisements for the Chinese restaurant next door. He would only take the boxes, and the old watch that had belonged to his father. The watch was the most important part. He knew from the movie that he needed a time piece and, the older the piece, the farther back he could go. The watch was at least 100 years old. He wouldn't go back 100 years. That was too far. He would only go back to his childhood, before his legs were bent and his joints burned. Every night he would wind the watch back until his fingers hurt. Tomorrow night, he would wind it back for the last time.

His dreams were filled with adventures from his childhood, and rotten kimchi. He slept fitfully and woke early. He didn't mind. It was his last day here and the early start would allow him to collect more boxes. He also had to go to the hardware store and buy the rope. He has measured carefully, and knew exactly how much he would need.

He set out with his cart before the sun was up. This made things easier for him. He wouldn't have to dodge any hordes of pale, vampire-like students in their matching uniforms. They always clogged the sidewalks and chirped into their giant cellphones as they made their way to school. The girls were all the same with their shoulder length hair and bright orange lips. They were paper dolls, cut from the same catalog. The boys were all lanky and pimply.

He collected boxes all day, not even pausing for his daily sweet potato. The ajumma at the outdoor market eyed him suspiciously when he rolled past her without stopping. But he didn't have time to stop. He had to make use of his last day.

At 9:00 p.m. he stopped by the hardware store to buy his rope. The middle aged man at the counter measured it carefully for him. He would need 50 feet exactly. When he handed his money over to the man, he knew that it was his last. There would be no more money to buy rice, or kimchi. If he didn't succeed, he would starve. The man at the counter didn't know this though. The old man told him he was using the rope to lower his food scrap bucket down from

his apartment, because the arthritis in his fingers made it too hard to carry. He had seen an elderly neighbor doing this once, and made a note to use it as his excuse.

The salesman coiled his rope and carried it out to his cart for him. The old man would miss the way the middle aged men treated him. They offered him their seats on the bus. They helped him push his cart over the steep curbs of the city. They never complained when he jumped on front of them at the convenience store checkout. They respected his age and wisdom, unlike the young generation with their video games and self-entitlement. He wouldn't allow video games.

The old man pushed his cart home. It was stacked high and he struggled to make it up the little hill, to his building. He thought about his younger self, with his strong legs and thick hair. He thought about his adoptive mother kissing his face when he cried, and beating him when he stole a sweet potato from the bowl. His life had been full of hardships. Hunger and poverty. Abuse and tears. But he welcomed it all back. He had no use for machines and the constant sense of urgency. He missed sitting and breathing.

He unloaded the boxes from his cart and climbed his stairs for the last time. Once inside, he scanned the room. He would not miss it. The walls were crumbling, and the stench of rotten kimchi filled his nose. He opened his little refrigerator and pulled out the remaining kimchi. After a quick sniff, he snatched a handful and shoved it into his withered mouth. There was no crunch left and the flavor was ripe and sour. It was long past its expiration date.

He finished the kimchi off and made his way back down the stairs, to his piles of collapsed boxes. He started with the inside, carefully lining his pushcart with the thickest of the boxes. He wanted the cabin to be sturdy and well insulated. He added layer after layer, squeezing the boxes tight, until there was only enough room for a small, bow legged man to fit in the center. He then began covering the outside of the cart with boxes, securing the first layer with his rope. He added two more layers, wrapping each one with rope, then he used the remaining rope to make one final coil around the cart, pulling the end tight and knotting it.

The three remaining boxes would be the door to

his vehicle. He tore open the seam of each box and tucked a flap into the layers lining the inside of the cart, creating a series of hinged doors that covered the top, enclosing the small space inside. He was trusting they would hold throughout his journey. He wondered if he should have thought of something better for this particular element, but he knew he couldn't wait another day.

He looked over his completed cart and carefully made any last minute adjustments that he thought it may need. After he had finished, he reached into his pocket and brushed his thumb across his father's watch. He would wait to set it. It only needed one final turn.

His neighbor had left a bike helmet hanging from the handlebars of her rusty, orange ten-speed. He quietly snatched it and tossed it into his cart. He wasn't a thief. He would look up her family when he arrived and return the helmet to them. Maybe they would save it for her. He would worry about that later.

The old man pushed his cart out of the covered area and onto the sidewalk in front of his home. He looked up at his tiny, grimy window and gave it the one fingered salute he had seen

young foreigners give, when they disliked someone. Then, he set off for his hill.

