

Exile

Volume 44 | Number 2

Article 16

1997

Salt

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Recommended Citation

Stine, Alison (1997) "Salt," *Exile*: Vol. 44 : No. 2 , Article 16.

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Salt

A woman scatters
salt on the sidewalks this cold morning
the way my mother used to
throw feed to the chickens,
holding the eggs secret to her stomach.
The hens were getting better
at hiding them. But her fingers hunted
till they hit something hard,
scrapped the dried white shit
and straw,
shell chinking against shell, small music.
When it was winter,
she slipped an egg or two into her shirt,
and they nestled there, warm
and red-brown between her breasts,
bantam, beating.

I will drive through this snow to reach my sister's
for dinner. My ovaries inside me like the food on cool plates,
like bell peppers split up the sides,
tear-cut seeds, white and thin as sesame,
strung from yellow skin strings,
salted fish hung to dry,
spilling bloodless
athwart the knife, across the table, into our hands.

My sister's eggs
would be pumpkin seeds,
fat and fleshy behind curtains of string—
the kind we used to burst
through with our fists,
digging the seeds
out with our hands,
orange skins to the elbow.

Do you want to see,
my doctor asks,
has a hand mirror right there ready
beside her silver tools.
A man would never ask me
this, but we are supposed to take pride
in our mysteries.
I shake my head on the paper pillow.

There is more than a sheet
separating us.
There is a curtain of skin,
hiding nothing but breath.
There are seeds that have been scattered
into cold air,
like salt
melting.

—Alison Stine '00