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The name of the sandwich itself.

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THE NAME OF THE SANDWICH ITSELF

By

Amanda Lee Phillips
B.A., The College of Wooster, 2005

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2011

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By

Amanda Lee Phillips
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A Thesis Approved on

April 11, 2011

by the following Thesis Committee:

Thesis Director

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Don and Jan Phillips.

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I would like to thank my advisor, Jeffrey Skinner, for his guidance, support, and uplifting sense of humor. I would also like to express thanks to my good friends, Cassandra Madden and Janna Tanner for their inimitable patience and willingness to listen. Many thanks, too, to Jessy Blanchard, Clay Marshall, and Diane Batts for their ongoing input and helpful suggestions. Finally, I would like to thank Jeshua Caudle for believing in me, and for never failing to remind me of that fact.

ABSTRACT

THE NAME OF THE SANDWICH ITSELF

Amanda Lee Phillips

April 11, 2011

The poems in this collection seek to explore and highlight connections between the familiar domestic realm (often seen in depictions of food preparation and consumption, social events, or material possessions) and shifting, sometimes ambiguous relationships between people. Gender, in particular, is examined, exaggerated, and/or deconstructed to underscore the author's ongoing interest in the ways in which expected male and female roles are constructed and performed within personal interactions. The poems here exhibit a variety of different tones, ranging from darkly comic to contemplative, from joyous to solemn. The author believes it possible for poems to possess both comedic and serious elements, for simple language to convey complex meaning, and for elaborate language to make a celebration out of the ordinary. In other words, poetry has the potential to use contradiction to create meaningful effect.

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CAUTIONARY TALE

Everything's coming up babies
when you're 27 and actively childless
or so my mother reports and
the evening news agrees.

But ladies of my generation have perfected the art of
broadcasting the miracle of their reproductive prowess:

This one announces the dilation (in cm) of her
cervix on Facebook tangle of fallopian tubes like
so much Bubble Yum stretched out from post to post
to post another boasts cyst free ovaries while yet
another uploads pictures of her peed-on First Response

Twelve "friends" "like" this.

I never asked to consider their insides, Jack the
Ripper style. They color themselves in like accidents
waiting to happen. They are pink and red and glistening.

I am pixilated newsprint, black and white
grainy, essence of dirty laundry aired on street corners.
Yellow journalism, stained white sheets, anonymous underwear
at the foot of the bed. Boxer brief confusion.

Status update: whos r these!?!?

I carry my IUD's ultrasound in my iPhone
make it my screensaver
coo over it with colleagues: Mireeeena.
I crunch Ortho Tri-cyclens like spearmint
Tic-Tacs between coffee breaks.
And, in response to ol' First Response,
I upload pics of used condoms into the ether
place them on vintage black velvet
arrange them aesthetically:
translucent opera gloves.

Status update: good news.....not pregnant!!

And later: better news.....they're MAGNUMS!!

Twenty-seven "likes" sprout up overnight:
congratulatory little mushrooms on my Wall.

I defriend you, Breeders!

Defriend deflower devour all of you!

Mwah ha ha ha ha!

LMAO

Insatiable me:

Smacking my lips, I'll slink off in search of some men to eat,
and babies.

I'll twist my handlebar mustache between greasy fingers,
laugh maniacally in the direction of the railroad tracks.
Train when it passes is black and white and glistening
beneath this fat waxy moon:

A cautionary tale.

An accident waiting to happen.

BESTIARY

Peacock, I doubt I possess the
confident humility to be
your plain brown shapeless mate.

Do I read too much into the thousands
worth of green and gold ink
blossoming across your shoulders,
etched quills tapering down the
length of your spine,
disappearing tauntingly below your belt?

Does it defeat me, after an evening
of rich food and red wine that your
stomach muscles retain their ripple
effect? That each contour glints like polished
freckled quartz?

