

**We're All Ears**

LOST BREAD CO. | CORN

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# Queen Corn

Corn is the most widely produced crop, grown in fields on more than three quarters of the world's countries<sup>1</sup>. We've figured out how to use it to thicken our pies, fatten our livestock, and power our engines. And though here in the U.S. corn can bring out the worst in our monocropping, glucose-fructose-loving, throw-away culture, human's relationship to the crop can be beautiful, too. Here are a few uplifting kernels from near and far.

- The owners of Blue Corn Restaurant on the Italian Market, the Sandoval family, imports blue corn from San Mateo de Ozolco in Puebla, Mexico to make stellar tortillas and pinole. They're supporting a community of farmers who are protecting the genetic diversity of heritage varieties while making a living.
- This season, at least 30 Pennsylvania corn farmers are in the process of converting their fields from conventional to organic with the help of organic crop consultants at the Rodale Institute. (And *gasp* the project is partially funded by the USDA!)
- Iroquois White Corn, a Haudenosaunee variety that's at least 1,400 years old, is kept alive in Ganondagon, a Native American historic site in New York. Residents work with Native American farmers to learn to grow, harvest, process, and mill the corn; they hope to make it the staple it once was for the Seneca people.
- In southern Oaxaca, the indigenous Mixe people cultivate corn that can fertilize itself. Olotón's aerial roots produce a bacteria-rich mucus that can fix nitrogen in the air to feed the plant.

*<sup>1</sup>The U.S. is the top producer, harvesting more than 375 million metric tons from about 90 million acres (about 90% is genetically modified varieties). This year, because of the extremely heavy rains in the corn belt in June and July, planting was delayed; the USDA estimates this year's yields will be at least four percent lower than last year — better stock up on Fritos and Four Roses before prices spike!*

breweries that could've supplied them with yeast or didn't have the means to reach them.

Cue our star -- salt risin' bread. With the help of hydrogen produced by *Clostridium perfringens* (the same bacteria found in gangrene) this uniquely American bread rises in a similar way to yeasted breads aided by carbon dioxide, but with a wild flavor side effect. In order to cultivate this bacteria, cornmeal, milk and flour are mixed together and left in a warm place (usually the family fireplace or wood-burning stove) to ferment. Eight to twelve hours later, you have a foamy mess that smells as if a teenage boy had left his dirty socks and a hunk of brie in his locker for a few weeks. Folks, it made Lost Bread's oven stink for HOURS after we cultivated this starter. The starter is then fed more flour to create a "sponge", and left to sit for roughly another hour. Finally, this gloriously putrid mess can be kneaded into salt, flour and a little more water to become a dough. If you've ever wanted to inspire unwanted guests to excuse themselves from your home, bake this bread. The starter is a very easily contained stank, but once you start creating a final dough and getting your oven involved, expect to be confronted with the fact that your kitchen is now a rotting wasteland filled with garbage. Congratulations. However, your trials will be rewarded with a treat that has a buttery, parmesany flavor and a soft, delicate crumb.

All smells aside, this bread was vitally important to the survival of moun-

## Salt Rising Bread

*Sam DeGennaro*

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to leaven something without yeast or baking soda? What if you wanted to bake bread for your family, but were restricted to ingredients that would last on a weeks-long journey? Women of Appalachia in the late 1700's faced these exact problems. Despite immigrating from European communities with strong yeast and sourdough traditions, these conservative, Evangelical Americans either refused to associate with

