

I Married the Mystery Meat Queen

By Betty Castleberry

I came home from work yesterday and found a platter of mystery meat on the table, again.

Perhaps I should explain further. I married Patsy ten years ago. From the day I proposed, I knew she couldn't cook. That didn't matter, because I was prepared to eat sandwiches for the rest of my life, if she would only accept my proposal. However, I didn't fully understand what I was in for.

I have to give Patsy credit for trying to learn a few cooking skills. The first dinner she fixed really stands out in my memory. Patsy had been watching a cooking show on TV, and decided she would try to make something she had seen. When I came home, the fireman who greeted me at the door thoroughly explained everything. Patsy now knows Cool Whip is not the same thing as meringue. It cannot be browned in the oven.

When our first little one arrived, I hired a cook to help out temporarily. Helga was a robust German lady who made wonderful pastries and good solid meals. She even offered to teach Patsy how to cook. While the baby was sleeping, Helga took Patsy into the kitchen and tried to instruct her.

When I wandered upon the scene, Helga was standing with her hands in the air, shaking her head. "This woman does not know a noodle from a strudel. I give up."

Neither Helga nor Patsy explained to me how the biscuit dough got stuck in the ceiling fan, so I didn't ask.

I would have loved to have hired Helga permanently, but her elderly brother back in Germany called for her to come and stay with him, or so she claims. I can't help but wonder if Patsy's surprise muffins weren't the real cause. Did you know that even a small amount of popcorn stirred into muffin batter will not soften? It will, however, pop. My firm but gentle explanation that popcorn was not really considered a whole grain did not fall on deaf ears. The Fourth of July Muffins were not revisited.

If you've never had to explain to your family doctor how a simple tossed salad caused a cracked rib, you have missed a blessing. I know, because when I did this, the doctor had a hard time keeping his face straight. I was glad I could entertain him, even though I was in pain. As I told the doctor, Patsy was cutting tomatoes, and somehow, a piece flew out of her hand and landed on the floor near me. I bent to pick it up, and another piece shot out from somewhere in the vicinity of Patsy. I slipped on it and started to fall. I did try to catch myself on a nearby chair, but only succeeded in soundly whacking my side. The contortions I performed on the way down must have been side show worthy.

Patsy rushed to see if I was all right, the tomato knife still in her hand. Fortunately, it was a very small paring knife, and I only received a flesh wound.

By the time our second little one arrived, Patsy had gotten the hang of making a few simple meals. We ate a lot of spaghetti, topped with sauce from a jar. Sometimes, it was even heated.

Fast food is a staple for us. With just a little practice, I really think Patsy could master a cheeseburger, but she hasn't really tried. She says the kids would miss the clown too much.

One Saturday I awoke to a spicy scent wafting into our bedroom. When I got to the kitchen, Patsy was pouring juice for the kids. I looked around, hoping beyond hope that something delicious was baking in the oven. When I asked her what the delightful aroma was, she pointed with one hand to a scented candle, while opening a box of cereal with the other.

Maybe you can understand a little better now why I wasn't surprised to come home and find

something unrecognizable on the table.

I wouldn't mind cooking, but the truth is, I've been known to burn water. So, if not being able to cook is Patsy's biggest fault, then I'm a very blessed man. She's my soul mate, and I'm glad she doesn't hold my faults against me. She's great at calling out for pizza, and I don't even mind mystery meat now and then. Besides, it tastes just like chicken.

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