

The Sensationalist: #16

1/18/23

“Are you on penance-core TikTok, broh?”



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The Pickle Prince and the Tomato Tyrant

(Part 3)

Henry Levitt

The Tomato Tyrant's maniacal laughter echoed in the Pickle Prince's ears. He had known asking for the Plum Princess' hand in marriage was foolish, as Mr. Onion had lamented all the way to the royal court, but he did not expect to be laughed out of the throne hall. Nevertheless, The Tyrant ordered his servants to retrieve the Great Jar and the tallest ladder they could find. Naive youth drowning in

The preserved cucumber rolled his eyes and began his ascent skyward. As the figures below became smaller and the insufferable mocks of the Tomato Tyrant and his circle of peach-kissers grew fainter, the Prince could finally concentrate on his mission. Finally, when he mounted the top of the prodigious jar, he was shocked by the horribly grotesque site that befell his eyes. Half submerged in the top layer of sauce, a full garden of produce princes lay decomposing. The acidity of the sauce had disintegrated limbs and stems and created a twisted mass of vegetable carcasses. "Goddamn that tomato's a charmer!" the Pickle exclaimed to himself.

Without a second thought, the duty-bound pickle confronted his reality and accepted any fate that would follow. He took a deep breath and plunged stem-first into the chunky cess-pit. The crowd below gasped with morose amazement.

Within the sauce, the pickle felt at home for the first time since leaving his beloved Kosher Dill province. It had been too long since he swam in his acid-acuzzi. While most other vegetables cannot stand the acidity of tomato sauce or being submerged in liquid for that long, the Pickle Prince wasn't bothered in the slightest; he had been born

acidic tomato innards was the Tyrant's favorite sporting event, after all.

The Pickle Prince prepared to climb the ladder and brought Mr. Onion in for what could be their last embrace. The Tomato Tyrant sauntered over and taunted the young pickle, "Hey garlic-brain! You really think you're going to live? Har-Har-Har. Remember, all you have to do is bring up the gold ring...oh, and say hi to my daughter's other suitors before you drown up there!"

from acid. Furthermore, the silence was a nice relief from Mr. Onion's endless tirades on the arbitrarily constructed vegetable hierarchy.

As the minutes passed on the outside of the jar, the Plum Princess and Mr. Onion began to grow worried. It shouldn't take this long to retrieve the ring, they whispered amongst each other. As more time passed, rumblings of the Pickle Prince's ultimate fate began to circulate around the crowd.

"I think he got lost in the sauce," whispered some plump nobility.

"Just like all the others...what a horrible fate!" responded a purple heirloom of noble lineage.

"The sauce took another life today,"

Ten minutes had passed and there was still no sign of the prince. The Tomato Tyrant was itching to claim another victory for himself and his enormous jar of sauce (consisting of what was once his political enemies). His plumpness shoved tomatoes away and waddled to the front of the jar. Raising his staff in the air he declared in ecstasy, "The Pickle Prince has been lost in the sauce!" With the exclamation the tyrant brought the staff down hard, causing a rumble to reverberate throughout the entire square.

The Pickle prince felt the thump and thought it wise that he start hurrying up with his challenge. He had been blindly scouring the bottom of the jar for five minutes looking for that god-forsaken ring in vain. While maneuvering to the last unchecked quadrant, he bumped into spherical shape, or corpse rather. At first frightened, the pickle prince examined this victim further. The body was vaguely yellow and presented a sense of derelict greatness. Then, as he moved closer, he saw it--the ring. On the right thumb of this nightshade was a golden ring, scintillating even in the almost pitchblack depths of the jar. Quickly, the prince slipped the ring off the tomato's dead hand. As the Pickle Prince prepared to commence his upward journey he felt another piece of metal, this time much larger, on the tomato's head. It was a crown. A realization reverberated through the Pickle Prince immediately--this wasn't an ordinary old tomato...

Chaos was building in the court. The tyrant's loyalists rejoiced in song and dance while the Plum Princess and Mr. Onion wept unending saltwater springs. Speciously believing that the jar remained undefeated, spectators began to leave. But then, in a marvelous display of power, the Pickle Prince emerged from the sauce and sent a shower of chunky remains down on the crowd. The Tomato Tyrant was flabbergasted.