tain communities from Southwest PA right down into Tennessee and North Carolina. Isolated and almost entirely reliant on oral traditions, the women of these settlements were thrifty and ingenious enough to find a ferment that worked with their own crops and could be replicated for generations. It wasn't until the 1860's when commercial yeast was widely distributed that this bread faded into obscurity. Even so, bakeries like Rising Creek Bakery in Mt. Morris, PA and bakers like Genevieve Bardwell have done the legwork to keep this treat alive. In fact, if you're looking for recipes, stories, and science as it relates to salt risin' bread, Genevieve and her baking partner Susan Ray Brown have a website dedicated to it all - [saltrisingbread.net](http://saltrisingbread.net). I highly recommend perusing some of the interviews with older folks who grew up eating and making this bread with their mothers. Lost Bread's take on this nugget of American ingenuity comes in the form of the corniest thing we could muster - a salt risin' cornbread. The flavor and smell you'll experience with the loaf in your box is almost identical to the traditional white bread loaf, with a little extra corn for good measure. Eat it as is, or toast it with some butter and jam (*GOOD LORD, DO THIS*). Either way, you're eating a little piece of Appalachian history.

# Masa Cooperativa



*Katherine Rapin*

Every Friday, cooks at South Philly Barbacoa grind about 200 pounds of corn to make the masa that they'll press into thousands of golden tortillas over the weekend. (During the 31 hours the restaurant is open over three days each week, they serve 4-5,000 tortillas.)

But the most crucial process happens the night before as the corn steeps in an alkaline solution of slaked lime (calcium hydroxide) and water. It's an ancient method called nixtamalization<sup>1</sup> that renders corn more nutritious, flavorful and easier to cook; it loosens the outer coat of the kernel (called the pericarp), kills mycotoxins, and makes inherent nutrients like niacin available for us to absorb.

And it's partly what makes the tortillas at South Philly Barbacoa so dang good. Plus, they use corn grown just 60 miles away at Green Meadow Farm. This fall, farmer Ian Brendle will harvest eight acres of Hickory King and Reid's Yellow Dent — two varieties of dry corn he grows for the

restaurant. "Hickory King is an old southern variety," Brendle says. "It can produce 14-inch ears with fat kernels."

His corn makes tortillas that are deeply yellow, tender, and a bit sweet — vastly different from the nearly-white, uniform tortillas found pretty much everywhere else.

One quarter of tortillas in Mexico (and about half in the U.S.) are made with Maseca, a line of dry corn flour products created by the multinational company Gruma, started by Roberto Gonzalez Barrera in 1949. In the 1990s, with the help of the Mexican president and Barrera's pal, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Gruma fixed the amount of corn the government bought from independent farmers (at a fair price) and sold to tortillerias, and necessitated that all growth in the market would be filled by Maseca. That move accelerated Gruma's rise



to the biggest corn flour and tortilla producer in the world.

Maseca is responsible for putting thousands of independent corn farmers in Central and South America out of business and largely wiping out a food tradition while increasing dependence on Monsanto's GMO, Roundup-Ready corn they use to make their products. The tortilla's at South Philly Barbacoa, made with fresh masa from local corn, are an act of resistance that they're hoping to spread. They're forming a Masa Cooperativa – a cooperatively owned masa making business, of which undocumented workers can legally be member-owners, that supplies masa wholesale to Philly restaurants, says South Philly Barbacoa co-owner Ben Miller. (Individual customers can buy a kilo of masa -- which makes 30 to 40 tortillas -- to take home for \$7.)

Brendle will be the first farmer member, selling the co-op about 6,000 pounds of corn this year. "It's an outlet that allows us to devote more acreage to corn, and we get a fair price," Brendle says.

The masa will be sold at a fair price, too; \$4 per kilo, says Miller. "We want to sell to all the restaurants down here – the Mexican family businesses in South Philly – so that all the tortillas can get better in the neighborhood."

