

Zhao Xia

Translated by Rachel Levitsky and Zhang Er with the author

BoYang

I share the communal yard with a group of
enormous men, a few women. As night falls
their bare-assed children run around
our common bath house
its few familiar faces pretending
as passers-by glide outside

the half opened door. Does the blue curtain
material expand in cold and contract in heat? The downpour
isn't shy, it comes and intimately kisses the twill
shirt and every little frilly cosmetic detail and
the white gauze skirt that screams a tiny little scream
calling me to stop in front of the wet wood door

Two 24 hour supermarkets nearby sell orange yellow
tangerine juice and the talisman of eternal joy. I hold
the thin sheet of a letter, rushing around for a 50 cent stamp,
give up and turn back to the bottom bracket,
the chain set that sounded loud for a month and now
must be completely rebuilt (Ha! Handled!)

When swimming, Wu Yong says that I have big
strong lungs "Head up, sink. Head down, float."
Such nonsense! I climb heavily to shore, tail flicking
water, charming (so I think) in a thousand ways
Later a cold noodle shop explodes in the wild
unprecedented laughter of politician artists

Neighbors at the outdoor table their guts spill
spit fish bones as a grown man in the street
persuades the monkey to perform
a pretty somersault. The room temperature
is high enough to dissolve the coffee, a few
bottles that were perfume a few seasons ago
skin can sense time as it slinks away

In a recent journal is an article by Yu
teasing himself erotically making jokes
through his feelings of the day
one day at the end of the century and
for me the best joke is that Bo Yang

doesn't write me back, that single line
presumably in Chinese character
would make me tremble with cold

At the point of the acute angle
on an iron wire, a female spider suspended
in air brings an orgy of joy hard to come by
this ultimate composition, spreads beauty
under the sun I shake dust off my simple cotton
clothing and wearing it, go to fresh seafood buffet?

The workmen in the morning climb up to the roof
as I peacefully sleep like an infant
so sad, the light is clear without twist though
on the wall cloth are confusing squared patterns
as his photo falls on top of my July rush
the flurry of films, the door bell, careless
pleasures of the door knock in the afternoons

My body, is a pile of plain
yet confused ruin
bars twisting dancing halls
intimacy between others is like
the identical high-rises around the ruin

All I see retreats softly walking
out from doors of stores in soft light
riding on the bicycle, passing the hot season's
solitude, tiny as the pit of a jujube date
The corner of the fence painted green
winding alleys that cut through Nanjing University
campus, the Greek arena, thus I'll spend
all love before I turn 90.

The Musical Life of Thomas

Every day, the neighbor Thomas
listens to an obscure song walking, in and out,
holding his garage key in mouth

Never tired from anything in this world
Romance, the repeated formula of medicine refreshed

by the water, soup, some other liquid
the chaos of a million varieties drawn from one root

As the girls fell under the strings of his instrument

and he rolled them out into fragrant musical scores.

Yesterday's winding melodious blues
was rest note for the woman with blue top hat, trill trembling

like eye lashes. The coda concludes smooth
as her bottom.

Each time he feverishly guzzles eleven cans of beer,
then sweats, drunk, with a skull bone plectrum in hand

on top a pile of tender fat undergarments.

Narrowing study

1.
This day, bright and clear, shows evil
the atmosphere seems to darken
and the pen's ink moves upward
I'm surprised by the vacancy in the orchids.

2.
You say that wind falls, so tilt the fan up
higher. Everything reflects light, the cloud layer
looks a little thin. Reading FAZ, your German Daily,
you burst out, holding the full page photo of Shanghai:
"Look at the viaduct in black and white!"

3.
Comes to read, as if divvying the stolen goods:
Leisured unsatisfied wives, those revenging gamins,
wait for opportunities to clutch the head and tail of the
sentences, one swoop of the knife,
and the dish is served!

4.
Mentions the chilly chicken from Xin Jiang,
that little restaurant fading daily,
retreating into history. Today
there are strikes on the street, exaggerated
rhetoric amplified by the microphone
can't compete with the hot ZiRan spice.

5.
Would even this crumpled paper would
return to its mountain forest?

Vines, shoots, the nerves of hunters,
rushed illegible radicals omitted by
the curious Fabre and forgotten?