

Ouyang Yu

AN OLD CLASSMATE VISITS MY MELBOURNE HOME

it was to the accompaniment of the creaking noise of the left door
that he got into my car
i was thinking of their lack of such things back at home
and he was asking about the price
and concluded that four thousand wasn't really that much

we were on our way from the city to west heidleberg

i showed him around in my rented garden
he wasn't particularly impressed with all the rank grass
he was a businessman by the way
i took him in and made him a pot of tea
the kind that you bought at a chinese shop
but never had the flavour of a home grown one
on which he commented that he'd bring me some next time
when he visited me

my wife noticed that he hadn't brought anything with him
except half a pack of Marlboro
which both of us dragged
i could have thought of buying another pack
since he was here
but my wife was busy preparing the food:
a murray perch nice pork rib pink shrimps mushrooms
and we were busy reminiscing about the good old days
who were doing what in where
and who were the most successful

when the dinner came
he politely declined all the meat stuff
asking for only snow peas and vegetables
saying that he had had too much of that already back home
that he wasn't used to that kind of cuisine any more since the way of life
back home was much more improved and seemed better than here

glancing up and down at me and at the interior of my three-in-one
bungalow
he said
pointedly
that yours is the worst i have yet seen in all my days in australia

and that did for it
in an outburst of rage
what did i throw at him but words that suggested that i was already a poet
a poet who had done quite a number of readings around the town
in english
and was invited too

to his curious perplexity

later when he was gone
my wife said to me
do you think he understood what you said at
all he saw
in you and your melbourne home
was living poverty
and you were talking about poetry!

i sat and brooded