

Darryl Benjamin  
P.O. Box 493  
Hyde Park VT 05655  
802.585.5855  
[darryl@kafkaturtle.com](mailto:darryl@kafkaturtle.com)  
Word count: 1,942

Death of a Foodie  
by Darryl Benjamin

Sure, sure it all started with the plants and the earth and then the freakin' cattle grazing it and then man eating the freakin' cattle and that was supposed to be enough but no we had to go and fuck it up by mechanizing the process, by making it efficient, by expanding to economies-of-scale; the individual wasn't good enough any more, goddammit, but I say the individual is good enough and I say we gotta stand up for our rights to eat healthy, nutritious foods, so that's why I started *Mirabile Dictu*.

Have you tried our compressed figs and young red beets, Hakurei turnips – yes, they are small and plump and white and very cute – red ribbon sorrel and a coulis of pine nuts? I assure you each flavor is bright, distinct, amazing, but none is so purely intense, as reduced to its essence, as the dense, fragrant craziness of the figs.

Are you kidding me? You think that nitwit Fleisher can do better? Let him try. Go ahead and let him try. How many Chefs do you know of with a Ph.D. in Botany/Plant Science? I've air-dried, pickled, cured, foraged and researched every goddamned edible plant you can imagine. You want to talk trophic levels? I'm there. How about weeds? Hah! No such thing, I say. Food security? Tell me about it. I'm on a Safari to hunt plants, and I found the one that's going to blow the roof off the restaurant industry.

Oh! You want to hear about the secret ingredient? Is it an extract or just the plant, straight-up and unadorned? Yes, yes, I can explain, I can tell you. But I'm not going to. Tomorrow I will tell you at our Grand Introduction. My advice to you is to remember your wet-naps.

Never mind what that means. Figure it out for yourself.

Best to leave the sonsofbitches guessing. Information-grubbing vultures. Kimmy says I need them. Yeah, like a hole in the head. Tomorrow they'll find out. Tomorrow the world will know about the plant we found at Parque Nacional Corcovado in Costa Rica.



Once a year I go to Corcovado in search of new ingredients for *Mirabile Dictu*. This year I took my girlfriend, Kimmy Strimple, who insisted she come along.

“There'll be bugs,” I say. “That's OK. Bugs don't bother me.”

“There'll be disease,” I say. “I'll get shots,” she says cheerily.

She knows I'm just testing her. She tells me she loves me but I'm not sure she understands what that means.

I almost lost her fording one of the rivers we crossed. Then I discovered the plant off-trail in the unlikeliest of places: under a mushroom. What compelled me to look under the mushroom? I don't make it a habit to look under a mushroom. The mushroom itself was unimportant, though it was orange with bluish spots arranged like stars. On first take I guessed it was mycorrhizal with dark tuberculate, warted spores, which probably put it in the family Thelephoraceae. Obviously a stipitate hydnum, or “teeth fungi with stems,” as I attempted to explain to Kimmy.

The plant looked delicate and intricate with mossy tendrils, like a vine bent in a Fibonacci spiral, with tiny green and purple leaves nestled in the inner circle. The stalk is scrobiculate and at first slightly sticky. Not as showy as Passiflora. Sedate. Demure. Not as dense as Yellow Chamomile. Simple. elegant.

“Try this,” I suggested. Kimmy touched the brim of her hat and smiled. Her willingness to try anything was one reason I invited her. The plant smelled like pistachio biscotti. The tendrils looked as if they invited chewing.

Kimmy sniffed it, held it above her nose and examined it up close, rotated the slender plant slowly, then popped it in her mouth and thoughtfully chewed. Her eyes relaxed and she drew in a deep breath.

“Tastes like a poem to creaminess, a meditation to rainy summer days,” Kimmy said dreamily. “I’m tingling down there.” She pushed me up against a tree (a Royal Mahogany, if I’m not mistaken).

That was another reason I invited Kimmy. She was always ready. Maybe it was her youth or natural exuberance. I was thrilled as I had never had that effect on one so comely.

Before Kimmy could touch me she stopped dead in her tracks, crossed her legs and began to moan. She writhed in a semi-circle, jerked and then sat down, her knees up, her arms encircling them, gazing up at me through heavily-lidded eyes. “Sorry,” she murmured sleepily.

I watched in amazement. “Kimmy, are you OK?”

“That never happened before. Instant Karma. No additives needed.”

Against my nature, I said, “You had a spontaneous orgasm. I can’t possibly turn you on that much.”

It was she who made the connection. “Give me another sample of that plant.” Ten minutes later we had confirmation.



Kimmy leaned heavily against the tree, one arm propping her up as her head sagged. “Wow.” She looked at Folker. He looked as exotic as the plant species he collected. His head was long and round, with a large forehead and squinty, wizened eyes. His short-cropped jetblack hair capped a frame of prickly stubbled cheeks and chin. His oddness fascinated her from the first. So what if he was 42 and I’m 26, she thought. So freakin’ what? She liked being with him. She noticed she was getting in the habit of injecting profanities when she least expected it. He had begun to rub off on her.

