

SAMPLE POEMS FROM

Familial

Hungers By

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SURFACE TENSION

Somewhere between the hard and
soft palate flashes an electric mouth

memory—jolt of savoury steam,
silken custard, ground pork,
cured

egg yolks laden with salt and age—
emerging into the present.

Cooked

in the quietest way: slow steam bath,
whisper of soy, white pepper,
sesame

dissolved in an egg-water
cocktail that sets into a shaky
metaphor

for my own watered-down
identity. What I despised then and
now

need, this residue of
hunger. I can't find salted
duck eggs

here—I'm left to preserve my
own grocery store carton

packed in sea salt, nowhere
near the real thing. The
magic

of eggs transformed twice in the
same dish, buried and diluted.

BEFORE YOU ASK

After Gillian Sze's "He Asks, Where Are You From?"

Every answer sounds like a lie. I'm from Saturday morning congee and after school pizza pockets. I'm from gently warmed milk before bed. From math contests and second-hand clothing. From bone broth simmered long before it hit the influencer market. Baked pork chop rice and milk tea after church. That weekly hour of Chinese school where I read *The Baby-Sitters Club* under my desk. *The Sound of Music* reruns every Christmas break. Lashings from my father when I brought home a B+. Long walks to school with my mother, who was afraid to let me cross the street alone, despite—or because of—crossing an ocean on her own.

I am from a majority of minorities, maybe you know it as *Hongcouver*? From adult-onset lactose-intolerance and the milk I no longer drink. Years of disused Cantonese—unable to read the Chinese menu at Wong's, phone calls left hanging. Stilted bus shelter conversations with locals who keep trying to locate me. That white therapist who asked if I had a *tiger mom*, despite the hour I spent explaining our family dynamics. I'm from seven provinces away and unlikely to fahn oohk ghei. A country I've never lived, reduced to a single aisle at the grocery store.

THE VENN DIAGRAM OF CHINESE CHRISTIANITY

doesn't overlap. We called ourselves
Christians but my mother reminded me we
were Chinese
first. I apologized to God for the way my parents
feng shui-ed the house, pasting prosperity
posters
upside down and mirrors high enough over the
doors that my friends asked why. I couldn't explain

the superstitions. I didn't wear the jade talisman
my mother bought to protect me from my bad
luck
year, opting instead for a little gold cross. It's
easy to choose one over the other when you
don't see
we're all looking to transform something
from nothing: water into wine,

a janitor's salary into enough. Rice and
tofu not so different from loaves and
fishes.
The ancestral altar a sort of confession booth, a
soft place for prayer to land. The shared fixation

with sons, sacrifice, love and its unconditional
parameters. Jesus the quintessential firstborn who
could have been Chinese in another life. The familiar
imperative to be untouched

by sin or human hands, sex as a necessary evil
only for procreation. The compulsion with
eating
bitterness first, with immortality that allows the dead to
see their suffering was worth something, anything at all.

THE SIXTH LOVE LANGUAGE IS CUT FRUIT

It wasn't in the handbook so I didn't
know the love of an immigrant parent

could be found in a bowl of cut fruit:
mango diamonds, cored pineapple,
peeled
apple slices. We didn't talk about how the
skins unfurl by the blade of a paring knife

clenched between calloused fingers,
unravelling counter-clockwise. I never had a
chance
to throw the peels over my shoulder to reveal the
initials of my future soulmate, just as I didn't want

cut fruit, cast off cubed cantaloupe, orange
segments and the ghosts of their discarded peels.