

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

Maureen Kingston
Sisters in the Ring

You live to knock my squandering ways. Today's gripe? Paper plates. I buy them in bulk. Use them as throwaway cutting boards. Which about blows your mind. The waste of it. I say my wooden board's a pulpit for germs. Say, if CSI can find trace evidence in the hilt of a knife, what chance do I have at disinfection? And you give me the did-you-really-try look, and I say, I really did: lemon juice and baking soda, salt scrub, vinegar. Peroxide my favorite, the way the bubbles fizzed and flushed out malinger-gering microbes. Until your tongue clucks about how I've used the wrong concentrate--not strong enough. The germs survived. And as your lips lift in sickle smile, murder hormones flood my brain. I can't contain their rising tide; can't help imagining your know-it-all tongue staple-gunned to my kitchen wall. Or better yet, grilled like steak, resting on one of my fresh white paper plates, gathering juices, waiting to be sliced. Some of us turn away when the cutman slits the boxer's eye. Some of us don't.

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My Summer Job in the Valley of the Shadow of Peas

I ought to warn the ladies visiting from Iowa their pictures won't turn out well. I ought to mention how the Jolly Green Giant faces the wrong way. His back's to the sun--bad photography 101. Advice they might not welcome from a kid mowing the lawn of this bygone stop, a roadside attraction abandoned decades ago by its parent company. The giant survived somehow. Hands on his hips, smiling, he'd refused to yield the high ground. A proud Minnesotan to the end.

Some of the ladies approach the giant *en masse*, swarm his calves, ankle-nip his size 78 shoes with their snapping cameras. Uff-da. No sense of proportion whatsoever. Bread and circuses. Too easily distracted by the heft of his Robin Hood slippers. A few sheepishly climb the staircase between his legs, lift their permed heads. Ho-Ho-Hum. Not great Caesar's ghost beneath the fiberglass leaves, but his forsaken eunuch son.

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The Premiere

She chose me, a grease spot on her side of the velvet rope. Turned her adorama flash on me, promised to make me a star. I glowed infantile infatuation, dropped quarter after quarter into her stereoscope, in love with her spun-sugar image of me. Each new infusion of praise spread nectar through my body until I was umbilically-hooked, couldn't get enough of being her sweet-sweet girl.

Then, poof. The klieg lights dimmed, the Karo sluice dried up.

Enter Brutus, stage left, lurching about in his terrycloth toga, beguiling me with his freak-show face: crossed-eyes and a slapstick tongue that impossibly thwacked the tip of his nose. My fealty flagged--was bought off by a father's vaudeville act. She skirted around me then, returned to the red carpet, determined to attract the audience she craved from the next baby in line.