

Honeymoon du Jour

by martha clarkson

Sunday — Tomato

Jake and I don't know this town, so we pick the closest café, even though the windows are smudged and the menu's not posted. It's our second day of marriage and we're still taking chances. Specials are listed on a chalkboard not done by an artist, leaning on an extra chair under a coatless hook. We're early for lunch and the room and its furnace are not yet in sync. Jake's stepmother called this town quaint. Tomato soup sounds like the most comforting thing we can order after last night — my inappropriate nightgown and his incorrectly measured Viagra lead time.

Monday — Split Pea

At sun-up we rode Appaloosas around a tight corral, on the advice of the one-page tourist brochure. It's easier to go to this cafe again, right around the corner. Life beyond the pulled shades of our hotel, the only one in town. Quaint has many meanings. Some think a seventy-year-old ring with a disintegrating diamond chip is quaint. It's a rickety town, waiting to stabilize on a theme. Split pea, you either love it or hate it. I'm the former, Jake the latter. "Like someone barfed," he says. If the peas are not disintegrated, I agree. Like a bad New Year's morning. But it's my favorite.

Tuesday — Cream of Mushroom

My mother circled our kitchen every night, putting cream of mushroom over chicken, pork; heating cans of Campbell's on the stove for lunches. This cook wears the same red-checked apron, bib style. We sit at a table for four, in the corner, without asking, because we're like regulars now, waving to the owner, picking up

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our own menus. If this soup is homemade, we'll see fresh mushrooms topping other specials. But the chalkboard is bare but for soup. Two cups, please, we say, as we hail the owner. "And your usual Rosé, Miss?" he says, "It is, after all, noon somewhere." He knows me now.

Wednesday — Vichyssoise

How fancy we're getting now, little town out here in the middle of desert country. We were told this terrain would be like central France but someone lied. We haven't been to central France, but I know the French wouldn't stand for it. How long did it take the owner to find the right spelling of this soup? It doesn't fit on the chalkboard and the last S and E curve downward. We pretend we're our own small town — city council fights, where growth should occur, who ultimately owns the water. On our white placemats we draw out plans for a four-star hotel. The soup is cold on purpose.

Thursday — Chicken Noodle

We sit at a larger table for four, and situate diagonally, pretending we need the space to read the paper, even though it's a weekly that came out Monday. Chills are coming on, fever may be imminent. The cold soup yesterday must have left us with false hope. For this soup, an all-day simmering carcass. A bird deboned, handfuls of cubed carrots, homemade pasta carted in from an Italian's kitchen. "Simmer down," was my mother's expression to her active children. Bring me your biggest bowlful, carried between the two masculine hands of a bubbeh. The smell alone can cure you. We'll feel better soon, better soon.

Friday — Clam Chowder

Of course, it's fish Friday. Old nuns swishing around the school cafeteria, meting out bowls of fishtail soup. Our navy blue sweaters with drip dots, even though we couldn't stand the flavor and washed it down with water. We were a poor diocese. Jake doesn't know fish, other than tuna, like the Bumble Bee kind. And what does a bee have to do with fish, anyway? Clams don't seem native to this waterless town. I look for signs of #10 cans, but the owner has done skillful prep concealment. Jake wants to understand the need to eat fish, when he's hungry for a burger. He wants what he wants.

Saturday — Egg Drop

The simple coming together of broth and egg, the perfect boil to leave a scrambled egg thread across the top; an equator, divider. An exotic move to Asian, as if there's any diversity here. We've seen all the sights twice. Uncanny Canyon, the largest Sequoia in the county, Miss Mickey's Yarn Barn. Aren't small town people nice? Over and over they are nice, we get it. We're trying to be the same, congenial city people in appreciation of a preserved wood sidewalk. We'd love to have a filet of beef, braised, with perfect inner temperatures, contained juices, flavors allowed to mingle. More wine, please. Another beer, Jake says. Hold us until soup.

