



Dear Mr. MacHlavan
May I tempt you with a meal?

I loved the names like "Delight" and "Surprise." Small, stemmed glasses filled with jewel-like melon balls floating in ginger ale. Thin soft bread with the crusts trimmed off, cut into circles, squares, diamonds, and half moons, topped with seasoned spreads. Tiny bright garnishes. Straws made of cheese. Fluffy stuffings. A juice called nectar. I went to sleep dreaming of cocktails, hors-d'oeuvres, and canapés.

As I slept, the chef spoke to me.

MIX SAVORY AND SWEET TOGETHER;
Cook Until Desired Tenderness.

SALADS

THE CHEF SAID

INGREDIENTS USED IN MAKING SALADS SHOULD BE SELECTED ACCORDING TO THE FOLLOWING

RULES: THERE SHOULD BE A PLEASING BLEND OF FLAVORS. THERE SHOULD BE A CONTRAST OF TEXTURES. THERE SHOULD BE A CONTRAST OF COLOR. PARTICULAR ATTENTION SHOULD BE PAID TO THE ARRANGEMENT. SERVE WITH A WELL-SEASONED DRESSING SUITED TO THE BLEND OF FLAVORS USED. SUCH PREPARATION ASSURES ATTRACTIVENESS.

With his offering of tenderness, sweetness, and attention, I followed the chef into the salad section. Lettuce was used as an attractive bed. There was a porcupine salad made from canned pears with slivered-almond quills. Decorative molds filled with canned pineapple rings, radish roses, and bright maraschino cherries.

Practically every salad had something forbidden or exotic: marshmallows, Jell-O, soda pop. Sugar was included in nearly every recipe; I was no longer alone. My favorite was the Bird's Nest Salad: a nest of shredded lettuce holding "bird eggs" of tinted cream cheese balls—eggs full of yummy surprises like grapes or marshmallows.

VEGETABLES & FRUITS *The Chef in the upper left corner said:*

"IN TIMES PAST, FRUIT HAS BEEN FORBIDDEN OR THOUGHT TO BE DANGEROUSLY TEMPTING, BUT MODERN THOUGHT IS THAT FRUITS AND VEGETABLES CAN LEAD TO A PLEASING UNION OF HEALTHY AND DELICIOUS —WHEN LOVINGLY PREPARED."

Most of the vegetables and fruits on the recipe cards came frozen or canned. I hadn't had much exposure to cans, but I found them exciting—like little surprise packages. No relation to the real vegetables that grew in the garden. The pretend fruits and vegetables were layered in ring molds with cans of cheese soup, whipped into soufflés, or baked into casseroles with Fritos on top. In between Ideal Pimientos au Gratin and Noodle Ring Supreme was another note.



Today in the vegetable bin I noticed a beautiful fruit ~~one~~ that I had never tasted before. I could sit, slumped, thinking about the beautiful fruit and then thinking of Dale. I brought the fruit home, handling it gently, just to see what was inside. I looked for a recipe of what to do with the fruit, but found nothing. The start of a relationship can be so uncertain. All paid with food, and life, love, we have a codebook that tells us what to do with our insatiable impulsive desires how to create the objects that we crave. If only there were a recipe, with instructions to follow carefully, that would guarantee the desired results.





The chickens were fascinated and jumped onto the lid of the cooler. I had to hurl the cabbage appetizer at the rooster to keep him away while I unmolded my terrine. The chickens were not polite dinner guests. They flapped and squawked and pecked at each other, as was their nature. But they did enjoy their meal.

That was the day I found a fork in the road. It was a small, tarnished silver fork with a twisted ribbon pattern. I shined it on my skirt and hid it in my pocket for the day I might wake up to find Chocolate Waffles.

The little fork was the start of my flatware collection. It led me down a food-filled path. When one rebels from the counterculture, the only direction left to go is straight.

When I found that fork in the road, I wanted an adventure, and I took the path **MORE** traveled.



Chocolate Waffles

- 1 c. Flour-
- 2 tsp B.P.
- 1/4 tsp. Salt.
- 3 T. Sugar-
- 1 Egg-
- 3/4 c. milk.
- 2 T. butter.
- 1 Sq. Chocolate





THE NEXT PIECE I ACQUIRED FOR MY COLLECTION WAS A DISPOSABLE SPORK. I GOT IT FROM THAT BOYFRIEND, WHAT'S-HIS-NAME. THAT WAS SHORT LIVED.



The boyfriend liked fun, clear things, like Zima or that clear Pepsi. It was silly but that was one of the things about him I was attracted to. His favorite food was Jell-O. He was fun and light-hearted and I was with him to cleanse my palate.

The *à la minute* relationship would have never begun if he hadn't cooked dinner for me one night. He had the cooking, cleaning, and courtship tied up in a minute with the dexterity of a cowboy. But not your average rustic cowboy. More like a polished, zippy cowboy—like Twinkie the Kid.

Plastic baggies and convenience foods often came into play. Boneless, skinless chicken tenders were slipped out of their Styrofoam and into a Ziploc with some bottled sauce. While the meat marinated, the boyfriend leaned on the counter and held a glass of wine in one hand while chatting casually. He had me wrapped up and tied as easily as the dinner.



He neatly wrapped the marinated chicken in tinfoil packages with some herbed frozen vegetables and popped them into the oven. The food never touched his hands, dishes, or counter, which left him free to work on me like the winning calf-tie in the rodeo. Convenience foods, like the horse, did the job they were meant to do. He put the cooked chicken on the table with a plastic fork. With a little more wine, I was his and the boyfriend raised his arm in triumph.

I watched the boyfriend's instant pick-up scheme the way children outside of Karmicland watch cereal commercials on Saturday mornings—and I bought it like a two-for-one offer. I wanted a fun but simple relationship where everything was clean and predictable. One where the product on the inside of the box was exactly like the picture on the outside of the box, and tasted the same way every time. I dug in, looking for the free prize.



I inspected the labels on the unfamiliar packages in the refrigerator.

SELL BY, BEST IF USED BY,
EXPIRES ON, DO NOT USE AFTER.

PACK DATE, CODE DATE,

GUARANTEED FRESH FOR SEVEN DAYS BEYOND
THE DATE STAMPED ON THE PACKAGE.



Looking at the dates stamped on the packages, I realized his old relationship hadn't expired before his new one had begun.



As I added my own belongings and pushed the haunted ones to the back of the cupboards, the recipe card for the Tuna Noodle Casserole felt somehow untouchable. Maybe the former mistress of the kitchen knew something I didn't. The first dishes I cooked in the new kitchen were a little wobbly. My timing was slightly off; my ears weren't sensitive to the sounds of the liquid in the pots just starting to boil or drying out on the bottom. I didn't notice the smell of the food changing from caramelized to burnt. I didn't read ahead in recipe directions to anticipate little problems. Jack nodded while he chewed and mumbled, "It's delish." I thought he was being patronizing.

I overcompensated for my perceived food ignorance or lack of sophistication by devouring restaurant reviews and large, well-regarded tomes of celebrity chefs. I dragged Jack to all the newest restaurants. We didn't have the means to partake in full meals, so we sat at the bar and had an appetizer. At my favorite restaurant I expounded on the renowned chef's menu as if it were literature and praised his food: *a masterful combination of sophisticatedly refined classical cuisine and the satisfying exuberance of traditional cooking.*