We Name Our Meat Pie Sergei Antonovich

I.

It wasn’t until years
after
we started trying  that we took
blue and black permanent markers
to mark each other up,
while we did it  we referred
to a butcher’s chart so we could indicate
our favorite cuts of each other.
I circled around your thigh,
wrote ‘shank’ in capital letters,
when I made a straight line
from just below your ribs to your pubic line
I said it was prime sirloin,
but
my hand shook  so that  the words began to fall off
your navel  when I looked at them.
While I looked at my handiwork,
I feel your hands on my back,
from L-2 to T-3,
your blue marker arches over my back,
I feel your steady writing,  letters which say
‘sirloin’ at the bottom--
the top part,
written just so on my body,
announces your taste for ribs.
With your reminder
my hand finds your chest,
counts
down,
fingers dig underneath your ribs
as much as I can.

I ask
if I can have a little extra,
when you take my hand with the
marker,
to write
for me.

II.

It isn’t until after
you get home
from church on Sunday
that we get out the sharp knives,
a pack of scalpels you stole from work,
we look at each other to make sure
as we press knives
to the marks
we’d made.

III.

We’ll pretend that we never did any of this.
We’ll pretend that our wounds
came from a car crash
so when friends come over to see our wedding photos,
we can pretend
I never took my lips
from your Adam’s apple.

IV.

You tell me that I can’t bake,
if I wanted your opinion
I would have asked for it
before slicing open
our cheeks
to collect fat
    that I use to make the crust of a pie.
I knead the dough by hand,
    the fat from our cheeks seeps
between my fingers,
escaping back into the bowl.

    I tell you
    this would be easier if
    I had
    a baby’s cheek fat
    because it’s richer,
but you remind me
    I can’t bake.

V.

I keep forgetting that I’m making a pie,
    until I put a hand on the meat in the freezer,
    until I find a partially rolled out pie crust shoved
    at the back of our kitchen cupboard.
One afternoon when you
are teaching embryology,
    I find the crust
    ---
    I think that I should try again,
    but when you get home
    I’m crying in the kitchen
over a black pie,
    filled with the meat we carved
    from one another.

This Is a Love Song About the Moon and Cardiac Tamponade

At night after you’ve finished removing all your teeth,
    you leave the cuspids, incisors, and molars in a sea-sick-green bowl
    of blood
so that you can savor each tooth when you
put it back in,
if you ever bothered to look,
you would see the rope
hanging
from the bottom of the moon.

The rope hangs in my grandfather’s garden,
where we drink sangrias on hot summer evenings
next to the bush of dead JFK roses.
One summer evening,
we climb up until my palms touch the dust of the moon.
The dust is fine and smooth as I sift it through my fingers like flour,
we take some to make chocolate chip cookies,
but when we finish eating
we throw up in the tiger lilies,
we tell ourselves never again
until we run out of flour in my grandfather’s kitchen
right when we want to make vanilla cupcakes.

Before we eat these,
I give you a root canal in the living room
while you slice open my chest
to slip your hand through my true ribs
so that you can almost feel my heart
because you can’t feel my actual heart
when I won’t let you slice open the pericardium.
Even though we spend half the day making love in the shrubs,
we don’t get sick.

Later that night, while I’m sleeping,
you bring me your bowl of teeth,
set them on my bedside table,
the next morning I tell you,

I don’t want them.

I want you to sew up my chest.
It’s summer and I can’t go swimming with my chest like this.
You say that’s not your problem.
I press my lips to one of your cuspids,
I feel how it shreds my esophagus on the way down.
When you take the rest of your teeth,
you climb the rope back up to the moon,
you cut the rope near the top.

As far as I know,
you’re still up there with a samovar,
so that when I dream about you at night,
I imagine us playing poker on the moon
for the right to slice open my pericardium,
for possession of your teeth,
except the
white, even incisors
holding a sugar cube between them.

Let’s Pretend the Moon Isn’t Watching You Have Sex

Let’s pretend one evening when you are thirty-two,
you walk into a bar called ‘Sack’
because you think it’s your favorite gay bar,
the one where drag queens remind you of bachelor Uncle Tom--
Don’t you remember he used to make you pancakes with banana slice smiles
and chocolate chips?--
even though you realize it’s not,
you stay.
At the bar two old men argue,
When one asks you about the meaning of life,
You say
“Double Scotch on the rocks.”

