



BLOCKBUSTER

®

**It's where you'll be this Friday,
with your parents.**

**You will see people you know
and it will be mortifying.**

Funbits

Volume 10 | **THE MEATSPACE ISSUE** | May 2023

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Cover by Julian Jones

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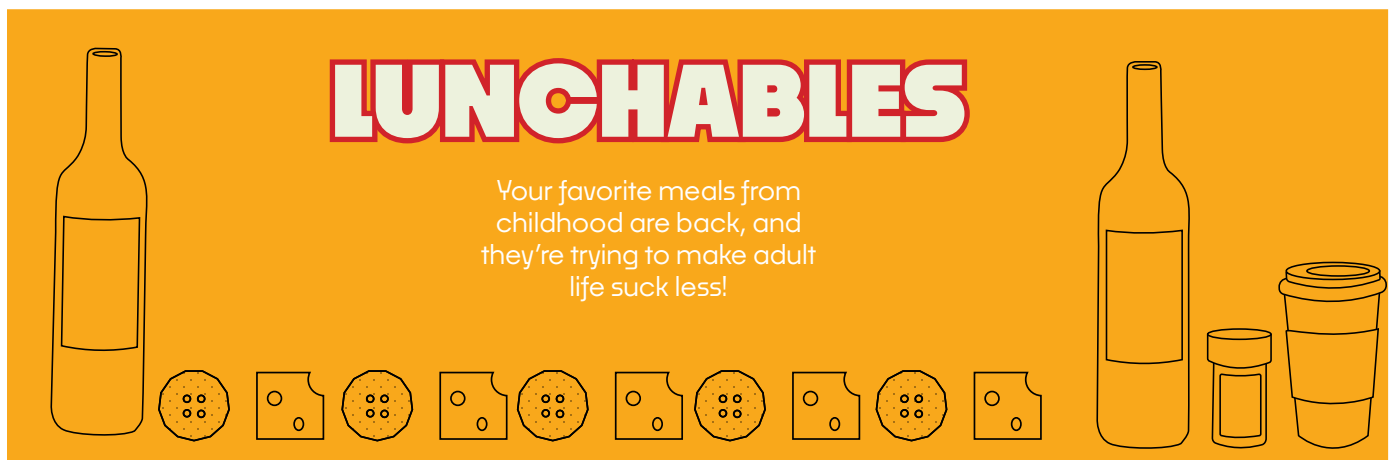
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Jessie Mitchell (Bright-ass Animals) is a cog in the machine living in Ardmore, PA. She likes large bodies of water, coffee, and chachkies. She dislikes onions, when people are only described as "nice," and mechanical pencils. You can see more here: jsmeej.wixsite.com/seasonsnbread

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* I ALSO HAD
THE SAME
THOUGHT
WHEN I
FIRST HEARD
THAT TERM.

WHAT DO YOU THINK
MEAT SPACE
MEANS?

