

*FIVE-EIGHTEEN* 五・十八

a play by James Y. Lee

## characters

- **MARK KWON** / 권명훈 – 32, korean-american. *the director*. well-intentioned. has visited south korea nine times in his life.
- **KIM SANG-CHUL** / 김상철 – 54, south korean. *the actor*. tired. has visited the united states three times in his life.
- **JENNA KWON** / 권수아 – 30, korean-american. mark's sister. *the visual artist*. active. has visited south korea seven times in her life.
- **KWON MYUNG-SU** / 권명수 – 22, south korean. mark's father. *the presence*. was he ever american?

## settings

- **times**
  - **late 2025**, following the election of donald j. trump and the impeachment of yoon suk-yeol / 윤석열.
  - **1980**, during the gwangju uprising.
- **the suburbs of chicago, illinois**. mark and jenna's childhood home.

## notes

- if you are, at any point, entertaining, considering, or allowing the option of casting any of the characters in this play with non-asian actors, **DO NOT PRODUCE THIS PLAY.**
- when dialogue is spoken in korean, you are free to translate lines in korean that also have accompanying english translations, however you wish on-stage.
  - **at least near-native korean fluency should be a requirement for the roles of MYUNG-SU and SANG-CHUL.**
  - all of **SANG-CHUL's** lines in english should be delivered with a somewhat heavy korean accent.
  - likewise, all of **MARK's** lines in korean should be delivered with a somewhat heavy american accent.
  - **for the purposes of this particular draft, lines written in blue are lines that will eventually be translated into korean in future drafts - either by myself or a translator.**
- a slash (/) marks an interruption, where the next line or action interrupts where the slash is in the previous line.
- new lines in dialogue are markers of rhythm.

ONE

*father*

*it cannot be if somebody, anybody, all of us do not rise up.  
even past the difference between rich and poor,  
in a reality such as this, where the meaning of life feels so empty,  
we need matches to set off a bomb in the thoughts of those  
who seek to put out the fires lit at their feet.*

*[...]*

*i can only ask for your forgiveness, father.  
comfort, oh comfort, my poor mother  
for the rest of your living days.*

- from the final letter of **hong gi-il** to his parents

---

TWO

*恨 itself is so vast, so impossible to define.  
[...] even today, scholars struggle to describe it.  
we cannot know if the dead possess 恨 or not  
because the living are the subjects who accumulate it.  
[...] only we, we, are the ones who have carried it over history.  
in japan, it manifests as the concept of revenge  
but here, it festers within koreans  
like a grudge.*

- director **im kwon-taek**, speaking to film critic **jung sung-il**

## 第一部 - 항쟁

day one, 5/18/1980

*over darkness:*

### JUSTICE MOON HYUNG-BAE (archival V.O.)

이에 재판관 전원의 일치된 의견으로 주문을  
선고합니다.  
탄핵 사건이므로 선고시각을 확인하겠습니다.  
지금 시각은 오전 11시 22분입니다.  
주문 피청구인 대통령 윤석열을 파면한다.  
이것으로 선고를 마칩니다.

with the justices' unanimous  
decision, we now pronounce the order.  
since this is an impeachment case, we  
confirm the time of the ruling. the  
current time is 11:22am.  
we order the defendant, president  
yoon seok-yeol, to be removed from  
office.  
this concludes the ruling.

### CROWD (from off, repeating)

비상계엄 철폐하라! (abolish martial law!)  
휴교령 철폐하라! (end school closures!)

*lights. we see this house. all on one floor, there is:*

- *a living room with a tv.*
- *a master bedroom.*
- *a bathroom with a mirror, between the bedroom and the living room.*
- *a wide, well-furnished kitchen.*
- *closets, scattered all over the house, but mostly concentrated in the bedroom.*

*keys rattle at the front door. it swings open. in 2025 – MARK KWON enters this house. he closes the door behind him and opens windows.*

*deep breath. this is hallowed ground. in 1980, KWON MYUNG-SU enters, wearing glasses, lingering outside the house, in the midst of protests. it is crucial that throughout this moment, he moves like how he speaks.*

*the chants reemerge again, lower this time.*

### MYUNG-SU

you cannot see the sun today  
you look at the streets in your city and all you can do is wonder  
wonder about the fury on your friends' faces  
wonder what those soldiers are thinking

