

My Familiar Lover · *Cynthia Macdonald*

All too. We ran away from the burrow of family
To meet at the Continental Divide. Apart
The pieces had fallen into place; together, they fall apart.
Yet from all that tearing up and down and in and out of
Passion's landscape, finally a sigh escapes its prison of ribs
As the awe-full snow-capped Rockies are glimpsed, then
Confronted. At the pinnacle there is division, of course:
Water flows in opposite directions, blue arteries,
East and West. And snow replaces green as
Rock's embellishment. We stand on the ridge watching
A single mole, a hairy beauty spot against the white
Below. Here, together, our penny dreadful melodramas –
Gaslight flicker, Noh or Passion play, Peking or
Puccini opera – will be played up and down and out and over.

The worst of what is familiar is less likely to maim
Than the moderately bad of what is not. So we
Make neither up nor out nor over, just make sure to guarantee
The worst as we set out – the picnic. For me, because my family
Came from Alsace, Weiss and Campagne; for you, from Gdansk,
Kielbasa. Spreading the cloth, you state this is no picnic
And turn to put on the ritual paint, red silk kimono.
Gilt fan in hand, you exhale the gasping music speech as
I dress in lampblack satin, jet beads, a crow boa
And paste a heart-shaped mole on my left cheek. The play
Begins: you use blocks; I, faints. Nothing
Meets; we slice the sausage into familiar declarations.

In spite of the gloss of the scenery, perhaps because of it
There is something sinister here which even the best paraphrase
Cannot put into words, a certain spitefulness thickens
The exhilarating air. Moles thread the snow,
Suggesting subterranean terrors better left unmolested.
Old enough to know it is impossible to change weather or
Landscape, we look at today's parts and try to change them,

Try to braid the twain. Compromise: *Turandot*. You, still in
Eastern garb, lie down in the snow to ice for the role,
Impressing a perfect Asian angel. I suit up as Calaf who,
Though he won the Empress, his Turandot, would not claim her till
She loved him, too. We perform in Asian fashion:
Man becomes woman, woman, man though your heavy beard,
My wide hips become neither part. Puccini's music echoes against
Channels of rock, flows with water into clefts.
Only when the sky's scar, a lightning bolt, strikes me as
You raise your hand do I realize I am no Calaf but a common suitor
Who does not wish to die for love and therefore will.
Turandot hits high B-flat conveying the rules and penalties.
After the first act we sit down to recast, struggling
For something easy. Making mountains into molehills is not,
Especially when Wagner shimmers in the distance like
Forest fire without trees. Impossible immolation.

Black-brown fur blinks in the drifts. We stop
Counting down and up and in and out to push the snow aside
Revealing the squirming litters, dark, moist, quickly
Increasing. Let's take cover in the pulsing, moving bed.
They weave around us, licking, softly probing, warm nest
Of fur, nothing molten. Music: breath in thin air,
A hum, small scale, piano practice instead of
Pageant. We pull up the blanket of snow and cleave together.
Such familiar comfort, my love, we forget what we know.