

Korean Mom in Philadelphia Suburb, 1977

My mother bought
A birthday cake
When I turned seven
I never thought
That she would make
Such a fuss, even

I knew she'd splurged
Money was tight
And this cake swanned in
As if it had surged
From a fairy's sleight
With a magic wand

Tall, three layers,
Encrusted in walnuts
Chopped fine as gems,
Putting on airs
With icing roses studded
With silver ball bearings

That posed as dew
And were called dragées,
It was perfect.
As if my mother knew
That her daughter's birthday
Could shine by edict. Hers.

To a fairytale obsessed
Bookworm like me
My brilliant mother
Was the fairy, the quest,
The firmament, the queen,
The tower, the steps, the salt and the sugar