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FARM TO TABLE

Eliza Mittelstead

Skidmore College, emittels@skidmore.edu

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FARM TO TABLE

Nell Mittelstead
April Bernard
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THE CROOKED MOUTH

It waits covered in darkness, 
trapped and gagged 
but still I can hear it, gnashing its teeth. 
*I can hardly breathe in here.* 

Every so often it spits blood, 
hot and dark. 
That’s when I feel it smile at me. 
*See that? See what I can do to you?*

With a handheld mirror I can see it, 
that crooked mouth that lurks at the apex of my legs, 
see it open its lips and sneer at me, 
*Do you understand yet?* 
*I own you.*
Under cloud-cover they meet.
Protected from the yellow burning eye of the sun
in the moment they unite, he pets her blonde
and shining hair and coos in her perfect
leaf-shaped ear. He sees no shame in their unity
under the steel armor of cloud, that which he has
pulled across the sky to protect her, to protect him.
She smells a sweet reek in their love-making.
She kicks him once as his hands are strange and buzzing,
and she does not recognize her own body, her own limbs,
but when he pulls at her soft velvet breasts she surrenders.
The pull and release of his glowing fingers on the pink
and swollen teat releases a flow of white froth
in a thin sharp hiss down to the milk-made mud.
She lies curled on the grass below the sky,
yellow hair glowing moon-like,
and he, the universe, lies besides her.
FRESH SALT

Exposing my teeth with his thumb
I taste the fresh salt of skin:
this is what a man tastes like.

In between my wettish lips,
my spit eases the odd finger
to slip decisively behind yellow-white teeth.

It taps on the back wall of the row of bones
and when my tongue raises to meet it,
the thumb presses hard, pinning it down.

And I could bite but I won’t
as the thumb holds firm on my tongue,
pushing the slick muscle

about my sepulchral mouth,
roaming expanse of the cavern
as if I were speaking

but there is only quiet wet.
A voice says hot in my ear, suck
and this is what a man sounds like.
THE FISH; THE CHEF

The Sea Bream still smells like salt, ocean, even as it lies here on the cold steel table. My knife scrapes back the scales chipping away opaque flakes, the sound like metal on metal. It takes two cuts across from the front fins to the center bone penetrating the stone of its skin to reveal the lean pink muscle that once pulled the fish through the shallow temperate waters, which now I slice through fully exposing the back of the head, and that is when it bleeds. I remove the head and spine and place them in one piece on a square tray of ice to save it for the stock. It leaks red. I pull the thin bones from the slab, as the pile of ice grows increasingly bloody by my side. For a moment my hand slips, cutting the tip of my finger. The head sits atop of the curled and flesh-less spine. The fish watches me from the ice bed, catching my eyes like a hook.
THE BEAR PELT

The pelt lies in the dead center of the living room awash in the throbbing heat of the fireplace.

With the talon of her stiletto, the hostess pins the hide to the hardwood floor. She gestures with her glass resting in her palm, in the nest of a damp cocktail napkin. *We just love being out here in the woods,* she says, *among nature.*

The bear pelt chooses not to hear her. Its claws lie still on the floor and, glass eyes fixed on the coals, hears only the sound of the gas-burning flames and the wood screaming on the hearth.
THE PAST IS AN OLD HOUSE

with other folks
living in your rooms.
The unlatched back door will one day
be latched.
You will rattle the handle
but you will not carry the key.
WET BREAD

The rain has made it wet.
The halls ooze wet
and the front porch sags wet
and there’s not a dry spot to be seen.

Momma gives me a piece a toast for breakfast
with a little margarine on top.
There’s scattered crumbs stuck
all over the kitchen table.
I pick at them with my fingernail.

I eat the toast slow
and Momma says, Quick.
Before the bread goes old.
and the mold creeps in on the ceiling.
THE TAPPED WELL RUN DRY

That woman’s breasts hang limp like the plastic bags from the corner store where we buy toilet paper.

I watch her from the fire escape as she tries to feed her newest baby but the child cannot latch and the milk from her breast will turn sour until gradually it thins to water.
HASH

I grated my knuckle making hash browns, the chunk falling among the shredded heap.

When I ate, I could not taste the difference.
THANK YOU COME AGAIN

A bag is caught by a tree.  
The branches gouge through  
the round plastic face which rasps  
Thank you come again.

On the street below a box has been split  
open in the gutter, noodles gathering  
like worms— greasy, wet, crawling.
THE SCARAB, ROLLING IN THE DIRT

I have formed the most perfect orb of dung, rolled it carefully into its shape, delighting and enticing the envy of others.

