

## Winter in Sokcho

**Elisa Shua Dusapin**

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In Elisa Shua Dusapin's novel *Winter in Sokcho*, a young woman has a fateful encounter with a man who is as lost as she is.

Sokcho, a Korean beach resort, has little to offer tourists during the off season. But one tourist comes: Kerrand, a French comic book artist in search of inspiration. He becomes a source of reluctant fascination for the narrator, a new employee at the isolated guest house where Kerrand is staying. Each of them seeks something undefinable from the other, even as it becomes apparent that they will not find it.

The narrator is not close to her mother or her boyfriend, and she knows nothing of her father, save that he is French. Perhaps that is what draws her to Kerrand: he embodies something she lacks. Or perhaps it is his drawings, always so stark and always destroyed by morning, that attract her, even as his behavior repels her.

The narrator's languor is heightened by the fact that Sokcho, in her view, is a dead end. Yet Sokcho has beauty that she cannot see: colorful buildings, mountain vistas, beaches, even the fleet of fishing vessels that light up the dark sea. Nor does she see her own beauty: those around her suggest that she get plastic surgery, and she struggles with disordered eating, even as she tries to persuade the dismissive Kerrand to try her cooking.

In Sokcho, everyone is in a holding pattern. The country waits for the war with the North to reignite. The town waits for warm weather and the tourist season. Kerrand waits for just the right spark of inspiration. And the narrator waits for she knows not what: perfection, happiness, freedom...or maybe just simple acknowledgement.

*Winter in Sokcho* is a spare novel about existence in the between spaces of identity and passion.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2021)

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