Let’s pretend you meet a man who is older than you at that bar.
His name is Sergei Sergeyevich Sidorov,
you will never meet his parents,
he will only meet yours at your funeral.
The first time he tells you he loves you
is when you find out how hard his knuckles are
against your soft lips.
The second time he says it is when the two of you are lying in a field,
showing you constellations you never knew existed,
while the quarter moon leers crookedly.
The third time is when he presses his lips against yours
to lick the blood off your white, even teeth.

Let’s pretend that you and Sergei move in together.
Between the two of you it’s a nice condo,
nice neighborhood,
it is then that you realize you have been together for three years.
After he goes to work the next morning,
you cry while you dab on some concealer,
(your boss is awfully concerned lately)
because you realize
   you love him too,
   or you don’t know what to do without him,
you don’t know the difference
--you wonder if the difference is like how smooth vodka goes down
   compared to how Scotch burns when you take gulps.

Let’s pretend that one night Sergei tells you that he wants a child.
A hand will automatically go to your neck,
touch it delicately, let fingers trail over ridges of welts.
You don’t answer.
Instead, take his hand and go to the roof,
where you feel the light of the full moon,
you distract him by kissing the thin trail
   of black hair
   on his belly
   that goes into his pants,
slide your fingers under the band of his favorite, red boxer-briefs,
his hands soon have a
   painful   liberating
   hold
   on my hair.
You keep your eyes
down
   with
every thrust,
take every one as a sign
    as you realize that the moon is watching,
Enjoying it,
    has to be enjoying it-- you're covered in the moon's semen.

For twice more,
    let's pretend.

Let's pretend that three months later
you finish putting your signature on adoption paperwork with Sergei,
    he smiles at me,
the moon makes a cross shaped shadow on his face
from where it peeks in between curtains,
when you blink the cross is gone,
    so is his smile.

Let's pretend that two months later
    the clocks are melting.
    (cerebral hemorrhage is an awful sounding word, isn’t it, sweetheart?)
Sergei finds you at the bottom of the shower.
    --the last thing you see is his face,
    he pulls chunks of hair
        from his goatee,
        starts screaming,
    --
in a single, exhilarating moment
    every individual hair is illuminated
        by the sunlight--
    you wonder if you burned his coffee again.

Dead Children Will Stay Married Forever

I.

When we’re growing up
we don’t realize
we’re forever stuck on Aunt Millie’s sofa,
that ugly one our older brother says
looks like a motel bedspread dropped LSD
and then threw up all over another motel bedspread
after they were done having sex
because one owed the other money,
she started crying after the first bedspread said to her--
“So Kierkegaard and Camus walk into a bar.”
That ugly couch. The one she can’t get rid of because Uncle Dick died on it,
when you ask how he died
(because you remember how he used to make you caramel apples when
you’d stay the night and it was always between the two of you, wasn’t it,
pumpkinsweethearthoneyand—all-those-other-disgusting-names?)
She just starts crying and our mother looks at us
Like
we’re
the ones who
did wrong and
That’s when we realize we did.
We forgot to turn off the oven.
So we start crying
and poor Aunt Millie, oh poor her,
she thinks
we’re crying about
Uncle Dick
and we are,
but not for the same reasons.

II.

When we’re ten we realize that adults aren’t really adults,
they’re aliens and we can call them the ‘Ruiners,’
that’s what they are and all
they ever
really were.
We remember that time we found
a shack
in the woods behind
Aunt Millie’s house,
we made it our place,
where our official country policy was: No Ruiners Allowed.
Se Prohibiten Adultos
Quien Ruinar.

III.

When we’re eleven, we play basketball with the boys down the street
because our dad approves of those boys
with their bright knuckles and hard eyes and chipped teeth,
one Wednesday evening in October
Scotty knocks the ball out of our hands,
we run into the street to get it again,
our older brother yells.
Before we see the face of our brother,
we see
a spatter of blood
across the bright orange basketball
we’re clutching,
the silhouette just like the outline of a bouquet of carnations
we saw once in a Valentine’s Day display.
And when we don’t get it, he looks at us
Like
we’re
the ones who
did wrong and
That’s when we realize we did.

We didn’t bring our Sunday best.

