

# The Hunger for Ecstasy

Kathryn adjusts her prayer shawl to rest upon her bare shoulders. "The word 'seder' means 'order,'" she explains, "because there is an order to this meal. We won't just be eating—we will be enacting a ritual of remembrance. And during this ritual," she states, pulling a riding crop out from beneath the table and smacking it in her palm, "I will be keeping order."

Despite my not being Jewish, Kathryn's Sexy Seder is the one religious holiday I never miss. It's my fourth year of sitting at this Passover table, candlelight dancing off the rough surface of the matzo plate before me. I feel my boyfriend's hand on my knee, slide my hand atop his. Across the table, Leigha pours herself a glass of wine, Gordon laughs with closed eyes and open mouth. Kathryn snaps the riding crop against her palm once more and we all snap to rapt attention.

"God damn," my boyfriend whispers to me. "I'm so hungry." As if on cue, my stomach rumbles in agreement. "When can we eat all this?"

Kathryn overhears, languidly walks over with the stiletto heels of her boots clicking against the wood floor. "The hunger is part of the order," she says. "This is, after all, a remembrance of the horrors of slavery." She runs the end of the riding crop along his jawline, red lips curling into a smile. "Anyway," she purrs, "a little longing can be a good thing."



## remember to breathe

BY NICK MATTOS

The things we are hungry for are symbols, ritual objects imbued with far more meaning and power than simple chemical equations.

I pour sparkling grape juice into my wine-glass. Blame it on getting older, or sobriety, or even on taking too many semiotics courses in college; in any case, though, I have recently found myself fixated upon the meaning of hunger. Nutritionists have identified at least six different kinds of ways that our bodies signal a need for food, ranging from thirst to headaches to the sense of an uneasy presence around us. However, these signals don't clearly indicate what it is that our bodies actually crave. We know that we are hungry, but what are we hungry for?

Sometimes it's basic—I want that matzo, and then that glass of wine, and then to hide in the hallway and make out with my boyfriend. At other times, the hunger is more complex—I want the people at this table to like me, I want to be in love forever, I want to feel like my life is worth saving. The desires, from most mundane to most exist-

tential, link themselves together and become an unbroken mass, the way my voice merges with the others around the Passover table as we pray.

"Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha olam!" we say in unison, holding our glasses high in the air. The scent of roasting lamb and simmering matzo ball soup wafts out of the kitchen and surrounds the table. *Blessed are You, King of the Universe*, our voices call out together before we drink our glasses ravenously.

I think of Carol Flinders, a brilliant writer who is in my opinion one of the clearest-eyed observers of the spiritual experience in the modern world. She is brilliant at erasing the line between mundane rituals like voting one's conscience and the rituals of spiritual practice. What I really love about her, though, is how she got her start as a writer: penning the landmark cookbook *Laurel's Kitchen*, a thick and thoughtful volume that treats food and the experience of nourishing oneself with the sort of reverent verbosity usually left to scripture.


As lofty and philosophical as Flinders can be—and as a feminist writing on the numinous, she's prone to both—in her work she always returns to that simple point of origin,

chopping carrots on a wooden board and measuring out flour in heavy glass cups, feeding herself and her family, finding bliss among the dirty pots and pans.

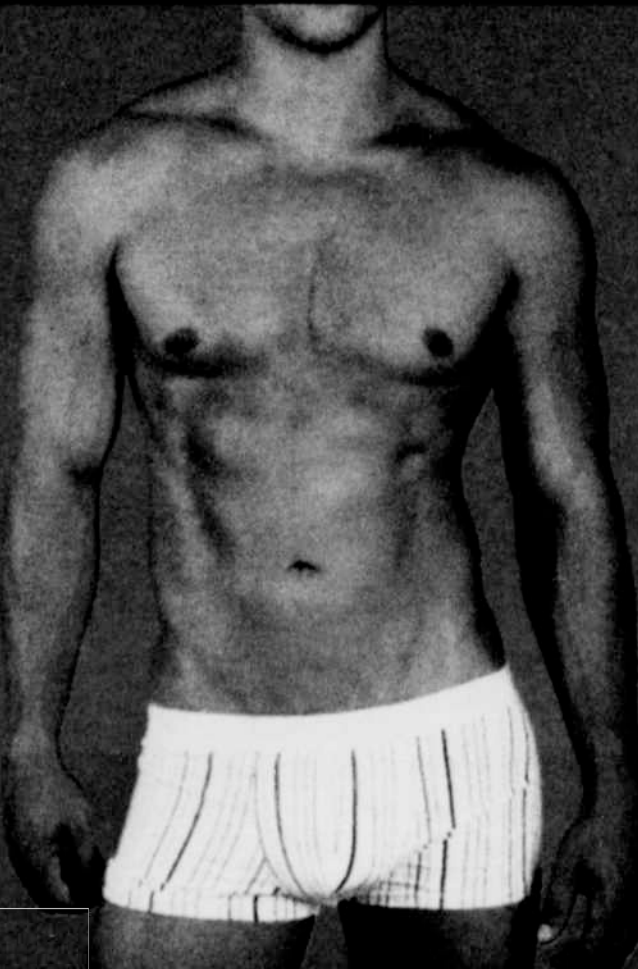
Now, the dinner is done. We sit around the table full of dirty plates and burnt-down candles, my boyfriend leaning back in his chair full and sated, Kathryn pouring her fifth glass of wine, everyone's faces lit up with light, heat and joy. The things we are hungry for are symbols, ritual objects imbued with far more meaning and power than simple chemical equations. Our bodies cry out for wine and matzo, lamb and drugs and kisses in part because our souls cry out in hunger, too. We eat, drink, pray and fuck because we are hungry for ecstasy—longing to be part of something larger and broader and more important than the simple boundaries of our lives.

With a waxy hiss, the last of the candles sputters out. All of us sit still for a moment, no one moving to turn on the lights, our bodies and hearts sated by the meal as we observe the great peace that has fallen over us. In the darkness, we smile, ecstatic. ☪

NICK MATTOS left out the part of the evening that rightly brands it a Sexy Seder—you can fill that in yourself. Send meaningful recipes to nickmattos@justout.com.



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