The Body in the Boudoir

A FAITH FAIRCHILD MYSTERY

Katherine Hall Page

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EXCERPTS FROM

HAVE FAITH IN YOUR KITCHEN

By Faith Sibley Fairchild
with Katherine Hall Page

Veggie Mac 'n' Cheese

6 ounces sharp cheddar cheese
2 red bell peppers
3 large garlic cloves
1/2 cup water
5 cups cauliflower florets
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
2 tablespoons milk
1/4 teaspoon paprika (preferably smoked)
1/2 teaspoon salt
6 ounces penne, ziti, or elbow macaroni

Preheat oven to 350°.

Shred the cheese and set aside. Reserve 1/4 cup to sprinkle on top.

Deseed and dice the peppers, mince the peeled garlic cloves,

and place in a saucepan with the 1/2 cup of water. Bring to a boil and lower to simmer until the vegetables are very soft, about 15 minutes.

Start to boil water for the pasta.

Steam the cauliflower and when it is soft, transfer it to a bowl and mash roughly—you want some texture.

Cook the pasta according to the directions on the package and in the meantime place the contents of the saucepan, the butter, and the milk in a food processor or blender. Pulse until smooth. Add the mixture to the cauliflower along with the shredded cheese, paprika, and salt. Drain the pasta and mix into the sauce so all the pasta is coated. Pour it into a casserole and top with the reserved cheese. Bake in preheated oven until nicely browned and bubbling. The red peppers give the sauce a bright color and the smoked paprika, widely used in the Mediterranean cooking, adds a subtle flavor as well as more color.

Serves 6.

You may also serve this sauce over pasta without baking.

You can make a tasty, easy soup with any leftover florets, if the head is a large one, and the stems. Simply chop roughly and put in a saucepan. Add a small sliced yellow onion and cover with chicken broth, your own or store-bought. Bring to a boil and simmer until the vegetables are soft. Puree in a blender or food processor until smooth. Return to the saucepan, add 1 cup half-and-half or milk, and 3/4 cup grated white cheddar cheese. Add a pinch of salt if your broth was no salt. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until the cheese is melted and serve or freeze. A curry spice blend is also nice in this. (Faith, and I, hate to waste food. You can use this recipe for broccoli stems and other vegetables as well.)

Poppy's Popovers

2 large eggs
1 cup milk
1 tablespoon melted unsalted butter
1 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 tablespoon additional melted unsalted butter

Preheat the oven to 450°.

Beat the eggs and add the following four ingredients. Stir, but do not overbeat.

Brush the cups of the popover tin or whatever you are using with the half tablespoon of melted butter.

Bake for 15 minutes. Do not open the oven door. Lower the temperature to 350° and bake for an additional 15 minutes. Ovens vary, so you may have to play around with the timing. James Beard's recipe calls for 30 minutes at 425° in a cold oven—no preheating—and this works nicely. I've found I get a slightly puffier popover with preheating, but the Beard recipe is quick!

Remove popovers and serve immediately with butter or jam. Try flavoring the butter with maple syrup. And an unadorned popover is also delectable.

Makes 6 popovers.

Popovers are impressive and easy. They also lend themselves to all sorts of variations. They can serve as containers for creamed chicken, shrimp, or veggies. Add a teaspoon of fresh herbs to the batter or 1/2 cup of grated cheese. For a nice breakfast treat, add 1/3 cup of finely chopped crisp bacon to the batter. For a sweet popover, add a teaspoon of sugar. Try other flours—buckwheat

especially. If you do not have a popover pan, you may use a large muffin pan or individual custard cups. Faith and I recommend a slight splurge on a real popover pan, however. Otherwise you don't make them.

For some reason, popovers have long been associated with brides, appearing prominently in cookbooks for brides. I have two, both titled *The Bride's Cookbook,* one published in 1915, the other in 1954. I picture these brides turning their hands to popovers as a way to impress new in-laws or perhaps hubby's boss—this was another era, remember.

