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LOOKING OUT OF A BUS WINDOW, VIETNAM

Allison vonMaur

A kind of thick night moved over some man, his apartment.
Through his kitchen window, a breeze wove in
and out the lattice of gray screen. He was
pensive, tugging air through a smoke.
Haze exhales floated out to where
the dark Indonesian- carved bamboo
chimes spun in a circle, clattered
then sucked in air, moved out a song.
This reminded him of a certain night back home

in Michigan, spread him over the shores of Rosey Mound
where his old lover and he laid in cool sand
and counted as many stars, two hundred, as they might
before a thundercloud rush could cover them
spill them over, onto an already tumbling shore.
He remembered the way her finger pointed out,
up from their chins, the way its tip brought in a row
down their arms about cluster recounts. His numbers

ending in and out a reality. The man decided
to go to Phan's One-Stop Shop and unhook the gate in the back.
He had been there before, knew Phan had no use for keys.
And when the man did Phan was well asleep, was back in Shanghai.
His hand skimmed over the smooth, sober steel of Phan's
lattice chain links. It made a tink-drum by the tips of his fingers,
no particular rhythm. In Phan's storage
which served the same as an office, the man found
blue crates neatly stacked. Six high in rows of four, corners and sides

married, one after the other. His hand latched. In unison,
two fingers through two plastic, midnight holes.
Then his left did likewise. The man could have taken more
had he counted more the how. But no. It took him a few rounds.
His room to Phan's. Back. Forth. There again.
Each time he carried along two proud, blue stars
suspended by two white and sweaty holds.

Each moment he sighed a stacked relief at the block corner;
 the one turning his street away from Phan's. It was marked.
 Tiger Lilies. Shut and resting the night in their berm. Their smell
 made him feel invisible, the air less a labor
 on his tensing lungs. It rolled in through
 the man's senses, over and tumbled in waves. At five o'clock a.m.
 in Michigan,

when he had re-latched the Phan's gate, began for home, the man noticed
 on the clouds, how thickly, they packed over his deed, his mission, carrying,
 in this unified shadow, the last two of its buried brilliance to his home.
 And when he had, at last, the blue crates all lined up with corners
 married, the man was surprised. He could not raise his chin
 nor smile. No girl was present to point, disagree on their count, their worth.

Take the moments that stray ahead
 and peel them back, dig your fingers
 in ripe fruit of time.

*It could be sweet as when Persephone used to be.
 She entwined Black-eyed Susan stems,
 twirled them seven times
 fair capello strands wound her airy toes.*

At times they have a sour bite,
 a twinge
 puckering lips.
 We squint our eyes from spray juices, a sunny orange.
 And we may shield their sight
 our hearts, but they will come out anyway
 with seeds from our mouths
 to the ground.

*I tied your cravat as you had instructed,
 looped it carelessly while staring into you your eyes...
 when there was me in them, I was away staining my Hades blue.*

It was forgotten in a moment . . .
 with that moment
 This moment sliced in sections
 rich with flavor.

*You string our tree and the fort becomes yellow. Dimentichi...this history
 our decorations turn us red with shame and defeat? Look at the leaves
 they mass down on us in _____ . . .
 Catch them and they paint regret.*

It will be new for our memories, yet how much
 would fill one moment? We recall the taste, curl our tongues
 up against our palates, crave the zest
 opaque as honey in our noses
 that scent,
 that sweat.

On a bicycle she
 balances her day;
 coconuts in one basket,
 digital watches in the other.
 Bamboo rod finds its groove
 along her shoulders
 as the baskets teeter,
 shifting heights.

Round white faces gawk
 through waffled windows,
 nearly opaque
 breath thickening my sight.

As though it were normal for the bus,
 it jolts suddenly,
 bouncing,
 bobbing bodies,
 nodding heads.

Then she,
not pausing to brush
the caked dirt from her face,
instead shakes her head
and climbs back on the bicycle.

Ragged edges
of roads,
of her clothing,
of myself
become clear
as I lean back,
sinking in
against the straight line of the seat.

Today I made a promise.
To live
in the place between
nurturing rocking
and open-eyed shaking.