



# Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen

Written by Marilyn Chin

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Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen

# Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen

By Marilyn Chin

## Revenge Of The Nerds

An uproarious debut that lays bare the complicated generational relationships of Chinese American women.

## Revenge Of The Sith

Raucous twin sisters Moonie and Mei Ling Wong are known as the “double happiness” Chinese food delivery girls. Each day they load up a “crappy donkey-van” and deliver Americanized (“bad”) Chinese food to homes throughout their southern California neighborhood. United in their desire to blossom into somebodies, the Wong girls fearlessly assert their intellect and sexuality, even as they come of age under the care of their dominating, cleaver-wielding grandmother from Hong Kong. They transform themselves from food delivery girls into accomplished women, but along the way they wrestle with the influence and continuity of their Chinese heritage.

## Revenge Of The Dreamers 3

Marilyn Chin's prose waxes and wanes between satire and metaphorical lyric, referencing classical Chinese tales and ghost stories that are at turns sensual, lurid, hilarious, shocking, and surreal. .

Forget fairytales and fables that threaten rape and violence to women who go off the beaten path, deny their parents, or refuse to marry. Marilyn Chin's novel, *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen*, doesn't lock away its female protagonists into a tower so a prince can climb up their hair and doesn't ask the women to honor and obey their parents. Instead, Chin's twin protagonists are riot grrrls of the immigrant set: they take on everything from gender and sexuality to Chinese mythology and the immigrant experience. Forget fairytales and fables that threaten rape and violence to women who go off the beaten path, deny their parents, or refuse to marry. Marilyn Chin's novel, *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen*, doesn't lock away its female protagonists into a tower so a prince can climb up their hair and doesn't ask the women to honor and obey their parents. Instead, Chin's twin protagonists are riot grrrls of the immigrant set: they take on everything from gender and sexuality to Chinese mythology and the immigrant experience.

Duality is a central component to the book: the sisters at the heart of the stories are like night and day. It's no coincidence that the sisters "Moonie and Mei Ling" are known as "double happiness." There is the hypersexualized sister, and there is the asexual sister: each is as wild as they are rebellious. Mei Lin throws herself into fling after fling as she makes deliveries for her family's restaurant while her sister rips her away from too-willing American men again and again. Here, the contradictions of stereotypes are thrown into the face of the reader. The Madonna/Whore dichotomy was never so smartly articulated.

Chin is not unaware of what is at stake for her protagonists. Their boldness is spoken of when Chin writes of Mei Lin's reckless promiscuity: "It could ultimately mean the death of your tribe and your people." The children of immigrants often have high expectations to fulfill. They must honor their cultures and succeed in a new world. The tongue-in-cheek statement certainly has some levity behind it: Failure is not an option for the first generation child.

Chin drives the stake through the heart of the matter when describing the twins' reaction to a fellow first generation immigrant, Donny Romero: "Now he's on the East Coast studying art at Yale. How spoiled is that? First-generation immigrant and he gets to study art." While the girls rage and rebel against this expectation, they do indeed fall into it. They become the Ivy League successes predicted by their family and by the world around them.

The collection's only misstep is that the narrators, and consequently Chin, sometimes seem too pleased with themselves. Chin knows what she's doing, and like the adventurous Mei Ling, she seemingly has so much pushing the envelope that the message of the pieces is sometimes drowned out by the volume of the sexual escapades and wink-wink criticism of assimilation. For example, "Wiping One's ass with the Sutras" would be more than fine, but when coupled again and again with sexually explicit language, the

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rebellion at the heart of the collection is dulled because the nail is hit one too many times. The profanity is meant to jolt the reader, but without some relief from the jolting, the risk is desensitization.

The growing pains of the Chinese immigrant experience are bursting at the seams. These twins do not reject their heritage; they simply poke holes through its hypocrisies. These sisters do not blindly accept American culture, and mock its excesses. These are the new stories of the immigrant nation. It's no accident that the restaurant owned by the twins' family is called Double Happiness. Here, making one's way means working hard, sacrificing, and forging a path to the Ivy League schools, something the twins expect as much as the mooncakes they deliver. These vixens rebel and buck and crow against expectations: this "double happiness" of living in a new land with old world expectations. The twins make their own path without rejecting the history, expectations, and hopes of their family.

Chin does not offer a happily-ever-after-type ending nor does she offer a tragedy. Instead, the twins play in murky water and shed new light on old struggles.

