

Pickled Hearts

By Beth Boodhoo

Find an outdoor market, best if not your own, ideally foreign, perhaps Italian. We're trying to get over someone, and Italy is a good distraction. Italian markets, when the season is right, also provide the best chances to get artichokes in large quantities.

The markets in Rome will often trim artichokes for you, saving you from the nasty work of getting your hands stained and sticky. Your hands are already stained from the mess you just walked away from, or the mess that walked away from you. You don't need more residue on your self, you need a clean cut. A cut that the trained knives of the produce vendor can offer, rapidly, cleanly, all for a nominal fee. We already know you've paid enough to get here, if not financially, the emotional cost was high and you have enough scars already. Outsource the dirty work this time.

Shove your purchases in a bag. Don't bother placing them in delicately, they'll soon enough be damaged goods, just like your mom said you would be in that belief that your value is tied to your purity. No one wants damaged goods, she once said, knowing that this relationship wouldn't work. We'll make the best out of these damaged goods. Even your mom would be impressed with what can happen with the flowers that have been bruised.

When you're home, get out the lemons. You have lemons at home, right? Italo Calvino wrote that you can always tell the kitchen of someone who cooks because they have lemons and garlic. There's no one to cook for anymore, the lemons and garlic are both a bit aged, they've seen better days but they'll do.

Put on a pot of water to boil. Don't forget to put on the kettle for yourself. Make a cup of tea while you wait for the water to boil, using the tea that you retrieved from their apartment when you got all your stuff back, before you had to tolerate one

last shot of verbal abuse. You don't drink tea? Use the instant coffee, our standards have sunk.

Slice things. Just slice, sliding the knife along the board, allow everything to just pile on the counter before you drop things in water to boil. Things? What things? Lemon, artichokes, maybe throw in some of those dried garlic cloves. Add everything to the pot of boiling water.

It seems like enough time has been spent in the pot. Things look like they're done, softened but not falling apart. This isn't you we want to recreate, it's something to put in the cupboard and let it get better with age.

Place the artichokes in sterile containers. Remember the place of the breakup? How you couldn't go back there for a while? It's now clean and been antiseptically washed of that pain, hopefully the containers you selected are just as clean. Just as clean, as ready for a new experience, as ready to let things develop peacefully.

Top the jars up with a warm acid. How much? Depends on the kind. There are recipes for this, but there are so many variables. How long will it take you to get used to this new life? Depends on the length of the relationship, some say. Depends on the intensity, the size of the life shared, the age, so many other useless things that are out of your control. These hearts are just as variable. Who knows what is going to work.

Seal the jars tightly. Don't let anything into your hearts. Put them away and let them rest for a while. They'll be fine when you're ready. It'll all be just fine.