

Badlung Press

# DEPRESSION COOKBOOK

Sad Meals for Sad People



Edited by Adrian Belmes

A Zine by Badlung Press

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## **recipe for anniversary dinner**

write a self-portrait as the crust of ice  
that gathers over plastic bags of freezer-burnt food  
that you forgot you bought, but you eat it

because it's too late to order takeout  
and you can hear your mother chiding you  
that three cups of tea isn't a meal.

a self-portrait as irony  
and paper plates. as your mother's voice  
in your head. as the dark cavern  
you don't ever clean.

a self-portrait as a dinosaur shape and a heart shape  
and any shape as long as it isn't one of the four  
that mcdonald's decided were acceptable  
to include in their happy meals—  
bell, ball, boot, and bone—  
because you aren't alliterative  
and you don't want to think about your bones.

as a person who lived on the same street  
as a man who drove a little debbie truck  
but couldn't get free cupcakes,  
even on halloween.

as a person who sat cross-legged on a carpet floor  
and learned that the end of the world  
tastes like kindergarten.

throw out any self-portrait as  
arbitrarily all-caps words or fear.

replace with self-portraits of a person who eats vegetables.  
a person who remembers how to breathe.  
a person who is standing.

## Meat and Potatoes

It starts, as it so often does, with an idea. A dreamy sense of determination concocted by a developing young mind. I awake to a dark room filled with pink lace and cream frills and the same heavy stillness in the air. I find my thoughts drifting to the memory of an awkward dinner hours before, interrupted by a raised voice and the clashing of dishes in the ceramic sink. It wasn't a conscious fear that had woken me, for the hallways of this desert house were filled with ever-present visions; of a man with sharp, tapping fingers that could slice and snip and tease. It wasn't hunger that crept. Shocking, because I found comfort in the multiple meals that remedied the reality of joint custody. Nor was it a night terror, although the night always fell with the same impending sense of darkness— of sinister, saguaro eyes watching me walk to the kitchen from the wash behind the beige suburb. A child of nine years, I was endlessly tormented with the knowledge that I was prey to their predatory gaze, unbeknownst to the adults in my life.

Once I reach the end of the long windowed hall, I approach the stainless steel refrigerator with quick, furtive glances to my mom and stepfather's bedroom. Quiet as a mouse, I pry open the double doors. Light fills the space, the steady hum of electricity breaking the silence. I stand before the pot roast on the middle shelf, comforted. I couldn't dare risk excavating the carcass from its master. With slow, deliberate motion I retrieve the evenly stacked utensils from the drawer behind me. I cut, one-two-three times to reveal the deep hexagon of sinew between the meat. Spreading the pieces until I could find what I had been looking for—small bits of congealed fat between the stretched muscle. I poke. Dipping the tines of my fork and the blade of my knife to free the oil that had solidified there. I prod. Satisfaction, as I inch a piece toward me without tampering the beauty of the innards. I gaze in wonder as I pull and stretch and pry at the roast, finding more and more geometric ligaments to explore. Tiny holes no larger than a peppercorn, protecting the flavor of what once was.

Suddenly, I hear a creak emanate from down the tiled hall—footsteps—and freeze as I calm the pounding in my chest. I take a moment to glance at the list of chores on the fridge. Of streak free glass to be Windexed and the fluffing of leather couch cushions, of mowing verdant grass one-fourth of an inch daily and the vacuuming of the rough, high pile carpet in the front room that no one was allowed to enter. I pause and leave my body until I'm sure the intruder has gone back to bed. I return to my autopsy to find that the fat has started to melt from the open fridge and wonder just how long I had been standing there. Sighing—forlorn, I go back to my room and lay still until the temperature cools and the fat congeals, burrowing itself back into the roast's webbed rump.

This wasn't the only time I sought comfort in the kitchen, and I returned to my project every night until it expired. Until I had explored its every crevice, leaving it mutilated and empty. To my initial relief and following dismay, my mother tossed it out a few days later. I could at last rid myself of the shame I felt for my clandestine outings with the meat. Although it's been seventeen years, my thoughts often return to the leftovers and the nights my fascination had awoken me. Some might say a succulent pot roast and its various accoutrements lie within the realm of "comfort food," although I'm not sure this is what they had in mind.

If you also seek solace and have not yet developed appropriate coping skills, follow this recipe below:

### Pot Roast

|   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1 cup night terrors                     | 1/2 cup shame spirals     |
| 1/3 cup obsessive compulsive stepfather | 3/4 tbsp emotional trauma |
| 1/2 cup parental abandonment            |                           |

Place roast in your crockpot set to high. Cover with body issues and undiagnosed post traumatic stress. Simmer for 24 hours in a thick marinade of adolescent depression and top with your favorite herbs. This author recommends a dash of sexual abuse disguised as experimentation and a sprinkle of early onset anxiety. Salt to flavor. Cook until well done.

Enjoy at your leisure.

# Mother's Milk Clone

*(Logan K Young Remix)*

Amount to make: 10 ml

Target VG / PG: 50 / 50%

Target Nicotine Strength: 0 mg / ml

Nicotine Base Strength: 0 mg / ml

Nicotine Base VG / PG%

Steep Time:  $\geq 70$  hrs

| Ingredient Name                        | Type   | Milliliters | Grams | Drops*     | % of total      |
|--|--------|-------------|-------|------------|-----------------|
| <u>PG with no nicotine</u>             | Base   | 2.55ml      | 2.64g | ~50 drops  | 25.49% of total |
| <u>VG with no nicotine</u>             | Base   | 5ml         | 6.25g | ~100 drops | 50% of total    |
| <u>TFA - Bavarian Cream</u>            | Flavor | 0.29ml      | 0.29g | ~5 drops   | 2.94% of total  |
| <u>TFA - Vanilla Custard</u>           | Flavor | 0.2ml       | 0.2g  | ~3 drops   | 1.96% of total  |
| <u>TFA - Strawberry (Ripe)</u>         | Flavor | 0.98ml      | 0.98g | ~19 drops  | 9.8% of total   |
| <u>TFA - Cheesecake (Graham Crust)</u> | Flavor | 0.49ml      | 0.49g | ~9 drops   | 4.9% of total   |
| <u>TFA - Sweet Cream</u>               | Flavor | 0.29ml      | 0.29g | ~5 drops   | 2.94% of total  |
| <u>TFA - Dragonfruit</u>               | Flavor | 0.1ml       | 0.1g  | ~1 drops   | 0.98% of total  |
| <u>TFA - Orange Cream</u>              | Flavor | 0.1ml       | 0.1g  | ~1 drops   | 0.98% of total  |

