



Author's Note

By Lee Chang Dong

From *Snowy Days and Other Stories*

Rereading these stories for the first time in a very long time, my heart ached as if I were reading an old diary. It's because the short stories I wrote in this collection are based on my actual experiences in those days, or they're about my family, friends, or people close to me – and some were even written just as they happened, with very little fictionalizing.

Three years before I published my first short story, "War Trophy," many hundreds of citizens resisting a military coup were massacred in Korea. That national crime was kept secret for years under strict media control. *To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.* I had just begin my life as a writer, but those words of Theodor Adorno's became a proposition that I could not deny. And yet I still had to write. What role can a line of writing play in changing reality? Even as I asked myself such questions, I had to write my stories as a way to avoid escaping reality. And now that I'm rereading these words, it seems I can feel the air of the streets of those days mixed with the exhaust fumes and tear gas that stung my eyes; and the damp smell around Nokcheon Station, which was under construction then, seems to come back to me with the chronic pain – like anger that weighed on my young heart and a burning thirst whose object I did not know.

It's been nearly forty years since then. Korean society has changed profoundly, and the world itself has also changed. At the time, I could not have imagined the world as it is now, or even that I would be making movies the way I am today. But even now, as I am making films, I am still questioning the meaning of what I do and how my films relate to reality. How much distance is there between movies and reality? When people are angry and despairing over the pain of reality, what can movies do for them? In that respect, I could say that who I am today is not much different from the person I was when I wrote these stories.

Now the stories in this volume have reached new readers across a long span of time and a vast distance, and they are coming to life again in the present. I am truly grateful to everyone who created such an opportunity. First of all, I would like to thank John Burnham Schwartz and Helen Rouner of Penguin Random House. I would also like to thank Jin Ash of The Wylie Agency. And I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Heinz Insu Fennel and Yoosup Chang, the two translators of this collection. Heinz Insu, who is an excellent novelist himself, played a decisive role in bringing this volume together. Finally, more than anyone else, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the readers who will read this book with an open mind.

Lee Chang-dong