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A Damn Good Time

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A Damned Good Time

Vignettes, poems, and recipes inspired by a life lived like Ernest Hemingway

Written by Gabrielle Schenkelberg

A Thesis

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A Damned Good Time

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Abstract

“Write about what you know and write truly and tell them all where they can place it...Books should be about the people you know, that you love and hate, not about the people you study about.” - Ernest Hemingway

Hemingway fandom is complicated, especially in the twenty-first century. It’s one hundred years later and so much has changed, yet so much has stayed the same. People are still traveling, eating good food, drinking, cheating, fighting, writing, and falling hopelessly in love. This project was born from inspiration to lead a life like Hem’s, fueled by jet setting, good food, and good sex. Many find Hemingway troubling, and his reputation has been questioned in recent years but that is not discussed within these pages, because I find his portrayal of life to be complex, tender, and exciting.

Ernest Hemingway became the zeitgeist of the 20-something back in the 1920s. The way his writing forces readers to read between the lines with subtle nuances paved the way for modern American novelists. Adopting his style would be impossible, but I try to employ his Iceberg Theory wherever possible. This project is inspired by the love and desire created in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the complexity of friendships and relationships in *A Farewell to Arms*, the adventure in *The Sun Also Rises*, and his short stories that pack so many feelings into very few pages.

After Hemingway got his Louis Vuitton trunk filled with old manuscripts sent from Paris to Cuba, he set out to edit the pieces he wrote while traveling at the beginning

of his career as a writer. The collection of these manuscripts written in the early 1920's later became his memoir, *A Moveable Feast*, published in 1964. This collection beautifully parallels exactly what "A Damned Good Time" is to me: a mixed-genre collection of pieces written while travelling and experiencing life like Hem. It would benefit from the wisdom of revision forty years from now, but I don't have that kind of time.

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

“If the reader prefers, this book may be regarded as fiction. But there is always the chance that such a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact.” - Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*

Ernest Hemingway is my role model for how to live life fully and without inhibition. I know, calling him a “role model” sounds crazy, but his ability to lean into the joys and the sadness equally is something I admire. An epicurean and hedonist, a partier and drinker, but also a deep thinker, he unapologetically chose himself over and over again. I hope to portray his zest for life by bringing people around the table with delicious recipes, and showing that it’s ok, even delightful, to dance in the kitchen. The following vignettes, poems, and recipes are all an homage to Hem and to living a life on your own terms.

After writing two initial stories, “My Mother is Hemingway,” (which made the collection after a lot of editing) and “Poulet Rôti” (which did not), I knew I had a project that was tangible and exciting. Once I was fully committed to the project of a Hemingway inspired cookbook I began to delve into his greatest works, tearing them apart, and writing chapters and recipes based on the books themselves. I felt like I had an interesting project, but it was not from the heart. The work felt clinical after being deconstructed and rebuilt in a way that had direction but no sustenance. The work began to reveal itself after I restructured it to follow the places Hem traveled instead of the books themselves.

I drafted four concrete chapters: Spain, based on *The Sun Also Rises*, France, based on *A Moveable Feast*, Italy, based on *A Farewell to Arms*, and Cuba/Key West based on *The Old Man and the Sea*. I have always been an avid traveler even choosing to

move to Spain in 2014 because of how inspired I was by Hem and *The Sun Also Rises*. So it was my plan to travel to these places, stay for a while, and experience gastronomic poetry in the most Hemingway-esq fashion possible. I wanted to live cheaply, party lavishly, wine and dine to excess, tell stories that seemed grander than they were, and write stories inspired by this way of living.

A couple of plane tickets were purchased for Summer 2020 and I worked to tie up loose ends at home. It was February 2020 and the world was launched into chaos as a global pandemic halted life as I knew it. I watched as the world shut down with no sign of opening anytime soon and feeling defeated, I cancelled all my plans and set aside the project until my mind could process where to go from here.

I began concentrating more on why I'm so inspired by Hemingway and less on the importance of the physicality of the book. I still wanted to experience wonderful meals with wonderful people and explore every corner of pleasure that piqued my interest. I wanted to remain open to adventure even in a time of fear and animosity. I knew I would find a way to see the project through - it was just unclear what it would look like.

Then I met H, the Hadley to my Hem or the Hem to my Hadley. The world opened to me in a way I never expected. Like Hem during his war correspondent days, we found places open for tourism, researched their safety and entry requirements, and booked tickets to see the world without expectations. What ensued was one of the most fulfilling, invigorating, and beautiful years of my life.

During our travels I began journaling. Most of my journals are inspired by Hem's *A Moveable Feast*, and it shows. He wrote most of it during his travels in his twenties and

I feel connected to him in that way. Hemingway was a true travel writer, easily encapsulating a place and its culture and the way he felt there. I try to do the same. Life is unrelentless, and if you're fully open to the ebbs and flows, it will write a beautiful story for you. What went from being journals of travels and food became accounts of falling in love and experiencing life's twists like never before. The project again took a bit of a turn because omitting the love and the difficult way in which we fell into it seemed untrue, and to be true to my inspiration, I had to write the truest thing I knew. I tried to fight it and I tried to rewrite it, but when it comes to writing the truth, love lies within these pages.

