

SOUP'S ON

A short story



KENNY ABDO



Wine Mamacita

Sip happens. Dinner happens anyway.



WINE DOWN WEDNESDAY

My Long-Awaited Polar Night Soup

A cozy, once-in-a-lifetime liver soup for the people you would do absolutely anything for.



Something cozy is on the stove.

Hello, my beautiful Mommy Juice Heads!

This has been a long time coming.

Pour yourself an adult juice box and pull up a stool, because the package I have been waiting fourteen months for finally arrived this morning.

Fourteen months! I have carried three human beings for less time than that, although admittedly not in a row. LOL. Braydon, Praxton, and Jaxon were born close enough together that some years feel like one extremely long pregnancy where the baby learned to walk, request password resets, and leave wet towels in places where towels have no business being.

But today is not for complaining. Today is for celebrating.

The doorbell rang at 7:06 a.m., just as I was packing three lunches that would return this afternoon in three different states of rejection. The silver

Meet Mamacita!



Mother of three.
Keeper of the kitchen.
Always pouring.

From my kitchen

Tuscan "Divorce Is Expensive" Chicken

One-Pot Mommy's Little Meltdown Mac

Short ribs & long days

SIP HAPPENS

pour yourself a lifeline

shipping case sat on the porch under enough warning labels to wallpaper a powder room. White vapor curled around the deliveryman's shoes like we had ordered a tiny haunted house.

I may have squealed.

Fine. I squealed.

The boys came running because any box in this house belongs to them until proven otherwise. Braydon asked if it was his new headset. Praxton asked if there was food inside. Jaxon kicked the case because he wanted to see whether it was "metal for real." I told him we do not kick international freight before breakfast, a sentence I somehow always knew motherhood would require.

"What is it?" they kept asking.

"Something special," I said.

"For us?" Praxton asked.

Of course he did.

My husband glanced up from his phone. "Is that the thing?"

The thing.

Fourteen months of emails, delays, translated messages, weather complications, and one satellite call, and it was the thing. But that is marriage! He keeps the Wi-Fi alive, I keep everything else alive, and between us we have built a home. Sip happens.

I signed for the case and dragged it inside while four curious men watched. The deliveryman offered to help, but I said I had it.

I always say I have it.

He looked unconvinced, which was sweet.

Longtime Juice Heads know I am always hunting for recipes that bring adventure to the family table. You loved my Tuscan "Divorce Is Expensive" Chicken. You made my One-Pot Mommy's Little Meltdown Mac so many times the printer-friendly version crashed. And I still receive messages about the short ribs I served after Jaxon told his kindergarten teacher Mommy's favorite hobby was "standing at the sink."

This recipe began with an article I found late one night while waiting for Braydon to come home. He was forty-seven minutes past curfew. My husband was asleep because one of us had to work in the morning.

I had worked that morning, too. Then through lunch, pickup, homework, dinner, dishes, showers, a missing cleat, a missing charger, and a permission slip discovered inside the backpack where I said it was.

But his work has direct deposit.

Anyway!

The article described an ingredient so rare that most home cooks will never see it. It comes from a place of blue snow, hard wind, and months when the sun barely rises. Getting it here required permits, inspections, dry ice, more emails than our entire mortgage refinance, and the patience of a woman who has spent eleven years waiting for someone else to replace the toilet-paper roll.

Are you ready?

Top off your lifeline.

The special ingredient in tonight's cozy, creamy, unforgettable soup is:

POLAR BEAR LIVER.



A little adventure for the family table.

Yes, Really!

I can hear you from here, Juice Heads.

"Polar bear?"

"Liver?"

"Can you buy that?"

Apparently I can.

The color is extraordinary. Dark, glossy, almost purple in places, wrapped inside layers of insulation. It arrived colder than anything has ever felt in my hands.

Braydon said it looked disgusting. Praxton asked if it was legal. Jaxon wanted to poke it.

My husband finally looked up.

"We're not eating that," he said.

I laughed and told him it was for the blog.

That satisfied him. The blog is one of my little projects. Like the herb garden he backed over and the chair in the garage I have been “going to refinish” since Jaxon was two.

So let’s wine down with this lovely recipe!

What You’ll Need

- Yellow onions
- Carrots
- Celery
- Potatoes
- Garlic
- Beef stock
- One extremely rare liver, obtained through channels you should not attempt to reproduce
- Red wine, plus a splash for the chef
- Bay leaves
- Black pepper
- Cream
- Fresh parsley
- Salt, to taste
- Four people asking when dinner will be ready while watching you make it

The liver came through members of the Qavaniut, an Alaskan community whose name translates roughly to “people of the south wind.” It is not easy to get a Qavaniu on the horn. Their reception is terrible and their texting is atrocious. Frozen fingers! I am kidding. Mostly. Some messages were just consonants. Which, as it happens, is the dialect my little men have chosen for speaking to me lately.

So. I was fluent.