Nowadays two of the best places for popovers, other than a home kitchen, are in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, at Popovers on the Square, and at Maine's Jordan Pond House, a restaurant with its beginnings in the nineteenth century. It is located in Acadia National Park in Bar Harbor. At the Jordan Pond House, besides mouthwatering popovers, you can feast on the view of the Bubble Mountains reflected in the pond's shimmering water.

Southern Fried Chicken

One 3-pound fryer, cut into 8 pieces
Water
1 tablespoon white vinegar
2 teaspoons salt
2 1/2 teaspoons freshly ground pepper
2 large eggs (beaten)
1/2 cup evaporated milk
1/4 cup water
I teaspoon paprika
2 cups all-purpose flour
Vegetable oil

Place the chicken pieces in a deep bowl and cover with cold water plus a tablespoon of white vinegar. Put in the refrigerator and let soak for 1 hour. Drain and pat completely dry. Season with 1 teaspoon of the salt and 1 teaspoon of the pepper. Whip the eggs, milk, and 1/4 cup of water together in a new bowl. Add the dry

chicken a piece at a time and coat thoroughly. As you coat the pieces in batter transfer them to a heavy paper bag containing the remaining salt and pepper, the paprika, and the flour. Shake vigorously and fry in vegetable oil. Faith uses canola oil and a large, deep, iron frying pan. Only put in enough oil to come halfway up the pan, as the level rises when you add the chicken. Also be sure the oil is hot enough by adding a pinch of flour. When it bubbles, it's hot enough.

Good fried chicken takes time. About 15 to 20 minutes, less for the wings. White meat cooks faster than dark meat, so consider this also. Turn the pieces 2 or 3 times with tongs for a crispy, golden brown skin. Serve immediately.

Feeds 4, more if there are children to grab a drumstick or wing.

As with all classic recipes, there are many variations. You can add cayenne pepper, garlic powder, dried spices like thyme to the flour coating. Some cooks add bacon fat to the oil. Others replace the evaporated milk and water in the batter with buttermilk. Buttermilk is also used to soak the chicken instead of the water/vinegar bath.

And don't forget that there is nothing as special as cold fried chicken on a picnic with a good eggy, pickle relish, old-fashioned potato salad and plenty of biscuits and corn sticks.

In addition to the legendary African American cooks, Edna Lewis and Sylvia Woods, mentioned in this book, I'd like to add Leah Chase, known as the "Queen of Creole Cuisine." Now eighty-eight years old, Leah Chase started working at her musician husband's family's restaurant, Dooky Chase, in the Treme section of New Orleans during the 1950s and began to move the menu toward her Creole roots. Her gumbo is world famous, and the restaurant is known for the diversity of its clientele—civil rights activists, artists, musicians, U.S. presidents, and a loyal following among the Big Easy's residents and tourists. After

Hurricane Katrina, Mrs. Chase and her husband lived in a trailer, determined to open again, which they did. Their superb collection of African American art, displayed on the restaurant's walls, was saved from the hurricane by their grandson, who was able to place it in storage in time. In her cookbook *The Dooky Chase Cookbook,* published first in 1990, Leah Chase reminisces about going to Mardi Gras as a child and buying fried chicken from one of the booths selling it fresh from the pan. There were also booths selling fried fish and red beans. She'd watch the parade and eat the chicken out on the street, a rare treat. My copy of her cookbook is inscribed by Leah Chase to my husband, my son, and me: "Life is for living. Enjoy together," which pretty much says it all.

Champagne Punch

1 1/2 cups fresh lemon juice
1 cup sugar
1/2 cup orange liqueur (Grand Marnier or Cointreau)
1 cup fresh orange juice
2 bottles chilled champagne or other dry sparkling wine (You may also use a nonalcoholic wine or club soda.)
Orange and/or lemons, thinly sliced
Mint (optional)

Combine the lemon juice, sugar, orange liqueur, and orange juice, stirring until the sugar dissolves.

