

*Review: Triple Crown Restaurant*

I Dreamed of Dim Sum

by Faith Hart

How did we end up here, Mr. Baby Octopus? Your pale, squishy body rests between my two wooden chopsticks as I heave a crestfallen sigh. I want to look you in the eye and tell you I wish we were meeting under better circumstances (a saying I normally reserve for funerals), but I'm not actually sure you have any eyes. You lurch towards my red lipstick-clad mouth and for a second I'm convinced I hear you laugh at me. I don't blame you. I feel pathetic. Eleven weeks into quarantine, I donned my finest dress and bought a bottle of Pinot Grigio that cost more than three dollars just to share with you. I dreamed of you, dim sum.

Since you're a baby octopus, you may not remember the good old days when octopi like you and girls like me used to meet in the hazy glow of real live restaurants, electrified by the buzz of nearby conversation, the warmth of bodies, and music gently thumping overhead. We'd meet over a two-top littered with an endless possibility small plates and take each other in, my face flushed by candlelight. Mr. Baby Octopus, how do I begin to describe the feeling? Your generation just doesn't understand it! How we used to laugh and drink and dance... oh, Mr. Baby Octopus. Don't cry, it's not your fault.

How do I say this? It's just that looking into your shapeless blob face, devoid of any seasoning or spice for life, reminds me of all that I'm missing. Here I sit, a dejected old spinster— all dressed up with nowhere to go. I'll tell you the story of how we met. You, Mr. Baby Octopus, are just one bite of a seemingly-promising variety ordered from Triple Crown Restaurant as I reached beyond the Yelp app into the lawless void looking to feel *something*, anything at all. Perhaps it's my fault for being disappointed. Perhaps I should have known that neither you, the turnip cake, or the braised short ribs majored in psychology and consulted a therapist instead.

Mr. Baby Octopus, I'm sorry for dumping all of this on you but here's the truth: I just wanted to feel alive. I wanted to feel that luminous swirl of flavor and alcohol and ambiance churning in my body, let it rush over me and drown out quarantine's monotony. Eating used to be so... sexy? Was I wrong to assume Triple Crown's offering of "Late Night Dim Sum" held some secret, sexy magic differentiated from the old run-of-the-mill lunch dim sum, Mr. Baby Octopus?

This fateful night, takeout boxes dripping with condensation bubbled up from the twenty-minute ride from Chinatown, is so not sexy. In fact, if I had to use one word to describe my meal from Triple Crown Restaurant, it would be gelatinous— a world that intrinsically reminds me of nursing homes, boogers, and slugs. I'm not trying to insult you, but we really need to talk.

I ordered you stir-fried in "special sauce" and you arrived limp and decidedly un-special. Your celery accompaniment was more flavorful and that stuff is essentially water. Did you talk to the braised beef

short ribs in the car ride over and conspire together to be fatty and sparse in substance? I suckled on hard discs of bone searching for meaning and found none, despite an earnest show of effort at achieving texture from your scallion counterparts. I'm sorry, scallions. While we're at it... turnip cake, what did I ever do to you? You arrived cold and landed on the tongue like a casket being lowered into the ground— lifeless, heavy, and utterly still. Chicken feet, why did I gamble on you? I have to admit that I admire your unapologetic nature, the way you dripped with callous, sticky sauce and felt no shame at your oil-sogged structurelessness. Thai curried rice, I don't even want to talk to you. I wouldn't even know who I was addressing, as the shrimp and scallion blurred into commensurate globs of rubber. You employ canned pineapple as if only to tell me I don't deserve to feel joy, resigning me to pale clots of stringy insolence. Custard bun, you're a liar and a fraud. Why are you on the dessert menu if biting into you only delivers a grainy, unmixed slime that tastes closer to a poorly boiled egg than sweet custard? I spit you into my napkin because I'm angry and done with our toxic loop of dishonesty and disappointment.

What's that? Okay. True. You're right to say that not all our times were bad, Triple Crown Restaurant dim sum. Spicy fried eggplant, you were the best I ever had. Your flavors— salt, chili, ginger, earthiness— danced on my palette in a rhythm that reminded me of a life I once knew. Your brilliance broke through the desperation and sadness that had welled up in me while I was eating. Your generosity of zest persuaded me that perhaps I had been too harsh on my other dishes. Perhaps what I feel is actually closer to sadness than anger, as I mourn what that soggy turnip cake could have been if it were delivered to my table piping hot and served with a smile.

I was looking for a meal that would stand in the place of memory and console me that the magic of dining is not lost on us, but that was too much to ask for. You little sweaty takeout containers full of impersonal mush, like me, are just doing the best you can at navigating a painful, unforeseen moment. I don't blame you for the way you droop and congeal, trying to replicate what once was and finding it an impossible task. I too am struggling to believe I can keep standing tall when the weight of the world is pressing so insidiously.

It's time that I stop projecting my fantasies on food that is inevitably soured by lack of inspiration, long car rides, and an unyielding air of depression. Of course dining isn't the same. Nothing is the same. My stale fortune cookie, sputtering a contrived affirmation about how bright my future is, reminds me of just how uncertain the days to come are. For now, I'm holding onto hope that we meet again soon, Triple Crown Restaurant dim sum. I'm dreaming of us under the warm glow of lanterns and among the bustle of Chinatown, feeling like ourselves again.