

Yellow Plum Season

黃梅季節

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AFTER “LANDSCAPE NEAR AUVERS” BY VAN GOGH

Why not? Let calm descend like a fine mist,
let clouds whirl and run on the canvas, but
not despairing. We need a day like this,
a day we can see far. Take in the wheatfields,
vast as the lover’s heart in which you roam
naked. Take in the small sea of cornflowers,
heaving poppies and believe in their beauty.
Let the wolf prey upon the animals
for they are safe under their keeper’s watch.
Let nothing break the calm. See mounds of hay
fuzz to gold in the sun and the olive trees
wind around low hills into the ether.
See beyond this room bleached in miseries
big and small threatening to pull us in.

MONSOON (1967)

When we get back the harbor is bloated again,
late night ferries bobbing on the water
like lanterns held by angry men. Fog this thick,
we will eat canned meat and pickled
mustard-greens for weeks, then pass around
the table bowls of rice gruel.

When the market opens, we wait in line
to buy flour and peanut oil, wait in line
to send the food packages off
to villages in Canton.

We wait obediently, then absent-mindedly.

By the time we come to the postal clerk's window,
none of us could remember our relatives' names, or
those whose hands are still tied behind their backs,
floating face down from the Pearl River, each
in his swollen goat-white skin: for
this is monsoon, mad rain hung
before us like a sheet of ghost.

VANTAGE POINT

At night airplanes flew overhead,
their tail lights trailing like blood stones.

The air whiffed of rotten fruit,
soot had settled on the garden saints.

Summer was running itself out.
We lifted glasses from the tray

to the intoxicating beginnings
that had nothing more to do with us.