

Boots for stars

Gareth Alun Roberts

I came from out of the East, almost all of the way until winter and the road got into my boots with holes and stones and stars, which I thought ominous and, so, persisted. I still carried the stink of the camels, although the camels had left soon after the lands where the birds were too fat to fly and, when you stood on them, made a soft, sad sound and made good eating. And then I was walking.

I got into a land where I didn't like the pubs very much: the sweaty fingers and sweaty language, the suspicious prices, uncomfortable food. I longed then for a fat bird. The nights were bad and full of alarms that nobody wanted so I kept my blade close and felt guilty. I tried talking to the sort of people that they had there but their voices were not melodious and their words stank of bog herbs.

So I went into the mountains where the sky was lumpen with all manner of dull forebodings and stupid winds. I soon learned of nothing nearer nor further than snow; and when the snow parted the way back was seen to be littered with the clanking of hungry bones. Stumbly, I blinded on, weathering the rocks that were left and gradually becoming a vestibule for heaven.

You held my hand then; and warmly we shared the last of the provisions which was a fat bird that I'd forgot. We watched the light come up from out of the snow softly and slip away down the silent tracks. How beautiful it is to speak on the last mountains lost in silence when our words are the only sounds and the quieting land cherishes them as if they were music. I followed the music up and up until I could cling to the firm underbelly of winter clouds and sail them away across the sea

to the flat lands that were disappointing in the rain. I saw the music dribble all away down gutters and drains while all the sorts of people haggled about umbrellas and plastic macs in the gloomy markets. The rats there sat in dank corners and side-alleys: sad-eyed and surplus. I empathised with those redundant rodents and started to wonder if the snowy mountains were but a dream, whether the stars in my boots were just stones after all.

