



ALEXANDRA ROWAN FOUNDATION VOICES OF TOMORROW SCHOLARSHIP WINNER: SUSAN COYLE, POETRY

THE BURNT ONES, POETRY – SUSAN COYLE

My grandmother loved the burnt ones
potato chips cooked to a bitter edge
offered across the kitchen table
as we played word games until
our eyes crossed in the smoky kitchen
she let me fill in empty crosswords in
books she had set aside and
chastised me only a little bit
when I took too many

My grandmother was razor thin despite
her faithful daily intake of
one can of Narranganset prescribed by her doctor
Bavarian-Canadienne bones chiseled by sixty years
of up and down up and down
up Grafton Hill
down to the factories
her sharp bones carrying her home

My grandmother slapped me once
after I sassed her thoughtlessly
in the backseat of my mother's car
my cheek smarted imprinted with
the bony heat of her fingers
I never knew the right words to say to
my grandmother after that
so I said very little until she died
having nothing to offer

My grandmother the orphan is buried in Northboro
a skinny slot in a big family plot
she never did take up much space
her name is carved on a book of stone
between relatives who never sat at her kitchen table
but they had a place for her when the tubes came out
and the smoke cleared

My grandmother loved the burnt ones
that no one else ever wanted
but that we would have given her gladly
even if we did want them
were she here now
I'd slice and fry up a batch of potato chips
and push them to the edge of burning
and show them to my grandmother
so she would know
what I could not say before

MUSTACHE, POETRY – SUSAN COYLE

There's a mustache where your face should be
a furry shadow cast long over me
a mustache is all that's left
I try to call your name
catch the hem of your postman's shorts at the knee
in my fat little fingers
but those are gone too
I remember you coming home from work
with samples with other people's names, smiling
it didn't seem strange then
it was Christmas every week
with little boxes of Frosted Flakes and Froot Loops and
you weren't afraid to hug me then
when I ran to the end of the driveway to meet you
one day I was cold
and reached up for you and
you said "no don't touch me"
and it got colder
and I never did touch him again
because I always obeyed him
we all did

In the photos of you
looking down reading serious alone
I keep expecting it to have faded
like a ghost story
but you're always there
your mustache swallowing your face
shadows covering words I don't understand

I can't forget
and I wonder if that's what I inherited from you
the curse of memory
an intractable, unmovable self
and the fear
fear is all that's left to us sometimes
but not all that's left of me
I know it I know this

But in my dreams
where you are muttering
and speaking of haunting and of angels and red sin
all I can see is your mustache
and all I can feel is how cold the world was
when I couldn't touch you anymore.

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