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Seam and symmetry

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Seam and symmetry
Mark Anthony Cayanan

Something about the light hitting you wrong, I tell him as he puts on his shirt. He is inside-out. Through the window, everyday moves through itself, and it is scandalous. I rub my eyes, and he knows I wait.

: After everything, he gets on the plane, puts his feet up on the empty seat next to him.

Who is he, who was responsible. I pull out fresh socks from a drawer. Here, I say.

: This city is dirt under your nails, is rickshaw, is sweat stains. The city is: Swallow. He hops on a cab, gives the name of his hotel, and is taken to a temple. The driver repeats a single word: Here here here. He thinks the driver means: Pay.

But this is a minor misunderstanding. How will it be of use to us.

: There's more—

I want to say, The air is heavy with—but why should I insist.

: At the night market, he shadows a woman with a basket of fabrics on her head, follows the pungent trail of shrimp paste, gets his foot trampled on by a cart selling bread that smells of warm earth. He goes back to the hotel, a part of him now purple, the swelling a form of grace:

Finally, a symbol, a thing I can dismantle with myself.

: He takes pictures of roofs from his balcony, and in this new light their sharp finials are warnings. He leans on the balustrade, and of course, something happens.

Is this what you mean for me to know, I ask. I hand him his coat because this is when he must let me find out. Maybe there is lemongrass in the air; maybe the door is just as ambient.

: Why do you pretend you don't understand. In the real story, he retreats to his room. He sleeps through or under the livid ache: again and again the day invalidates itself.

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In the middle of the restaurant, he takes his coat off and proceeds to eat it. He begins with the right sleeve, wool tasting of turpentine, which tastes of sepia. Let your tongue travel over the memory of the one you loved first and best, and you would have come close.

: That's not how it happened,

he explains much later, his thumb kneading my palm. My hand ravel, ribbons. I wish for something; it is urgent.

: That's not how it tastes.

He is about to chew the lining of the breast pocket

: —cured meat over charcoal: it can make the dead disappear—

when the head waiter rushes in from the pantry to give him a tablecloth, newly starched and eager. Along its hem, embroidered flowers the color of a desired sky.

: Not this,

he tells everyone willing to listen. The diners have turned away from their meals, the food has grown cold, the wine is vinegar. A woman starts nibbling at her husband's paisley tie.

: I can't swallow something my body can't contain.

He brushes my hair out of his face, the intention behind it a corridor overthronged by objects, some covered in white cloth, some in their original packaging, some held together by glue. When I move, the stacks unsettle.

: In the real story, I didn't say a word. I tried to speak, but the sun lodged in my throat and held back the sound.