Add the champagne and refrigerate, well sealed, for at least 1 hour.

Pour into a glass pitcher and float the fruit slices and sprigs of mint to garnish. Serve in punch cups, champagne flutes, or white wine glasses. If strawberries are in season, these are also a pretty garnish.

This recipe may be doubled or tripled to fill a punch bowl.

Strawberries Romanoff

2 pints fresh strawberries
2 tablespoons sugar
2 tablespoons orange liqueur (Grand Marnier or Cointreau)
1/2 cup freshly squeezed orange juice
1 cup crème fraiche
Grated orange zest

Rinse the berries with the stems on and then hull and halve them.

Combine the berries with the sugar, liqueur, and orange juice. You may eliminate the liqueur and use all juice if you wish. Let the berries soak in the refrigerator for an hour. Bring to room temperature and layer the berries and crème fraiche in parfait glasses, clear dessert dishes, or as Faith's caterer did, martini glasses. End with a layer of the crème fraiche and grate orange zest over each portion, topping with a perfect strawberry half.

Serves 4.

This is a versatile, easy, and impressive dessert. You can use whipped cream or vanilla ice cream instead of crème fraiche. When strawberries are in season, another lovely dessert is also a simple one: toss the strawberry halves with a tablespoon of brown sugar and a dash of balsamic or a fruit vinegar. Serve as is or with a dollop of whipped cream or Greek yogurt.

Culinary history agrees that strawberries Romanoff was created by the legendary French pastry chef Marie Antoine Careme (1783–1833) for Russian tsar Nicholas I. In the United States, a version of the dessert was made famous by another legendary figure—Prince Michael Romanoff (not a prince, not Russian, but Lithuanian; his name was, in fact, Hershel Geguzin) at Romanoff's in Beverly Hills, California, his star-studded restaurant in business from 1941 until 1962.

Author's Note

Eve was the first bride and saved a fortune on her dress. The reception—a partially eaten apple—wouldn't have set God the Father back much either, although He might possibly have wished He'd thought to spring for wedding insurance. Since then, through the ages and across the globe, the basic notion of joining two lives through ritual has remained unchanged. The ceremonies and celebratory rites are an entirely different matter.

Our forebears might recognize some of our modern customs. Take rings, for example. The ancient Egyptians believed that a vein ran from the second finger of the left hand directly to the heart, hence the spot for the bride's ring in many countries. World War II servicemen returning to the U.S. brought the European custom of a double-ring ceremony. Today most grooms here opt for a wedding band. Those who don't may have the anonymous canard in mind: "Marriage is a three-ring circus. First comes the engagement ring. Then the wedding ring—and then the suffer-ring." A fact new to me concerned the bride's wedding ring during Colonial times in this country. An engaged woman was given

a wedding thimble. The bottom was cut off for the ring itself (presumably ahead of the ceremony).

"Bridal" comes from Middle English and refers to the wedding feast with its copious amounts of "bridale"—"bride ale." The word "wed" or "wedde," an older term, also derives from Middle English and meant "pledge." A man pledged goods in exchange for the bride. Bride prices, dowries, a father "giving away" his daughter, transferring his power over her to another man, all remind us that marriage across societies and time periods was primarily a financial transaction and the practice of marrying for love is not very old.

Nuptial superstitions know no time limits and we're all familiar with the one about the groom not seeing the bride before the ceremony, common in numerous cultures, as well as the importance of adhering to "something old," linking past and present; "something new," to ensure a bright future; "something borrowed," a token from a happily married friend or relative so her good luck rubs off; "something blue," the color traditionally symbolizes fidelity and purity. In modern weddings the bride usually wears a blue garter. My sister, like Faith's sister, Hope, was my maid of honor and made a lovely garter for me. A friend, Helen Scovel Grey, realized in a panic on her wedding day that she didn't have a blue garter or anything else of that hue. A creative bridesmaid ran to the closest CVS and bought a bottle of blue nail polish. Among Helen's wedding pictures is one in which a single toe is being adorned. She's been married for twenty-three years. Superstitions are best not broken. And she had a sixpence in her shoe, as the last line of the rhyme specifies. Sixpences are often passed down from mother to daughter for even more luck.

