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DENISE from HUSH by April di Angelis Published by Faber & Faber

Age of character: 23

DENISE: Once I got really pissed. Really pissed at this party and then I got really hungry, really hungry, you know, like you do after drinking and so I devoured a bowl of peanuts. A whole bowl, to myself.

*Pause.*

And then I vomited the lot back up. I sort of regurgitated them. The thing is, they came out whole. I must have just swallowed them down without any sort of chewing. Later someone remarked that they shot out like bullets. Ping ping. Ping.

*Pause.*

I was a bit depressed at the time.

*Pause.*

The reason I'd been depressed as because I'd been working at this sandwich-making job. I was living with this bloke and we were making sandwiches in his flat. At first I really threw myself into it. I experimented with fillings, I bought a butter dish. We used to drive round delivering sandwiches to local businesses only quite often we never got any orders. We ate quite a lot of sandwiches on those occasions. That dealt quite a blow to my enthusiasm I can tell you. Not to mention the fact that I wasn't getting the correct balance of amino acids in my diet. And that can lead to personality disorders. Like shoplifting or slimming. Then one day we found a cockroach lying upside down in a giant size tub of margarine. It wasn't me that left the lid off. That was when the infestation started. You can never be alone with an infestation. Soon after that he left me. He

walked out leaving rent arrears and twenty-seven kilos of cheddar. I lay in bed weeping for days.

I don't know if what we had was love but it did provide light relief from all the buttering. That was before I became a Buddhist. I used to watch the cockroaches basking on the walls. They do say in the event of a nuclear holocaust cockroaches will survive to inherit the earth. They used to crawl around in a superior manner as if they knew they could survive intense heat and I couldn't. Cocky bastards. The thing is, I'd never go through that now. Be used like that. Because now I'm different. Transformed by experience.

*Pause.*

Sometimes I wonder what happens. What happens to people who can't find enthusiasm for things. The way things are.

*Pause.*

Of course there's always acupuncture.

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