The hunting party was gone longer than expected. Two members did not return. Shipping paused while the community attended to their families, which was obviously more important. Family comes first.

I sent flowers.

Step One: Pour Yourself a Lifeline

You cannot cook from an empty cup, Mama.

My husband likes to tease me about my “Mommy Juice.” He says it with a wink when we have people over. Everyone laughs because a mother drinking wine is funny. A mother hiding in the pantry while someone pounds on the door is a meme printed on a tea towel.

He bought me one that says SIP HAPPENS.

I hung it on the oven handle.

He has never used it to dry a dish.

Step Two: Build Your Base

Start as most good soups do, with the ordinary things.



Start with the ordinary things.

Onion. Carrot. Celery. Garlic.

Chop them evenly. If the knife knocks loudly enough against the board, someone may wander in and ask whether you are mad.

Say, “No, honey.”

Praxton came in while I was working and opened the refrigerator.

“Where’s the ketchup?”

“Door.”

“Where?”

“In the door.”

“I don’t see it.”

It was in front of him. Red, upright, and labeled.

I pointed with the knife.
He told me to chill.
That is funny because of the dry ice.

Step Three: Give It Time

Let the vegetables soften. Add the stock, potatoes, and bay leaves.

Braydon used to sleep with one hand wrapped around my finger. I spent entire nights bent over his crib, afraid to move. In the morning my husband would say, "You should have woken me."

I never did.

He needed sleep. The boys needed lunches. Someone needed to know Thursday was library day and Praxton would only wear the blue socks and the pediatrician had moved offices and the milk smelled wrong.

Step Four: Add the Wine

The wine loosens the browned bits from the bottom of the pot.

My husband opened the dishwasher a few minutes ago. He saw it was full and put his glass in the sink.

"Smells good," he said.

Step Five: Let It Simmer

This is where the flavors deepen, so do not rush them.

Braydon shouted "Mom" from upstairs because his charger was beside his foot. Praxton needed poster board by morning. Jaxon asked what was for dinner while eating the quesadilla I had just made him.

My husband came through and asked how much longer.

No one mentioned the silver case.

By then, the dry ice had vanished, leaving only a little water behind.

Some of you have already opened another tab. I can tell from the messages arriving while I type this.

Yes, I have read the same articles.

No, this is not like raw cookie dough.

Thank you for your concern.

Step Six: Finish with Cream

Cream smooths everything out and gives the soup that gorgeous, cozy color. This is also a good time to taste and adjust the seasoning.

I have not tasted this batch.

It is an unusual choice for me, I know. Usually I taste dinner so many times that I am no longer hungry when everyone finally sits down. Then my husband looks at my empty plate and asks whether I am doing that apple vinegar colonic or fasting thing again.

Tonight I made myself toast. I ate it over the sink while the soup simmered.

The boys will come when I call them. Not the first time. The third.

Braydon will bring his phone. Praxton will ask if there is anything else. Jaxon will make a face before he tastes it. My husband will tell him not to be rude without looking at me.

Someone just commented that polar bear liver can make a person very sick.

I know, Melissa.

Your concern has been noted. But focus it on your husband's late-night texts to his innocent work wife.

Step Seven: Garnish and Serve

Fresh parsley adds a little color.

Scatter it over each bowl. Wipe the rims. Use the good napkins even though someone will complain that they feel weird. Light the candle they gave you for Mother's Day, the one called MAMA NEEDS MERLOT, because no one remembered you stopped liking sweet scents after Praxton was born.



I have set four places.

Four table settings for our little army of five. And before any of you well-actually busybodies go running to the comment section, just remember: I've already had my toast.

Praxton has come in twice to ask whether he can eat yet. The second time, he looked directly at the bowls. He did not look at me.

"Almost," I said.

He took a roll from the basket and left the drawer open.

The messages keep arriving. One of you has typed DO NOT SERVE THIS in all caps. Three of you sent the same medical link. Someone asked if this is satire.

Mommy Juice Heads, you worry too much.

The package took fourteen months to arrive. I signed for it, carried it into the kitchen, cleaned up the water from the dry ice, and spent the afternoon cooking. Dinner is twenty minutes later than I promised.

It would be wasteful not to serve it.

My husband is calling from the living room.

"How much longer?"

"It's ready," I tell him.

I lower the heat.

Wine Mamacita's Pairing Pick

Serve with a bold red, crusty bread, and a small-batch churned Midwest Amish-style salted butter nobody can ever find unless you put it directly in front of them.

Wine down, Mommy Juice Heads. The soup is beautiful. I wish you could smell it.

Dinner is served.

Photo credits

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SOMETHING ELSE IS WAITING IN THE WOODS.

FUZZIES

A NOVEL BY KENNY ABDO



Meet Mitch, Ella's new cuddly companion.
He can be a real **BEAR** when she's upset.

"It'll be okay, I promise."

Keep an eye out for Fuzzies.

STILL HUNGRY?

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