**MYUNG-SU (cont'd)**

this is first time you have seen martial law  
 you wonder how many more times you will see firsts like these

*mark moves slowly through this house, setting his things down.  
 he first reaches the living room, sitting down on the couch. it is very  
 presentable.*

**MYUNG-SU**

you see somewhere far away just how many soldiers are here  
 where you stand, near jeon-nam-dae – there are dozens  
 you try to count how many of you there are. hundreds. probably thousands  
 the fact that you can't tell which is probably a good sign

*while myung-su says the above, mark examines more details of the living  
 room, observing the furniture, dusting it off with his fingers, checking  
 the books there.*

*he sits down at the dining table. nothing here astonishes him. he looks  
 at it from different angles, feeling its surface gently. he is thinking  
 of how to frame it.*

*he pulls out his phone. takes a photo. at a specific angle.*

*he moves to the bedroom. lies down in bed. sits up. as that's happening:*

**CROWD (from off)**

전두환 물러가라! (away with chun doo-hwan!)

**MYUNG-SU**

you're swept up in the crowd now  
 you know what to chant  
 what it all means  
 what you're crying out against  
 but you don't know which way you're going  
 and before you know it, you're caught in geum-nam-ro  
 and one part of the crowd drifts to gwangju gong-go  
 and without any intention  
 your shoulder bumps into someone else's bag  
 your wrist nearly sprains backwards in the crossroads of two paths  
 and in the mess of that blind feeling  
 you head there with them, too

*mark stands up again. this time, he moves to the bathroom. right now.  
the mirror reflects his face. as he washes his hands, then his face:*

**MYUNG-SU**

you start breaking the windows of police stations  
 and then their motorcycles  
 and every facility that those fucking pigs (잡새들) use  
 two of those motorcycles burn  
 and you're right there with them  
 match in hand, fuel being poured  
 if the sun won't come out we'll make it right here

*amid this, mark pulls out his phone. takes a photo of the bathroom. at a  
 specific angle.*

*he leaves the bathroom, turning the lights off behind him, and goes this  
 time to the kitchen.*

*the fridge is empty. he checks the stoves. they work.*

**MYUNG-SU**

but it's not the police you're worried about  
 because you forget in the rush  
 that the soldiers are still there  
 and it doesn't matter that there are more of you than there are of them  
 because they have their clubs  
 and they have their rifles  
 and they see you  
 oh fuck they see you

*mark pulls out his phone. takes a photo of the kitchen. casually.*

*he returns to the living room, sitting down on the couch, breathing in  
 fresh air.*

**MYUNG-SU**

and they're angry  
 they're angry in the way they're angry with communists  
 so they run at you  
 and holy shit they're really running at you  
 there is so much blood in their eyes

*screaming begins. myung-su runs for his life and exits. the second he  
 does, one of the windows in this house slips shut, startling mark.*

*beat. he calms down. peace, in myung-su's absence.*

*someone knocks on the door. mark goes to answer.  
JENNA KWON enters.*

**MARK**

i thought you were coming later

**JENNA**

the meeting i had ended early  
did you just get here

**MARK**

yeah

*beat. both of them settle down in the living room awkwardly.*

**MARK**

can i be honest with you  
i feel fucking crazy right now  
being here  
really, truly insane  
that we get to use this place

**JENNA**

uh huh yeah really great seeing you again after months too mark, i agree  
i've really missed you as well

**MARK**

come on don't tell me you don't feel it either  
neither of us have even been *here* for a bit

**JENNA**

yeah well i've usually cared more about you instead of this house so

**MARK**

i don't think i'm any more important than this house, jenna

**JENNA**

yeah i don't know i wouldn't say that about a house i haven't been in for a  
while at this point

**MARK**

well

that's part of the point of why i wanna / do this

**JENNA**

mark listen

it's genuinely cool that you wanna do this movie about him

because yeah dad was part of something important

and we probably need his story right now

and you're probably the person to tell it

but i just think if you're going

'fucking crazy right now

'like really truly insane'

before you've even started making the movie

just by being in dad's house

i have good reason to try and like

i don't know

calm you down maybe

*beat.*

**MARK**

oh shit, i haven't told you who i got to play dad yet, did i

**JENNA**

god what a question

uh and no you haven't told me

**MARK (incredibly excited)**

i got kim sang-chul!