The time of year one marries is very important as well. In China couples select an auspicious date, taking into account the animal zodiac symbol of the years of their births. The pragmatism of early New Englanders gave rise to the superstitious belief that

it was unlucky to marry in December, October, or May, as they avoided the bad weather during winter months and they needed to devote the others to planting and reaping. "Marry in May and you'll rue the day" also refers to the time period during most of the month following Easter when the Catholic Church prohibited marriages, a prohibition no longer in effect.

A bridal bouquet speaks the language of flowers. Ivy stands for fidelity, and the Greeks believed it symbolized an indissoluble union. Red roses mean love, and when carried with white ones connote unity. White lilacs stand for innocence; lily of the valley, purity; and orange blossoms—especially popular in Victorian times—happiness and fertility. Marigolds, among Queen Victoria's flowers when she married Prince Albert, signify passion, as in sensuality. Considering that theirs was an epitome of marital love and loyalty, producing nine children, the blossoms worked. After the wedding, some of the myrtle from Victoria's bouquet was planted, and royal brides ever since, including Kate Middleton, the most recent, have carried a sprig from the bush for luck. Queen Victoria's 1840 wedding is also generally cited as the start of the widespread adoption of white, as brides copied her satin gown in Europe and North America. In China, India, Vietnam, and some other Asian countries red garments are traditionally worn, although the bride often changes into a white Western dress for the reception. In Japan, a bride may wear as many as three different wedding kimonos as well as a Western gown.

The Greeks and Romans did not carry bouquets but wore wreaths on their heads and garlands around their necks, sometimes carrying them as well. The garlands were composed of herbs, spices, and garlic to ward off evil spirits. Once again that nuptial trendsetter Queen Victoria popularized a custom—that of using fresh flowers in a bride's bouquet. Victorian and Edwardian bouquets on both sides of the ocean were large. Princess Diana carried a replica of an Edwardian one to match the broad width

of her dress. The cascading result—gardenias, freesia, stephanotis, ivy, and other flora—was forty-two inches long and fifteen inches wide. The florists, Longmans, assembled three identical bouquets, remembering that in 1947 the orchid one they had made for then Princess Elizabeth went missing following the ceremony and had to be re-created later for the official photographs.

Another wonderful story from my friend Helen's wedding. On the morning of the big day the females in her wedding party gathered around a large table in her home, a parsonage, to make the bouquets and boutonnières. The same group had gathered some weeks earlier at her grandmother Deborah Webster Greeley's house, where she taught them how to make the decorations for Helen's wedding cake. She had the molds and other equipment and they all had a fine time creating white and dark red roses, various sizes of sugar bells, and green leaves (gently assigned to those less adept at roses). Deborah Greeley, president of the Herb Society of New England at the time, made the three-tiered cake itself closer to the big day, adding fresh herbs around the base—ivy for faith and divinity, sage for wisdom, rosemary for remembrance, and thyme for courage. If you ever happen upon the now out-of-print book *A Basket of Herbs: A Book of American Sentiments,* illustrated by wonderful Tasha Tudor, to which Mrs. Greeley contributed, grab it!

Weddings are mnemonics—of ones we've attended, ones we've been in, even ones we've watched on the big screen. Who can forget the wedding scene in *The Graduate*? And Molly Ringwald's sister weaving down the aisle in *Sixteen Candles*? Or Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant in *The Philadelphia Story*? And then there are *Four Weddings and a Funeral;* the original *Father of the Bride; Fiddler on the Roof;* Fred Astaire dancing on the floor, walls, and ceiling in *Royal Wedding;* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (which must have caused a huge blip in Windex sales). We, especially women, love celebrity weddings—the tasteful and the trashy. We delight

