

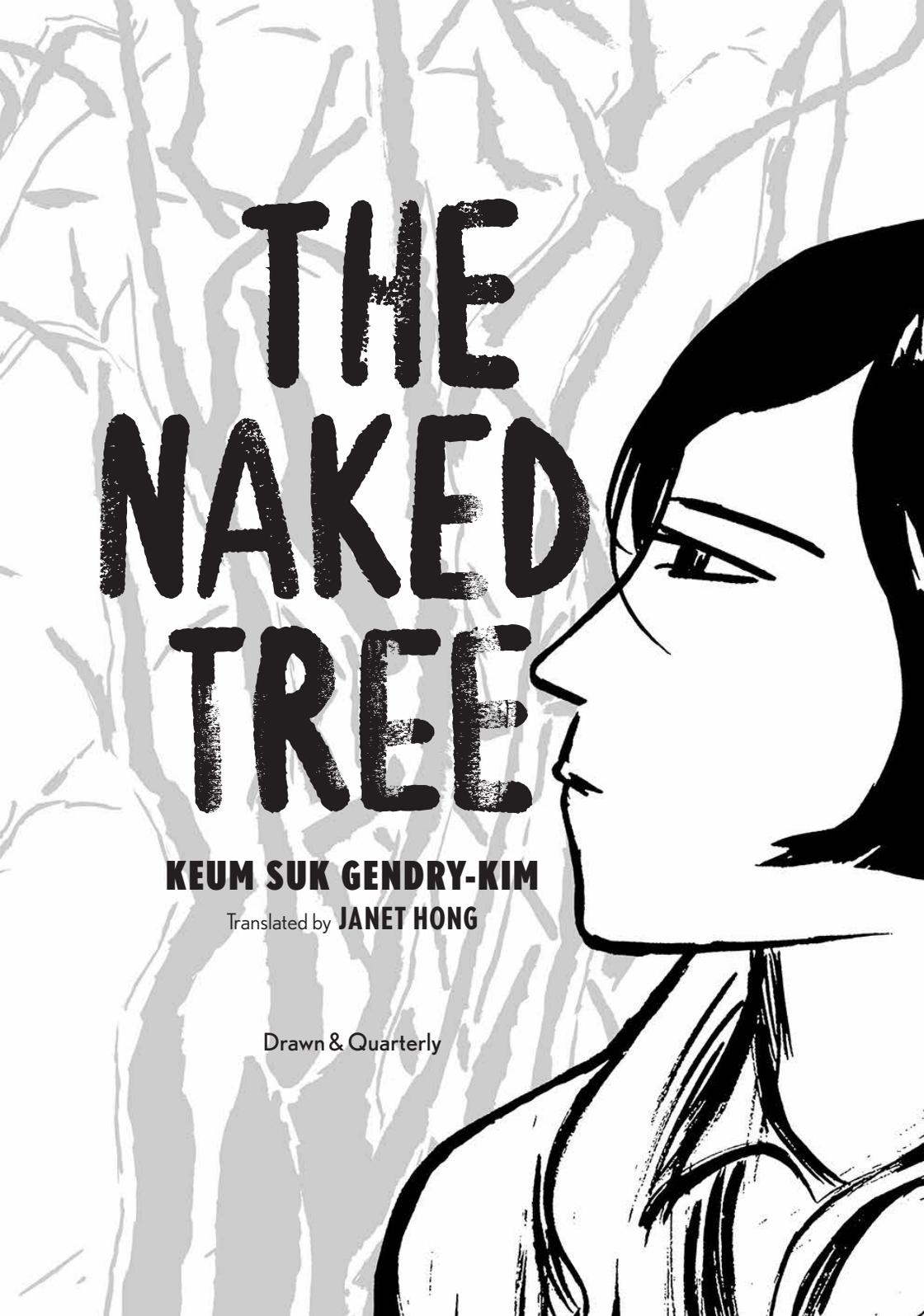
From the author of *Grass* and *The Waiting*

KEUM SUK GENDRY-KIM

THE
NAKED
TREE







THE NAKED TREE

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Translated by **JANET HONG**

Drawn & Quarterly

THE NAKED TREE LIVES AGAIN

HO WON-SOOK, NOVEMBER 2019

"I wrote my debut novel at the age of forty, but I remember writing it with the youthful, simple innocence of someone under twenty. Maybe that's why it doesn't feel like I was forty when I wrote it."

