

BEETROOT

by Harry Dunn
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You know - the colour purple was once considered royal,
And in ancient Rome was only worn by senators and Caesars,
But never by the hoi-polloi, no matter how important, rich or loyal;
So this regal colour wasn't seen outside the Roman Forum
On ordinary geezers,
And down south in Palestine, you'd never ever see it
On Galileans and Judeans, like Peter, Paul and Jesus.

So, why was the purple colour so rare and so revered?
Well, it seems that back in ancient times
The dye they used to make it was over-priced and under-gear'd,
Extracted as it was from an ocean mollusc's rare secretion,
Until that poor old ocean mollusc was over-fished and disappeared;
Then they found another source of purple dye, just to fill the gap,
This one was called *archil*, extracted from a lichen,
Which was also very rare, so the price stayed off the map,
And purple remained regal, royal and strikin'
So you would never see it on the local check-out chick or chap.

And, yes - I know that you will wonder,
How this bit of history relates to the *beetroot*, or its juice,
That humble root-crop veggie, eaten sliced or just rotunder;
Well, have you ever noticed - and how could anybody not -
That a smallish can of beetroot - if you should happen to upend it -
Is inclined to spread somewhat
Especially when it falls from fridge-top height,
And explodes like cannon-shot.

If such a thing should happen, and I speak from sad experience,
You'll find yourself dyed purple, that colour once thought nifty
And that juice, it spreads like wildfire, or the effect of strong aperients
In fact I've just recoloured several rooms in our wee home and house,
And the total cost of raw materials was about a dollar-fifty.
Now, you might think that such a bargain would merit and deserve
A rousing accolade from an ever-grateful wife;
But, no, there was not a word of gratitude from Madam Lash
In fact, she threatened to deprive me of my one and only life,
Then burn the sad remains, and flush away the ash.

Last Thursday, when this happened, and here I have to think -

The mail-order bride was playing bingo, down at Invy Bowling:
I'd had one or two aperitifs - a small pre-dinner drink,
Just enough to cleanse the palate, as all the best folks do,
A practise cultivated, which needs no explanation, excuses or extolling,
Then I opened up the fridge to see what Madam Lash had left in store
To feed the hungry lions, as they do at Melbourne Zoo.

I placed not one, but several, opened cans upon the fridge,
Including one of beetroot, resplendent in its purple-crimson juice
Above the door's top edge, which had a tiny ridge,
Just enough to catch the corner of that brightly-coloured can;
So when I closed that heavy door, the rotten thing broke loose;
I watched it fall, and my life flashed right before me
As it always does when beetroot juice is in mid-air
I knew that I was on the cusp of a major spill disaster
And tried to catch it with my foot, but that stuff shot every-where,
From polished vinyl floor to nicely painted ceiling,
It made an instant change to the colour of our plaster,
The timber round the door, a nearby kitchen chair,
And a largish serving bowl of Mother's fresh-made pasta.

The child-bride now returned, while I was cleaning up,
Diligent in action, but perhaps still just a little 'in the cup',
I'm told her shriek was heard both clear and loud,
As far away as Koo-wee-rup.
'Mein Gott!' she cried , 'You're crimson head to toe -
There's been a bloody murder here - I'm ringing Triple O.'
'Hold on! Hold on!' I begged, 'Before you call the cops -
There's been a minor accident; it's only beetroot juice
And I beseech your mercy, dear, my life and limb be spared,
Of course I offer no excuse,
But at the time, my judgement and my balance were just a tad
impaired.'

The Madam looked around, now that she was calming,
And cried out in bitter anguish unconcealed,
'The damage to this house is extensive and alarming;
How could a can of beetroot juice stain the carpet in the hall?'
'Oh, that' I answered airily, 'There must have been some on my shoes
When I went to get the mop and bucket, just before I hit the wall.'
'And what about these purple footprints, everywhere, even on the bed?'
'Ah, those,' I said, sounding unconcerned;
'That must be Pussy's footprints, after she had skated in that stuff,
Are they royal purple, or a purplish sort of red?

I know that poor cat panicked, as she left the kitchen and adjourned
To not one, but several rooms, that wicked quadruped.'

And those nasty beetroot stains, which started life as purplish-red,
Are now somewhat less florid, some would call them *puce*,
Since our cleaning and shampoo-ing went full steam ahead,
After World War Three was over and the missus called a truce;
Perhaps one day, they'll fade away, even prints of tiny feet
But there is one thing on which you are assured;
Beetroot's off the dinner menu down here in Dixon Street,
Until the day-and it's years away,
When stain-free, pure white beets can be procured.

But if only I had lived in ancient Rome,
And had a crate of Aldi's beet,
I could have made a fortune, for all that money's worth
Dyeing tunics, togs and togas, just like I did at home
With crimson-purple highlights to their hair and sandalled feet,
And it wouldn't cost the earth.