

Sauce

The package fell off the cart when they unloaded the big truck in front of the super market. She saw it fall, even from the other side of the road, and she saw it roll under the truck. She could still see it lying there when the workers had long gone inside. The sun had not come out yet, but the package was bright yellow and it shone in the first light of day as if asking her to go over and pick it up.

Would it be theft? she thought, but it was only a brief thought, just long enough to last while she crossed the street. She looked around. She was alone. She reached under the truck and pulled the package out. It was not big. She could hide it under her coat. It was a pack of instant sauces, six different flavors, each one in its own little box. She hurried down the street and vanished in the shadows. She didn't look back.

This evening she couldn't wait for him to come back. She paced up and down around the old barrel which was her kitchen and her stove, peering into the darkness, listening to every noise, every creaking branch.

"Here you are," she said.

"Dinner," he said. He was never one to talk much.

She served each of them a plate, one of the plastic ones they had recycled from a bin outside the mall. A plate with thin strips of tender deer meat in a ragout sauce, arranged in the shape of a star around the center of the plate.

"What the hell is this?" he said.

"Deer ragout."

"Have you gone out of your mind?"

"Try it."

He pulled one of the tender strips out of the sauce and peered at it suspiciously.

"It's bread," he said.

"No, it's meat. It's deer. Try it."

He tried it, and it surely tasted of deer. It was tender and meaty and it didn't taste like bread at all.

"It's good," he said. He didn't say anything more, but he licked his plate clean at the end and she smiled.

The next day she made fish curry.

"This is no fish," he said. "It's bread, just bread."

"Try it!" she laughed.

He ate all the fish and all the curry and this night they cuddled together and it was warm and nice and her belly was full of fish and curry, and as she closed her eyes she could still taste a thousand strange spices from India.

They had Chinese pork strips after that, sweet-sour, and chicken in pineapple sauce and German strudel in vanilla sauce and beef in sherry sauce. They had another dish every night, and as they ate it they travelled to the places the dishes came from. She told him of the Chinese with their pig-tailed hair, and of the old castles of Europe and of the bull fights in Spain. She had never seen any of those things, but then, he hadn't either, and so he just sat there and chewed the precious meats and tasted the sauces and from his eyes she could tell that he listened to her.

Then it was over, as suddenly as it had begun. She had used up the package and nothing was left. All day she sat around and she thought of the past week and she tried to figure out what to do when he came home tonight. This evening there were no plates awaiting him. There was his wife and she held up two plain, dry slices of bread. She gave him one.

"What happened?" he asked.

"A wonderful thing happened," she said. "We're back. We're finally home! We have seen India and China and the Pacific, and we've crossed Europe from Germany to Spain, and now we've come back home again!"

He took the bread from her.

"Isn't it nice?" she said. "Real bread again. I missed it." And she looked at him, afraid of what he might say.

He took the bread and for a while he chewed on it. It was old bread, hard, and he had to chew for quite a while before he could speak.

He looked up to her and slowly he smiled.

"Yes," he said. "You're right." He took another bite of the bread. "Good old bread. The taste of home."

This night they lay side by side, and their bodies touched in the dark. He put his arm around her and they looked up at the stars far above and she rested her head on his shoulder.

"Let's travel again someday," he whispered in the dark.

Prentice Mumfuzz