my 6-year old

SPACE THAT IS
MADE OUT OF
MEAT!!!*

PLANETS
OF SALAMI

& BOLOGNA

SAUSAGE
MOON

MEAT BALL SATURN WITH

MEATBALL METEOR

BACON STRIP RINGS

Bright-ass Animals

by Jess Mitchell

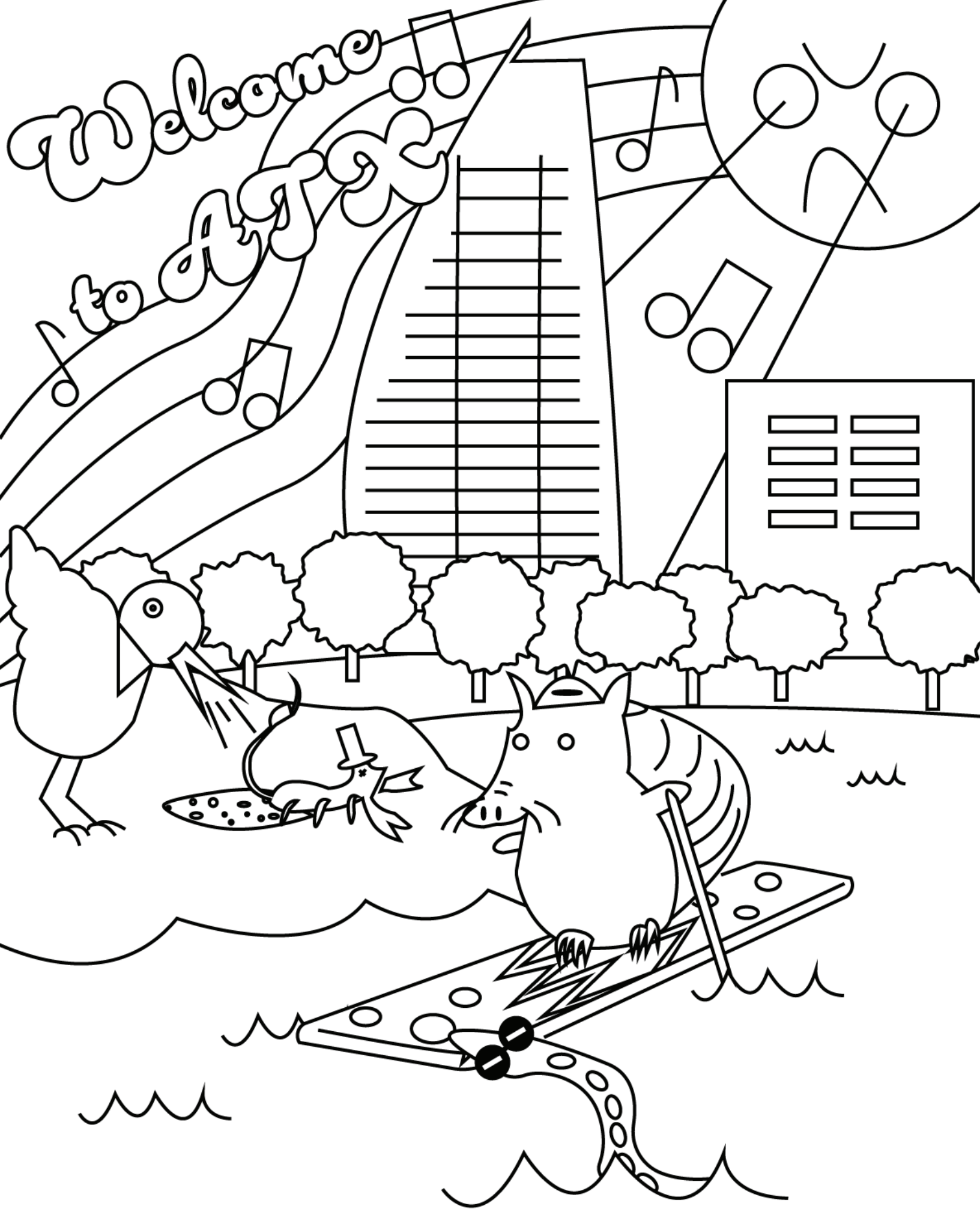






Your turn!

Use the next page to color your very own bright-ass animals.





Scenes from an Italian Restaurant

by Andrew Eaton

Excerpt from an internet review of Marcelino's:

Marcelino's, the newest Italian restaurant to join Crystal City's historic Restaurant Row on 23rd Street, is the real deal. The moment you enter you immediately feel invited in by the familial hospitality and cozy, romantic atmosphere. Everything we ordered was made with time, love, and care. A few things deserve special mention: the warm homemade bread, the Carpaccio, the pollo alla cacciatora, the Vitello Tonnato (!!!), delicious Sgroppino cocktails, canestrellis, and a wonderful tiramisu. It's truly authentic Italian. Highly recommended for those looking for a little taste of the old country!

by Renato A, 1 week ago (6 people found this helpful)

‡

My time in Italy was brief, but impactful. The liberal arts college I attended in Baltimore offered an exchange program with an art school in Florence, affording undergraduates an opportunity to study painting, sculpture, and opera in the birthplace of the Renaissance. I took full advantage, extending a semester-long program into a whole year. For the first time, I felt at home in a culture with a demonstrative appreciation for beauty and excellence.

