

Pops met my ma in '86
at the casino where she served drinks sub-rosa,
when her English was broken and she still
smoked cigarettes and skipped Sunday service.
When he was in dental school and kept his hair straight,
read science-fiction and painted to jazz in the evenings.

For weeks they didn't know aunt Cathy had set them up.
Yet ma had fallen for his freckles, his smile lines, his steady hands,
the way he said his sentences all at once.
And he found exactly whom he wanted to come home to,
an Asian woman who knew how to talk and to cook,
who had no jewelry and perfect pearl teeth.

Six months later, they drove cross-country to elope in Frisco.
Switched off every six hours and slept in the backseat.
Ma sang along in the shotgun to the whistle of a cracked window
and rock and roll on the radio.
They hadn't met each other's families, they
didn't need to. They didn't *have* other people.

In the polaroids, they are warm and gorgeous.

I came home this spring
to the dog laying at his feet in the sunlight,
to him eating her roast chicken that falls off the bone.
Pops got a perm last Tuesday and didn't bother
to dye away the gunmetal streaks—
I've never seen it straight, not even in photos.
Ma wears the first diamond earrings he got her,
and now a gold cross, her English is fuller now
but you can still hear her roots in her r's.

They don't sleep in the same room.
She's in bed by ten for church at six
and he never sleeps before two.
He goes to an American church on Sundays
so he can pick up dim-sum coming home,
so we can have supper with sides of small talk and not sorries.

There's an unfinished canvas next to the basement door
of ma holding an umbrella at the Cherry Blossom Festival.
When he falls asleep on the couch watching Castle I wonder
if he still dreams about fixing other people's smiles.