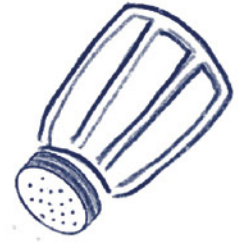


Adriana Toledano*
Illustrations by Laura Castellanos**

13 Ways of Looking at a Meal

1 Two hard boiled eggs, some salt wrapped in foil

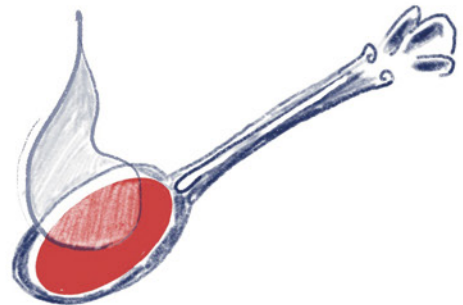
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Were my hands shivering out of their gloves to
Pull apart the eggshells, dressing each bite with salt
Because I wouldn't be my Jewish-Ukrainian grandfather who died of a heart attack's granddaughter
If I didn't need added salt in every bite.



2 Caldo de camarón estilo Tonalá

Feeding gives us warmth in the midst of snowy winter
And the spice that jolts us out of the stupor of tropical heat
In this beach in the beautiful territory I was lucky to be born in the belly of and have someone decide
I am a natural citizen of these pristine waters, just as much as these lineage fishermen and these
Matrons of the cauldron who can withstand the bubbling heat inside the bubble of heat
That is this land and spend the minutes waiting on the
Times and rhythms of the meal prep staring
At the unruly waves from their hammocks in the shade

I let the spicy red *caldo* sit in my mouth for a bit
Mingling with the sea salt
Before I swallow



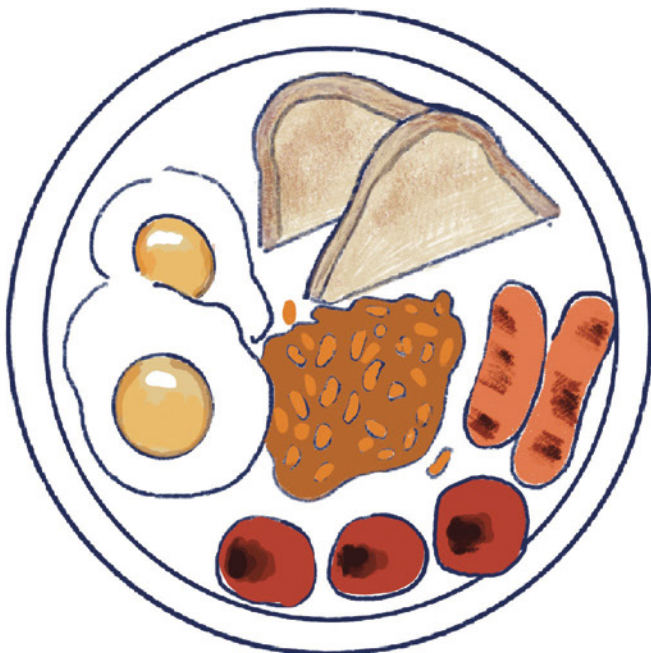
* Adriana is a writer and Fulbright scholar currently enrolled in the Creative Writing MFA at the University of Notre Dame; you can contact her at atoledan@nd.edu.

** Laura is an artist, illustrator, art project manager and educator; you can see her work at www.elecastellanos.com.

3 Tacos de suadero, low on the salsa

I know the *taquero* will participate in the ritual of the guild
Whenever a *güerita* asks for “*poquita salsa, por favor*”
And will scoop a generous spoonful of that fiery hot *chile de árbol* salsa
Over the luscious lard of my suadero tacos just waiting to dissolve in my mouth with the
Fresh crispy cilantro;
I guess in his specialized wisdom he knows
That’s what we party girls need at 3 am to absorb
The alcohol a bit before we get into our Ubers

I burn at the mouth and cry tears of joy that blur the city lights and sounds and laughter of my friends
Who are still dancing

