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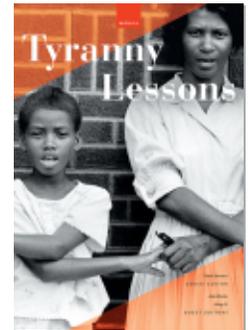
Gunshots

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Gunshots

Nowadays in my country
people wouldn't recognize real gunshots.
Today's writers only take on subjects
safe to write about: the cruelty
of the past, not the present.
It's the same with screenwriters.
Occasionally, songwriters are braver,
but songs of that kind are never popular.

For example, tonight
at the market near my house
I saw three vintage pistols for sale.
One hundred eighteen. One hundred sixteen.
"Do they make a loud noise?"
I was dumb enough to ask.
"These aren't real,"
the seller replied, "they're cigarette lighters."

City lights are set on dim.
But wait, I almost forgot.
Three months ago a taxi guy told me
that in another district a gunfight broke out
between the police and gangsters.
Newspapers would of course never report it.
People fall asleep after work.
Gunshots are censored from the news.

But I have heard real gunshots,
startling as firecrackers.
It was over ten years ago.
I think about it from time to time—
the fear has faded, along with other things
that you don't want to relive. Better to forget them.

But the forgetting has created its own fears in me.

2001

Translation from Chinese by Ming Di and Frank Stewart