**SWEET ONION SOUP WITH CARAWAY AND CROUTONS**

I have always adored onions. Like some of my favorite people in the world, they are not so likeable at first, but if you break though the bitter armor, you find they are sincerely sweet underneath. The trick to making something as simple as an onion into an amazing soup is in using a bit of butter and slow-cooking the onions to bring out their natural sugar. Your nose will tell you how you’re doing, as it often does with good cooking. Trust your senses, young Jedi. Serves 6

¼ pound (1 stick) unsalted butter

1½ pounds sweet onions, cut into ½-inch-thick slices

1 cup minced celery

1 sprig fresh thyme

1 sprig fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 bay leaf

3 cups chicken stock

1 cup heavy cream

Kosher salt

1 cup finely diced rye bread

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

1 teaspoon caraway seeds, toasted

1 In a heavy, medium-size pot, melt the butter over medium heat, and when it bubbles and froths, add the sliced onions. Cook the onions for 30 – 40 minutes, stirring regularly, until they have colored a bit, but most importantly, until they smell truly delicious. Add the celery and cook for 5 more minutes. Then bundle up the thyme, parsley, and bay leaf in some kitchen twine and toss that in, too. Add the chicken stock, increase heat to bring to a boil, and turn heat down to simmer for 10 minutes. Stir in the cream. Season with kosher salt to taste, and remove the herb bundle. Remove the pot from the heat, remove the herb bundle from the soup, and get ready to puree.

2 Set up your blender with a clean pot next to it, and rest a conical sieve in the pot. Arm yourself with a small ladle for pushing the soup through the sieve into said clean pot. Puree the soup in batches, and pour it through the sieve into the pot. (You can omit the straining if you want to go in a more rustic direction.) Taste the soup and adjust seasoning with salt if necessary.

3 In a small bowl, toss the bread cubes with the olive oil. Place them in a small sauté pan and toast over medium-high heat until crisp. You will want to watch this process closely, because the difference between cooking croutons to a successful golden brown and burning the heck out them is nary a minute or so. When they are done to your liking, remove from the heat and reserve.

4 Ladle the hot soup into bowls, and garnish each one with a pinch of toasted caraway and some croutons. Eat.