

Fruit and Vegetable

by Michael D. Brown

I walk into the fruit and vegetable market and she sees me right away. I've been successful in avoiding her for more than three weeks. The break-up was not a good one. I still have a scar over my left eye where the ashtray hit me.

We're not speaking but I'm not going to another market either. I like the produce at Garden of Eden and it's my neighborhood too after all.

I head for pears and apples. She would have no reason to be in that section. She never ate a pear in two years we lived together. Come to think of it, I don't usually go for pears myself but what the hell. I'll occupy myself with a fruit I know she doesn't care for.

I can feel her watching me, taking into account that I'm avoiding her. It's as if she has Superman's heat vision and she's boring a hole in the back of my neck.

Granny Smith apples might be nice. They're tart. Very appropriate.

Suddenly I see a hand pull out an apple from the bottom of the pile. I turn to see if it's hers and she's at least ten feet away immediately as I turn back to the apples and they begin rolling in an avalanche all over the floor.

I drop my basket and try to stop the whole pile from cascading and of course more of them fall than I'm able to catch. The guy in charge comes over and says, "It's all right sir. It's all right. Manny, come over here and take care of this, will you?"

"I'm sorry," is all I can think to say bending to pick up some of the fruit.

"It's all right, sir." Manny and the other guy are waving me away as if they're afraid I'll cause another accident while trying to help. I can see her by the onions. Is she smirking?

I walk to the deli section. I came in originally for potato pancakes. I hate to cook, but I'll microwave anything easy to prepare. Three

customers wait to be served so I busy myself looking in the counter to see what else I might get.

When it's my turn, she steps forward and the big guy says, "Yes, mam?" serving her before me. Am I going to say, "Hey, I was here first?" I don't think so. It's not worth setting her off over potato pancakes even though I don't see anything lying around that she could use as a weapon, nothing as hard as that ashtray anyway. She might pick up one of the salamis and hit me with it, but no...

I decide to let deli food go for later and head to the dairy section. I get a tub of garlic, dill cream cheese, a couple of yogurts, and I'm looking at the soy milk, when she strikes. Without warning, she drops an egg into my basket and it cracks, of course, oozing through the basket onto my good running shoes.

Why did I come in here? On seeing her, why did I think I could continue shopping? Well, I'm not a wuss. I remember the seven painful stitches in my eyebrow. Bitch.

I pick up a carton of eggs and place them in my basket. As I'm walking away, I open the carton surreptitiously, get a nice grip on one of the eggs and turn quickly to smash it on her shoulder. Only she has moved to the olive section and some other woman gets a blouse full of egg. The woman makes like to scream, but no sound comes out of her mouth. My ex was about to laugh but now sees this could be very serious. She steps over and apologizes to the woman, says that was meant for her and that I am a monster. Then the woman screams for real. "Manager, manager, oh my god. There's crazy people here."

Others stop to see the crazy people. I figure this is my chance. I'm going to get thrown out anyway. In quick succession I crack three eggs on my ex's head. She doesn't flinch though. She has a soft tomato ready for me and wham I get it in the nose, but I think she's torn open a stitch because my eye hurts like a bastard.

We empty our baskets quickly throwing things at each other and I almost expect a scene like in a slapstick movie where everyone starts tossing pies, but except for the disgruntled woman, there are only two of us tossing food at each other. We each get through about

half a dozen pieces of fruit before a couple of workers come to usher us out.

"Don't put your hands on me," she says.

"Come on mam, let's just take it outside," the manager says.

"Just don't touch me," she says.

I'm thinking, if I were you, buddy, I'd listen to her. I'm using a handkerchief to wipe tomato off my face. I guess it was just the juice stung my eye. The brow feels solid.

The manager is gripping my arm, attempting to show how he is able to lead me out, so if she knows what's good for her she'll leave also. She's not resisting. She just doesn't like strangers touching her.

Outside on the street, the manager says, "Please, don't either of you come back here. Take your business elsewhere." He dislodges the doorstep on his way in so that the door, usually kept open, now swings shut.

She looks funny with egg dripping off her hair. I offer her my handkerchief for what good it will do with the tomato bits on it. For a second or two she looks as if she is going to be furious.

Then she laughs. "Well, I guess neither of us will be able to shop here for a while," she says.

"I guess not," I say.

"So," she says, "Next week, D'Agostino's?"

