

Three Lessons

for voice and guzheng

I.

Another festival today—a banquet for our family’s ghosts
across the seas. Grandma sends their invitations by incense
and greets them warmly as they come: fathers, mothers, aunts and uncles
introduced by forgone names—those voiceless artefacts she aims
to bind to her blood, and to ours. She tells us where to place the bowls
and we obey: pour tea and wine in shallow cups, curl golden paper
squares to ingots, clasp and pump our hands in prayer: luck and health,
success and love. Jasmine smoke unfurls a promise, loosely swirls

Grandma tries her best to feed the crowd but can’t transform
the hot roast chicken, plastic-wrapped, to baahk chit gai
or languid oats to hearty mounds of rice. The old ghosts sigh
around the coffee table crammed in the garage
an altar space our car will gladly fill when she departs
with all her guests—their voices lost, a dried mirage

4/4 5 5̣5̣ 5 6' | 5 6' 53 \1 | 6. 1 5 - | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - |
5 5̣5̣ 5 6' | 5 \3 32 6' | 1. 6 1 - | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - |
3 3̣3̣ 3 56 | 1 1 6 i 3' | 2 5̣ 2 - | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - |
1 1 1 i \6 | 5 5̣ \3 2165 | 6. 1 6 - | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - |
2 2 2 2 35 | 6 6 1 2 3 6' | 5 5̣ 5 - | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - |
2 2 2 2 35 | 6 6 \6 53 2' | 1. 6 1 - | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - |
6 6 6 6 3' | 6 6 1 53 \1 | 66615- | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - |
5 5 5 5 6' | 5 5 \5 32 6' | 11161- | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - |
3 3 3 3 5' | 1 1 \6 i 3' | 2 5̣ 2 6 - | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - |
1 1 1 i 6' | 5 5 \2 1 5' | 66616- | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - |
2 2 2 2 12 | 33'6623\7 | 5 5 3 5 - | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - |
2 2 2 2 35 | 6 \653216' | 116'5 - | 6 6̣. 5̣. 5̣. - ||

II.

Across the seas and centuries, we play
 the voices of the dead to life; invite
 their legacies borne not by blood but flight
 of ink and spirit—spring of all delight
 My teacher curves my fingers to fit her palm
 and teaches me to sing in foreign tongues:
 bourrée, chaconne, gavotte, courante, allemande
 I learned the ways of old when I was young
 and now I sit beside the keys and guide
 my students, children, towards the famous ghosts
 I try my best to conjure joy and pride
 in charming hammered felt to well-formed notes
 but present tides are strong and ever changing
 the seafloor's form, always rearranging

<u>12121212 12121212</u>		<u>13131313 13131313</u>	
<u>14141414 14141414</u>		<u>12121212 1212 1</u>	
<u>12121212 12121212</u>		<u>12121212 12121212</u>	
$\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ - $\begin{smallmatrix} \dot{6} \\ \dot{3} \end{smallmatrix}$ -		$\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ \dot{5} \end{smallmatrix}$ - $\begin{smallmatrix} \dot{5} \\ \dot{2} \end{smallmatrix}$ -	
<u>12121212 12121212</u>		<u>12121212 32323213</u>	
$\begin{smallmatrix} 2 \\ \dot{5} \end{smallmatrix}$ - $\begin{smallmatrix} \dot{3} \\ \dot{1} \end{smallmatrix}$ -		$\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ - - -	
<u>13131313 13131313</u>		<u>13131313 13131313</u>	
$\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ - $\begin{smallmatrix} \dot{6} \\ \dot{3} \end{smallmatrix}$ -		$\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ \dot{5} \end{smallmatrix}$ - $\begin{smallmatrix} \dot{5} \\ \dot{2} \end{smallmatrix}$ -	
<u>13131313 13131313</u>		<u>13131313 61616</u>	
$\begin{smallmatrix} 2 \\ \dot{5} \end{smallmatrix}$ - $\begin{smallmatrix} \dot{3} \\ \dot{1} \end{smallmatrix}$ -		$\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ - - -	
<u>66134561</u> ⁷ ₃ <u>5376313</u>		<u>66134561</u> ⁷ ₃ <u>537</u> ⁶ ₁	
<u>55135612</u> ³ <u>1532542</u>		<u>i</u> ⁵ <u>3535</u> ³ <u>2535</u> ³ <u>i535</u> ³ <u>i531</u>	
<u>25612356</u> ⁶ <u>6134313</u>		<u>25612356</u> ⁶ <u>6134313</u>	
<u>55123513</u> ⁵ ₅ <u>2542</u>		<u>i</u> ⁵ <u>3535</u> ⁵ <u>2535</u> ³ <u>i535</u> ³ <u>i351</u>	
<u>06130613</u> ⁶ <u>06130613</u>		<u>06130613</u> ⁶ <u>06130613</u>	
$\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ \dot{5} \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ \dot{5} \end{smallmatrix}$		$\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ \dot{5} \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ \dot{5} \end{smallmatrix}$	
<u>06130613</u> ⁶ <u>06130613</u>		<u>06134313</u> ⁶ ₁ -	
$\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ 2 \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} i \\ 5 \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} i \\ 5 \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} 2 \\ 6 \end{smallmatrix}$		$\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ - $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ \dot{6} \end{smallmatrix}$ -	

III.