*\*Assuming 20 drops = 1 ml ... which may not be entirely accurate*

**I am**

I am rank pork stewing,  
marinated in farts and tears,  
resenting Time's rhythmic chewing  
to the aimless muzak of the spheres.  
Every second a small chunk pecked  
from flesh and brain and self respect,  
my body some dreary food display  
dumped on a cosmic late night buffet.  
No point in cosmetic procrastination  
when faced with dystopic  
mastication  
entropic  
cessation,  
as the ultimate smorgasbord  
terminally gnawed,  
bored.

**Recipe**

for life.

Take erectile tissue (larded / bland and /or festering),  
a smatter  
of  
irrelevantly seasoned  
matter and a  
bloom  
of ... spores.  
Dust (finely) with contemptible  
green (soylented for choice). Sprinkle laughter, let it (fade) in awkward  
silence.

Meld in a crucible  
hung  
from  
chains  
that  
scream,  
its smoking blackness  
peeled and  
softening at the rim.  
Hate for eternity (- infinite time)/  
the heartbeat of a nightmare.

Weep.

Squeeze husks from religious  
hypocrisy, spit on the scum  
seething  
at the meniscus of a sigh.

Sift.

The kernels will be sour,  
but let them  
melt on the tongue  
and hopelessness  
will rot through.  
Open lips and wounds.  
Swallow,  
wallow  
in the juices,  
die.  
Repeat.



## **A Local Sourdough Starter Set**

After my dog died on Easter and descended into hell, I was left with a gaping companion void. Then, on May 10th, I also found myself without a mother, as she was quarantined halfway across the country. I knew then that there was only one thing left to do... join in on the San Francisco golden brown bread rush fun by getting a Chia Pet-like sourdough starter set.

So I set out to my local half-baked hole-in-the-wall quasi-culinary artist installation in search of a “mother sponge”.

When I got to the going-out-of-business bakery, the despondent, urban dictionary Dutch oven disc jockey was beyond confused as to how or why he had a customer.

“Can I help you?” he asked.

“Yes, I’m here for your mother.”

He deeply sighed, then exclaimed, “I’ve been nursing her at home for the last twenty years and just brought her here the other day to die with the store! But, ok, go ahead. Take her. You might as well. She’s the last thing between me and oblivion.”

So I grabbed the androgynous sour patch kid from amongst the others and named it Mason.

We did everything together for the next several weeks. I took it everywhere with me and fed it Gerber Baby formula and grape juice for “refreshments”.

Before going full Hansel and Gretel status, my stay-at-home microbiology professor friend told me that I kneaded to put Mason’s puberty body in the fridge overnight for “retardation” purposes.

Call me a crackpot, but when the batard was done with his timeout, my temperature began to rise, and I gratuitously slashed him before throwing him into the oven to get about as baked as the guitarist from Guns N’ Roses.

Then it was time to rock n’ roll.

The outside was so caramelized that the first bite was like drilling into the earth’s crust. Although, the chewy, dog food delivery company-like holey honeycomb murder hornet “crumb” inside was the crème de la crème. It was like God had busted a sweet & sour sauce nut into my mouth, especially when the transcendent, Fertile Crescent, kombucha-like fermentation buzz kicked in.

I thought the soft, probiotic-rich pillowy dough would boost my immune system and caress my intestines—but alas, my germ theory was incorrect—as I forgot I was gluten intolerant.

As soon as the conmen bacteria and endosperm proteins hit my stomach, they proceeded to obliterate my microbiome with an all-out biological warfare assault. The bubbly pop culture leavening had all but leveled my gut, and I wound up doubled over, kissing the porcelain throne, cursing Sourdough Sam’s non-panning out prospector name.

I pretty much turned myself into a two hundred pound Petri dish, and had about a baker’s dozen bowel movements in one sitting.

But at yeast the colony of microorganisms made me feel less lonely, and left me with some semblance of dysfunctional symbiosis.

I awoke the next morning, naked and afraid on the cold bathroom floor, riddled with lactic acid. Maybe this is what having kids feels like, I thought.

People told me making sourdough would be therapeutic, but I ultimately wound up paying my therapist for a PTSD session.

I think next time I’ll just get a Giga Pet, or a loaf of Amish Friendship Bread instead.



## Carb Concrete

It's February, and the winter feels like it's never going to end. The solstice, the dark pucker at the center of the year's ass, is long behind you, and you keep telling yourself the days are soon to get longer, the weather is soon to warm up, but the outside world is grabbing itself on both sides and stretching that filthy hole until it's months wide. You wake up in the dark and shiver. You shiver all day long and go to bed shivering beneath four layers of moth-eaten flannel. Your skin crawls with dead dry flakes like tiny mummies. When the sky's not dark it's an ugly overcast the color of old cement, the color of prison, and when it's not either, it's a knife of jagged sunlight that whistles through the dessicated air and skewers your frontal lobe with near-continuous migraines. The thought of living to see spring is of less and less interest to you each day, but what keeps running through your mind, indeed one of the only things you can imagine articulately anymore, is a scene of your funeral, the preacher reading to the assembled crowd on a lawn, on a beautiful, sunny day with spring's hot living breath ruffling everyone's hair, and your coffin sinking into moist, loamy soil, with wholesome green shoots fringing the hole: and no one says so, but you can see in everyone's faces that they're judging you, pitying you, for being too weak, too stupid to just hold out a little while longer, for such a beautiful day as this could refill anyone's spirit.

