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## Corn

Corn has been a prevalent staple and lingering symbol around me my whole life. I grew up in Indiana in the suburbs. But even in the suburbs, it was not uncommon to drive miles and miles by corn fields on the way to school or to a local mall. They surrounded us. The tall green stalks stood in straight simple rows, but in a protective stance, making you wonder just what was beyond their dominant wall. Occasionally you would see a straw scare crow, plotted next to a row of corn, as if it was guarding its existence. To me, it was always a mysterious plant. One summer, my older brother spent the summer hired as a field worker "shucking" corn. I still remember at the simple age of twelve being mesmerized to understand what shucking was. I reveled in his details on how those long stalks come out of the ground and are morphed into a twelve inch food you eat at the table. I watched him come home exhausted, dehydrated, and sunburned every night. His days beginning at 4 am and ending at 6pm, only to do it all over again day after day. All of this for corn. I have memories of popular movies, during my childhood, Hoosier and Footloose

with scenes framed using backdrops of cornfields. My fondest memories were in college. After a night of cramming the books, I and my sorority sisters would grab an ice bucket filled with beer and drive to a nearby field to hang out. We would climb onto the hood of the car, lay back, look at the stars, and drink our beer. All while the corn surrounded us in a protective barrier, shielding us from trolling cops looking to bust us for underage drinking. We called it Groving. When I got older, I travelled in my job. My territory covered all the northern rural counties of Indiana. My day was consumed with hours on the road, driving from town to town, navigating the back farm roads, searching for my customers who were hidden by fields of growing corn. I can honestly say that it was probably my favorite type of food to supplement my meat and potatoes diet. I enjoyed preparing my own plate of corn once in a while. Peeling away of the thick leaves and soft hairs from corn, much like unwrapping a Christmas gift, excited to see what is underneath, before plopping it in a pot of boiling water. In it's a raw state, I loved the crunchy nature of white corn and the succulent sweetness of yellow corn. There was nothing better than using a fresh slice of bread, smeared with butter, to rub around a piece of corn to coat it. Then topping it off with a sprinkle of salt. I loved corn, until one day it turned on me.

I was 27 year's old living in Lafayette Indiana in my first home. I was single, making my own money, and dating a guy named Brad. He grew up in Lafayette and came from a family of farmers like me. In fact, his brother owned his own farm and was also a rancher with a stock of cattle that he

showed all over the United States. It was a match in heaven, right? Or so I thought. One of the things that attracted me to Brad was his loyalty to family traditions. He had a tradition of going over to his parent's house on Sunday for an early meal and visit. This was very similar to my own upbringing that involved Sunday Pizza with the family as we sat around and watched 60 minutes. I still remember the day vividly.

We took the extra-long route around Lafayette as he meandered along the route pointing out their neighbors and who they were, or what they were about. It was a warm Sunday in the month of May. We passed farm after farm with rows of beans, corn, and cattle. Brad would meticulously explain what was being planted, how that farmer did last year and what the season might hold. We bounced along in his new little red Dodge Dakota pickup truck. It was a possession he bought shortly after beginning to date me, a gesture designed to impress me after I had expressed my dissatisfaction of being picked up for our dates in his beat up old black Monte Carlo that had an orange 76 gas station ball topped on its antenna. The window was down and as I gazed and passed all the fields of our future food supply, my stomach rumbled for food. Brad had assured me his mother was the best cook around. We had only been dating a few short months, but he was convinced he was going to marry me and felt it was time for me to meet the family. Physically, the pressure of meeting his parents probably did not help the situation.

