



We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which these stories and images were created – they were gathered on Gadigal and Wangal country.

You are invited to respectfully reflect on the custodians of the land in which you now find yourself, as you enjoy these pages and go about your day; may we all do so with care and compassion.



During Sydney's 107-day lockdown of 2021, we found ourselves missing dinner parties.

We wanted to share our home, spill things on the floor from laughing, fill tummies with pasta and sinks with dishes to be done the next morning.

So, we decided to make this little book, themed around the kind of occasion we were longing for.

We asked Eora-based storytellers to contribute to a literary potluck. And they must have felt the same, for all of them accepted our invitation, joining with something special to share with you.

These pages are a celebration of our freedom to be together again, to break bread, raise glasses and make a delicious mess once more.

We hope you enjoy our dinner party. At this table, you are our guest of honour.

*Bon Appetit!*

<3

Fondue & Flower Books

Fondue



flower  
books



# entrée

## Vegetable Pie

*Tess Ridgway*

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## Old Friends, New Faces

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bathroom

break

before

eat?

we

ok

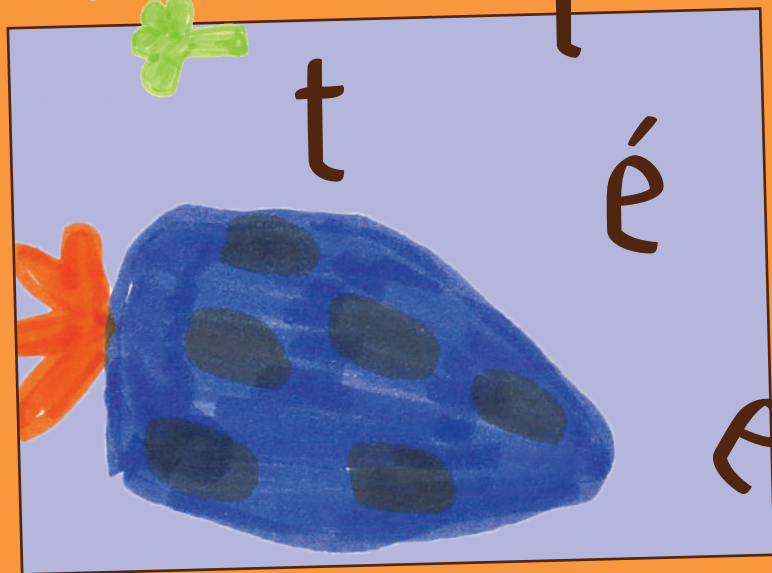
quickly

quick wee





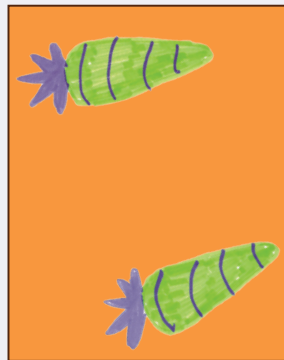
entrée  
e n



t r é e

Throw  
oregano  
& thyme  
in your  
hair

salt



your lips

say what

you've been

meaning to say

into

the

oven



Vegetable Pie

9

*Tess Ridgway*

There's no one way to start the day or cook a vegetable pie  
but tell me the best – multi-tab scrollin for the definitive  
~a flaky pastry paragon~

no clunky co-existing truths

*Whatever you think darling*

but I want tight measurements to be sure  
otherwise why not throw all the ingredients in the air  
and stomp them into the pan?

Stir foamy eggplant with tomato mud  
whole cloves of garlic, rosemary stalks  
let boiling water scamper out the saucepan  
flesh out puff pastry & rest it on your face  
for 15 to 20 minutes  
while you wait pour a little red wine down the drain  
now coat your hands in butter and massage the pie tin  
finger the name of your love  
grease their silhouette over the pan  
then clean your hands of them

Throw oregano & thyme in your hair salt your lips  
say what you've been meaning to say into the oven  
fan-force it out of you bake thoughts till they're knife clean  
remove tin with bare hands & drop it on the floor  
wear a tea towel like a shroud to atone  
flake the crust over your lap pour the jus into your mug  
stack all the dishes in the toilet to soak  
sweep all the crumbs into the garden  
watch the ants take them purposefully  
someplace – I don't know



**OLD FRIENDS  
NEW FACES**

It's hard to know what you want. In love, in a pet, in *The Sims*, in a snack. So, instead of deep-diving into your host's pantry shelves or hovering at the coffee table, take this quiz and find out which hors d'oeuvres your heart is pounding for.

When you finish, maybe you'll know your palate, and even yourself, a little better. Maybe the hounds of love are begging for a nibble. Or maybe you aren't so hungry after all...