Review by Lisa Bower [...more](#)

## Revenge Of The Dreamers

"The structure of this book is based on ancient Buddhist beliefs in reincarnation and the eternal cycles of suffering.... The characters are all trapped in a vicious cycle of reincarnation. The cycle of suffering is continuous. The oppression of women is continuous. Fleshly desire, which leads to suffering, is continuous.... Moonie and Mei Ling appear to be well-adjusted adolescents: narcissistic, hardworking, high-achievers on their way to acquiring the American Dream. When they will reach enlightenment or self-realization, though, is unclear. They are, as all human creatures are, on a picaresque quest toward happiness." - Marilyn Chin on the structure of "Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen"

Don't let Chin fool you: this isn't a nice little novel with deep, underlying meanings or spirituality. One of the stand out pieces in this novel was "A Portrait of My Sister Sexing Tofu", if that tells you anything.

More a series of interlocked stories all dealing with the many lives of Moonie and Mei Ling (but mostly written from Moonie's perspective, which is amusing considering the author IS Mei Ling, the "poet/professor in southern California who is well-known for her research on immigrant erotica"), one section is devoted to modern re-tellings of ancient Buddhist tales, another section devoted to animal tales which feature prominently in many culture's folktales, and yet another section entitled "Ten Views of the Flying Matriarch" that deals with the community's view of Moonie and Mei Ling's clever-wielding grandmother.

Chin is a poet, and you can expect her language to be succinct and the general playfulness that exudes from this book I would credit to her being trained in poetry. The story "Fox Girl" is a critique on academic poetry while mashing it up with an ancient Chinese story about a fox demon who disguises herself as a beautiful woman.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and feel that under the right kind of professor, so much more could unfold from this book. Chin knows her stuff and this work is pulled off masterfully. It's one of those books people will really enjoy if they are pulled into it by something, which is probably why I felt the need to summarize so much of this book. (I'm the first review of this book on goodreads too!)

There are a few minor problems with the editing, such as someone saying that someone died in 1989 and yet, a few pages later, it being 1985 and said person is already dead... but I'm willing to overlook that. It bothers the crap out of me, but I can imagine the editor not really knowing what to do with this piece of work, as cool as it is.

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Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen

I wish Marilyn Chin was stopping in southwest Ohio on her book tour... [...more](#)

Highly original and inventive "manifesto in 41 tales" with a heavily feminist bent. The tales are drawn from Buddhist texts and a platter of Chinese folklore, updated for a modern audience (i.e. fellatio and naughty bits).

Tone-wise the stories present a gritty or whimsical look at first-generation Chinese immigrant life, a stylised satire of over-sexed second-generation teenage life, and a fantastical world of vaginas with teeth, fox metamorphoses and ninja grandmas.

Very funny and refreshing.

## Revenge Of The Fallen

This is the most awesome Asian American Immigrant Magical Realism Extravaganza complete with occasional soft-core porn EVER!

I don't usually review on this site, because there's already such a plethora of smart, involved reviewers.

But the showing for this particular book is SHAMEFUL, and it's one of my favorites. So here's what I wrote about it once upon a time.

Moon grew up, lost weight and became a famous singer, which proves that there is no justice in the universe, or that indeed, there is justice. Your interpretation of the denouement mostly depends on your race, creed, hair color, social and economic class and I don't usually review on this site, because there's already such a plethora of smart, involved reviewers.

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Moon grew up, lost weight and became a famous singer, which proves that there is no justice in the universe, or that indeed, there is justice. Your interpretation of the denouement mostly depends on your race, creed, hair color, social and economic class and political proclivities -- whether or not you are a revisionist feminist and have a habit of cheering for the underdog. What is the moral of the story? Well, it's a tale of revenge, obviously written from the Chinese American girl's perspective. My intentions are to veer you away from teasing and humiliating little chubby Chinese girls like myself. And that one wanton act of humiliation you perpetrated on the fore or aft of that boat on my arrival may be one humiliating act too many.

For although we are friendly neighbors, you don't really know me. You don't know the depth of my humiliation. And you don't know what I can do. You don't know what is beneath my doing.

(Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen: A Manifesto in 41 Tales)

Marilyn Chin was born Chin Mei-ling in Hong Kong, only to later immigrate with her family to the US. (And renamed for Marilyn Monroe.) She is an acclaimed poet with four Pushcart Prizes to her name, but *Revenge* is her first novel.

