

DINNER WITH EDWARD

15

*Canapes of Sun-Dried Tomato and Chèvre
Cream of Cauliflower Soup with
Truffle Oil and Dried, Reconstituted
Porcini Mushrooms
Prime Rib
New Potatoes, Haricots Verts
Grand Marnier Soufflé with Fresh Cream
Turkish Coffee
Cabernet Sauvignon*

I called Edward to tell him the bad news: I was going to miss his big comeback dinner.

“I’m so sorry you won’t be able to make it, darling,” he said.

I asked him what he was cooking.

Prime rib with steamed haricots verts and potatoes au jus would be the spectacular main course. He was also serving martinis and goat cheese canapés with sun-dried tomatoes before the meal and a sublime Grand Marnier soufflé with hints of orange zest and topped with fresh cream for dessert. But Edward was particularly excited about the soup course he was planning.

“I was so looking forward to having you try my cauliflower soup,” he told me on the phone.

Cauliflower soup?

“Yes, with truffle oil and reconstituted dried mushrooms.”

The idea of cauliflower soup with truffle oil sounded simply too delicious and I asked Edward to give me the recipe right there and then.

“Well, first, you sweat the onions. You add some good chicken stock, and then you stir in the cauliflower pieces,” he said by way of explanation. “You cook them down, and then you use an inversion blender to mix everything together.” The truffle oil and the reconstituted mushrooms are added as garnishes at the end, he said.

I don’t know why I felt compelled to make that soup,

but after I wrote down Edward's instructions, I put on my clothes with great difficulty, popped a few painkillers, and headed to the nearest Fairway to buy the ingredients. I spent an inordinate amount of time weighing the differences between white and black truffle oil. I knew nothing about truffle oil, so I finally opted for the black—an unfortunate choice I learned back home when I called Edward.

“What were you thinking, kid?” he asked, both incredulous and amused that I would make such an egregious error in culinary judgment. He prefers the white, which he says is stronger and mustier than the black and has less of a garlicky flavor. Edward and I had unwittingly landed in the middle of a flap that had been heating up among some of the world's greatest chefs about the legitimacy of truffle oil. Most truffle oils are nothing more than a chemical compound, comprised of olive oil and “flavoring.” Edward checked the label of his bottle, which denoted that it had been made with infused truffles. He had the good stuff. I peered at the label on my bottle. Mine was indeed the fake. A wave of anger swept over me as I read, “olive oil, flavoring.” So now my wrong-color oil wasn't even the real thing.

I was in too much pain to return to Fairway but still determined to make the soup. I spent the evening cutting up onions and cauliflower and slowly cooking the mixture. Like Edward, I now had to grip the counters when I moved. I stood carefully on the step stool I used to fish ingredients and cooking implements out of cupboards that were beyond my reach. I puréed the cooked cauliflower and onions in the blender and the result was a velvety potage. I soaked dried porcini mushrooms, chopped them, and lightly fried them in olive oil.

I ladled out the soup, topped it with the mushrooms, swirled my fake black truffle oil over the top, and served bowls of soup to my daughter and her friend. I stood at the kitchen counter to eat. Maybe it was the medication finally kicking in, but as we ate I felt no pain. The soup, with the musky richness of the truffle oil and the porcini, made me feel better immediately.

“The inspiration can kill a lot of troubles,” Rita once said when we were talking about making some of Edward’s specialties. For Rita, it was Edward’s soufflé that took her through some of the rough periods in her life. For me, it became the cauliflower soup. I like to think that Edward had a hand in making us all feel better.