Of Soy

Carina Yun

I. Bean Curd (dòufū)

My little sister calls me dòufū. She loves with only her teeth—an impassable soul. And me? I use the lips. The preserved delicacy, unflavored, malleable thing—always in need of salt.

II. Fermented Bean Curd (fǔrǔ)

I am that which absorbs soaked with salt and Shaoxing wine, warped and molded ready to come apart under wooden chopsticks. I could never stay intact between a lover’s teeth.

III. Soy Milk (dòunǎi)

A cow’s surrogate or tapioca custard blushing on migrant lips.

IV. Soybean (dàdòu)

My mother soaks dàdòu in a ceramic bowl for two whole nights. She waits for the skin to shrivel before peeling back each pout.

She says when I turn sixty-five, my face will wither away like hers—soaked dàdòu. She wipes her hands and touches still the silk in my face.
She says by my thirty-first year
I must marry.
I wait for my mother’s absence
before plunging my face
into the ceramic bowl.