I refined my palate there as well. Though my parents had done their best to expose me to international cuisine, there was only so much accessible to us in rural New England. Eating in Italy, however, unlocked new pleasures. What astonished me most was how simple the meals could be. A mere few ingredients could be amalgamated into an exquisite dish. And the trick? Only that these items be of the freshest variety and the highest quality. *Cibo povero* like fish stew, bread soup, polenta bites, and even white bean salad were all made new again. There was an integrity to the food and the tradition it came from – a far cry from the never-expiring squeeze-bottled ingredients on which I was raised.

‡

My wife Robin comes from Louisiana, though she holds no special affection for its cuisine. While hosting friends for dinner last week, she was goaded to name her favorite local restaurant.

"Oh, I don't know," she shrugged.

"No good Cajun food up here?" one asked.

"I had plenty growing up," Robin answered.

"But surely there's somewhere you go when Lillith's out of town," another said, looking to me for any indication of an answer.

"Not really, I usually make something here."

Our friends grew impatient with Robin's inability to produce an answer for them to scrutinize and deliberate the merits of.

"What about one of the myriad Italian places in the neighborhood?" one asked, eager to move on.

"I don't know. I'm not the biggest fan of Italian food," Robin offered sheepishly. Later, after they left, we sat in bed reading and I turned to ask her why she said she doesn't like Italian food.

"It's not that I don't like Italian food," she said, closing her book, "It's just not my first choice when we go out. It can be so heavy."

"It doesn't have to be heavy. It shouldn't be heavy," I explain.

"I know you love Italian food," she said softly, "I didn't mean I haven't enjoyed what you've shown me. Listen, why don't you find a place for us to go for our anniversary next week?"

‡

Marcelino's wasn't technically a new restaurant. A restaurant with the same name opened on the same street in the late 1970s, around the time work began on Crystal City's subterranean shopping mall. This "turn-of-the-century shopping village," designed to attract commuters from D.C. with affordable condos and parking, started with an emphasis on small, locally-owned businesses. As progress continued, that emphasis became less a priority and, by the mid-2000s, the neighborhood ceded ground and restructured around the shopping center like a medina. By then, rising property taxes and opportunistic developers drove establishments like Marcelino's out of business.

This new Marcelino's wasn't owned or operated by the founders, though they had licensed the name to the new management and permitted them to advertise it as a re-opening of a restaurant "established in 1978" in order to lend the business more credibility among locals. The opening hadn't yet been covered by local press, which I explained to Robin could be to

our advantage; it presented an opportunity to beat the crowds and bandwagoners who would begin patronizing were it to become well-regarded. In the weeks since it opened, I found only a few customer reviews online, all of them positive. This seemed as good an opportunity as any to reacquaint Robin with Italian food.

‡

Our anniversary fell on a Friday this year, which was fortuitous given we're typically free of obligations that night. I made a dinner reservation for seven o'clock so that we'd have time to freshen up after work. There was no mention of a valet, so we left early in case we needed to circle the block a few times. This proved unnecessary, given there was ample space out front.

As we walked up, Robin squeezed my hand. "I love you," she said, kissing my cheek. "Thank you for planning this." We entered the restaurant and Robin immediately remarked upon the scene, "Oh wow."

It had the atmosphere you might expect from a traditional Italian restaurant - and seldom found outside a major city. There was the dark wood paneling and dim ambient lighting, mostly emanating from Venetian candles and red light fixtures. There were flowers in wine glasses and absurdly-oversized kitchen utensils hanging from the ceiling. Behind the host stand stood an impressive array of wine flutes that resembled a glass version of the terracotta army.

A lithe older man appeared from behind a pillar and approached us.

"Good evening, ladies. Welcome to Marcelino's," he welcomed.

"We have a reservation for two," I said. "The name is Lillith."

He opened a large guest book on the host stand and scanned a page for our name with a finger. Then he produced a smart tablet out of the front of his apron and checked there.

