



## ELIZABETH DI GRAZIA

### COMMUNITY

Sitting in the park with the other playgroup mothers, I watch as they place Veggie Booty—green speckled yellow puffed food—in front of their children whose tentacles reach for it eagerly. Immediately following comes the soy yogurt, the blueberries, the applesauce, and wheat crackers. There I am handing my son a circus shaped cone of Kentucky Fried popcorn chicken. In the recess of my mind . . . way back there . . . hours ago when it was still morning, I recall the newspaper article about employees at a chicken factory swinging chickens against a wall, stomping on their heads. Shrugging my shoulders, as a reminder that I don't care what they think, I look at my chipmunk son, cheeks bulging, hoping that he swallows the animal flesh instead of spitting up the spoils. He's gotten in the habit lately of masticating forever then expelling in one giant blagh the dregs.

"Oh, I've never tried Kentucky Fried Chicken," says the mother with the Veggie Booty. She also has two children so I can't say that she doesn't have the dirty diapers, the tired toddlers turned whiny. People say expressive is a better term to use than whiny. I know that they don't have a whiny child then, cause I know whiny: the incessant chord of a bee, not in search of sweetener but working my edge, wanting, wanting, wanting what! . . . I don't know . . . and . . . they don't either. When I say, "Stop!" silence reigns . . . until . . . their engine jumpstarts, the constant off-key thrum lodging in my inner ear, unbalancing me . . . again.

"No, you can't have another cracker until you eat a spoon of applesauce," a mother says.

I say to my son, "No, that's milk. You won't like it." Not wanting to be wasteful, I open the carton and drink the warm chalky liquid. As the liquid dribbles down the back of my throat I think, maybe . . . maybe I should have my children try milk again. Their tastes are always changing, so much so that I can't keep up with them.