

cravings

by Daniel Passamaneck

It wasn't often she felt this kind of craving, but it seemed to have been her first coherent thought that morning and she just couldn't shake it. Not that she wanted to. Maybe she'd dreamed about it, but she couldn't remember. She'd been dreaming about something when the alarm had startled her back to reality, where she'd laid very still, curled like an unclenched fist, savoring the blanket's returning of her own heat back to her, content to let her lost dream slip irretrievably away, wishing, for some reason, with all her heart, that her fingers were warm and heavy, not with drowsy languor, but with a hamburger. A thick, hot, juicy burger, tucked coyly into a sesame-spangled bun, surmounted by a fringe of lettuce for crunch and a slab of tomato for its acidic tang and the thrill of its redness. She could almost smell the char from a greasy grill, the hot fat seeping into a spongy bun. With a sigh she rubbed her face into wakefulness, and then sucked two fingers, thinking of melted cheese.

She'd been a vegetarian once, years ago - a high school convert to a lifestyle that was for her as much about the distinctiveness of self-abnegation as anything else. It had antagonized her parents and gave her something to talk about, and that was all the motivation she'd needed at the time. In college she'd gone further down that path, dating a vegan and denying herself so many delicious things that she began to dream of them, both sleeping and while awake. Eventually her boyfriend had pressured her to sell a treasured leather cloak. After finalizing that sale, she weighed the cash in her hand and realized that her own identity was turning into a negative phenomenon, built up of things she wasn't and wouldn't instead of those she was and did.

She'd ruminated on these concerns for a week and then woke up one day starved for eggs. She went across campus for breakfast, to a dining commons she rarely visited, a space where she was most

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likely to be left to her own devices, where her transgression would attract the least attention. The truth be told, she was ashamed. No, embarrassed. The hunger was hers, she owned it and was ready to satisfy it on its own terms - but it was a private matter and one she preferred to keep to herself.

The Denver omelets called to her, glinting lewdly under heatlamps like sunbathers slathered with oil, their diced peppers festive and familiar as mardi gras beads, the chunks of ham fingerquick pink and so blatantly shameless she felt justified salivating over them, responding to a bell being rung within her. With sure but trembling fingers she grabbed a big one and loaded up her tray, completed her transaction with minimal conscious thought, and found herself a secluded table where she could spend some quality time.

She ate as slowly as she could, which wasn't very, since her yearning was so intense and deep. The food was offering itself up to her on a veritable platter, begging her indulgence. Restraint was an afterthought, when she could think of restraint at all. She reveled in every sensation as she ate, tasting with every ending of every nerve. The ham was firm but yielding between her teeth; she absorbed the ovarian sustenance deeply and gratefully. It warmed her belly and soothed her mind. Dairy, eggs, meat: a trifecta of non-veganism. Satisfaction welled up within her till she thought it would explode out of her.

She stood reflexively, realizing that that was exactly what was about to happen, and barely got to a restroom in time. Four years meat-free, and now she'd forgotten how to handle it. Her innards were in paroxysm, violently expelling what they no longer recognized as food. And even as the waves crashed out of her and she sweat coldly through her t-shirt, she knew she'd never go back to denying herself what she truly wanted, no matter the price to be paid.

These were her recollections as she roused herself, pulled on some

clothes, cleaned and voided and brushed her teeth hastily, and left home hungry. She was a breakfast person; she didn't usually like facing her day without a solid bite and something hot to drink in her belly. Today was different. Her regular diet would not suffice. She needed meat. A nearby diner served decent burgers around the clock, and she knew one had her name on it.

