

This Isn't Just to Say

written by Brittany Borghi | July 20, 2015



The choice to buy the 30 pounds of peaches was sudden. We had traveled to Colorado to hike a few mountains, drink some microbrews, eat some smothered burritos—and hopefully—buy some green chiles. August, however, was still a little too early in the season for chiles, we found out.

But peaches—they could be the thing for us.

A frantic smart phone search told us we would be passing through Palisade on our way to Telluride, Ouray, and eventually, a spot very near to the 14,150 foot summit of Mt. Sneffels. I would have a series of panic attacks leading up to our final ascent of the mountain, wherein hikers must shimmy through a blind keyhole, hoping the promised summit ledge is in fact still sitting on the other side of this craggy circle of rock while cloud-filled 40 mile per hour winds blast them in the face.

I can still feel your hands against my ham hocks of a buttocks, fingers nearing bone, shoving me toward the opening as hard as you could, until I finally yelped, “I *can't*,” and sat on the safe side of the summit eating a Snickers bar with a woman who had lost one of her fingers in a dog training accident. We had planned to eat the Snickers together, you and I, but you were on the other side for such a long time, and I couldn't wait for you anymore. The photos from the day will falsely indicate that we both made it to the true summit.

So it was, a day or two before that hike, that we found ourselves at a roadside stand in Palisade after exiting the Grand Army of the Republic Highway, peeling down a dusty road, and following signs indicating that peaches were imminent.

We saw the Clark Family Orchard stand first, and it looked like the right kind of place. A boxy shop with a wide front porch stacked stoutly with bushels of peaches sat in the dirt in front of rows and rows of peach trees. The orchard backed up into the side of a steep cliff face. We could keep driving, but where else would we want to buy them?

No one was tending the shop when we walked in the front door, and I kept thinking how easy it would have been for us to just grab some peaches on the sly and take off. Wasn't it nice, how, being with you, I wasn't even compelled to say that out loud?

A middle aged woman emerged from behind a curtain or door and we presented her with our situation: we were traveling through Colorado for a few more days, and then you would be driving the peaches back to Iowa while I flew to visit my family in western Pennsylvania.

“What do you want to do with the peaches when you get them home?” the woman asked.

We probably wanted to bake something with them, we thought, or freeze them for some time, we said.

The woman sold us a very recently picked bushel of fruit, and indicated that, if we simply kept the peaches in a cooler, they would likely make the trip. The 30 pounds of peaches ended up costing something near \$40, and you looked at me hard as we figured out how much cash each of us had on hand.

We rearranged the backseat of your Ford Escape to fit the new cargo, got into the car, and drove to a gas station closer to the town of Palisade itself, passing peach stand after peach stand, as the novelty of the thing started to wear off. The options for rock fruit in this singular town are nearly overwhelming.

At the gas station, I pulled a peach from the box and a napkin from the glove compartment, and took a bite. Juice swelled past the broken flesh beyond my lips and down my chin. The image of someone biting into a peach is as sexual as it is tired.

But here is where the novelty was—and is—for me: I love peaches, I love summer because of peaches, and if we could have sat on the curb and picked through the box until we threw up, I would have been endlessly charmed.

Those orange orbs feel intensely personal, always. For no other reason than the fact that when I was small and soft as a newborn, my mother called me “Peach” as a nickname. As an adolescent and teenager, I would steal away from feeling fat in my swimsuit to stand in front of the tiny under-cupboard television in our kitchen and eat a peach. I would close my eyes and bask in the warm glow of the TV and the warm dose of sweetness and be safe and alone. When Missouri peaches crop up in our Iowa grocery stores, I gasp, “Finally,” and linger to smell them.

The pull is present.

“I’m not going to eat one just yet,” you said, and we got back on the highway.

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We hiked Mt. Sneffels and I got on a plane, as planned, to visit my family in Pittsburgh. I took six peaches with me, and my mother and I made a peach pie for a family gathering with my aunts, uncles, and cousins. I ate a slice in the grass on the side of my house near the big rocks and the tall tree, alone.

You took the rest back to where we lived in Iowa. You blanched, peeled, and froze each fruit, alone. You couldn’t wait for me—by the time I got back, the peaches would have been over ripe and under utilized. After an afternoon of your hard work, there they were: three one-quart bags filled to the brim, stopped in time, for us to make anything.

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When we found out you'd gotten the job in Denver, I'd already been accepted to graduate school in Iowa.

When I spent the weekend in Denver helping you move, you said it was one of the best weekends we'd had in the two years we'd been dating. I agreed.

When I called you from home to say I couldn't keep doing this, you asked if we could figure it out.

You told me I should take the peaches from the freezer, to not forget about them, you said, because no one else would eat them. You would ask about them in subsequent conversations.

When I stood in your empty bedroom after one specific night of drinking with your friends, I cried.

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The next day, I offered to watch your roommate's dog while he went to work. I walked the dog to my house and let him run around the yard for several hours. I ate a few grilled vegetables and gave the dog the scraps.

I walked the dog through the new dusk and back to your house.

Sheepishly, I called my mother to tell her the truth: I missed you. I told her about the people who told me that "our personalities just weren't suited to being in a relationship" or, how they'd "wondered why our love never really took off."

"Well, who's the judge of that? Who gets to decide that?" she said. She is always empathetic of my need to be right when I feel wounded.

I walked the dog up the wooden stairs on your wobbly porch and into your living room, where he puked up everything I had fed him. I cleaned up the vomit and stood in your old kitchen, staring at the freezer with the peaches inside, three one-quart bags. My grocery tote bags are in a bundle by your open-air pantry. My pepper grinder is on your shelf. The dog lay down and looked at me with wet, shameful eyes.

I thought about the side door of your house I used to sneak through when we didn't want anyone to know we were sleeping together. I thought about the time we walked home together from the farmer's market. My friends were at your house to pick me up, and said to themselves, "If they're trying to convince people they're just friends, they're not doing a good job." I thought about the first morning you made me coffee, and how we sat silently on the wooden bench on your porch while the sun hung high and I had an hour before work. What could I have said to you, then? I thought about the people who had loved me once, and the people who would come to love me still.

I left your house, bought a quart of chocolate milk and drank some. A bearded man chaining up a bicycle near the shop smiled at me.

I walked home in the dark. I left the peaches in the freezer.