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Thursday Afternoon: Life Is Sweet Holly Iglesias

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Holly Iglesias

THURSDAY AFTERNOON: LIFE IS SWEET

I know what's happening, see what's coming, and try like mad to fight it. Tapioca simmers in the dented pot. *The Joy of Cooking* says to use a *bain-marie* but I say, *bain-marie, my ass*. That Rombauer woman never shopped at Goodwill a day in her life. (He'll be home in three hours.) I stir constantly, watch carefully because that's what the damned book says to do but any fool knows that the stuff is done when the spoon starts to drag.

Tapioca has many lives, grows a new skin each time a scoop's dug out. Those beady little eyes—even though the cookbook insists on calling them pearls—bounce from the box all dry and nervous and then the hot milk leaches the starch out and makes a gluey mess. The book says, *Never boil the pudding*, but screw that: I love those thick, beige swells exploding like volcanoes, the sound as the surface breaks, the smell of burnt sugar at the bottom of the pot.

They tell you, *Spoon the pudding into individual cups*, but I put the whole mess in a plastic bowl and watch it quiver as it slides into the icebox. The kids like to press little dimples into it, then lick their fingers clean behind the icebox door so I won't know who did it. Me, I push clear through to the bottom of the bowl and my finger comes out so coated that it fills my mouth.

I leave the pot on the counter, won't wash it for hours. (*Slob*, he'll say, but I'm learning to ignore him.) The residue dries into a sheet as sheer as dragonfly wings and the kids will peel it off, laughing and drooling as it melts in their mouths. I can hear them yell now as they race up the driveway, pitch their bikes against the gate. The screen door slams and in rushes the smell of them: sweat, cotton, soap, candy.