Wearing the crown of the previous sovereign and presenting the magnificent golden ring, the prince stood victorious on the top of the jar. Much to the Tyrant's dismay, the pickle had survived. And to add insult to injury, he had recovered the crown of the Tyrant's once-bitter enemy.

The spectators went wild. The hopeless Princess and dejected allium couldn't believe their eyes--their friend had beaten the Tyrant's challenge after all.

Pushing to the front of the crowd and trampling a few green tomatoes, the Tyrant attempted to void the Pickle Prince's success: "You may have found the ring, but you were still deemed lost in the sauce! No victory for you," he boomed. Rage swelled up in the prince and he began to yell

down at the deceitful tyrant a myriad of colorful words and phrases. The crowd made a ruckus. Evidently they supported the Pickle Prince in his claim to victory.

To appease his subjects, the Tyrant declared that there must be another challenge to determine the Pickle's worthiness. One challenge of finding a silly ring was much too simple to deem the outsider noble enough to marry the Tyrant's daughter.

After a prolonged huddle with his advisors, the Tyrant presented the Pickle Prince with his next challenge, "You will go to the plains of Rho and slaughter the great beast of the dragon fruit. You will prove your exploit by bringing back a scale. Only then will you be worthy of marrying my daughter."

Despite the Plum Princess' and Mr. Onion's objections, the Pickle Prince was determined to leave that night before sundown. Supplies were readied and the two foreigners were led to the city gates. The Pickle Prince embraced the Plum Princess and gave a most heartfelt farewell. While the Princess believed the Prince would return, the Pickle privately doubted his abilities to slay the prodigious dragon fruit.

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Now our story takes us to the unforgiving Parsley Peaks where the Pickle Prince and Mr. Onion were fighting for their lives.

"Mr. Onion, I don't think we'll make it this time," cried a very cold Pickle. Mr. Onion's morale had run out weeks ago while navigating the endless mountains that separated the Hamburger Kingdom from the Lost Lands. With one final prayer the two collapsed into the deep snow and succumbed to what they believed to be their fate.

However, the next morning the sun's strong rays melted most of the snow and revealed a very cold, albeit alive, pickle and onion. "Mr Onion," The Pickle Prince groaned, "We're alive,"

"I can see the plains now, hallelujah!" For the first time since crossing the mountain peaks into

the Lost Lands, the two were able to see the plains of Rho. Without tempest clouds, they were even able to make out dozens of dragon fruits grazing in the endless flower field.

The journey down, now with complete visibility, took no longer than a few hours and afforded the pair time to warm up after a chilling few days. They finally came into the field and promptly rolled around in the alpine valley vegetation. It had been weeks since they saw the color green (other than the Pickle Prince's complexion, that is). Mr. Onion set up camp while the Pickle Prince went off to study one of the dragon fruits. The plan was to slay the beast on the morrow and climb the mountain while the weather was still clear...

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He didn't know how, but the Pickle Prince suddenly found himself dazed and flat on the ground while Mr. Onion's terrified squeals sounded above him. He looked up and saw a monstrous and grotesque creature above him--it was a dragon fruit.

The fruit, about five pickles in length and two tall, had 13 enormous, magenta scales protecting its elliptical body. Inside its mouth were two huge canines anchored into the bottom jaw and a multitude of sharp teeth protruding from every angle. The beast was swinging a tail that ended in a dense cudgel.

The Pickle Prince remembered instantly his mission, and rose to his feet. He realized he had just been knocked to the ground by the scaly ball on the tail. As he circled the best, sword in hand, he looked for an opening, a chink in the armor. Within the blink of an eye the beast swung around and sent the Pickle flying straight up into the air with a perfectly placed strike right to his abdomen. Once again the Pickle Prince landed hard on the ground and almost forgot about his discovery from the previous evening: dragon fruit have a chink in their armor just behind the scale on the back of their head. Until that moment, the Prince had been unsure as to how

he would maneuver his sword into that exact point, but with his last blow to the chest, he had an idea.