Bottom line: you need to put enough carbs in your furnace to get you past that finish line. You need something hot, for it's cold; easy, for your body has all the verve and pep of a wrung-out dish rag, and yet not too easy, because your mummified brain desperately needs to feel like it accomplished something; and above all, something calorie-rich that you can fill up your howling gut with and return to your busy schedule of nestling up on the couch and staring at nothing in particular. Enter: Carb Concrete.

Start with two boxes of macaroni and cheese. This can be the fancy shells and cheese, with the foil bag inside full of neon orange jelly, but those are expensive, are they not, and besides, the regular kind comes in a thinner box so you can fit more of them in your pantry and when the store has a bunch of old boxes, or a brand they're going to drop soon, and they lower the price to 50 cents, walk out with a dozen or a score or a gross packed neatly into great bulging hexahedrons inside plastic shopping bags like you're a small mammal stocking up for the winter.

Whichever you use, this is what goes into Carb Concrete first. You boil some water. You should boil more water than you think you're going to need, because you don't own a humidifier and the steam is soothing, you're going to want to sit over the pot and just slowly huff in and out, steam up into your cold-damaged nostrils, your sinuses that feel like throbbing hernias, down your throat, try to dislodge the congestion lodged there by the untreated respiratory infection and the cigarettes you can't seem to kick even with the weather how it is, you're amazed you haven't said fuck it and started smoking inside yet but you always were a glutton for punishment.

Once you've given the water a chance to boil off about an inch to steam your apartment with you should dump two boxes of macaroni in. Don't worry if you lose track of time: if it turns out mushy so much the better, and if there are macaronis stuck to the bottom of the pot when you go to drain because you didn't stir, well, that's just a fun game for you to play later, scraping and peeling off the noodles like scabs and popping them into your mouth, not really out of hunger, just to pass the time.

Once you've drained the noodles then you should make the mac and cheese according to the instructions on the box. Be sure to lick the glob of that unnatural-looking orange gel off the torn foil if you got that kind. If you got the powdered kind then make sure to run your finger along the torn edge of the paper packet and stick some in your mouth – it tastes like salt, and grit, and it melts and it makes an oily film between your lip and gum.

If you got the powder kind you're going to have to add milk and margarine, but you should be adding milk and margarine anyway. Any odds and ends of cheese you have in your fridge should go in too. Canned parmesan cheese. Shredded taco cheese. American cheese slices. Big blocks of cheddar cheese with tooth marks in them from midnight foragings that have sat and dried out in your fridge and darkened and cracked. It all goes in.

Here's where it starts getting interesting: Take a packet of instant stuffing from your pantry now. You should have one, because when does it ever occur to you to eat stuffing? It's really just a holiday dish, right? And you don't want any emotional associations with the horrible holidays you've been through. Well you're in luck, because the stuffing is going to be totally unrecognizable in this dish as anything except more carbs. What you do is rip the packet open and pour it all in there dry. Disregard the instructions on the box. Pour some milk in there and stir until the stuffing starts to hydrate. Maybe put some more butter or margarine there too. What, are we watching our saturated fat all of a sudden?

After the stuffing chunks fluff up, now's the time to open up a can of chunk chicken. There's some of this in your pantry. You keep it around because while it may be a little more expensive than regular chicken, and smell vaguely of cat food, it has the unbeatable advantages of ready to eat right out of the can and freeing up freezer space for bottles of vodka. God, that stuff tastes so good cold! Bottle numbing your lips, kind of hurts going down. Oh, speaking of which – you should be doing steady pulls of freezer vodka while you cook this dish. It's going to make it taste almost like something when you're done.

You dump the chicken all over, sure pour all the can water in there too, gross slimy can water with tiny chicken shreds floating around in it, who gives a fuck. Add flavor. When the mac and the cheese and the more cheese and the stuffing and the chicken are all mixed in together, now comes time to personalize the dish. This one is entirely up to you. Just throw whatever odds & ends you like in there. Odd condiments from the fridge, from bottles mostly empty with congealed gums of old stuff on the bottom. Weird seasonings from your spice cabinet. Anything pickled and floating ghostly in jars of cloudy brine – olives, jalapenos, pickle slices, cocktail onions. Cans of weird beans. Canned shoestring onions. Crushed-up corn ships. Indulge the feral goblin in you. Think of how the friends you haven't seen in months would react to see you put that mixture in your mouth. Revel in your unfitness to live among humans. Take an extra-large swallow of vodka and cackle like a witch.

Put everything in and race to the finish line. Stir and mash and stir and mash and let everything liquidate under the heat until you're left with a trashy vomity mess, grayish-yellowish-orange. This is Carb Concrete.

Now eat. Don't wait for it to cool down. Shovel it in, raise some blisters on the roof of your mouth. It should have a gluey texture and stick together so you can balance golf-ball-sized gobs of it on a spoon. You may want to keep going until you've downed half of it and can feel a huge rock slowly solidifying in your lower abdomen, hence the name, a sort of sick feeling that's not really full but it's sure as shit not empty. Or you may decide that two spoonfuls do the job well enough, silence the rumble in your stomach, and stick it in the fridge where the odor will permeate until nothing in there doesn't taste like Carb Concrete, and come back to it whenever hunger knocks again and eat another cold spoonful straight out of the pot, for every meal over the next few days or weeks, as it gets dry and chewy and weird smells begin to issue from the bottom, and sit back on the couch, and feel your body slowly transform under a Carb-Concrete-only diet, and smell cheese ooze out your pores, and stare out the window and wait for spring.



Dorito dust on copy paper.



**dismal pepperoni pasta and casserole<sup>1</sup>**

(serves: none)

This casserole is perfect for weeknights and is made even better by men or women that cannot cook.

- 1 large package of pre-sliced pepperoni
- 3 Tbsp. A-1 sauce (or more to taste)
- 2 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 jar prepared spaghetti sauce, or homemade if burnt
- 1 pound pasta, spaghetti or macaroni work well here
- 1 1/2 cups chopped celery

Mix the first four ingredients and heat. Boil your pasta. You can expand your dismal horizons as far as you like here: hard, crunchy, mushy, or gluey, as you see fit, but please keep some of the pasta water, a cup or so will do. As your pasta cooks, add the celery to your sauce and stir. As soon as the pasta has been drained, combine all the ingredients and the reserved pasta water, give a stir, and voila: dismal pepperoni pasta.

