

Score

Japanese Lullaby

Song for Voice and Harp

Ann Carter-Cox
Poem by Eugene Field

Dolce (♩ = 95-100)*

The musical score is written for Voice and Harp. It consists of three systems of music. The first system is for Voice and Harp, the second for Hp. (Harp), and the third for Hp. (Harp). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 12/8. The tempo is marked *Dolce* with a metronome marking of ♩ = 95-100. The lyrics are: "Sleep, lit-tle pi-geon, and fold your wings,-- Lit-tle blue pi-geon with vel-vet eyes; Sleep to the sing-ing of moth-er-bird swing-ing-- Swing-ing the nest where her lit-tle one lies." The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one sharp, a 12/8 time signature, and dynamic markings like *Dolce*. The lyrics are placed below the vocal line and above the harp lines. The harp part is written in two staves (treble and bass clef) and includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one sharp, and a 12/8 time signature. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one sharp, and a 12/8 time signature.

Voice

Sleep, lit-tle pi-geon, and fold your wings,-- Lit-tle blue pi-geon with

Harp

Hp.

Hp.

4

4

Swing-ing the nest where her lit-tle one lies.

*With rubato where suggested by the lyrics.

6

A - way_ out yon- der I

see a star,-- Sil- ver-y star with a tink- ling song; To the

10

soft_ dew fal- ling I hear it cal- ling-- Cal- ling and tink-ling the night_ a -

12

long.

Hp.

15

In through the win- dow a moon - beam comes,-- Lit- tle gold moon- beam with

Hp.

mis - ty wings; All si- lent - ly creep- ing, it asks, "Is he sleep - _ ing--

Hp.

18

sleep - ing and dream - ing while moth - er sings?"

Hp.

20

Up from the sea there floats the sob of the waves that are

Hp.

break - ing up - on the shore, As though they were groan - ing in

Hp.

25

25 ang-uish, and moan-ing-- Be - moan -ing the ship that shall come_ no

Hp.

27

27 more.

Hp.

29

29 But sleep, lit-tle pi- geon and fold your wings,--

Hp.

31

Lit- tle blue pi- geon with mourn - ful eyes; Am I not sing - _ ing?--

Hp.

See, I am swing-__ ing,-- Swing-__ ing the nest where my dar-__ ling

Hp.

34

lies.

Hp.

Researching poetry in the public domain for lyrics for a new song project, I came across Eugene Field's poem, "Japanese Lullaby". I was charmed by the image of a mother bird singing to her "little blue pigeon" while swinging her nest. The musical ideas came right away and worked until the fourth verse which seemed not to fit with the rest of the poem. I wondered what this fourth stanza was all about. Thinking that knowing something about the poet's life might explain this stanza, I read the Poetry Foundation's bio of Field. I learned that he

- 1) was a journalist, humorist, satirist, and prolific poet who was born in 1850 and died in 1895;
- 2) was born in St. Louis, MO, married Julia Sutherland Comstock with whom he had eight children three of whom died in childhood;
- 3) wrote a column, "Sharps and Flats", for the Chicago Morning News (Was he a musician? A mystery I could not solve;
- 4) studied books of children's literature from many cultures, and collected legends and folktales;
- 5) wrote a number of culturally-themed lullabies found in his book, "With Trumpet and Drum", which also contains his most famous poems, "Wynken, Blynken and Nod" and "Little Boy Blue".

Clearly his interest in children's literature from around the world explains why he would write a JAPANESE lullaby. However, the question remained: why the dark idea: My thanks to a poet friend, Rebecca Ross, for helping me understand the fourth verse of "Japanese Lullaby".

First off Rebecca recommended reading a PBS article, "Why are so many lullabies also murder ballads?" The article begins with a quote from the Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca, observing that the country's "saddest melodies and most melancholy texts" are contained in cradle songs. Think about the "broken mirrors", "fallen horses", and "mockingbirds that won't sing" in our own "Hush, Little Baby", and "Rock-a-bye Baby" in which a cradle with baby plummeted from a treetop. Clearly lullabies are not necessarily sweet and soothing.

The article continues: since babies do not understand words, the UCLA ethnomusicologist, Andrew Pettit, asserts that lullaby words are as much for the parent as for the child, and that lullaby lyrics can be interpreted as a reflection of the caregiver's emotions. Pettit is quoted, "People have said that lullabies are the space to...say the unsayable...and express the feelings that are not okay to express in society." He observed that in lullabies darkness has pervaded across cultures and centuries, and that lullabies have expressed fears directly or metaphorically about absent fathers, injured or lost children, domestic abuse and unhappy lives.

And there is the clue to the fourth verse of the poem: the absent father. For while no "father" is mentioned in the poem, the culture and geography and history of Japan would strongly suggest that the mother's anxieties would be sea-based: drowning, shipwrecks, a storm at sea. Perhaps, in accordance with historic cultural tradition, the father was off fishing to feed his family. Perhaps he was a sailor in the Japanese navy. (The modern Japanese navy was instituted during the Meiji Restoration - the period of Japan's industrialization. As a journalist Field would have been aware of such international movements.) In an island nation where a husband and father would likely be away at sea, the mother's worst fear would be "...the ship that shall come no more."