

Bourne toWrite...

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The Cook Disgusts Me

by Nancy Bertenshaw

The cook disgusts me. He flares my nostrils with his acrid sweat. He's unwashed and filthy. A stink of dirty undergarments emanates from his clothing. His huge, jowly face drips with opaque beads of panting, mouth breathing. His breath has a stench of rotting teeth, food, tobacco... raw onions, always onions.

I loathe that onion smell... boiling, raw, frying. It's in the air, on my fingers... can't wash it off, as much as I try to have it gone. The whole kitchen is filled with bitter smoke from the log fires, burning fat from the spit, singed hair from something or someone.

The cook passes very close to me. I smell him coming – the Great Unwashed; lewd, with his vulgar jokes about what he did to his woman last night... and his foul breath. How does she stand it?

Oh! He just grabbed my buttocks, then stroked my hair! Filthy swine!

Or did I imagine it? I certainly didn't want it...

I press fresh, uncut herbs, from the wooden table, to my nose, to block out the unpleasant odours around me... neutralise the environment and the unwanted memory.

Parsley, Devil's herb they say. The seeds go to hell and back 7 times, and therefore take a long time to germinate. Herb of death, oblivion, funerals.

But, I think, parsley conjures a mild, grassy fragrance of fresh, green fields, healthy, sometimes hints of promising oils and sunshine, spring and rebirth. Effugium.

Was I talking out loud again? They are all laughing at me, looking at me. The cook is leering at me. I'm not his 'pretty boy'! I know perfectly well, 'there's no time to waste before the feast is ready, chattering and day-dreaming.'

The quiet pungency of the parsley has awoken me from my nightmare. A brilliant flash... a plan; lips tight closed, no one can hear me. 'The deed', then escape.

Where is cook going? I'm following.

The faecal smelling store is dark inside. Something moves. I grab the head; there is a strangled cry and swiftly, with hate and a pounding heart, I slit the throat with my sharp knife. Warm, metallic blood gushes everywhere, I can't see it. Its pungent odour tells me that my hands are covered. I can taste it on my dry lips. I must spit.

I sit on an oiled and beeswaxed bench in church. Salty tears stream down my face and splash on the tiled, musty floor. A warm smell of beeswax drifts from candles in the side chapel. I cannot wash the blood away in the stale, holy water in the stoop. I must move on.

I have finally succeeded in being considered totally uninteresting... The garden to my cell is my lifeline. The brothers do not laugh at me. I lie on the earth and give thanks. Fingers touching the growing plants, I inhale their goodness. I talk to them... whispering. My soul is free; no one will find me here.