

MAKING JAM

for my grandmother

Her hand twisted, deftly weaving another strand from the clothing of the past.

Her fingers knew how to dance these steps, how to walk this lifelong practice of love and compassion.

It's a beautiful thing, to create what others can receive comfort from. The softness of these completed carpets underfoot were reminiscent of walking on grass, lessening the hardness of the wooden floors and bringing in the feeling of the outdoors.

Her hands moved through the motions, an olympic swimmer gliding through fabric, when she realized that there was something on the stove.

"Mary", she said to herself, "You're always doing this! It's silly of you! One thing is going on, and then another, and then another. It's like you think there are 3 of you."

She put down her rug-weaving materials a bit impatiently, and proceeded to walk once more the stairs, holding the wooden bannister that was always there for her.

Up she went, and following the stairs, she walked into the kitchen, feeling a wave of the familiar jam-making humidity.

She went to reach for the lid of the quietly bubbling pot on the stove, and upon touching it gasped and withdrew her hand.

"Mary!", she said to herself, "You're always doing this! You might as well try to write a novel at the same time!"

She stopped right in place, mid-way through putting on an oven mitt.

And suddenly, she knew what to do next!

With the pot murmuring on the stove, and the mitten on her hand, she quickly shuffled to the computer room.

"There are so many things to do!", she thought on arriving. "What about the jam? What about the rug? What about this mitt??"

She removed the mitt, and put it by the computer.

She took one long, slow breath, thought about the cookies she needed to make, and exhaled.

Halfway through turning to go bake some cookies, she stopped again.

This time, there was no internal voice asking for her attention, somehow.

The cookies, the rug, the jam, it was all at bay.

She inhaled.

And then she exhaled.

And immediately went to tend to the jam.

“Mary!”

This time, though, it was her wonderful, magnificent, gloriously pony-tailed partner Victor (the great) Reimer asking for her.

“Mary, dear, my sweet, love, cherry blossom, sugar sweet, apple, molasses, how are you?”

They met in the hallway.

He looked at her with a completeness of love that summarized their life together, and she suddenly knew what to say.

“Reimer, there are 3 things on the go, and many more things, and even more things than that! What am I to do? I can’t do them all at once!”

“Well.”

He paused for a while, pensively basking in the love he felt for her.

“My dear sucrose, I feel that it is best that you just lie down right here until you feel better”.

She stood, shocked, at this suggestion.

He continued,

“Yes, just lie down right here. It doesn’t matter how the floor feels. I know we’re in the hallway. I know you were on the way to tend to your berries, but I think the most loving thing I can do right now is suggest that you lie down. I’ll lie down too.”

What else could she do? She threw up her arms.

“Reimer, you know what, I’ll do it. Those blasted blueberries can wait. I’m done for now”.

They both made their way to lay down, unsure who was creaking more, their bones or the floor.

“I’m glad I suggested this,” said Vic. “I’m tired, too.”

Mary nodded, sagely.

She looked at Vic.

He regarded her with a completeness of love that encapsulated their life together, and he suddenly knew what to say.

She gazed at him with a completeness that represented a gathering of all the love they had shared throughout their life together, and she suddenly knew what to say.

They both looked at each other and said:

“We don’t have to do anything!”.

They collapsed on the floor out of sheer exhaustion and slept for 17 hours straight, or at least that’s how it felt.

Upon waking, they looked at each other, and smiled.

“I want to go make some jam,” said Mary.

“I want to go spray-paint a dead fox I just found,” said Vic.

Their phone rang.

And rang.

And rang.

And they just lay there, smiling, happy together in a simplicity that hadn’t existed since they were infants.

The phone stopped ringing.

They got up, holding each others hands in the process, certain it was the floor that creaked more than their bones.

Mary felt a little splash on her cheek, and she looked up.

Vic smiled down at her, a little river glistening on his cheek where the tear had passed.

Mary then also shed a tear, which landed with a soft tap on the floor and left a small river on her cheek, as well.

They both basked in how nice it felt just to be there, without anything to do.

They basked the heck out of that moment until Mary said,

“The jam might be burning - I’m going to go check it”.

Vic said, “The fox might be stinking up my workshop, I’m going to go empty it’s innards into my pee bucket so I can take all of it out at once”.

They smiled at each other, and parted ways.

The parting was so effortless it felt like there wasn’t a parting at all, really, but only a continuation of something that had been going on their whole lives, unbeknownst to them except on a few occasions.

