

Dinner Out

by Christopher Howell

We went to either the Canton Grill
or the Chinese Village, both of them
on Eighty-second among the car lots
and discount stores and small nests
5 of people waiting hopelessly
for the bus. I preferred the Canton
for its black and bright red sign
with the dragon leaping out of it
and sneezing little pillows of smoke.
10 And inside, the beautiful green
half-shell booths, glittery brass encrusted
lamps swinging above them.

What would I have?
Sweet and sour?
15 Chow mein with little wagon wheel-shaped
slices of okra and those crinkly noodles
my father called deep fried worms?
Fried rice?

Among such succulence, what did it matter?
20 We could eat 'til we were glad and full, the whole
family sighing with the pleasure of it.
And then the tea!
All of this for about six bucks, total,
my father, for that once-in-a-while, feeling
25 flush in the glow of our happy faces
and asking me, "How you doing, son?"

Fine, Dad. Great, really, in the light of that place, almost tasting
the salt and bean paste and molasses, nearly
hearing the sound of the car door
30 opening before we climbed in together
and drove and drove,
though we hadn't far to go.