I Won’t Talk About The Part Where We Visit The Cerebral Cortex

I tell Anton after he sleeps
we will travel through the openings in his wounds.
We’ll take a yellow submarine,
    stop for lunch
on his medulla oblongata,
    fight after we wriggle through
    a hole in his lung,
I’ll say to him,
    “you took that turn
    too fast,
    you cut off
    that family of tubercles”
he will say that he did not,
before either of us understands how,    I tell him that
he’s acting like his father,         he is--
    and then we’re throwing words like they’re circular saws
    which run on ill will,      we take our chances without safety
glasses.

We’re silent until we get
    to his  beating heart,
    where we make-up
    by making love,      where his thrusts
    match the rhythm.

The cinema in his brain
    is filled with immature red blood cells
    and conjugating bacteria in the back row,
    jerky film of his childhood plays
    flickering
    images
    of his father’s hand coming down on his head,
    clutching    a    Russian    Orthodox    Bible
    to the beat of the music
as he sings in the church choir.
I tell him
    I don’t want to be here anymore,
he reminds me
    that
it was
    my idea.
Just behind us, I hear
    a bacteria loudly exclaim
that he finally got lucky,
    now he is resistant to vancomycin.

But when we do leave,
    I don’t know how to get home,
he says
    we will get home the same way we came--
except the wound
    is sealed up.

Anton takes out a scalpel
    from his waistcoat,
feels along the inside of his rib cage,
with a long, steady stroke
    the skin is separated,
he pulls himself through, reaches down for me
    and I tell him
    I don’t want to.
He says
    it’s too late for that
    as he takes my hand and
    pulls me through
    the layers of muscle and fat.

He Uses Yellow Thread and My Fingers Heal By Morning

I don’t start breaking
    my fingers
until you ask that
I stay out of your writing shed
    when you catch me
rifling through
    carefully organized papers,
whose ink glints from Cyrillic letters,

Antoshkin, I say,
I cannot read Russian.

I broke my left pinkie
and index finger
the night we emerged
from your chest,
I reached for a needle and thread
to sew you
back up--

Let's pretend that you let me
use gray thread
that complements the color
of your eyes when
you talk about your father.

You let me sew you back up,
everything is fine.

We'll let the rain wash
your blood from our bodies
as we stand nude behind
your writing shed,
when we lie together in your garden,
it won't matter whether or not
we make love
because it will be enough
to know that we could,

but,
however,

while we should be talking
about when my father’s ghost
will visit
underneath a bush of lilacs,
I’m sitting in the kitchen,
waiting for you to finish,
keeping the samovar just
the temperature
you like and
you are sitting in the bathroom,
struggling to keep the needle
between your fingers as you
cough
blood on
your image in the mirror.

The Ballad of Using Small Bones As Toothpicks

You’re the only one who notices that the dog is dead.

The dog is from your childhood,
a former Irish Setter you named Simone
after your mean grandma,
she’d been everything a dog should be
except she’s dead
and you know this
because she’s only a skeleton
with a purple and white polka-dotted collar.

But when you tell your father
he asks,
“Did I raise this idiot?”

You want to say

No.
No you didn’t raise me.
I met you the one time,
when you were in room 248
I walked in
you had red and yellow mucus
dripping down your stubbled chin,
giving you
an elegant,
striped hospital gown.

You were raised by your father.
You know this isn’t your father
--because your father
would never wear
that shade of mucus.

He asks you to make a bicycle out of the dog’s bones
as you press your fingers on the dog’s vertebrae
and then your father’s,
they feel just the same.

So you make a bike out of the dead dog,
intestines for tires, femurs for the frame,
clip a card of Cal Ripken on,
you’ll hear it click on the spokes made of ribs.

You ride the bike to the hospital,
make your way to room 842.
You meet your father,
his green and black mucus
merrily streaming down his chin
as you peel the skin on his fingers like bananas.

Because he *would*
wear that shade of mucus
you cry while you peel.
It doesn’t suit his skin tone
at all.

You ask him if the dog is dead,
he asks,
“Did I raise this idiot?”

Yes.
Yes you raised me
we met that one time,
shared a Cherry Coke
while playing poker
over a coffin we filled with
childhood dreams and Chivas Regal
-- and I helped you
put your skin on.