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# KOREAN LULLABY

By HOWARD FAST

## KOREAN LULLABY

When at last the guns were silent,  
In the graves where children lay  
The crying passed away,  
And the dead had stopped their weeping,  
Little children sleeping  
While the night turned into day.

Then I saw that the wheat was golden  
On the vast and rolling plain,  
And I heard the people singing,  
A thousand bells were ringing,  
Yet the little children sleeping,  
Forgotten of their weeping,  
Stirred not, though the wind blew sweetly.

They went to sleep with a lullaby;  
Go to sleep, my baby child,  
Close your little eyes,  
Your eyes so wide and clear and round,  
And see no burning gasoline,  
The gentle, jellied gasoline  
That burns with a flame so pure and serene,  
That the scorched bone stands out white and clean,  
And hear no sound  
Of bursting bombs that fall around,  
And tear the flesh and rend the ground,  
And hear no sound  
Of screaming pain,  
From the guts of a man gone half insane,  
But close your eyes, my baby child.

And how does it sound in Korean,  
The land where we hold a lien  
On every inch of blasted soil  
And every hour of human toil  
And every cup of fresh-wept tears  
And every hour of awful fears,  
A language expressive, I have no doubt,  
Expressive the whisper, symphonic the shout  
Of screaming pain  
From the guts of a man gone half insane?

Die gently, little children,  
And dry your frightened tears,  
And have no fears,  
You are rescued from oppression,  
And the "free world" from depression,  
And all the bits of brain and bone,  
The wail of pain, the anguished moan,  
The stink of burning human flesh,  
Lacerations bleeding fresh,  
Are nothing, you see,  
Since they make you free.

When was a lullaby like this composed before  
By men who came from a foreign shore,  
And when will the memory go away  
From the scorched earth where the children lay?

## KOREAN LITANY

VERNON BLAKE, RIFLEMAN:

My age reads, as long as the wood lasts,  
twenty-three, and read my name,  
I, Vernon Blake, who died in action  
from a sniper's bullet—and rests in peace,  
or less than peace perhaps, in Korean soil.  
And fortunate perhaps, for only one question  
twists a little with the maggots.  
You see, the American way of life  
was all at one with me, ten generations on each side  
all from this soil, and the house I lived in,  
Chester, Vermont, white clapboard,  
and easy with all those generations.  
I ate, drank and slept and played,  
studied a little, grew strong and tall and proud;

I saw it when my mother looked at me,  
and my father's eyes were full of pride,  
and I wrote to him, "I make a good soldier,  
and all those days we tramped the fields  
and brush together were not wasted—"  
We went for rabbit and squirrel, and once a long shot  
at a deer. How my mother loved us both!  
"Two men," she said, "the Bible notwithstanding,  
my own prescription for a happy home."  
And I fought her when she wanted my college diploma,  
framed in the livingroom—why didn't she  
have four children, tall and strong and proud like me?  
I would have answered her question eventually,  
for I had no doubts and no questions.  
It was in her that the doubts grew, like a cancer,  
"Why, why, why, why? Why are you there, my son,  
and not with me?" I would have framed the answer,  
given time, framed it proudly for her to hang on the wall—  
for there must be an answer.

#### HARRY MORGAN, MACHINE GUNNER:

My old man never had much sense,  
working on an assembly line all his life,  
the candle burned at both ends, squeezed in the middle,  
and always yapping of the pride of class  
a worker has. "What future where the world is yours?"  
I'd ask him. "You got only a past, old man,  
and the smart money goes to the smart fingers.  
Get smart, old man, get smart.  
I'll take a buck and you—you keep your commie line."  
He could have said a lot of things,  
and talked of damn young punks,  
but it wasn't easy for him to put in words  
the things he felt, and the one letter he sent,  
I never answered. "Only remember," he wrote,  
"the men you fight are your brothers,  
working with their own hands, as I work with mine,  
and you with yours." Where are my hands,  
old man? Both of them blown off by a mortar shell,  
and me looking at the stumps as I bled to death.

ARTHUR DEMBROWSKI, CHEMICAL WARFARE:

Dug up quickly, you would see,  
snub nose, sandy hair and a broad face;  
we never like what we see in our own mirror,  
and I only started shaving three months before the service.  
A girl would like or not like that face,  
making a better judgment than mine—  
but even love was postponed, this crazy kid  
making a pal of a three year old, my brother,  
sixteen years between him and me,  
me the child of my mother's youth,  
and he of her last bearing time.  
The way it was, I never loved anything  
the way I loved that kid,  
and we were better friends than most brothers.  
With his little fat hand in mine,  
we'd walk on my furloughs, and they'd say,  
"There's Dembrowski and his buddy."  
I was a flame thrower, and out of one burning house,  
crawled a Korean child, blistered and singed  
all over his skin. I picked him up  
and cradled him in my arms, talking to him  
when a bullet blew off the back of my head.

