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## Popped Corn

With a scraping whirr, the metal spears of the popcorn popper rotate, bathing the kernels evenly in corn oil that grows hotter with each sweeping motion. Steam rises from the holes in the clear plastic dome, and beads of liquid trickle down its inner surface. The first renegade kernel leaps from its oily bath and turns itself inside out in a burst of rounded whiteness. A frenzied popping ensues as the other kernels hasten to follow its example. Just as the new, expanded kernels threaten to push the dome off its seat, the popping dies down. In one swift motion the world is inverted. The dome becomes a bowl. The metal spears and their base are pulled away in a hiss of persistent oil. The kernels turn their white bellies to the open air.

In passionate delight we fill individual margarine tubs from the bowl and crunch the cloud-like puffs to nothing. The excessive salt put on by over-enthusiastic hands stings our lips. Some of the kernels we dunk in water glasses. They expand like sponges before we toss them, soggy and limp, into our mouths. They taste of nights in front of the old movie screen watching family slides or brilliant images created by a humming VCR. On wafts of the warm smell float memories of lying in bed, sensing the same scents, and tripping back down the steps to have one bowl of Dad's batch, eaten with toothpaste-tasting teeth. One or two kernels escape and find hiding places on the floor and under the chair.

Our margarine tubs are empty. A few kernels, well-tanned but unpopped, cluster together in the bottom of the big bowl. We pluck them out and let them rest on our tongues, peeling their salty skins off with our teeth and tasting the coffee-like interior. The skins burrow under our gums and demand to be removed with dental floss. Our fillings cringe as we pulverize the kernels. We lick the lingering granules of buttery salt off our fingers with frugal tongues. The empty bowl grins fondly up at us.

*Christina Cass*