

EATING HER

Sally-Ann Murray

There are established rituals concerning food. The peeling of an orange, for instance, is a feat that Nora must accomplish in a single, looping spring which falls from the paring knife like a snaking ribbon. If she doesn't manage, she gets cross with herself; force-feeds the failed fruit to the girls and makes herself start over.

And even when she gets the peel whole, in one, even before she breaks off segments to eat, she arranges the empty whorl of skin back into the appearance of an unpeeled orange. Then she holds it so very carefully, cupped gently in her hands, provoking the girls to contraries of belief and incredulity. Is it, isn't it? Has she, hasn't she?

Sometimes, if it is dark and the girls are awake, she calls them to watch her tear off a piece of peel from the loop and bend it, sppfft, into the quick flame of a match. Out of nowhere, the sputter summons a split second of crackling, hissing blue, and a sharp, fresh pungency which makes them all taste orange, without having eaten.

The girls love that instant; are happy that Nora brings them to share it, never mind that it's late and they were already in bed. But they tense with anticipation as the match burns ever closer to their mother's fingers, because she never drops it, instead allowing it to shrink down to the last singed tadpole. Then she is left with the most delicate shrivel of charcoal, a husk of a matchstick which crumbles the second she moves her hand.

There is also, she would say if they asked, a slight tingling in the tips of her index finger and thumb. How it feels after numb, and before blister.

Looking at the tiny blackened stick with the unformed amphibious head, Halley wonders: Was this really a match? Was it a match even then, like that, all used up, or only before? And was this really her mother, a matchless being who could hold fire, making herself impervious? Or did she feel it, and did that make things better, or worse?

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ONE PER CUSTOMER

Steve Kissing

My mom was the coupon queen. No, make that czar. When the fine print said ‘only one per customer’, she marched my three siblings and me into the store, each with a coupon and a dime or two. We kids left in single file, each with, say, a tube of frozen orange-juice concentrate rolling from side to side at the bottom of our paper bag. Mom would follow right behind, smirking as if we had just robbed the store of all its cash, and were walking, undetected, to our get-away car.

Once buckled, Mom would say, ‘We didn’t get *squeezed* for this juice, now did we, kids?’ She’d laugh and then flip the store off, her hand between her legs where none of her kids could see – except me, riding the backseat hump with a clear shot of her lap. Mom would laugh again as she sped toward the next bargain.

If our loot was loaves of two-day-old bread, Mom would say, ‘That bread cost practically no *bread*.’ Laugh, fuck-you finger, laugh. If our conquest was deeply discounted buckets of peanut butter, Mom would say, ‘We’re really *spreading* our budget around.’ Laugh, fuck-you finger, laugh.

All these years later, I prefer to pay full price. It’s a character defect, I’m sure Mom would suggest. But I find it oddly exhilarating to get *rolled* by donuts or to be *milked dry* by premium ice-cream. Paying full price also makes me feel less guilty when, driving away from a store, I put my hand out the window, raise my middle finger, and think of Mom.