

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

John Brantingham: Flash Fiction

John Brantingham · Wednesday, November 25th, 2020

Orange

You're sitting on the back porch, peeling an orange, getting down to the deeply spiritual part of the orange, down where you can taste the bitter rind just from smelling it because you're pulling off the skin, high, close to your nose.

This is the way you did it when you were a kid and you needed a minute away from life because you were dealing with the deep and existential questions of childhood, questions that dealt with monsters and homework and your dad and whether or not you were going to be able to make it through to adulthood.

On the angry days when your mind spun all the worst possibilities, you'd take an orange from the tree in the backyard, and you could lose yourself inside it, and on this day when you have found out that your presence will not be required at work tomorrow or any time after that, despite the fact that you have a four year old and a wife who is underpaid, you find yourself trying to lose yourself into this childhood orange and not making it, you suppose because your face is streaming with the tears of terror and incompetence.

That's when you notice Cyndi, standing at the back door in her little overalls. She's watching you and sucking on the first three fingers of her right hand, trying to understand what's happening.

You stare back a moment, and you could say anything, but your mouth lands on, "You wanna see a trick, Gumdrop?" You hold out your hand to her, and she comes over close enough that you can grab her and put her on your lap. "This is how you make everything better, okay?"

"Okay."

You start to peel the orange again and say, "Breathe in, okay?"

"Okay."

"Isn't that good?"

"Yeah."

"This is your trick for knowing that everything in the world is good." Cyndi doesn't say anything to this, but she leans back hard against your chest, and you can feel her breathing deep, going into

that spiritual world of the orange. You can see into her mind because it was the same mind you had at her age, and it's true. Everything in this world is good.

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Pear

You're lying on the couch, pains shooting through you. Cyndi's in the next room making tea and cutting up a pear. You figure you have two months more to live if the doctors are right, and you're guessing they are.

This, it seems, is probably a moment for contemplation, and when you think back to childhood, you realize your best memory is that pear you had one day when you were four or five, the flavor more complex than any other fruit you'd ever had. Your dad handed it to you. You must have been on a trip because there was snow on the ground, but you lived in California.

Cyndi comes in and puts the plate with the cut up pear on the table next to you, and you say, "You know, I think my earliest memory was of a pear."

"Yeah," she says. "The one Grandpa gave you when you were a kid." She places the tea next to you too. "Why do you think I cut that up for you?"

You shake your head. "When did I tell you about that?" You thought you'd forgotten about it until just now.

She looks up at the popcorn ceiling. "I don't know. I was pretty little. You handed me a pear and told me about it. It's one of my favorite memories."

So all right, you think. That's it. That's the circle. The only thing left is to eat your fruit and let everything happen as it's going to happen. You must have worked through the other four stages, you suppose. So you pick up a slice and lift it to your nose. It smells of childhood and love. You bite into its complexity and think about nothing.

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