Since there are plenty of leftovers, make your next night's dinner easy as well. Place the pasta in a casserole and bake until a sufficiently dismal result jumps from your hot oven.

This dish should not be forgotten. The flavors will haunt your taste buds like childhood memories of all the dismal food that your parents forced you to eat.

<sup>1</sup>This dismal recipe comes from *The Dismal Cookbook*, available in the future when dismal cookbooks are published instead of moldering like a forgotten tub of soured cream.

**“Easy” Focaccia**

Adapted from <https://www.bonappetit.com/recipe/easy-no-knead-focaccia>

1. Whisk 2¼ tsp.-ish yeast, 2 tsp. honey that you didn't actually have but borrowing some was a great excuse to get your human contact in for the week, and 2½ cups lukewarm water in a medium bowl and let sit for 5 minutes (it should at least get creamy; if it doesn't your yeast is dead—stop here until you can motivate yourself to go to the store).

2. Add 5 cups of all-purpose flour and 5 tsp. salt and mix until a shaggy dough forms and no dry streaks remain. Wait? Was that the fourth cup or the fifth cup of flour? It doesn't matter. Just go with it. Realize you forgot the salt and add it just a little too late. Add the rosemary that you've let blacken in your fridge and a few scoops of chopped garlic. Garlic will fill your kitchen with ~smells~.

3. Pour 4 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil into a big bowl. It's is going to rise, hopefully! Transfer dough from the medium bowl to the big bowl and coat in oil. You're in a rush, so let it rise at room temperature. Plus, there's no room in the fridge for that bowl until you throw out those pizza boxes. Watch the dough blankly for a few hours until it has doubled in size.

4. Butter a baking pan, the size of the pan doesn't matter, you are going to eat it with your hands as soon as it come out of the oven. Let the butter sit on the tips of your fingers, oiling them. Your fingers may feel like over proofed buns, maybe it would be better if they were all chewed off. How do you think that feels? Pour 1 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil into center of pan. Let the oil slip from your fat-soaked fingers and splatter all over the floor.

Take a break to cry in a puddle of olive oil.

Fold and shape the dough, then transfer dough to prepared pan. Pour any oil left in bowl over and turn dough to coat it in oil, making sure not to use any oil from the floor. Let the dough rise again, uncovered, in a dry, warm spot (or any surface that is flat and unencumbered by garbage) until doubled in size.

5. Gently stretch out dough to fill those cold hard edges of the pan. Dimple focaccia all over with your fingers, like you have something to prove, creating very deep depressions in the dough. Unlike you, the dough will slowly spring back. Drizzle with more goddamn olive oil and sprinkle with flaky sea salt, maybe some rosemary, even those flower vegetables if want to post this bread on social media to give off the impression that everything is going so well. Never mind, the only vegetable you can find is a potato crossing its lanky legs on the window ledge. Bake focaccia in 450-degree oven until golden brown, that's about 20–30 minutes.

6. Celebrate your achievement by eating your feelings.

## HUNGER

A sense memory today; the wisp of  
a thought, a knockout of sensation and  
I've suddenly gone back in  
time; I know The Method, you see.

(I inhabit – flawlessly and with surprise –  
the character of my own body like  
I didn't totally live it the first  
time at all.)

A winter road trip; childhood; pillows in the  
backseat. Boredom like  
waves of seawater breaching the shore of  
my tolerance, and my stomach aches.

Today, a Tuesday. Three  
decades later, though any day  
is the same, and I work; write; parent. Live.  
Blood sugar low, and I have a migraine.

And soon, I reflect, tomorrow; and the day  
that comes next, though any day  
is the same, and I play the role of myself  
like an actor who isn't actually ravenous with emptiness.

Hunger.

###

A sense memory today; and I have known this  
hunger my entire life; an experience  
foretold by the Principal of Unintended  
Consequences;

by the epigenetics of an eating disorder and  
the comfortable circle of intergenerational  
trauma and the formative moment in my youth when  
free will ceased to be my own.

Cognitive dissonance  
as the pain in my stomach and  
the pain in my prefrontal cortex battle to the  
death over a plate;

pasta cold and vegetables limp and  
all the good smells  
– the stuff of sense memories, the stuff of love –  
long since dissipated away.

Hunger

###

A sense memory today; despite all  
the years which have  
passed while the Anorexia remains  
unchanged through it all;

and now children, miniature versions of me,  
entirely perfect, epigenetically screwed; and all  
that I do as a mother, as a human, in service of  
a vow that they will never know what I know.

Hunger.

## RECOVERY À LA MODE

- Preheat oven to 350° Fahrenheit.
- Endure horrific childhood trauma.
- Gather whichever ingredients you prefer; it's pretty much moot.
- Train to be a professional ballerina.
- Measure 150 ml each of red and white wine into appropriate receptacles.
- Pour white wine down the sink; replace with red wine.
- Drink both receptacles.
- Let ingredients soak in one cup of stock of your choice; or don't.
- Mix equal parts nature and nurture.
- Beat two eggs until frothy; pour into ramekin.
- Add one helping undiagnosed mental illness
- Add one helping college sexual assault.
- Hit rock bottom.
- Cry for help.
- Place cookie sheet on center oven rack; feel guilty for even considering cookies.
- Check into residential treatment for months.
- Feel great surprise that it takes several more years of work to even approach "better."
- Keep fucking fighting.
- Bake for 28-32 minutes.
- Build a life. Find a partner, or don't. Procreate, or don't. Live. Love. Experience joy.
- Cry more.
- Work more.
- Let cool for 10-20 minutes; cut slices on the diagonal.
- Eat all the fucking ice cream in life.
- Fuck Anorexia.

