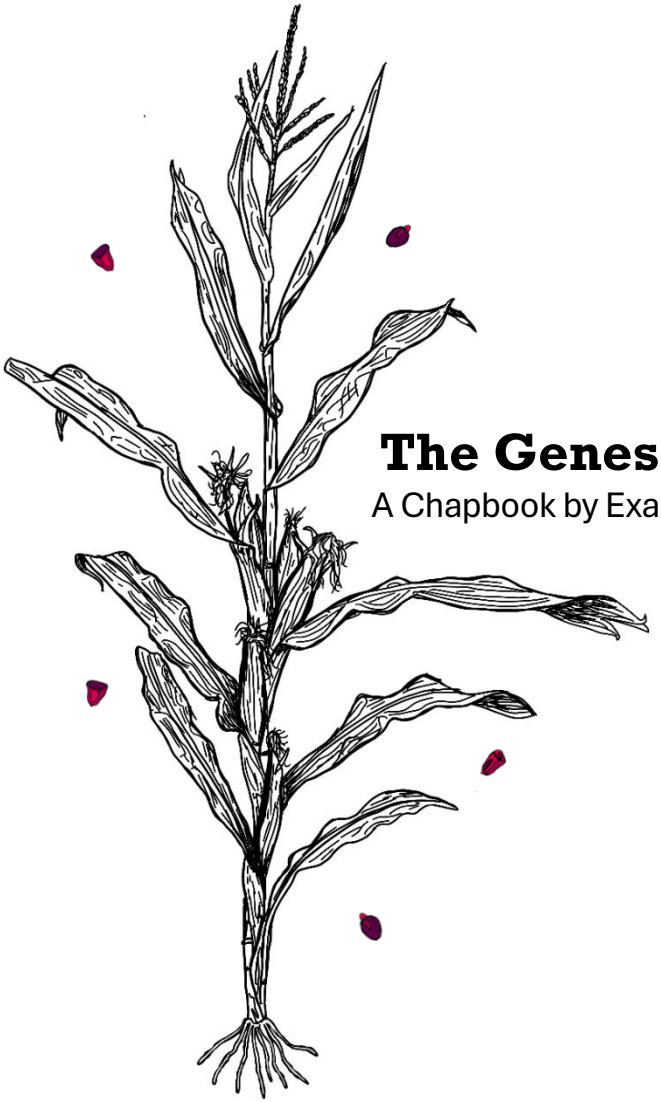


The Genesis of Food

A Chapbook by Exacerbated Hunger

Edited by Jade Crimson Rose Da Costa and Naty Tremblay


EXACERBATED
HUNGER

To the farmers, earth workers, and food justice activists in Congo, Sudan, Palestine, and the global Indigenous community.

Credits

Illustrations and Graphic Design by Naty Tremblay

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Text Layout and editing by Jade Crimson Rose Da Costa

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Maïs

Uprooted

By Megala Dharmapalan

What seemed as eons ago in the grand scheme of things

Wasn't. *That*. *Long Ago*.

Now–

I don’t wanna rehash the story of us fighting for groceries and essential items during the height of the pandemic;

the fact that they were barren boxes

and the ability for some people to get food was…*immense*.

I don’t wanna recall the experience of

collecting groceries

and looking through the abundance of aisles,

that isn’t the point *of all of this*.



What I want is to explore how our life mirrors roots.

How the richness

and the vastness of life

can be seen in the tail ends of roots as they grow.

and as we grow, too.

When we look at roots in nature

and we look at roots in ourselves,

we can see that they're messy,

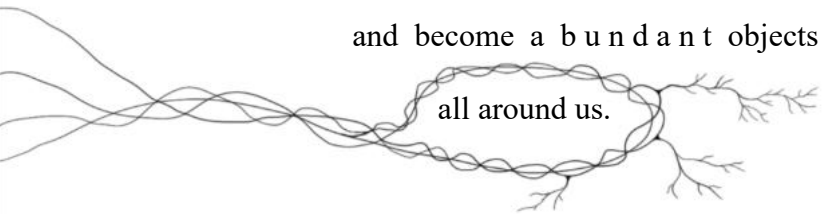
they're intricate, *they're fun*

they're a little bit confusing.

b u t t h e y g r o w o u t

and become a b u n d a n t objects

all around us.