*'The word comes from the Mexican Spanish adaptation of nextamalli, the Aztec term for the process, which literally translates to "ashes" and "unformed corn dough." Aztec and Mayan civilizations likely used limestone to make the alkaline cooking liquid, Native Americans used wood ash as a source of calcium. Whole nixtamalized corn is called hominy – the key ingredient in dishes like pozole and hominy grits. In communities that relied on dry corn as a main food source, but skipped the nixtamalization process (parts of Italy in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the American South in the early 1900s), Pellagra epidemics caused by niacin deficiency broke out, killing tens of thousands.*

# Anadana. Anaconda. Amadama. Amadana. Amadama. Homana homana HOMADAMA

*(sounds captured at farmer's markets*

*over six years of selling Anadama bread)*

*Alex Bois*

My parents whisked me away from my birthplace of Baltimore when I was barely out of toddlerhood in the early '90s. I spent the next 20 (or so) years in New England, mostly around Boston. But until we moved, most family outings were decidedly crab-centric. I remember piling into our car, trunk full of packaged "misc. chicken meat" from Giant, and driving to the Chesapeake Bay to lob chicken thighs attached to strings into the surf. We'd pull them

up to see a bounty of writhing crabs hanging on to the treacherous feast with one claw. We'd take them home (learning after the first pungent caride that they must be kept in ice-packed coolers) and try to cook them without really knowing how.

Most often though, we headed to a crab shack across from a restaurant shaped like an ocean liner ship, donned our plastic bibs and, wooden mallets ablaze in the harbor sunset, attacked spice-and-salt-encrusted crabs over soggy brown kraft paper. The spectacle of it bewildered and bewitched me. My parents, who moved from a farmhouse in their native France just before I was born, were equally entranced. We relished the sweet and nutty crabmeat, and also took to the boiled Silver Queen corn that always accompanied these feasts. For my parents, it was a welcome relief from the veggie-scarce supermarket culture of late '80s America that clashed with their country homestead paradise.

When we moved to Massachusetts, I

could walk, talk, and hold a 5 dollar bill confidently with both hands. The new foods I found to enjoy -- like carnival fried dough coated with powdered sugar and cinnamon -- brought new disagreements with my parents. Sure, I enjoyed the meals prepared by my mother, a force in the kitchen, but as I got older, I craved burgers, Coca Cola, and fries. I was decidedly the "American" son. My older brother, born on the French farmhouse, didn't share as many of my embarrassing food predilections.

My parents did manage to turn me into an early bread snob. They took me to visit our family in France and exposed me to so many great baguettes and croissants, I wasn't having the replicas in Boston. Instead, I took to two uniquely American breads--a soft white bread made with potato at the High Rise Bread Co., and a sweet and crumbly Anadama bread made by When Pigs Fly bakery. Everyone has heard of potato bread, but Anadama is a New England specialty, corn-and-molasses sandwich bread originating in the fishing villages

around Gloucester, MA. Its mythos is tainted by some mild casual misogyny, so I won't go into details here, but suffice it to say a fisherman had a wife named Anna, and Anadama is a portmanteau of "Anna, damn her"!

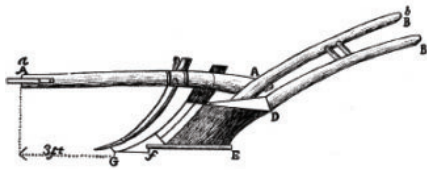
20-some years later, as I was working on menu development to help open High Street on Market, I set out to create breads that could be enjoyed by a broad swath of people, not just lovers of "European-style hearth breads". Potato and Anadama breads were the first products I wanted to make, and given our shared love of corn, I tried to envision an Anadama my parents could get behind--dark, crusty and full of whole wheat in the style of a rustic French miche, but still corny and touched with the bitter sweetness of blackstrap molasses. Good, local dried corn inspired the addition of obscene quantities--almost half the weight of the dough--of a coarsely cracked corn porridge.

When I moved on from High Street, I left them all my recipes, never intending to replicate them. I wanted to evolve and expand, but it was a long

time before I felt like I could envision an evolution of the Anadama that I loved.

