

Huangshan sonnet

Dazed with mountain snow and anger I arrived at last.
 I leapt from the train into the station's darkness. All afternoon
 I'd stared through the window, past his unforgivable face,
 at snow-blind houses, precarious cars, ice on the pass
 far above. He kicked along behind me on the way through town
 penitent or sullen, impossible to say. God, I loved to flay
 him with inattention: blanket silence, clipped syllables,
 sweeping his argument's pages to the ground.

Eventually we stopped to eat, ordered bottles of beer
 and if our silence had been any less crisp, if I'd smiled
 at a joke or let him draw me into a story, I'd have poured
 half that beer down my throat when it came. Instead, my whole body
 an accusation, I took one prim sip, then stopped to spit
 a fine crescent of glass into his supplicating palms.

Ella Jeffery

scenes from the last night in guangzhou

we chose sea snake.
i'd seen them in pictures,
roping through ocean.
memory tells me this one was striped
white and black, threaded
on a stick where the meat sagged,
little fillets about two fingers'
width. it melted
to nothing in our mouths.

a british woman on her way
to macau bought us tsingdao
and leaned on our table.
she told us what it's like
to be a professional gambler,
all the risks and expenses. we listened
in silence. "well" she said
"it never hurts to try."

the food stall shrank in the heat
to an umbrella and grill,
meat laid in still groups each
with its own kind. behind us
the cook lopped heads
from chickens and dropped
bodies in a tin bucket.

early evening dissolved
into stillness. a boy and a puppy played
fetch with a pack of cigarettes.
when he threw it, smokes speared
the air and the puppy couldn't choose
which to chase.

we ate a few bucks'
worth of skewered chicken
and let the night
extend for hours in all directions.

Ella Jeffery

2

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