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Pineapple Juice

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Pineapple Juice

William J Francis

He certainly didn't consider himself a gawker. One of those jerks who made a point to ogle every woman unfortunate enough to cross his path.

But it was late and the supermarket was practically deserted and she caught him by surprise. He nearly knocked the poor woman over, causing her to drop her frozen entrees, the ones on sale that week, two for six dollars, onto the black and white checkered tiles.

"I'm sorry," the redhead said. "I didn't see—" Only she cut her apology short when she realized where his eyes were glued. His manners kicked in, his ears blazed, and he dropped to the floor and gathered up the two green boxes that flaunted such modern miracles as only five carbs and new and improved cherry crisp.

"Completely my fault," he said righting himself. "I was trying to read the signs, trying to find the frozen pineapple juice, you know, the kind that comes in the cardboard tubes?" He smiled weakly and waited. The hum of the freezer was deafening in the silence. Overhead, one of the florescent lights flickered. At last she nodded, though he couldn't be sure if it was because she did know about juice frozen in a glorified toilet paper roll or if she just thought acquiescence might prove the quickest means of getting the hell away from him.

"Anyway," he went on, "I wasn't looking where I was going." He held the frozen dinners out to her, but when she tugged, he was surprised to find that his hands did not let go. She mesmerized him. Her tanned face. The faint freckles on her cheeks. Her sun streaked hair spilling down her shoulders and covering the straps of the pink ribbed tank top she was wearing. His heart vibrated just behind his teeth, and he had to resist the urge to take in the front of that tank top once more. She tilted her head slightly and peered intently at something. Him. He could sense she was feeling him out. Trying to decide if he was just another Neanderthal. Behind his ribcage, something tumbled and he thought of the big Ferriswheel at the state fair.

"I'm sorry," he stammered. "For not looking where I was going, and for—" this time he stopped short. He cleared his throat and stared down at the frozen dinners, suddenly shy in a way he hadn't been since a teenager standing in front of the nuns at Our Lady of Eternal Suffering Catholic School for Boys.

But I Won't

Bianca Pittman

Folded,
complex and intricate,
like a mysterious
creature of origami,

your arms melt around me.

With a lack of discretion
that is laughable at times,
sometimes your overt squeezes
are just mad sexy,

oddly fashionable.
(like strutting runway
with heart-shaped
Louis Vuitton sleeves-

strings of Calvin Klein kisses
- suspended -
from a curve of shoulder
to the small of my back)

Even in subtle productions, you
move me to wear your colors
boldly (out of season),
permanently on display
for each corner of the world to see.

"Apology accepted," the redhead announced.

He met her eyes in time to see a lopsided smile slowly materialize on her face and right then he knew she had made up her mind about him. He loosened his grip on the sweating entrees; she pulled them from him slowly, and he felt the cool slick cardboard slide across the palms of his hands. "Got a name?" she asked.

"Did you get the juice?" a familiar voice interrupted. And just like that he could feel himself shrinking, melting, like the witch in the Wizard of Oz. He wondered if he could possibly slip away unnoticed, leaving nothing but a puddle of clothing in his place. Associate to aisle nine with a mop, please.

The redhead's green cat-eyes blinked twice in rapid succession and her mouth made that little oh expression. Her gaze dropped to his hand and the gold band that had been hiding beneath her chicken-ala-king.

"Ryan?" his wife asked as she stepped into the space that a minute ago had belonged only to him, this redheaded stranger, and two frozen dinners. Becca had her dark hair pulled through the back of a baseball cap and she had on the same baggy T-shirt she wore yesterday. In her arms she carried a package of tampons the size of their first apartment. He looked from the redhead to his wife and then to the bulky, glossy package promising that four out of five women prefer their gentle-glide applicator to the leading competitor's. "Ryan. Juice."

Ryan nodded perfunctorily. The redhead had gone from looking embarrassed about the situation to looking embarrassed about his situation. She pointed across the aisle to the freezer case directly parallel to the

one she had plucked her frozen dinners out of. Grateful, but not risking a murmur of thanks, he half tripped over his own feet as he hurried to the adjacent case.

He stood much longer than necessary with the glass door open, allowing the frigid air to cool his burning cheeks. He pretended to consider which brand of pineapple juice to purchase. As if he had a choice. Knowing he couldn't stall forever, he grabbed five cans of Minute Maid, two in each hand, one pinched under his arm. Hesitantly he poked his head out of the icy swirls of fog; the redhead was gone. Relieved and heartbroken at the same time, he nudged the glass door with his hip.

He spoke. "My dad used to say there is no harm in looking at the menu." He had meant it to be funny, to break the ice, but even to his own ears he sounded like a jackass. Becca made that same face she made when he loaded the dishwasher too full, or walked to the mailbox barefoot, or forgot to put his razor back under the sink when he finished shaving.

Behind him, the glass door of the freezer finally closed, the rubber gasket making a sucking sound as it sealed. The sound reminded him of a kiss. Not a peck on the cheek like when he left for one of his business trips or brought home flowers, but that frantic kind of kiss that used to leave his lips raw and his chest aching.

Seasons = Delights

Sally A. Roberts

Rain

Droplets

Winter-robed

Crystal snowflakes

Flutter earthbound in winter=s frosty light.

Snowflakes delight in winter=s wonderland

Swirl in sunshine

Springtime=s melt

Droplets

Reign.



SELF PORTRAIT Nakita Vojnovich