

JEFFREY SCHWANER

MEI YAO-CH'EN AND I, WALKING DOWNTOWN FOR PIZZA ON A MAY AFTERNOON AND COUNTING OURSELVES LUCKY TO DO SO, ENCOUNTER A GARDEN FULL OF BUDDING PEONIES, NODDING THEIR ROUND HEADS IN AGREEMENT, WHICH ON CLOSER EXAMINATION ARE EACH HOSTING AT LEAST ONE ANT, WHICH LEADS TO A DISCUSSION OF PEONY FOLKLORE OVER GUINNESS AND THE EVENTUAL AUTHORSHIP OF THESE LINES BY A CERTAIN SUNG DYNASTY POET LIVING IN MY HOUSE

An ant crawls across the crown of the king of flowers.
It may be just an old wives' tale after all

that this least artistic insect opens the peony by nibbling away at the closed bud until its thousand petals uncloset and cluster as if embracing memory.

In Luoyang the peony crawls across the second largest city in the world and opens up the city's memory that it is beautiful in spring.

And in much the same way I nibble on these lines because I like them having no idea what will unfold in you.

If love could embrace you forever you would feel the red peony around you.
If lost you were ushered home by the moon it would smile like the white peony.

The dewy eyes of the first glance of your first child
are a black peony and the ants scrambling away invisibly are every moment
you lived before that moment.