Fumbling in the shadows, I struggle
to unveil--your sheer unapologetic beauty
is too much.
I trip on my own skirt.

Biding my time in shadow while you undress
in merciful candlelight, I watch you
stretch and preen:

butterfly emerging from his chrysalis.

Jesus.

A million more insipid animal analogies
procreate in my sloshy brain--
most of them damp and fur covered.

Crouched, trying not to pant,
I wait for the right moment:
twitch of ligament when
the flint goes in.

Gleam of pearly eyeball rolled back in the skull.
You are warm tendon and muscle and sweat.
I imagine your ribcage, your pulpy heart
plumping and sucking like a mouth.

I want to feast on you.
I want to mount you over the hearth.

BUBBA

I want to make a sandwich
that's as fattening as I am sorry.
That's as bad for you as I am.

Drinking vodka from its plastic bottle,
I use bacon grease for paint,
the skillet for the canvas,
but that's your field, *Wunderkind*.
I only make sandwiches.

Fry up two eggs with American cheese,
take two more swigs.

I get creative:
sauté mushrooms and onions,
artichokes expiring in the jar.
Remaining juice
looks like formaldehyde.

Take another gulp to preserve
what's left of my desire to see you,
add a slice of ham to the mix.

There's something therapeutic
about frying flesh and canned fungus

in popping pig grease.
I am smiling, now,
but not because I know
you're coming.

The sandwich is complete upon your arrival:
fried egg, ham, and cheese,
mushroom and artichoke,
onion impaled on a toothpick,
the name "Bubba" attached:
a blue lined notebook paper
white flag of surrender.

Bubba, of course, is not your name.
The sandwich is not named after you.

It is the name of the sandwich itself.
It is the name of a fat man
in a stained undershirt.

You wait in the porch light,
smeared with oil paint,
proffering pink carnations.

I smell like bacon grease,
limp onions.
This is what you get.

AFTERSCHOOL SPECIAL

It was funny for a minute.
She kept yelling the same thing,
telling him get out, get the *hell* out.
Shrill, like she more than meant it
and we whisper laughed:
if he knew what was good for him,
bastard'd get gone.

Smack of what might've been
her pretty little pissed off hand,
French manicured and fussy,
against what might've been
his clean shaven aftershave face.
red flesh slap, not fuzzy like stubble.

We hushed and listened,
pressed together against wrought iron.
You live in a beautiful old neighborhood.

We heard her apartment's insides
getting shoved around.
Knuckle breaking on drywall.
Clatter of overturned chair.
Glass shatter could've been Waterford,
was more than likely empty Jim Beam.

Your voice wasn't natural when you drawled
'domestic disturbance' into the receiver.
It was like you'd been rehearsing for a part.

When the courtyard flashed blue and red,
you smooshed your face into mine
and mumbled you hoped no one ever did that to me.
But with guys, you said, you just never know.

Now you move over me on your mattress:
a sullen, dim-witted ghost.
Our limbs have gone sticky in the lamplight,
tepid shade of old nylons, of band-aids.
I slap my hands against your shoulder blades,
peel them off, slap, peel, feel again this slight
ridge of new ink beneath your skin:
a poem I read in high school.

You have no words, now. Neither do I.

GIRL BOY GIRL

His family once threw lovely parties but
you wrecked that like you always do: wrecking things
sloppily and messily, wetly, mascara bleeding
into your pores, face greasy.

Their house was a Georgian Colonial,
all brick, so solid against the wildflowers
his mother planted.

The “guest house,” as you put it,
in the back? That was for the slaves.

You scowled when he told us that,
his arm resting heavy on my shoulder,
as though something that once
held ugliness or sadness
would always be ugly and sad.
But all that purple and yellow sprawling all over
made it pretty for his parties.

His yard boasted a trampoline and a volleyball net,
homemade barbeque and mint juleps.
Somebody always got out a guitar.
Sometimes there was a fiddle playing,
and a mandolin. Sometimes we sang, our mouths
red and slick with sauce.

