

'This place has kept its ghosts',  
I observed, 'an immeasurable pollution'.

In cool shadow I watched  
the emperor's endless oscillations.

'Why so constantly?' I objected.

'All will die if I stop'  
said the son of Heaven.

From his robes  
rituals soared among the swallows.

At the Women gate  
though the cannon boomed,  
I saw the imperial kites.

## STEPHANIE SEARS

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### *The Sanctuary*

I drifted into the Forbidden City  
on a vapor of tadpoles and rusted pipes  
that rose from the moat.  
A student turned to smile,  
teeth like wet pebbles.  
Swallows swam above  
in the blue nets of summer,  
gullets jammed with pellucid odonata.  
Thrones bore solitude  
like shackled wizards  
as Orlando shrews  
imagined emblemed silks  
on their broad behinds.

By the Hall of Terrestrial Tranquility,  
under an umbrella pine  
I saw the emperor, still young  
on a satin swing  
sway to and fro,  
three empresses by his side:  
one slim and moist like a papyrus stem;  
the other two powdered with gold  
like Mallard ducks,  
jade baubles in their ears,  
springs of lapislazuli in their hair.