## All Life is Rehab

*Notes from quarantine*

Gaze

horizontal

Anti-inflammatory diet

Anti-inflammatory diet

Life in one room

Here I crawl around

like a larva on my

fifteen square meters

Negative thoughts in every body part

I'm an air mattress

but the air leaves me

as I lie down

Capitalism is a death cult

Capitalism is a death cult



---

Disposable body

My food is so strange

It doesn't contain any additives

Everything that is dear to me

is learned

My head is full of lint

but I still have extra masks

in my bag

Staying in bed

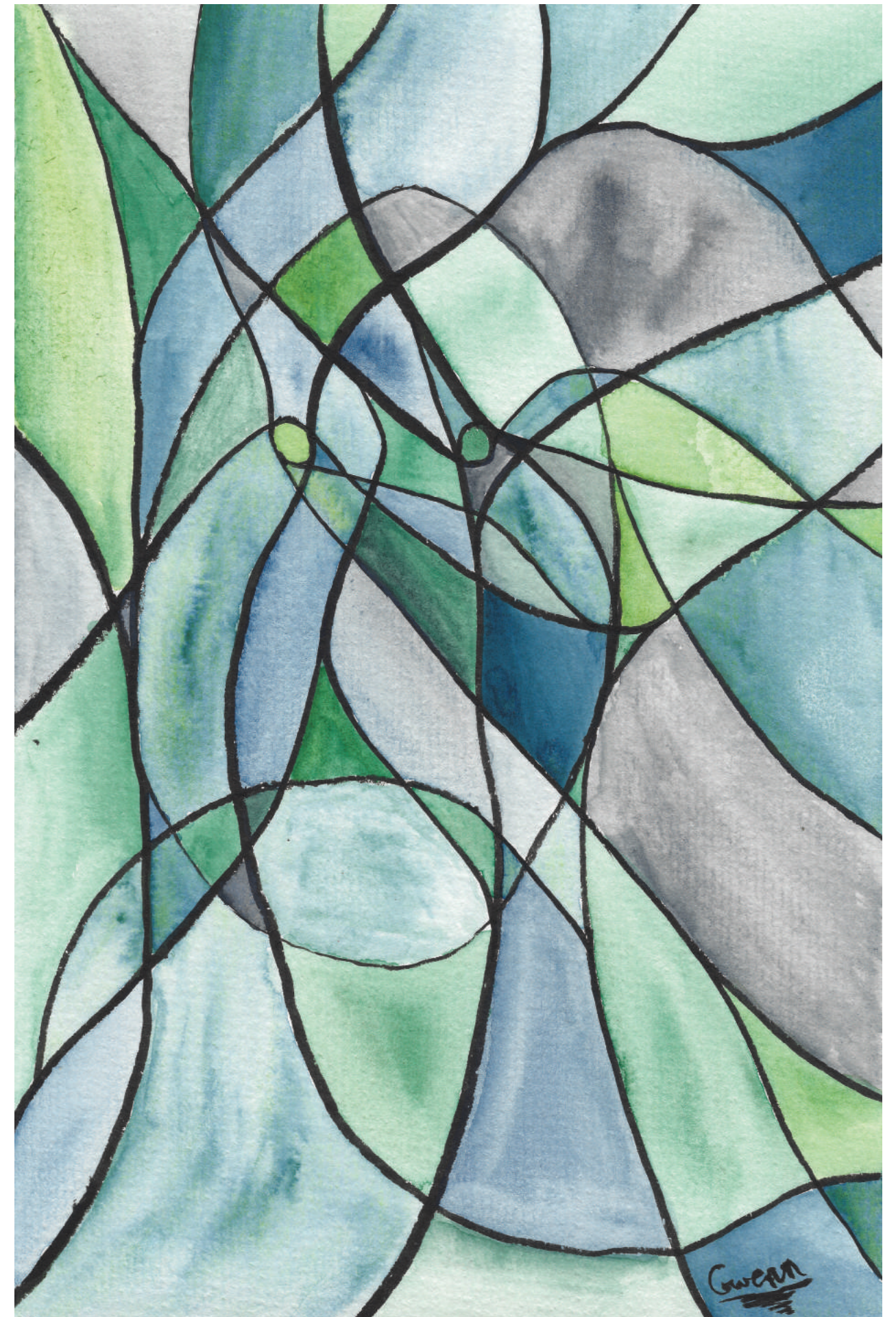
Workism is perfectionism is fasiscm

In isolation the one-room apartment becomes my brain

Thinking becomes three-dimensional

To listen to one's surrounding as music

The radical rest



Watercolor on paper.



## **Bleeding Broth**

The onion growing from my elbow was my heart failing.

The asparagus protruding from my spinal cord was liver disease.

The potato eyes penetrating my fingernails were dementia.

The other vegetables were a myriad of indistinguishable illnesses that I would eventually die of. The harvest was a celebration of my decline. A bounty growing amidst the destruction and decay, their roots drank from my disease.

We decided to make soup despite it all, as we had just purchased a discounted crockpot and we were hungry enough at the time. We filled the ceramic interior of the pot with tap water and set it to keep warm, with hopes that the water would inherit the flavors of the vegetables soon enough, and we would drink in my suffering to sooth our hunger.

My wife delicately tugged the onion stock and a small bulb birthed from an unknown place in my body, sliding out of my skin as though it were freshly watered soil. The onion was placed on a wooden cutting board we had gotten from a wedding guest we no longer talked to and she resumed her purposeful gleaning. She ran a straight razor over my back to collect the asparagus, navigating the hills and valleys of flesh and cutting into the white and green fingers that sagged toward the earth from every vertebrae, leaving enough of the root behind within the skin folds to potentially grow again. I dreaded the sensation of the stocks limply brushing against my back, but the desire for a tepid bowl of soup was unpredictable, so I joined in her hope for regrowth.

She used a toothbrush to pry cilantro from my tongue and I felt the immediate relief of unimpeded saliva draining into my stomach. A knotted carrot effortlessly discharged from my belly button landing flaccidly on the floor and I sheepishly picked it up, examining its imperfections in disgust before placing it carefully on the board, even though it was undeserving of its modest purpose.