Those occasions being:

like falling in love,

like building a house,

like weaving a rug,

like spray-painting a tree,

like reading, sometimes,

like eating fresh bread,

or creating a quilt.

But now, it felt like every breathe they took, motion they made, thought they thought, and thing they did was a place of refuge, a place to be.

Hearing Vic walk downstairs to the rotting fox, she thought perhaps she would watch TV later.

First, though, she went to the kitchen.

Her body felt, once more, the wonderful scented wave of humidity that sprung forth from the pot that was simmering on the stove.

She turned the corner, and went to reach for the oven mitt... that was still in the

computer room.

She smiled to herself, and went and got it.

Returning, she put the mitt on and gingerly gripped the lid, ready to lift it and peek in like a child, eager to see what is inside.

“The most wonderful jam I have ever made”, she whispered as she lightly opened the pot.

The scent tendrils of blueberry, cinnamon, ginger, a few raspberries, a hint of mint, and a splash of lemon juice crept out from the pot.

The aromas would have knocked out The Hulk.

But not Mary.

She just smiled.

She tipped the lid back down.

She took off her oven mitt and placed it to the left of the pot.

She turned off the heat.

She thought, “It’s not a disaster. It’s alright. I think it’s done. Too bad I don’t have someone here to taste-test it.”

She looked around, and a mischievous gleam shone in her eyes.

She went to get a spoon from the drawer to the left of the sink.

She took out one of those fancy spoons with the smaller spoon end.

She set it down by the pot.

She put the mitten back on, this time on her left hand.

She grabbed the spoon with her right hand.

She lifted the lid off the pot with her mitt hand, and put it, dripping with condensation, on the countertop.

This time, she wisely chose to take care, and stepped back from the mass of sense experience that was to rise from the pot.

And good thing she did, or this story would be over, because she would have been

out cold.

The powerful odours gleefully filled the air in the kitchen, and then the living room, the basement, and even a little in the workshop, where they mingled cheerfully with the smell of the rotting fox.

Vic wiggled his nose a bit.

Mary smiled wider than she ever had.

Her eyes widened enough to take in the whole spectrum of light.

A small chickadee landed on her shoulder, and sang.

Flowers danced and joined in the song.

Suddenly the flowers had arms.

She snapped out of it.

She tentatively put her right hand over the steam, careful not to drop the spoon in, to test how hot it was.

The steam was not unbearably hot, so she proceeded.

She dipped the spoon in, took the smallest amount, and smiled to herself, looking around again.

Her shoulders were hunched up a little more than they usually were.

She lifted the spoon up to her quivering, excited lips.

She tasted it.

She cackled,

and thought about how nice it was going to be to give the jam to people she loved.

Putting the spoon back down on the counter to the left of the pot, by the lid, she took the mitt off as well, and left it there beside.

She shuffled over to where the jars were kept, opening the door to the garage and feeling the stark contrast of the chilly air on her skin.

She stepped down the steps carefully, and went to retrieve the jars that were sitting near the closer of the two freezers.

She picked them up, and heard the garage door close behind her.

She brought them over to the steps, feeling the chill of the cement floor through her socks, and put the jars down on the first step.

She then turned the door handle, still bent over, so that the door opened a crack.

She gripped the jars once more, firmly, holding the door open with her hip, and lifted them while leaning into the door.

And in one fluid gesture, she overcame the final step and arrived back in the kitchen.

The box that the jars were in had an open top, and she put them down on the counter while the garage door moaned its way shut, to a soft thud.

She went over to retrieve two dish clothes from the stove door handle.

She smiled at the touch of them, and she laid them down neatly, on the counter beside the stove.

Then she went over to the electric kettle, filled it with water, and turned it on.

She proceeded to remove the lids from all the jars in the box, placing them in the...

She put the lids down.

She went to retrieve a small bowl from the cupboard to the left of the sink.

She placed the bowl down on one of the cloths.

She placed the lids she had already removed in this bowl, as well as the rest of the lids, and then she started removing the jars from the box.

She placed the jars on the cloth with the open side up.

The water was gurgling loudly at this point, and having put all the jars in neat rows, she listened to it.

Soon after listening to the water, there was the familiar 'Click'.

She went to retrieve the water.

She poured it knowingly over the lids in the bowl,

and she poured the remainder in a few of the jars.

She then put the kettle back in its place, and retrieved a ladle, large-ended funnel, and

another cloth.

