

Inventions

LI SAN
XING

He invented the very first desiccant bag.
The prototype was knitted and wrapped in plastic.
They were orange; he was worried;
Lived a life on the lam, for some reason or another
(It was never explained); wore his brilliance sheepishly,
Drumming fingers on a sheet of white paper; “a weapon,” he joked,
“For administering paper cuts”. Nevertheless, he kept it by his side,
Darting Spanish glances over this shoulder and that.
Now and then a gangsterly man passed his stall.
Even we were convinced this was it, this was it,
He was done for, this was the one; his easy genius
Would splinter on the floor right in front of us,
His ideas rolling like marbles
For us to pocket. Meanwhile, ten o'clock

Traced those treasured daily movements
Across the piazza, his porthole into her routine:
Rinsing her cup in the fountain; her black cotton hat
Bobbing by the rusted railings as she swept,
Once more, out of sight; the rest remained
The privilege of the unknown corners of her day.
At night he dreamt up these missing gestures,
Filling her out like a balloon, smile by smile;
A skip up the stairs, a V-stretch, a yawn;
And the *pièce de résistance*, a stranger to his waking hours,
Her voice, asking how much the little bags were;
These details, borne from his most gracious sleep,
Completing her picture left unfinished by day,
His greatest inventions.