Two main factors went into creating the Lost Bread Homadama. I had always wanted my first Anadama to be whole grain, but I couldn't get the right textured flour. Now that we're milling whole grain flour on our stone mill at the bakery, we can grind the grain to just the right consistency to make a 100% whole grain version. Second, we have been delving deep into traditional processing methods for every grain we mill, and have come up with a modified method of nixtamalization (see Masa Cooperative) that works to unlock nutritional potential and layer a roasty tortilla flavor on top of our sweet corn, without the labor intensive requirements of traditional nixtamalization. The downside is our "quixtamal" makes lousy tortillas, but since we're a bakery and not a tortilleria, we can get away with it!

I hope you enjoy the current version of Homadama... it's my personal corn history in bread form.



# The Nitty Gritty

Teddy Moynihan

*Teddy Moynihan raises organic produce, dry beans, grain, pork, and lamb with his wife, Faith, on their 20-acre farm in Bucks County. Here, he shares his motivations for growing polenta corn and explains the techniques he employs to help it thrive in the fields at Plowshare.*

**Katherine Rapin:** Why did you start growing this variety?

**Teddy Moynihan:** We first read about Floriani flint corn in the Fedco Seed catalogue. It was described as having a higher protein content (12%) than most field corn (9%), as well as excellent flavor and texture when made into polenta. We love eating polenta at home, and were encouraged by Andrew Wood of Russet to grow Floriani since he was familiar with it and would buy as much he could use in his restaurant. The protein content appealed to us because it could be a good feed for pigs or lactating ewes.

We were drawn to growing maize for the calories. Meat and grains represent a large percentage of calories consumed, and a truly local food system needs to be built on more than lettuce and heirloom tomatoes. Maize is the Americas' greatest gift to agri-

culture, providing more calories per acre than any other crop on earth. While its flavorful pink-hued polenta is nice, knowing that, if necessary, a half acre could sustain our family for an entire year is what really sets corn apart.

**KR:** What have you learned about growing the variety on your farm?

**TM:** Corn is a very heavy feeder. It requires large amounts of nitrogen to produce a good crop. Nitrogen can be added to the soil in a few ways: chemical ammonia-based fertilizer, organic fertilizer that uses blood meal, feather meal, and other organic nitrogen sources, or through leguminous cover crops planted the season prior.

We use a combination of organic fertilizer and cover crops. Clover, alfalfa, peas, and vetch, through a symbiotic relationship with rhizobia (root [rhiz] bacteria [obia]) take nitrogen out of the air, and fix it into a solid form in nodules on their roots. The root bacteria live on sugars exuded from the legume's roots, and store nitrogen that the legumes later use when going to seed. Grown the season be-

fore planting corn, leguminous cover crops store vast amounts of nitrogen (up to 150 lbs per acre) which is released when the plants are killed and plowed into the soil. The cover also has the added benefit of adding large amounts of organic matter to the soil as well as scavenging micronutrients from deep within the soil.

We have begun to develop a system whereby we plant a cover crop in midsummer, allow our sheep to graze it in the fall (adding loads of manure to the soil), let the cover crop regrow until the following spring, and then graze our pigs on it, which adds even more manure to the soil, and usually results in the pigs rooting up the field to make tillage easier. Through the magic of photosynthesis, our animals are able to take large amounts of feed off of the field which is quickly replaced when the cover crop regrows. In this way, one acre of land planted in cover crop can yield two grazing rotations (free meat!), build soil organic matter, a decent nectar crop (free honey), and supply nitrogen for the following year's corn (free fertilizer).

**KR:** How do you process the corn?

**TM:** Under ideal conditions, corn will dry in the field. When the cobs are just about dry, they tend to fall limp, still attached to the stalk, but pointing at the ground as opposed to the sky. The many papery layers of husk allow rainwater to run off the ears and not get into the kernels. If extended wet weather is forecasted, we will sometimes harvest before kernels are completely dry and allow them to dry in storage. We have harvested by hand, and had a neighbor come over with an antique corn picker and sheller and process for us. We have had it milled at Castle Valley Mills and at Lost Bread Co., and as we scale up we are working out larger scale milling on farm.