AL CARLTON, MEDIC:

When I crawled up to a Korean wounded  
to heal him, and got a bullet in my gut,  
I hated for the first time in nine months,  
dying wastefully and painfully, whimpering,  
"Oh Jesus—what a lousy way!"  
And he, with one arm torn off,  
lay watching me and whispered,  
"Hey, Yank—what for you come here?  
Go home. Go home." And then we bled together,  
blood mixing with blood,  
and the last thing I thought of  
was blood brothers, and then I died  
by the side of the man who killed me.

GERALD CARTWHEEL, TANKMAN:

The day my tank rolled through a village,  
flattening those flimsy houses,  
I saw a woman caught under a beam,  
screaming as the tank rolled over—  
on that day, I wrote to my congressman,  
my free and democratic right,  
“Was I sent here to do this kind of thing,  
or tell me why, or have I no right to know,  
or do you know?” I sought no easy answer,  
knowing—as others don’t—  
that things are not all black and white.  
Others ribbed me, scoffed, and said,  
“Tell it to the chaplain, bub.”  
I wonder what the answer would have been,  
and whether I would have felt at ease,  
cooking in a burning tank  
and screaming for my mother.

AARON KLEIN, RIFLEMAN:

I did what I did, and followed orders through,  
and died with one hundred and sixteen men,  
all together, brave men who fought and died,  
and left a wife and child, and a mother  
who will die too, this being too much pain  
for her to take and live with,  
and I was brave, and asked no questions,  
and never asked to know what I,  
a Jew and kin to those six million  
whom Hitler slew, was doing here, in this strange land,  
making a desert and a graveyard  
of a sunny place where people lived and worked—  
and never asked what good dead children did  
in freedom’s struggle. And if I thought,  
am I or the man across the ridge and facing me,  
fighting freedom’s fight? I never changed  
the thought to words or deeds—  
then why do I rest so poorly,  
in this strange soil?

JAMSIE ANDERSON, QUARTERMASTERS:

I used to laugh and say,  
"I got no future, but lots of past."  
Well, take my past and put it you know where,  
all of it, cleaning toilets and shining shoes—  
not like them that sat and sighed  
for a glass of beer at five o'clock,  
just that to walk on them soft heaven clouds.  
That ain't no heaven for me,  
promoted to driving a half-track through Korean mud;  
and then they'd say, "You're turning evil, Jamsie,  
evil as all hell." Oh, no, never, not no evil  
in me now, but just a little plain damned common sense.  
"Then keep it to yourself," they said. "Black man's  
got no business talking common sense."  
But never was a man could take his common sense  
and force it to behave, and mine kept plaguing me.  
Oh, what a lot of questions I could ask  
of them strange men who blew me all apart.  
Not white men, boss men,  
no southern accent there,  
but colored men like me,  
with eyes as full of pain—  
lifted me tenderly,  
and buried me in Korean soil. I'd ask them calm and gentle,  
not evil, but just with common sense.

A SONG OF PEACE

I closed my eyes in darkness  
and opened them in light,  
and over the world,  
like a flag unfurled,  
was a sweet sound and a holy sight.

A dove spread wings of magic;  
its shadow was golden and broad,  
and the people of earth,  
in a passion of birth,  
had shattered an ancient sword.

Oh, why is my country hated  
and made such a thing of scorn,  
this fruitful place  
with its varied race,  
this land where I was born?

And why is my country darkened,  
when the rest of the world is light,  
and cloaked in fear  
of things once dear,  
and weak in its frightful might?

And why are the people silent,  
and where is the ancient song  
that mankind found  
was freedom's sound,  
to shatter injustice and wrong?

We'll not have our country hated!  
Our country is strong and grand.  
Oh, be not dismayed  
by those who betrayed  
the heritage of our land.

If a song can be made so simple,  
if a word can become a creed,  
then the sound of peace  
will gently increase,  
like the harvest from the seed.

Ask not why the land is silent;  
let the people measure their toil,  
and the human race  
will share its grace  
with the lonely folk of our soil.

Its grace is new and holy,  
and peace is the dream of the world,  
and the people of earth  
in a passion of birth  
will see their banner unfurled.

The banner is pure and sacred,  
enough of the swine who destroy!  
Enough of the night,  
the world is bright—  
and the future is filled with joy.

Our cup is running over  
with the graft and the lies and the hate,  
and the renegade  
is too well paid  
with our broken dreams and our children's fate.

We'll open our eyes in the darkness,  
and boldly look to the light,  
and call to our side  
with earnest pride  
our people who dwell in the night.

And they'll see the dove so holy,  
so pure and wide of wing,  
wide as the earth  
in its passion of birth—  
with a joyful song to sing.

And the lilt will be made so simple,  
and the word will become a creed,  
and the song of peace  
will gently increase,  
like the harvest from the seed.





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