I stand in the kitchen doorway and watch my American mother prepare the feast. She deep-fries the spring rolls, boils water for the longevity noodles, searches through her spices for sweet almond sauce so she can make Eight Precious Pudding.

"Aren't you going to get dressed?" she asks without looking over.

"I am dressed," I say.

"You know what I mean," she says. "Aren't you going to put on your *qipao*?"

She's referring to my one traditional Chinese dress. It's red silk, with a high collar, long sleeves, a too-loose chest and a too-tight waist. Ankle length with slits up both sides.

"I don't think so," I tell her.

She stops cooking. "It's the first day of Chinese New Year," she tells me. "The Year of the Ox."

In less than an hour five more adoptive mothers and two adoptive dads will barge through our front door. They'll drag along nine adopted kids, all Chinese, all adopted, all girls, all of whom would have rather stayed home. As the oldest, I'll be expected to maintain order. The adults, in the kitchen, will eat *jiaozi* and *cai tou* as they listen to *Deng Li Jun's Happy New Year Album*. Meanwhile we, aged 3 to 15, will crowd into the TV room, crunch down Lay's Potato Chips, and watch an *iCarly* marathon on Nickelodeon.

My adoptive dad, wise to this, is sixty miles away sitting in the bleachers in the freezing January weather watching his old college play football.

"Maybe you could stuff the red money envelopes," she suggests.

"Do I have to?" I ask.

"C'mon, honey," my mom prods. "A little pride in your culture."

"*This* is my culture," I tell her. "This house, this town, this sweatshirt, these jeans..."

"You know what I mean."

"It all just seems so phony," I say.

This stops her. She grabs a dish towel from the handle of the refrigerator, dries her hands, approaches, stops right in front of me.

"If we were—say—the last two native-Americans on earth, wouldn't you want to let the world know that?"

I'm not sure where she's coming from here, but I say, "I suppose."

"Okay, then," she says. "You're Chinese and I'm Jewish and we both have cultures we should celebrate."

"I don't think of you as Jewish," I say. "You eat bacon."

"What does the suffix –*ish* mean?" she asks.

I shrug. "Doesn't it mean *kind of*?"

"Exactly," she smiles. "As in 'I feel rather young-ish.'"

I smile back. "I'll be there around seven-ish."

"I'm neither orthodox nor reformed, but I am Jew-ish."

She laughs at this and, despite myself, I do too. The woman can put a smile on the face of a clock, as my dad would tell you.

Forty-five minutes later I change into a black skirt and a white sweater. Not Chinese, but respectful. I run into my mom coming from her bedroom wearing her own maroon *qipao*. Her graying hair is in pigtails, and she wears lime green Chinese mesh slippers.

"How do I look?" she asks.

I can't resist. "Chinese-ish," I tell her.

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