



Dishes

She smiles wanly at him over a bowl of cold cereal, asks "When did you stop liking peanut butter?"

He stopped liking her homemade peanut butter the first time he tasted it in the boat of a green celery stalk – gritty, thick like a sick person's mucus on his teeth. His friend at day camp brought smooth peanut butter sandwiches for lunch and once he'd tried to swap, offering not only his sandwich, but a banana and two flaxseed cookies, too. No deal.

"I like other peanut butter," he says, tugging at the vinyl tablecloth.

"Other peanut butter isn't really peanut butter," she tells him. "It's full of chemicals." She tries to smile, but it doesn't stick. He looks up from the tablecloth and watches her lips fall.

"Eat your cereal."

She shakes her head, stands and turns away from him to face the sink, stacking the dirty dishes intently: bowls hold each other, plates layer into a history of organic meals, the ceramic mugs she'd thrown on a foot-powered wheel in college line up – lumpy, overweight soldiers. She takes all the forks and spoons in one hand and up-ends them into a mug filled with water. She'll let them soak and wash them later.

He watches her arrange the unmatching dishes. She stacks them, then reorganizes her stacks – bowls closest to the sink, plates farther out. She makes neat rows of mugs, then picks them up one by one and places them into the sink. She runs the tap a few seconds, shuts it off. On. Off.

On. Off.

She's forgotten he's there and he watches the mountain of her back, wondering what shape her mouth is making on the other side.