And I think of roots

As just one piece

of the puzzle.

Because when we also change our perspective,
we see that there are things beyond what we thought possible
and things that make our world seem so much smaller.

When I look at roots from different perspectives

when I look at things to the
up and *above*
me

and to *down* and *below me*

I see myself as someone who is in the bigger scheme of the world.

Things that are around us are not all that exist.

And so when I think of roots,

I also think of the opportunity to

g r o w and *interact*.



But when I look at the pandemic,

I see how our roots have been trimmed *by society*,

by greed and *individualism*.

And I see that the richness that could have been for a lot of us
has been deprived…as we continue to live in our smaller bubbles.

I think of this as plants in silos

growing

individually.

But I think there is immense benefit when they grow together.
I think of zucchini and beans and eggplants that grow in harmony.
When the beans provide shade,

the eggplant and zucchini take less from the soil.

It's a perfect balance.

So when I think of roots intermingling

and how they work together,
I see it as a plate bigger than just the two of us,

as things that are beyond us, such as nature;

us as non two leggeds | the animals | the plants | the trees.

and I feel that care allows us to stand in solidarity
and enjoy the a b u n d a n c e of life together.

But then here we are.

The poem ends

and your life continues.

and the notion of care

while in theory, it *feels* good, and it *sounds* right…

the practicing of it is tough and it's uncomfortable.

And it puts us in situations where we have compromises.

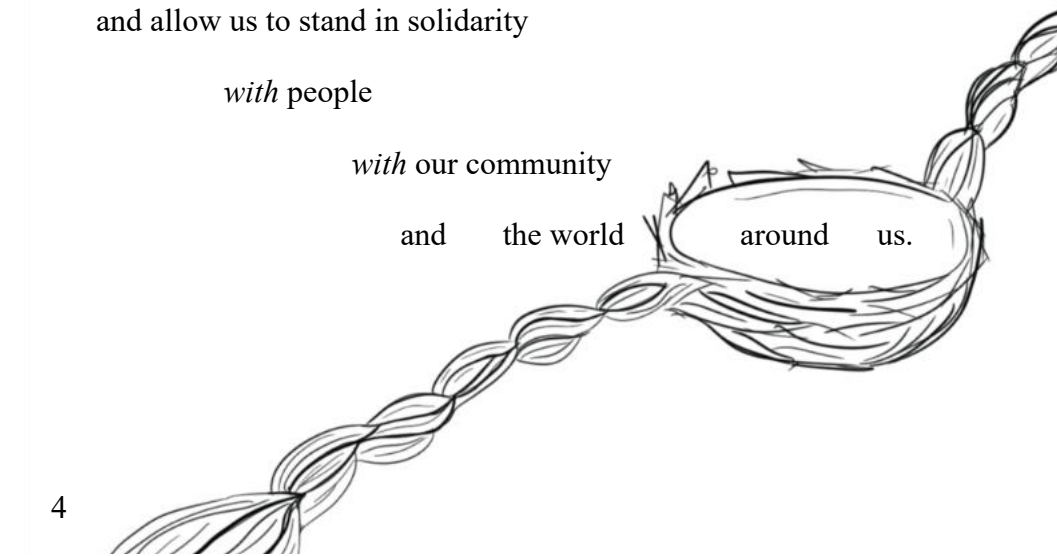
But what I'm trying to say is that *care isn't easy –*
and the way you practice it isn't any easier.

But prioritizing it,
and making it intentional and having heart behind it,
is what can lead to those connections,
and allow us to stand in solidarity

with people

with our community

and the world around us.



What's Cooking

By Alitha Griffith

Step 1. Finely chop your prejudice and grate your animosity.

This is to ensure that we can't taste them in the final product.
However, be careful.
These aromatics can never fully be concealed,
as their flavour screams in defiance.

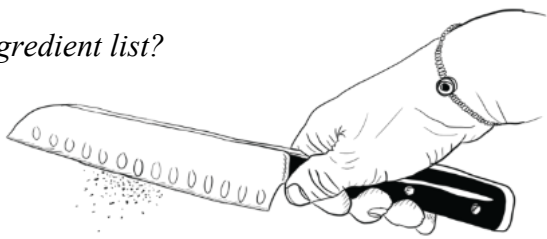
The prep time for this recipe is minimal,
as we will be using your leftovers to feed your delusions.

