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TWO POEMS

Gary Finke

The Dark Angels

To the sidewalk in front of my father's
Razed bakery I return. To the patch
Of burdock where the stacked ovens deep-browned
The crusts of a million loaves of rolls.
To the cinderblock cracked like the soot-pocked
Windows where I watched, in Etna, the dark
Angels escape the coal smoke as if they
Wanted to swoop back to chimers. To shards
and splinters where I hated the sauerkraut
In the cramped, next-door kitchen, the boiled
Shank end of pork which clustered files against
The latched screen door. To the steep, shale downslope
Where the walls of the bakery are landfill,
Where the first bulldozed soil coats wallboard
And lumber as if coal were refueling
Industry's return, covering the spot
Where I was careless, once, with Saturday's
Trash fire. Where it followed the easy weeds
To the brittle boards of the bakery.
Where that neighbor shook free the tiles and sprayed
His hose and a set of obscenities
Keyed to my foolish name. Where my father
Thanked him and led me to the last eclair,
Settled me on the work room's folding chair
And said nothing except "think," and I thought
That the neighbor was listening at the window
While I held chocolate and custard until
My father said, "You eat that," and I did.

Decorative Cooking

My mother repeated the story
of St. Julitta, whose shed blood
spelled the name of God. My father
insisted the name of God was work,
half or more of each day but Sunday.
There was time for food, God's bounty,
reinforced, from the radio,
by Betty Crocker, who explained
The New Design for Happiness, meals
that showed love for the families
in America's homes by working
canned soup and cake mixes into
the miracles of ready-to-eat.
In her cookbook, in full color,
she probed the pictorial charm
of food by stuffing pie shells
and peppers, filling tomato halves
and sculpted pastry, creating,
on my father's favorite page,
mock steak from ground beef and Wheaties,
a strip of carrot for the bone.

So pretty, yet economical,
and on our table, each Sunday,
were decorative dinners prepared
the night before: the shimmering,
shaped Jellos; the rank and file
of peeled and slivered apples.
Yearly, the anise Magi cookies,

the browned crosses of holy rolls.
Three times, the flag of celery
and carrots, the field of coconut
holding forty-eight walnut stars.
And once, as God's duty, we hosted
our former pastor, who had returned
to Pittsburgh to declaim the death
of God. He sat, so heavy, at our table,
the pinwheels of sweet peppers seemed
to churn on the cucumber cogs.
He unrolled, while we passed bread,
four slices of ham and beef;
he unfolded, while we poured milk,
three cheeses, and formed the stack
of a child's simple sandwich.
My father waited for him
to swallow one bite, and then
he gave thanks for the care with which
our food was prepared, directing
his message to the living God
and his resurrected son while
the pastor held his sandwich in both hands.
An then we decorated our bread
with arrangements of tomatoes
and onions and lettuce before
we added the roll-ups of meat
and cheese, each of them arranged
like the pipes of the church organ
I listened to, this morning,
for the first time in thirty years,
that fat pastor and my mother dead
ten of them, my father driving us
to her grave near the unmarked site
where the minister's ashes,
according to my father
were scattered like the hopeless.

Where God is working, my father
lays wreathes. Where God is working,
my father pulls weeds and hand-trims
the topiary of heavenly hosts.
All morning he wove pine boughs
while I read, and then he called out
the passing of each mile to thirteen,
the right turn through the open gates
to the plot in the Garden of Dreams.
He laid those evergreen crosses
by the headstone of my mother
and the four nearest neighbors
in a symmetry of remembrance,
and then he removed what he'd left
for last month's anniversary,
adding those branches to the border
of woven designs so they could extend
the decorative work of God

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