

# My South Korean Tour

In Monsoon season, the streets would never be clean.

My combat boots were always covered in mud and grime,

sidestepping puddles as deep as my knees. We hummed

“Looks like dirty water and smells like turpentine,”

in the chow hall, downing our ration of steaming cups.

Beside Tongduchon gate, open urinals festered and stewed,

next to the dazzling storefronts of imitation designers.

Every alley, was filled with unrelenting grandmothers,

with permed hair and loud-mouthed voices, goading you

to buy an impersonation of Nike, Gucci, Versace.

Protestors' broken bottles threatened to trip us as we raced

to make curfew, stumbling back from the clubs in the village.

We tossed in our bunks, puppies yelping from nearby mills,

pigs squealing in their pens. By day, we didn't ask questions

to the local villagers who set up tents inside our camp, ready to cook

us anything on their hot plates and tiny grills: sautéed meat on a stick,

rice bowls with eggs, piles of blood-red kimchee, rice-paper dumplings

shaped like half-moons. The student radicals carried anti-American faults

on outraged placards, cursing, and glared with resentment, but the older

generation offered nods and smiles, of gratitude, to us in camouflage

who protected the border, knowing what lurked in the North.