The sphere will inspire conflict, given its sheer size and brilliance. But in a fight, I surely will win,

as I have the horns of a beast, tossing aside the weaker lot whose shit cannot compare to mine.

The orb will feed me. I will crawl into it, maneuvering a home under the shining ochre surface.

Eventually it will be my breeding ground. The next generation will crawl out and will continue my lineage of perfectly sculpted spheres. And as I have been named sacred, as I have been worshiped god-like,

so too will my progeny. With this perfectly formed orb, constructed with the finest of materials, the bloodline will continue, will continue worshiped, revered as holy, as we have always been.
THE BOAR

He nuzzles at the base of the tree, turning the dirt with tusk and muzzle. The wealth below the tendon-like roots, now exposed by the long hairy snout which furrows in the mud. Eating the pulverized mouse and the single and rugged truffle, the boar does not notice the slightest difference between them, he is only happy to be eating. He does not know which is of value, which one is sold out of locked and armored cars to those at the top of the restaurant empire, and which one is merely owl pellets, spherical excrement. The Boar does not mind, regardless. He gnashes his crooked teeth, pushing the pulpy matter to the back of his throat with his pointed and warty tongue. When the boar hears the snap behind him he does not mind it, does not notice the hunter cock his gun, when the boar hears the pop he does not mind at all.
THE BOAR HEAD (MOUNTED)

The Boar Head is in the den.
It hangs on the wall
above the couch.
Mother told me the color of the paint
is *Elk Tongue*.
I believe the Boar Head does not mind
what the color of the paint is.

When this year is over
I will enter my twelfth year
and all I can think of is
the Boar Head.
Twelve is the Year of the Boar,
and the last year of the cycle.

Mother told me the Boar was a gift
from my Uncle
when I was born.
So when I will be twelve
the Boar will also be twelve.

The hair on the animal
is sharp and when I was younger
I ran my hand across the snout
and the barbs stuck deep
in the surface of my palm
and when my mother plucked them out
and my skin bubbled with beads of blood,
I saw that they were the same color as the walls.
ON THE FARM

Chickens in the Coop

The chickens screech when storms are brewing. When you hear their wild squawking, take cover. They know more than you can think to know.
Potatoes in the Patch

The potatoes have eyes.

When you remove
the spud
from the dirt
do not look
too closely.
They have many eyes,
you know.
Do not let them
look into your own.
Sally in the Well

Do not remove the iron bar that hold the lid in place. Those sounds you hear coming up from far below are surely just the wind. We keep it covered for protection.
Sweet Corn

If the silk is wet and red then leave it on the stalk.

An unripe ear should not be picked.
Yeast

This yeast is old
and hungry.

You must
feed it
so it may bubble

and belch.
WET PAPER FOUND, JOHN DOE
Cambrai 1917

No tanks found
on the route from
camp to camp. The split between
Porky and me grows.
Porky can't, Porky's tired.
What piss.

We pour our guns
out faster along the walk
veering north then
east. The route
is flat but we see
no tanks.

Since Porky never shaves
or eats peaches past midday,
he saves me his razor blades.
I keep my face clean.
Porky writes menus to distract himself
and we keep seeing
no tanks.

Porky washed
on the way
threw me
a porky.
OYSTERS ON A TRAY OF ICE

The slurp is audible
when she slips the slug-
like mass between her lips.
The man across the table
can hear her rolling it
around her mouth
with her tongue.
Almost chewing, almost not.

She feels the cold muscle
pass through her body,
drop from her throat
and land at the apex
of her groin.
She shivers then
and leans over to him,
pressing her lips to his ear.

Hours from now,
the man will slowly peel
her underwear from her body.
He will see a white soggy mark
in the palm of the black fabric
and will remember the oyster,
but will not recall what it was she said.

After she swallows
she turns over the shell.
These ear-shaped rocks,
do you think they can hear us?
I knew my grandmother was a witch
ever since I saw her stirring
that tall pot on the stove top,
with that long, crooked, wooden spoon,
the steam climbing up around her
like ghosts. Wreaths of garlic and peppers
hung besides the kitchen windows,
I wondered what she could do with their power,
she who understood their nature best.

We call her Nonni, which means
“Grandmothers” in Italian, because Nonna,
the singular, is not enough.
I imagine she swallowed all
the rest of the grandmothers.
After folding them carefully into
the flesh-colored polenta
she would bring the spoon to her lips,
tasting the flavor of those other
mothers of mothers,
what flavor they brought to the pot,
saying, still needs salt.