

All the Wild Hungers: A Season of Cooking and Cancer

Karen Babine

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Achingly sad and incredibly beautiful, Karen Babine's *All the Wild Hungers* is a welcoming invitation to dinner, family, and laughter, evoking a warm, full kitchen and good company.

The essays follow Babine through the discovery and subsequent treatment of her mother's unique cancer, showing how spending time in the kitchen became a way for Babine to show her love. Cooking is a form of meditation, and sometimes a distraction, as Babine powers through this new obstacle.

The book is replete with style. The chemistry of cooking and the science of cancer are examined in comforting comparisons. Brief chapters read like poetry, with symbolism and metaphors peppered throughout.

As Babine cooks, she ties everything together. Family history is explained through cultural and hereditary influences, and it bleeds into each recipe, ingredient, and technique. Seasonality affects ingredients and recipes, holiday cooking and family gatherings dictate menu selections, and as the weather chills, these changes parallel her mother's chemotherapy treatments.

As inanimate objects take on new life, Babine's mother's illness and body become opposingly inanimate, closer to computer hardware than familiar flesh and bones. Chemistry is the unknown; cancer is the unknowable. Learning to cook is learning to cope with the unknown—with the things she cannot see, cannot help with, and cannot understand about her mother's illness.

Every detail in *All the Wild Hungers* has meaning and weight or a connection to a memory, and Babine takes the scenic route to get there—speaking softly but with force on issues including money-hungry polluters, choosing to remain childless, and modern medicine. Snippets from intellectuals like Soren Kierkegaard and culinary touchstone Julia Childs are an entertaining addition.

With emotion and details, colors, seasons, smells, traditions, history, love, and family are made to intertwine in *All the Wild Hungers*, whose pages impart pangs of sorrow and of hunger.

KATIE ASHER (January/February 2019)

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