PS – I stole these questions from eHarmony.

*Who* What is the most important *person* ingredient in your life?

- a. Hummus <3
- b. Good-quality extra virgin olive oil.
- c. Salt.
- d. Variety. I'll try anything once.

*How do you feel about yourself* chilli – physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually?

- a. My palate is sensitive. It's genetic. Please, no black pepper.
- b. A mild amount is ideal for an entrée, but never so much as to overpower the flavour of the dish or ruin the palate for the next course.
- c. Sriracha goes on everything and it's been that way since 2008.
- d. I like my food Carolina Reaper spicy. Send me to the ER.

*When do you feel most afraid?*

- a. When my mum asks me if I'm still vegetarian and I have to lie to her again.

12           b.       When my dog Martini starts yowling. He has, like, a sixth sense or something.

c.   On top of that platform at Jamberoo. But I'll still jump off. For the boys.

d.   In social situations. Hahah, I'm honestly fine though. I want to be here.

*Who is your biggest enemy, and precisely how and why did this person become your enemy?*

a.   Jesse Peters. In fourth grade, he stole the fruit roll-up that I had for recess and never apologised. And then he added me on Facebook a few months ago and asked if I wanted to get a drink. A drink?! Are you kidding me? No. I want my fruit roll-up back.

b.   Anyone who makes a better confit duck than I do. So far, no one.

c.   Probably my dealer. Ahahah. I actually owe him so much money.

d.   KFC. Down with Popcorn Chicken and Capitalism and Kentucky Deep-Fried Moral Turpitude!!

*What is the role of God cheese in your life? Do you believe there is a God cheese, and if so, what is God cheese like in relation to you?*

a.   Cheese is my literal queen princess baby and maybe one day, instead of there being sand on the beach, there will be tiny shreds of Parmigiano Reggiano, and the rocks are burrata and the water is Pinot Grigio and the clouds are fresh ricotta.

b.   Like my Gucci bum bag, cheese is one of the best functional accessories out there. Sure, I'll nibble some Gorgonzola with quince paste if it's on the table, and could I actually have a negroni, too – or do you not have any vermouth?

c.   Those Kraft squares go alright. Good size for cheese on toast.

d.   Cheese make me poo poo :(



- a. Trying everything on the menu at Sushi Train.
- b. In Paris, obviously.
- c. I would attend heaps of gallery openings (only the ones with snacks). You've gotta put a tiny piece of salami in your pocket every time a different person starts talking and then by the time you get home, you can make a whole pizza with it.
- d. Harvesting vegetables from the community garden and cooking with my flower-pot friends.

*What is the most important thing in ~~the world to you~~ your fridge?*

- a. Oat milk, duh!
- b. Yottam Ottolenghi's preserved lemon mayonnaise. You'll know I'm not ok if I can't find my Gucci bum bag and I don't have any of that mayonnaise in my fridge.
- c. Just BBQ sauce and cooked pasta that smells like farts but it's only been there a week so it should be fine. Wait, I might've heard the question wrong.
- d. My versatile and trustworthy hunk of extra-firm tofu.

Your cheeseboard destination:

Mostly As – Gruyere, rosemary wheaten crackers, prosciutto-wrapped rockmelon and Sicilian olives

This arrangement will pair perfectly with the Prosecco and OJ you picked up from the bottle-o on your way here. Look, there's a mysterious person making eyes at you from behind the olive bowl. Don't tell them the Jesse Peters story. Just smile, laugh, flick your hair, sample the cured meat and don't you dare feel guilty about it.

Mostly Bs – Smoked cheddar, beef tartare, horseradish cream, pickled daikon, taro gratin

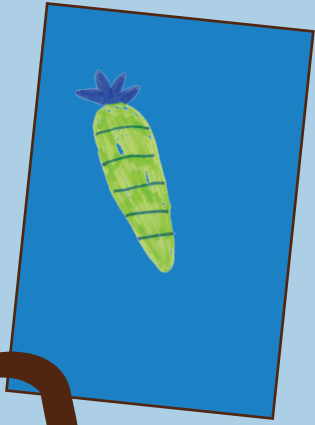
Hey, maybe you enjoy eating raw meat and egg yolk. Who am I to judge? You know what you like and that's hot. Just don't spill anything on your plush embroidered bathrobe or your very clean, very stylish, very fluffy poodle, Martini. Live it up, babe! Go and put on a Latin jazz mix.

