

WILLIAM L. RAMSEY
Running Late in Yuyao

—*Zhejiang Province, PRC*

We stopped briefly before reaching
the bridge, your eye distracted by some
silk that might be suitable for a cheongsam.
So I turned toward the mountains, your purse
in my left hand.

A brownish black goat planted
a hoof in the dirt, lifted the other hoof,
planted it, shifted, looking down a long
draw toward an old woman washing pots
in stream water.

Voices like water over the rocks,
clashing, chaotic, unexpectedly quiet,
carried up the hill, but you bought
no silk. And I continued to hold your purse
in my left hand.

The brownish black goat lowered
its head to the stream, so fast and cold,
so much louder suddenly than women
or wind. I cannot remember if the bird sat
in a nearby tree

or on one of the rocks to sing. But,
as you looped your arm in mine and began
walking down to cross the river, every voice
inhaled, and in that hush I heard it: high notes
in a clustered hurry.