*You can purchase Plowshare's ground polenta corn at the Rittenhouse Farmers' Market this fall.*

# Seed Stewardship

Alex Wenger

*Alex Wenger is the founding farmer of The Field's Edge Research Farm in Lititz, PA. He has a Master's in Sustainable Food Systems from Green Mountain College and his current projects include breeding disease-resistant tree fruit, developing *Apios americana* (a perennial vine with edible beans and tubers) as a new crop, growing specialty produce for restaurants, as well as documenting regional agrobiodiversity and foodways.*

Holding the hard, ruby, jewel-like seeds of Floriani flint corn in the palm of my hand for the first time, I felt a connection to farmers of the past who kept this variety safe from extinction while other maize cultivars were replaced by hybrids bred for industrial agriculture. These seeds tell a story, a history of their fore-bearers, stored in their DNA. When I made the choice to add this corn, also known as “Spin Rosso della Valsugana,” to our farm, I joined a lineage of farmers that stretched back nearly 400 years.

The Sugana Valley lies in Southern Trentino, in Northern Italy. Here, corn, *Zea mays*, became a staple food after its introduction from Central America in the 16th century. Spin Rosso, “red spine,” refers to this variety’s pointy deep-red flint kernels. “Floriani” is the name of the family who preserved this particular variety. There are more strains of “mais

della Valsugana,” each adapted to its own bioregion. I tracked down this Floriani, which was introduced to the States by food historian William Rubel, because I heard that it made “the very best polenta,” a favorite food memory from my grandmother’s Pennsylvania Dutch kitchen.

Helping Spin Rosso to take root in Northern Lancaster County proved to be a challenge. Heirloom and open-pollinated crop varieties are less uniform than their hybrid cousins. Many traditional maize varieties are “landraces.” No two plants in a field are genetically uniform. Some ears mature at waist level while others appear at six feet toward the tops of the plants. Often they mature at different times throughout the fall – the opposite of a commodity! But, this genetic variability allows crops to respond to changing growing conditions, pests, and food needs. Those genetics played out in a big way in our fields.

In our first growing season, nearly 90% of the Floriani lodged (fell over) right before harvest. The 10% that remained became the parents of the next year’s corn crop. Each year we scout the field before harvest, choosing the strongest and most productive individuals from which to save seed.

Over the last seven years, we have stewarded the genetics of this variety to the point where we can harvest the ears with an old fashioned corn picking machine. Producing a Floriani crop sustainably under organic conditions was only the first half of the challenge of working with this heirloom variety. Next we needed to consider its role in the kitchen.

I was surprised to learn that some folks had never tasted roasted cornmeal. During my childhood growing up in “Pennsylvania Dutch” country, corn was usually roasted before milling, a tradition of toasting grains that is found in many cultures around the globe. The rich, nutty aromatics from roasting topped off the Floriani polenta. Corn breads, tamales, macarons, grits, tortillas, beer, pasta, pudding, and scrapple are just a few of the culinary creations that we have tasted through the last seven years, both in our kitchen and as chefs experiment with the Floriani’s unique culinary attributes. Fresh Floriani also has a special place on our farm: baby corn, “teenage” size ears, husks wrapped for tamales, sprouted kernels, and even the fresh stalks used like hearts of palm lead to flavorful dishes before the grain crop is harvested in Octo-

ber. The possibilities are endless.

My journey to save seeds from extinction has led me to a place where the seeds of the crops that make up our farm are my partners. Together we steward the soil and ecosystem that sustains our collective existence. As we learned from our experience stewarding Floriani flint corn and working with its diverse genetics, adaptation is the name of the game, in the field, and in the kitchen.