—**PARK WAN-SUH** from the afterword in the original 1985 edition of *The Naked Tree*

When I think of *The Naked Tree*, what comes to mind is the tatami room on the second floor of a Japanese-style building that used to be my father's factory. My mother wrote the first draft there. I wonder if anyone is aware of this fact...

During the summer of 1970, it was very hot, and I can still recall the smell of that old, crumbling tatami mat, threadbare in places and rough in texture. Propped up like a tree against the wall was a wooden workbench one wouldn't imagine using as a desk. Though I can picture her old exercise book, in which she'd written the draft, I have no memories of watching her write, believe it or not. When did she write over 1,200 pages?

Yet I should have known it was a story in the making, because she always said, "One day, I'm going to write about Park Su-geun, how

he drew portraits for the American soldiers at the PX. Your father knew him well, too."

Her words had seemed like a resolution, a forecast of what was to come.

I will never forget the day her debut work was published. A two-column, vertically written book that one received as a bonus with the purchase of the magazine *Women's Dong-a*, *The Naked Tree* so captivated me that I couldn't put it down for even a moment. At the same time, I was overcome by an inexplicable awkwardness.

While I felt her pain as though it were my own, I couldn't help shuddering at her words. No longer did she seem like the mother who planted flower seedlings with an affectionate smile. Or the mother who was happy and proud of making our clothes from scratch.

I became the banished child, the babe not ready to be weaned. Feeling a profound sense of loss, as if I had been expelled from the Garden of Eden, I mumbled to myself, "What do I do now?"

The day I first read *The Naked Tree* had felt like the tension brewing before a revolution, the quiet before a typhoon. However, it did not change my mother's life as drastically as I expected. In the forty years since then, she has written many books and our family has experienced various ups and downs, but my mother remained humble and steadfast throughout. Was it because she wrote with the same spirit for all of her career, from *The Naked Tree* to her very last work? Having watched from the sidelines all these years, I am amazed by it all.

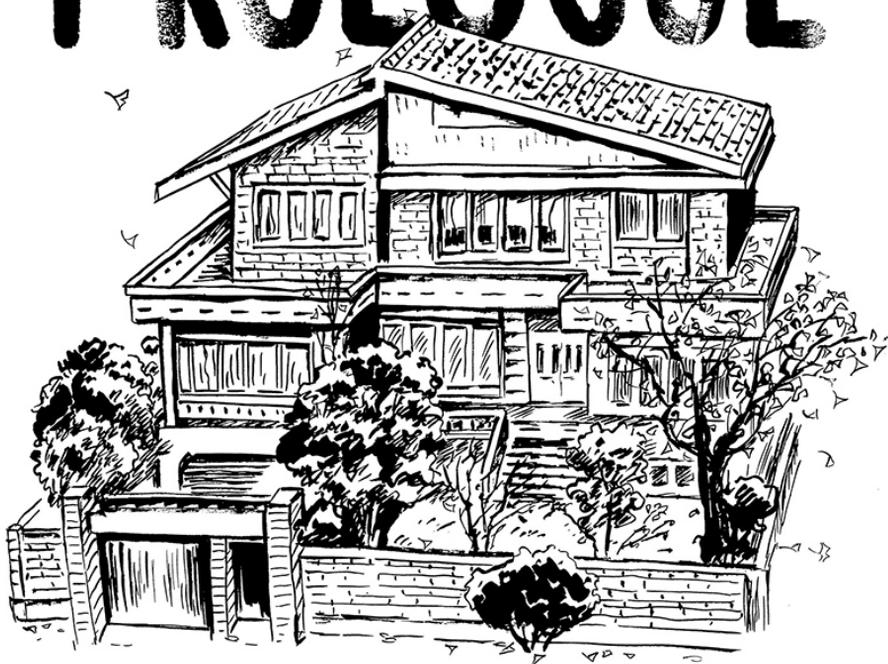
I must admit, when I first read Keum Suk's draft, I was uncomfortable with some of the changes. I'm sure it didn't help that I was unfamiliar with the medium of comics, but I found it difficult to enter an interpretation of my mother's world, especially now that my parents were part of the narrative. However, after rereading it several times, I noticed it had a kind of charm different from that of the original. It was as though the artist had burrowed into my mother's soul to bring out the intentions of the original story, while fleshing out the characters and scenes in a fresh, imaginative way, breathing new life and humor into the work. Some moments left me in tears, while some made me feel the flutters of youth and love. They will all stay with me for a long time.

