

RITA CIRESI

Hunger

At school the brown clock says Seth Thomas. But you wish Seth would say ten o'clock. Ten is when the janitor brings in the milk crate.



You don't give a *fongool* for the milk. You've got your eye on Miss Teacher's Honey Maid graham cracker box. You can't wait until she pulls out a thick brick of graham crackers, breaks each cracker in two, and gives you a half that's scored down the middle.



You can either eat your half-cracker whole or you can break it into two separate pieces. You bust yours in two because that way it seems like you got more.



After the last bite dissolves in your mouth you do the same as all the rest of the first-graders: lick your finger and pick up every single crumb from the dirty wooden desk, then lick your finger again.

Miss Teacher says this is bad manners.

So is asking for seconds. So you don't.



Between the time Seth Thomas ticks from ten to twelve o'clock, you think about the rumor going around school, that you'll get a whole graham cracker instead of just half when you reach second grade.



At noon you walk home, bony knees knocking against each other and stomach rumbling. You wonder what Ma's got for lunch. You dream about a *legna*—a whole loaf of 'talian bread—stuffed with fat-pocked salami and thick chunks of provolone. But most of the time Ma spreads a thin coat of Jiffy peanut butter on a slice of Sunbeam bread. She calls these open-faced sandwiches, which is a fancy way of saying she only has to use one slice.



In winter Ma makes white rice with a teaspoon of milk and a sprinkle of sugar on top. Some days there's no milk. Other days, no sugar.

On TV, ladies go next door to borrow a cup of sugar. Ma doesn't.



Back at school you keep your eyes on Seth Thomas until his hands reach two o'clock. Two means Art. Art class is the best class. When the teacher isn't looking, you can eat the glue and suck on the clay.



After school you follow the fat girls home. The fat girls really got to-eat. At their house chocolate milk comes out chocolate straight from the carton. Here you can *mangiar'* six Oreos instead of one. Nobody's counting.



Fat Donna has all the Oreos she wants to eat at home. But on the walk back she still stops at Bruno's Market and buys twin packs of Ding-Dongs and Ring-Dings. Sometimes she gives you a ding or a dong. The rest of the time you watch her eat both.



You set the table with forks and spoons. Never knives. Knives are for Sunday supper, when sometimes there's meat inside the macaroni. Other times, not.



You never use plates. You always eat from bowls. Like this:

Colazione: bowl of cereal.

Pranzo: bowl of rice.

Cena: bowl of macaroni.



In the dark, before you fall asleep, you think about the picture books you've read at school, where the bowls never run out of soup and the pasta pot keeps growing spaghetti.