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For the Desert Island

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Tae-ch'ul Shin · Korea

FOR THE DESERT ISLAND

Waiting for spring, the unblossomed forsythia

I stroke my frozen ears.
I must survive.
I wait for spring, the unblossomed forsythia.
First, I swallow my words.
Then, drinking raw water
I look up at the exhausted sky:
Overcast.
Will there be a fleecy snowfall?
For a moment, men with hidden tails look serene.

1974, not guilty?

Don't you know my crime?
Haven't I lived clinging to my land like a madman?
Haven't I committed the mortal crime, of yearning to die on
my land?
What nonsense! Is this your land? This land belongs to all!
You are not guilty, not guilty, do you hear?
Am I really not guilty?
Then, shall I enjoy this privilege alone?

For the desert island

The sea flows in silently
And makes several islands of me.
Drown me, rather,
For even those who formed a village without wronging me
Have each gone his own way,
Ebbing in dark deadly waves
Beyond the horizon.
Slither away! From all the islands,
The last liners are departing.

translated by the author and Marilyn Chin