

CHOSUN: THE MORNING CALM

How to Make Kimchi

Kimchi

is the Korean native food

Like hot dogs and apple pie

only stronger

Take several heads of cabbage

and chop them up

Add some red peppers,

onions,

garlic,

and ginger

Drown in salt and seal it

in an earthenware jar

Bury it

And wait for it

to knock on your door

and tell you that it's ready

Chong In-ho

*a middle school student
who hung himself because
of poor academic performance*

Imagine your grandmother's horror
To come home from the beauty parlor
To find you decorating the bathroom pipe

Foolish little boy
To be so oppressed by the system
To believe that success can be measured in grades

Had you lived but for a few more years
You would have learned
That life had infinitely harder trials
 waiting for you

Song Kyong-hee

*who committed suicide over her
families poor financial condition*

A song dies

Breathing deadly coal briquette gas

You wrote in your diary that you wanted

“to help poor people like me”

And you complained that teachers were

just pressing you to study harder

Not showing you how

to be a good person

What were you thinking?

To ease the family burden

by creating one less mouth to feed?

Or were you just tired of sacrificing your dreams?

What were your last thoughts

as the light slowly dimmed?

Of your parents whose lives would be altered forever

when they discovered the body

of their treasure of just 18 years?

Or was there a painful and terrifying moment

when you realized that you had been foolish,
That life, even in poverty
was still worth facing each morning
And yet it was too late to undo your death
the arms too weak to open the window.

The eyes are closed
The heart still
So dies the blossom
So ends the hope
So dies the song

So Chong-gi and Lee Yun-hee

two lovers, 25 and 19, who committed suicide

because their parents opposed their marriage

It is sad when lovers die by their own hands

Because they are so convinced of the rightness

of their action at the moment of execution

To die for love --- the greatest loss

Romeo and Juliet

So you checked into a cheap inn

Shared a last moment

Took poison

And turned out the light

It reminds us of another true love story

Among the 161 dead in the Tae Yun Kak Hotel fire

They recovered what they thought was a single body

But the autopsy revealed it was actually Japanese newlyweds

fused together in a final embrace

The ultimate moment of love

So many older couples, weary and infirmed,

blow out the burnt candles

of their long live together

But young lovers

explode in a fire that singes

forever

those they leave behind

Goodnight So

Sleep well Lee

May you rest peacefully

in each other's arms

for eternity

Flight

A misty silence shrouds my rice field

And I sit on my heels

comfortable in the slight morning breeze

a mute observer

The wind gently moves over the reeds

the faint sound of running water

the croak of a lonely frog

Time stands still

Then

Silently as a kite pulled into the sky

A large white crane

as if impervious to gravity

rises from its hidden resting place

Hovering against the green terrace

a picture painted for a tourist

a specter from a primordial past

The ancient coexisting with the present

And

In an ever-so-slow motion

of a rustling of wings unfolded

it ascends into the air

Flying off to the next paddy

bearing my spirit away