Every section is inspired by Hemingway's life and each chapter is inspired by a specific story or book that Hemingway wrote. The chronology is only meant to help readers have a better understanding. I have promised to immortalize my love of all things gastronomic, pleasurable, and adventurous and do so in a way that is honest. This is a mixed-genre collection filled with good food and true emotion. Hemingway fandom is complicated, falling in love is easy, and together they coexist within these pages. This project is deeply personal, but it is a work of fiction, because Hem would say so.

EATING GOOD FOOD

“In Europe then we thought of wine as something as healthy and normal as food and also as a great giver of happiness and well-being and delight. Drinking wine was not snobbism nor a cult; it was as natural as eating and to me, as necessary.”

-Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*

H's Hot Pan Red Sauce

I got up early and enjoyed a hot cup of coffee in the sun on the patio. Monday mornings are preferable to Tuesday mornings because they are so different from the weekends and everyone moves a little slower while trying to wake up and get back into the swing of things so they seem relaxed and easy. The morning mostly consisted of writing and taking phone calls and other mundane things that Mondays consist of. Once I finished my coffee, I sat next to H at his breakfast bar and watched him work through a busy Monday afternoon. We spoke very little to each other and the silence was only broken by clothes flipping in the dryer or fingers against a laptop.

“Do you ever make spaghetti?” I asked sweetly while sitting cross legged on my stool, peering up at H with childlike eyes. He looked perplexed, like I had caught him in the middle of doing math.

“With red sauce?”

“Is there a different kind of spaghetti?”

“Spaghetti is just a kind of pasta.” He raised his eyebrows in a way that made it seem like this was a lesson in classic Italian cooking and less of a sarcastic remark. “My red sauce is just a hot pan sauce.” He stood up and walked into the pantry leaving his email half written. I followed like a puppy. “I learned from my uncle in Italy,” he said as he pulled spaghetti noodles off of a high shelf.

After gathering a can of peeled tomatoes, spaghetti, and olive oil we returned to the kitchen where I was instructed to *sit* and *wait*. I obliged, with my mouth watering. Peeled cloves of garlic submit to his hands, splitting under pressure from the flat edge of a sharp knife. They were tossed into a pan full of hot olive oil and left to dance until tanned and aromatic. The smell hit the air immediately and the kitchen came to life.

“The key to a perfect pan sauce is the flavor of the oil,” he said while carefully placing two fresh basil leaves next to the golden garlic cloves.

He easily held the large can of tomatoes in one hand while he peeled away the lid with a *snap*. Dipping his fingers into the can he pulled out a single San Marzano tomato and held it over the hot oil. He gently crushed the tomato in his palm, almost softening it before placing it in the pan carefully. I heard the slick juices pop as they trickled from his palm and fell into the oil. He did this until all of the tomatoes were out of the can and deliciously sizzling in the pan.

“I’ll keep the rest of this tomato sauce to cool down the pan if it gets too hot,” he said as he crushed the tomatoes with a wooden spatula.

He dumped a fistful of Celtic grey mineral salt into a pot of boiling water followed by a pound of spaghetti, which he let fall into the pot, glancing up at me to make sure I caught his lesson without having to be told. I did. He began to add drops of tomato sauce to the hot pan to cool it down while waiting for the spaghetti to cook. The smell of the kitchen was robust, like something had been stewing for days, even though it had just been minutes.

“It should be just under *al dente*,” he said while holding up some spaghetti with tongs and inspecting it. He took a noodle and threw it in his mouth and I watched his jaw

contract and release under his perfectly cleaned and clipped hairline. “It’s perfect,” he said, and used the tongs to transfer the wet, hot pasta to the simmering pan sauce. “The salt from the pasta and water seasons the sauce.”

I started to squirm in my chair, ready to have this perfect pan sauce in my mouth. He teased me by making me watch as the pasta soaked in the sauce for three painstakingly long minutes. Using tongs, he twirled the spaghetti into a beautiful knot inside the bowl as steam billowed from it. He microplaned a heaping mountain of parmesan cheese on top of it, not stopping for a long time.

“It’s fluffy. Mostly air,” he said with dubious eyes.

I shook my head *yes*, eager to please, but my eyes were fixated on the bowl of spaghetti.

“Last thing,” he took out another bottle of olive oil. “A nice finishing oil.”

Then he placed the bowl in front of me. I was infatuated. Obsessed. In a trance. And in so much trouble. A sharp *clank* woke me up as a ramekin of flake salt was set between our bowls with the warning, “you might not need it. But you probably will.”

