

New Year's Tears

A Salty New Year

A wrinkled, whiskered woman
Viciously attacks her honey cake batter
Whisking in her own aroma of moth balls and herring

The oven beckons her
With the tantalizing odor of roasted chicken
Her mouth waters as
She reaches in to pick at the crisp, browned skin
Burning her fingers
But then savoring the juicy morsel of meat underneath

Sounds of a whistling kettle and clanging cups overhead
Draw her back to the stovetop
Rapidly she unscrews the kettle lid
Releasing steamy hot mist into the air
It hugs her with a comforting warmth
Numbing her

She sits down to a cup of chamomile tea
Sugar cubes in hand
Her rough, yellowed nails scratch off a few coarse granules
Before submerging the cubes
And watching patiently as they dissolve

Her eyes drop down to her tattered patchwork apron
It reeks of decades of hard work and perspiration
Mixed with the zest of orange and the stickiness of honey
An odd, yet satisfying combination
Evoking memories of sweeter New Year celebrations
When family and friends decorated her holiday table

Tonight she'll be dining solo
Disappointed by her children and grandchildren
Whose pictures bedeck her wall
They say that she must let them go
Yet it is she who has been let go

And new stains appear on her apron
A new smell, a new taste
Salty, lonesome tears

A new year.

A Bittersweet New Year

A stiffly postured woman sits on a kitchen bar stool
French-manicured toenails curl around its lower sterling rim
She babbles into the cell phone attached to her diamond-studded ear
The phone so comfortable, delicately resting between her fingers
As if taking an afternoon nap

Her thoughts are far from the teenage girl in the doorway
Who enters the kitchen and studies the shiny appliances on display
Her young fingers caress the smooth, glistening granite
She is not impressed by this perfect blend of ebony and chrome
To her it is empty

As she approaches the SubZero
The girl musters all her strength and
Swings open its giant doors
Releasing a thick icy mist
Its coolness, a breath of fresh air
In the numbingly stale atmosphere

She is struck by the sight inside
On the left, a kaleidoscope of ice creams and TV dinners
On the right, a torrent of take out dim sum and sushi
In white styrofoam cartons, neatly organized by size
Disappointment registers on the girl's face, but not surprise

Absentmindedly, she turns to sift through the mail
Her eyes and heart stop, as they catch a familiar address
"Mom," she calls
To the woman who is lost in a call of her own

The girl fingers the corner of the envelope ever so gingerly
Careful not to rip or destroy the
New Year's card which greets her inside
Simple and plain, yet warm and inviting
The cursive is loopy and graceful, old fashioned

As her eyes take in the words
Sadness mixes with anger
For she can read her grandmother's loneliness
It envelops her
She breathes it in, and makes it her own

How long has it really been
Since we sat together, eating the roast chicken and honey cake
Sipping chamomile tea at dessert
She yearns to lash out at her mother
But how can she reach this unreachable woman?

The beginning of a tear forms
Staining her cheek
As it drips down slowly, steadily
It reaches her lip and she can taste it
A salty, lonesome tear

She walks over to her mother
Silently handing her the greeting card
Watching patiently while she takes notice

The woman's eyes drop down to the
Newly tear-stained paper
And in that instant she understands
The loneliness
Of her daughter, her mother
She feels it herself

Now, no longer immobile
Her cell phone in hand
She dials a number
So slowly and tentatively it seems foreign to her
And as she strains to remember the last four digits
Cloudy memories push through
The modern façade she has worn so well

"Hello Mom," she says shakily
"Happy New Year."