



PLATE TWENTY-SEVEN *Princess Sophia's Tears II*

lavish paint handling always pulls our eyes back to the surface, to the world of artifice, just as the images themselves are pulled out of their natural settings.

Chandler's renditions of Marie Antoinette's private fantasy domains—the labyrinthine gardens at Trianon with expansive terraces and reflecting pools; the little rivers that would fill the soul with melancholic and peaceful thoughts; the court theatre in which the aristocracy could escape the highly ritualized and ceremonial nature of life—invoke the desire to be carried away by something greater than ourselves. They suggest that the pursuit of sensual delight is trivial compared to other undertakings, but pleasure is also important, one of the things that gives life its shape and meaning. At every turn, we are children again, enthralled by the crystalline sublimity of glittery snowflakes as well as the innocence of towering birthday cakes and frilly pink boudoirs. Yet within these ungraspable settings are separate worlds as inconsistent as dream sequences. A goose wanders through an empty theatre. Another one perches on top of an enormous cake, surrounded by burning candles. Huos are alternately acidic, juiced-up, hushed, velvety, precious like a jewel

box. All the imagery is vibrantly drawn with a light touch. Chandler allows potential storylines to slink almost casually through the swirls of high-fashion color and ridiculous designs of the French court. "The theatrical fantasy settings, the carriage that carried her entourage to picnics, the Alpine cottage, all provided lush worlds within a world," Chandler says. "Just as Marie Antoinette isolated herself at Versailles, people today are shutting themselves into interior worlds. They've found a comfortable isolation while sitting at the local Starbucks or texting conversations on their BlackBerrys. But we still desire wonderful things; we desire luxuries and embellishments that are no longer attainable. What was once a reality has become a fairy tale." Whereas Chandler captures the gilded cage experience in all its romantic decadence, she suggests that we're rapidly in danger of becoming inured to a world without beauty and pleasure. Yet beneath the campy, cream puff designs and frivolous excesses is an examination touched with melancholy, of what it means to live in a world coming apart at the seams. In *Princess Sophia's Tears I* and *II*, furies of snowflakes collide, split apart and jostle together. Dancing between abstraction and