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Five Poems from I'm Only Alive When I'm Anxious – Ahn Joo Cheol

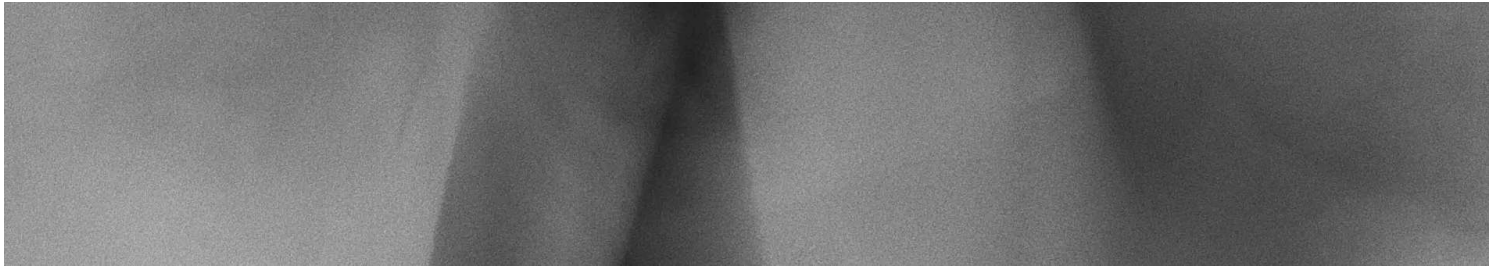


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Five Poems from *I'm Only Alive When I'm Anxious*

By Ahn Joo Cheol
Translated by Beth Hong

A Child Holding a Child

I've eaten at Paengmok Port
I've eaten at Mokpo New Port
Did I eat with a living person
or with a dead person?
Did I eat with a child? Or did their parents eat?
Did I eat, or did you eat?
I don't know
My memories have been cut off
How many pieces of me survived to eat the meal, sleep, and walk there?
Some pieces of bone were found
Some pieces of bone miraculously became a child
Some pieces of bone were found again
and some pieces of bone tried to become a child
In the end they couldn't become a child
and wandered around the child
The road from Paengmok Port to Mokpo New Port continued to fade
It was so dim that it was clear
But while I was panicking because I didn't know who I was

While you were panicking because you didn't know who you were

The child was leaving the child

It left an unknown order

The child kept leaving the child

Sometimes the roads from Paengmok Port

to Mokpo New Port spilled from the sky

The dead child put some pieces of bone

Neatly on his palm

And walked slowly and carefully

A Life of Giving Back the World

It's good to live in a room where the moon rises.

I like to take myself with me.

A life that gives the world to itself to the fullest

I like mornings when the sun rises

I like evenings when the sun sets

I lie in the bed that its former owner gave me

Where would he have moved to?

I live like that person

Cry like that person

I come home bringing some beer I bought from the corner store

And when I think that I spend my day exactly like that person

Neither the heavens nor earth seems far

And the roof and basement are equal

The person who has left is someone who has left

But I wash the dishes just like that man

And sometimes I cry and make stew

But I live by the feeling as if I'm secretly

devouring

All of the stew that the man made, all by myself

I lie in the bed that its former owner gave

I don't know until when I'll live here

Though I don't know

until when

I can keep myself going

Squishy Life

Everything I've ever seen

Is stepping on me and wriggling past

Walking along the stream that leads to the Han River,

Looking at the moon if it's up

If there's sunrise, going until it fades

And the night falls

The twinkling stars among the cedars

I think of them as cedar fruit

And I walk

At the Han River, I cry out River Han a few times

Looking at how River Han is folding the river water again today

and sitting

And I walk

When I see the man who has sat in front of the grocery store selling vegetables

I cry. A man in his fifties

hold the little girl in his arms

When she fiddles with the glasses she picked up a few days ago

Her fingerprints on the inside lens of the glasses

Will be filled with tears

I don't have the strength to tell you that I am the home of my tears

But I can't say that the home of my tears

Is the future of that man

Though my life and his life may not be so different

There'll be trouble

For which we'll shake our heads side to side in opposition

The world that I've seen

Unravels one by one by one

This unraveled world is always bumpy

And I am placed inside as an object

Though I'm not a human being

Though I'm not a fruit

Silver Trout

There's an evening like that

The setting sun is not visible in the low valley

It's a cloudy evening when you have to cry

imagining the sunset

From the narrow stream

The cold wind crawls up one by one

A flock of minnows will spread a lot of silver

If you flip it over, it's nighttime

Is it the flicking sound of pale darkness?

Am I crying straining my ears

Trying to hear the sound of the setting sun?

I don't believe it when people say they want to stop living,

But let's stop living, since maybe we're at the point

Where saying let's live well is not enough to keep going

They're going upstream,

Turning the silver boat upside down

Before the darkness becomes a long one



Ahn Joo Cheol was born in Wonju, Gangwon-do. He began his career in 2002 with the publication of poems in the journal *Changjakgwa Bipyeong*. He has published poetry collections, including *Things to Be Done in the Next Life* and *I'm Only Alive When I'm Anxious*.

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