a ring in his nose. he's calling

for me: a chick he says, some chick. meaning

me. i look like fluff to him even

in my solemnest bikini. after the surgery

i stopped being able to talk back

and returned your letter. the one reading *please*

be real but first i ripped it up.

AMY MARCOTT

On the Menu at Marco's

Peter brings them to me, always Peter, my lovely delivery boy, whom I wait for from the security of the house I never leave. One a week for a time, then two, then four, when I can't help myself I'm so hungry. All of Marco's sandwiches in order, all thirty-six of them. I forgot what desire felt like, the clutch of it, its need to devour. The Garden of Earthly Delights with cucumbers and peppers and mushrooms, the Continental Divide with apple slices and brie. So many choices—how else can I order but sequentially, blindly? If there's no surprise, I might not want it.

"What are you so afraid of out there?" Peter asks once we're friends.

He's a gangly kid, a man, technically, though he reveals his innocence with a thoughtful moistening of his lips, and for weeks I've fantasized his legs wrapped around me. Would he understand that you can be out in the world yet still dodged by life's crescendos, that I'm not afraid, just paused, waiting for something to catch up to me?

"What will you order now?" he asks, slowly building to thrusts after he's brought me number thirty-six and I straddle him on the couch.

Reflected in the window, my sandwich appears to have a ribbon trailing off to the side, and I say, wanting to try out the words, "Come back later?"

"Later, when you're off work," I clarify, both meaning and not meaning it as I look back at my sandwich, the tape loosed by a scrim of tomato skin trapped in its adhesive.

"What…will you…order…now?" he says, his words more mantra than question as he thrusts, oblivious to me straddling him.

If only I could pause this moment, let it build in the kind of crescendo that sweeps me up and leaves me, in its wake, with the gift of something to lose. A gangly kid—a man, he's no longer innocent—has his legs wrapped around me.

"There's really nothing to be afraid of out there," Peter says, looking past me toward the door.

There's nothing that surprises me with yearning either. "There are so many choices, Peter, and they never seem to be the right ones." The Kitchen Sink with baloney and salami and liverwurst, the Bite Me with roast beef and habanero mustard.

Clutched by desire, we often forget that what we most long for we cannot choose; it has to choose us.

For now, I'll order all of Marco's sandwiches, all thirty-six of them, in reverse. Four a week for a time, then two, then one, as my hunger subsides. My lovely delivery boy, "You'll bring it to me, won't you, Peter, what's on the menu at Marco's?"

MINI INTERVIEW WITH
AMY MARCOTT

Salt Hill: How does intuition play a role in your process? How much of the story's direction do you foresee at the outset?

Amy Marcott: I prefer to let stories develop organically, generally stemming from my desire to understand an aspect of human behavior, like what might motivate someone who's agoraphobic. I find that stories lack heart if I know what's going to happen before writing.

Intuition is important in my revision process, but it involves a conscious level of decision-making I avoid in early drafts, when I just want to get words onto paper, not considering whether they are the right words. When I'm initially creating, imagination dominates, and I'm most concerned with getting in the zone—tapping into that unconscious well of ideas from which surprising details and plot elements emerge.

SH: How do you know when you've discovered the inevitable word, phrase, or image? I'm thinking of "dodged by life's crescendos" and the "scrim of tomato skin."

AM: Here is where I rely on intuition, though in a short-short, I won't keep phrases just because they feel right. I need to justify their presence. If I understand how the language enhances the narrative, I can then build upon it. This piece was tricky because it's palindromic in nature. It began as an exercise to see if I could write a story with a certain number of sentences that repeat (though not word for word) in reverse order. The replicated words and phrases, then, assumed heightened significance.

I chose "crescendo" because it echoes the crescendo and decrescendo of the story's structure and helped me understand the narrator's emotional development—how the anticipation of the relationship provides more fulfillment than the actual affair, which wanes as the sentences wind down to their inevitable conclusion.

The sentence containing "scrim of tomato skin" and its companion are the pivot point in the story, where sentences begin repeating, and were added in the final draft. Intuitively, that pivot wasn't achieving all it could—namely, how the narrator is affected by the relationship. I wanted to convey her hopeful ambivalence that's then tempered by the coarse reality of the tomato skin. Scrim, with its connotation of theater scrim, of alternating opacity and transparency to aid in role-playing, I felt expressed that duality.

SH: Are there certain subjects, ideas, or entities that you return to? Is this a conscious decision or something driven by the work itself?

AM: I don't consciously set out to write about certain subjects. Those narratives fall flat for me. Instead, I dwell on an intriguing character or situation and let the work dictate what it all means. I do strive for plausible psychological development, and often with short-shorts I gravitate to certain forms as a way to cultivate the story's theme. I'd been mulling the idea of an agoraphobe who develops a relationship with a delivery person for years. I worked on it periodically, but it wasn't until I enforced the palindromic structure that I figured out what it was about.

WESTON CUTTER

Knocking Before Entering vs. the Unknown

There are keys for this: the door without a window:
and inside always music: the sound of water running:
even in the same room it's hard to know if you're
hearing everything right: sometimes she calls: sometimes
not: and behind door number three: today we ran
out of carrots: making soup: plenty of celery slash
peppers slash chicken but no carrots: and I reached for
keys: walked toward the door as she asked *isn't it weird*
that something so orange grows in the dark? : you'd think we'd be
ready by now: to admit it all: cravings for certain skin:
not that it hasn't all been said before: that *we* have said it all :
she looked at me: at my keys+hands: I know too many
names: remember too many kisses with each blink: some days
every number: color: and what algebra solves for the x
of memory when: when: : she looks away sometimes:
certain questions: I look away: there are songs we sing
together, off key voices next to each other like a drunk
with a belly full of several different liquors: it's the lilt
in her voice: when she comes over: unannounced: uncalled-
ahead: the way my name is her question and: and what's
known: and what's not: and what shouldn't be: not even
that there's a darkness: just that there could be: that
a flashlight is what it is because it focuses: is shone
toward whatever sound woke you: + there's a reason
the friend who's been married longest swears by the earplugs
he wears : right next to love : every night : whiles he sleeps: