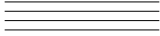


T H E L O S S O F T H E J O Y
O F C O O K I N G



R O B E R T B . S H A W

The book is missing. Somewhere in the house,
mis-shelved, or at the bottom of some pile,
its columned pages keep their measurements,
ingredients, oven times, and helpful hints
beyond perusal in a fat, useless wad.

The island kitchen counter lets me have
my pick of sides to feel myself marooned on.
I push ahead without a recipe,
halving quantities of what I have
somehow to make edible without
the stir of appetite.

We used to work
together at it, each on a different side,
she stirring, measuring, tasting, I
chopping, dicing, mincing as required.
Rocking the blade the way she showed me to,
I freed from each raw thing a smell we liked:
the garlic's earthy reek, the ginger's sting,
the anise wisping up from celery leaves.

Now I look at the counter's empty side
and listen to the onion I hacked up
sputtering angrily, intense but futile,
faltering as its fund of hoarded tears
dissolves in the hot oil that some hunks
of meat will sear in next. It probably

isn't quite right (like so much else these days)
but it will do: I need to make it do.

The book is missing. Even if it's found
and followed to the letter, there will still
be loss, the unlisted ingredient
throwing the best efforts out of balance.
It bakes itself into what's left of life.
The cold plate waits. Nothing now tastes the same.