

Thieves in the Family

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Ladies who lunch

at Le Bernardín prefer oysters
no larger than two inches.
Briny, muscular, manageable,
the most popular are widow's holes,
like a punch line to a dirty joke
about the world's favorite aphrodisiac.
Instead, it is named for a widow
married to a lost-at-sea whaler
who lived on the Peconic
where oysters are born, bred,
cultivated to lady-like taste.
If left alone, can live for fifteen years,
grow to foot-long sea creatures.
Almost inert, inanimate as a plant,
oysters live sealed inside shells,
filled with their own juice.
Take one firm bite
or the creature will live on
in your stomach, say the French.
Puff your cheek with its liquor,
taste the salty air, a sweet creature.
*Slurp, never chew. Tease it,
work it with your tongue,
never sink your teeth in, goodness no.*
Yet others say, *If you swallow,
all oysters are the same.*

When Magritte Wasn't Looking

When is an apple an apple?

When it is not a painting of an apple.

Or, when its high chartreuse makes us disbelieve its waxen sheen, and size, larger than the palace behind it.

It tells us something.

That, it is an apple overgrown, overcome with itself, so vast, it drowns all sense of time, emits a faint perfume from the skin still sealed tight.

Once the skin is pierced, diced, shared with someone you love, someone familiar with the ritual of slicing symmetrical crescents to be consumed without sharp cheddar cheese or peanut butter or dripping with melted chocolate marring its pulp and skin.

Compare this to a baked apple.

Its skin shriveling as sugar bubbles out of its core to gurgle and rise from its bulbous green body, trembling in the heat of a roasting pan, settling once it hits the cool air, its pulp ready to receive the spoon that scoops out its heart.

Polish Interrupted

Their necks rose with voices
that bellowed at weddings and wakes
with songs from the old country.
From Warsaw and Cracow
they arrived in Greenpoint.
An uninterrupted Polish experience—
walked arm in arm,
men with men, women with women;
ate their kielbasa, pierogies, drank vodka and beer,
danced the polka, held candles at St. Stanislaus vigils.
Now they drive American cars,
wear white-collared shirts.
*My friends don't sing anymore;
first they forgot the words, then the melodies.*

The Same

I want to tell
the little Chinese women
with the loud voices
to sit beside each other
so they don't shout
across the subway car,
over my head,
shattering
my space.
I offer my seat.
The lady with the
short-cropped perm
red as a rooster's comb
in a Chinese market
gives me a toothy grin
the essence of onions, garlic
shakes her head
from side to side like a
tai chi exercise, no, no, no
as if to say, "I may shop in Costco
wear jeans, a North Face down jacket,
but you'll never
make me a Westerner,
won't drop
my Chinese voice
a single decibel
to suit you and your
Anglo-silence on subway cars
as if they were chapels
or private property."
I hear my grandmother's
staccato Calabrese vowels
clang against brick walls
in an alleyway in Queens
with the same defiance,
the same pride,
the same sorrow to be in America.