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Pomegranate-Braised Beef Cheeks with Butternut-Squash Puree

Recipe adapted from Cathy Erway

Makes 4 to 6 servings

- 5 pounds beef cheeks, trimmed of excess fat and cut into equal pieces
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 2 to 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 large carrot, chopped
- 1 celery stalk, chopped
- 2 cups Chianti (or other dry red wine)
- 2 cups pomegranate juice
- 1 large butternut squash
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- ½ cup heavy cream
- Fresh pomegranate seeds, for garnish

1. Prepare the beef cheeks: Pat the meat dry. Season with salt and pepper on all sides and dredge in a light coating of flour. Heat the oil in a Dutch oven over high heat. Shake off excess flour and place the beef cheeks in a single layer on the bottom of the pot (working in batches, if necessary), browning the cheeks on each side until they are lightly golden. Remove the beef cheeks and set aside.
2. Preheat the oven to 325°. Place the onion, carrot and celery in the pot, adding more oil if the bottom is very dry, and sweat over low heat until softened, about 6 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the pot. Return the beef cheeks to the pot; add the wine and one cup of the

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pomegranate juice. Bring just to a boil, stirring. Cover and transfer to the oven for 3 to 4 hours.

3. Prepare the squash: Slice the squash in half lengthwise and scoop out the seeds. Generously oil a baking sheet and place the squash halves on the sheet cut side down. Roast for about 1 hour while the beef cheeks are braising, or until the tops are soft to the touch and the flesh underneath is tender throughout. Let cool, then, using a spoon, scrape out the flesh from the skins. Transfer the squash to a saucepan and add the butter, cream and a couple pinches of salt while stirring over medium heat. Using a hand blender, process until smooth.
4. Remove the beef cheeks from the oven and return the pot to the stovetop. With a slotted spoon, transfer the beef to a separate dish. Add the remaining cup of pomegranate juice and reduce the sauce by half.
5. For each serving, arrange the beef cheeks on a plate with a scoop of the squash puree and top with a ladle or two of the sauce. Garnish with fresh pomegranate seeds and serve.