You drank too much
of someone else's schnapps
and fell down stupidly and
stupidly stupidly
you stumbled to his car
his car with one headlight
eyeball dangling
and you stupidly
stupidly slid your
pants down.

I say this now,
not to defend him but
because it is a fact:
I would have fucked you too.
And not friendlylike, oh no,
but blunt and uncomfortable
legs bumping awkwardly
against the gear shift.

Teenage sex at its worst:
imitation leather stuck to your cellulite,
hula girl gyrating on the dashboard.
It would have been everything that it isn't
when he does it with me.

I would have torn you apart with my fingers:
this is what you get when you embarrass me.
Everyone knows we're best friends
even though you're just a bruise,

a jelly-colored stain
seeping through the back of a skirt.

I would have shredded your gaping slimy mouth
with my teeth. I would have sucked everything
nice and belly-up gigglegiggle out of you and spit it
into your hair and rubbed it in like bubblegum.

Stupid bitch.

Submissive piss.

I would have laughed at you afterwards
for being so drunk and messy.

I would have cleaned you up, later,
in the bathroom with the handmade soap,
little flecks of oatmeal and crushed lavender,
the mandolin trembling yellow
in the kitchen.

VALEDICTORIANS

While cutting up the vegetables
for the pasta salad,
layering them
in the big glass salad bowl,
she notices the water boiling
on the stovetop.
Could you dump the pasta in?
she asks him
and watches, mute, as
he opens the bag and
pours it, *gemelli*,
into the salad bowl:
the dry spirals clatter over her hands,
which are wet from the cucumbers,
the olives, the sliced tomatoes.

REGIMEN

a good secret
can work wonders for your complexion
if applied immediately upon waking

there's no point in brushing your hair or
changing your shirt
secrets allow a certain careless grace

try stretching out
stomach to mattress
while listening to his shower run

close your eyes and make like a cat
elongate neck and spine
toes point until legs twitch
file your nails
on sheets that match his walls

go get a solitary latte at noon
lap foam from your cup's rim
lick your finger before you turn each page in
that magazine you aren't reading

secrets are hearty
so you probably won't be hungry

take your freed up time and explore
his neighborhood spring down streets
with rows of storefront windows:

tea sandwich wine shops sustainable coffee table books
art you can't afford but could easily consume

enjoy your hips
your hips as they reflect
over tableaus of gentrified bounty

secret spreading shiny down
the length of both arms
which are suddenly lovely
glistening white

when your cheeks grow tired from grinning
at his neighbors and their little dogs
take the secret home

get it in the bathtub and rub it in
really work it into a thick cream lather
until the water goes lukewarm

and you rise up gasping

GNOCCHI

She's braless, barefoot,
but you won't answer your phone.
She's making things to eat
in massive costly pots.
Complicated vegetable dishes:
eggplant and gnocchi.

If you were here, in her incensed apartment,
she would tell you what gnocchi is.
She would pronounce it properly
because she looked it up.

She would tell you lots of things
and you would press your hand
against her back
through her thin green shirt
and she would pull her hair back
and be all business.

You would get in her way,
in this narrow kitchen,
reaching for her
as she reaches past spices
on the top shelf:
anise, tarragon, thyme.

She'd be looking for something
she forgot to buy.

She would prattle on about
farmers' markets and whole grains,
laugh at your taste in beer,
thrust something Belgian at you,
watch expectantly as you
tilt it to your lips.

O to be watched like that.
It would weaken your defenses.

She'd insist you have seconds, thirds.
Without realizing it, you'd be starving. Starved.
You would eat her whole.
She'd let you.

Later, she would press her face into your back,
hold questions in her mouth
like hard candy.

BALLROOM

You explain it to me with a sigh:

The man. In ballroom, the man's the frame.
He surrounds his partner, pretty as a picture,
makes her the focal point. Here, I'll show you.

