I'm Tracy K Smith, and this is a slow down.

Perhaps there is always a little peril involved in family gatherings, who is on good terms with whom, and what will be said done or revealed that will need to be recovered from apologized for or painstakingly forgiven? And what is the word for that feeling? A combination of anger, hurt, frustration and determination that wells up when a family member habitually refuses to recognize you and your life as valid. When a sibling dismisses your passion, as a hobby, you'll soon outgrow, or when your parents seem to short circuit, like 1960s robots, every time the topic of your sexuality is broached. Today's poem is I invite my parents to a dinner party by Chen Chen, and it soothes some of the hurt and unrest that gathering with families can sometimes stir up with humor, and compassion. It orchestrates a kind of healing for the poem speaker and his parents. It says, This is who I am, and who I will always be. And this is the person I love. Who is right here, willing to love you too. Now, here's your part. Go ahead and say these words, which mean, I recognize you, I accept you. I love you. I invite my parents to a dinner party by Chen Chen. In the invitation, I tell them for the 17th time, the fourth in writing, that I am gay. In the invitation, I include a picture of my boyfriend and right. You've met him two times, but this time, you will ask him things other than Can you pass the whatever you will ask him about him. You will enjoy dinner. You will be enjoyable. Please RSVP. They RSVP. They come. They sit at the table and asked my boyfriend. The first of the conversation starters I slipped them upon arrival. I was worth going. I'm like the kid in home alone, orchestrating every movement of a proper family. As if a pair of scary yet deeply incompetent burglars is watching from the outside. My boyfriend responds in his chipper way. I pass my father a bowl of fish ball soup. so comforting isn't it? My mother smiles her best sitting
with her son's boyfriend who was a boy smile. I smile my Hooray for doing a little better smile.
everyone eats soup. Then my mother turns to me. whispers in Mandarin. Is he coming with you for
Thanksgiving? My good friend is and she wouldn't like this. I'm like the kid in home alone, pulling
on the string that makes my cardboard mother more motherly. Except she is not cardboard. She's
already exceedingly my mother waiting for my answer. While my father opens up a Boston Globe
when the invitation clearly stated, no security blankets. I'm like the kid in home alone. Except the
home is my apartment. And I'm much older and not alone. And not the one who needs to learn
has to remind me what's in that recipe again. My boyfriend says to my mother, as though they
have always easily talked as though no one has told him many times. What a nonlinear slapstick
meets slasher flick meets psychological pit is now co starring in remind me, he says to our family.

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