The sun had set and the streets were starting to fill up with young people walking arm in arm. They disgusted him with their chubby legs and carefree attitudes. He plowed through the scantily dressed youth and made his way to the outskirts of town. He could see his hill in the distance and knew that the daily hikers would be gone when he arrived at his destination. He hoped that no one would be there. He couldn't risk the other cart pushers knowing his plan.

The hill was empty. He leaned forward, using all his strength to push his cart up the steady incline, to the top. It took him almost an hour to reach the peak. He stretched his aching muscles and surveyed the scene before him. He could see his small city, laid out before him like a smog filled snow globe. The lights gave a hazy glow like something from a dream, and the cars moved along like slowly crawling insects. It was silent on his hill, save for the soft steady hum of the city below. He remembered a time when the city was just a cluster of homes, and the air was clean and bright. That was the time that he longed for.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out the watch. He began to wind it for the last time, as he sucked in a kimchi filled breath. His fingers shook as he wound it back to the time that he had calculated so carefully, many months ago. When he was finished, he carefully placed it back into his pocket and turned to his cart.

He pushed the metal and cardboard machine a few more feet, to the very top of his hill. He used a large rock as a step stool and carefully climbed inside, strapping the helmet to his head. He reached up and pulled the door flaps over, completely cocooning him inside. He reached into his pocket and ran a withered hand over the watch one last time. Then he used the last bit of strength in his defeated body and lunged forward. And the cart began to move.

END

Lydia Clack is a freelance writer, living in North Carolina. In addition to writing, she works in literacy advancement for young adults. She enjoys her two dogs and watching Sherlock Homes (the Cumberbatch one).

Birds Fly Away
By Rabia Ramzan

Everything was comfortable and cheery as

always or perhaps, more than ordinarily patronizing...a general impression of preparation and relief, highly conducive to spirit and amusing anticipations, with a completely modern character which imparted an air of convenience: dusty streets passing in a frigid blur, rusting iron doors, barred and locked as usual with no sign of anything discernible, unclosed window-shutters, drooping roofs, scribbled-on walls with whitewash torn everywhere, silent noises of the footfalls, mute knockings at the doors, and quiet turnings of the handles, dim lights strobing in the dark spells and folding inside themselves until absorbing the sunlight completely, deep and red flickering fires proceeding from the hollows of chimneys and echoing in clouded darkness, howling wind steeping in shadow...Nothing had changed. Everything was same.

It was the third day. And, I, holding my son's hand tight, was taking him to school routinely. I did not want to stop or even look at it; conceivably, I didn't want to face the harsh reality or possibly I might have thought that by avoiding looking at it, I could also avoid the impending doom. But I began to walk towards it nervously. I couldn't resist: towering in front of me stood that old-looking locked door of a

decrepit house, the dismal stone walls with sadness oozing out of every crack and crevice. They all gazed over me. Standing tall, the somber portrait of their cold eyes glared at me.

Gaping at what stood in front of me, I trembled close towards the deserted door and reaching for the handle hesitantly, my hands began to quiver, my heart started beating faster, making it harder for me to breathe, my voice strangled in pain; my body was being overwhelmed by fear. I forced myself closer and grabbed the handle with my hands still shaking. A cool shudder trickled down my spine. The cold wind whispered the worrisome voice of Ms. Shin Hye into my ears: “the birds fly away, never to return”. Wondering if all of this was real but not taking my chances, I slowly paid my respect and shunning all the fears and thoughts, held my son’s hand tighter and set off to where I was heading before getting distracted. This house had always been a source of motherly comfort to me, but now, there was something that really chilled my bones.

Stumbling at past, I could see the shadow of Ms Shin Hye passing and repassing perfectly, distinctly. She was a particularly fearless and scrupulously religious, square, short woman,

with black hair; dressed like some picture book vendors, with the impression of being left in charge of the empty house by the proprietor.

I still remember the day when my husband and I had come to take possession in this neighborhood. She was the first person we encountered. She was nice enough to help us in settling things down; brought us food for one week until we had properly accommodated. The days went on and she became a helping hand to me. I never heard her complain but counting her blessings always. She was never angry, neither perturbed, nor vexed, but the only thing visible in her black shiny eyes was a strange sadness and hollowness.

Lost in her thoughts, I didn't realize what time we reached and when my son entered the school gate. On my way back, my eyes unintentionally circumambulated her ramen stall; it was closed and there were no customers.