Mostly Cs – Babybels and food poisoning

I know you don't like cleaning out the fridge, even when there's mould on the three-week-old noodles that are leaking onto your housemate's uncovered lasagne from last night, the same ones you thought would make a nice pre-dinner snack. But a good clean is always worth it. Here, have a hairband for when you're throwing up into the toilet. Tonight is not the night. I'll invite you to another dinner party when you're feeling better <3

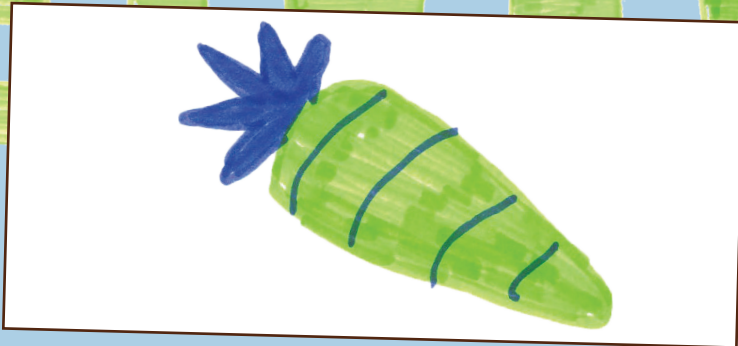
Mostly Ds – Massel vegetable stock powder with hot water (some may call it soup), Kettle chilli chips and a spoonful of peanut butter

For you: a barnyard explosion of an entrée, but it hits every flavour note in the goddamn textbook – spicy, warm, fatty, filling, crunchy, naughty. Aren't those the ten commandments? God, you look fresh in your expensive hoodie and crocs. Go and take an ironic mirror selfie for your dating profile in the bathroom and have a sip of your savoury stock tea.



# main course

*of  
course*



ciggie?

no

sit

down



the

tortilla

is

coming

LOCKDOWN

DAY 81

HEY GUYS ... LET'S DO A

# SPANISH COOK-UP ON OUR PORCH

THIS WEEKEND

HOUSEMATE



ENMORE, NSW

THAT WEEKEND ...  
AFTER AN ADVENTUROUS MORNING  
SPENT BETWEEN THE BOTTLE-O,  
THE FISH MARKETS 'N' VEGGIE SHOPS  
'N' COOKING 'N' PREPPING EVERYTHING  
IN THE KITCHEN ... WE DID IT!



TRADITIONAL  
SIDRA POUR



TWO LONG  
HOLES CARVED  
IN THE CORK

HIGHER  
HIGHER!  
GO HIGHER!

THAT'S  
IT!

HALF  
OF IT IS  
SPILLED ON  
THE GROUND



SCRAPETTA: WIPING THE PLATE  
OR PAN CLEAN WITH A BIT OF  
BREAD



SALUD!



WE'RE  
OUT OF  
SIDRA!

ANW  
I LOVE  
YOU GUYS



18 Tricky Dietary Requirement

*Anita Donovan*

I am in a period of grief

I need you to know that

so right now, a hot flush is a fever  
current symptoms portend some horizon-holding arrival

which I am perfectly reasonable about.

I pour more wine, because for  
tonight, there is no tomorrow:  
this is denial



A will requires a witness  
a signature. Maybe  
if you rile me up enough I'll eke blood up your ears  
to put in the wax seal: a tribute

I'm not so palatable tonight

*twisting the tablecloth of small talk into a dark hollow  
leading you into a trap, quietly,  
just between you and me,  
and I draw your attention to the oil separating from the sauce,  
how it pools in my mouth*

*Much later, you might see me singeing black onto my fingers with the pink  
and yellow candles, with a smear of blueberry debris  
on my face*

a toddler of dark omen, embarrassing  
to witness. I do none of this  
for your eyes to remain warm  
I watch us talk from the birthday cake's halo of flame  
where sits my anger

I have left the pain at home – with a book – to stay up,  
give me some water, and put me to bed

But I was never a gambler  
a few people are clinging to the chilli bush  
out back, oneupmanship burning its way from their throats to their mouths

acceptance is waiting for me in my stomach,  
I feed it my dinner, watching a candle burn its way through its body

A song is suggested, sparks among the giggling smokers' group  
I watch it travel mouth to mouth on my way to the bathroom

Emerging, I meet the eyes of the next occupants: wary,  
speed-glazed, staring at my too-solid outline on the wall  
an imprint of what they are trying not to fall into tonight.  
I step out. It's tricky  
to move between the attentions of the living and the dead  
twenty-four little flames are blown out quickly, happily  
and for a moment we are all in the darkness together  
in the exhale – before the applause, the volume dial being wrenched like a  
sticky tap –  
the silence of a wish steams from our lips



20 Remember when we?

*Farz Edraki*

Remember when eating a meal involved more than a burrito at your desk and the dead-fish light of your laptop screen?

Remember when you sat next to someone you didn't know at a table, indoors, and asked them to please pass the salt?