Serving size? Too many.
"*There are always too many mouths to feed anyway*."

The cooking time is indefinite, but quick recipes are hard to find.

Step 2. Your oil should be hot by now.

Oh? Oil wasn't in your ingredient list?



That's okay.

Use what you've got.

Now add your aromatics to your oil.

Step 3. Insert your opinions into conversations you can't relate too.

(Many individuals usually substitute empathy for this step. This can greatly enhance the meal).

Step 4. Try Pouring all of your intention into listening.

Don't skip this step,
as it makes the cooking time
much more seamless.

Step 5. We wait.
Let it simmer.
And as our biases floats to the surface…
skim them from the top.

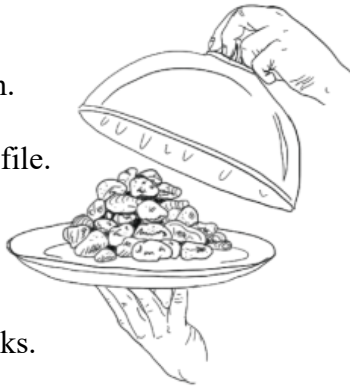
We give it time.
We give our **voice**.
We give **our** actions.

Now feel free to garnish with fresh **perspectives** or extra love.
Best served **from a** warm, **kind place**.



Living in the Grey

By Zera Koutchieva



Hunger isn't always about an empty plate.
Sometimes, it's a full plate… that can't be eaten.

I'm a parent of an autistic child with a PDA profile.
In our home, hunger isn't just about money.
It's about texture, taste, colour—
and survival.

We live with food insecurity. We visit food banks.
But what's offered often doesn't match what
my child can tolerate;

mushy vegetables and fruits, unfamiliar frozen, meaty body parts; and chickpeas, *chickpeas*, *chickpeas*—

it's like handing someone a plate of rocks.

We also face the same challenges as
every other family using free food programs.

- A lot of the food is expired,
- not culturally relevant,
- or just endless cans that clutter the house.

As a single parent with my own ADHD, the more random free food I bring home, the more disorganized my space becomes.

Meal planning collapses under the weight of it.

If I manage to cook once, I don't want to cook again—
so I end up eating what my child eats.

Then the guilt hits.
Neither of us is getting the right nutrition.

Food dignity is walking into a space and not holding your breath.
It's not worrying about the stares when your child
refuses what's offered,

especially when it's free and you're 'lucky' and—*how dare you*.
It's not hearing, "*cheese pizza again today?*"

It's being able to feed your child in a way that works for them—
without apology, without shame as a side dish.

It's trust instead of judgment.
It's choice instead of "*beggars can't be choosers*."

It's a quiet corner where sensory overload isn't a failure,
where 'picky' isn't scolded,
where you're seen as a parent doing your best—
not a disappointment to your culture's rich culinary history.

Picky eating isn't just a personal quirk—
it's an expensive reality.

There are no subsidies, no grants, no extra supports for families
whose kids can only tolerate a handful of specific foods.

I often face an impossible choice:
buy all my child's safe favourites so he'll eat,
and risk falling behind on bills—
or stretch my budget, and risk empty plates.

I live in overdraft just so my son can eat.

There's a cultural ache too.

I grew up with a garden, with fresh, home-cooked food.
Now I watch my child reach for pasta, bread— *everything beige*—
and I feel like I'm failing him.

Like I've lost a part of what food used to mean in our family.
We've learned to get creative.

I barter with and lean on our neighbors;
fill out all the "*tell us your pain for gift cards*" questionnaires;
and make sensory-friendly versions of meals.

When he tries something new— *even one bite*—
it feels like winning the lottery.

For families like mine, dignified eating is more than just food.

It's a deep breath.
It's belonging.
It's knowing we can show up as we are—
messy, real, human—
and still have a seat at the table.

But no family should have to become an acrobat
just to feed their kid.

Hunger isn't one-size-fits-all.