On reaching home, I finished my household chores and fell further deep into past. All that was in sight was the day she died on. It came out that I was invited to her house that day. She had prepared a sumptuous lunch, though it wasn't a special day, nor was it the birthday of her son,

neither of her daughter's, which she used to celebrate grandly. She seemed different and pale. There was something very peculiar about her eyes. With tears springing from her eyes, she closed the door but her hands wouldn't let her push it hard against the latch. Exhibiting all the symptoms of extreme loneliness, she raked through the darkness, along a seemingly never ending path, but found none within it.

"I had always been strong enough that nothing made me sad or give in", she said with titanic courage, "I never took anything to my heart; nothing ever got hold of me, even the death of my beloved husband. But, lately, I feel that my loneliness is eating me up. It will kill me. Before it does, I want to see my children again".

"I want them home now, can they not come back and play with me?" she coughed to apprise herself of their absence, and turned again towards the wall.

"I was the only child of my parents", she reflected.

"My father was a doctor and my mother, a teacher. We lived in a remote area of Daegu. My father was earning much, and, because my

mother was a frugal lady, they were able to save a big sum of money and bought this house in central Seoul. We lived here happily. I was admitted to the best high school of the town. It was hardly a year that we had shifted to this house when one day coming back from their jobs, my parents' car met an accident and they died leaving me alone in this ruthless world to fight the currents of the wild wind on my own. I left the school, did many part-time jobs and married Park Hyun Soo. We had two children, Gun Hye and Tae Shin. They fought and loved each other. Life went on. I thought that now nothing would change and my house would always be filled with happy chirps of my birds. I can still recall, they were in college then. It was raining heavily on that day and Hyun Soo did not come back home. We called everyone we knew, searched wherever we could, but to no avail. The night passed away and the next day, he came home, but dead. He had died of heart attack. He could not manage to pay the interest on debt. The restaurant was sold and I was left empty handed. I started working ramen seller to fend for my children. And, after burning midnight oil, I could enable my children to seek higher education and get good jobs. I got my daughter married and sent her to America but had I the slightest idea that she would never

return, I wouldn't have let her go. My son also wanted to explore the new skies. He flew to England and got married. He used to call me in the beginning but then I did not hear from him ever again". I didn't realize until later what she meant by: "The time has come. The last bird is about to fly. The nest would soon be empty. I pray that there never be any lonely bird dying of frost."

There were hundreds of people on her funeral to bid the lonely bird farewell. It was the first time I had seen her children and grandchildren. They were crying; the sea of tears was not drying. They regretted they could not come earlier. Now, even if they wanted to come back, there was no mother bird to nestle them, nor the nest; she had entrusted her house to an orphanage. Soon, they retired to the new nests they had built, but which comparable to this one, were nothing but mere shadows of this nest, deprived of the warmth and comfort of it.

"Keep hold of your son. Let him fly but make sure that he doesn't take the flight that might hinder him from coming back", she would say.

The knock at the door dragged me back to present and I was surprised to see my son back

home. I looked at the clock and realized how much time had elapsed. I gave him jajangmyeon to eat and started helping him with his home work. Soon after, I was shushing my son, holding him tight in my lap as if he would fly away, the moment I would let him free and he, constantly pointing at his atlas, was saying that he wanted to go to this country and that and that he would never come back. His thoughtlessly uttered words faltered my thoughts and I was shivering, not knowing what to do.

I froze in fear. I felt sick. Considering this all a dream, I shut my eyes and tried to fill up with some hope and make myself believe that these apprehensions were not real, but as many times as I attempted this, all the fears rushed back.

THE END

I am a Pakistani and my name is Rabia Ramzan. I am a BA, B.Ed; an MA (English Literature and Linguistics), with course work of post graduate diploma in Teaching of English Language as a Foreign Language (TEFL) completed, and currently enrolled in MPhil (English Literature).

Moreover, I teach English Literature and Linguistics at university level in Pakistan. I wish to produce literature that transcends borders and boundaries.

The Deconstruction of a Myth
Poetry Collection
By Jo White



The Deconstruction of a Myth

The deconstruction of a myth

A thankless affair

Dependent on

엄마

Or

아빠

A childhood institution

Of presumable nonsense

Sent to recycle

Youth

Unto

Youth

Until two grey hairs succeed the one



Edible Transportation

If traffic cones

were full of kimchi

I suppose

more accidents would occur

and cabbage would slip

down greasy windshields

as commuters snacked

and plucked radish
from their antennae.

