

By Cindy Xie

My Parents Visit Ralphs on Their First Halloween in America

When in the fall of '97, they spot the pumpkin mountain

That sprouted in the grocery store overnight.

The shine in their eyes, gourds rolling

down the conveyor for a few bucks a pop,

Tasting of giddiness: a child's first birthday,

Their first anniversary in Los Angeles.

I wonder when my parents realized those weren't for eating:

If it was the boiling water, where orange flesh

Refused to melt molasses-like how they did in Beijing,

Or perhaps my mother's bike ride to work,

Spying the jack-o-lantern on her neighbor's doorstep.

Or was it the children bursting out in their costumes at night

As their foreign tongues cartwheeled down Sunset?

Was it their giggling hands, cheap buckets held out

For chocolate my parents didn't know how to give?

My mother clicks her tongue at motorcycles, cursing *those people*

as they weave through the afternoon freeway jam.

We ignore the blood rush as they skim our window

but is that buried jealousy I see

in my mother's glaring eyes?

Does she taste steaming pumpkin in the exhaust,
or hear the ghosts of her wedding portrait, laughing in the engine roar?

True: a motorcycle is the opposite of our home,
whose foundations sag with refrigerated sighs.

A motorcycle is the opposite of our shelves
who fight the gravity of cracking plaster.

A motorcycle is the opposite of my father,
quantum-physicist-trained eyes eaten dry
by the glare of his laptop screen.

Can growing up strip away childhood imprints?

Because Mother: I press hands down the alleyway of your desires,
Walls tinged with winter's 4 P.M. nightfall,
Walls that narrow to white plains on the sky
Where all behind me is a funnel of lost time.

True: I dream of the day

When we stack towers of your fine china
And speed a motorcycle down Interstate 5,

You: in the driver's seat.

Your best pots: warbling in the wind.

They fall, slip, break, crunch under car wheels.

The bone trail winks at me like first snow.