That Distant Autumn Morn

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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. I stirred no more; the lost energy
My handmaidens quietly held aided my blooming.
their dignity, and would not weep
with fear in those final moments.

The snap of their slender necks My final words drifted
pulled me from the bedding. with the love of my child:
And the patter of wooden steps I know not where he is.
raised me onto my feet
only to be knocked back
by those same steel claws.

They withdrew from my chest They dragged my body outside
that leafy red mist; as mulch is tugged through market
and that winter flower passing by broken husks
was cleaved from my back.
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.

Juan's Whispers
Leila Valencia