I Ask My Mother How It Happened

It’s noon. She takes the blue box from the pantry shelf and sits a cookie on the table. Chips Ahoy. Brown circle decked with darker flecks of brown. I can smell the chocolate, imagine the taste, while outside black and yellow mynas fight in the plumeria tree. Do you want it? Would you like a taste? I’m about to reach for it when she smiles, studying me: That’s how it happens. The sun pours in, the birds are taking their grievances from tree to tree and the sweet, dark smell intensifies. Her eyes are chocolaty, so I know it’s safe to ask, Because of cookies? She laughs and what I want more than the whole box is to make her do it again. Because of desire. It’s all our wanting that makes the world so sad. I rub my sandals on the chair leg, fidget in my seat. This seems important. I’m thinking Chips Ahoy taste too dry, anyway. She stands, moving to put the box away. In the convent, we prayed that Christ would live in our hearts, driving all other desires away. I study the arch of her narrow back as she tidies the cupboard. She’s wearing a green dress that I know she doesn’t like. It’s only a cookie, I say, but I know how I’d feel if someone took what I want most away. It’s o.k. You can eat it, she says. The lesson is over. The birds have gone. Only the sun is left slicing the room with its clean, bright sword. Eat it, she urges, but even hours later, when I creep downstairs to say goodnight, the sweetness sits untouched on the empty tabletop.