“Do you think it would work for you, too?” she asked.

It did.



I grew excited that I – we – may have found the greatest medical breakthrough since willow bark was converted into aspirin.

The more I thought about it, the less I liked it. “This is dangerous self-indulgence,” I said.

“You want to be remembered by the uniqueness and deliciousness of your food, well here’s your chance. A light touch will go a long way. You want to leave your customers satisfied.”

“But in that manner?” I asked. “Do I want to be remembered as the fool who introduced it to the general public? For all we know, it’ll be a controlled substance faster than you can say cocaine. I think it’s better we keep it a secret.

Kimmy laughed. It sounded like Church Bells in a European square in June. “How are you going to keep people from coming in their pants? A woman might get away with it, but a man?” She laughed again, clear and sweet and unabashedly joyful.

I persisted. “Is it possible to overdose? What about long-term effects? Prescription conflicts? What if your dog eats it?”

“You can control how *you* use it, at least,” Kimmy said. She chided me for looking so miserable. She told me it was better than Viagra, because it cut out the middle-man. We laughed, we shouted, we cried, we made love.

At last I agreed. I could no more contain this secret than man could stop building newer, more efficient weapons to kill his fellow man. Go ahead, let the bastards slaughter each other. At least I can make a few people happy. My tiny corner of the earth.



My samples are gone! Someone has stolen them.

It can only be Kimmy. Kimmy whom I trusted. Kimmy whom I think I loved has stolen my only store of *Mirabilia*. That is what I’ve decided to call it, in honor of my restaurant. She even took my grafts. I can’t grow new fungi. Why would she do this to me? Even if I wanted to, I doubted I could ever find another like it.

I've called Kimmy maybe a hundred times, but it's always the same: "Hi, you've reached Kimmy. I'm busy now, but soon I won't be, I'll call you then!" She's been busy for a long time. What could she possibly be doing?

I thought about calling the police. But it'd be my word against hers. I have no evidence. Unless they catch her red-handed, she can do as she pleases.

I wondered if Kimmy had a drug problem. Had she thrown me over for a plant? To anyone else, that might be an insult. To me, it's a compliment. Plants are sexy. I'm not sure I am.



Rob Fleisher, that son-of-a-bitch! He owns Pimento, a restaurant he claims is Farm-to-Table but I know he has his produce shipped in. His distributor told me. He cuts corners and has questionable sanitation. Personally I would feel safer eating at a fast-food restaurant.

Here is a small story in the "Living" section of the *Humphrey Gazette*.

Guests at Pimento got more than they bargained for last night. For some, natural food does not seem to be enough: guests claim they experienced spontaneous orgasms after trying the table-smoked wild-caught Tasmanian ocean trout, Nordic deep sea shrimp with sour cream and chives and a new ingredient introduced by daring celebrity Chef Rob Fleisher.

Fleisher claims to have discovered a new plant he is calling Pimentana after his restaurant. When questioned, Fleisher refused to reveal where he had procured the plant. "Let's just say it's in keeping with our policy of serving only the freshest, healthiest, most natural ingredients."

Some guests appeared offended. Gloria Momjus of nearby Jamesville said, "They at least should've warned us. Me, I didn't order the entrée, but my husband did, and I had a taste, and he soiled his trousers and I got embarrassed. We came for the food, not a thrill ride."

Other customers said they'd be back. "This is going to be the very next fad," one young man said. "More likely a trend," his girlfriend said. They both had wide smiles.

When asked about the legality and safety issues of introducing a new plant, Pimento owner Fleisher deferred to his business partner, Kimmy Brigston. "It's all on the up and up. I've checked it out. There are no laws against it."

Fleisher had the last word. "Sure, I'll lose some customers, but I think more will come than won't."



Folker Soberline, owner of Mirabile Dictu, born in Switzerland and raised in the United States, considered by many the finest chef in the United States of America, felt as if he had been punched in the stomach. It was insult to injury. It was an outrage. How could she have lied so brazenly? Maybe he was a blind over-the-hill old man. Maybe she was in league with that bastard Fleisher all along.

On the six o'clock TV news there was video of people lined up around the block at Pimento. "It's a blockbuster!" the announcer said wryly.

It had always been Folker's dream to have guests beat down his door to get in. Now his dream, his girl, and his property had been stolen.

Folker sat in his La-Z-Boy and wept.



Here's the thing that Folker Soberline finds the most amusing as he watches Pimento burn against the night sky: the flames are orange with bluish spots arranged like stars.

He wonders if Kimmy and Robbie were making love on top of piles of money when they first smelled the smoke. He wondered if they tried to get out but couldn't because the restaurant was fully involved. He wondered what the bushel of plants he had taken from Corcovado smelled like as it burned – would it still smell like biscotti and pistachio? Or of burnt rubber?

After Mirabile Dictu folded and Folker Soberline was long forgotten as he sat in his cell, he marveled yet again about how much joy he could have brought to the world. If the bastards had only let him.