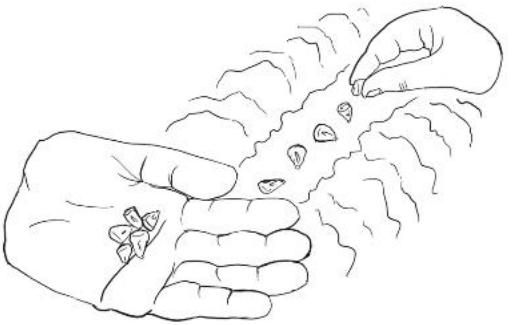
We need to widen the conversation to include

- neurodivergent hunger
- sensory hunger
- intersectional hunger

and the hidden costs of feeding a child
whose body and brain experience food differently.

No family should have to choose between feeding their child
and failing them.





The Unresolved Case of the Curry

By Shreya Shrestha

How does it feel to need something that you can't find?

Wellllllllll, it makes me feel like Sherlock Homes
like I'm a food detective,
trying to find the *perfect* suspect for my hunger,
trying to find ingredients for my *Fish Curry*

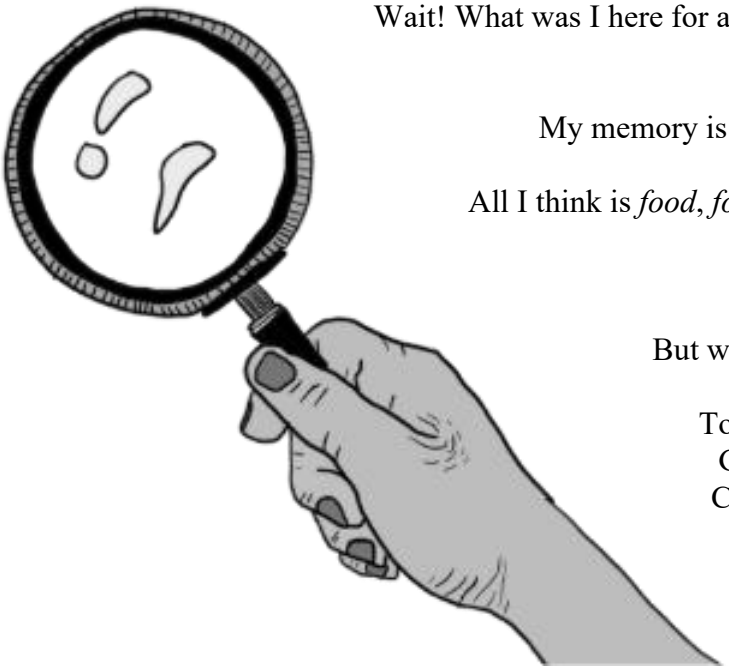
I visit one store after another
looking for the missing ingredient for my curry

As I scavenge my way through the aisles of the store
I look each suspect in the eyes

Nope! Not this one
…not this one either–*SHOOT*

I knocked a product off the shelf

ARghhhhhhhh



Wait! What was I here for again……
Urg

My memory is so blurry

All I think is *food*, *food*, *food*

But what food?

Tomato? *No*
Garlic? *No*
Cumin? *No*

Ah! I remember
I want Justice.

My heart echoes, but I put a fake smile on and keep searching
until I'm standing in front of the frozen meals section

I grab a ready-to-eat meal and head towards the counter
"*I guess I should check out some other stores tomorrow–Yeah!*"



Damn

DAY 100 without my CURRY.

Humans think that they have dominion over everything…"*Oh, wow. That's arrogant*." You know, can everybody realize that they are themselves a seed? A vessel. That has the capacity to grow and mature in a good way to nourish the plant itself and everything around you that you touch, touch by touch, touch by sound, touch by taste, touch by hearing, touch by thought, touched by heartbeat, touched by energy, like, we're much more than just the physical vessel. We're like a seed shell. Or the shell of a seed.

–Nookomis Carol (Research Interview)

Nii'kinaaganaa

By Nookomis Carol Tyler



Nii'kinaaganaa.
All our relations are celebrating.

Anishnaabe.
Ways of being, living, doing.

Nii'kinaaganaa.
All our relations,
are building up each other
in loving ways.

