

Searching for Cranberries in February

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[This essay was published in The Remington Review, Spring 2024 --
<https://www.flipsnack.com/remingtonreview/remington-review-spring-2024/full-view.html>]

It's turning February and none of the four grocery stores in walking distance from me has any frozen cranberries left. Of course the fresh, crimson twelve-ounce bags were gone by Christmas. I always buy an extra package or two at Thanksgiving and stuff them in the freezer for later-on muffins. This year, I'd already used those up making extra batches of cranberry sauce for my pregnant daughter-in-law. It wasn't pickles she craved; it was the tart, deep red condiment that we traditionally serve with the turkey and mashed potatoes.

My family has never messed with the jellied, circular canned stuff. I simmer the raw berries in orange juice with the zest of a fresh orange, a little grated ginger, sugar. Kayla had used up the leftovers I gave her from Thanksgiving and a second batch I'd made and jarred with the cranberries in the freezer. Every evening, they had been her snack with ice cream as she tried to consume enough calories to feed her growing belly and herself.

In the fairy tale Rapunzel, the husband must steal food from the witch's garden in order to save his wife's life due to her untoward cravings. The witch catches him in the act and lets him bring the food home, with the evil caveat that she will take possession of the couple's firstborn child. Alas, they give up their daughter to be locked in a tower, and we know how the story goes from there.

Fortunately, Kayla's cravings are not so great that I need to make that devil's bargain. She calls and tells me she has found a substitute for her evening snack made from local Marionberries, purple, not deep red, a little too sweet, but apparently sufficient for the last

few weeks of pregnancy. Since I have been fixated on my unsuccessful hunt for cranberries for the last few days, I am relieved.

Providing food for one's children is a primal instinct. The day before the cranberry quest began, I had sat in the room with Kayla and her lactation consultant as my daughter-in-law expressed the first watery drops of colostrum from her pregnancy-swollen breasts. As for most women, her body had not always been her friend, and she was afraid she would not be able to produce the milk needed to feed her sweet, soon-to-arrive little one.

We both sat in awe. She was taught to squeeze and a few drops of the translucent liquid spilled into a tiny plastic cup.* It is one thing to put a chicken in a pot with carrots and celery and onion and cook up a pot of nourishing soup for your children. But, as Kayla said, "It is a miracle that *my body* can make the food my baby will need to survive."

I thought back to the hours I had sat, holding her husband, my second baby, his sister, my first, at my breasts, peaceful moments in the chaos of new motherhood. Those blessed days were hard. Labor excruciating; sleeplessness sanity-robbing. But after my children figured out how to latch on, after the nipples hardened, nursing was also miraculous for me. Breastfeeding doesn't work out for everyone, but I hope these tiny drops of colostrum predict a bounteous milk supply, a calmly nursing mother.

I thank Kayla for letting me share in that moment of intense intimacy when she realized the impossible was possible. I will try to be the good mother-in-law, present when needed, fading to black when I become too much. And next October, when fresh

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cranberries start showing up at Trader Joe's, I will become a hoarder and fill my deep freeze with their tart goodness. Maybe by next Thanksgiving, our granddaughter can even try a tiny spoonful herself.