

Unhealthy Cravings of a 34 Year Old Waitress

The heat comes through the 3x2 window,
and I tend to stare at the staling
tortilla chips. The ones I've come to realize
aren't even on the menu. However,

you know,

most of the time his body
is in the way. The other day, I stood
in front of my pantry, picturing those chips,
the gumming crispness of them, and then
there he was, the fleshiness of his midsection,
the succinct way his eyes took in my hesitant

you-want-me

manner. After picturing him standing there
in front of me, I no longer craved that dullness
that crept into the tongue after too much grainy saltiness.
I became thin,

a bit more than what's normal.

Then one day, he was in my bed with me
and the hankering for salt came back, so I licked
up his neck, and I couldn't help, but yearn
to hear the crinkle of the bag
and so I tore open a ribbed condom, slid it
over him and if only that was enough.
What I really had to have
was the crunching noise deep in my ears,
and I kneeled above him, my calves hugging
the outside of his thighs, and the crunching happened
with the metal bed frame rubbing
against the cement block walls. I stopped,

I must admit it happened too quickly,

with that dullness
creeping into my belly, down around
where I linked with him
to where I could no longer tell if he was there, or not.

Garden of Rattler Daisies

the first one i hid neath a single cornstalk
after the air stopped comin from outta his nose
short and raspy
fore that his eyelashes gummed
together like dryin elmers glue back when heed get bruises
from crawlin outta his crib in the night
to sleep in the suitcase hind the door

but under that cornstalk he was the rattler daisy keeper
two summers later i planted the second one just stalks away from the first
his face had nothin special when he pulled out my stomach and fell to the floor

just a freckle in the dip neath his nose
and outta that freckle grew the prettiest rattler
weed ever seen i fed um the hooch filled sweat
that been squeezed from their dads overalls
and fist fulls of chewed up sunflower seeds

come straight outta that sonnabitchs rotten teeth
seven of um down there all totin the world on their backs
below the dirt and cow shit and rags tossed out the back window
when the sewer backed up and come runnin out all the cracks
in the house but there be no way to stop it til we fed it more babies

pull the stalk up by the roots and tie it bout
their backs tight nuff it leave dents in their sides
a harness that kept um from floatn way
i wrap their hands round the butts of my cigarettes
for keepsakes cause i knew theyd be scared
when the earth shake come october
when their rattlers be rip from the stalks above um

you hear um cryin when the wind
tears through the fields early december,
but only thing be left was dust hittin gainst that single hinged screen door

A Wife: To Her Grey-Haired & Close-Eyed Husband

I had skinned knees and a winter's breath
with paint above my left eyebrow
 and nipples that tapped at a blank t-shirt
 and the clicking of the record player began
the letter telling of the simple pleasure
of not being near you.
I sang when accents lived in one place
 and when hiccups stopped the heart
 and the man beside you said *God bless you*
instead of taking you to the ER in a Camry.
I ran with pinched nerves
 and a pail that held my tomato and mustard sandwich
every day of my life until sixty-seven
when I drove blind into the lake in Daphne,
Alabama for my eighteenth birthday
 and all I got was mud and a plastic bag filled
with soggy Cheerios.
There was a railroad
that ran straight through town that reminded me of your ribs
when you were too skinny to sleep, when your mouth
tossed your words sideways on the ground
 and they burrowed into the carpet like LEGOs
waiting to be stepped on.
You watched our daughter
gone down to the rock on the river where that dark girl read Wilde
to the birds
 and the scared raccoons, while you sat
with your Beefeaters
 and the dog
 and you raked the grass when there were no leaves,
just to keep yourself from hearing them laugh, but it was okay
when they kissed in front of you because there was no sound
when the pink of their tongues spelled hello.

Remind Me to Tell You of Bird Land

Where there are no birds. Where little boys chain
up silly-string to keep out the mustache-clad elders.
Where oak floors turn green from the rain inside
the houses. Where the muskrats yell, "won't you feed me!"
Where the coffee beans hang from the trees as juice-packs.
Where I passed out once from all the sugar, and my hair mixed
into the grass, where it started growing on the other side of the earth
as a baobab tree. Where I met your mother and all she did was laugh
and laugh, she did. Where the pink of her insides floated above her head,
where her laugh was not a trill, but a caw that beat my chest.
Where her laugh still hangs today, but she stood where the sidewalk was,
where I only walked with muddy feet, until the mud took up house
between my toes and there they were, a neighbor
to your mother's laugh, but instead of waving like good neighbors,
the mud and the laugh, well, they retreated
from one another, so all I had was mud and your mother's open mouth
with no sound. Where the pink no longer floated above her head,
but lay splattered on the ground. Where the teenage boys
rolled up their silly string. Where there were no grown ups anymore.
Where it stopped raining on the floors, and there, in Bird Land,
still no birds.

Gray Linings

The funeral's for the woman with the crooked finger.
The one who's last words were morse code on the tire above her.
The boy and the girl in a Chevette left the car listening
to the mother's patterings along the undercarriage.
Looking up, they expected a blue jay
to come shrieking past, for a cheaply-sought sign.
The sky stuttered and panicked
looking for a bird to throw down at them,
but there were none.

On Sundays I go to the nursery with ones in my pocket from the night before,
smelling of lotion and Hennessy on the rocks.
The men all wave with soil-caked palms, and the Japanese maples imitate them,
bent and repetitive.
When I take the tree home, I don't water it, let it die, not giving it a chance to mock again.

Capillaries tickle his cheeks between sex. He stands,
rubs his eyes, sweat falling on her inner thigh,
the dog rushing in, its tongue softer than the man's.
Her limbs, encased in a spring, lengthen, but don't break.
A blanket falls over her naked middle and she grabs at the edges,
the stitches between her eyebrows pulling together.

"Adonis can I have your number?" a woman says, her red mouth
turned softly down,
towards the head of the poet. The cardboard cutout of the man
smiled. Wire-rim glasses
never removed, left indents in his nose, where the cartilage shrank in
and hugged. She left him
standing on the corner wrapped in her tattered red bra and beige, cotton underwear,
bored by his homely appearance.

The man at the feminist magazine, Fake Silver Earrings,
gave himself a pseudonym for his cleaning column, "Shirley, It's Time to Clean!"
He writes about getting sweat stains out of frequently worn shirts,
and what to use to get blood off the backseat of taxis.
His real name is Sebastian, but no one calls him that at the office.
All the others are women.
They all like Shirley better.
They all have bets placed on who he tries to sleep with first.
They all say the janitor, Sylvia.
They can all, "just see Sylvia's stringy blonde hair getting wrapped up in Shirley's OxiClean
fingers."
They all say there's nothing wrong with losing a bet
when it comes with a man who knows how to get a cum stain
off the lapel of their favorite blazer.