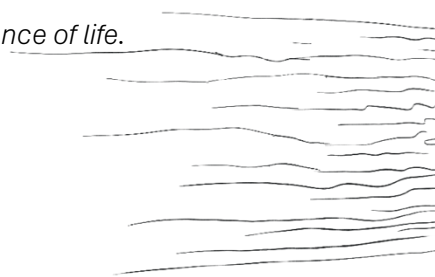
N'danwendaagan.
Kinship families are walking together.

Shkakmigkwe wi-zaaga'igan
Nayanno-niniimaang Gishigamiin Mnidoo Gamii
These lands between the lakes.

Weweni Anishnaabeg Gichi-kikinoo'amagejig miinwaa Gete-ayaa'ag.
The original instructors,
the ancestors,
are sharing their voices;
stories; the teachings
Now.

Weweni.
Listen with your heart.
Know where to find the water.
Know how the fire moves.

Mino bimaadiziwin.
Seek always the balance within the abundance of life.



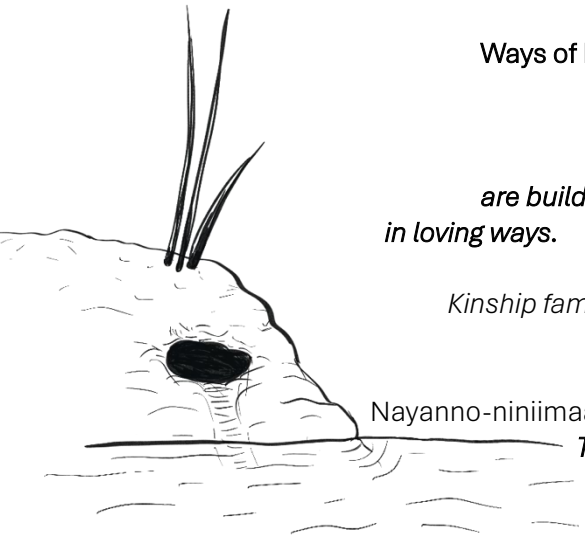
Nii'kinaaganaa.
Weweni.
This is all there is for now.
Creation is still creating.

(All Our Relations)
...and Kin

Nii'kinaaganaa.
All our relations are celebrating.

Anishnaabe.
Ways of being, living, doing.

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Nii'kinaaganaa.
Weweni.
This is all there is for now.
Creation is still creating.


SOUP

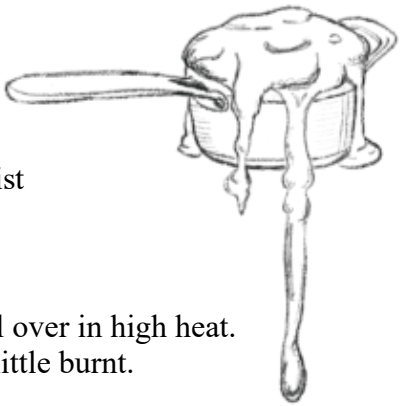
Recipe for Food Justice

By Rachana Mandal

A Receipt to Feed Over 2,200 International Students.

Ingredients

1. 1 Foodbank
2. 1 Community Fridge
3. 3 Employees
4. Volunteers to taste
5. 252 Clients
6. 30 Items per month
7. 2 Visits per month
8. An ever-growing waitlist
9. Uncertain enrollment



Preparation

Put everything into a pot and let it boil over in high heat.
Serve overdone, stretched thin, and a little burnt.
Throw out when times out.



A Recipe for Food Justice

Ingredients

- Eliminate food waste
- Embrace food security
- Share food

Preparation

Survey the students.
Identify those in need.
Tell them about the foodbank.
Try to convince them of the benefits (if they are hesitant).
Grow, *collect*, and *share* resources; *distribute*; and *repeat*.
Serve until everyone is satisfied.

Nomoshkar (নমস্কার)



A Personal Story of Mutual Aid and COVID-19

By Karen Huff

In my late 50s I decide to go back to school to train for a second career in food. I reach out to The People's Pantry during the second covid quarantine. It's midway through my second year of chef's school. I'm feeling a lot of uncertainty and frustration. The pandemic changes my perspective on the food and hospitality industry. Lockdowns, and income assistance programs, like the CERB, make hospitality workers question everything.

> Underneath all the glamour of fine dining, celebrity chefs, and viral cooking videos
>
> lies a dark underbelly.