"Yes," he beamed. "If you would follow me?"

He sat us at a corner table in a mostly empty section, placing two menus on the table. There was one other couple nearby, and a few guests in other sections, all seemingly enjoying their food - an encouraging sign.

"Your server will be with you shortly," he said, with the same smile.

Robin clasped her hands together like she was praying, as she always does when she sits down to eat. A vestigial habit from her religious upbringing.

"Well this is really something. Not what I expected!" she said with quiet excitement.

"I'm intrigued," I said, with tempered expectations. "It's novel."

‡

A young man with a puckish smile and a high fade came from the kitchen. He looked to both of us, as if he deliberating who to address.

"Buonasera, signoras," he greeted, "I'm Stefano. I will be your server tonight. Have you dined at Marcelino's before?"

"No, we haven't," I answered. "We understand you only just opened."

"Yes, that's right," he said, squaring his attention toward me. "And we're excited to be back. To each of our guests eating traditional full course meals, we're offering a free glass of house wine. Have you had a chance to look at the menus yet?"

"I wonder if you might first tell us about any specials," I said.

"Molto bene, signora." He smiled and proceeded to read the specials.

"That's fine. We'll start with *carpaccio* for the table. For my part, I'll have the *strisce alla chiantigiana* for the *primi*, and *veal scaloppini* for the *secondi*, with your house salad. And the house wine you offered, what label is it?"

"They're blends," he answered unhelpfully.

"A red blend then."

"Fine choices, signora," he said, writing very slowly. He turned to Robin. "And for you, signora?"

"I'll have the asparagus *cappelletti* with the house salad and house white wine, thanks."

"Excellent choice, signora," he said approvingly.

After our server left, I asked Robin why she didn't order a *secondi*, or main dish. I had explained the courses of the traditional Italian meal in the car ride over, so this omission surprised me.

"I'll just see how I feel after," she offered. "It may be enough."

‡

Stefano returned with two miniature carafes and two stemmed glasses, which he filled. When he left, we raised our glasses.

"To us," Robin toasted.

The wine tasted familiar.

"Hm, that's interesting," Robin said diplomatically.

"I believe this comes from a box."

"Lots of good wine comes in boxes these days. Do you remember when you snuck me into the Goucher library the night before graduation? We drank boxed wine then."

"I do, though I don't remember it being an Italian label."

"That's one of my favorite memories," she said.

‡

The *carpaccio* arrived. Razor-thin slices of uncooked beef drizzled with olive oil and squeezed lemon, with arugula, capers, and onions.

"Buon appetito!" said Stefano, encouragingly.

I explained to Robin this was a dish first confected at the renowned Harry's Bar in Venice.

We began to eat and gradually became aware of the faintest soupçon of sulfur.

"It has a very strong taste," Robin said, registering it too.

"I believe this may not be fresh," I said, pushing my plate away.

I motion for Stefano to return and relay my concerns about the condition of the beef.

"Signora, I assure you, this is fresh and perfectly safe to eat."

"Assuming so, it's still not very appetizing."

He smiled knowingly. "They say the appetite comes while you are eating."

"Please bring a charcuterie board," I said, ignoring his comment.

‡

I recounted to Robin the best meal I ever had.

It was at sunset on an August Sunday, at a nearly-inaccessible restaurant carved into the side of a hill in Sicily. Passersby would stop in their tracks to gawk and point at the scene: eight or nine plastic tables and patio furniture circling a bar and kitchen built into an exposed cavern at the top of the hill.

I had hiked three hours to get there, having only days earlier received a recommendation from a fishmonger in the village. I sat at the bar by myself and was served *cavatelli* with ricotta and capers and a glass of white wine. The cheese was made in house with fresh sheep's milk made by the owner's mother.

I raised the first pillowy forkful to my lips and shuddered as it entered my mouth.

An intense pleasure overtook me, unlike anything I'd felt before. My eyes began to water, such was the power of the flavor.

I reached for the wine - a Vermentino - and welcomed the new sensation. The citric acidity and almond finish with the ricotta was an incomparable pairing.