Getting up once more, the Pickle Prince now yelled taunts at the dragon fruit, much to Mr. Onion's dismay. Just as the Pickle expected, the fruit spun around with enormous force and lightning speed and sent his little green body somersaulting high into the air. This time, though, the Pickle Prince controlled his fall. Coming down with enormous force, the Prince brandished his weapon and stabilized his trajectory. To the observer it looked as if the sword plunged, with a flailing pickle attached, straight into the back of the neck of the beast. The action was so perfect--an act of destiny.

The dragon fruit's eyes grew wide with shock. The beast then released a deafening roar before falling lifeless on its side. The Pickle Prince was dumbfounded by the success of his foolish plan. He stood with a blank expression next to the corpse of the beast while Mr. Onion gave the Pickle Prince a tight hug.

"You did it! Now you can marry the Plum Princess and save the Tomato Territories," shouted Mr. Onion with exuberance.

"I-I guess I did. I did! I did it! I slayed the beast!" exclaimed the Prince now fully realizing the consequences of his action. Quickly the pair sliced off the green tips of two scales from the dragon fruit as well as the mace on the end of its tail. Though heavy, the Pickle Prince desired a souvenir from his daring journey.

As luck would have it, the skies remained clear for the whole duration of the trek through the mountains. The two made it to the outskirts of the Tomato Territories in a fraction of the time of the journey to the plains of Rho.

As the heroes came through the gates, they were greeted by delighted tomatoes. They marched straight to the royal court of the Tomato Tyrant to present the scale tips.

"Your plumpness," called out the Pickle Prince. The Tomato Tyrant turned to see his adversary. "I have done what you asked and slayed

the magnificent beast of the dragon fruit, sire. Here are not one, but two scale tips from the beast. As you can see, the dragon fruit is enormous.” The Plum Princess ran through the palace to the royal court. Her eyes welled up with tears of happiness upon seeing her favorite Pickle for the first time in two months. The Tomato Tyrant, though, was not so happy.

He was frankly shocked by the Pickle's success, given the challenge was meant to be an exercise in futility that he hoped would end in death. Quickly, he brainstormed a way out of his promise to the young Prince. The Tomato Tyrant began, “Oh little Pickle, but you have failed. I asked for you to bring a scale from the dragon fruit, which everyone knows is pink. But what have you brought me? A green horn?”

“Oh, please!” begged the Pickle Prince, “Allow me to demonstr-”

“You have done enough! If you truly desire to win my daughter’s hand in marriage, you will complete one last task. This time there is no way you can cheat...” Stated the Tomato Tyrant, clearly enraged.

Once again, the Pickle Prince was confronted with the reality of leaving the city and the Plum Princess behind once more to perform some impossible task. This time, the Tomato Tyrant concocted the most treacherous and time consuming challenge: the Pickle Prince was to build a covered path through the vinegar geyser field. Speciously, the tunnel would provide an important trading route to the Melon Colonies. However, the Tomato Tyrant chose this task knowing that six tomato construction teams had been all but evaporated by the geysers; there was no way the Pickle would survive. Yet the young Prince continued forth.

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Almost a year had passed and the Pickle Prince was still toiling away in the geyser fields. He had almost finished his project. A white washed tunnel, made of salt cubes left over from evaporated

hot springs, meandered through the three mile stretch of the wasteland. Mr. Onion has been boiled and pickled by the geysers at that point. He always wore shades, even at night, and referred to everyone as “dude” or “dudette”.

Finally, the Pickle Prince and Onion Dude, as he was thenceforth called, finished their challenge. They marveled at their work--an enormous tunnel that stretched over the geyser field as far as the eye could see.

When the two returned to the city, there was a different feeling in the air. The inhabitants seemed more unsure of themselves but lighter at the same time. One year and three months had passed since the Pickle Prince last met with the Tomato Tyrant and he was looking forward to this final showdown. As he approached the court, something seemed off. There was none of the usual business and neither the Tomato Tyrant nor the Plum Princess was anywhere to be found.

At long last, a group of robed figures came from out a dark hall and approached the Pickle Prince--it was the grand counsel. “Pickle Prince, we must have a word with you,” they all said in unison. “We regret to inform you that the Tomato Tyrant choked to death on a stem last week. His funeral is being held today. Please attend.”

The Pickle Prince was taken aback, “My greenness! That is horrible! May I ask who will succeed him?”