Her extraction became feverish at certain points, perhaps unable to deal with the stench of the vegetables protruding from certain areas, her fingers worked with the diligence and coldness of a butcher. I apologized with every audible severing of connective tissue and nerve that spiraled up the base of our meal but she remained quiet, her resentment growing in unison with the pile of spoiled produce that would soon nourish us. Blood flowed freely at times when roots were picked or trimmed too hastily, but neither of us acknowledged its presence. It simply saturated a threadbare bath mat, permanently sewing my guilt into its darkening brown hue.

Later that night I would use a handful of paper towels to quietly mop up the mess my body had created and hoped the blood wouldn't affect the ability for it to be recycled.

Her hands never ceased.

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Several hours later, our wooden shrine was filled with my passive achievements. Unwanted trophies that deserved their insignificant destiny of slowly dissolving in a refurbished crockpot before eventually providing enough nutrients to propel us through another purposeless day or be immediately evacuated into our toilet before anything was absorbed. Though unlike me, they were indifferent to their legacy, exempt from judgement or hatred. Each shape and color taunted me from its position on the board, satisfied with either outcome or no outcome at all, ready to submit to the impermanence I always wanted.

She used a knife to scrape the vegetables into the crockpot and I thought about how the motion of her hand and the sound of the knife on the wood wasn't all that different to my own skin, though the relief of its burden was instantaneous and mine was perpetual. Some cilantro leaves remained on the board in apparent protest and were eventually washed into the garbage disposal.

We looked at the water full of vegetables for some time.

Neither of us had much to say about me dying or the soup created from that dying.

Maybe we were both just hungry.

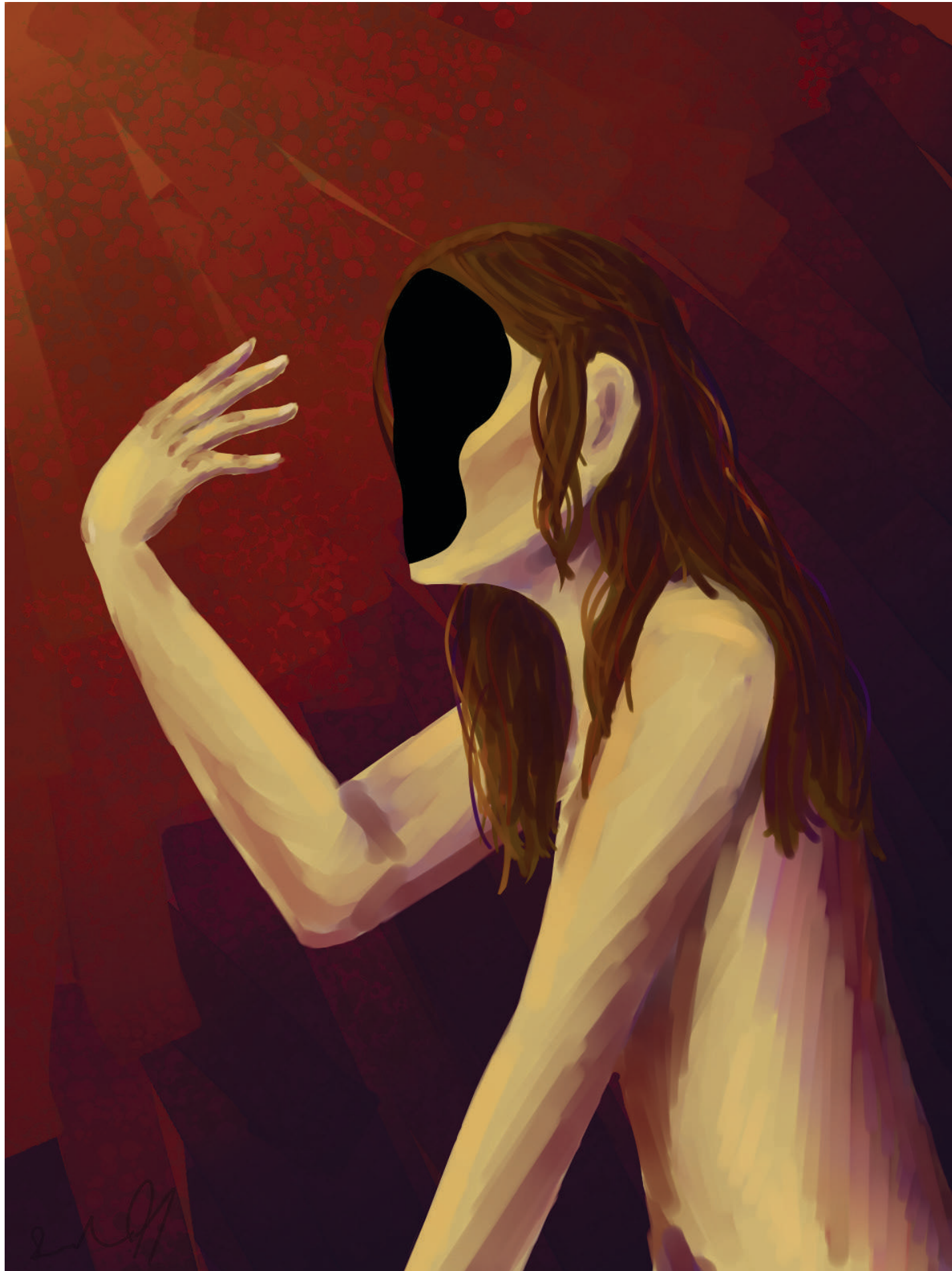
Maybe we just wanted the water to consume the vegetables so we didn't have to look at them anymore.

We fell asleep in each other's arms that night, hoping that the soup would taste good even though we knew it wouldn't.

Hoping our love would survive another harvest

Hoping my disintegration and submission would be as seamless as the ingredients disappearing into the warm embrace of the water.





Digital medium.

## Sweetness is Optional

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 Large Lemon
- 1 Small Bowl of Sugar (Optional)

### INSTRUCTIONS

- Take one (1) large lemon and cut it horizontally down the middle so you have two round halves.
- Simply lick the lemon juice from the sour fruit until you have had your fill. You may dip the open half into the bowl of sugar; it sweetens the sour taste, like saturated lemonade.

