Three Uses of Chopsticks
by Juliet S. Kono

I.
She drops her head between her knees.
Her long black hair flows over.
She gathers the strands,
flips up her head
and twists her hair
into a silken bun.
She takes a pair of chopsticks,
sticks them into her hair
to hold it up; together with an orchid,
chopsticks make a practical decoration.
The nape of her neck is exposed
tempting him to touch it.
At the right moment tonight
she will pull out the chopsticks
like a knife
and drop her hair
for the kill.

II.
Teeth-chipped red lacquer chopsticks
with wood exposed like flesh.
She saves the old ones for him.
He uses the chopsticks to prop
orchid plants heavy with flowers.
From her window, she watches
him stab into the cinder
at the base of the plants.
He is careful of the aerial roots --
blue-green veins more familiar now
than veins on her breasts
that he once tracked
after parting her long, graying hair
fallen across her chest.
She notices he binds chopsticks
and stalks with soft wire
in an unlikely embrace,
preventing winds from toppling
and crushing the plants.

III.
She walks down the path
like a bride -- white orchids
fluttering like butterflies in her hands --
to where he waits for her.
She loops white hair
straggling from her bun
over an ear as she walks.
Fronting the small stoop
near gas burners, she bows,
draws a pair of long steel chopsticks
from their case. She picks up
the char-free bones
left among the ashes:
fragments of hip bones, pieces of skull,
parts of teeth.
She drops them into an urn.
She then ties a black cloth
around the copper box,
sticks flowers into the square knot,
and folds her arms around him
and orchids.