Dumbfounded, I looked around to see if someone - anyone - else was having a similar experience, but they were all too absorbed in conversation.

An extraordinary change had occurred in me at that moment. I knew I would be chasing this feeling again for the rest of my life.

‡

The charcuterie board had been forgotten, which was inconsequential because our first course arrived soon after. Stefano served me the *strisce alla chiantigiana* - strips of long pasta made with Chianti - and Robin her asparagus *cappelletti*.

"Excuse me," I said, observing Robin's plate, "I believe that should have come with a sauce."

"This is the way we make it," Stefano said, with the same smile he used for all interactions.

"That's just asparagus and *orecchiettes* - which is not the pasta she ordered either," I explained.

"This is Renato's family recipe. He stands by it," Stefano said and directed our attention to a mustachioed man sitting in a nearby section. He grinned and waved at us upon hearing his name.

"It'll be fine," Robin mollified, "This is what I want, it looks good."

After Stefano left, I began to tell Robin she shouldn't have to settle for less than she expected.

"I'm having a nice time, let's not let a few mix-ups spoil our evening."

‡

My *strisce alla chiantigiana*, though unremarkable, showed significant improvement over the hazardous *carpaccio*, which I dissuaded Robin from eating any more of. "Drunken pasta," as it's sometimes referred to, was something even the staff of Marcelino's couldn't mangle too badly.

Stefano came back only a few minutes later with my *secondi*.

"And veal *scaloppini* for signora," he said, eager to frustrate me again.

"So soon," I said as he moved my unfinished plate of *strisce* out of reach. Stefano left again and I wondered who patronized Marcelino's. Were they first-timers like us? Begrudging patrons of the restaurant that once was?

I looked back at Renato, who was at that moment engaged in a friendly conversation with two employees. Could this have been the same Renato who penned 5-star reviews on several reviewing platforms?

I looked to the wall next to our table. It was covered in small plaques, listing the names of sponsors or patrons, presumably from the previous iteration. One read:

Mark Lipton
Marp Likton
Mack Lickedpen

Another mummery.

‡

Robin recounted her day at work.

"Mark's been really difficult to work with and people are afraid to speak against him because everyone's paranoid about layoffs."

I asked Robin why she hasn't voiced her concerns.

"It's a lot of he-said-she-said. It's not my problem, but it will be if people begin refusing to work with him."

I didn't have a comment for this, so Robin pivoted.

"How was your day?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary," I answered, and finished my wine. I motion to Stefano and raise my glass.

"Si, *signora*?" Stefano asked.

"I'll take a glass of *amarone*," I said.

"I don't think we have *amarone*."

"Well, then I'll take *barolo*."

"We mostly just have blends."

I fixed on him a smile so contemptuous there could be no mistaking what it meant. I wondered what the maximum sentence would be for plunging a bread knife into his back or getting up and returning to this spot in the restaurant with our car, if he would only stay in one place long enough to absorb its impact. He understood the meaning in my smile and left stupidly.

"You're having a bad time?" Robin asked.

"It's not ideal," I said.

"Because of the service?"

"What service? There's none to speak of."

"He just seems like he's inexperienced and

doing his best."

"I can see that he's inexperienced."

"Everybody has to learn sometime."

"I didn't come to be practiced on."

Robin lowered her voice, as she always did to signify seriousness.

"Are you happy?" she asked.

We were no longer talking about our dining experience.

"There are more important things than being happy," I answered.

"Like what?" she asked.

I considered this for a moment before answering, "I face things as they happen. And sometimes being happy is a byproduct."

Robin's brow furrowed.

"You're dancing around the question."

"Were this meal good, or even beyond just acceptable, your enjoyment would be no different," I answered sharply. "It would still be lost on you."

A silence ensued.

‡

Attempting to break the silence, I explained to Robin that the color magenta takes its name from the site of a battle in the Franco-Austrian War, such were the color of the hills from the blood of fallen soldiers. She offered no reply.

‡

Stefano returned, seemingly oblivious to the distress he had caused.

"Will there be anything else, *signora*?"