I personally experience poor access to PPE; coworkers and patrons pressuring me to stop masking; low wages and long days; late nights and no weekends; ageism and sexism. *Frustration and uncertainty*.

In gastronomy class at chefs school, we discuss many other issues that are facing the industry, such as the poor work life balance; widespread drug and alcohol abuse; reliance on tips to survive; the precarity of undocumented workers in the industry; the industrialization of agriculture; food deserts; record grocery store profits; the mistreatment of temporary foreign workers; animal cruelty; overfishing; cultural appropriation; loss of Indigenous food systems; climate change. *I have so much noise in my head!*

***

My earliest memories about food are drawn from farm life, helping my parents plant our large vegetable garden; pulling weeds; digging potatoes; shucking corn; canning peaches, pears, and tomatoes; making jam; gathering and sorting eggs and helping prepare meals.

In a family that didn't share our feelings or show a lot of affection, preparing special meals at holidays or for a recently bereaved family in our community was a way to show love, care, and unity.

I did the same when I cooked for *The People's Pantry*.

I often cooked for a man named John, and his family.

One day, I make meatballs, salad, and roasted potatoes. I use a recipe I love from one of my favourite cookbooks. I think of John's family sitting down for a meal to be shared together and I prepare the food with love. I taste it to make sure I like it. I pack everything up carefully and arrange a delivery time.

Later, John thanks us for the delivery. I want to thank him, too.

Fast forward to 2024. It has been a long time since I have cooked for *The People's Pantry*. I am on the lookout for another volunteer opportunity that involves preparing food for people in need. I apply to volunteer in the kitchen at my local hospice. I get the position.

Trans activist, Dean Spade says that "mutual aid work is deeply satisfying; [it] transforms us from being passive observers to inspired builders of the new world we crave and need."

The People's Pantry introduced me to the idea of mutual aid. This concept really resonated with me. I provided nutritious food for several families in need during a challenging time.

Planning, preparing, and delivering these meals gave me a renewed sense of purpose during COVID and quarantine and through community care. Today when I cook at the hospice, I continue this tradition through the preparation of meals for folks who are at the end of their lives. *To show love, care, and unity*.



Hunger the Way to Food Justice

By Abdulah Raed

Food justice started with hungry nights and COVID-19.
It started when I learned about the hunger of others;
the hunger of farmers; my elders; single mothers.

Hunger drove me to drive my car around the city
over and over
to find cheaper food;
over and over
to find a better job.
Hunger drove me to fight for food justice.

Food Justice is a basic human right.
Yet millions of people across the world go hungry.
Their kids go to bed with extended b e l l i e s.

Not because there isn't enough food in the world;
but because of systemic inequalities
that determine who has access to what.

Food justice is the movement that recognizes this truth.

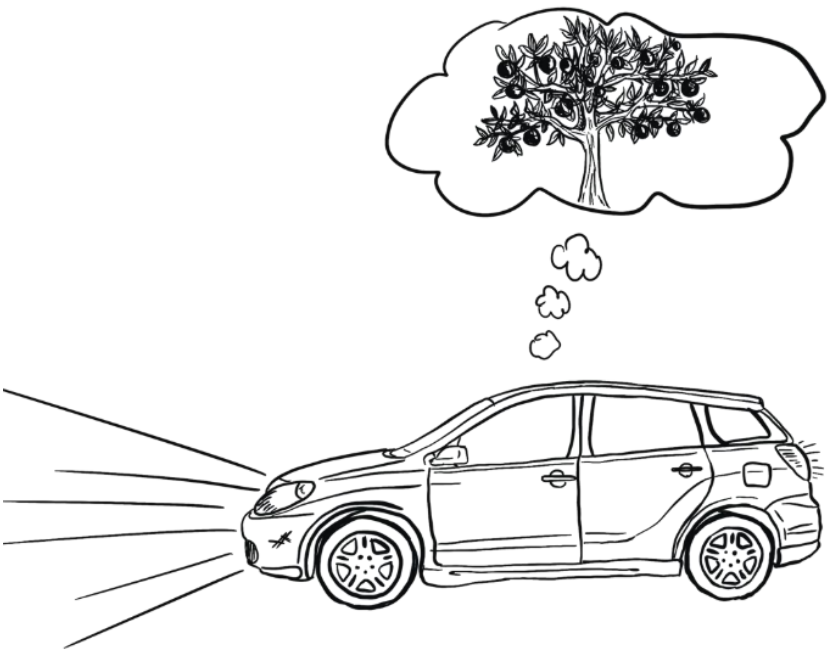
It refuses a food system driven by profit
and yearns for one rooted in equity;
sustainability, and human dignity.

