

### **One**

Wide and beady innocent eyes studying the room.  
Wooden dragons, golden Buddhist statues, and red paper lanterns,  
Curious nostrils inhaling the familiar aroma,  
A tang of fish sauce clouds the air, incense smoke swirls in spirals.

### **Three**

Rapid single syllable words bouncing back and forth between mouths,  
A child adapts, her soft dialect flows in a southern vietnamese tongue.  
Small hands and fingers reach out to her mother,  
Cold and smooth silk imported from Hanoi gripped in her palm.

### **Five**

A foreign setting with others like her, youthful and idealistic minds,  
Except she was an imposter; almost but not absolutely understanding them.  
Cheers for flat dough with tomato and cheese, each bite sent her shivers of repugnance,  
Laughter and words amongst each other, in a speech impossible to comprehend.  
Tearful eyes and reddened cheeks, a noisy stomach from starving each noon,  
She couldn't digest the culture, couldn't belong, couldn't understand, couldn't, couldn't.  
She was off her mainland.

### **Seven**

Two masked kids at the doorstep, eagerly clutching spacious pillow cases,  
"Trick or treat!", her parents' shoulders raised, bewilderment on their faces,  
She gestures to the hard melon candies, they pour a whole year's worth.  
The thirteenth, she's crafting paper cards with bags of chocolate from the pantry,  
A strong scolding, her parents give for stealing and wasting,  
They don't understand what she's come accustomed to.

### **Nine**

Fried egg rolls, piping hot beef noodle soup, and yellow shrimp pancakes,  
Mother was up at sunrise, making delicacies for her birthday.  
Unknowing stares and reluctant forks, small forcibly mustered gulps.  
A traditional green honeycomb cake decorated with colorful fruit,  
Its unusual jelly texture swishing around in mouths, never swallowing,  
She went for seconds, thirds, and fourths while her friends watched her.

### **Eleven**

Taunts and sneers about obscure Asian cuisine echoing,  
Pulled back skin under index fingers imitating a slant at the corners of their eyes,  
Her language is laughable in its trashy pronunciation and loud speaking,  
The stench of her soy sauce and sour soup...is that dog she's eating?  
They see an exotic creature in a zoo,  
Something to observe, to point at, to laugh at, to mock.

### **Thirteen**

Opaque liquid black gel runs across her lash line in a triangular motion,  
To create a thick crease on top of her prominent monolids.  
Her body lathered in soap and perfume of vanilla spice,  
To mask the sour odor of her mother's classic vietnamese dipping sauce.  
Dense layers of concealer in the shade 'classic ivory',  
To hide the yellow undertones of her warm skin.  
Desiring to remold her exterior, to be rid of their jeers.

### **Fifteen**

Fried egg rolls, piping hot beef noodle soup, and yellow shrimp pancakes,  
Favorite dishes, her mother urges her to savor.  
She's grimacing, plugging her nose and shaking her head,  
Recalling dinner at Jen's: saucy lasagna, seasoned asparagus, and buttered rolls.  
She's begging for a meal that doesn't leave a trace of sour odor,  
Plate untouched, refusing to eat, she's walking to Jen's.

### **Seventeen**

Henry with his curly blonde hair, deep blue eyes, and pointy nose,  
Henry, who was smart, charismatic, noble, and kind.  
Henry, whom she greatly wishes was her's,  
He glances and smiles past her at Jen.  
Nose exercises to lengthen and pointen,  
Double lid tape to indent and fix,  
Shiny dyed blonde hair to fade away its matte black,  
He glances and smiles past Jen at her.

### **Nineteen**

In the mail, mother sends a letter and gift,  
A long red silk dress from Hanoi and a book of her homemade recipes.  
She's burying the paper bag at the end of her closet,  
Behind the tweed skirts, blue jeans, and flannel shirts.  
She's setting the book on the dusty corner shelf,  
Under the Thanksgiving dinners 101 binder.

### **Twenty-One**

Her mother falls victim to sickness, she's digging for any remembrance,  
Discovering the recipe book: fried egg rolls, piping hot beef noodle soup, and yellow shrimp  
pancakes.  
She finds the red silk dress deep in her drawers,  
Clasping the buttons, clutching the recipes,  
She's glances in the mirror and walks to the kitchen.