

Herman Fong

Tangerine

Moon rising new in a late winter sky.
The oak clock chiming the passage of days.
Tonight, we gather patient as worshippers,
solemn as mourners, and ponder
the death and birth of years.
My father offers me a tangerine,
dangles it by a stiff green twig
with leaves curled and intact.
Begin the year with good, he says,
and with good the year will end.
The fruit shines bright and clean
like a ball of gold.
In my room,
I notch the skin with a knife
and peel it easily,
unwinding it in a single wide strand
as simply as thread from a spool,
separate the white membrane, like veins,
and taste its sugary juice,
the sweetness of Double Happiness.
My mother sees the tart skin drying on the sill
and smiles, tells me
there is luck in removing the skins
in a lone strip with hands

free of weapons—

The seasons will come with fortune
and leave behind long life.

When they have gone to bed,

I wipe clean the blade,

hide it in my coat,

sleep fitfully till sunrise.