
POETRY | FALL 2016

Vanishing Point

By Ting Gou

At midnight, sit on the balcony of a cruise ship
and look out over the blackness, where the obsidian ocean
tumbles off and the sky, speckled with distant city light,
rises up to meet it.

Forget that you never wanted to be here anyway,
though you've found an hour of peace
unspoiled by the hip gyrations of waiters
forced to dance the Macarena and the racist jokes
of a standup act.

Is this real life, you think, but shut up
for the sake of your parents,

who don't catch everything that's happening.

You are on vacation. It's time to forget...

Stare out over the ocean at midnight and you will understand
how a sailor could see monsters in the foam
and on his death bed regret more than anything
how so few people believed him,
his story fizzling out like the last snort of a leviathan
vanishing under a ship's bow.

You're convinced that true knowledge of earth
began at sea, in the same way
that the love of anything is deepened
by taking a step back,

how on vacation you can even come to love
the lies of a patient who thinks he's fooled you every morning
with his fake hallucination of a black dog
pacing his hospital room, baring its teeth.

Two days of being at sea, you start dreaming of deserts,
swaths of color shooting out of dust,
the mania of rainstorms and their aftermath,
cacti opening up like so many eyes, memorizing the world
before the earth goes blind again and sinks back
into monochrome.

You dream even of vultures, their endless spirals,
sunbaked death.

You dream of fish bones pushed into rock
by the weight of an evaporated sea.

How thousands of miles from here,
the fishhook cactus is blooming magenta,
its body round like a sea urchin's,
shooting needles into an ocean
reclaimed as sky.

Ting Gou is a fourth-year medical student at the University of Michigan Medical School, interested in psychiatry and the relationship between memory and identity. Her first chapbook, *The Other House*, was selected for the Delphi Poetry Series at Blue Lyra Press and was published in 2016. Her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart three times and appear in the *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Best of the Net 2014*, *decomp*, *Ghost Ocean Magazine*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *r.kv.r.y.*, *Superstition Review*, and *Word Riot*. You can also find her poems in *JAMA*, *Chest*, *Anesthesiology*, *Medical Humanities*, and elsewhere. She is a poetry reader for *The Examined Life*, a literary magazine published by The University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine.

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