

*Marilyn Chin*

SUMMER SONATINA

*You turn your head and I shall never see you again,  
My youth, my summer, lorries passing.*

Damask roses, Vivaldi's 4th season, clichéd and beautiful.  
My tongue is glib, I shall tangle the strings of your heart.  
My version of history: palanquins, wrists, the red descent of  
    peonies.  
Enter the turtle, my mother's back, take what you desire.  
What do I have to lose, sweet immigrant, but everything.

★

That tintype you embraced, was it not of your father?  
That daguerreotype you erased, was it not of your mother?  
The opera you lampooned, was it not *The Jade Hairpin*?  
The phoenix broken, her emerald eyes dangle.

*You must not sing praise on the same day of mourning.  
You must serve the mind and the "doctrine of the mean."  
You must learn to cant the names of birds & beasts & flowers.*

★

Yellow pearl, I bemoan you preciousness.  
They will pluck you from the great chancre.  
The soft palate lolls, not quite bilingual.

Don't tell them, says mother, they will deport you.  
Don't tell them, says father, I was a paperson.  
Don't tell them, says brother, our misery is our own.

Kingdoms come, kingdoms go, but family is forever.

You were splayed on a Cal-Rose sticky-rice bag with a waiter named  
Damien.

Your hair black as raven, his—blonde as rope.

I thought you were dead, but you were tired from pleasure.

But sister, we're not suppose to feel until we've passed the Bar  
Exam.

We must not sully our frock behind the pantry, sedge and mallow.

★

He is so fair you can see the Thames pulsing in his temples.

So fair, he blanched the skies of the suburbs.

You love him anyway, his beauty is all you know.

So fair, you imagine sowing his grey children.

In a parking lot, you say to Marguerite,

“Why must I yearn for his bland porridge?”

We search for the Great *Elixir*,

manless, childless,

Without a cloud in the sky.

★

*Thank you for your graciousness, a pair of porcelain nags,*

*Yo Yo Ma's lugubrious cello.*

*Thank you for the CDs of Prince, Ravel and The Time,*

*for the Cornish game hens at Yaddo.*

★

Necks, gizzards, livers—tucked in the cervix.

Dark meat, white meat, you prefer the white.

Plucked, dressed, they look like important composers.

When you clean the head, don't forget the eyes.

The soft palate behind the cheeks, extra tender.  
The scales scraped backward crackle like ice,  
Tiny shattered pupils, we can see our reflections.

★

Some American poet said to me, *The haiku is dead.*  
I thought, *pink and swollen, something sad about his body.*

He said, *The Tao is untranslatable and the haiku is dead.*  
I thought, *pink and swollen, something sad about his body.*

★

*The poet guards the conscience of society—no, you're wrong.*  
She stands lonely on that hillock observing the pastures.  
The world scoffs back with bog and terror.  
Fake paradise, imported palmettoes,  
O Prince, do not lose your soul in the ramparts.  
West of Chin's edge, there are no new friends.