"We'll take the check," I answered flatly.

"Very good, *signora*," he said and left promptly.

Robin was waiting for me to speak.

"If I spoke too sharply earlier," I began.

"You always want to be somewhere else," Robin interjected. "Even if things were better, you would have found something to not like about it. And I think that's true of us as well."

She stood up, her eyes full. Her voice was quiet but firm.

"You might consider living your life with a new perspective and not criticize everything for not being better, which clearly hasn't proved sustainable over time."

She turned and left. I stared dumbly at the table.

I will never return to Marcelino's, I thought. I will banish it from my memory. It will return to being simply another Italian name like the others, sometimes spelled one way, sometimes spelled

another. Certainly not the place where Robin and I would spend our last civil moments together - under cartoonishly-exaggerated kitchen utensils hanging from the ceiling.

‡

"We hope you enjoy a pleasant evening," Stefano said proudly.

I looked up from the table at his stupid smile. He was holding a check in one hand and a small plate in the other. On the plate was served a generous slice of tiramisu.

"I didn't order this," I said.

"Compliments of the kitchen, *signora*."

Stefano left me with the check and the tiramisu.

‡

I recalled in that moment that the so-called "father of tiramisu" had died only a few years earlier. The dish was created by accident, like penicillin, when mascarpone was perchance dropped in a bowl of eggs and sugar. I wondered if such an accident would ever occur in the kitchen of Marcelino's.

With nothing to lose, and still hungry from having not eaten most of my meal, I tried it. There was a rich layer of espresso and the subtle aroma of Marsala, not rum.

Upon first bite, I was pleased to discover they had used real mascarpone instead of whipped cream. The ladyfingers were refreshingly airy and spongy. The cocoa powder, though over-generously portioned, was evenly applied across three layers.

I wondered what Robin would have thought of the dessert. I wondered how things might have turned out for her had we not met in college after I returned from Florence. I wondered how many meals she quietly enjoyed while listening to me chasten the Stefanos of the world for not aspiring to better.

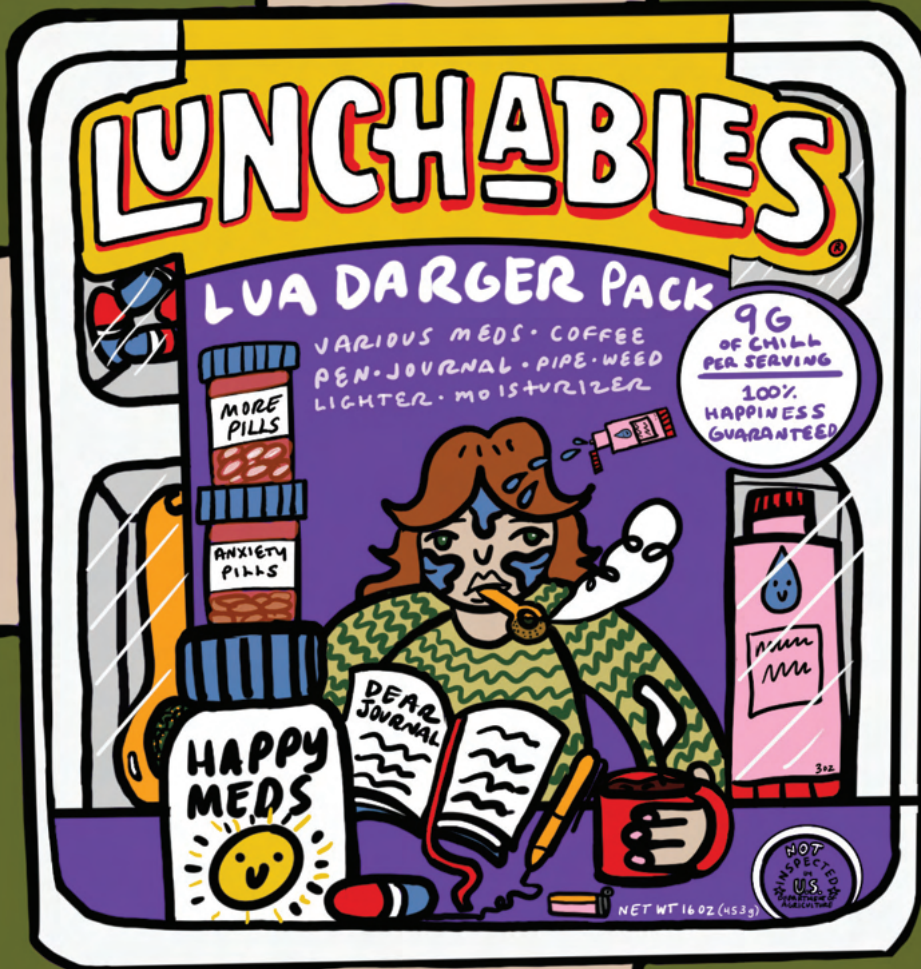
I wondered what a good life with finer things would be like, as if such a life did not already exist.