Songs of blood are hard to sing—believe me, I’ve tried everything:
 martial arts, calligraphy, language classes, recipes
 none of which rang deep or true
 enough to call a song, myself a singer

So I tied a line around my waist and cast it back a few millennia
 when ancient poets plucked drunken tunes in bamboo groves
 and zithers were all the rage. I hoped my stubborn blood
 would resonate with the instrument, which shredded

my fingertips and stiffened my thumbs—a hardening
 my ancestors knew as the grind of a shovel, the back-heat
 of working fields. Grandma brings me chrysanthemum tea
 when I practise and lingers to listen, sometimes hears a memory:

a red song for breakfast; twirling with friends in the square
 when she’s gone, I’ll invite her to dance

6̣ 1̣ 6̣ 6̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 1̣ 6̣ 6̣ | 5̣ 3̣ 2̣ 1̣ 2̣ | 3̣ 6̣ 1̣ 6̣ 5̣ |
 3̣ 1̣ 6̣ 5̣ 6̣ 6̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 1̣ 6̣ 6̣ | 2̣ 1̣ 3̣ 2̣ 7̣ 6̣ 5̣ | 6̣ 3̣ 5̣ 3̣ 3̣ 5̣ |
 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 1̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 1̣ | 3̣ 3̣ 3̣ 5̣ 3̣ 3̣ 3̣ 1̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 3̣ 2̣ 2̣ 7̣ 6̣ 5̣ | 3̣ 3̣ 3̣ 5̣ 3̣ 3̣ 5̣ 5̣ |
 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 1̣ 1̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 1̣ 1̣ | 7̣ 1̣ 1̣ 1̣ 7̣ 1̣ 7̣ 6̣ 5̣ | 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 1̣ 6̣ 3̣ 5̣ |
 6̣ 6̣ 1̣ 6̣ 3̣ 5̣ | 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 1̣ 6̣ 6̣ 3̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 1̣ 2̣ 3̣ 2̣ 3̣ 4̣ | 3̣ — — 3̣ 5̣ |
 6̣ — — 1̣ 5̣ | 6̣ — — 6̣ 5̣ | 2̣ — — — | 0̣ 3̣ 5̣ 6̣ 1̣ 2̣ — |
 6̣ 6̣ 5̣ 6̣ 1̣ 6̣ | 5̣ 3̣ 2̣ 1̣ 6̣ 6̣ 3̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 3̣ 2̣ 7̣ 6̣ 5̣ | 6̣ — — 3̣ 5̣ |
 6̣ — — 6̣ 5̣ | 2̣ — — 6̣ 3̣ | 2̣ — — — | 0̣ 3̣ 5̣ 6̣ 1̣ 2̣ 3̣ |
 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 1̣ 6̣ 1̣ 5̣ | 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 1̣ 6̣ 3̣ 3̣ | 6̣ 2̣ 1̣ 6̣ 2̣ | 3̣ — — 3̣ 5̣ |
 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 3̣ | 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 3̣ | 5̣ 2̣ 5̣ 2̣ 5̣ 2̣ 5̣ 2̣ | \ / \ — |
 6̣ 6̣ 5̣ 6̣ 1̣ 6̣ | 5̣ 3̣ 2̣ 1̣ 6̣ 6̣ 3̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 3̣ 2̣ 1̣ 6̣ 5̣ | 6̣ — — 3̣ 5̣ |
 6̣ 6̣ 5̣ 6̣ 1̣ 6̣ | 5̣ 3̣ 2̣ 1̣ 6̣ 6̣ 3̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 3̣ 2̣ 1̣ 6̣ 5̣ | 6̣ — — 3̣ 5̣ |
 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 3̣ | 5̣ 2̣ 5̣ 2̣ 6̣ 3̣ 6̣ 3̣ | 5̣ 2̣ 5̣ 2̣ 5̣ 2̣ 5̣ 2̣ | 0̣ 3̣ 2̣ 1̣ 6̣ — |
 0̣ 6̣ 5̣ 0̣ 3̣ 5̣ | 0̣ 6̣ 5̣ 0̣ 3̣ 1̣ | 0̣ 1̣ 6̣ 3̣ 0̣ 1̣ 5̣ | 0̣ 6̣ 5̣ 0̣ 1̣ 7̣ |
 6̣ 6̣ 3̣ 0̣ 6̣ 6̣ 3̣ 0̣ | 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 3̣ 3̣ 0̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 5̣ 5̣ 0̣ | 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 3̣ 3̣ 0̣ |
 6̣ 3̣ 3̣ 0̣ 6̣ 6̣ 3̣ 0̣ | 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 3̣ 3̣ 0̣ | 5̣ 5̣ 0̣ 5̣ 5̣ 0̣ | 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 3̣ 3̣ 0̣ |

6̣ — — — ||
 3̣ — — — ||
 1̣ — — — ||
 6̣ — — — ||
 3̣ — — — ||
 5̣ — — — ||