*The Field's Edge will harvest their Floriani corn in October. You can reach out to Alex at [the.fields.edge@gmail.com](mailto:the.fields.edge@gmail.com) to inquire about purchasing grain and follow [@thefieldsedge](https://twitter.com/thefieldsedge) to find out what local chefs are serving it at their restaurants.*



# PUMPKIN CORNBREAD

## with ALEX'S COARSE GROUND FLORIANI ROASTED CORNMEAL

- 1 cup coarse ground roasted Florians
- 1 cup flour like SP41
- 1 Tbl. baking powder
- 1 tsp. Salt
- 1/2 tsp. Cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. Nutmeg
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup pumpkin (not puréed)
- 2/3 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup oil (used coconut)
- 1 Tbl. Molasses

→ COMBINE DRY INGREDIENTS

→ IN A SEPARATE BOWL, BEAT EGGS,

MIX IN PUMPKIN, MOLASSES, BROWN SUGAR & OIL

→ BAKE AT 375 °F APPROXIMATELY 30 MINUTES

# Tiste

Ana Caballero

Tiste is a beverage made of ground corn, sugar and spices typical in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Ground corn is a common ingredient not only in tiste, but in a wide range of “energy drinks” of indigenous origin throughout Mexico and Central America. The regional variations have different names— in addition to tiste, you can find pinol, pinolillo, atole, pozole, and tejate, just to mention a few.

I grew up with the corn based drinks of western Honduras, which come from Maya k'iche' tradition. As a kid, I drank pinol (which is arguably the same thing as tiste), but the stuff we got was factory made. It was once made in households and sold at markets, but in Honduras that practice has died out almost, if not entirely, along with the decline of the countries indigenous groups.

“Before Coca-Cola came to the country<sup>1</sup>, If you visited friends that lived in rural areas, the first thing they would offer you was glass of tiste,” says my grandmother, who remembers when tiste was made and sold at markets in her hometown of Copan (circa 1940's). That tiste was “white,” meaning that the traditional version in Copan was made with only ground corn, sugar, and spices. I used Guatemalan and Nicaraguan recipes as the

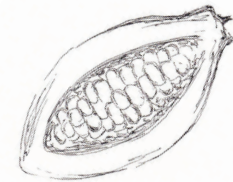
basis for the tiste I developed because they include cacao, which I prefer. Although I've had tejate made from scratch in Oaxaca Mexico, I hadn't tasted or prepared homemade tiste until developing the mix included in your share.

### How to prepare:

Combine 1/2 pint (entire jar) of dry mix with one quart of water and blend or whisk vigorously. You can add ice and drink immediately, but I like to let it sit for a couple hours in the fridge so that the spices fully infuse the drink. Add a couple strips of lemon or lime peel during refrigeration to make it extra refreshing and bright.

When ready to drink, stir well and add lots of ice.

A note on texture: the corn and cacao do not dissolve— they only infuse the water— so the drink is coarse, but that's part of the experience. Although tiste is traditionally made with water, you can mix with milk or nut milk if you prefer.



*<sup>1</sup>Even the most remote areas of the country have Coca-Cola and Pepsi trucks selling to local puperias (bodegas). These two companies also sponsor signs announcing the proximity or entrance of a town so when driving on a roads signs read: “Bienvenidos a San Jose, PEPSI.”*

# Whole Corn Polenta with Miso Roasted Vegetables

*Kenan Rabah*

**Makes 4 servings**

*To make polenta: In a large pot, bring water to a full boil over high heat. Slowly pour the polenta corn into boiling water while whisking. Turn the heat to low and let simmer, covered, for about one hour, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and add the grated parmesan cheese and butter (optional). Cover and let sit for five minutes.*

*To make roasted vegetables: Preheat the oven to 450F. Mix together the miso paste, vinegar, olive oil, grated garlic clove and coriander seeds. Set aside. Chop the vegetables into medium size cubes. Set one tablespoon of the miso vinaigrette aside and mix the rest with the vegetables. Roast the vegetables in the oven for about 15-20 minutes until tender. Toss the roasted vegetables in the remaining miso vinaigrette, add fresh herbs, and serve over the cooked polenta.*