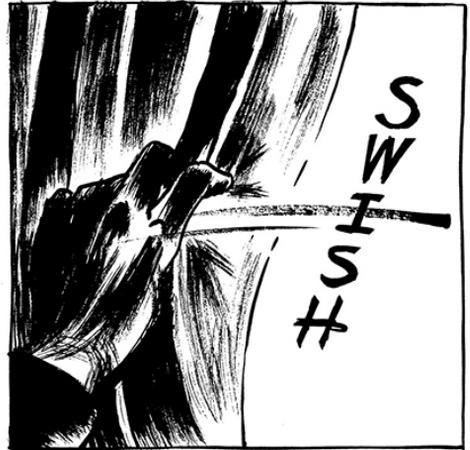
I am deeply grateful to Keum Suk, who worked long and hard to complete this work. I would also like to thank the publisher and editors for their tireless efforts to publish this graphic novel.





PROLOGUE







THE YELLOW GINGKO LEAVES
ARE FALLING ONE BY ONE.
WHEN IT RAINS, THE TREES
WILL BECOME BARE.

ISN'T IT
REFRESHING?

HMMMRPH!



I COULD CATCH
A COLD.

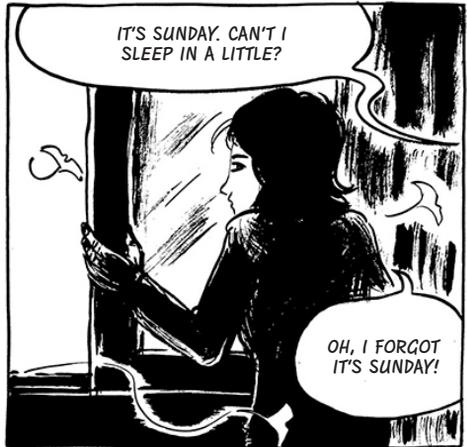


WHOOSH

ACHOO!

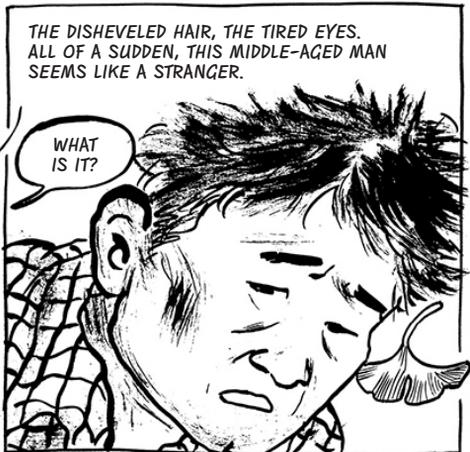


I TOLD YOU TO SHUT THE WINDOW!

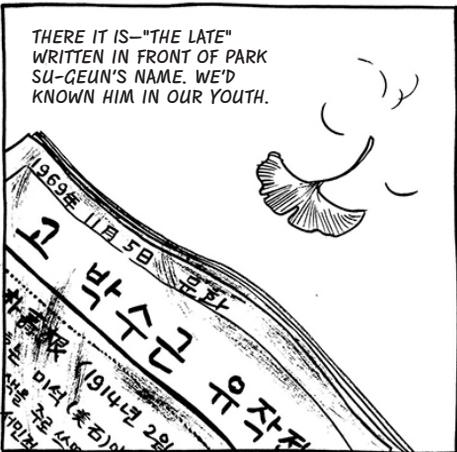


IT'S SUNDAY. CAN'T I SLEEP IN A LITTLE?

