

## Who by Chicken?

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BY LORI WALD  
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Your synagogue is packed. Parking spaces scarce. You've been careful to hold on to your ticket, which is required for entry. These are the days of awe. The time to contemplate the state of your mortality. In the sanctuary, a man blows a ram's horn to signify the seep of the ancient into the present at a time when the congregation prays for the future. Please God. Inscribe me and my family into your Book of Life. As always, you ask for one more year. Around you, they recite the poem with the punch list of how one might perish. *On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed: Who shall live and who shall die. Who by fire and who by water? Who by sword and who by beast? Who by hunger and who by thirst? Who by earthquake and who by drowning? Who by strangling and who by stoning?*

But never mind about that. This is the time when you and all Jewish mothers everywhere prepare for the arrival of the family and attempt to make this holiday as authentic and real and Jewish as possible. Obviously, it's about the meal. Nothing is more sacred than food.

# Lilith

INDEPENDENT, JEWISH & FRANKLY FEMINIST

The rabbi looks down from the pulpit and smiles as if to say he acknowledges your presence. It is an especially good turnout today. The fall weather is crisp and cool in that encouraging way that makes you feel as if everything is worthwhile after all.

This year, your plan does not include your mother's uninspired chicken soup formulated from convenient cubes of monosodium glutamate and partially hydrogenated palm oil. You can do better. Your grandmother chopped carp in a worn wooden bowl, mixed it with matzo meal and set it in a jellied broth, but that won't do either. Your grandmother's traditions were born of poverty, your mother's of modernity. You are inspired by the great Jewish restaurant on the lower east side of New York City with its hand-chopped liver and pitchers of schmaltz. No need to be confined to a solely Eastern European model for traditional Jewish food. Think of your Lebanese friend and her kibbeh, luscious little mounds of raw beef, green onions and mint leaves. You can scoop up that deliciousness with warm pita bread. Throw in her tabbouleh. Tomatoes, parsley, mint, bulgur. *May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year.*

The prayers pray on. Next to you the manufacturer of vibration testing equipment smiles at his wife. Behind you the real estate mogul's grandchildren stare at their mobile phones despite the rule prohibiting electronic devices in synagogue on holy days.

*Who will rest and who will wander?* You shall go forth and pit the home-grown plums until your fingers stain purple. Combine the plums with cayenne peppers from your garden and blend the ingredients into a spicy sauce to be spread on grilled chicken thighs. Roast mushrooms. Whir and blend them into a thick woodsy soup. There must be schmaltz and chicken livers with chunks of onions. Add hard-boiled eggs and grind it all together. Mash up cannelloni beans for a smooth creamy hummus and go ahead and roast the fingerling potatoes drizzled with olive oil and plenty of sumac. The sumac smells exotic and bursts red and tangy. Send someone out to pick up the cake-like challah from the Hungarian bakery. If you insist, go ahead and bake the apple honey cake, the one whose recipe you found in the New York Times and always insist on baking the day of.

The family will descend. *Who will be safe and who will be torn?* The big crowd-pleasers will be the apples dipped in honey (required) and the char-grilled lamp chops, cut three chops thick and roasted medium rare. The chopped liver will taste of iron and cadmium. A metal resonance can be neutralized if paired with the proper vintage. The wine shall flow. Drink, talk, laugh and eat until you can eat no more. By the time the last wine glass is rinsed, you will be exhausted, but it will be worth it.

*Who will be calm and who will be tormented?*

In two days, half of your 14 guests fall ill, with one landing in the emergency room and a couple of others hospitalized. At some moment between the time they dipped apples in honey and ate dessert, you poisoned your family.

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The lady from the health department will call. Completely avoidable, she will say. Had the proper cross-contamination precautions been taken, things would have turned out differently. Hands must be washed after every touching. No utensil that touches raw poultry should ever touch anything other than more raw poultry. Most importantly, without a meat thermometer, there is no certainty.

Surely there might have been other possibilities, you will say to her. The plums or the mushrooms should arouse some suspicion.

It's always the chicken, she will say. Chicken can kill you.

Poultry protocol aside, there are accidents. Accidents after all, are accidents —devoid of will, intention, fault. What of it? It will be too late by all accounts. Too late to ponder the deed, too late to determine the cause of the distress, too late to unravel and unfold and untangle the cobwebs of coincidence. The deal has been sealed. Finito. The End. Too, too late.

Everyone in the congregation looks at the person sitting to his left and sitting to her right. They recite the questions in the voice of the whole. The shaky old men. The svelte lovely ladies. The ones who are poisoned and the ones who are protected. The anonymous poets and the renowned patrons. The myopic and the astigmatic, the imprudent and the susceptible, the easily conned and the artists who con them.

*Who will become poor and who will get rich? Who will be made humble and who will be raised up? On Rosh Hashanah it is written. On Yom Kippur it is sealed. Repentance, prayer and charity can transform the severity of the decree.*

Next year, you might consider sticking to your mother's chicken soup.

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