*(Tip: I strongly recommend for the betterment of your health, for your own sake, to add the sugar)*

I share with you a Simple Recipe  
That Tastes of Childhood Nostalgia  
Take a Lemon from the Tree of Life  
Plump with Sour Kisses  
That Brings Chapped Lips to Pucker

I found Mine from the Lemon Trees  
Barely Thriving, Lined Beside the House  
Of my Abusive “Grandmother,”  
12 years my Family Suffered and Endured  
A Broken Shelter, Allowed Rain to Pierce  
Haven not granted from Outside Harms

It is the Trees I Proudly Shown and Shared  
With Suicidal Friends I held so Dear  
The Juices We Agreed Tasted Quite Familiar  
Like the Anguished Tears we Once Bleed

Slice it in Half, Down the Middle—  
Let the Acid Burn your Cuts Clean  
Let it Sting your Somber Throat Awake  
Shock your System from Dissociation  
You make use of Life’s Lemons, “Content”  
The Sour you’ve Always Known

But might I suggest a Bowl of Sugar?

I share with you a Simple Recipe  
That Tastes of Childhood Nostalgia  
Take Sugar from the Canes of Self-Growth  
Sweet with Delicate Strokes of Fingertips  
That Soothe and Comfort Aching Hearts

I found Mine from my Kitchen Cabinets  
Safe and Sound, a Home to Call my Own  
Made by my Loving Mother and Father  
Ties Severed, Family now Free to Breathe  
Glass Windows Scatter Sunlight in Peace  
Fresh Eyes, World’s Beauty Rediscovered

It is a Place where I will Warmly Welcome  
My Recovering Friends, Laughter Unending  
The Dust We Agreed Tastes Quite Favorable  
Like Celebrating our Triumphant Survival

Grab a Bowl or Cup your Hands—  
Let the Sweetness Summon a Toothy Smile  
Let it Grant Compassion to your Story  
Pain not Erased, but the Process is Eased  
Collect those Grains of Happy Memories  
A Healing Balm that Tastes of Lemonade

But You must be the one to Add the Sugar

## The Drought, The Deluge

I grew up in a perpetual drought.

My father always had one eye cocked to the skies, waiting for a bounty that never came as he dutifully turned off the sprinklers around our trailer. The grass crawled across the landscape like a dying man in the desert, parched the sort of yellow-white that comes just before surrender; tomatoes fell off the vine and molted to jelly. In the dusty scab of August 1987, we all went without and prayed for rain.

It's what I think of now, age 41 and counting, as I stand in front of the refrigerator and stare glassy-eyed at its secrets. It holds things I once really wanted but have now forgotten to care about. When did I become so insouciant? A Tupperware rectangle yields cheesy jalapeno dip, a 2-liter of Dr. Pepper slowly fades to flat. The bottle judges me from the top shelf, offering a truth that's been inside me all along: *you would have killed to have free access to these things as a kid.*

Instead I had chicken salad on a hank of white bread, Kool-Aid in a plastic dinosaur cup. I ate what my parents ate and only minded when I had a craving that couldn't be satisfied because it was too expensive, or too far away. The injustice felt like being slapped on the hand by our Baptist minister, it felt like impotence. Kids are at the mercy of the people they live with. Kids are at the mercy of people, in general.

Adulthood is a wellspring. We rarely think of it that way, but it's never more evident than in the kitchen. I can have ice anytime I want it, cold fresh water that doesn't stink of the trailer park well, macaroni and cheese at midnight. Those thoughts come, but I can't offer them any attention when things get dim at the edges. Instead my memories tangle up with the present and I remember the last meal I ate in that trailer, lukewarm fast-food bought as a treat to smooth over my parents' separation. My mother and I left for a new city that evening while my dad stood in the driveway, hands on his hips, face unreadable. Suddenly, I want salty fries dipped in a chocolate Frosty.

I settle for Miracle Whip on white bread, something my dad always called a Wish Sandwich. It's pillowy comfort on a cold night, when my thoughts are weighted and shadowed. And still, with all I have, I want what I don't: cold cherry Kool-Aid in a plastic cup.

## A Recipe For Admiration

Ingredients:

- 1 David Bowie corpse
- 1 record player

Directions:

1. Get a friend to help you lift the corpse of David Bowie.
2. Put the corpse on the record player. Make sure the spindle skewers him just above the belly button.
3. Put the needle on his nipple and turn the player on.
4. Watch his limbs rot and fall off as he spins around.
5. Scream "Suffragette City" and kneel by the record player to collect every single fallen hair.

## A Recipe For Sorrow

Ingredients:

- 2 slices of bread
- 1 mother

Directions:

1. Make toast.
2. Think of your mother.
3. Cry.

## A Recipe For the Feeling of Sunshine on the Skin

Ingredients:

- 1 backyard or local park
- 1 book of matches
- 1 bookshelf
- 1 clear day

Directions:

1. Preheat your oven to 350°F, 177°C, or gas mark 4.
2. Prepare your bookcase by looking at it. Stare at the bookcase. Notice it. Realize it is there.
3. Decide that the bookcase is too beautiful to continue.
4. Pull all of your books and tchotchkes off the bookshelf and leave them in disorganized piles around your kitchen.
5. Drag your empty bookshelf to your backyard or local park.
6. Destroy the bookshelf. Pull out its shelves and break them; punch holes through the backing; cut the entire structure in half.
7. Collect the remains of the bookshelf and put them in a pile.
8. Set the bookshelf on fire and watch it grow into a fantastic blaze.
9. Sit before the burning bookcase and absorb its heat.

## **Fancy Meatloaf**

*for KT*

The New York Times called the recipe “luxurious,” and Nora Ephron said it was “remarkable.” I was simply looking for a new way to make use of all the miscellaneous frozen meats and vegetables we purchased to prepare for the pandemic, but it just doesn’t get any better than a frozen pepperoni pizza, eaten outdoors while playing Yahtzee, listening to Zapp & Roger, and drinking iced Rosé, after a full day of spreading cedar mulch and planting arborvitae, with the woman you’ve loved since 2002.