Remember knocking over a small bowl of baba ghanoush with your elbow at that same table, prompting laughter and a new nickname?

Remember when Caitlin made a chestnut trifle, each layer a new saccharine surprise? When you dipped your spoon, it was like undressing alone in front of a mirror. Remember?

Remember Golden Century?

How about when your mum made ash-e-reshteh? Or when you bought forty loaves of sangak to go with it, from the only hole-in-the-wall in Guildford that sells the bread? Then you strapped those loaves like a newborn in the backseat and drove them to her in Canberra, ripping off pieces with your left hand, right hand on the steering wheel.

Remember these three words being asked in succession: *table for four?*

But do you even remember?

Remember going to your friend-of-a-friend's house with a knot in your stomach, unsure of how to make conversation with Young Professionals, stumbling over your words and going to the bathroom at least four times, even though you didn't need to go maybe three of those times? And when you came home, feeling more alone than you had before you left?

Remember the nickname? I think it was SPILLS. Or maybe it was CLUTZ.

Remember the taste of your childhood? It tastes a bit like Coco Pops. You ate them while watching Cheese TV when it rained, before you left the house to go to school. Or during sleepovers, piled into the living room with doonas and blankets and snacks. Is that how it went? More often than not, you were



self-isolating on weekends before it was a thing.

21

And what about gochujang? You know, the paste you used to make kimchi soup? One of the last things you ate outside of these borders, before all *this*. (Wait, what came before?)

Remember spending fifty dollars in a restaurant that made you put napkins on your lap, and your stomach still growling with an empty feeling of hunger afterwards?

You had Coco Pops last Sunday, remember? In an ice cream you ordered on your phone, that arrived in a small cardboard box, which you placed in the corner of the living room along with the other delivery boxes from the past week.

It didn't taste as good as you remembered. In fact, it tasted more like cardboard.

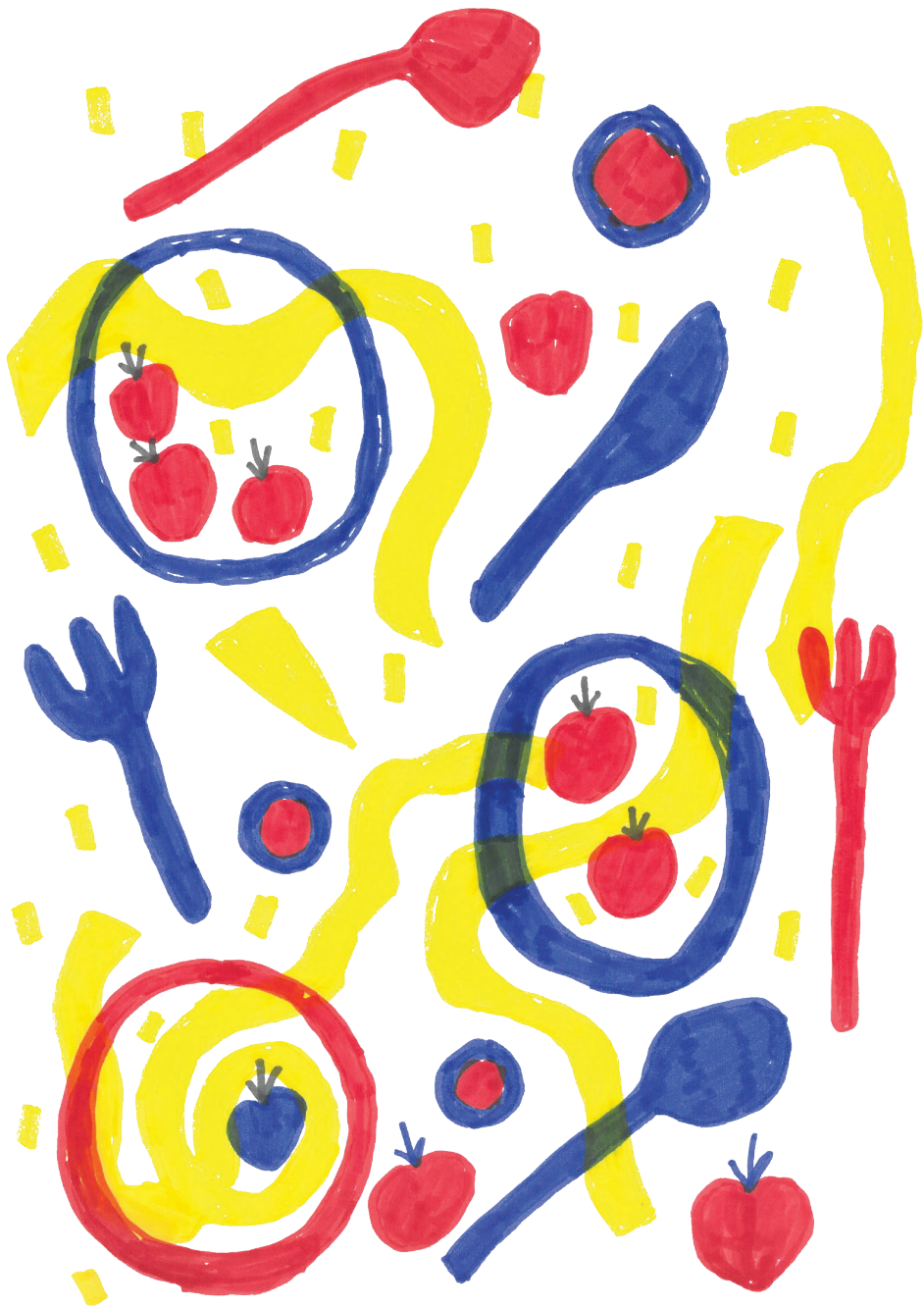
But do you remember when we would?