“Well,” began the counsel, “As it seems you have completed the final challenge, and the Tomato Tyrant cannot give you more, the throne will naturally pass to you and your prospective wife, the Plum Princess.”

The Pickle Prince’s eyes lit up. It was finally the end of his impossible tasks!

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“Dudette, do you take this dude as your husband in plumpness and withering, in love, in all that great stuff, until the end and stuff?” asked the ordained Onion Dude.

“I do,” responded the Plum Princess. “What happened to him?” she whispered to the Pickle Prince, receiving a smirk and a shrug.
“You may kiss the dudette!”

~

The now Plum Queen and Pickle King decreed all the yellow-kind free and led the Tomato Territories in harmony, health, and love forever after.

On Brunch

Henry Levitt

I am writing this to defend myself in lucid and absolute terms against two certain individuals who criticized my definition of this meal while I was enjoying a 3 pm avocado toast. And while I was not able to construct a coherent argument then, I have done much reflecting and I am finally ready to present my view to the critics, along with refutations to objections that I anticipate.

The classical definition of brunch, or brunch purism, is a meal between the hours of approximately 10 am and 2 pm consisting of an amalgam of breakfast and lunch foods, usually served on weekends. And while I do concede that this definition incorporates one avenue of brunch, I argue that it is much too narrow as a definition and does not encompass the true ethos of the meal. My thesis (known as brunch transcendentalism) is that brunch is an idea that has few criteria for its time of commencement and contents and instead hinges on the context and manner in which the meal is intended to be enjoyed. To be more specific: brunch is a leisurely meal where the emphasis is not on the rapid satiation of the carnal desire. Instead, both the sustenance and period of time ought to be relished in a relaxed social setting with little to no time constraints to allow for rejuvenation; it compliments the rest after periods of stress and/or activity (i.e, a long week, a night out, etc.). Naturally, the food must align with this goal, hence why breakfast foods are great options, though the food can consist of almost anything that maintains the ethos of brunch (more on this later). In essence, brunch is a special event. It transcends the eating itself and represents an event designed to facilitate dawdling¹.

I do understand my purist opponents’ confusion on this considering a weekend meal in the late morning to early afternoon usually provides an exemplar excuse for this activity of

¹ concise definition: a leisurely, social meal after a period of rest consisting of foods designed to be consumed slowly

leisure. However, there is a reason for the frequent alignment between the true brunch ethos and its classical definition. I will explain through objections and refutations why this is the case while supporting brunch transcendentalism. Before that however, I will include a brief discussion on the genesis of this meal and its evolution from the original definition, to the classical definition, and finally to its true definition.

The word brunch, and arguably the idea, too, was conceived by British writer Guy Beringher in an 1895 article and represents a stroke of genius within the Western dining canon. I recommend everyone read his article which I will include at the end of this essay. It is worth mentioning that Beringher's original definition differs slightly from the purist interpretation due to the commercialization of dining, but also crucially outlines the purpose of such a meal, "Brunch, on the contrary, is cheerful, sociable, and inciting. It is talk compelling. It puts you in a good temper; it makes you satisfied with yourself and fellow beings. It sweeps away the worries and cobwebs of the week." This excerpt flawlessly encompasses the metaphysical aspect of the ethos of brunch. Beringher also states that brunch is inherently a Sunday meal. And while the "purest" form of brunch may follow the Sunday midday format, it is far from the only way to enjoy brunch.

Sunday inherency will be the first objection that I take aim at. Sunday is the most popular brunch day only because it is the primary day devoted to rest within Western culture. This means that Sunday most easily facilitates brunch transcendentalism, though any day can do so long as a state of leisure and cheeriness (with little time constraints) can be obtained.

The next objection, and perhaps the most vehement of my critics, is that brunch must occur at a specific time of day. Their strongest, and perhaps most compelling argument is that the word "brunch" is a portmanteau formed through the combination of "breakfast" and "lunch". This, they would exclaim, must mean that the meal, too, must fall between or within the period of time of these two meals. However, I push back against this with an observation that on days with few to none required tasks, the usual schedule of rest and meal times disintegrates in favor of an organic eating schema where words like "breakfast", "lunch", and "dinner" are mere suggestions or approximations rather than stringent categories. And it is only on these idle days can brunch truly occur. Because the categories of meals have dissolved, a more accurate way to define brunch is necessary, hence the new ethos of brunch that I have presented. Furthermore, in our modern society, there are even fewer universal requirements of hours one must be awake due to the nature of certain occupations and preferences; there is more temporal variation afforded to days of leisure. Finally, consistent with my definition, so long as a period of inactivity precedes brunch, which can occur at virtually any time, the meal

is capable of mirroring the classical definition in spirit--which is the only distinction that matters.