Standing there with the cloth, funnel, and ladle, looking over her wonderful concoction, and hearing the faint sound of the chickadees outside, she thought,

“At last.”

Immediately the song started playing in her head, and she smiled and hummed it a bit to the jam.

At last, she thought (after having her moment with the jam), I can give my creation a home.

She proceeded according to plan.

She put the ladle down beside the pot.

She picked up a cloth.

With it, she lifted a jar with hot water in it, and emptied it out into the jar behind it.

She placed it back down, and put down the cloth.

She put the funnel over the newly emptied jar.

She took the ladle.

She stepped one step left to the pot.

She lowered it in the way of her ancestors, the secret way passed on through generations and generations, thereby maintaining the sacredness and the distinct flavour of the Thiessen jams alive in the world.

The ladle plunged, joyously, into the marvellous, goopy jam.

She lifted it out, and tapped the ladle on the side of the pot.

She tapped it a few more times because she liked the sound of it.

She then made to lift it, fully, above the rim of the pot.

As it came into view, nestled in the ladle, the jam shone shades of colour only Mary could see, in her semi-inebriated state of jam intoxication.

She stood, dazzled a bit, gazing at the jam...

and then snapped out of it.

For this was it.

This was the moment.

Her breathing steady.

Her gaze razor sharp.

Her smile quietly there, although she didn't know it.

Her mind zeroed in on the singularity that was her and the task before her.

She brought the ladle full of love over the rim, and it glided through the air with such unwavering intent that the moment lasted for a lifetime.

And,

with a command of will that could lead armies,

she dropped the jam into the funnel.

It went in the jar,

filling it to the perfect height.

She smiled.

She put the ladle back in the pot.

She then grabbed a cloth, and emptied the hot water of the jar next to the newly homed jam into the next row.

She put down the cloth.

Then, she lifted the funnel off of the steaming jar, putting it on the next jar.

She proceeded to take the pieces to make one of the lids out of the bowl of hot water.

It had been sitting for a minute or two, so she didn't mind dipping her fingers into the water to retrieve the pieces she needed.

She put the lid together.

She then took a cloth, and made sure none of the edges on the jar of the newly homed jam had anything on them.

After close inspection...she saw that they didn't.

Familiar with this next sequence, she then balanced the lid on the jar,
grabbed the cloth,
held the hot jar full of jam,
and twisted the lid on,
nice and tight.

She exhaled, and smiled at the jar.

It smiled back at her.

Together, they marvelled in the beautiful experience that is Making Jam.

Then, she proceeded to do this with all the jars.

Time passed.

She stood back, acknowledging the beauty that was the jam, newly homed, in the jars.

Now, she needed to label one.

She went downstairs, grabbed the labels from the hallowed jam cupboards of joy and peace and love, and returned upstairs.

She retrieved a pen from the shelf by the stove.

She put the pen down, and picked up the stickers.

She peeled off a sticker with ease, even though to most people it's tricky.

She stuck it on the jar she filled first, which had cooled the most and was already sealed.

On it, she wrote:

"Mary's fantastic blueberry, cinnamon, ginger, a few raspberries, a hint of mint, and a splash of lemon juice jam".

She needed to write very small.

She regarded the kitchen, seeing the dirty pot, the ladle, the funnel, the bowl, the spoon, the cloths, and the mitt on the counter.

She decided she would clean up later, and instead went to watch TV for a bit.

She wandered out of her aromatic land of magical jams, and shuffled down the stairs.

She paused, hand on the bannister, and felt a lot of gratitude for it.

Then she caught a wiff of rotting fox in the air.

It, strangely, was pleasantly mixed with the lingering smell of the jam tendrils.

“That man,” she thought to herself, smiling, “What am I going to do with that man.”

She paused bit longer and then thought, “I’m gonna keep him”.

She reached the bottom of the stairs, wandered over to the TV, and turned it on.

The sound of the TV overlapped with the sound of the dead fox being spray-painted.

She thought about how:

that’s probably not healthy,
doing that in the workshop.

She thought about how:

it’s probably not good to create waste like that
and it’s probably not good for the air, either.

She sighed.

She looked towards the workshop, and her eyes fell on her rug.

She thought about working on the rug while she watched TV,

but then decided against it.

She smiled.

She shuffled backwards,
and settled into a chair.

A program about how to make jam was on, and she thought, “What the heck, I might learn a thing or two”.

She sat and watched TV,
without doing anything else,

and learned a lot.