

MARY CARROLL-HACKETT

The food she makes him

she still cuts in tiny bites, Ahi tuna almond soaked, sesame slick and shiny, nori wrap blooming from the pads of her fingers, until each seam gleams from her mother's touch. She pines sticky rice, each grain twice-rinsed, to free the starch, to feed this son, strengthen the march of those infant legs she recalls, the thump and pull as he swam up from the hollow sway beneath her ribs. Her hand cupped on her belly, back then she imagined him a sharp-tailed shrimp, frothy pink curl of flesh, anemone in a sweetened sea. He belongs to me, she had whispered, hollowing melon with the bowl of her spoon. Giving she knows. It means to live. So even now, dumplings grow fat and rich in broth, aji, sweet pickles, salted cod, daikon, miso ball for soup. He will always want miso, when he comes. She'll boil water later, fry enoki, eggplant, as good as that wife might wish she could make, that wife who keeps him, so far away, for years now, in a city she's never seen, where she knows, just knows, the Ahi is never fresh, the nori dying from lack of salt and water.