*beat. jenna's brain loads. no results:*

**JENNA**

...who the hell

**MARK**

emmy winner kim sang-chul?

the guy who did kingslayer

your majesty

the follower

twelve other joseon dynasty k-dramas from the 90s broadcasted on kbs

**JENNA**

that's maybe the first time i've ever heard a list where the last entry literally multiplied my options instead of narrowing them down

**MARK**

okay well he was also in the latest fast and furious movie and that new star wars show if that helps you

**JENNA**

... oh wait yeah that guy!  
damn how'd he end up in those things if he's had such a / long career in-

**MARK**

whatever  
the point is that he's really big news here  
even if he's not all that big in the u.s.  
and i got him to play our *dad*, jenna  
or *basically* our dad  
in this new movie

**JENNA**

cool

*beat. mark is clearly disappointed at jenna's lack of recognition.*

**JENNA**

you still haven't shown me your script yet

**MARK**

you know i can't  
contract terms

**JENNA**

i think you can probably swerve some of those for your literal sister  
don't you think

*beat.*

**MARK**

listen i'll find some way  
i owe you that much  
but don't spread it out

**JENNA**

i know how much this means to you

...

is it what i think it is

**MARK**

what do you mean

**JENNA**

like are you just telling the story of what he did in gwangju

**MARK**

for all ten days of the uprising. and how he moved to america and had us  
because i can't leave out that part

this idea that

you can fight for freedom in one country

and still have to fight for it in another

**JENNA**

sure

how are you showing him in that part

where he raises us in the u.s.

*beat.*

**MARK**

look jenna i have to be honest about my perspective

**JENNA**

i just think you should have interviewed me

**MARK**

i know what you've been through

we both experienced that

**JENNA**

okay you're framing it like he beat the shit out of me or something

**MARK**

no obviously he didn't

otherwise i wouldn't be making this movie

but i just think i knew enough about your experience to just write it from  
scratch

**JENNA**

if you really understood how the competition between us kinda fucked with me you wouldn't be doing the exact thing that would basically be reinforcing it

**MARK**

jenna i'm sorry i didn't / mean to

**JENNA**

and on that note  
you've never asked me how my exhibition's going  
like pretty much all day today

**MARK**

...  
i was meaning to

**JENNA**

yeah only after i brought it up right

**MARK**

no not really

**JENNA**

i told you my meeting about it ended early and you didn't even ask me why

**MARK**

why did your meeting end early

**JENNA**

no particular reason!  
it just ended early it was fine nothing happened  
so it's not like it matters  
i just wish it felt like we were on level playing ground

**MARK**

well dad made that really hard for both of us

**JENNA**

he certainly made it less hard for you than me

**MARK**

because you're working in a more esoteric field-

**JENNA**

sorry, *what?*

**MARK**

which is not to say that it's worth any less! but  
it's harder to  
picture. long-term. for someone like dad

*jenna sighs and turns away from mark.*

**MARK**

i want to honor him, jenna  
i never got the chance to do that before he passed  
he's the reason i'm here in korea making this movie  
i made two features that toured full festival circuits because he believed in  
me when i said i wanted to make movies  
you have an exhibition going up here because he also believed in you enough  
whether you wanna believe that or not  
and we both know why he wanted us to go into the arts  
you know what impact gwangju must have had on him  
if he were alive to see things now  
with  
*our president* running things  
while the president here just got removed from office for trying to pull off  
martial law for the first time since gwangju  
dad would want us to do what we're doing  
with both our projects

*beat.*

**JENNA**

listen you're making something that's actually about him  
but i'm not really using him to tap into where i come from  
at least not for this exhibition  
you're not wrong mark  
dad was a hero  
but he was also just our dad  
and i get worried you miss that every so often

*lights fade on mark and jenna in this house.  
they exit.*

*in 1980, myung-su reenters,*

*still outside the house, looking for a place to hide.  
the sounds of violence surround him.  
beatings, strippings, brutal attacks – all surround the place.  
he huddles in a corner, shivering.*

**MYUNG-SU**

you hear it  
how can you not  
you hear it all night long  
you can't sleep  
after a certain point you wonder  
if they are being so brutal  
so fucking vicious  
because they don't want you to sleep  
at least some things are a relief  
at least they aren't firing their guns  
at least you managed to hide away  
at least they can't break in here  
at least at least at least at least at least

***blackout.***