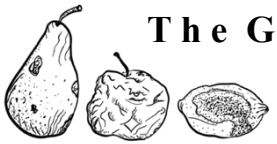
I dream of city streets
filled with fruit trees.

I dream of community farms
replacing big box grocery stores.

I dream of food justice.

Dear 5-year-old me, enjoy the food that your parents provided.
Dear 25-year-old me, fight for food for the next generation





The Genesis of Food

By Janielle Maxwell

Food Justice; Security; and Sovereignty,
I see as three fruits labouring to grow on a forgotten,
and unkept tree.

We've forgotten and even belittled our connection to the land that should nurture and grow our own food

And we pay the high price, our most vulnerable are starving, their bodies decay returning to Earth as dust too soon,
how sad, how crude.

If only the system had been maintained with its initial intent.

If only the Garden of Eden and its bounties were not so greedily stolen and appropriated by the serpents.

Because our system is broken, few are they that benefit with backs turned from the beauty of unity, community, growing, and sharing.
How can we ever win?

Take me back to the Genesis of food.

When everyone had enough and food was true to its meaning.
To the body, mind, and soul it was healing.
Oui what a mood; Oui what truth; Oui what a feeling.

When I think about food, in its truest form,
it behooves me to tell a story of abundance–but we have been so wired to see scarcity as the norm.

When I think about food in its purest form,
there is no shortage of fruit, vegetables, grains, nuts, and herbs; as a fruit hanging from a branch;
as a branch attached to a tree trunk;
as a tree trunk grounded in roots to fertile soil.

Such is the story of food abundance–emphasis on connection, unity, one to all. A hidden story now, a forgotten narrative, a state many dream of is food abundance

I wish I could grant this to all.



II

I speak on the Earth, providing our purest form of food because that's how things were intended to be.
When everything was created and life was good. Mother Earth provided all we need.

No one lacked and nothing was wasted, even the leaves were used to feed. So, when I think about food in its purest form, I think of less-waste; a cycle of cause and effect; cyclic connection, and, of course, creativity.

I think of herbs and plants as medicine for me; medicine and healing to the nation's needs; to the body, to the soul, to the spirit indeed. I am grateful for all three.

My relationship with food, is grounded in the Earth; is grounded in roots that know no bounds, *yah*?

It is Sugar Cane, Ackee, Rice, Gungo Peas, Kidney Beans, and Breadfruit; grounded on grounds that grounded my own feet when I myself was a mere babe.

Where soil was blessed, fruitful, and black,
and from it grew all sorts of edibles–it gave and it gave
and we did not lack

We were *not* a people who lacked.

But the strangers that came did not so much like that.
Self-sufficient Natives; self-sufficient Blacks.
thriving off mutual aid, working the land, and trade.

They witnessed all this and dismantled it, displacing us in our own place and pushing us to the outskirts;
no longer a sacred space.

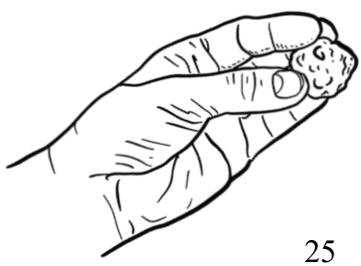
Severing the connection between food and mouth with greed, abuse, manipulation, no doubt. It was very well targeted and very well planned out.

Experts at presenting false presents.

A gift-wrapped box that was empty inside.

Unfair extraction.

Unfair labour.



The people now consumed with meeting quotas
and appeasing the stranger.

One of the greatest downfalls of our time.
With hindsight, I pray we become more wise.

That's why they're important to me–
Food Security; Sovereignty; and Justice.

Why. Can't. You. See?

They are not just trendy buzzwords.

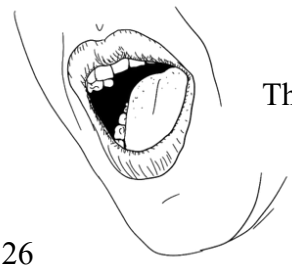
We want to be free, liberation soon come.

