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## Fresh Raspberries

*For Britta*

It's tasteless, she says, and I chew slowly, attempting to prove her wrong.

She's right, though – the thin, over-cooked puff pancake leaves my tongue devoid of sensation, like imaginary food.

The texture is interesting, I say. It's like a pleasant piece of sandpaper on my tongue.

Saying that makes it even more disgusting, she says, going to the refrigerator and returning with a bowl of raspberries we'd bought the day before from the small market at the end of our street. It was the middle of February, so finding fresh raspberries (and not the lesser, year-round supermarket variety) was something of a surprise. Yet there they were, plump and ruby red, their styles creating miniscule shadows in the crisp afternoon sunlight.

My daughter grows them in our backyard, the man behind the cart said. I'm not sure how she does it, exactly. She refuses to grow them at the right time of year. She plants them right at the beginning of December and picks the last berry at the very end of April. No fertilizer, no cover, no heat lamps no matter how cold it gets.

That's amazing, she said, leaning down to inspect the berries, as if by getting closer she may hear them whisper the secret to their existence.

The strangest thing, he said, his voice dropping suddenly, is I can't seem to get anything else to grow during those months. Nothing. Not even things that *should* grow.

I've tried everything I can think of. And she refuses to try growing anything else, so raspberries are our only crop this time of year.

It's a good thing she grows a lot of them then, I said, picking up two cartons.

*One thing at a time, daddy*, he said, taking my money and handing me the change, that's what she says to me.

These are delicious, she says now, sitting back down across from me.

I continue tearing off pieces of the failed, Frisbee-shaped pancake and chewing on them thoughtfully. I really do enjoy the texture.

Why do you think she's able to grow these? she asks, placing another berry gently in her mouth.

I'm not sure, I say, it doesn't make much sense, does it?

I think it makes perfect sense, she says. Sometimes it's better go with the way things feel than how you think.

What do you mean?

Well, she says, take that pancake, if you can call it that, for example. You followed the directions in the book to the letter, didn't you?

It's a rhetorical question, but I nod anyway. We've been together long enough for her to know that I rarely deviate from written instructions. I have every operating manual and assembly guide from every single piece of furniture and appliance in our apartment in a filing cabinet in my closet.

Well look at how the pancake turned out, she continues. There is absolutely nothing to it. But these raspberries, grown in an impossible time of year... she couldn't

have *known* they'd turn out this way, could she? She had to have just *felt* like they'd grow beautifully.

But that's just it, I say, shifting forward in my chair, they'll only grow for her. Her father can't make anything else grow.

That's because he knows it's impossible, she says. He knows the truth – that raspberries can't be grown in February.

So she can grow them because she doesn't know the truth?

Or she doesn't believe it, she says, or she doesn't care.

She couldn't just be incredibly lucky?

She shakes her head. No.

There are two small pieces of pancake left and I shove one of them in my mouth mindlessly, completely disregarding its incredible texture, chewing to keep myself from speaking. All the while she stares at me curiously, as if she'd been walking through a field of tall grass and suddenly stumbled upon me. It was as if she was just now recognizing me.

Without a word, she pushes her chair back and stands up. Picking up her purse from the counter, she walks to the front door, looking back one more time with that same, curious look before pushing the door open and stepping outside. She leaves the door ajar and I can hear her footsteps down the stairs on the side of the building, growing fainter until all that is left is the sound of the soft winter breeze coming in from the doorway.

I pick up the final piece of pancake and rub my fingers across the rough, sandpaper surface. Just before the pancake reaches my lips, it occurs to me that I could add a raspberry, giving the pancake the taste it has been lacking. I'm surprised that I

hadn't thought of this before, and sit with my hand suspended near my mouth for a full minute while I mull over the possibility.

*One thing at a time* I finally think to myself, placing the last piece of pancake in my mouth.

I sit and chew, delicately, until it too melts away.