

## **Familiar Scent**

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Oneness between the cook and the ingredients can be recognized by a simple scent.

Nine year old me would wear goggles when watching my mother cut onions; her hands moving with delicacy from years of experience, chopping each part completely unfazed. That effortlessness ingrained itself into me, as I ultimately dropped the need for accessories and upheld discipline against the strength that onions brought to my eyes. Though our eyes might've stung, we never complained.

It fills the air as we cook, so we close our closet doors tightly and keep the windows open—a quiet ritual passed down to keep the strong scents from settling into our clothes and haunting our rooms. Regardless of our efforts, the scent lingers in the halls, filling up the empty voids. It's stubborn. But that's okay, it brings warmth to our home as familiarity is one's strongest sense of comfort. And when we close the closets, it's not out of shame but out of respect, for the routine of onions to claim a space and announce their promise of a fulfilling dish.

Often, both of my environments clash. I have my American side, which puts less emphasis on onions, while my Ethiopian side values them as the heart of the meal. They are the beginning of my favorite dishes, ranging from Doro Wat to Tibs, recipes that consistently follow years of traditions. There's no emotion that they aren't able to appeal to. Seemingly fitting every mood—whether annuals, festivities, or funerals—that scent will always strengthen the presence of community, and the love that was put into making it is recognizable and heart-felt.

Never excluded from the grocery list, it has been a scent I grew up learning to tolerate and appreciate, a scent my mother has brought with her to preserve the cultures of back home. At the center of many memories, good and bad, the act of cooking is complemented by this one ingredient. We start every dish by chopping onion pieces in a gushing pan of oil before being joined by garlic and spices. Even as tears stream down our faces, we conserve it, as it is a process that places value onto our meals, and allows the cycle to continue.

The sharp stinging of the once unbearable onions has taught me that life's bitterness is not meant to be permanent. To cry eventually softens, much like the moments in life that seem unbearable but, as time passes, leave us stronger and wiser. It has always been, "Worth the tears," I'd say.