But that's not how it is with us.

You lift me into the air
like it's nothing. Like I'm
nothing.

You spin me into a blush,
reduce me to a swirl against the rim
of a glass.

I orbit you.

Honest I do honest

I do: impossible not to.

We cannot both fit into this crinoline, stupid, we'll stretch it.

Someone has to wear the suit.

I am too proud and you are too lovely.

I want to stomp my foot, hand on hip, declare with certitude:

I'm the pretty one. *I AM.*

I'm so tired of making my friends

be men.

AT OUR FRIEND'S PARTY

in her parents' country house,
we snag two beers and slip into a bedroom,
stand at the foot of the vacant canopy bed,
and proclaim that goddamn chenille spread
the prettiest thing either of us has *evah* seen.

In the den, which sprawls creamily
into the kitchen, other guests compare
their portfolios in the lamplight,
polish glasses on inherited coattails,
positively ooze foreign policy and/
or vacations and/or *au pairs*.

We tell one another we've lost weight,
hitch up last season's Derby dresses,
take turns peeing in the master bath,
squealing at the choice in paint.
Robin's egg blue? Little boy blue?
Blue ball blue?

We stop ourselves at the medicine cabinet,
but consider under-the-sink fair game:
L'Occitane candles, hand soap, *lavendah* water.
Is that perfume? we say, huffing Chanel.
It's for lay toy-*lay*, we say. *Obviously*.

Giggling, we stalk down the polished hallway,
smoothed as sea glass,
categorizing all that amuses us:
Mahogany umbrella stand? Dahling.
Waterford fruit bowl? Gorgeous.
Monogrammed LL Bean dog bed? *Divine*.

In the dining room, we sneak sips out of a lone
chardonnay and shush each other:
seventh graders at the Louvre,
everything so vast and significant.

CUE THE GODDAMN VIOLINS

Darling man:

We all have a Poor Me story stored deeply
or not so deeply within the annals of our marginally
privileged childhood memories. We need excuses,
you understand, for the way we'll treat you later.

I'm telling you this now because you seem nice
and southern and you call me sweetheart
in a way that ensures there won't be a second date.
If you made me yours I wouldn't be. You'd stumble

out of the bombed out crater of our courtship
three years from now, squinting stupidly, muttering
to yourself and kicking at rubble, an old man at thirty.
Remember this for the ones who come next, and next:

They will hurt you. And sniffle their story into open,
trembling palms.

Are you paying attention?

I'm going to attempt mine with a straight face.

Take notes.

Stop touching me.

Ahem.

*The sixth grade cotillion boasted a surplus of girls
in Gap slip dresses and clunky pleather heels.*

I was skinny and breastless, few prospects.

It's so obvious, isn't it?

I'm sure you know what's coming next:

I sat out more often than I danced.

Now I'll pause and look at my hands for two beats.

Catholic school boys

Did you go to private school? No?

You look like you would have

*with their pleated khakis and sunburned lips
saw it in their best evolutionary interest to squeak
around on the linoleum with the ones who smiled.*

Three beats. Sniff.

*I remember another girl who didn't get asked.
She pushed the church folding chairs together and
reclined languidly along their metal spine
looking for all the world like a nineteenth century
magazine ad for smelling salts.*

Note how this peculiar detail adds texture and interest to the story.

*I didn't have the self-possession to do that. I just
sat there, an awkward jumble of knees and knuckles
as her pale dimpled wrist dangled across her eyelids.*

At this point, I could tell you I'm a lesbian, and that
this cherubic brunette was my first crush.

Trust me, I am not that interesting.

No, no: *I went home and snotted up my pillow, convinced
no boy would ever notice me.*

Music swells, time to bring it home.

*And a little bit of me still feels that way now. It's like
there's a shortage of possible chances to be held, desired.
I can't sit out, not even for one song. I could miss my last
opportunity. I know it's crazy/selfish/unfair.
Please know that I never meant to hurt you.
Please know that.*

Please.

