

DOROTHY CHAN

So Chinese Girl

Anyone who makes tasty food has to be a good person,
because think of all the love that goes into cooking:
salt and pepper, sprinkle a little extra cheese, and pop open a bottle

of Syrah, or if we're eating at my parents' in Las Vegas,
we're drinking Tsingtao beer, my father's favorite, and he adds more
bamboo shoots and straw mushrooms and baby corn,

and fun fact: When I was a baby, I'd eat only corn and carrot-flavored
mush, and now, my dad adds more to the Buddha's Delight,
a vegetarian dish from China, and I think about my aunt

in Hong Kong, who, once a year, buys fish from restaurants,
only to release them back into the sea—eat tofu,
save a life—but back to the dinner scene in Vegas,

my mom is making her Cantonese lobster, extra garlic and ginger,
and I grew up licking lobster shells for their sauce,
I grew up waking up during summer vacations

to my mother wearing a headband, warding off the grease
from cooking crabs and shrimps, heads intact, and there's something,
just *something*
about my parents' cooking that makes me feel

a little more like a Chinese girl, because I don't live in Hong Kong,
and unlike my cousins, my daily stop isn't Bowring Street Station,
where I could pick up fresh mango cake before it's sold out,

or what about chocolate mousse cake in the shape of a bunny
or mini-dome cakes shaped like cows and pigs
or cakes shaped like watermelons and shikwasa and citrus mikans,

and who wouldn't want custard egg tarts or hot dogs
 wrapped in sweet bread or sesame balls, washing it all down
with cream soda, and I feel like that little Chinese girl

 in Kowloon again, getting picked up by my grandpa
after preschool, ready to go junk shopping, and I'd come home
 with shrimp crackers and a toy turtle aquarium and a snowman

painting and a dozen roses, and no, I don't even like flowers anymore,
 but there's something, just *something* about thrifting
with my grandpa now at age twenty-eight that makes me feel

 so Chinese Girl, the way he bargains in the stalls,
asking for the best, "How much for that Murakami-era Louis Vuitton belt?"
 or "What about this vintage Armani?"

and it's like that look he gives me at dim sum, after the sampler
 of shumai and har gow and chicken feet and char siu bao comes,
and he tells me to eat everything, watches me chow down on

 Chinese ravioli, and that face of his freezes in the moment:
"Eat more, eat more, eat more. Are you happy?"
 And oh, Grandpa, I'm so happy I could eat forever.