Do you?

Remember when we?

Remember when?

Remember  
when you  
sat next  
to someone  
you didn't  
know at a  
table,



Yellow Spaghetti  
*Lily Golightly*

I could hear something. Been hearing it for decades actually. It was sometimes clear and at other times muffled – drowned out – like a wind chime or something. It was like the wind chime that hung on the back veranda of my neighbour's house when I was a kid. You see, it didn't matter what way the wind was blowing back then, which chimes hit other chimes – it always sounded sweet and bucolic. Even over the muttering of the late-night drunk who sat himself on that back veranda, chain-smoking in between fits of coughing and spluttering and calling out to his dog, Lucy, an over-fed golden retriever. I suppose I liked the idea of it always sounding good, no matter the conditions. I could always rely on that wind chime to sing me to sleep and to keep me occupied when I couldn't. So I kept it, locked it away somewhere deep.

Later in life, I lost those chimes for a while – got caught up in the not knowing – the chaos of it all. The city was a breeding ground for that.

Why I left? I guess I needed to, needed to do it then and there and without deliberation.



I'd been cycling for three months by that point, from Albany, WA, on my way to Rockhampton, some three thousand kilometers over the plenty highway. Chasing chimes. Content in the rotation of spoke on dirt road, slowly drifting further and further. Each full rotation measured in one revolution of perfect stone crunch, my rhythm, my anthem. The Indian big blue, all salty and so crystal it was almost milky, was all but behind me by then, replaced with a different kind of ocean – one populated by roos and salt bush flats that would rival any ocean horizon. On certain days it stretched on forever like that same day would stretch on forever.

The not knowing was dripping off me in beads of sweat by then. It had all become clearer in that dusty hum-drum cycle. Or was it that it didn't need to be anymore? Either way, I could hear the chimes again, dawdling across that vast island of nothingness; I could hear the hollow metal pipes clanking in the suburban backyards of a lost nation. I could smell the mulberry and the thick-crust pies and those purple flowers we stuck to boys' backs when boys were

like flowers. Back then, that is. I was losing my way forwards to a place where human interaction was scarce and one needn't worry themselves with the bigger questions. Now that I think about it, I mostly concerned myself with the trivialities of cycling. Perhaps one could say it was a practice in meditation. Perhaps it was the meditation that did it. Maybe that was it. In those night reaches I stretched out my body, limbered my soul, could change a star like a light bulb and smooth out the velvet blanket upon which it hung.

Rest, cycle, cycle some more, recover, rest and cycle again... more rotations. The only imperative to move forwards. It was certainly not about the bitumen anymore. That was long gone, melted or never lain. Just dirt and perfect inane sense.

Not many folk really understood why I was doing what I was doing. Raising money for cancer was a good place to start but that was merely a front to silence the disbelievers or those not willing to understand why a person would ride such an awfully long way for no good reason.

When I pulled into a homestead off the Donohue Highway, it became clear to me that I was well and truly in the sunshine state. My rubber black cycling boots melting in the thickening September heat. I'd called ahead to ensure I could find some water – planning to refill my pannier bags and get going. I was greeted by old machines rusting at the homestead entrance – nothing prepared me for the paradise that lay before me. Manicured lawns and freshly laid gravel, demarcating civilisation from the mulga scrub. Well kept buildings, neat and quaint. Old wagon wheels hung ornamentally, western history abundant. Forwards, past a larger home with a white chain-link fence built from old pipe, was a grassy bluff; and beyond that was a vast lake, glassy, sun setting through red river gums at its banks. It occurred to me then that the entire ridgeline that lay beyond that lake – some kays away – would have once harboured a great inland ocean full of ancient marine life. I was at the foot of another time, fawning at its benevolent, enticing shores. Reprieve. The water wiggled in the afternoon, playfully, like little kids bob and hoot and shriek in backyard pools. It called me out – my siren song – those chanting chimes of a different time. I plunged below. Opened my eyes in the silty muddy waters, cuts stinging blissfully.