OH, I FORGOT IT'S SUNDAY!



THE DISHEVELED HAIR, THE TIRED EYES. ALL OF A SUDDEN, THIS MIDDLE-AGED MAN SEEMS LIKE A STRANGER.





WHAT'S THE USE OF A SOLO EXHIBITION AFTER THE MAN'S GONE?



HE NEVER GOT TO HAVE ONE WHEN HE WAS ALIVE.



WHAT GOOD IS ART ANYWAY?



EATING WELL, BEING COMFORTABLE—THAT'S WHAT MATTERS.



YAWN
MAN,
I'M BEAT.



LEMME SLEEP FOR ANOTHER FIVE MINUTES.



CAREFULLY, I COAX OUT THE STORY I'D LONG KEPT BURIED IN MY HEART.

IT WAS A DIFFICULT, UNHAPPY TIME. EMBERS
THAT THREATENED TO SPARK INTO FLAMES AT
ANY MOMENT SMOLDERED IN MY CHEST.

THIS IS A PORTRAIT OF MY STORMY YOUTH...





MY REMINISCENCE OF
A PAINTER I ONCE KNEW.

IN THIS STORY, THE PENNILESS
PARK SU-GEUN, WHO WAS
"JUST A PAINTER," WILL TAKE ON
A DIFFERENT NAME. I WILL, TOO.

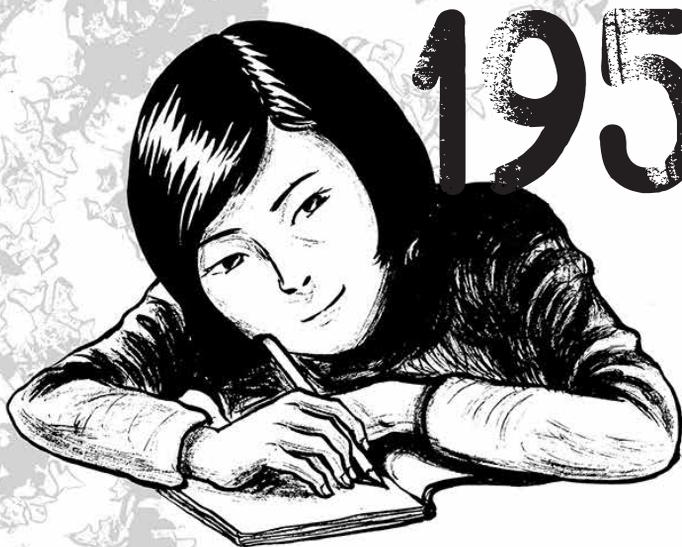


No. 1

T R E E

L

W A N - S U I



1951

FOLLOWING THE NORTH KOREAN INVASION OF SOUTH KOREA ON JUNE 25, 1950, SOUTH KOREAN FORCES WERE DRIVEN BACK TO THE NAKDONG RIVER, BUT THEY STARTED A COUNTERATTACK WITH THE HELP OF U.N. FORCES.



