

"In these joyful, poignant, and wonderfully vivid poems, meals are crafted and cobbled, foraged and scavenged, relished, remembered, and lovingly shared. Savor is a sensory banquet."

- Catherine Pierce, *Danger Days*

SAVOR

Poems for the Tongue

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Ode to the Fish-Fry

We arrived like the fish did barreled in truck beds
swaying with backroad drifts and fishtails coughing dust ducking rocks
and holding onto each other for dear life.

The driver: step- father, their father, man who loved my mother.

We: little sister, me, and step- sisters, step- brother.

The family I had always wanted, but didn't know I was about to lose
like the fish

snatched up out of the creek, out of the lake, unexpected

now outside sizzling in fryers, their discarded scales and spines crimsoning soft-
ened snow.

Somewhere, the chainsaw whine of snowmobiles
and their headlights pulsing through trees,
desperate to hold onto winter.

Our hair, stiff and windblown, now sags with the heavy heat
of bodies and grease as we join the rest of the village filling
this barn packed with too much food, rusted folding chairs,
and coolers of Bud and Jack scattered like dice.

Wooden walls wet with olive oil
dripping in beads

coating taxidermy heads in glossy tears

cigarette, wood smoke, cooking steam:

a dense haze we breathe and dance through
as a southern twang none of us can mimic swings from the rafters'
zip-tied speakers.

Tables bow with stacks of fried pickles, crusted green beans,
crispy corn, crowns of golden cod, and the squelch of cold macaroni
salad quickly warming. On my sister's plate, a greased aspen leaf she begged them
to fry for her.

The only memories I have of my mother's laugh
are in this place of food and sweat and lime-flavored beer
her head tossed back, strawberry-blond shining in mason-jar light
her arm falling easy across stepdad's shoulders, his working hands on her
thigh

I wish I would have held onto that sound
more than I worried about the fish yet to be fried, slick and stinking
in metal buckets, floating atop melted ice. And like the rest of us:
dead-eyed and dancing.