

VERSE



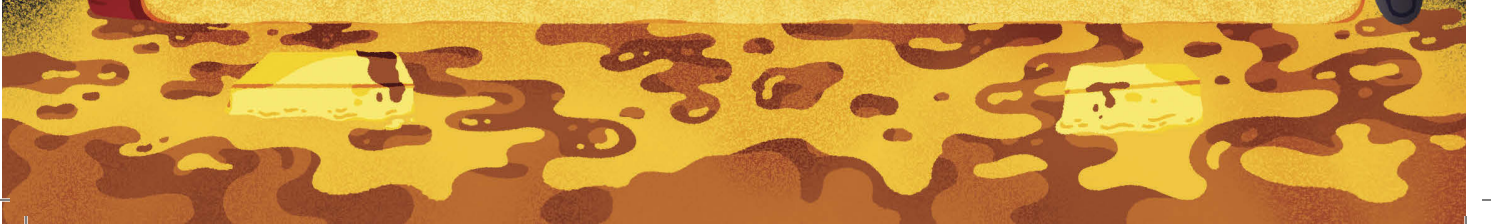
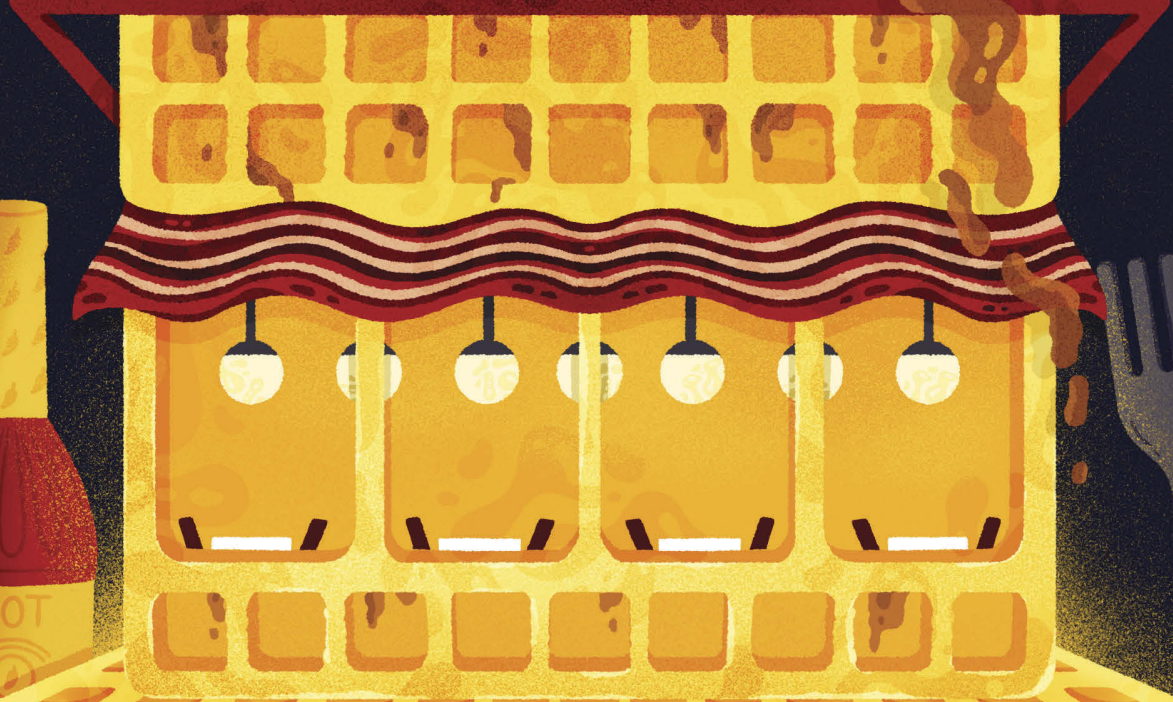
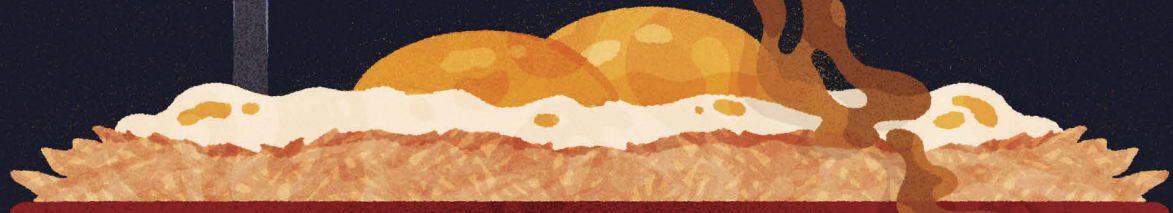
“You were born in Vietnam. I don’t see any of that in your food.”

—*Top Chef* judge Tom Colicchio to season 3 winner Hung Huynh

BY JOSHUA NGUYEN

I must have left what you want from me
back at home—along with my full metal *ao dai* cardigan
& my fuck-you rice hat—you speck of snow pea
squeezed between take-out chopsticks. You splinter
of a person, you papercut pushed into a vat
filled with two-year-old office hand sanitizer. You single
pop-rock in the back of the throat. Rinse your mouth
with my tongue until you forge the accent you crave
straight through the roof of your mouth
until it protrudes out above your right eye. Tell me
how to pronounce me again: does it sound
like phở, or foe, or does it sound like a hole? O, the lights,
the camera, the cilantro going black. Step back
from the knife before you get cut to commercial.

WAFLE
HOUSE



A Nocturne for Waffle House

BY JOSHUA NGUYEN

Chunked / hashbrowns / two hard / eggs / a waffle [sometimes] / less than \$5 /
this second / home / knows / my usual / order / I wonder / if they remember /
me / from the dropped / bacon / I ate / off / the floor / once / Tony said
something / that changed / my life / *Don't lie to yourself* / The Jackson 5 / plays / on
the jukebox / who / is really loving / you? / I watch / the old cook / spread / the
potatoes / across the hot-top / potatoes from / a large milk carton / a mountain /
of potato / ham over / the sausage / I eat / the waffle / just with butter / Tony
brings / his own hot sauce / syrup / & fork / they store it / in the back for him /
we eat / by the window / in Waffle House / in Houston / in Atlanta / in
Mississippi / the yellow orbs / reflect infinite / above us / in the glass / a friend
tells the other / advice / waffle / waffle / & apply to graduate school / *Joshua* /
follow/your damn/dream/be/a writer / the grits / are clogging / the grease trap / I
save / my hands / for my dining / some orders / don't change / some orders / get
taken / back / some orders / are 86 / Tony & the Waffle / House / are my usual

Joshua Nguyen is a Vietnamese American writer, a collegiate national poetry slam champion, and a native Houstonian. He earned his MFA in creative writing at the University of Mississippi.