

She folded the quilt with exaggerated care and put it on top of the chest of drawers, organized her desk, and arranged the drawers, and still the day remained impossibly far away. She tidied everything that could be tidied, even lining up her toiletries on the side table. Briefly, she let her hand linger on the small mirror she kept there. The world imprisoned in its glass was cold, silent, and unchanging. Gazing abstractedly into that world, the face that looked out at her was familiar, but for the bluish bruise branded on the cheek.

There'd been a time when people had been quick to tell her how "cute" she was. *You've got such nice features, it's like they came out of a copybook. You look like a dancer with that black hair, a salon perm would be pointless on you.* But after that summer when she was eighteen, the summer of the fountain, no one said such things to her anymore. Now she was twenty-three, and loveliness was what was expected. Loveliness in the form of apple-red cheeks, of comely dimples expressing delight in life's brilliance. Yet Eun-sook herself wanted nothing more than to speed up the aging process. She wanted this damned, dreary life not to drag on too long.

She gave the room a thorough going-over with a damp cloth, making sure to get into all the nooks and crannies. But even after washing the cloth, hanging it up, and going back to sit at her desk, the nighttime stubbornly lingered. She didn't read anything, just tried to sit there quietly, and hunger began to creep up on her. She went and filled a bowl with some of the early-ripening rice that her mother had prepared for her, then brought it back to her desk. As she silently chewed the grains of rice, it occurred to her, as it had before, that there was something shameful about eating. Gripped by this familiar shame, she thought of the dead, for whom the absence of life meant they would never be hungry again. But life still lingered on for her, with hunger still a yoke around her neck. It was that which had tormented her for the past five years—that she could still feel hunger, still salivate at the sight of food.

"Can't you just put it behind you?" her mother had asked, that winter when she'd failed the university entrance exams and confined herself to the house. "This is hard on me, you know. Just forget about what happened, then you can go off to university like everyone else, earn a living and meet a nice man... It'd be such a weight off my shoulders."

Not wanting to be a burden, Eun-sook had resumed her studies. She applied for a place at a university in Seoul, as far away from Gwangju as possible. Of course, Seoul was hardly a safe haven. Plainclothes policemen were a permanent feature of campus life, and students who fell foul of them were forcibly enlisted in the army and sent to the DMZ. The situation was so precarious that meetings frequently had to be called off. Life was a constant skirmish. The central library's glass windows were smashed from the inside so that banners could be hung from them. DOWN WITH THE BUTCHER CHUN DOO-HWAN. Some students even went so far as to secure a rope to one of the pillars on the roof, knot it around their waist, and then jump off. It

was a tactic to gain time while the plainclothes policemen would be occupied in racing up to the roof and hauling up the rope. Until this happened, the student dangling at the end would scatter flyers and yell slogans, while down below in the square fronting the library thirty to forty fresh-faced students of both sexes formed a scrum and sang songs. Not once did they get to the end of a single song; the crackdown was always too rapid, too brutal for that. Whenever Eun-sook witnessed such a scene, always from a distance, it was a safe bet that she would have an unquiet night ahead of her. Even if she did manage to fall asleep, a nightmare would soon jerk her awake.