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Interracial Marriage

Howard Schaap

Tonight, I just want to be left alone
with my day-old casserole: sagging
California veggies glued together
with cream of mushroom soup and
Velveeta cheese, mixed with deep
freeze beef, covered over with not
quite crunchy Stovetop stuffing.

But no. In the Styrofoam box
sits a Lao dish: ribbons of rice
noodles, red and green peppers
like party streamers, a festive
orange sauce screaming spicy,
and the translucent shoots of the
delicacy you love: chicken feet.

No doubt it's a niche market.
While breasts get filleted and
ice-glazed, wings and legs get
shrink-wrapped, and even backs
get vacu-packed in plastic zip-locs,
the rubber shoes of chickens go out
the back door to this savory fate.

Tonight, I'm content to let you nibble
down the nubbly skin and spit out
metatarsals like seeds of bone. But
now the kids prod me, sucking air
through their teeth to knock the edge
off the spice. When our three-year-old
invites, "Come on, Dad, try it," I know

I'm outside this circle. So I, too, hook
my incisors on the back side of the raspy
gelatinous skin and peel, whittle down
the cartilage ends of the phalanges,
add my clinks of bone-to-plate, suck
the sweet air through my teeth, the
five of us together, eating chicken feet.