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Potatoes

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About the Contributor

Heidie Raine studies English literature with concentrations in creative and journalistic writing. She loves asparagus, hates nail polish, and tolerates the color yellow.

POTATOES

Heidie Raine

Strength comes from the shoulder, so taut and stern that each downward push releases something. It's a churning, turning motion, hinging the wrist like a patio door swinging wide. Steam fogs up my glasses, but I don't need to see. This is innate, ancestral—carrying on the pioneering grit of heating and boiling and straining and adding and reducing. My tricep tightens when I reach the chunks still bound together, and I stumble into the pot when the masher slips through a pocket of soupy butter instead of spud. I can hear mom's voice calling to me, my grandmother, my aunt—my housemates, asking when I'll be done in the kitchen. I'm understanding ritual. I'm stepping the dance of my mother's feathered grip that labors for a number of victories: sustenance, a full table, validation, prong-bent forks clouded in white, exhale. I'm understanding "I cook, you clean," and even more why she always chose cook. It's creating and watching be consumed, the transformation of stock to product.

As I pass her recipe card to friends, guide them in the proper torque and seasoning, I am observation begetting continuation. I am mimicking a lifetime of peripheral memories, absorbed as I derived quadratics and pressed my elbows into the countertop behind the oven.

In my own kitchen, at my rented electric stovetop, I stand with her gait and practice, pressing, punching. I boil red potatoes and serve them, hand-mashed, from the pot she gifted me for Christmas. "Someday, you'll pass that recipe to your daughters," she breathes out over the phone. Shaved skins in the garbage, minced garlic spilled on the countertop, butter and cream rippling through whipped waves, I am conversing in her warm, lassoing tone.