

Artistic antidote  
Rebecca Grossman-Kahn

What is getting you through these days?

I ask this to faces caged in little rectangles on my computer. Postage stamp-sized faces in dim light, in dark bedrooms, on bedspreads and in parked cars.

*A new jigsaw puzzle, they tell me. I splurged on a new pair of fuzzy socks.*

In the late afternoon, after I overenthusiastically wave goodbye and close the tiny shutter on my laptop camera, I find solace in taking a pasta making class. The simplicity of mixing just two ingredients to form a mass—flaky, sticky, shedding flour. I knead the craggy dough until it is smooth and elastic. I learn to cut small pieces off a rope of dough, and squish and drag each nub of dough against a surface until it furls into a little hollow. The task is repetitive, satisfying, little pasta potato bugs dancing across the board. This gets me through long days of telemedicine in my cold home office.

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*I'm window shopping online," a patient tells me wistfully. I overflow my virtual cart with every lovely, expensive item I want, and then "x" out the fantasy when it's time to start making dinner.*

Seven full months into the pandemic, a Friday night. My partner looks at me, and deadpans: "I dunno, maybe we should just stay in tonight?" I don't know why but I can't stop laughing.

The joke gets me through the next three weekends.

*I'm getting really good at Sudoku. I'm rediscovering my love of old Westerns. I watch the squirrels playing outside my window. They distract me.*

Last summer, I booked a campsite for one night. Close to the cities. Tent under the trees. Nylon hammock under the stars. Smell of smoke stuck in my hair. Irregular party lights of fireflies blinking above. Cool blues pastel pink sunset over the hill. The shock of two iridescent yellow eyes, peering at me from the forest. The thrill of a harmless scare.

*Mystery novels and gummy fruit snacks, an adult patient sheepishly confides. I discovered they're a perfect combination.*

An article about baking bread in Lyon, France. It was a small gift, to open a magazine and enter a world of yeast, early mornings, salty French characters, a messy kitchen, *pain au chocolat*. It came out months ago, when I couldn't read anything else about the virus. I imagined editors fighting over email over whether to still publish essays about pastries, in the midst of 2020. How could they? How could they not? We need it. I needed it.

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