And it is awesome.

*Revenge* has many voices and many stories (forty-one, naturally), but its beating heart is the Double Happiness twins, Mei Ling and Moon, and their Grandma Wong. Their father dead of a heart attack, their mother escaped back to Hong Kong, the twins gained their neighborhood nickname from the

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restaurant their grandmother runs in Rose River, Oregon, a city so industrialized the very rain is toxic.

Moon is reserved, deconstructive, dry-humored, and a "latent homo." Mei Ling is defiant, hedonistic, irreverent, and rapaciously heterosexual. ("A yin and a yang!" declares the delivery doctor, to which the newborn Moon replies: "Thanks for showing your Oriental knowledge, asshole," before peeing on him.)

Granny is everything you would want your Great Matriarch to be: cleaver-wielding and fly-kicking, full of ancient fables and family stories. With Moon and Mei Ling, Chin perhaps strives to present differing ways to deal with assimilation and immigrant lifestyle. On the other hand, Granny is pure wish fulfillment, the righteous embodiment of filial obligation and general badassery. She kills gangsters and tends to neighborhood unfortunates, even haunting her granddaughters' dreams from beyond the grave. She reminds her charges of the past they have inherited, but knows the cultural entropy of their lives. When Mei Ling wakes up with Caucasoid eyes, Granny laments the loss of beauty but soothes her distress. "Deep in her heart," Chin writes, "she knew that each step backward would only mean regret -- the vector only goes in one direction, the homing geese must find their new nest, the ten thousand diasporas will never coagulate -- there was no way back to the Middle Kingdom."

I'm quoting freely from the text because, honestly, that's the only real way to get a taste of the book as a whole. There is no overarching narrative thread -- in 200 pages the twins are born, grow older, and become successful women (though not necessarily in that order). Sometimes the stories are written from Mei Ling's perspective, sometimes Moon's, sometimes Granny's, sometimes from the viewpoint of minor characters. Chin regurgitates fairy tales, Buddhist koans, Daoist stories, Zhuangzi, Confucius, ghost lore -- clothing them anew in the philosophy and experiences of the Wongs. (She includes a handy notes section for many of the allusions, but I read that last and loved the stories as standalones as well.)

As if that weren't enough to compel you, Chin's language is amazing. Let me say that again: Ah. May. ZING. Beguiling and abrasive by turns, her characters fuck and fight and feel with graphic, attention-grabbing imagery. Sometimes lyrical and sometimes crude -- and sometimes downright bizarre -- Chin exercises the poet's prerogative to make her sense out of nonsense, writing in cheerful contradictions and open ended (if not triple-ended) anecdotes.

A lot, if not all, of the reviews I've read for *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* have used the term "immigrant literature." I dislike this attempt at pigeonholing. Thoroughly. My own review is long enough without detailing exactly why, but suffice to say I think it downplays a book's appeal in a misguided attempt to find its "market."

And I say: fuck market. The Wongs are immigrants, yeah, and their lives deal with those conundrums and complications which inevitably arise from growing up immersed in the dominant white, Western culture when your family, your history, and you are something else. But while the questions plaguing the Double Happiness twins -- Where are my people? How can I be happy? What should I love? How should I love? -- are often brought sharply into focus when one is caught between two (or three or four

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or sixteen) sets of answers, no one lives entirely free of them.

No one should.

Brave, snarky, troubling, serene, conflicted, and uncompromising: this is a beautiful book. ...more

## Revenge Of The Nerds Cast

Near perfect. Irreverent and fun, wordplay without the annoying postmodern garbage (well mostly), light yet rooted, still, in ancient folklore, Buddhist scriptures, or simply Chinese beliefs, and in the Great American Dream. Sometimes the narrative is jumbled up which, instead of being a clever parody, only feels like "I'm-too-tired-to-research-this" or "there-isn't-enough-material-on-this." Still, I wish I read this before I read all the other contemporary Asian American works.

Marilyn Chin is coming to campus in a few weeks, so I'm teaching this book in my fiction-writing class.

## Revenge Of The Bridesmaids

Got tired to the crude humor at the expense of plot.