To celebrate our dignity, spirit, nutrition, subsistence, victory
and then some.

Back to the Earth, foods that have treated us well, back to what we know and what knows us, so well.

III

I want to talk about the Earth's foods that mean so much to me.
The ones I was disconnected from throughout my journey of becoming me.



The ones I felt shame to eat out in the open during school lunches. *Oh, what a pity*.

As a child I could not see that the system had me
right where it wanted me to be.

Ashamed of my heritage;
s t r i p p e d of any pride associated with these.
So, I want to talk about these foods that grew from the Earth on
fertile, sun kissed Caribbean s o i l.

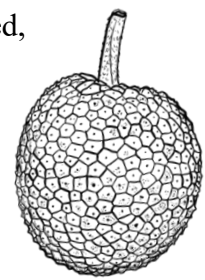
I am sorry I was ever timid about my connection to You

You are everything.

And what the people are striving to return to, their toil.

Breadfruit, true to its name.
I was blessed to partake of this just yesterday–the roasted
smokiness evokes feelings of being transported miles away.
I love Breadfruit today and always.

Gungo Peas, I used to take you for granted,
that is for sure.
But now when I see you on a plate,
I am so happy,
as you remind me of the old days.



My mom cooking Gungo Rice and Peas on Friday's eve–
smelling pungent with Thyme, Pimento, Scallion, Garlic,
Coconut Milk– Oh, how I wish this reality would *n e v e r* leave.

Ackee, you and I know one another quite well.
We have history which time could surely tell.
Poisonous when closed,
but rich and nourishing when fully bloomed.
I thank you for your contribution to my Sunday morning breakfast.

Open in full bloom, I guess that's just the genesis of food.

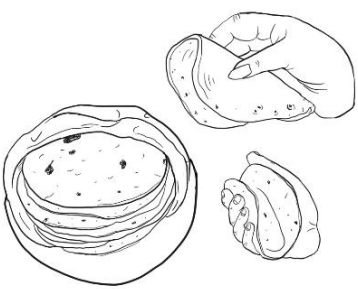
Take me back to the genesis of food.

Would you please?



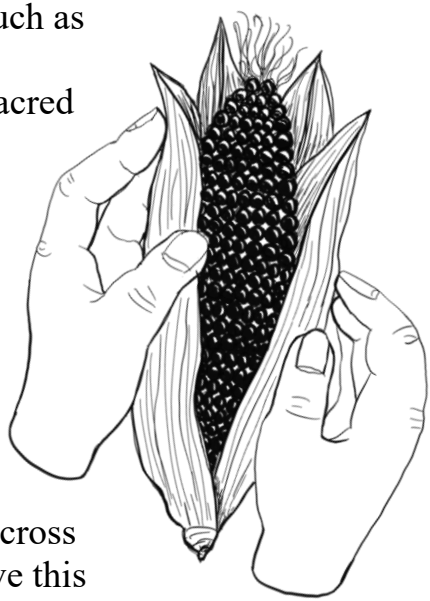


নমস্কার



A Note on *Exacerbated Hunger*'s Logo: Hands with Red Maize

Maize (corn) was domesticated 9000+ years ago in Mexico by Mesoamerican's who selectively bred the wild grass teosinte into the large edible cobs we now know today. By 1000AD, Maize was traded and cultivated across the America's through complex ancestral agricultural systems, such as the "Three Sisters" (corn, beans, squash), and was a crucial and sacred food staple among many Indigenous communities, including for the Maya, Aztec, and Haudenosaunee, among others. This ancestral and resurgent relationship between Indigenous peoples and Maize reflects a deep regenerative reciprocity between humans and our greater than human worlds across millennia (Tremblay). We believe this foregrounds the food abundance ethos of *Exacerbated Hunger*: food is political; food is love; food is kin, and that there is no food justice without food sovereignty and there is not food sovereignty without planetary wellbeing and the grace of Mother Earth. For this, as Janielle reminds us, is the *genesis of food*.



In solidarity and radical love,
Jade and Naty, on behalf of the *Exacerbated Hunger* research team, participants, and community.


Corn Soup



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