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Hong Kong, Born and Raised

Michelle Nemetchek

Frying green onions and garlic in a pan
my knife slices through pork and hits wood.
I dust with Chinese five spice; sizzling and sweet over flames,
it can turn away many unseasoned tongues.

When young, I would run below kettles and pans,
metal clapping against metal,
and wafts of seared pork in my grandfather's restaurant.
He would slip me a twenty, and my mother
would argue for him to keep the cash.

“He doesn't brush his teeth,” she said.
“And never taught me to brush my own, either.”
When we moved the rest of her college
books out, it was Chinese New Year. I asked him
to translate the woven red-string decorations.
“That good luck sign,” he said. “Good luck an' money.”
He sent us home with tin boxes of mooncakes—sweet bread
and a golden egg yolk moon, a glazed shell around the edge.

When I first smoked, it only smelled like Grandfather:
cheap beer, sweet pork, and fried rice every December.