in the details and hope for the best. And we read and reread our much-loved books about weddings. Some of my favorites: *Delta Wedding,* Eudora Welty; *The Wedding,* Dorothy West; *The Member of the Wedding,* Carson McCullers; *Weddings Are Murder,* Valerie Wolzien; and a new favorite, *Somebody Is Going to Die if Lilly Beth Doesn't Catch That Bouquet: The Official Southern Ladies' Guide to Hosting the Perfect Wedding,* Gayden Metcalfe and Charlotte Hays. (These are the same very funny, very savvy ladies who wrote a guide to hosting the perfect funeral, *Being Dead Is No Excuse.*) I also like to go back to the books of my childhood for happily-ever-afters—Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne's House of Dreams,* where Anne comes down the stairs, "the first bride of Green Gables, slender and shining-eyed, in the mist of her maiden veil, with her arms full of roses," to Gilbert waiting below "with adoring eyes."

And now a word about wedding cakes. These are among the oldest of our nuptial traditions, dating back to Roman times when, after eating a piece of a sweet barley bread loaf, the groom broke it over his bride's head to ensure good luck. Perhaps picking out the crumbs was one of the wedding night's activities! Since then the cake went through numerous configurations, appearing as "Bride's Pie" in the seventeenth century. Some of the cakes were more like what we now call fruitcake. Mrs. Beeton's recipe for "Rich Bride Cake" calls for five pounds of the finest flour, three pounds of fresh butter, five pounds of currants, two pounds of sifted loaf sugar, nutmegs, mace, cloves, sixteen eggs, a pound of sweet almonds, a half pound each of candied citron and candied orange, plus a gill each of wine and brandy. Rich indeed.

Queen Victoria again. Hers weighed in at three hundred pounds, measured three yards wide and fourteen inches tall. It was adorned with roses and topped with an ice sculpture of Britannia surrounded by cupids. Guests were sent home with boxes containing small pieces and more were sent all over the empire in celebration. They turn up every once in a while in drawers and

attics. In 1947 the cake Queen Elizabeth cut surpassed that of her ancestress. It weighed five hundred pounds and was nine feet tall. There were twelve cakes in all at her reception. Princess Di had one cake, five feet tall, but there were two copies waiting in the wings lest an accident occur. The cake featured the Windsor coat of arms in marzipan.

It is not known exactly where and when the custom of sending guests home with a small piece of the cake, usually in a little box, originated, but it remains widespread. Put the token under your pillow and you will dream of your future spouse. If already married, the act will lead to good luck in general.

Placing their hands on the knife to cut the first slice of cake is the initial task a married couple performs together and symbolizes their union. Feeding each other from that slice has become common, although when one or both smush the cake into the new spouse's mouth, the act may be a portent of rocky shoals rather than smooth sailing together.

Wrapping the top layer of the tiered cake to freeze until a couple's first wedding anniversary is now customary.

It's supposed to be bad luck for a bride to bake her own cake, but my friend Melissa, who turned out a dozen single-layer dense chocolate ones, her favorite, the day before to accompany the traditional cake, recently celebrated her fortieth anniversary. Thinking of her tale, I had the idea that I would ask a number of friends for the recipes, and stories, of their wedding cakes. Picturing the cake Helen Scovel Grey's grandmother had made, I asked Helen's mother to send me the recipe. Faith Greeley Scovel, like her mother, made wedding cakes for friends and relatives, complete with sugar bells and icing decorations. What she sent is a treat, four pages of instructions for "Silver White Cake," with many notes for multiplying the amounts and obvious signs, even in the ancient xerox, of much use—in places dripped batter has obscured the printing. Faith Scovel noted that the recipe probably origi-

nated from Fannie Farmer or *The Joy of Cooking,* both of which have excellent, easy-to-duplicate recipes for as impressive a cake as the $500-plus ones appearing at today's often over-the-top receptions. Faith Scovel also sent me a wedding cake recipe from her husband's great-grandmother, that appeared in her mother-in-law Myra Scovel's memoir, *The Happiest Summer.* It seems to be an American interpretation of Mrs. Beeton's recipe, although it calls for twenty eggs! It also lists molasses and grape juice as ingredients.