*200 g Toasted ground polenta corn  
1600 g Water  
40 grams freshly grated parmesan cheese  
2 tablespoons butter  
50 grams miso paste  
30 grams white vinegar  
20 grams olive oil  
1 garlic clove  
1 teaspoon crushed coriander seeds  
2 medium Italian eggplant  
2 medium green zucchini  
2 medium yellow squash  
1 cup fresh herbs leaves  
(mint, parsley, basil...), roughly chopped  
Salt to taste  
Pepper to taste*



It was as if we didn't need rest in the days after Elder Lala passed. We hurried to bring in the corn harvest, filling the fields with more people than ever. Lala's death seemed tricky to explain, none of us ever having lost a human relation before. We understood that extra hands would bring the work to resolution quickly. The village was excited to hear how and where Lala had transitioned.

Usually it took one week and fifty villagers to collect the youngest corn. These are eaten raw or used for adding sweetness to desserts and fresh texture to our beans. We share a special 'milk' with teething babies as they gnaw on the cobs. Corn is a first food for many born here with the land. It would be another two weeks until we gathered the remaining corn, matured slightly on the stalk, which would be brought in for roasting and drying.

This harvest of young corn, gathered by two-hundred hands united, made the week elapse in three days. Lala's encouragement was a breeze on our

backs. This time was joyful as everyone loved the work, but the songs were missing a voice, the meals shared were missing a certain laughter. It was expected that Lala, our oldest living kin, would pass away eventually. We were not shocked. In fact, we felt energised. And we knew completing all of the work would allow us to rest and for the mystery of departure and absence to unfold.

When we finally came upon the evening rest we had prepared for. The last course would be one that Lala taught us, that they instructed us to make for people who had just given birth. In the newness of the experience, we felt appropriate holding this preparation in bowls, savouring the rich, salty, sweetness and succumbing to the warmth in our bellies. The thick porridge was made of ground corn from Lala's last harvest with us, soaked and then cooked in water and milk with butter, salt, cinnamon and honey, and finished with a large dollop of peanut butter.

We whispered gratitude into our bowls before eating, of course. Elder

Lala, though they would never admit, single handedly planted the first of many of our crops. They stumbled upon the hills where we lived, pregnant and with two babies swaddled and tied to their back, and side. They had seeds which they hand planted across three acres of land in their first months. They foraged for 90 days as the fields grew thick with food. Each night, Lala told us, they would look to the stars as a record of how many of us were on the way to them. And as we arrived, grew into a community, and processed our first corn into meal, Lala would tell us that their love for us could be measured by the infinite stars, the infinite granules of corn meal. That was how much Lala loved us.

Stories continued to pass around on this night of remembrance and suddenly someone realised that we hadn't heard the final story. The one that would help us all understand what our deaths might be like.

On their last day, Lala had gone to the water with some of the young guides (teenagers in old world language), so we waited for them to speak. We took a breath together and Lala's grandchild spoke. The young person said that as they swung on hanging vines, releasing their grip over the water's expanse, Lala too decided to take a plunge. Lala encouraged our listening to the rush and ripple of the water

like we would a story, so it was natural for the young people to watch Lala dive off of a cliff. This time though, as Lala descended head first into the water they watched spirit detach from body like corn silks and husks being pulled from the cob. They said that they could see the fire and air that Lala had possessed in personality turn to a red bird with wings open wide, coasting on an upward breeze. Their body slid into the water with grace and did not reappear on the surface though they watched for some time.

Our group took another collective breath and whispered gratitude onto the air of the night. We decided to feed the fire and stay intertwined in each other's embrace. We drifted off slowly and I would like to think mine were the last eyes to close. When we were awakened in the morning, we saw, sitting atop the stalks left in the field awaiting the customary fire after a harvest, a red bird with wings spread, pecking at one last ear of corn left behind.

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