

CHERYL R. COWTAN

The Importance of Mustard

I lift the limp paper towel  
and peek at the sizzling bacon.  
Just a few more minutes to perfection.  
I push the "1" on the microwave.

The cracked-wheat bread pops out of the  
toaster,  
and I lay it, side by side, on the beige tile  
counter.

Four, thick slices of marble cheddar cheese  
slide off of my knife.

I place them on one side of the toast,  
parked tightly beside one another like school  
buses.

Then, I picked up the tomato,  
Red and round and firm.

I hold it to my nose and breathe in the scent.  
A smell that was three months in the making,  
beneath the sunflowers.

I can hear my sons' laughter, as they run to the  
tomato patch.

This is a summer tradition of daily searching  
to see how many tomatoes the raccoons have  
left us.

I smile as their joyous cries carry across the  
lawn.

They have found a red one among the green  
globes.

I slice the tomato delicately, trying not to  
bruise the flesh.

The slices look like microscope cross sections.  
Alien pockets of gel surrounded by webbed  
tissue.

Ah! The bacon is done.

I air-lift it with my fingernails,  
sizzling and snapping, to the cheese.  
The hot grease slides onto the orange  
rectangles,  
melting them on contact.

I shake miniature black flakes and clear cubes  
onto the stepped tomato slices  
Ceremoniously, I place the top layer of toast,  
and then I take it off again.

Mayonnaise.  
It must have Mayonnaise.

I uncap the jar and my mouth waters,  
as the creamy topper jiggles on my butter  
knife.

It soaks its way into the porous bread behind  
my spread.

Perfect.

Perfect.

I press down on the toast and slice the  
sandwich into two triangles.

He's going to love this.

I start to carry it in to him  
but the word, "mustard"  
materializes in my mind  
and stops me.

What if he wants mustard on it?

I waver, time VS mustard.

I return quickly to the kitchen.

"Mustard, mustard, mustard."

I walk in a circle,

not sure,

not wanting to make a mistake.

What if I put it on and he doesn't want it?

Do we eat mustard on bacon and tomato?

Do we?

I can't think.

"Ummmm."

"Ummmmm."

"Where's that sandwich!"

He shouts from the living room.

I jump

and bite back the startled noise,

while it's still in my throat.

I reach for the fridge  
and I'm surprised to find  
that I'm holding onto my finger.  
It just started to ache.

An ache from an old break,  
from the last time

I didn't put mustard on his sandwich.

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