

In Another Life

Vienna Teng

In another life
You and I worked West Virginia coal mines
Side by side
Collecting the black dust like sin
The day the main shaft caved in
I caught your eye
As the lantern light guttered out
And the afterdamp swallowed us slowly
I gripped your hand
And caught a glance
Of the next time 'round

In another life
You and I were Red Guards in training
Side by side
We marched on Tiananmen
Turned our own parents in
For hoarding rice
And in the Great Leap forward
We crawled on our bellies and died
A blood orange sky
Gave a cry
Of next time 'round

In another life
I was married at thirteen
You were killed at twenty-one
On a minor battlefield
I was buried beside my second stillborn child
My last thought it seemed
A fever dream

Now we sink into a summer afternoon
Central Park in June
Marveling at the bounty our days contain
And we feel it like the shiver
Of a passing train
That other life
Deep underground
You and I
Side by side
We are the next time 'round