

It really is going to chuck it down, you think, drawing in a deep breath as you emerge from the dim, twilight world of the gymnasium. You head for the backyard, wanting to drink in more of that clean air, but stop at the corner of the building, worried about straying too far from your post. Now the voice coming from the speakers is that of a young man.

“We cannot just hand in our weapons and surrender unconditionally. First they have to return our dead to us. They also have to release the hundreds they’ve thrown in prison. And more than that, we have to make them promise to admit the true facts about what happened here, so we can recover our honor in the eyes of the rest of the country. After that, there wouldn’t be any reason for us not to return their firearms, would there? What do you all say?”

You sense that the cheers and applause that follow are coming from a much smaller number of people than before. You remember the assembly that was convened the day after the soldiers withdrew. Then, there were so many people that the overflow crowded onto the roof of the Provincial Office and the clock tower. The streets were laid out like a paduk board, with no vehicles permitted entry, and what had been the only available space had been taken up by the buildings. A great mass of people, more than a hundred thousand strong, surged through those streets with the rippling motion of colossal waves. Their voices joined together for the national anthem, the swelling chorus rising up like a tower, a story for every voice. The sound of their clapping was like thousands of fireworks being let off in succession. Yesterday morning, you listened to Jin-su and Seon-ju discussing what was going to happen. Looking serious, Jin-su had said that there was a rumor going around that when the soldiers came back, those who were gathering in the streets would all be killed, and so the demonstration was being hastily scaled down. “We need there to be more of us, not less, if we’re to prevent the army from reentering the city... the mood’s not good. Every day there are more coffins; people are starting to think twice about venturing out of doors.”

“Hasn’t enough blood been shed? How can all that blood be simply covered up? The souls of the departed are watching us. Their eyes are wide open.”

The voice of the man conducting the ceremony cracks at the end. The repetition of that word, “blood,” gives you a tightening feeling in your chest, so you open your mouth wide and suck in another deep breath.

*A soul doesn’t have a body, so how can it be watching us?*