The last objection I will be addressing deals with the type of food present at brunch. Brunch Purists will contend, again due to the constituents of the word in question, that brunch ought to be an amalgam of the two meals. However, congruent with the true definition of brunch, I maintain that the food ought not to be of a specific variety or group, but instead it must be capable of a leisurely consumption. Food enjoyed at room temperature or within an acceptable deviation warmer or cooler therein represent the best candidates. Furthermore, multiple courses of relatively lavish and lighter fare is ideal for achieving extraordinary enjoyment and sociability of the meal. This is why mixtures between breakfast and lunch often comprise the greatest category of brunch foods, though any combination of foods that enable the previously-described, leisured and gregarious environment will do.

Now that I have satisfactorily quelled the most potent objections, I invite my adversaries to raise any more issues they may have with my description of the true brunch ethos.

I want to finish this dispute by asserting that I am unequivocally a champion of brunch. I believe that it is unparalleled and ought to be appreciated at least once a week for optimal physical and mental health. Brunch transcends all arbitrary boundaries we create and affords a vital period of dawdling and renewal that is essential to the human experience. Brunch purism, as opposed to brunch transcendentalism (of which I am a proud member), does not allow for the true, unadulterated enjoyment and fulfillment of the meal. Purists deny and deprive us of this exceptional event through whimsical technicalities they impose on our collective brunch indulgence. For this reason, and all those previously presented, I urge all to become brunch transcendentalists and preserve this last bastion of mealtime merriment.

City at Night

Thaddeus Basil Smith

Hold fast,
the neon daydream
of American culture.
When will we ever learn
that violence
does not create equals?
Never.
I have seen
the minds of rabid
learners and creators
destroyed
by the ever present ping
of America's pin.
What do we call ourselves
wrapped in false silks
stolen from other peoples?
An amalgam.
A mosaic.
We do not have an identity
that is not already created
by someone else.
I wonder if we ever will.
Until then,
I will flounder
and fumble,
until I have learned
that which a hero deserves.

The American Dream.
What a mission.
Who knows
who can screw others over
through omission,
submission to our system,
or psychiatric care?
I wonder if there are
other things out there.
Who knows?
Not the complacent.
For our type is the lonely,
sullen,
hopeless,
and ever present,
Americant.
Grieve those who
with silver tongue deceive
the great order
to which we adhere.
Those who dream
of high peaks,
and lower lows;
of dusky sights,
no one knows.
When will we learn?

Football-Fan Conversion Therapy Camp

(Submitted to UGA Campus Newspaper)

I want to preface this article with the fact that I almost did not write it due to concerns for my personal welfare. However, my fear of being locked in a pillory in front of the Athens Ben and Jerry's was assuaged when I realized that the Red and Black is frequented (though frequent may be the wrong word) chiefly by relocated alumni and equally football-apathetic students as me...

This editorial comes fast on the heels of our National Championship Win and is therefore its least or most salient--I'll let you be the judge of that. Despite the publication date of this article, I lament my apathy towards football all year round. And against my best efforts, including choosing to enroll at the University with the top football program in the nation and residing in a town where fall weekends practically revolve around the sport, I have found that I still can not give a single shit about football--not one. This has been extremely disheartening to me in my college career as my peers all seem to revel in game-day exuberance.

Recently I have come to a conclusion: I cannot learn to care about football by myself. I cannot learn to love waiting in lines for hours only to wait more in a giant metal bowl underneath the scorching sun while surrounded by hordes of sweaty college students. And when the game finally starts, I find it difficult, nay impossible, to care enough about strong men running at each other and inflicting traumatic brain injuries on one another in order to stop a weirdly shaped brown ball from moving down the field enough to stay for an entire four quarters. I actually think it's a miracle that I've managed to find enough will to stand for close to four hours and watch something so immensely unentertaining. So, I've decided I need help--namely from a football-fan conversion therapy camp to ignite my love for the sport.