Upon arriving at their home, I encountered a dinner table filled with fat, starchy foods. There was Crisco fried chicken, freshly prepared garden

green beans, large bowl of Idaho mashed potatoes, and homemade buttermilk biscuits. It was a feast to say the least and I gorged myself. About ten minutes into stuffing my face with crispy chicken, I saw his mother bring over a very large white plate topped with ears and ears of bright yellow corn. I remember how the steam rose above it as if it was making a mystical entrance. I was told it came from his father's garden. My eyes closed almost involuntarily, when I tasted that corn. I literally wanted to cry. I had never ever in my whole life tasted something so fresh, sweet and intense. It did not taste like the corn I got from the grocery store. Before I knew it I was about 4 ears in and reaching for another piece, when Brad gave me an incredulous look of disbelief that I was going to eat another one. I remembered smiling meekly, wiping butter off my chin and saying "it's so good" in a sincere pleading!

After sitting there and finishing off the rest of my plate, something that was pounded into me as a child by my own grandfather, the conversation between his parents went on and on. He and his mother clucked like hens about every neighbor, relative and local business man. I sat enthralled at their conversation but feeling too sleepy to engage from the aftermath of my gorging. After about thirty minutes, I started to notice a slight gurgle in my stomach. Slowly that gurgle became a piercing stabbing pain in my gut. As nonchalantly as possible, I steadied my restlessness in my chair as I held my breath between the innocent gas blurts. Hoping to god no one could smell them. I began dropping cues to Brad that we should be on our way. I had thought it was a simple stomach ache and some gas due to my over indulgence.

After much pleading and polite insistence, I was finally able to peel him away from his mother. We eventually made it out to the pickup truck after we said our goodbyes. I remember as he backed out of the driveway, my body announced its war with me. I was overcome by a larger, deep sharp bellowing pain in my stomach. It felt like a knife thrust into my gut. I fell forward in pain as Brad asked if I was ok. I could no longer hide my personal agony. I insisted he just make it home quickly and not to take the long way. As he drove fast and the pickup bounced along the curves and turns in the road, my stomach felt like it was fighting to get out of my body. Tears sprung to my eyes as I gripped the door handle wondering when the pain would end.

As we got closer to home, the urge to relieve myself, grew intensely. No matter how tight I clenched my buttocks, I knew I was going to shit my pants. I casually looked over at this guy sitting next to me and wondered if he really was going to want to marry me if I shit my pants in his new truck. Sweat began to form on my neck and started beading on my forehead as the stress of the situation grew. I must have lost a lot of color in my face because at one point, he looked over at me and began a barrage of questions.

"Do you have to throw up?"

"No"

"Do you want to go to the hospital?"

"No"

"Do you have to go to the bathroom?"

"Oh God, yes. Please hurry!" At that point, he started to laugh.

"What's so funny?"

In a matter of a fact way, he said "You ate too much of that corn. I tried to warn you."

Just as we pulled up to the driveway, I could not for the life hold it anymore. It came out like volcanic, demonic projection. The best way to explain it is like the kid in Stand By Me that vomited into the crowd after over indulging in pie. I rushed into the house as disgusting corn feces ran down my leg and sagged my underwear. I began to have a horrific flashback that this was what it was like as a child with a dirty diaper. Something you don't ever want to realize as an adult. There is a reason you don't remember things when you are a one year old. I hit the bathroom, peeling my clothes from me. Realizing Spray on Wash was irrelevant at this point and everything hit the trash can. After making every attempt to wipe myself clean, I realized only a shower was going to do the trick. After I came out of the bathroom, my mind was consumed with absolute embarrassment. I found Brad in the kitchen putting away the leftovers in the refrigerator. Horror consumed my face as I watched him for some signal. I was not sure if there were residuals in the truck. I was too embarrassed to ask. He turned around and began laughing and bellowing over as he stamped his foot on my kitchen floor in a hysterical release.

"Ok ok, get it out" I exasperated between my own laughing. "You have to swear on your life you will never ever ever tell a living soul this happened! Is there anything in the truck?" He seemed to laugh harder with that question.

"Sure sure, no nothing in the truck." He tried to comfort and assure me. But I couldn't quite believe him because he could not say it with a straight face.

"I mean it, swear on your life, you won't tell anyone, not even your brother!"

"Yes, yes, I swear".