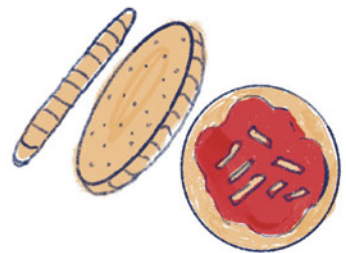
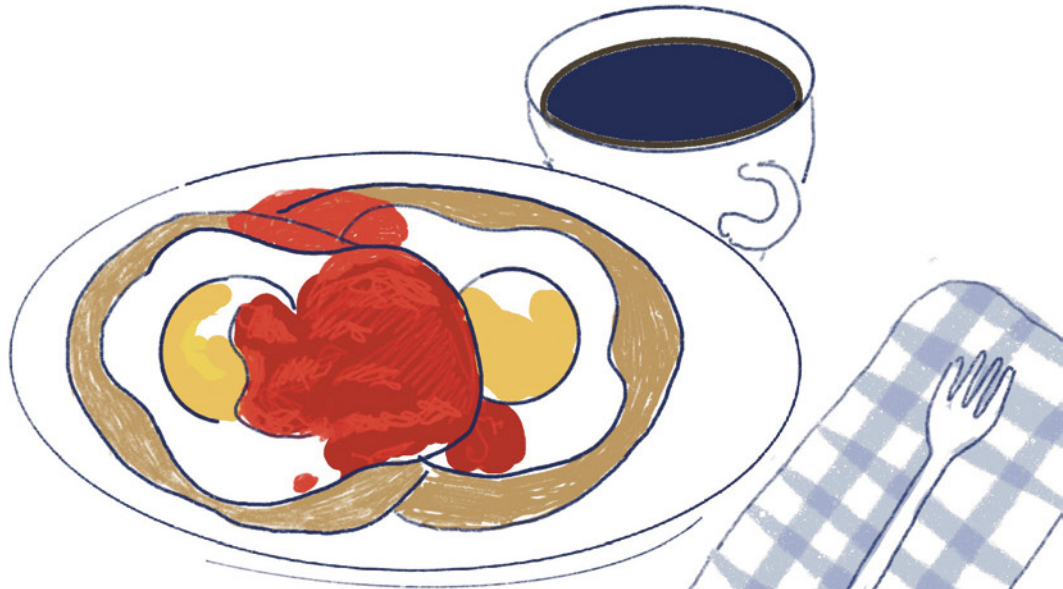


4 English breakfast

Is somehow oddly analogous to Mexican breakfast
We also eat beans but these are sweet
There is sausage instead of chorizo
The tomato is whole instead of in salsa
And there’s toast instead of tortillas
My friend and her family who are hosting me in their home
And feeding me English breakfast
Are probably the English equivalents
Of my family and I

5 Huevos rancheros

When my parents were still together
Was my mom reminiscing
How my dad taught her to cook
Fresh bright pink salsa on crispy fried tortillas
The whites of the egg golden-brown, the egg yolk oozing out
Late morning weekend breakfast that left our breaths heavy with garlic and onion and tart
We were definitely not like my classmates' waspy families who ate blueberry pancakes for breakfast
After jogging in the park



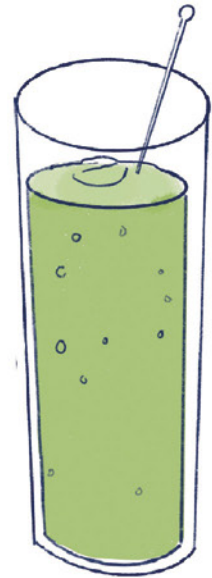
6 Lunchables

Daddy, mommy, for my birthday I want Lunchables
It's like fake food but it's real, it's a miniature version
It's square and everything fits together, each one is the same but unique
The excitement of not knowing what I'll get like Happy Meals back in the day
And the best part is dessert for lunch!
Who cares if it's just brown goo on a cracker

Me too!

7 Green juice and brown rice

I'm living in Mayan territories now and it's like a different gravitational center
I'm healing my womb, my chronic inflammation
Purifying
I don't need the density of animal muscle and fat or all those *ultraprocessed* foods,
To be locked into survivalism...
Only the light crystalline energy of chlorophyll and the cleansing fiber of a whole grain



8 Lentils, rice, bean flower soup

Cooked on an open fire
In my own wilderness land
By the power of my pussy
And the machete I wielded to clear the vegetation on the trail
Eaten underneath the stars warmed by the flames after witnessing fireflies listening to the cooing and
The cawing of the insects and the birds
Those Michelin star restaurants ain't got nothin on this

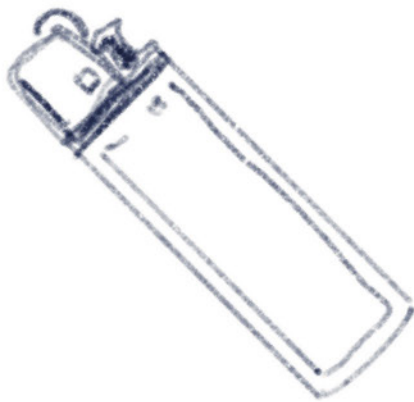


9 The whole tube of cookie dough

Half of it in handfuls
The other half (half) baked
Lying on my bed
Too languid and lazy to lift my neck
Fingers sticky
Face rubbed with chocolate
Crumbs on my sheet
The TV on
While I doomscroll on Instagram
I have surrendered to all forms of pollution
Binging
It is contamination itself
That purifies me now

