

*You will make me proud, yes?”*



You are thirteen, and you are testing the waters of rebellion, experimenting with just how far you can push your parents without major consequences. It starts with your best friend. Like most of your classmates, you live in government subsidized housing. He is your neighbor. His father immigrated from Sicily twenty years ago and manages an Italian restaurant in town that everybody knows is a front for the mob. On the weekends, the two of you work as busboys there, then spend all your money on Reese's Pieces and firecrackers you set off in gas station parking lots.

Your best friend's parents love you. They think you are polite and your grades are nearly perfect. You are an excellent busboy; there is talk of promoting you to host. "If you're interested in business," your best friend's father says, winking at you, "there's always a place for you here."

Your best friend has three sisters and a brother. Somebody is always using the single bathroom at his house, and somebody else is always pounding the door and yelling to get in. Your best friend flunks every test and his mother yells at him, but he doesn't care at all. He drinks milk directly out of the carton and skateboards in the house. "I've given up on that boy," his mother sighs to you. "Do you want to move in? You can share his bed. Maybe he'll even pass history." She makes you stay for dinner and heaps spaghetti onto your plate.

At home, you ask your mother to make spaghetti. She frowns. "Spaghetti? *What is that?*" The next day, you see her reading from a recipe she photocopied at the library. For dinner, she serves bowls of spaghetti bolognese that you all eat with chopsticks. You and your sister are thrilled. Your father refuses to eat it, so your mother makes him a bowl of rice and cold banchan instead. "Why are we eating this?" he complains, gesturing to the spaghetti. "It is not even American."

Spaghetti becomes a twice-weekly rotation, then chicken nuggets and