

Except Salsa

Every other Thursday, at 12:18 pm, I invariably utter the words, "Except salsa."

I measure my time in tacos; they serve tacos in the cafeteria every other Thursday. A taco represents two weeks. It's an excellent system. There are two tacos in a month, and twenty-six point zero seven tacos in a year. But God forbid we should have tacos for dinner one night; I could lose several days of my life in that way.

The tacos they serve in the cafeteria are funny tacos, that sometimes overburden a plate and sometimes appear mysteriously tiny. They serve them with meat, cheese, lettuce, and salsa. These tacos do not follow the regular laws of folding; they reject them violently. If you try to roll it and then fold it, it will all fall out the back, and if you try to fold it and then roll it, the fragile taco will tear, leaving you to regret having decided to wear any clean clothes at all that day.

The worst affliction that can come from these tacos, however, is the drippiness. There's something in them that, without explanation, goes off like a biological weapon, showering taco liquid in a steady drip onto your unhappy plate. There is no avoidance.

I ate tacos at that cafeteria for three years before I figured it out. Once, helping prepare for some event after school, I wandered into the kitchen and discovered the half-made salsa sitting in a large plastic yellow bowl for the next day. I picked up the bowl. It was watery as anything!

The next day, when I went to buy my lunch at 12:18 pm, I watched carefully as the Taco Lady spooned all the condiments on it. "Everything?" she asked, a knowing smile on her face, with a point of the scoop toward the bowls.

"Except salsa," I said, grinning.

So now I take my taco every other week, thinking to myself, "This must be March thirteenth," and sit at the table with my friends. While they fumble and flail with their fajitas, desperately trying to get in down their throat before the soggiess sets in, I calmly and patiently turn the corners, give it a slight fold, and maneuver the perfect dish into my mouth.

Although they all look at me enviously, their hands and clothes an orange contagion, sometimes, on those days, I dream of something more. I dream of having my cake and eating it too. Although there is no longer any confused, distraught flurry for me every other Thursday, I am wanting. Because I have everything I could ever want in a taco.

Except salsa.