



5-1-2018

That Distant Autumn Morn

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Recommended Citation

Suntrapak, Domenic (2018) "That Distant Autumn Morn," *Calliope*: Vol. 49 , Article 49.
Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/calliope/vol49/iss1/49>

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That Distant Autumn Morn

Domenic Suntrapak

October 8th, 1895 marks the assassination of the queen of Korea at the hands of Japanese extremists in the wake of the First Sino-Japanese War. Before the sun rose that day, Empress Min and half of the royal retinue had fallen victim to one of the most violent events in Korean history.

I wakened to the violent whoops
of foreign fowl; hot tongues
that spoke no friendly phrase.

My good captain, where-
where was your patriotic cry
to wake the slumbering yard

I thought little of it, the sport
of October birds eager to fly
along the crest of the sun.

Then came another sound
rounding beside the window,
that hoarse gargle and growl.

Silence fell through the morning frost
and I saw no need to stir, no cause
for alarm, the aged rooster

I heard it in my husband once,
that lordly release
echoed forth, streaming from the others.

already lay pinned to the earth,
silver talons injected into old, reliable flesh.

Soon after they dropped
fine swans, plummeting down

without their fair-weathered wings.

My handmaidens quietly held
their dignity, and would not weep
with fear in those final moments.

The snap of their slender necks
pulled me from the bedding.
And the patter of wooden steps

raised me onto my feet
only to be knocked back
by those same steel claws.

They withdrew from my chest
that leafy red mist;
and that winter flower
was cleaved from my back.

I stirred no more; the lost energy
aided my blooming.

My final words drifted
with the love of my child:
I know not where he is.

They dragged my body outside
as mulch is tugged through market
passing by broken husks

of my sisters cast out
from the balcony, and onto the soil.
I receive them in august embrace.

Fire and smoke follow us.
Flames lash at the compounding
sweat and lick it off my face.

The wind takes me.
I attain multitudes,
soaring out into the stale air.

Now I am everywhere
in every corner of my kingdom
but my son eludes me:

I know not where he is.
was cleaved from my back.
I stirred no more;
the lost energy aided my blooming.

My final words drifted
with the love of my child:
I know not where he is.

They dragged my body outside

as mulch is tugged through market
passing by broken husks
of my sisters cast out
from the balcony, and onto the soil.
I receive them in august embrace.

Fire and smoke follow us.
Flames lash at the compounding sweat
and lap it off my frail face.

The wind takes me.
I attain multitudes,
soaring out into the stale air.

Now I am everywhere
in every corner of my kingdom
but my son evades me:
I know not where he is.