Aunt Cil said she didn’t like the
taste of food, and I wondered
at that my whole life. Everything
tasted bad to her except tomatoes.

I worked teenaged summers in her
industrial clinic, where washed up
alcoholic doctors tended to the garment
workers of LA. My aunt would triage
the frightened, mangled ones with
her comical Spanglish, speaking
louder than necessary. She knew
the words that would work.

Always the first name first, and Jorge
or Maria would hang on through
the bone-setting and stitching. She was a blond
saint to them. To me, she was a mystery

sending me out for a lunch she didn’t
want, she would scarf it down just like
you would fill a tank with gas. At home
she cooked big meals for Tom and the boys

but still sat, short of liking them, too. But
then came mid-summer and we drove home
through the disappearing fields of Orange County
and I could feel her anticipation
for when someone says she only likes tomatoes, she doesn't mean sauce or canned tomatoes, or tomato soup. She only means really fresh tomatoes

and I wanted to be there on the day she swerved off the road and parked near the rickety stand and bought a flat of heavy beefsteaks. She would grasp the warmest one in her hand and bite and I would bite, too, and a red world would explode all over us, and we would suck out the juice. She would look at me, and I

at her, and I wouldn't see a saint, but a sinner like the rest of us, and it gave me some hope about my future as a wife, what I could still get away with if I ever settled down.