Seoul Sunbather

I shall lounge in the sun

And bathe in rays

Besieged by concrete titans

With millions of diminutive eyes

Blinking

As their lids are pulled closed

By controlling hands.

I shall turn in my chair

And listen to the footsteps

Of mechanical pets

Scampering

On the inky river below.

I shall sip cool liquid

And wipe my brow

As metallic insects

Hover

In the smoggy grey jungle

Above me.

I shall retreat

As my skin grows pink.



A Clawfooted Destruction (The crabs of Haeundae Beach)

Shallow sand became my savior

and brine my saboteur

As behemoths built their ephemeral domiciles

through tunnels I had constructed

by the stars.

Escaping by veiled

co extending

byways.

Forsaking those lost as

discarded

alveolate

tombstones.

Jo White is a wife and mother from Athens, Georgia. She has traveled to many countries in this beautiful world, including South Korea, Senegal, Switzerland, New Zealand and Bolivia. She enjoys poetry and hopes to one day create a collection to share with the world.

THE ISLAND

By Allen Jones

Night falls, walking in the market place
probably about four. The street still wet
from women washing down their stalls.
Everything covered with tarps and ties
and string. The wind soft and swaying,
a distant tinkling of things. Heels click
and scrape on the pavement like a horse,
this memory I've never seen before.

Arirang, arirang, arario...

In the harbor below the falls, squid
boats creak and sway, out on the horizon
fishermen pulling up their nets, marking
the world's end with white lamps.
Just west of the sea wall the rocks take
strange forms. Some flow like water,
skin like the moon, others are monoliths
perfectly square, and one, a child,
playing with her hair. Across the crush
of rattling shore, a high sound echoes
and is returned. Women dive for abalone,
speaking with dolphin tongues, hands
strong as iron hooks. Twenty floating
whicker baskets slowly fill with shell.

Arirang, arirang, arario...

The cliffs are cut by empty caves of war,
half-filled with smooth skipping stones.
A hundred feet offshore, a single finger
rises from the surf. A lover died here,
this metamorphic tower marks the place.

Your father and mother, somewhere
on the shore, but you're not home.

Arirang, arirang, arario...

Night falls on drummers dressed in white,
yellow, red, and green streamers attached
to hinged poles on their heads. Rising up
on pointed slippers in unison, they rock
and bow, tossing their colored headdresses
twenty feet in perfect arcs. Three becomes
five, then nine, and the rhythm stretches
toward the infinite that is also one.

Arirang, arirang, arario...

Darkness downtown is synthesized music
thumping beneath fluorescent lights, smoke
of searing pork, scent of red pepper soup,
blasts of steam from fresh dumplings.
Women giggling in pairs, skitter flat-footed
through dark alleys, flitting from one bright
room to another, dangerous as mermaids,
light as air, their favor neither bought
nor sold, but still a livelihood, constantly
coming and going, promising more
until business men lie down drunk
in the street in their silk suits and weep.

Arirang, arirang, arario...

The mountain road is paved in pine,
walled by basalt, a wall of craters and air,
stacked against the wind by tangerine men
who each day machete back the jungle
as it wraps around fields, barns, and houses
pulling on the legs of the stone grandfathers,
this writhing mass of brush, barb, and leaf,

parting only for the ancestor's mounded grave,
scissor-cut grass guarded by interlocking
evergreens filled with black hook-nosed birds,
squawking as if death could be called back.

Arirang, arirang, arario...

The sun rises on a poor family's house,
walls built of black brush strokes, rooms
scented by the tea leaves of emperors,
fingers stained with hand-ground ink,
daily practice slowly moving silks,
a meditation passed from body to body
through war, across famine, under
oppression, a ceremony undoing eternity
to the sound of a piercing reed, a song
everyone knows but no one can explain:

Arirang, arirang, arario...

Someday we will return to the women
of the sea, the marketplace, the volcano,
the star-filled trees. We will find shadows
filled with obsidian, graves overgrown,
women bent and clawed, children gone.
We will open our mouths as if to speak,
move as if swimming against a dream,
or remembering some forgotten dance,
and only half believing, we will sing:

Arirang, arirang, arario...



Long ago, Allen spent a year on Jeju island. One afternoon, trying ludicrously to hike the entire coast, he heard what seemed birdcalls out in the surf. He turned to see Henya surfacing and signaling their safety to each other. It was otherworldly. He is presently a literature professor in Norway.