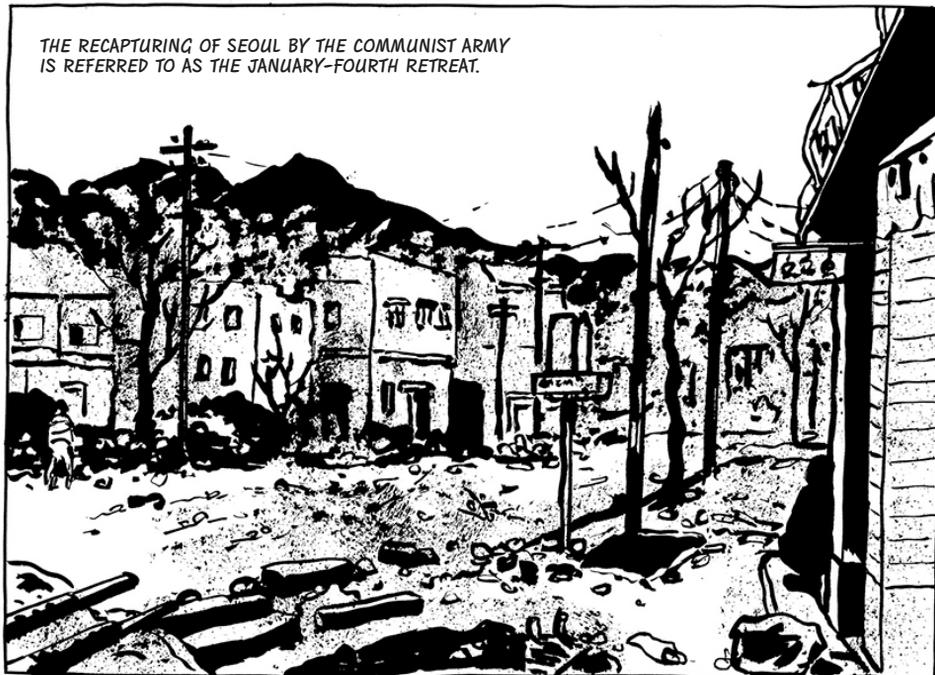
ON SEPTEMBER 15, THE BATTLE OF INCHEON RESULTED IN A DECISIVE VICTORY FOR THE U.N. FORCES. THEN ON SEPTEMBER 28, AFTER TWO WEEKS OF FIERCE FIGHTING, THEY RECLAIMED SEOUL, THE SOUTH KOREAN CAPITAL, FROM THE NORTH KOREANS.



IT DIDN'T LAST LONG, THOUGH. FROM DECEMBER THROUGH EARLY JANUARY, FURTHER ASSAULTS BY THE KOREAN PEOPLE'S ARMY AND THE PEOPLE'S VOLUNTEER ARMY WERE DEPLOYED BY COMMUNIST CHINA, LEAVING THE U.N. FORCES NO CHOICE BUT TO EVACUATE SEOUL.



THE RECAPTURING OF SEOUL BY THE COMMUNIST ARMY IS REFERRED TO AS THE JANUARY-FOURTH RETREAT.



THE COMMUNIST TROOPS ADVANCED ALL THE WAY TO PYEONGTAEK, GYEONGGI PROVINCE, BUT THE U.N. FORCES HELD THEM AT BAY.



ON MARCH 15, 1951, THE U.N. FORCES RETOOK SEOUL AND PUSHED BACK THE COMMUNIST OPPOSITION TO THE 38TH PARALLEL.



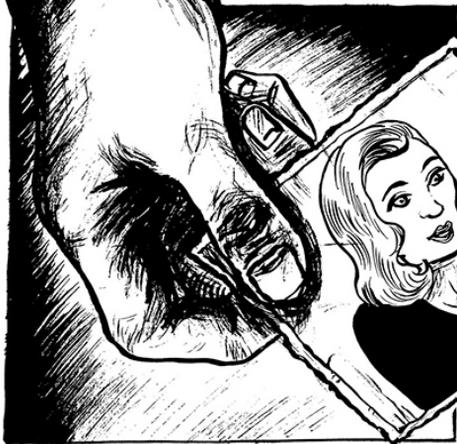
STILL, THE DAMAGE WAS DONE. PEOPLE
IN WAR-TORN SEOUL HAD ENDURED
THE TERROR, FEAR, AND HUNGER
BROUGHT ON BY THE WAR.





BY LATE FALL THAT
YEAR, I WAS TWENTY
YEARS OLD.





WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH ME? I'M LUCKY TO GET A SALE, EVEN IF I BUTTER THEM UP. I GOTTA TURN ON THE CHARM!



*ITALICS DENOTE WORDS SPOKEN IN ENGLISH.

