

KYO LEE

Parallel

dear mother, your name is flowering inside
mine. let's sit & fold mandu seven years ago
& laugh & forget about my becoming a god of trivial loves.

i met the girl at the back of the campus
& we devoured each other hungry
not for each other but for something incapable of staying.

dear mother, you threaded your flour-covered fingers in mine
& said you loved me the way god loves all his children:
unconditionally & with a few conditions.

i cut myself on her teeth trying to fit myself inside the cavities
between her tongue and her words: a wet sort of heaven
her: an imperfect sort of god.

dear mother, you taught me how to fold myself for the dead
how to bless the wilding graves with soju
how to sculpt mandu, 8 pinches each, into crescent moons

that flickered the night she and i stole a bottle of soju
& got drunk on the blessings meant for the dead & i
wondered if the cuts on her ribs were gods themselves.

dear mother, when i asked if god allowed us to pray
to our ancestors you said he would understand.
god is not a prick after all:

will god understand
that my lips were almost-prayer before being swallowed
by hers? will i go to almost-hell?

dear mother, when i asked why i am crying
in all of my childhood photos you said that film was expensive.
you could only capture the necessary moments.

she stuck her teeth in my neck & said she liked me best crying.
not broken but in the process of breaking. how quickly i
unrolled my ends & smiled for the camera.

dear mother, you said that i resemble your mother
how we both stained our nails with bongsungas & believed in love
& made mandu that were so ugly.

she told me that i resemble you, mom.
how we both peel our nails & say the word "grief" with a giggle
& make mandu with 8 pinches each.

fish market wedding

sometimes i think about marrying a woman just to piss off my mother. / i'll wear a red leather dress & let vengeance trail my back like a veil / down the aisle of the fish market. / when the oyster merchant in slimy yellow boots / permits our kiss / i'll watch myself in the woman's beautiful facelessness before / stabbing my tongue through her neck / piercing pearls through her spine. / the wedding will take place in the crisp & wistful moments / between yesterday & tomorrow / when the world becomes soft / fishermen drowning their boats & merchants bathing in red tubs. / the aisles will hang nooses of golden squid lights / & i will step over dead fish with gaping mouths & cavernous eyes / & i will have met it somewhere before / on my plate / when we used to eat mackerels / & my mother picked out the eyeballs / laid them on my tongue / & watched me swallow the meat / as she sucked on the skeleton. / we feasted / on live octopus legs / tentacles sticking to our gums / kissing their slimy skin before grinding them with our teeth. / the greatest kind of love, she said, was sacrifice. / at my fish market wedding / i will wade into the sea & catch an octopus & rip its legs & drop each squirming piece of life into my mother's empty mouth.