See how I bite my lower lip, shake
hair over my forehead,
obscure my eyes.

Darling man.

THE DRESS

It's hanging like a ghost in my closet,
I sob to a friend long distance
on a night before calling in sick.

The metaphor is flimsy but the dress is not.

There is nothing ghostlike about it,
save for the color, which is actually ivory

and in the dark of the closet
I suppose it is just the same color as
the dark, though I don't make a point of
sitting in there with it.

I picture it sometimes irrationally:

its flounced skirt and bone corset
gleam of almost-white
like the inside of a chubby girl's thigh.

Thick, substantial vein of
creamy fat in aspic.

Suspended in the cedar stained space,
pulsing faintly with

myriad opinions, beady-eyed
snap judgments,
piggish smirks
over what I've gone and done.

Refraining from biddy words like 'hussy'
doily words like 'harlot,'
preferring instead to glimmer and glare.

'Monster,' it rustles, if provoked. '*You are.*'

No, I decide, sobering.
There is nothing ghostlike about it.

STRATA

this morning when she was almost awake but not quite
she dreamed their bodies were the walls of a canyon
or an ancient fault line--almost touching but not quite.

the light in the room was moth-colored, sepia,
stubbornly reminiscent, like they'd already happened.
not fair, she thought, not fair too soon too soon.

but in her half-dream they could make it right with
minimal effort--because their limbs had become dough
and they twisted them together in the moth light.

they stayed that way for a hundred years all morning
folded into themselves like wet clay, like hot strata
shifting: benevolent monsters, darkly still, asleep.

LISTEN

listen, I want to tell you something.
downstream on that creek
the sun came diagonal through the trees
and we were green and gold and floating.
you glowed roundly like a drunk buddha,
refracted light winking blissful on the
contours of your face.
listen, I saw you.
you were there and then you weren't
because you were watching me
and then I was watching, too:
I saw myself floating,
wet hair streaming and kicking
feet submerged and vaguely elegant,
a glimmering girl.
I was a catch a catch a catch,
wet motion made still-life mounted.
my face went the kind of happy
that won't surface in a photograph.
you had to be there,
I told the girls.
you had to be there.

THE CICADAS

cicadas cluttered the schoolyard
the spring of my eighth year

we spent our recesses
picking them off branches
ferreting them out from between
blades of grass
covered in dirt

their bodies
welded
like tiny clocks
their eyes the dull red gleam
of a stoplight unlit
illuminated by sun

we stored our specimens
in clear plastic
pencil sharpeners

they crawled sluggishly
disoriented through
the shavings

sometimes they mated

and we were told they'd
return in seventeen years
after we'd grown
after we'd forgotten them

they'd emerge
from the ground triumphant
revolting and fascinating
in their numbers
mechanical bodies translucent
keeping time

DAYTONA BEACH, 1988

We took turns: she went first so I would understand the game.

I laid on my stomach, nightgown pulled up to my neck.

She traced pictures on my back, her frosted fingernails
barely visible in the motel's humid light.

I had to guess what they were:

a snowman

a sailboat

a tulip

I could only feel the shapes the fingers made,
their corners and curved edges:

three circles

a triangle

a long long line

But I knew my shapes,
glued them together in my head
like the collage at Bible school.
I got most of them right.

When it was my turn,
I traced a heart,
because I had just learned to draw those.

My fingernail snagged a mole,

no bigger than a flea,
on her shoulder blade.
She didn't move as the blood gleamed,
a tiny quivering bubble against her suntan.
I rubbed it in with my pinky, silently horrified.

It was hard to explain to people
that she was my sister. Half-sister.
That she was only three years younger
than my mom.
That our father was old enough
to be my grandfather,
and that when, at five, I traced a heart on her back
at the beach,
she was almost thirty.
She had a date later that night.