Unfortunately football-fan conversion therapy camps have come under fire in recent years with some state legislatures even going so far as to ban the practice altogether. This is likely due to the severe psychological distress they impart on non-sport-minded folk. Furthermore, there is little evidence to suggest that such camps are even capable of achieving their purported goal; resistance to sport-viewing hysteria may actually be an unchanging character trait. Nevertheless, I intend to enroll in the conversion camp so that my stubborn identity as a non-football fan is crushed like a graham cracker in the hands of a rambunctious four year-old. I hope that a burly caricature of a middle school gym coach pulverizes my partiality to pedagogical pursuits and instills in me a certain reverence for gridlines, goalposts, and game managers.

Yes, I know that football-fan conversion therapy camps are an extreme measure to cure my problem, but it is the last resort. I cannot continue living in shame caused by my sheer boredom by the game of football. I have been ostracized for far too long. Something must change.

At the camp, I will apply myself in every activity until not even a semblance of my past non-football fan self remains. When I return, I hope to take delight in watching Bulldogs football alongside all of you readers.

There is quite a difficult path ahead of me, but I am determined to succeed in converting my identity. I would like to thank everyone for their continued support in helping me care about football. The next time you hear from me I will be a changed man.

Sincerely,
Henry Levitt

Two poems about the intuitive heart

James Hooker

7/7/2022

Trust the gut of the universe:
It knows all because
it has consumed all
Everything beyond the veil
is also veil
Until you focus
on the intuitive heart inside
And watch it get ripped apart
Just to lay open-
Trials by fire.

11/11/22

Ah...so
So here we are:
Empty of our separation
All ears for the lover
Listening close to the pitter-patters of the intuitive heart
Swaying this way or that, gently tugging, an open brochure
Read the fine print closely
All the instructions are there:
How to find a home inside
How to hear what it is
This body must do
While I'm sitting here
Just sitting, so lovely
And watching the dance go on, the wheels turning
The old man's hands withered and decaying
just as they should be.
Driving the car to go visit friends and also destroy innocent lives
in places that just so happen to be rich with oil
Man of oil-
He has many faces and limbs. And all of us,
Lost children
Running straight into his open, loving arms to horrible endings.
Every possible pain
every possible scrutinization
are all ours to share.

Rust

L.K. McDonald

*The ashes of the aftermath float in the wind
The smell of smoke surrounds the air
The crying and wailing of the ones left behind
The loss and grief everywhere
The red rust on the metal left standing
Just like the rust on my heart
My soul yearns for inner peace
But I don't know where to start
The oxygen has touched my iron heart
The rust slowly takes hold
It slowly spreads to my entire being
And I didn't know it be this cold
The sirens off in the distance
As my empty eyes view this ravaged land
My hollowed body yearns for existence
But I know that it isn't planned
My destiny lies in being wasted
My destiny lies in being numb
Slowly left to rust and rot
And it's a destiny I can't get away from*

Remembering Sardinia

Frankie Vinehardt III

I remember my first summer in Sardinia...As we approached the rocky shoreline, the aggressive mediterranean sun washed out the colors from normally radiant tufts of evergreen growth, royally blue waves, and heroic pillars of dolomite, uncle and proud. It was this introduction to the beautiful isle that always stuck with me in the following summers since that majestic experience. Life in Sardinia always felt softened, washed out. Not without emotion, but always tempered. Contentment was ever-present and depression far removed, unlike the subliminal backbone that seemed ubiquitous within my life back home. Sardinia never changed. It has felt nostalgic since I saw the island for the first time. The seagulls swooping in flashes of white and gray toward the barnacle-encrusted bow. Just like the seagulls were filled with this joy by the island, I too was filled with a lighthearted emotion and the urge to meander through the rocky coastline or plunge into the exhilaratingly cool lagoons. Life felt drained of the darkness, of the vibrance of the real world. There were no worries in Sardinia.

This has been The Sensationalist: #16

“The enlightened man will never surrender his knowledge no matter how much suffering it has brought him”