‡

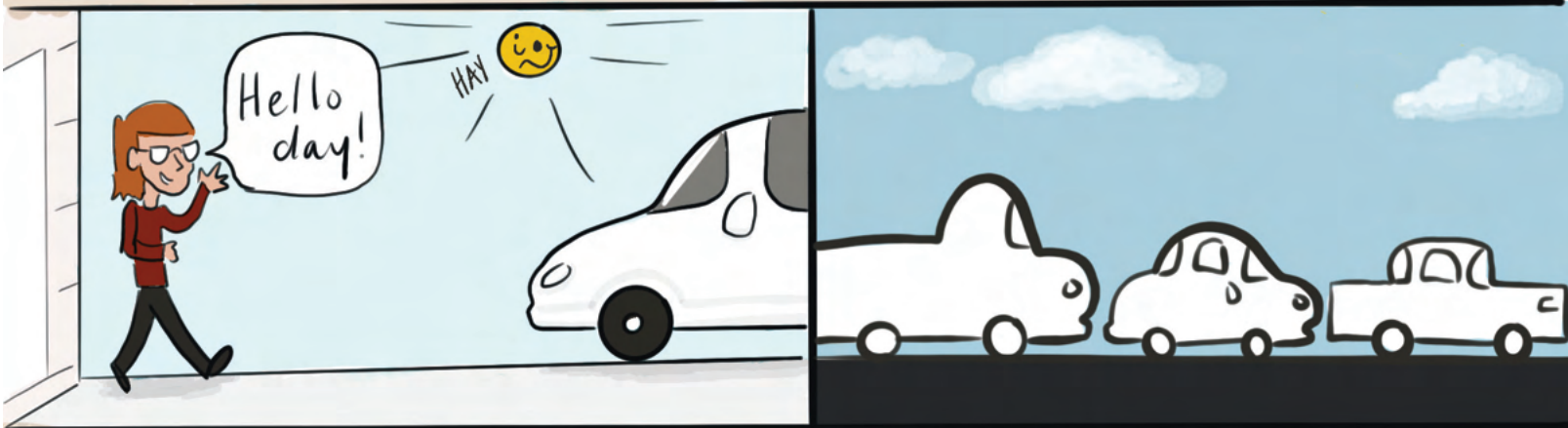
Another excerpt from an internet review of Marcelino's:

Went in without expectations. Nothing special, but pretty good. Spaghetti and meatballs is the way to go (we get it every time). You could do worse!

by Clark, 5 days ago (3 people found this helpful)



