

Marilyn Chin

VARIATIONS ON AN ANCIENT THEME:
THE DRUNKEN HUSBAND

The dog is barking at the door
“Daddy crashed the car”
“Hush, kids, go to your room
Don’t come out until it’s over”
He stumbles up the dim lit stairs
Drops his Levis to his ankles
“Touch me and I’ll kill you,” she says
Pointing a revolver at his head

The dog is barking at the door
She doesn’t recognize the master
She sniffs his guilty crotch
Positioned to bite it off
“Jesus, control your dog
A man can’t come back to his castle”
“Kill him, Ling, Ling,” she sobs
Curlers bobbing on her shoulders

The dog is barking at the door
“Quiet, Spot, let’s not wake her”
The bourbon is sour on his breath
Lipstick on his proverbial collar
He turns on the computer in the den
He calms the dog with a bone
Upstairs she sleeps, facing the wall
Dreaming about the Perfume River

The Dog is barking at the door
He stumbles in swinging
“Where is my gook-of-a-wife
Where are my half-breed monsters”

There is silence up the cold stairs
No movement, no answer
The drawers are open like graves
The closets agape to the rafters

The dog is barking at the door
He stumbles in singing
“How is my teenage bride?
How is my mail-order darling?
Perhaps she’s pretending to be asleep
Waiting for her man’s hard cock”
He enters her from behind
Her sobbing does not deter him

The dog is barking at the door
What does the proud beast know?
Who is both intruder and master?
Whose bloody handprint on the wall?
Whose revolver in the dishwater?
The neighbors won’t heed her alarm
She keeps barking, barking
Bent on saving their kind