



Romancing the Stove

What kind of wife doesn't cook for her husband...ever? **By Paula Derrow**



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WHEN MY HUSBAND and I first dated, I wasn't shy about confessing my foibles, domestic or otherwise. I wanted him to know what he was getting into. "I'm a terrible cook," I told him. "Actually, I *can't* cook; I never have." Blame it on being single through my 40s—with late nights at work, takeout delivered in 10 minutes flat, and plenty of nearby restaurants, why turn on a stove?

Randy seemed happy to cook, while I cleaned up. Then one night, he startled me with a question: "Why do you always leave the kitchen when it's time to make dinner?" I paused. My single-girl excuse wouldn't wash anymore. The only one I could think of—"It's my mother's fault"—seemed lame even to me. But it felt like the truth. When I was a kid, the kitchen was her domain; neither my sister nor I was especially welcome. If we wandered in, Mom would shoo us back to our homework. Our job was to earn straight A's. Whether she made matzo ball soup or mac 'n' cheese from a box, she did it solo while we bent over our books.

Now, apparently, my husband expected me to participate. "I have such good memories of everyone helping in the kitchen, growing up," he told me that night, his voice softening. "You can be my sous chef."

I was skeptical. The few times I'd cooked, I'd been anxious, juggling pots and pans, unable to get the timing right. I also worried that my husband, used to being in charge at work, would be a martinet in the kitchen. Yet whenever I heard him prepping, I'd feel compelled by guilt to slink away and do a load of laundry, as if proving my worth.

So the next night I asked, "What can I do?" Soon I was chopping vegetables as the smell of sizzling onions filled the kitchen. While we worked, we talked—about our days and our still-newish marriage—something we didn't have the chance to do when I was off folding shirts. Yes, he bossed me around, but when you're a novice, it's actually handy to have someone tell you exactly how to pit an avocado. Randy assumed I didn't know anything. I wasn't offended, because I didn't. My husband was teaching me.

One night, I made chili, mostly by myself ("Be sure to add enough spices—a third of the jar!") Randy couldn't help instructing, a backseat chef). When a neighbor strolled by the open window, calling out, "Smells good in there!" I glowed, and not only from the stove's heat.

I'm no longer gunning for straight A's, in the kitchen or anywhere else. Instead, I take comfort and even some pride from serving admittedly basic dishes to a mate who loves me anyway, even if my efforts are occasionally undercooked.

Recently, I surprised Randy with linguini and red sauce from a jar, to which I'd added onions, rosemary, and sausage. When he walked in, his face lit up. "You're cooking!" he enthused. I lit up, too, and offered a taste, feeding him. Feeding us. **GH**