

My Dear,

The earth has drawn a full circle around the sun since Your last birthday. We've been spinning in our own dance for two years already; now let us still, with the music dimming in the background – let the bow halt above the violin's strings. So quiet You can hear the strings of bubbles in golden champagne, the foam rising at the top of a glass, and the inviting clink of the plates, and the clear chime of cutlery ringing against the porcelain.

The table is beckoning; let us have a seat, and let us talk.

This site is a gift to both You and me. It is to wish You all the best things, while fulfilling my own – my dream of preparing a secret party for You. Of choosing the dishware, cleaning the silvers, tending to the stove. Of polishing the crystal glasses and wounding a serviette round a bottle's neck.

I'd design a menu intricately constructed around Your particular tastes. Something that joins our appetite for salt and flour and sour that developed under eastern palates and at eastern tables, with a twist of orange peel & anise of further east; curry and ginger, lemongrass and pink pepper sprinkled on top of the culinary penchant for homeland cuisine.

Fried on fire; crispy outside, heat-softened inside. Crumble, crunch and flakes; a soft roll of mint leaves and cool sage, balancing the fat with the fresh. Thinly sliced: heat of pepper, earth of lotus root. Flour dough so fine it is see-through, pearly when set in hot water. Strings of bubbles rising in the pot, golden sizzle in the pan.

Entrée of hors d'oeuvres, tiny, bite-sized, teasing. First course – clear and pure, a mild heat under Your heart, a courtesy of easing the edge before the main course. Plat principal, full and hot, layers to yield under the knife, a pool of sauce with golden eyes of melted butter. At last, the sweets: a thin crisp of burnt sugar that breaks around the spoon, the soft pillow of cream, the slow drip of salted caramel.

What You offer me in our friendship is much like the wonders that take place in the kitchen or at a table. A wide palette of tastes and textures dancing on one's tongue. Delightful, unexpected, wildly satisfying.

By the time You read this letter – I hope – You'd have had Your share of full glasses and plates, of cherry drinks, salty snacks and sweet treats. I wish that one day we'll be able to celebrate such a grand festival together, closer; close enough that I'll be the one pouring Your glass.

With all my words, all my dreams of cooking for You, my wish for You to be warm and safe and happy; and most of all satisfied, content with having Your particular cravings fulfilled to the last drop – with all of it, my heart aches to express how much I love You. You are a dear friend of mine, one that we get a chance to make once in a lifetime; there's no better date to celebrate You than today, the anniversary of You being brought into this world.

You are my treasure, a tiny little wonder that shines through my clasped hands. An artist in more ways than one: an artist at hand, at eye, and at heart. I commit to memory every piece that You draw and paint, I strive to see the world as You see it, discerning the fluid lines of movement, of weight, of shape. I'm trying to open my heart the way Yours is open, delight in the little things, notice the light bouncing off a surface, the chime of murmur in the background, the depth of a composition. Relish not only the artwork itself – but the element of the canvas, the golden frame that closes it safely within its bounds. I'm trying to match Your step, creating something rich in details that could please us both.

No one has ever given me such a lovely playground, such a safe, imaginative space as the one that unfurled between us. I could not be happier, I could not be more creatively satiated than I am at Your side. It's a testament to how extraordinary You are – kind but challenging, demanding but courteous. The mutual charity that we have, and the grace that You extend towards me, is one of a kind; Your energy is so rare in this world and in these times, Your entire person so precious, I feel immense inner wealth being lucky enough to

know You. The thought that I could have never gotten to meet You, to keep You, is unimaginable. You are already a part of me, the one thing that's perfectly pure, the one crystal shard cutting into my heart with an impossible shine. My pearl, my pride and joy.

You are a delightful person, soft and sweet and open; but with a sharp humor, brilliant intuition, honed sense of aestheticism. A good friend, an even better critic. All of these qualities mend together seamlessly within you, perfectly balanced, just like how our relationship joins artishood with friendship. You are the waffle chips in smooth cream between heavy layers of a torte, the satisfying break of sweet with sour, the tangy pit around which the honey is all the more pleasing. You both dazzle my eyes, and feel like home to my heart. The wonder never ceases when it comes to You; a quality that I've been searching in vain in so many places before.

Let's raise our glasses – a toast to You! I wish You all the happiness, all the fulfillment. I wish You the feeling of safety, of guidance, of being cared for at all times. I wish You finding Your very own path, one that will allow everything to align and create a harmonious whole. I wish You peace, inner sunshine. I wish You health and well-being, rich selfhood and gratifying hel-hood.

I wish to give away all my wishes for the upcoming new year, if that means that at least one of Yours will come true. Close Your eyes before blowing out the candles and think deeply, and say it out loud in Your thoughts.

Whatever you dream of will find You. I promise.

Happiest, happiest birthday, and biggest, biggest love! Tallest cake and drinks that overflow the glass' edge. I'll be here next year to celebrate another year together, and every next one too, as long as You allow me.

Yours,

Chai ❀❀❀