Hello, welcome back to ★ MEAT SPACE ★

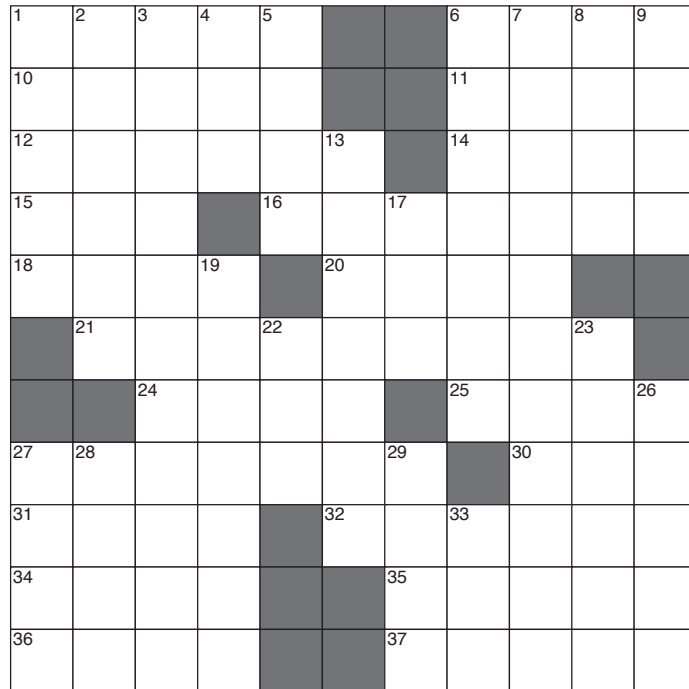


— ONE — HOUR — LATER —



Puzzle for a Zine

By audreytwo



Play online at <https://crossword.org/crosswords/1035033/MtGriffith/puzzle-for-a-zine>

ACROSS

- 1 photographer Adams (you are legally required by his estate to clue this answer this way, i don't make the rules)
- 6 * ____ bang shrimp or the big ____
- 10 a Guy who the internet hated, then abruptly decided it loved (dateline: flavortown)
- 11 author El-Mohtar that co-wrote the EXCELLENT _This Is How You Lose the Time War_
- 12 an excerpt from your favorite fanfic: "Tales's sweater caught on the door handle, pulling a thread. 'Here,' said Sonic, biting his lip to suppress teasing giggles, 'Let me ____ that for you.'"
- 14 * ____ lox or super ____
- 15 * ____ bream or ____ of Tranquility
- 16 euphemistic way of describing how you feel when you do the math wrong on the weed gummy dosage

- 18 a club anyone can get into, provided they can pay the \$45 fee and fit the giant jars of mayo in their cabinet
- 20 get you a rose quartz egg from GOOP to shove up there
- 21 * IRL, or a hint to the starred clues
- 24 ballerina's dip
- 25 recipes will beg you to do this to your flour but let's be honest with ourselves it's not 1933 we are simply never going to
- 27 a pokemon that evolves into electrode
- 30 band best (?) known (??) for "Summer Girls"
- 31 * ____ ragoon or ____ nebula
- 32 leaves out until it is over-crunky, as bread
- 34 fine, goddammit, i give up: COSTA ____
- 35 * ____ dwarf star or ____ castle burger
- 36 a large knife or dirk, for all the help that is
- 37 like a tendon basically, i think

DOWN

- 1 in country songs, kickin' this up can be a good thing or a bad thing
- 2 time to log on to work and send some gd slacks
- 3 a theme park, like Lego Land, for parents who think Disney is not educational enough
- 4 Donald Glover's character's name in _Atlanta_
- 5 when doubled, a Jim Carrey film about a duplicitous lawyer who learns the error of his ways
- 6 the most apPEELing fruits
- 7 antibiotic and delicacy known in my childhood home as "bubblegum pink"
- 8 the thingy between your narthex and your chancel (not the apse, the other one)
- 9 11A's co-author Max ____ stone
- 13 they're big squirters
- 17 a type of rabbit, or, if you change one letter, a place where you would like a rabbit to sit
- 19 viral chef famous for theatrically sprinkling his favorite seasoning atop meat (and whose restaurants are universally reviled)
- 22 Bruno or Félix, to Mirabel Madrigal
- 23 i only ever hear this adjective applied to the word "liberals" and you know what you can just come out and say gay
- 26 oh do you make your own clothes? no, sadly, i never learned
- 27 ancient devices of yore, used even ere dvd players to watch movies
- 28 the eldest Incandenza brother in _Infinite Jest_
- 29 by the way, more than once
- 33 the sushi tuna, not the can tuna

LUNCHABLES

