

Inscriptions for Chinese Paintings

1

I, Stick, paint this in the style of my master, Branch, but cannot attain the iridescence of his bark in darkness.

11th day of the 5th moon, which returns and returns, but not to me.

2

This splinter rests among begonia leaves as if it were a flower. Fingers know the wisdom of brushing nothing away.

Inscribed in the 5th moon by a mind without fingers.

3

Here is a filament of spider-spit knitted with dust, smiled upon by light. My friend, turned to ash, was dispersed by a gust. A cinder of his lung lodged in my throat.

12th day of the 5th moon, which sputters through me like a breath, deepening.

4

Leaves green the celery woods of spring: brushes, and their lines lengthening in the breeze.

19th day of a moon as smooth as the rim of a robin's nest from which all have fallen.

5

When I moved the black pine into the picture, its roots remained behind. Now it reaches out to help me across the river. Shall I go?

Inscribed between the 6th and 7th branches, whose shadows calibrate the moon.

6

Ice cleaved this rock last winter. Did it suffer? I inspect its faces, which squint in the sun at the minerals of me.

21st day of a moon that cleaves to the sea.

7

Is the eye less surprised by five deer than by six? Here is where they arced across the road.

Inscribed as time attends with the force of hooves landing.

8

The lake is incessant small peaks, repeats, antique, release, increase, repeats, upbeats, each crease, each pleat replete, sun heat, retreat, blue teats, conceits, drop leaps in deep. Do you think it is also wet?

Inscribed this 23rd day of the 5th moon as I blow on ink to cool it.

9

I prove to you this butterfly, leashing it with one hair from my brush. I hold on, tethered to the page, can go no further in, come no further out.

Defined, this 24th day of the cysalid moon.

They Run

They run. In every generation some run on every continent, mostly Africa, often Asia, used to be Europe, never Antarctica though penguins hurry. Even America north of the Great Equator. They run. Sometimes the continent drifts and they cannot but shift back with equal and opposite perturbation. I'm saying this more slowly than it happens. They run in only two syllables, right left right left, those that have both options still. They run in dust, grit coating the insides of their open mouths. They used to run with baskets and satchels and duffels, now backpacks and laptops and iPods. Some hang back to pack, some just go sans portmanteau. Some sew into the lining of whatever cloak remains things fathers bestowed before they ran, but these days what fabric has backing? Some, running in summer, notice green sun glowing through luminous leaves at 4 a.m., but find in dawning beauty a betrayal. Always it is too late, always is *all ways* where time equals distance and everyone runs. Some run shouting *Where is*, shouting *Grab him leave her* then equal and opposite *Grab her leave him*, those that have both options still. They run. Some tie the doll to the child's wrist, circle the child with a fence in the mind, padlock the mind, bury the key by the planted tree, then run. Someone pushes Nana in a handcart to the border, where guards barter, then balk. They run. Nana can be Granny, sometimes Mima Oma Savta. Always a trochee with an open end, a feminine rhyme, like the skin that smiles on the bottoms of her feet, then laughs itself away. She runs. Coming round a corner, men for days unshaven glimpse themselves in windows and scare at the sight. They run. They run through wheat fields and rice paddies, yank a gourd off the ground, but also through trolley barns, strip malls, empty market stalls where turnips roll off a table. *Grab them Leave them* say those that have both options still. They run. There remains in the middle of the road a sandal slapping air with its arc of strap. They run. Some in torrents run like salmon against the waters for their lives and for their spawn. Mud sucks their boots off. They run. Inside-out around them buildings are turning, people too outwearing their innards in cries. Listen to the rustle of the lining. When it comes our time to run all ways may we, on a late green day, betray.

Slut

I will go wherever a few lines might
come together. Gentlemen, you

don't want to know this about me
but it is the *almost* and the *after* I

am after, the chosen pickins,
the gate in no fence around

a pasture, the peckish apéritif,
the weed between the tree, and oh, you

too, if I can bear you, heft my
half, parse the *must* in *us*.

But I prefer the angled glance
off the edge of an eyeful,

suggestive weather by dint of
round mint on the pillow, not

the full weight of a truffle
on the tongue, well maybe

full clench of tenses
present and passing

long enough for me to take
notes and you to pay the bill.