# INGREDIENTS

**Cynthia Mar** is a data analyst for a homeless non-profit. They draw and/or paint almost every day.

**MP Armstrong** is a disabled queer writer from Ohio. They are the author of two poetry chapbooks: *who lives like this for such a cheap price* (Flower Press), and *the truth about the sky* (Selcouth Station), a reader for Prismatic Magazine, and an editor for Fusion and Curtain Call magazines. Their work is published or forthcoming in Qwerty, Brainchild, and bed zine, among others. Find them online @mpawrites and at mpawrites.wixsite.com/website.

**Erika Skjei** hails from the southwest and often wakes before the sun does (not by choice). Thrice published for poetry and creative nonfiction, but the first one didn't count. Recently relocated to the coast in an attempt to cure writers block and all she got was this stupid pandemic. IG: @highbiscuits\_

**Logan K. Young's** factorial chap, I(<3)U!, is out now. A summer student of Thurston Moore at Naropa's Kerouac School, he's since been published everywhere from Jacket2 to 3:AM and anthologized as far flung as Urgency Reader 2: Mutual Aid Publishing During Crisis (Queer.Archive.Work) and the F E M M E C R A F T edition (No. 8) of G U E S T. Recent exhibitions include cyber via SendMeNudeLetters.com and on a train (New York-Montréal) for the Synchrony 2020 Demoparty.

**Sadie Maskery** lives by the sea. She is on Twitter as @saccharinequeen where she describes herself, optimistically, as "functioning adequately".

**Charles J. March III** is a quasi-writer, pseudo-musician, and counterfeit-artist currently living in California. His pieces have appeared in such places as the Chicago Tribune, L.A. Times, in the toilet, and in the trash. Last year he poured his blood, sweat, and tears into Blood Tree Literature's hybrid contest, and wound up winning third place. PBS once contacted him regarding his work, but it didn't work out. More can be found at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/charles-j-march-iii-4114b5b2/> & <https://soundcloud.com/charles-john-march-iii>

**Tyler Peterson** is a writer from Des Moines, Iowa. His short fiction has appeared in Misery Tourism, Expat Press, and SCAB. He tweets at @type\_\_\_e.

**Nick Cricket** is a Miami-based educator and artist. He works primarily in alcohol ink but enjoys experimenting with unconventional media. He's going through it right now.

**Bram Riddlebarger** is the author of THE DISMAL COOKBOOK, two novels, EARPLUGS and GOLDEN ROD, and several collections of poems and stories including WESTERN EROTICA HO and MESSAGES FROM THE AMERICAN TRASHCAN. He is also the founder of Gob Pile Press. He tweets @gob\_pile and lives in SE Ohio.

**Cassie Birk** is a graduate of the University of Iowa where she studied words. She is currently a fiction editor for The Conium Review. Her work has also been featured in Funny Looking Dog Quarterly, GLITCHWORDS, streetcake magazine, The Daily Drunk, and more. She currently lives in the Pacific Northwest and probably smells of Italian food. Find her on Twitter @BirkCassie.

**Shannon Frost Greenstein** (she/her) resides in Philadelphia with her children, soulmate, and persnickety cats. She is the author of "Pray for Us Sinners," a collection of fiction from Alien Buddha Press, and "More.", a poetry collection by Wild Pressed Books. Shannon is a former Ph.D. candidate in Continental Philosophy and a multi-time Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee. Her work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Bending Genres*, *Epoch Press*, *X-R-A-Y Lit Mag*, and elsewhere. Follow Shannon at shannonfrostgreenstein.com or on Twitter at @ShannonFrostGre.

**Roger von Reybekiel** is a visual artist who lives and works in Stockholm, Sweden. His individual and collaborative projects explore artificial distinctions between art, life and the everyday. Most recently his practice has examined the role of writing in artistic processes and digital developments in contemporary art and writing. Von Reybekiel is the initiator of the web-based exhibition Robopoetics (robopoetics.com) published by Dear Bubble in November 2018.

**Mark Wilson** is a Chicago based author/visual artist driven by crippling monotony and reheated bath water. He is the author of "PowerPoint Eulogy" from Fly on the Wall Press and "Until No Crevice Remained" from Orbis Tertius, with forthcoming collection "Sparsely Attended Funerals" coming soon from Close to the Bone.

**Savannah Hernandez** is a creative writer and a visual artist who graduated from Cal Poly Pomona University with a Bachelors in English Literature. Her work often centers around themes and topics of healing, coping, growth, insights and reflections in hopes to help those who may be in need of it. You can learn more about her and find her other works through her blog at theilredwriter.wordpress.com

**Amanda Crum** is a writer and artist whose work has been published in *The Hellebore*, *Barren Magazine*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, and more. She has forthcoming work in Lunch Ticket and SmokeLong Quarterly; her most recent chapbook of poetry, *The Day You Learned To Swim*, made the shortlist for a Bram Stoker Award nomination in 2021. Amanda lives in Kentucky with her husband and two children, where she fosters a healthy love of horror movies.

**Teddy L. Friedline** (they/them) is a Maryland-based queer writer. Their work has appeared in *Yes Poetry* and *Burning Jade Magazine*, among others. They currently serve as co-editor-in-chief of *FAIRY PIECE MAG* and social media editor for the *Collegian*. You can find them on Instagram and Twitter, both @jadeitebtrdish.

**Sister Gwenn N. Dowtte (@sistergwenn)** is a fully professed member of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, currently living in San Diego, CA. She has bipolar depression and discovered visual art as both a coping mechanism and an avenue for self-expression. She hopes to help end the stigma of mental illness by openly sharing her creative work and living her truth.

**Josh Olsen (@\_WorkingStiff)** is a librarian in Flint, Michigan, and the co-creator of Gimmick Press, a micro publisher of pop culture inspired literature and art (gimmickpress.com). His latest collection of flash nonfiction, *Things You Never Knew Existed*, will be released summer 2021.

