

C.N. Bean

Texas, the Summer before Kennedy got shot

I.

He had his own route and got a bread truck
a big metal box that had two seats and four tires
and plenty of space behind the seats for the bread
fruit pies and pastries that rode in trays made to slip
in and out of racks that rolled from a loading dock
to the truck in one smooth move after dark

which meant he slept days and worked nights while Mom sewed clothes
in a sweat shop and we buried sound
for fear of the wrath of a tired man awakened
before the hour he established for our knock
at his bedroom door, followed by our, Are you up?
If we heard movement it meant, Don't knock again.

II.

The summer brought heat and stale baked goods in mountains
that went on forever and let me know why manna
caused people to hate forty years of the same food
because I grew sick of small fruit pies, even peach
which I liked best. Blueberry I refused to eat
but apple and cherry were okay. The boxes

of larger pies Mom sliced up and put out on small plates
for breakfast, lunch and dinner made me dread eating.
Pecan and lemon meringue I could tolerate
but apple, cherry and peach left a rotten smell
once the pies sat long enough for fruit to ferment.
I heard that happened to manna also.

III.

Up to our nostrils in stale pies we told Mom our issues
before Dad got home and she left for work.
We said we were tired of pies each meal and wondered
why we couldn't eat normal food like other people ate.
Silent while we spoke, she ground her teeth in locked jaws.
Finally she said, At least you eat, and told Dad

who turned Moses mad and said, Get sleep while you can.
I heard him wake my brother and felt him tap me.
We followed him into the night oven of a sealed truck
and shared a seat while open doors blew in heat.
Dad left fresh baked goods and picked up stale all night
but dawn surprised us with quail.

IV.

We stuffed ourselves with truck-stop pancakes and bacon.
On our way out to the truck, Dad bought us each a candy bar.
I felt a reprieve from manna
a mouth-melted chocolate that lasted all the way to November.