

Know Your Onions

Last Sunday Hugh and Meg came to lunch and Meg brought us an onion. Very nice, you say--are they poor? Hang about, this was no ordinary onion. It was large and fat, and its leaves, a foot long, were as meticulously braided as a schoolgirl's pigtail. It was, in fact, one of the first of an early crop from our friends' ample kitchen garden.

What do you do with a really special onion? You fry it with liver, of course. So yesterday Mary got a generous half-pound of rich tasty organic pigs' liver from Graham the Butcher--most of his snooty customers feed it to their cats--and sliced the onion to fry it into a comfy warm bed.

She could tell the difference as soon as she cut into it. The rings were hard, crisp and juicy, with no trace of slipperiness in between to make them slide apart under the knife. She brought me a chunk, hot and sweet, on the end of a spoon. I could have munched it whole like an apple, tears of joy running down my cheeks.

Mary left the sliced onion to sweat slowly in olive oil and went upstairs. Fifteen minutes later she remembered. My God, she thought, it'll be burned to a blackened crisp. But no; it was so juicy that it was just settling down into limp rings of candied amber slush, in itself a thick sweet sauce to which the eventual addition of a small dollop of grain mustard was hardly necessary, though not unwelcome. The thin lightly floured slices of liver, laid on top and barely cooked, took to it right kindly. Mashed potatoes and freshly hulled peas cooked wrapped in a lettuce leaf filled up the nooks and crannies. Simple pleasures are best, especially when they're perfect.

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