When I resurfaced and made my way back up the embankment to the grassy bluff, I saw a young man watching me from the corner of his eye, lent up by

25 a shed with a pair of pliers in his hand. His face was freckled and sun spotted; he looked older than he really was. His hands covered in a thick grimy grease all cut up – working hands, I guess. I gathered my belongings. Only, when I raised my head he was gone, a deserted compound in his place. Circumspect, I began to refill water and collect my things.

Upon folding the pannier bag closed I noticed a hand from the corner of my eye, that same hand I saw before, sun spotted and cut and dry. The young man handed me two homemade sausage rolls wrapped in alfoil. He introduced himself as Roudy, a title I suspect was not his given name. Later, he came back with two glasses of the coldest green cordial. We sat on a hollowed out inland gum and watched the sunset, munging on cold sausage rolls in between slurps of green cordial. After this, he halved an orange with a knife from his belt, handed me one, a good one. Each brilliant orange bead of citrus burst with a tart tanginess followed by a saccharine sweet finish.

‘Reckon it’s pretty deadly what you’re doing out here. Reckon most people wouldn’t understand it either ay, riding your bike in the heat day in, day out. I reckon I get it but. Reckon it makes perfect sense to me, why’d you’d do that.’

always  
room for



dessert





what?

there's

**MORE?**

no,

I

couldn't

**possibly**



oh,

on

go

then



*Elise Hislop*





*ONE*

today I'll try being a girl who likes the rodeo. who stuffs her hands into gloves  
and stuffs her gloves with fistfuls of tufty hair

he bristles by my side, eyes glued to the buckling struggling figure at the centre  
of the dust bowl, a man atop with iron thighs iron eyes a hat brimming over  
them, a jaw set in stone

I reach my hand down to his, squeezing it, his fingers curl limp between mine a  
last meal I want to refuse but couldn't of two crumpets (pores pooling with mar-  
garine) a scraping of (finger nail) marmalade, he ordered it for me, he always  
forgot my gluten intolerance

*TWO*

clown I am. bucking wilding riding.

curdling silently, slightly like yoghurt in the sun, silent like yoghurt.

a last meal of pappardelle ragu (heady, rich, torn ribbons from a pony tail) red  
on fingers, face, along cheek bones, down a spine. rogue rouge. my tongue is  
split like a snake and I see his eyes from the crowd on me as I lick along the red  
outline of my mouth, the stadium blurring like a carousel.

*THREE*

the bull you overpower looks over his shoulder at me. I want it to be you looking  
back at me. skin powdered mounted with talc and I shudder at the thought of  
your chalky skin sliding against mine.

it would be bellinis and cocktail olives skewered between the eyeballs of the  
bull I had to kill to get you to be mine.

I take her hand wishing it was yours, the hair from her gloves sprouts between  
my fingers, a pony's tail hanging stiff in the breeze. My hands sticky with peach  
nectar that has dropped from above, the horizon leaking onto my skin.

I lean into the megaphone, the microphone, an icecream cone – my words weigh as much as the clouds. hovering above the dust and the screams I see it all.

the girl wanting to be wanted, her boy wanting the clown, the bull wanting the ground the ground wanting to drown.

a gold spoon folds into a chocolate fondant wetted with sauce, whetted against a stone, a dessert spoon, carved a cave, cavernous chocolate spills out, flooding up my arms, neck, eyes. no one sees me so I no longer see them.

*FIVE*

the love story goes on around me, the clown bewitches a plebeian, ruins his life, runs his life red. I cannot see red. sacrilegious for these humans who need red to tell them it's love danger death heat.

I think I could taste red, a final meal of air from beyond cities and coasts, air that is bound with red dirt, filled with freedom and horns they took from me, of the sounds of screeching galahs not a false god and his crackling microphone.

*SIX*

I am anointed with everything – splashes of beer, lashings of blood, excrement from above and uprising from below. and all I crave is water, drawn from a stone or sobbing thunderous clouds voices, hoofs, applause all shake me

shake me until I erupt, I will give a last meal of dust of righteous sound that promises to come again, if I erupt I could rebuild it all.



31 Nudging the Custard

*Lucia Moon*

The spoon drops.

Clatters on the wooden floorboards

an echo of the rodents

scuttling

perfidious

in the ceiling.

Their gnawing haunts me –

snacking *biscottini*...

