

challah, adapted.

1 1/2 cups warm water, divided.

if you asked me to paint this year (and i wouldn't recommend that you do), it would be in the form of liquids. no solids.

1/4 + 2 teaspoons sugar, divided.

no lemons, just vessels. lined up like some kind of dim, nativity scene.

2 tablespoons instant (powdered) yeast.

this was the year that a virus ate through our cities. told us to rise just enough to knock them back down.

6 cups flour — either all white or half white, half whole wheat.

these were the days that bound us together. held us stitched together by keeping us apart.

2 teaspoons salt.

this is the year we forgot how to swipe metro cards, tip bartenders, taste City without diluting it first.

1/4 cup mild honey, plus an extra tablespoon for egg wash, if desired.

but these are the days that reminded us to look out for those we often look over, look under. to find calmness in the chaos, even once the sun has started to set.

2/3 cup flavorless vegetable or canola oil.

each day, we are reminded to feel the wind — she has not yet stopped blowing.

4 eggs, plus one yolk for egg wash, if desired.

we are moving forward, for those of us who should be so lucky. there is new each day. take apart what you are able to hold onto — let go of the rest.

Put 1 cup warm water in a small bowl. Add 2 teaspoons of sugar, sprinkle the yeast over top, swirl the bowl just to combine, and leave it to proof for five minutes.

we wash our reflections, again and again, recalling only briefly what it feels like to recognize completely. we stare. try to fill in the missing pieces.

While yeast is proofing, mix flour, salt, 1/4 cup of sugar, in a large bowl. Stir to incorporate or blend on low speed.

we rearrange. alter. white out the places where our faces gave a little too much away. and then we snap back. and the world, just as ever, is an increasingly fragile and fragile place.

In a medium bowl, mix remaining water, honey, oil, and eggs.

we remain holy, holy, still. learning to blend together the parts of ourselves that we have long since forgotten, whether consciously, or otherwise.

When yeast has finished proofing, add it to the flour, immediately followed by wet ingredients. Mix with a large wooden spoon, just until combined, about 30 seconds. *we remind ourselves that this is the year for growth. i have chosen to redefine what that means. i have blended myself in with the hardwood floors in my home. have interwoven my doubts into a tapestry that hangs above my bed. i only buy food that tastes like paper masks, now. rinse it all clean, they say. you can't have your city back until you do.*

Stir using spoon until dough becomes too thick to stir. Empty dough onto well-floured surface and knead by hand. Knead dough until smooth and no longer sticky, adding flour with a light hand as needed, 7-10 minutes.

time spent in the form of: brine, tolstoy, rubber gloves, subtitles, bolognese sauces.

Split the dough into two equal pieces. Set each in a large oiled bowl, cover both bowls with plastic wrap or damp towel, and let rise at room temperature until doubled in size. *lately, we feel less and less ourselves and more and more like basket cases. strung together by silly little sonnets and half hearted prose. this is what the now feels like.*

Preheat oven to 375.

i thank the sun each day, for she is holding me steady.

Braid.

tuck the different parts of yourself together, and fold them neatly into the pockets of your winter coats. store them somewhere, for now, and unpack them once this fleetingly fractured way of being has come together once again. it is coming, slowly, like molasses.

Bake for 20-22 minutes, until challot are golden and baked through.

believe in the myths and believe in the truths. there are no saints in this mess, only humans. saints, we do not know enough about. humans, we have met our flaws. these profound flaws do not, and should not, keep you from doing. we provide sanctuary to golden players in the game, those who have been prepared to demonstrate their courage. kiss remembrance into your coffee mugs, and hold tightly onto your paperback pages. these are the parts of the Cities that are keeping me grounded.

-sofy maxman