

STRAWBERRIES

Bulbous, fleshy, pitted, these toppers' noses stick out of the rows: a field full of old men boozing in the sun. One looks for rheumy eyes, tobacco spit, leers.

And then they dye your fingers red a winter fishermen's, untimely lovers', actors' at the Globe.

Plucked with even moderate vigor, they deliquesce beneath the thumb.

Best taken from the cellar shelf in January as jam, their sweetness reinvents June on the tongue and sends the seasons round.

When all is said and done, however, they have their apotheosis in cream.

FENNEL

In Italian finocchio <L. feniculum <fenum, faenum = hay. Great ramping white stalks tasting like licorice; sweetroot, with delicate ferny tops, the flavor of antique pastoral. Lycoris's breath tickling the ear of Gallus, sweetening his horny work under the Tuscan sun.

With black olives, a white dream, a green spending.

Under salmon, a testimony to the wisdom of Ceres.

A little aftertaste of pleasure. Dream of repletion without surfeit.

THE ELBOW

Hinged crook, it can be folded like a fan, locked in place like a boomerang or a spear. Erect, it hangs at a civilizing angle, accommodating coat, cane, or the arm of a companion. Crouched, it lodges in the groin, protecting one from savagery.

Bone needle, one swings the arm on it like the fixed point of a compass — writing, shaking hands, masturbating.

How it bores through shirt sleeves, the arms of coats and sweaters.

Dug into the mattress, an anchor for the missionary position, keeping one high and true.

Careful, certain types will lodge it in the ribs, an alternative to wit.

THE NECK

Beheading wasn't really it. Severing the neck, a kind of superior castration. How it brought the crowds.

For the Japanese, of course, the neck is the erotic ne plus ultra. Small wonder.

Rising out of the clothes, naked, sinuous, beautifully muscled, it slopes gracefully from the shoulders, undulant, tapering toward the skull, inviting the hands to embrace its swelling mass, to caress it, pulsing with life, topped with the head knob, alive with slippery hair and flicking tongue.

And then it contains the voice box. The mystery of speech alive in that fluid column.

How can one chain it? It must be naked. Its decorations are the breasts. Its occupation is connection. Its accomplishment is song.

FINGERS

They can make a coin disappear, tie a knot, comb hair, or destroy the composure of woman.

Jointed like frog's legs, they hang in a tangle from the hand, ready to leap into action on cheek, breast, or thigh in the flash of an eye.

Used to beckon, warn, or beg, the middle one is reserved for rude asseveration.

Snap them for order. Whistle with them. Goose. Thumb your nose.

— W. A. Fahey
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