

## Life and Liberty

For the 1 million people who walked from North Korea to Busan during the 1.4 후퇴,<sup>1</sup>

Infants are not born standing is what you tell yourself kneeling supplicant  
Under the breath of the sun. This is where you decide you might as well start  
Believing in God. Knees fuse with the asphalt, but it's better than half a toenail  
Horse-shoed into your heels, better than the cow eyes marbled in the grass-stalks  
From when the dirt spat up like a baby, never taught to be gentle. You are a rabbit  
Poised like this, flighty and afraid, willow-leaf eyes tilted upwards, driven by a dream  
Of something other than barley fields and wild dogs. They'll call it a regression,  
And right now, you can believe it, spine arced animal on a bridge mangled  
Like the necks of the headless hens out back. 할아버지<sup>2</sup> told you Busan  
Is where the water is silver with carp and freedom lies baptised in the sea.  
This is what you echo to your sons for America. My father's willow-leaf eyes'  
Whisper, downtuned, that you really just wanted this: a job out west and hills  
That rolled carp-backed. You dreamt of New York the way white men dreamt  
Of Oregon: of work and gold and gold and gold. But hear, in the church  
Pews, my thoughts of the soldiers that ran over those girls back in 2003<sup>3</sup>  
As they rolled their eyes up to God, confusing the sun with the shape of its own  
Shadow, wondering, like rabbits, why the sky was descending down  
To meet them. When the white men told you, they bore their throats and laughed  
Jester-like. Those men walking on acquittal and liberty and liberty and liberty.  
The President cried the tears of a disloyal dog, whispering *in God we Trust*, fields  
Of barley behind him. It looked like the North. The persimmon that fell too early  
Split like an infant's  
Skull that night, and you cried as  
If you'd lost a child.

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<sup>1</sup> 1.4 Hu-twae, or January 4 Regression, where one of the last waves of people walked from North to South Korea.

<sup>2</sup> Grandfather (harabeoji).

<sup>3</sup> The Yangju Highway Incident, where a United States armored vehicle ran over two 14-year-old girls, Shim Mi-seon and Shin Hyo-sun.

*Girls in New England and New York*