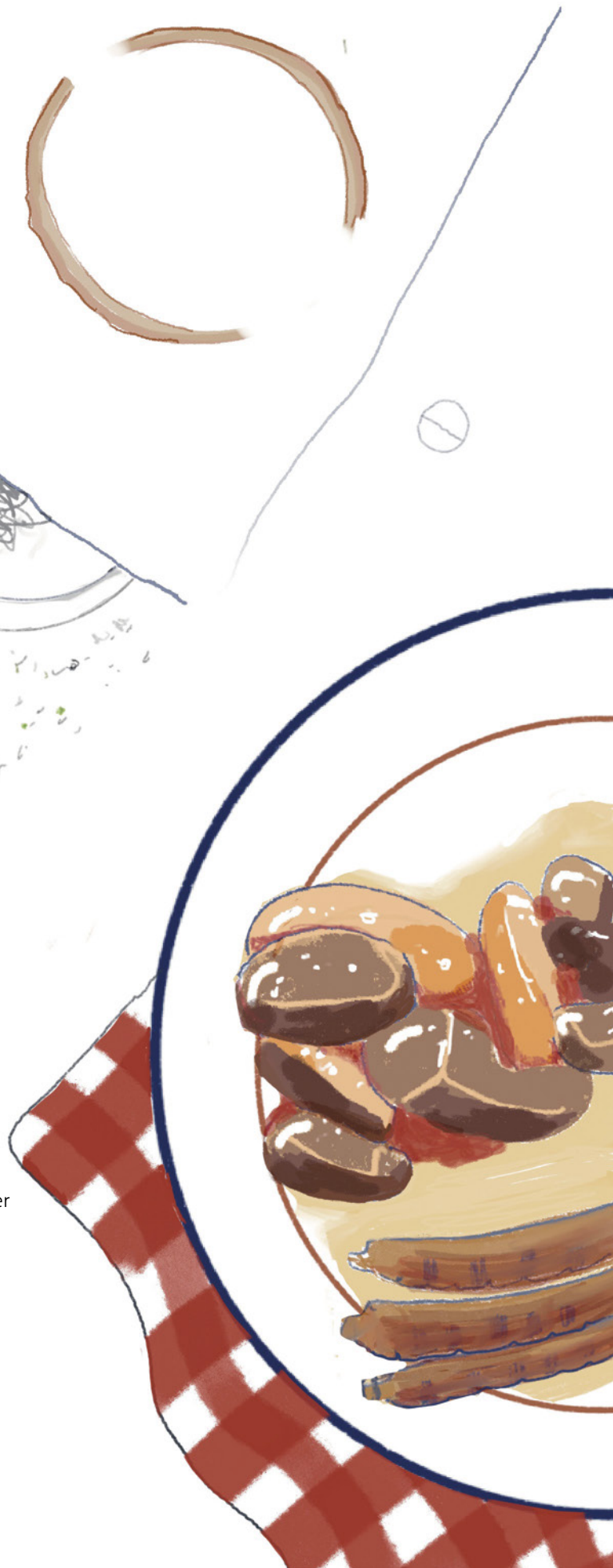
10 Coffee, weed, and antidepressants

Yes, that's all I had for breakfast
Yes, I feel fine
No, I'm not hungry



11 Duck ribs and beef tendons

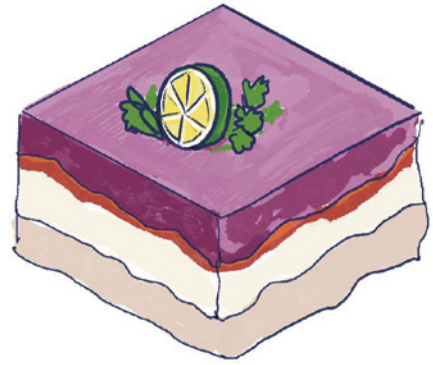
A new shiny city unlike ever before
Flat, windy, glassy, glossy
I go back to the dim sun place for shelter
As I abort the mission to the Navy Pier in the -8°C weather
Windchill -13°C
Order duck ribs and beef tendons because in my mind
I thought tendons = *tuétano*
And I craved the juicy, fatty marrow
And got chewy collagen instead
I've never been this far away
From all the other places I've ever been to
Before



12 Shuba salad with mackerel

The three of us are walking toward the same point
From three different directions:
The Russian restaurant in Santa María square

We hug, tease, interrogate, and interrupt each other
Order shuba salad with salty mackerel
The beets, the egg, the home-style mayonnaise
Cementing a fiction of our Eastern European identity
One that none of us new
 My mom first gen
 My sister and I second
But still with taste buds primed for the fermented flavors of (one of) our ancestral homelands
The one we choose to remember



13 Jalapeño chips, cheese dip, Sidral Light

I am home
In my comfort bed
Joined by my comfort cat
Watching my comfort show
Eating my comfort food
With my comfort person
The woman I choose to walk with
Who chooses to walk with me

There is no higher heaven