

The fifth annual short story competition

The Mogford Prize for Food & Drink Writing 2017

‘Supper for One’

by Ian Shine

...a huge success! Over 1000 entries
were received for the 2017 prize...



‘Supper for one’



I find this dish works best if prepared over a number of years and finally served in July or a month of freak summer heat. The higher temperatures provide the best environment for stewing discontent and discomfort, while the activity and implied liberty of the outside world create a tempting juxtaposition with the incarceration of the young man's flat that it would be impossible to concoct in winter.

As with all recipes, there are a few ingredients that can be dropped or changed, and I have pointed these out at the end. However, there are also some ingredients that you cannot do without, and in this case, essence of father is absolutely critical. Without this, the mother will not contain the requisite amount of bitterness nor the son the requisite amount of fast food, making it very difficult to bring the situation to the boil.

Ingredients

1 small living room, uncleaned
1 dog, any large breed
1 white leatherette sofa, new
1 towel, fresh
1 TV, large
Several padlocks
1 father, any size
1 oscillating pedestal fan
1 doting mother, 15 stone
Bacon, eggs, sausages
1 five-year-old son, 4 stone
Chocolate-based snacks
Essence of father
Lager
Fast food, with packaging
Plenty of summer heat

Preparation

1. Take the small living room and place the white leatherette sofa in the centre. Garnish with the five-year old son, mother

and father each night after they have been to school, work and work, respectively. Add TV liberally.

2. Within three years, the father will begin to bore significantly (skin sagging; eyelids drooping; under-eye areas darkening). As a result, he will start spending more and more nights down the pub, and may sometimes return suspiciously late. This will give the mother the chance to begin doting on the son, and the gradual introduction of fast food will now begin.

3. By the time the son reaches age 10, the father will be home only enough to ensure that he leaves an essence behind when he departs for good. The sofa will have started to colour noticeably by now, becoming cream or yellow in places, and some of the leatherette will have begun to crack. The son will be filling out to around 10 stone and becoming less inclined to move away from the sofa, resulting in a light sprinkling of fast-food packaging across the living-room carpet.

4. When the father finally leaves for good, a dog needs to be added. Breed is not overly important, as long as it is reasonably large and has a good appetite.

5. 'The mother's doting will really start to increase now. She

will start to cling to the son at around 9pm on most nights and begin to melt down emotionally, entering into bouts of laceration. The son (by now 12 years old, 12 stone and a victim of bullying) will take advantage of this dependence by bunking off school to stay at home, watch TV and eat fast food.

6. The mother will seal the doors and windows with padlocks to ensure the son's incarceration, telling him this is for his own safety as they live in a dangerous area. To try and keep cool, the son will often lie naked on the sofa. He will be turning more and more of a milky white, be soaked in a sweaty marinade and have nothing but the fresh towel under him, to prevent his sticking to the crisping leatherette. Crumbs of food will begin seasoning his burgeoning flanks, and the beginnings of an irrepressible aroma. The mother will introduce a cheap oscillating pedestal fan to clear the smell, although the fan's ineffectiveness will instead create more of a gestating effect. The dog's curiosity will lead it occasionally to sniff at and lick the son, and the son's thick, spreading flesh means he will do nothing to prevent this.

7. Once the son reaches 16 and finishes school, he will be 17-18 stone and the mother will encourage him not to work.

She will cook them both a daily breakfast of eggs, bacon and sausages, then padlock the windows and doors before going to work. Her occasional sightings of the father with a younger woman will help to bring a cloying dependence to the surface, and she (by now becoming plumper and senescing lugubriously), will return to the son on her lunch breaks with an assortment of fast food and chocolate-based snacks. Crisps would also be acceptable. This lunchtime process will be repeated in the evening, with lager.

8. The son will steep in front of the TV all day and all evening, with his only distraction the dog, which will begin to make a slow whining sound due to lack of proper food (see step 9). While much of the TV's content will encourage the sedentariness in the son that the mother requires, certain programmes (such as travel shows or sitcoms featuring lovers or close friendships) will infuse him with a sense of deprived liberty. This should now begin to mix with the essence of father so that step 10 develops successfully.

9. The mother's expenditure on fast food for the son, now aged 18 and risen to 25 stone, will have ensured an ongoing short supply of dog food. While the hound will have previously been able to get by living on fast-food leftovers, the son's

ever-swelling appetite will result in less and sometimes no remains. After prolonged periods of whining, the dog's anger will intermittently come to the boil (dashing; growling; barking), before simmering down into whimpering and dejected licking of discarded fast-food packaging, which will be spreading throughout the room in thickening mounds.

10. After another four years of stewing, the son will have reached around 30 stone. Everything is almost ready now – what we are waiting for is a particularly warm July afternoon on which a film about a prison breakout (Papillon; The Great Escape) is on TV. The film's flavour will combine with the essence of father and noise of children playing outside to peel the son away from the sofa, encouraging him to approach a window and attempt to break the padlocks. Unable to do so, the son will wrap the TV in his arms and toss it towards the window. The glass will crumble and the son will try to escape through the frame, but his viscous waves of flesh will prevent this, and he will instead receive a series of cuts, some arterially deep. This will send him back to the sofa, which his blood will begin to dye a pinky orange. The son will eventually pass out, and the dog will start sniffing and licking him, before biting into his leg. Years of inactivity will have given the leg something close to the feel and colour of panna

cotta, and by the time the mother returns from work with the evening's fast food, the ecstatic dog will have got through most of a calf and some thigh. The mother will scream, drop the fast food on the floor, and the dog will go over and begin sampling it. She will then go over to the son and begin her final bouts of lacrimation.

Alternatives

- If you are short of time, use separate leatherette armchairs instead of a sofa to more quickly dilute the family's emotional bonds.
- For a well-aged finish, the roles can be interchanged. The mother can leave the father, who will send the son out to work while he stays at home all day. It will now be the father who ends up being eaten by the dog after drunkenly concussing himself one afternoon.