

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.
 - **to directors**: please clearly delineate the outside and inside of the house as different realms of existence. **the outside of the house is the realm of the dead**.

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

*한 itself is so vast, so impossible to define.
[...] even today, scholars struggle to describe it.
we cannot know if the dead possess 한 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:

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. a few items are in boxes. many boxes are unused.*

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.

in 1980, KWON MYUNG-SU is thrown into the scene, as if forced into it. he's wearing glasses. he composes himself. he lingers outside the house, in the midst of protests. 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
this is the 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*

MYUNG-SU (cont'd)

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

hey
thought you weren't coming for a bit

JENNA

my meeting ended early

MARK

uh cool

awkward beat. jenna waits for mark to say anything more. he doesn't.

MARK

this is weird

JENNA

there's a lot of weird stuff going on right now
you're gonna have to pick something

MARK

both of us being in dad's house
we can start there
it's weird to be back in illinois

JENNA

oh poor you, la boy
gotta get used to single-digit november weather all over again!

MARK

well you never left the state / so

JENNA

anyways how close are we to clearing the place out

MARK

man that's harsh

JENNA

it's a practical question to ask

MARK

don't you think you'd want to spend more time in it before letting it go

JENNA

not particularly
you have better memories here than i do anyways

MARK

okay well
i was thinking i would use it as

MARK (cont'd)

a rehearsal space
at least for as much as i could for the movie
before we actually have to empty it out

JENNA

wait hold on are you filming your thing about dad here

MARK

no i don't think that'll work
but we have the budget to use a soundstage and construct something there
so it won't be a problem
but i do need this place for a bit

JENNA

that's insane
anyways mark we do need to sort this house out soon so like
if you have a timeline

MARK

we have pretty much everything ready for pre-production
same as the last few movies i made. i have weeks of rehearsal time scheduled
full shot list, all locations arranged, the studio is rented out for the set
all the equipment's there, funding's secure from our investors and studios
a24's already on board for distribution, and our cast looks / great-

JENNA

mark man you gotta pump the brakes for a second
i'm not talking about your movie
we gotta actually fucking deal with the house at some point

MARK

wait you have to hear about who i got to play dad though

JENNA

god what a crazy sentence
yeah sure who did you cast

MARK (incredibly excited)

i got kim sang-chul!

beat. jenna's brain loads. no results:

JENNA

... who

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!
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.

JENNA

cool

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

MARK

anyways i-

JENNA

mark if you don't ask me a single question about myself
in the next ten seconds
i will walk out of here and i will see you tomorrow

MARK

how have you been

JENNA

are you fucking kidding me

MARK

what am i supposed to come up with in ten seconds

JENNA

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

okay 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

oh god
you're one to talk about entering a long-term career
at least you got lucky as hell
but i'm doing well for myself thank you
regardless of what he thought
a full-time job, a great husband and
plans for a family...
all that

MARK (sincerely)

how are things at home for you lately

beat.

JENNA

you never sent me your script by the way
you kept promising me
and it just never happened
and now you're just making it?

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

JENNA (cont'd)

...

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

yeah. how he lived through all ten days of the uprising
and how he moved to america and raised us and let us be artists
because i can't leave out 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 me or abused me 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

yeah well i can't actually reinforce that cause he's gone jenna
and don't you think we should at least honor him
and the fact that this house is where he raised us
and that it's also where he died

in 1980, myung-su reenters.

he does not initially pay attention to the inside of the house.

MARK

and that he lived a life where he fought for the right thing
and that we need to remember that so we know better
so that we don't elect someone who's going to use federal agents and ICE
to just make people's lives hell
ever again in this horrible fucking / country

JENNA

obviously yes
i don't even disagree with you there mark
i just
you recognize that he hurt us here in the u.s. though right?
showing his temper, treating us coldly
drinking himself to shit for all his life until he finally-

MARK

don't

myung-su briefly turns towards the house.

neither of his children notice him.

JENNA

... okay fine
but look we pretty much fought for his favor the whole way through
and you won!
he was never as proud of me as he was of you
never
and you understand that. i know you do
yeah, dad was a hero
but he was also just our dad

beat
mark sighs

MARK

yeah well i'm still making this movie
and i'm still using this house as a rehearsal space for the next few weeks
so we'll figure out what to do with the place after
got it?

JENNA

... fine

lights down on the inside of the house. mark and jenna exit.
myung-su starts 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.