A possum thumps louder,

tail spoiled with fruit.

Rats are quieter

and quick, like me.

When the fire is lit

and I am silent

at table,

I detect rat

hind-leg whirring as they scratch.

A wet sponge

dragging the kitchen-bench.

Then – an army, galloping over

the beams above

to profiteroles.

I shudder

wanting this body

to be loved.

I imagine a smell in my bedroom.

And not so sure, paranoid then,

a spoor of stable

avocado skins

wet hay and pellets –

Those nimble tyrants

and their hungry business

of gathering peanuts,

A wet  
sponge  
drag-  
ging the  
kitchen  
bench.

Then -  
an army,  
gal-  
loping  
over  
the  
beams

nudging the custard  
while I ruminare  
enshrouded  
in a bed of plucked feathers.

I begin to smell them  
in my clothes.  
I wonder if my sweat stinks  
of rat.  
Each dawn, my stomach  
is awoken  
by a cold sheet,  
the approaching sun.  
I sniff the air, imagining  
what their dinner-party  
entailed in the night.

In terracotta silence  
the kitchen lies.

There is a sickening, sweet odour  
like milk.  
My pale yellow jumper  
is soaked in sweat.

above  
to prof-  
iteroles.

**WARNING: Contains traces of nuts, gluten, animal products and unsolicited oversharing.**

When I was 7 Dad made a volcano cake for my birthday. We celebrated the occasion at the pirate-themed putt-putt golf course in Warriewood. So the cake fit right in amongst the fantastical surrounds of wrecked ships, blue lagoons and caves strewn with faux-treasure.



Back then, Dad used to make projects of all my birthday cakes. He'd already done a blue Power Ranger, pajamaed banana, tank engine and other impressive designs. The volcano cake, though, was his magnum opus, his swan song, if you will. He stopped making them after that one, which was when Mum and I moved from Hornsby to Scotland Island, meaning I changed schools and she relinquished her spot as chair of the Gordon East Public School P&C committee.

In retrospect, perhaps both of these pastimes (Dad's creative outlet of cake decorating and Mum's active engagement in my schooling) were performed more for the sake of impressing the other parent than me. For they both abandoned these pursuits, abruptly, despite having devoted so much energy to them – as Mum and I moved on geographically, both my parents seemed to move on emotionally, into new relationships. There were no more cakes after that.

I don't recount this narrative in wistful longing or resentment or with any woe-is-me sentiment intended. This recipe's preamble is purely for the sake of context. To be honest, you might read the formula to follow as a deconstruction of the abandonment complex I carry with me to this day, years after Dad decorated his last cake; it certainly shouldn't be taken as 100% accurate, reliant as we are on my admittedly fallible memory.

I thought we could use this baking session to analyse some of that emotional baggage. It's time to cast off our unresolved trauma, shooting it away like molten pumice rocks. May this volcanic dessert serve as a fountain of catharsis and acceptance, our woes dissolving as though in hot magma.

Now, enough dilly daddying, I mean, dallying. Let's get going...

### **INGREDIENTS:**

- » 1 x large sponge cake – My Grandma used to bake the best sponge cake. Simple, soft, elegantly scrumptious. Dad, however, would've slopped his sponge together from a packaged cake mix or bought it prefab from Woolies. And I don't blame him for this; as an artist, he was always more painter than sculptor, a Picasso rather than Giacometti. Maybe my later commitment to chasing the dream of a struggling writer can be explained (at least in part) as an effort to impress my creatively inclined (albeit absent) father. It's food for thought at least.
  
- » 1 x 350 gram jar of Nutella – The dirt to function as what you might call the volcano's primer. Dad maintains that his icing was actually chocolate ganache, but I'm sceptical. I can distinctly remember a hazelnutty flavour lingering on my tiny palate and the words 'Nutella' being batted around; so we're going with Ferrero on this one.

» 3 x king-sized Violet Crumble – These are for the smouldering boulders. I always had a soft spot for honeycomb growing up. So much so that I named our two budgerigars ‘Violet’ (blue) and ‘Crumble’ (green). I loved those birds, although you wouldn’t have thought so. Our relationship consisted of the parrots being imprisoned on my childhood balcony as my late mother kept them alive with mixed seed and cuttlefish bones. Make what Jungian symbolism you will out of that set-up; the picture is a grim one, whatever way you cut it. Sorry, Violet. Sorry, Crumble.

» Several red Uncle Tobys Roll-ups – Cut into strips, these will serve as the all-important lava cascading from your volcano.

