June 2014

"Minghun," "Hearts," "Lament"

Elisabeth Murawski
Three Poems

ELISABETH MURAWSKI

Minghun

A family has lost a daughter. She will be our dead son’s bride. We pay 10,000 yuan to the fixer. It doesn’t matter she is plain, if she died by drowning or with fever. Was she stupid? Clever? Single, she qualified.

Now our son can’t complain he has no wife. And she will climb our family tree in the afterlife. A crane flies overhead, the sign of longevity. Whose? Not our son’s. Maybe those who loved him? The line of mourners winds uphill to the burial ground. Yellow soil’s heaped in a mound, waiting and final.

We’ve killed a pig, chickens, for the feast. Side by side, the dead lie wed in their coffins.
Hearts

I am playing a game with my father. Neither of us is any good at it. We take turns winning and losing, keeping score, his word against mine. He’s more than I bargained for. Witness the invisible bruising, the bell he’s a master of. He summons and I appear, swan dive with him into the river he was thrown in as a boy, swim or die. We take from each other what we can, hearts clenching, afraid of what lies beneath, the water below yielding, solitary as a birth.
Lament

A freak celebrity, London’s toast,
wife of Rolfe, honest woman
punished by ruffs

and layers of civilized stuff,
when she looked into
the white man’s mirror,

could she see her face
as the river held it first
before the current swept

her merry hips away?
Powhatan’s daughter, no one’s,
turning a cartwheel

naked as joy,
restless as a leopard
spurning confinement,

alive to the sacred
beating of the drum:
Matoaka, come!