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

Is it just me? Or do the holidays bring with them a definitive uptick in appetite? We gather and we feast we give thanks. We give gifts we share in the bounty of friendship and family. And when friends and family get together, the pleasures of food and drink aren't far off. At Christmas time, my mom and sister would bake tray upon tray of holiday cookies, hearts, and pine trees, stockings and gingerbread boys. It was my job to mix the powdered sugar with milk, vanilla, and a pinch of salt to bring out the flavor. I'd separate the icing into many bowls. Each tinted its own holiday hue, and stand icing the cookies one at a time. I will tell you the truth. For every three cookies I decorated, I ate one. Holiday cookies carry me back to those innocent happy days. Food carries us back two phases from our lives to places we once knew. And to people with whom we've shared experiences. I craved spicy foods when I was pregnant with my sons. Now they like the heat of spice on their tongues. And I wonder if their minds or bodies recall that period of waiting of becoming when what food they experienced reached them through me. Do you think foods can carry us back not only to our own memories, but to something older than our individual selves? Something more collective. It's a stretch. I know. I ask because one night last year, my husband made dinner using my aunt's recipe for peanut soup. It's a West African dish made from pork, chicken, sweet potato, peanut butter, tomato paste and plenty of spice. When my son's took their first bites, without saying anything, each put down his spoon and adjusted himself from a seated position to something more like crouching or squatting in his chair. The rest of us watched while in silent unison. Each lifted his bowl from the table to sip the soup straight from the dish. The tiny hairs on my arms rose to attention. It felt like we were witnessing something like an ancestral memory rise to the surface. Today's poem is sunlight and chilies by Vandana Khanna. It reminds
me of the many ways food nourishes us. sunlight and Chili’s by Vandana Khanna we could be anywhere. Jakarta, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, slurping cheap noodles from a pot. somewhere that makes this summer sharp tongue on our backs on our thighs worth it. That sounds more sultry than South Philly’s sticky streets. Steaming concrete. more exotic than row houses with churning fans and warm floorboards. More like papaya and palm fronds, sandalwood and star fruit. Out of smudged glass. The city stammers a sputter of diesel, asphalt and Kung Pao. somewhere. shopkeepers haggle over mud flecked mushrooms, rice paddies flooded with monsoon, rickshaws and motor scooters, taunt cows from their holiness. somewhere. The bite of sunlight and chilies rises like a hot red slap against our lips.

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