

# the HARLEQUIN

*Sam Thomas*

**Havana, 1857**

And I remember now how the snow looked  
even here watching ash fall from the sugar still  
and that it was a cold noon in the Xianhing valley.  
And you, my brother, after a long night's drinking  
were sitting backwards upon the old grey donkey  
we carried turnips to market with. The cart he pulled  
slowly barely as solid as the light dry hay in it.  
And as it was after market we headed for the passage  
and remarked on the chill in the air and I counted  
the giant rocks on each side, each round as plums.  
And how you began singing, up until the white sun  
was well behind our backs.  
And with the river close enough to hear from the road,  
we stopped to eat the rest of the rice mother  
had prepared from two bamboo boxes with straw  
hinges. The sting of soy spattering your hand as you  
laughed about the innkeeper's face the night before  
and how frightened he was when you roared you would  
be back to burn his inn down.  
And how you knew his young daughter, Su-Tian, watched  
from a slit in the paper walls, she could hear everything.  
And at this you became silent and we packed up  
our dinner and rode on towards the bridge.  
And it was after we crossed it and started up  
the mountain they came after us charging from the cedars  
still in their reveling silks saying you had dishonored them  
and I was only too afraid and ran into the high grasses.  
And watched as they dragged you from the donkey  
and tied you behind it.  
But it was too far from our home and not knowing  
how much further it would be, I followed and  
signed the contract with you to work eight years  
in a foreign land to repay the dishonor.  
And we were upon the ocean for what seemed like  
a lifetime and you were dead before we even sailed  
into port, your sores from their beatings having never healed.  
And I was traded many times over, my brother, and think  
maybe it is ten years on and only now since they put me

to work in this mill am I finally left alone to think  
on these things and where exactly we might have been  
and the snow that day in Xianhing valley.

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