» 1 x packet of sparklers – A fun fact about me is that I have a paranoid fear of sudden, loud noises. These days, it’s fairly manageable. Yet as a kid, I could be sent into an anxious spiral by an array of seemingly innocuous triggers: dogs barking, aeroplane toilets flushing, toasters popping or balloons exploding – which explains why there would’ve been none of these at the birthday celebration climaxed by our volcano cake. The point of this neurotic digression is my dad’s theory for the origin of my phobia. Apparently, at a school fête just a few years before the putt-putt party, I was so enchanted by a burning sparkler in the hands of a classmate, that I grabbed at the



1800-degree rod barehanded. Simultaneously, fireworks erupted in the sky above, heralding the arrival of an enduring unconscious association between loud noises and searing pain. According to Dad's diagnosis, that is. The moral of the story? Handle your sparklers with care, Fellow Bakers.

### **METHOD (TO YOUR MADNESS?):**

I wish I had more to say here besides 'put it all together' but I don't. And I wouldn't want to get in the way of you engaging your own creative faculties either. Let your mind run wild and your imagination roam free...

I would only suggest that you layer starting with the sponge – stacked into a vague hillock and held together with Nutella – and taking it from there. Add whatever other fun ingredients you like for embellishment.

Pro Tip: if you're having trouble spreading the Nutella, you can warm it in the microwave to thin it out a little. But for god's sake, make sure the foil is well-and-truly removed from the top of the jar beforehand! The explosive micro-catastrophe to result from neglecting this important caveat would be like the subconscious wounds you may or may not carry with you bursting open, bubbling over and spilling down mountain's side to jeopardise the unsuspecting township below that is your life's scenography.

I invite you to use this cake-building process as an opportunity to explore these potential mummy/daddy/whatever issues, a complex that'll probably take a lifetime to conquer, if you're anything like me.

Let out some of that harboured frustration as you smash up Violet Crumble (after all, 'it's the way it shatters that matters'). And, while you stab sparklers into the Oedipal phallus of a sponge-cake pile you've constructed, you could try picturing the parent who didn't give you enough love. You might light up those sparklers as you imagine a healing embrace between yourself and said parent, or, if preferred, your childhood self trembling in the face of life's many trials and tribulations.

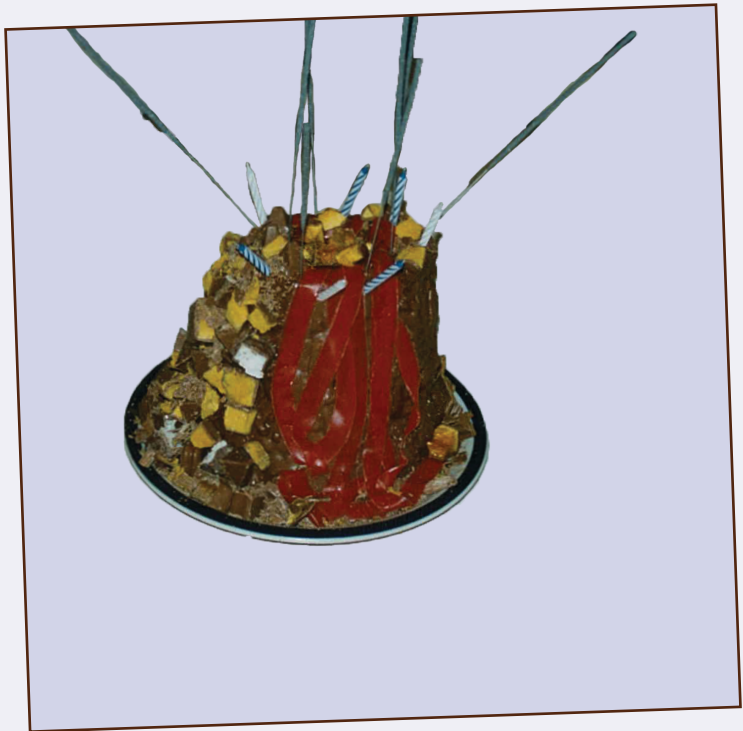
As the flaming embers descend, bring to mind all your pain and fears and anger towards those who've wronged you and frustrations that irk you, as one brilliant flash. If you can, resolve to let it all go. Then, as the final sparkler



37      fizzles out with a squeak and a last whisp of smoke, see yourself mirrored in the knife you plunge into the cake – just as you have plunged into the deepest reaches of your psyche. Bring the knife back out again, into the light, to safety, security and self, stronger now and hungry for a delicious slice of cake that you have so lovingly prepared.

Your gestalt masterpiece now complete, I hope you feel a little better, ideally having had some fun in this psychotherapeutic baking session. Take that first bite (and each to follow) as a generous, sugary act of self-love. You deserve it

Together, we have set our tortured egos free; do you see them fluttering away like jail-breaking budgies?



thank

you

for

coming



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