

Leo Hwang

NEAR PRODIGY

The first vegetarians I ever met
played cello and violin. They
were sisters, and with the father
and mother they made a quartet.
I could not believe that they lived
on vegetables and fish alone.
They were all willowy thin and
had a slightly hollow look under
their eyes. I questioned whether
this was the influence of genes
or diet. I wonder if the older one
was someone I could have loved,
but we were only children then
and she could play the cello the way
near child prodigies can, the technical
proficiency that is almost comic in the
body of a vegetarian child, but
the expression on her face was one
of complete seriousness, the focus
of someone who is slowly going mad,
or is starving leaf by leaf, uncovering
the core of lettuce, the stump that lies
hidden underneath us all. That is why
I wonder if I could have been her lover,
though I could not understand it all then,
I would grow into a man who cannot
think of sitting in that living room,
the summer cottage smell, August
streaming in through all the lake facing windows,
without sensing the deep root of loss,
the desire to climb back into that day,
back more than twenty years, and sit at her feet,
rest my head against her knobby knee
and join her in that distance that separated us,
the flesh eater from the eaten.