

*AMERICAN LOVE STORY IN A CAFETERIA*

I smell you —

Over the vat of oil where  
fries are baptized

Over the onion ring  
halos of buffalo wing  
-ed angels

Over spilt milk-  
shake tears forming Heaven's  
curdled clouds

Over floods of batter where fish  
'n' chips drown —

before I see you.

You bare your bottom teeth  
in my direction — this means  
Hello.

I am reminded of a chimp  
about to rip someone's face off. I half  
expect you'll start flinging shit  
at the next woman in your way — so much for  
evolution.

But we agreed,  
Friends. The weight of more  
was too much for you to bear;  
Prozac has its own  
gravity.

Admit it:  
it's amazing what grew  
amidst the smog & sickly

haze of incense & SSRIs, some holy  
microbe that clung to the walls of  
the processing plant.

Your scent lingers after  
you carry off your tray &  
even after a year  
we have nothing  
to say.

*DINNER WITH TOLLUND MAN*

This cold muck kitchen has no room  
for both bog-mummy and roving poet; deep  
in miry vinegar, we fester with  
fingernail clippings and blunt ash,  
old smashed pipes and pineapple scalps,  
pickled eggs and Mike-n-Ikes,  
runt sardines and minced sphagnum,  
chunks of blanched hair and oily guitar picks,  
strategic popcorn kernels and spiced wine,  
hard-cover books on philosophy and prize-panties—

a fine stew this all could make! The cold salt  
burns raw your leathery skin, and bakes mine  
to hardtack. Salmagundi it shall be.

After dinner, I am relieved to be wet  
again but cannot quite breathe (I took  
my mask off to eat) in the fetid miasma  
of weedrot, the poisonous perfume of your palace.  
Are there no lemons in your pantry, no camphor?  
Your hair of straw would do well as incense; O  
if I had tinder of my own! I would set you ablaze  
before some creature's breath courts my neck  
and I am left to wonder what disease will soon  
corrupt my heart.

*PUSSY HUNT*

Beware! Big cat loose in Back Bay.  
Men have no  
fear, for she hunts only  
other pussies.

Listen! Her feral howl  
resounds in crystal tumblers,  
echoes through amber  
elixirs. She possesses charms  
to bewitch vulnerable spirits  
    she possesses  
    vulnerable spirits & then  
drinks them.

Curiosity never killed a bird so I followed  
the scratching of her manicured words &  
claws to a blushing crimson cave where  
my appetite awaken'd. Abrasive pink pilgrim,  
slopping around the penumbra of  
my flesh

    softened to dough  
    in her caress. My eyes grew stars  
    & glazed over. My thighs sweetened to  
    jelly. My resolve was melting fast!—

    until she stole my scarf. She said I stole her  
    heart but I don't take  
    what I don't want.

*PLAGUE DOCTOR*

In the grey dawn, I don my dark robes  
& curved beak and slip into the still world.

Wings waxed, I take flight, scudding  
breakers and shrouded dunes high up

in saline gloom; the crows find a comrade in me.  
I agree to pass along the secrets of humanity. Sure,

I'll tell you all about my fiendish delights, disciplined vanity pursuits,  
whether the carpet matches the cloak.

Like right now, I am awaiting my magnum opus,  
my King Lear, my Frankenstein (hold the threesome with Lord Byron)—

*No, that's not what we mean. Tell us, what happens after death?*  
My, how risqué your croaks are! Don't be so grave—

tell me, what is your family name? Corvid? And how many  
in your family, 19? *Haha, very funny*, they caw. We are developing

quite the rapport. Say, do I still look sexy in my grim negligee?  
*Positively necrotic. Now what are you really up here for?*

Foul fowl, you shatter my narcissism with each squawk! Nothing  
awes me anymore.

*CODFISH*

Love is  
    a net  
        is death

I am what no angler yet  
has managed to catch;

From the lines of angels  
    the hooks of devils  
        the trawlers of Gods  
I've slipped (—I am no codfish !)

So how did you, Minnesota Stranger,  
appear upon a foreign shore  
and best the saltiest dogs?  
You plunged into the cold & held on

to my whiskers &  
welcomed my claws.

For weeks & weeks  
I wriggled & writhed  
in the swirling dark. You didn't drown  
but waited til I wore myself out then lifted  
my little body into the salt air (which was not poison but  
soft, sweet)  
& kissed my iron scales  
which melted in your heat.