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Opening extract from

How to Cook Children

Written by

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Esmelia says Erzulie Bumbumbaya's Cherub Gumbo is like a thick soup with lots of slippery, wriggling things in and eyes peeping out at you. Lovely. I don't like her at all though. She's a mad old biddy what lives in a shack in the middle of swamp. Her only friend is a zombie chicken what she brought back from the dead by accident. She calls it The Baron. That chicken is just impossible to kill and I should know, I tried to wring its neck a dozen times.

Cajun Cherub Gumbo

Maman Bumbumbaya

This here Gumbo is full of fun magic of a kind I done made up myself. I calls it Doodoo Magic. Now Doodoo is a little bit like old Voodoo, except it smells bad, just like the Gumbo. Them Voodoo folks, they sticks pins in little dollies that's supposed to look like people, but I reckon it's a dang sight more powerful to stick them pins in the actual folks themselves. Ain't a spell in the world as good as someone you've taken a disliking to walking around full of pins. They sure as dang know they're in deep Doodoo.

You can make the Gumbo with any old boy or girl child. Down here in the swamp I can't afford to be fussy. It ain't easy findin' a child, but every now and again the alligators snatches one off the riverbank and I just jump on that 'gator's back and punch it until that varmint lets go...



Ingredients

A cherub. Try and get one that the alligators ain't chewed too much.

Swamp water. You want about ten buckets full, making sure you gets the dark brown ooze as well as the green slimy stuff floating on top.

All kinds of slithering swamp creatures. You should have poisonous whiskery things with hundreds of legs, great big poisonous snakes, poisonous frogs, poisonous clams and whatever else you happen to find that day that looks as though it'd give you one big bellyache.

Laddies' fingers. The ones you want are fresh off little boy children and should have dirty fingernails on the end. Mind you, I have had good results from Ladies' Fingers, too. Just make sure you take the rings off or you might break a tooth.

Method

1 Pour the swamp water into a big cauldron and simmer for hours, stirring now and then to make sure the ooze doesn't settle at the bottom. While it's boiling I like to throw the Baron in with a rock tied to his legs. He don't mind and it gives the water the subtle flavour of zombie cockerel.

2 In the meantime, get your wriggling bag of swamp creatures. Take off all the bits that look nasty to eat – wings, claws, heads, whiskers, teeth, and all that. These are the bits you'll be wanting. The rest you can throw out or feed to the alligators. Make a separate pile of eyeballs.

3 Chuck all the squirmy things into the pot with the Laddies' Fingers. Now's the time to add the child. I always toss a couple of snakes in, too. It helps with the flavour, but more importantly, it's a dang good cackle watching the child being chased around the pot.

4 Now let the Gumbo bubble gently for about three days. You can lean over it mumbling strange sounding spells and summoning the spirit of Chatanooga Choo Choo if you likes, it's all part of the Doodoo.

5 The Gumbo is done when the leaves on the trees around have gone brown and birds flying overhead start dropping out of the sky. To serve, garnish with eyeballs. You may want to push some of them under so you gets a nice surprise when you finds them staring out of your bowl. Also one or two live frogs or snakes, squirming around on the bottom don't go amiss. And maybe a little cheese grated on top.