We stopped speaking after the funeral.
There was too much to talk about,
and also not enough.

I still trace those pictures
on my boyfriends' backs:
snowmen
sailboats
tulips

such a clever pillow game:
they will laugh and wriggle under my fingernails,
faces pressed into their sheets, pleasure muffled,
and I will love them, silently.

NIECES A AND P

A, her foal black eyes incongruent
beneath a fringe of fragile-looking blonde
bleached new,
claps her hands
at the blossoming artichoke,
asks P, her ginger-headed double
to find a vase.

P does things artfully.
My artichoke emerges
from the kitchen 3 minutes later
looking vaguely Japanese
 its foliage asymmetrical
 its silly fuzz-purple head
nodding demurely against her foyer's
red red walls.

A and P, pretty nieces, have made a spread:
diminutive slices of cheese,
olives shining slippery.
A bottle of wine and Oreos.

A has an Austrian husband

who only eats food from street vendors.
She twists her wedding band

her voice deepens and spreads
blue ink in warm water.

P sips wine from her highball,
casts sidelong mascaraed glances
at the artichoke.

A is staying,
sharing P's tidy bedroom
like when they were little
and had no choice.

A is a sound sleeper,
brags she can fall asleep anywhere
and P laughs: well aren't you perfect!

A tosses her new hair
and somehow, sadly, she is.

LAVINIA KNOWS

Lavinia knows things.

Like how to stop a run in pantyhose

(clear nail polish)

or how to put yourself to sleep at night

by naming parts of the room around you:

Fireplace. Window. Vanity. Door.

FireplaceWindowVanityDoor

until the room becomes a circle

and you don't think of anything else.

Lavinia knows how to catch a wasp

in an empty rocks glass

like it's no big deal

like it wouldn't have hurt

(that's the trick, her arched eyebrow tells me)

and she knows how to scramble eggs

without really scrambling them.

They slide from the skillet:

thick yellow cushions.

I have caught Lavinia,

on certain evenings,

rinsing her hair with vinegar

(for the shine)

and polishing the sterling

with toothpaste.

I think she is a witch,
and when I tell her so,
she laughs,
and her mouth makes a circle:
fireplacewindowvanitydoor
naming the room's parts,
tightening it like a drawstring purse,
and I can't think of anything else.

COWBOY CARTOGRAPHY

Accumulation of Midwestern road maps,
atlas pages, metro guides from Dad's business trips.
You taped them to your yellow walls. Mom stopped you

at the Bible, with its enticing Technicolor spread of Galilee--
baked brown earth edged with azure: *Bonanza* palette.
Heaven's cartography is a cowboy's face.

So you cut out and taped up what you could, and it was good. There's
a Polaroid, somewhere, of you, pigtailed and terry cloth jumpsuited,
gesturing gleefully towards that prismatic jumble of places.

Just think:

You could imagine paths connecting state capitals, calculate
the number of rivers to cross.

You could trace the red line all the way downtown
in search of ballerinas, gelato.

You could finger skip along the Arctic Circle.

Reykjavik Reykjavik Reykjavik!

Now you drive your city in early mornings and delight,
more quietly, again. Market eventually leads to Mellwood, if one has faith.
Oak turns to Winter turns to Grinstead.

Houses tumble past, and you see
your place here for what it is: a dog-eared panorama,
disarmingly shabby, peeled back, undone.

You press your face into map creases, inhale their dust, press
your palms against stacks of glossy atlases.

When you pull your hands away
they are cowboy colored, blue and brown.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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PRESENTATIONS
& READINGS: Panel Discussion/Presentation: "Helping Students Become Better
Writers: Collaborating to Test a Central Claim of Writing Center
Work"
Kentucky Philological Association, March 2010

Selected Readings (Poetry and Short Fiction)
Kentucky Philological Association, March 2010 and March 2011

Panel Discussion/Presentation: "Making Connections"
International Writing Centers Association, November 2010