Raucous, bawdy, political without apologies. This book is a mosaic of a novel about twin Chinese-American sisters and their cleaver-wielding grandmother with pointed updates of classical Chinese writings. I haven't found a book which so deftly pushed my buttons in a while — vengeful female ghosts, folklore adaptations, surprise martial arts moves, and a cheerful disregard for men's feelings and thoughts. My one small critique is that some of the politics/references read as a tiny bit dated; albeit

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## Revenge Of The Green Dragons

This is not your grandmother's Asian American immigrant story. This is (as another reviewer put it) sexy, witty, poetic, and profane. It's not a straightforward narrative and there's a quite a bit retelling of Buddhist and zen stories. You might especially enjoy it if you're a Chinese American academic swimming in bullshit, a rebellious former or current immigrant girlchild, or a lover of the profane.

Good. A bit too pornographic, but who am I kidding?

## Revenge Of The Nerds 2

I fail to appreciate the merits of the book. It just did not speak to me. The story was disjointed, I did not enjoy the style, and I could not relate at all to any of the characters.

I really wanted to like this more. There were some stories that were very, very funny, and a couple that were very sad, but the majority of them didn't really affect me one way or the other. I don't know why I expected this to be a novel rather than a collection of stories and fables, but I can't hold my misinformed disappointment against it.

Marilyn Chin can write, and she did make me think, again, about a Chinese immigrant's experience in America; I've had a couple boyfriends who were first-gen I really wanted to like this more. There were some stories that were very, very funny, and a couple that were very sad, but the majority of them didn't really affect me one way or the other. I don't know why I expected this to be a novel rather than a collection of stories and fables, but I can't hold my misinformed disappointment against it.

Marilyn Chin can write, and she did make me think, again, about a Chinese immigrant's experience in America; I've had a couple boyfriends who were first-generation Chinese American, and we talked some about their families; I had a friend in college who was Hmong, and luckily she was very patient and polite about discussing her family's Coming to America story, which I think now was quite rude of me to just ask of her. It's one thing to talk about family stories with a boyfriend, but asking someone in the middle of work, like, "So what is your name in Hmong?" god I would've wanted to slap me.

The point being, while I didn't enjoy all the stories so much, I did like the conversations Marilyn Chin seemed to be having with her characters, and trying to have with the reader. Anytime a book lets you relate to parts of it--the second-to-last story, "Happiness: A Manifesto" is one of the funniest things I've ever read--while constantly slapping you out of the comfortable "reading" place, it's probably a book that deserves more consideration. ...more

## Revenge Of The Electric Car

I began reading this book in 2014 and couldn't make sense of the plot. I was forcing a continuous timeline when one didn't actually exist. I contacted the author (prior professor at SDSU) to get more insight about the book and her style of writing. She asked me to finish the book and contact her again once I had read it completely.

I couldn't wrap my head around the crude writing and in a way I felt slightly insulted every time I read it. I set the book down for over a year and finished the last portion just now. I began reading this book in 2014 and couldn't make sense of the plot. I was forcing a continuous timeline when one didn't actually exist. I contacted the author (prior professor at SDSU) to get more insight about the book and her style of writing. She asked me to finish the book and contact her again once I had read it completely.

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Realizations:

1. The book is made up of a compilation of short stories.
2. The main characters aren't necessarily the twins, but rather the grandmother and the lessons that they learn from her.
3. The anecdotal stories are not to be taken literally. They are cleverly written representations that express the growth of the characters throughout the book.
4. The story is not linear and when you find yourself asking questions about the past- maybe something you missed, you'll find that the questions are answered in the future readings.
5. Don't take the readings personal and try to read the book without judgement.

It's certainly rough around the edges, but it's an honest and heartfelt read full of feminist qualities.  
...more

I put this on the LBGT shelf (which I mean to change to the LGBTQIA shelf just as soon as I figure out how) because one of the two protagonists seems asexual for much of the story, but has an affair with another woman toward the end. The other protagonist (twin sister to the first) is aggressively heterosexual, and I wouldn't say that queer sexuality is a major theme here. It's nice to see one character happen to be queer, though.

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The big theme is the second-generation immigrant experience in America, specifically the Chinese American experience. I have never, however, seen this theme dealt with so poetically, wittily, sexily and profanely. This is a novel-in-stories in which some of the stories are more like prose poems. It's magical realist from the get-go and hysterically funny. By that I mean not only is it very, very funny, but the hilarity has a slightly hysterical edge to it, as if the laughter were partly a way to stave off bitter tears.

I absolutely loved this book. It made me want to read Marilyn Chin's poetry. If she has written or writes any more fiction, I'll be all over it. ...more