

TANYA KO
Comfort Woman

1943, Shanghai, China

One night
a soldier asked all the girls

Who can do one hundred men?
I raised my hand

Soonja did not.

The soldiers put her in boiling water
alive
and

fed us.

What is living?

Is Soonja living in me?

1946, Chinju, Korea

One year after
liberation
I came home.

Short hair
not wearing hanbok
not speaking clearly.

Mother hid me
in the back room.

At night she took me to the well.
Scars seared with hot steel
like burnt bark
like tree roots
all over my body.

Under the crescent glow
she smiled when she washed me.
*My baby! Your skin
is like white jade, dazzling.*

She made white rice and seaweed soup
put my favorite fish on top.
But Mother, I can't eat flesh.

That night in the granary
she hanged herself
left a little bag for me
my dowry, with a rice ball.

Father threw it at me
waved his hand toward the door.

I left at dusk.