I love the sound of flake salt giving into the pressure of my fingers. I love the way it feels, rough and dry as it lands on top of my food, seasoning it to perfection. H and I get on well because we both like our food *well seasoned*.

“I’m grateful for the beautiful sunny day,” I paused, “and your cooking,” I said as I twirled noodles around my fork turning it into a bite of chewy, cheesy, tomatoey bliss. The acidity of the tomato hit first, cut by the fat from the cheese. The basil came as I exhaled steam, and the garlic stayed long after I had swallowed my first bite, complete with a ferrous hint from well-loved silverware. I asked him for a spoon, scraping the

bowl like a famished animal for oil and tomato leftovers. We both agreed we'd need *scarpetta* next time.

"Where'd you learn to cook this?" I asked even though I knew. I loved hearing him recount his summer spent as a young man in Italy. I listened to him again tell me about making pizzas at his family's restaurant, learning Italian, and exploring the country.

"This is my Uncle Gurrino's Supino, err, Supinese sauce," he says grinning. "My favorite was what we would do with the leftovers." My interest piqued and I checked the pan to see if we had enough. We continued to shovel spaghetti into our mouths.

"We can do it tomorrow," he said with a warm, knowing smile.

"Can I write down the recipe?"

"No," he said. "It's just for us."

"So what would you do with the leftovers in Supino?"

After a long shift at the restaurant they would throw together this spaghetti and have *family meal*. The leftovers went in the fridge and when they arrived the next morning, the wood oven was still hot so they'd toss the pasta into a hot pan, and then they'd crack a few farm fresh eggs on top, lightly stirring them in. Then they would put the pan in the still-warm pizza oven until the eggs looked cooked. Breakfast was a pan pasta pizza hybrid bound together with perfectly cooked eggs.

He set aside half of our spaghetti lunch for breakfast the next day, where he continued to impress me, even with leftovers. The texture of this delicious dish is both crispy and chewy, and completely delicious. I preferred it to the spaghetti but that may be

because it requires an overnight stay. This breakfast is best enjoyed while wrapped up in a furry robe, two sizes too big, wild-haired and sleepy eyed, sharing a pot of coffee.

Uncle Gurrino's Supino Supenese Sauce

Yields four, but recommended for two.

Please forgive me, H.

Ingredients:

1 16oz can of whole San Marzano tomatoes
4 cloves of garlic
½ cup of “nice” Italian olive oil -- “Spanish oil is for frying”
2 basil leaves
A handful of mineral salt
1lb spaghetti
Parmesan, microplaned, to taste
Sea salt, to taste

Procedure:

1. Begin boiling pasta water in a large pot
2. Lightly crush the peeled garlic cloves
3. In a medium-large frying pan, heat the nice oil on high, and add garlic when the oil is hot, watch the garlic dance in the pan. Fry until golden brown, tipping the pan to submerge the cloves, almost like a deep fry.
4. Remove from heat and add the basil leaves, stirring with the oil for 1 minute
5. Place pan back on the heat and add tomatoes from the can, gently spacing them apart
6. Using a flat-edge spatula, mix all ingredients together, gently cutting the tomatoes in half as mix, slowly add the sauce from the can to cool the hot pan
7. Add a handful of strong, mineral salt to the heated pasta water, add spaghetti and let fall
8. Continue adding the reserve sauce to the pan to cool it, and if you run out, put water in the can, collecting the leftover tomato sauce, and use the water to continue to keep the sauce from burning while the pasta cooks.
9. Once the pasta is “not-quite-al dente, use tongs to add the pasta to the pan sauce, let pasta boil in sauce for 3 minutes
10. Remove from heat, serve in bowls, top with microplaned parmesan and a “nice” finishing oil

Italian Playboy Breakfast

Yields two, to be shared with who you shared your bed with the night before.

I hope I'm the only one that's gotten to eat this breakfast, but I know that's wishful thinking.

Ingredients:

½ lb leftover spaghetti

3 eggs

Sea Salt to taste

Procedure:

1. Wake up before your girl, set oven temperature to 550 °F, then go for a 30-minute cardio workout, return, make coffee, and gently wake her up (Sorry fellas, I don't make the rules)
2. In a medium pan over high heat, dump remaining spaghetti and stir until flexible and hot
3. Remove pan from heat, and add eggs, break yolks and stir slightly
4. Place pan in the hot oven for 3-5 minutes, checking the eggs
5. Remove once eggs are cooked through, slice in quarters, and top with sea salt

A Good Palate, by Middle America

You have the merit of culture
Because you choose
Topo Chico over Perrier and
Ask for your pizza with
Cheese, only

Only an *American* would
Get supreme pizza, anyway
And carry Fiji water like
It's a designer clutch

Order your steak med rare
Salt and pepper, please
Chipotle take out yes
Add the guacomol--no
I don't care that it's extra

Spill salt on the table
Throw it over your shoulder
A flake left like a chip
Do you taste your meals shared in silence?