My own wedding cake had three layers, a delicious traditional white cake concoction decorated with buttercream frosting, hearts, and the small fruitcake layer on top trimmed with fresh white French lilacs. When we went to cut it, much as we loved the trimmings, our favorite one was the finger mark a dear friend's three-year-old boy had made. He just couldn't wait.

Whatever you choose, whether it be two cupcakes for an elopement, a groom's cake shaped like the helmet of his favorite football team, a tall cone of profiteroles filled with pastry cream and held together with caramel and spun sugar—*croquembouche,* the French wedding gateau—or three tiers with the nuptial couple on top, may you have your cake and eat it, too.

I love weddings. I love hearing about them, looking at wedding albums, and most of all attending them. And yes, I always get choked up when the couples exchange their vows. I've been to weddings in churches, synagogues, chapels, homes, museums, hotels, restaurants, in city halls, in tents, on beaches, in fields, in backyards, and I'm sure I'm forgetting some. The brides and grooms have ranged in age from eighteen to ninety. The music has been as simple as a single guitar to the full New Orleans Children's Chorus (and after the ceremony a streetcar took guests to the reception in the Garden District!). The ceremonies have included several civil ones and most religions. I've learned that "tying the knot" (a Celtic custom) figures both symbolically and literally in many cultures. The Hindu wedding ceremony, over

five thousand years old, incorporates ritual tyings of various kinds, binding together not only the bride and groom but also their two families. This joining was joyously acted out during the reception at Lakshmi Reddy and Andrew Kleinberg's wedding as the two families—wearing saris, yarmulkes, and all manner of dress—hoisted the bride and groom on chairs and danced the hora.

The longest wedding I've attended was in Beaujolais, France, the festive nuptials of our baker's daughter. We were living in Lyon at the time and our three-year-old son was one of the *garçons d'honneur,* looking very sweet in pale blue. The wedding began early on Saturday with the civil ceremony at the mayor's office, followed by the church ceremony, and then the entire village was invited to the farm for brioche and wine—with music and dancing. An only slightly smaller number of guests then went to a reception hall for food, more music, and dancing. The celebration lasted well into the following day (and in an earlier time it would have been several days). Onion soup gratinée was served in the wee hours, possibly to keep one's strength up! People came and went, children slept on jacket-cushioned benches. At one point we all took a walk around a nearby pond. It was absolutely wonderful.

However, my own wedding thirty-six years ago was the best of all. We were married in Holmes, New York, at Beulahland, the home of our dear friends Charlotte Brooks and Julie Arden, on the first Saturday in December, holding our collective breaths about the weather. As it happened, it was so warm, guests sat out on the large terraces. A week later the area was hit by a blizzard. I still have my beautiful white dress, and it still fits, although I do have to breathe deeply. My father gave me away, tears in his eyes. Everyone danced. I'm told the food was delicious, but somehow neither my groom nor I sat down long enough to eat—common for wedding couples. One of my parents' oldest friends told my mother, "If they always look at each other the way they're looking at each other today, they'll be a very happy couple." Prescient

words. I didn't toss my bouquet, white French lilacs and ivy. Another close family friend, Erik Johns, had made it and I wanted to keep it, later rooting the ivy. It's still thriving.

I had to be back at my teaching job at Burlington High School on Monday, my husband, Alan, to his work at MIT, so only one night for a honeymoon at an inn in Connecticut. Since we hadn't eaten at the reception, we were ravenous and bought submarine sandwiches on the way, consuming them happily with champagne in front of the fireplace in our room. It was a perfect wedding feast, although I'm not sure Faith Fairchild would have approved.

In the end, whoever the couple, what matters most was said in the Old Testament by Ruth to her mother-in-law, Naomi:

"Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

This is what we mean when we turn to our beloveds and say, "I do."