

drawn above his lip, like Rhet Butler or Martin Luther King, Jr.—two of my biggest crushes. He catches me staring and smiles at me, just like my Paw Paw would. Then he casually takes a big juicy black plum out of a plastic bag in his cart and inserts the whole thing in his mouth. I can't believe he just did that. I have to turn around.

Three seconds later, he sets a plum pit, slurped perfectly clean, on the candy rack just at my eye level, next to the Chuckles. Then he does it again. Another wet plum pit next to the first, then another, and another. He's spreading germs! He's stealing! I need to report it to the police!

I move forward and tug on my dad's belt loop and whisper, "Dad! Dad!" He turns around, already annoyed from having to wait in line for so long.

"What?"

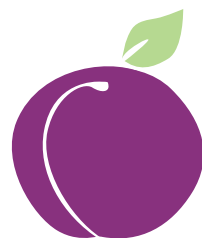
"The man behind us is stealing plums!"

I motion toward the man with my head and point at the collection of sticky pits on the shelf, but my dad only sighs, rolls his eyes, and says, "You need to learn to mind your own business."

"But! But, Dad!"

He turns around.

I feel burnt. I feel stupid. My cheeks are hot. I'm confused. I'm embarrassed. I'm mad. I sneak a look back at the plum man (who now doesn't remind me of my Paw Paw *at all*), but he isn't looking at me anymore. He's looking up at the store ceiling like nothing ever happened, humming along to "Billy, Don't Be a Hero" coming out of the round silver speaker. 🍷



Kelly Hogan is a singer and writer whose most recent solo album is I Like to Keep Myself in Pain.

PHOTO, PAGE 8 by *Kate Medley*.



COCA-COLA FUDGE CAKE

by *Laura Lippman*

Bestselling novelist Laura Lippman, creator of private eye Tess Monaghan, has won every major award in crime fiction. She usually sets her work in or around Baltimore, though her Georgia roots shine through in this recipe.

—JP

THIS RECIPE FOR COCA-COLA FUDGE CAKE has been in my family for years and I am no longer clear on its origins. I always thought it came from one of those old-fashioned group projects that schools and neighborhoods used to do, and that it might be from the Lovett School in Atlanta, which my first cousin attended. But maybe not. One thing I know for sure is that it is important not to gussy it up, although I feel bad about using margarine these days and sometimes substitute real butter, a sentence that encapsulates something important about the times in which we live, although I'm not sure what it is.

Whenever I tell people—well, non-Southerners—about Coca-Cola Fudge Cake, they say "Ewwww." When I serve it to them, they ask for seconds. And the recipe.

In Richard Bradford's novel *Red Sky at Morning*, there is a scene in the first chapter where the narrator's mother is asked for her ham recipe. The narrator, her son, recounts:

'There's really nothing to it,' said Mother. 'The trick is, you're supposed to warm the Coca-Cola before you pour it over the ham. Then you just keep basting. Lacey got it right the first time I showed her how.' The son, clearly not a fan, thinks: 'Yeah, she got it right, and she still cries every time she has to pour Coca-Cola over a country ham. You messed up the best cook anybody ever had, and I'm glad she's got a good job at the compass factory. They don't float that old needle in Coca-Cola.'

I love *Red Sky at Morning*, but I think Bradford is unduly harsh here. Or maybe it's Joshua. I'm always telling people not to think that I share the opinions of every character in my novels.

Coca-Cola Fudge Cake

Put 2 cups flour, 2 cups sugar, and 1 teaspoon baking soda in a mixing bowl. In a saucepan, put 2 sticks margarine, 2 heaping tablespoons of cocoa, and 1 cup Coca-Cola. Bring to a boil. Pour over dry ingredients; mix thoroughly. Add 2 eggs, 1 teaspoon vanilla, 1/2 cup buttermilk, and 2 cups miniature marshmallows. Bake in two eight-inch aluminum pans at 350° Fahrenheit for 40–45 minutes.

While the cake is still hot, make the icing by bringing 2 heaping tablespoons cocoa, 1 stick of margarine and 2 ounces of Coca-Cola to a boil. Add 1 box confectioner's sugar and 1 teaspoon vanilla; spread over cake. If it hardens too quickly, add a few drops of Coca-Cola. If it's runny, add more confectioner's sugar or even cornstarch. I've had more runny ones than hard ones. Please don't use that sentence out of context.

The cake freezes beautifully, which is why I recommend using disposable aluminum pans. 🍷

A NEW BREED LITTLE ROCK ROADKILL

A story by Jeff McNeil

