

An Anatomy of Memory

(for David in London)

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Wreaths battered in the wind.
All vivid colours leapt out
to the perpetual sky,
which is sometimes scratched
by slashing clouds.

A memory requires contradictory
captions. What you think
you remember is not always
what you really recall.
But you know best.

How many shades of green there are
on a bright May day near a hamlet
is how many versions of autobiography
you are allowed.

Someone was whistling a tune
through a clamorous storm, just for you.
Then you realised it was merely
the unsystematic rhythm of full force.
You were all alone, after all.

Smear'd, like a middle-aged
hooker's lips after giving rough
head one warm night
in a Shakespearean inn.

As we are no octopi,
only one heart lives in our body.
But one is enough to dog-ear
Others' lives and drop hints,
here and there, that we can split

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the organ into the power of two.
One can love and hurt many.

Something Happened

Tammy Ho Lai-Ming

What if I said I knew it all along? Would he believe it?
Would that ignite his sophisticated disrespect?
Did he know I knew when I playfully encouraged him
to paint his walls dark red, line his books on daring shelves
and buy a couch that smells of cinnamon?
I said, "Transform your minimalistic apartment
from abandoned carelessness to stirring fun,
and a learned girl might be persuaded to come."

Or maybe he did know I knew when I talked about romance
on train rides – he had hours to go before Milan,
where he pretended to be an art scholar,
take lousy pictures, messier notes.
On that first-class train table, a full glass of red wine,
Sybil, a wristwatch he causally put on the sill.
Or maybe not. I don't know if he had a watch.
I said, "Perhaps you'll meet someone,
whose slanted reflection on the window
has issued from the sun." To talk with a Scorpion stranger
about romance – was that a misbehaving hint
I did not know I gave?

I thought him bold to admit liking a line in a poem
that I wrote. The one about vodka, sex and tongues.
But perhaps I was the bold one:
I said I liked his middle name,
and that fifty-one is very young.

He was already like a scrap
of teasing memory in a sturdy glass box,
even though he had not been fingered or dog-eared.
See, I'm looking back before the beginning finishes
because he made sure to make me understand:
"I'm the least dangerous person in the world."
And so it stood to reason, then,
that nothing would happen.