

## A Dissertation On Food

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There is something so satisfying about watching a hungry man eating when you have enough to feed him. The other day I leaned back in my chair and watched the Big Boss really "going to town" on the meal I had set before him. When I cook, I am very like the old lady who said, "I can't abide these pickish eaters. I like to see folks relish their vittles," and this day the combination of his morning's hard work and his conception of the perfect meal produced a most gratifying response to my efforts. Everyone has his or her own idea about food and just what combination constitutes the most delightful meal. This day had given him that which he really considers the acme of perfection: ham and rich cream gravy, baked potatoes, sauerkraut, hot biscuits with butter and boysenberry jelly, and to finish it all off, there was an early apple pie with the rich juice bubbling through a flaky brown crust. When he finished with the food and leaned back to light a cigarette to go with his third cup of coffee, he looked at me with the warmth of affection that most husbands seem to show only when they are stuffed to the gills.

I don't think it is really necessary to be a good cook to get a man, but I certainly do hold that if you want to keep him for a life-time, the ability to cook, and cook what he likes, is far better than a ball and chain, a bear-cage or the latest thing in clothes and nail-polish. Sometimes I am

inclined to believe that a man falls in love with a gal through his eyes and his emotions, but he stays in love with her through his stomach. But then maybe I am old-fashioned.

Nevertheless, it is my belief that the best way of taming any animal, human or otherwise, is by food. Have you ever come into a kitchen on a cold rainy day feeling at outs with the whole darn world and practically hating your fellowman, to be met by the rich warm odor of freshly baked bread and spicy tang of cookies and the subtle mouth-watering aroma of meat roasting in its own rich juices? If you have never had this experience, then you have really missed knowing just what the fragrance of food can do in the way of eradicating the kinks from life. And if you can persuade the cook to let you cut the brown crusty heel from a fresh hot loaf, spread it with butter and apple jelly and to sneak a glass of creamy milk from the refrigerator—well, brother, that really "sends" you.

Sometimes, in the present day, one who can remember bygone years suffers from food-nostalgia. When I am foolish enough to let my mind slip back to my mother's day and recall the lovely fragrance of a fat hen simmering in the big kettle surrounded with the luscious dumplings that only mother could make (and I have never been able to reach her peak of perfection in dumplings), or see in my mind's eye the ten-pound roast of fat tender beef being basted with its rich brown juice in the oven, when I remember the rows of bubbling crusty hot pies set to cool on the pantry shelf—excuse me, please, while I take a few moments out to weep bitter tears of longing. And can you remember the hams, baked whole and wearing a thick crust of brown sugar dotted all over with fat cloves, to be used merely for "snacks" during the Christmas season, since there was the turkey, etc., for the piece de resistance? And the huge platters of crusty fried chicken? On Saturdays my mother used to say to my dad, "I think you had better kill me three fryers today so I can get them ready for tomorrow." Then she would stop and think a moment. "No," she would finish, "you had better make it five or six. I am expecting some folks to come home from church with us and I always like to have plenty left for the children's table." Nowadays you set the children down with their elders and let them take their chance of getting the neck, or a drumstick (if they are lucky), from the one chicken on the small platter, and you save up for a month to buy a two-pound roast and give the deadly eye to anyone who dares

ask for a second piece, and when it comes to steak—phooey, you have to be a bloody bloomin' plutocrat to ever come to steak, so why talk about steak.

Furthermore, unexpected company just before dinner in that long-ago time didn't put a wild, harried light into the cook's eye as it does in the present. Mother would simply push the plates closer together, shove up some extra chairs, trot about in the pantry getting out some special pickles, jams and relishes, bring out another pie or two, and call them in to the table. Now, you put on a stiff smile of welcome and hope you don't look as worried as you feel, excuse yourself and tear into the kitchen, yank your dollar's worth of meat out of the safe-deposit box in the refrigerator, look at its meager proportions, cut it into even more minute sections, beat them flat, dip 'em in egg and bread-crumbs to make the pieces look a bit larger, then hunt out your smallest platter to serve them on in order to give an impression of quantity. And how the heck can you bring any special jellies, etc., out of the pantry when there are none, special or otherwise, in it?

Yep, the food situation in these days is certainly making it difficult for wives to keep what they captured, for though conditions

change, men don't. And how can any woman keep the love-light burning (in his stomach) when she has to slap his hands when he reaches for the last tiny fragment of meat left on the platter because she has to keep that piece for making stew for the next meal. And as for those pies that really keep the flame glowing, alas, pies take shortening and sugar—and where, oh where, is the shortening and sugar? There seems little left for us to use as an anchor in the matrimonial seas but nail-polish and a cheerful smile. Maybe these can hold 'em, but I "hae me doots."



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