

She shreds the lettuce with a vengeance. ... she says she didn't know a man and a woman kissed on the lips. She shreds more lettuce. She says it makes her angry to admit she didn't know a man and a woman could kiss on the lips ... it makes her angrier to see the look of disbelief in my eyes. She thinks she should shred more lettuce.

The Art of Cooking and Kissing!

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She doesn't think I would understand ... she shrugs nonchalantly. She puts the shredded lettuce aside. She admits it never crossed her mind to wonder about that kind of kissing. Nothing triggered the wondering. There was no TV ... or rather there was one they could only watch at certain hours. During those hours only Egyptian series were broadcast: "They merely kissed on the cheeks. And when any two characters got married, they closed the door to the viewers." She still watches Egyptian series. ... It's become an addiction. She discusses the controversy over Ramadan's latest series "The Family of Hajj Mitwalli."

She asks me to wash the tomatoes.... She recalls her mom loved tomatoes. Her dad wouldn't eat them. She does not remember why. However, she can still remember that she never saw her mom and dad kissing on the lips... not even on the cheeks. She wished they would kiss on the cheeks like the Egyptian movie stars ... They did nothing of the sort. But sometimes on Thursday night they slept earlier than usual. Now that she's married and has three kids, she figures they retired early to have sex. She doubts they kissed when they had sex: "My dad probably only inserted his penis in my mom's vagina..."

She complains about the tomatoes. They are too wilted. When farmers don't keep the area around the roots moist, they wither. At least that's what their biology teacher once explained to them. He also explained other things, including the science of human procreation. In that long-ago session, the teacher specifically stressed that babies were formed when the penis penetrated the vagina. He never mentioned anything about kissing.

She sends the janitor to buy new tomatoes. She admits she had a crush on her biology teacher. She had a crush on all her male teachers. She never thought about kissing them. She only thought about their penis penetrating her vagina ... she wanted to have their babies. The janitor rings the bell. She is displeased with the newly bought tomatoes. She dices them.

She asks if it's okay to add onions to the salad. Some people have an aversion to raw onions. She has never had such a problem. Her only problem has been the kissing phenomenon. When her husband first introduced her to the art of kissing, she thought of how much she hated her biology teacher, her favorite Egyptian stars, and her parents. She

hated her husband most. Soon, she stopped hating anyone and got used to the kissing part. She never got used to the intimacies and sensualities that accompanied a sexual relationship.

She says it's been thirteen years. Thirteen years since her marriage. Still ... she feels awkward about her body in its connection to the opposite sex. She struggles to give me details. She says her

husband has never seen her body in full perspective. She refuses to shed all her clothes except in the dark. And in the middle of the sexual act, "I look for the bed-covers to hide myself or any piece of my flesh.... Sounds silly really. It's all silly. I don't know how not to be silly." I nod my head in faked impassiveness ... I try not to let my astonishment show.

She continues to struggle with the details. She says she refuses to have a shower with him, feels awkward when he massages her and stiffens when he takes his time ... She stresses she doesn't mind his penis penetrating her vagina. It's the teasing, the kissing ... the whole process of foreplay: "I don't know how to enjoy it. I can't tease back." And most important, "I can't feel comfortable with and about my sexuality ... if I have any."

She says she should try to avoid chopping onions. They make her eyes water. She rubs her eyes with the sleeves of her blouse. She says the whole sex issue has been a point of constant debate between her and her husband. He accuses her of being frigid, cold and a bore... Sometimes when he loses control he tells her she's screwed up. She retorts by calling him an animal and a sexual monster She thinks he's none of these. She rubs her eyes again. The onions make her eyes water a lot.

She squeezes some lemon. She talks about an American movie she watched years ago. She doesn't remember its name. She can still remember the woman in the movie. The woman was tempting a man: "She took hours to remove her stockings. She let the hero kiss her all over ... even on her toes. In the morning she stood in front of the mirror, without a bra, and brushed her teeth." She squeezes some lemon vigorously.

She says the salad will be ready in a minute. She mixes the vegetables ... adds the garlic, oil, lemon, and the sprint of thyme ... She admits she hated the woman in the movie. She still hates her: "I hate her because my mother was never like her ... I'd like to be like her ... my husband wants me to be like her ... I can never be like her."

She invites me to try the salad. Her eyes are still watering. She says she has forgotten the salt ... "Nevertheless, it's delicious" I tell her. She says her mom was a great cook. She taught her all about the art of cooking.