

Heralding the Hallyu which took the world by storm in 2003, *Jewel in the Palace* also swept my father off his feet and stole his heart. Even Greek monks on the Meteora had heard of it – the drama, not my father's feet or feelings. Taliban terrorists learned the greeting *annyeonghaseyo* in their caves because of it. Its impact was as unshakeable as syphilis as it singlehandedly engendered a 2810.83% tourism boom in Korea and a 8003.29% surge in its ginseng trade. Its impact was so overwhelming that twenty years after the gentle kraken was released into this godforsaken world, my family still felt the aftershock. We were a people that couldn't let go. Like bulldogs.

That year, it began with an unobtrusive palm-sized standee of Lee Young-ae, the doll-faced actress in the series, planted on the TV. Not to be confused with the American poet Li-young Lee, Lee Young-ae used non-metaphoric persimmons to brew medicinal tea as she played Dae Jang Geum the first female royal physician in Korean history. Lee as an actress defied the odds of the Korean industry's beauty standards: she did not possess the body of an adolescent boy—more Chrissy Teigen than Christy Turlington she was—and she was 32 by the time she clinched the role in a world where debuting at half her age was considered past one's prime. (Maths is fun.) Lee had a full figure and a full moon face, round and wide and open. Her appeal in the show, whether manufactured or not, stemmed from an idealised traditional gentlewomanliness that encompassed reserve, modesty, a nurturing nature, kindness, dedication, and meekness without ambition, all of which paradoxically came across as sensuous, sexy even, not sexless. Her maternal disposition appealed to my father's Oedipal complex and her traditional (repressive) womanhood to his male id – or at least that was what I thought my father would say if he had said anything at all. He simply placed her standee on the TV frame so no matter which channel he surfed, she was sure to be on it.