

## **The Risotto** **by Bill Spencer**

“Aaargh!! Amy!”

Chef slammed the scorched pot down on the South Bend cooktop. She then turned, scanning the kitchen for the guilty culprit. No luck. She stared again into the disgusting pot of burnt glop. The acrid stench of charred rice filled the room. A beautiful risotto...ruined. Chef circled the kitchen, furious. Still no Amy. Cooks busied themselves at their work stations, heads down, snatching furtive glances, sharing grimaces, grins.

“I’ll go find her, the sous-chef finally said.

Amy was on a smoke break. Amy didn’t smoke. At least, not any more. Amy didn’t smoke because it was gross. It made her breath and hair smell. Jimmy said so. But Amy still took smoke breaks. It just wouldn’t be fair if she didn’t.

“Jimmy is totally sick. So laid back, so deep. And can that boy stroll a pair of skinny jeans, “ Amy thought.

Amy got a ride to work with Jimmy. That way if she wanted to hang out with Jimmy later on she could ask him for a ride home. Unless he ditched her and he had ditched her. But she’d heard talk about the cooks going out after work. If they went out, Amy would go and then Jimmy would come too. But she didn’t trust those girls around Jimmy or was it she didn’t trust Jimmy around those girls.

“Anywhoo...” Amy’s reverie was interrupted when the back door opened and a sliver of light illuminated the loading dock.

“Amy. Chef,” a voice urgently called.

“Oh no! The risotto.”

Risotto is not a food. It is not an ingredient. It is not a grain, a legume, a starch or a vegetable. Risotto is a dish made from short grained rice. Classic risotto recipes include wild mushroom risotto, asparagus risotto and Parmigiano-Reggiano risotto. There is no hidden formula to making a good risotto. Recipes are remarkably similar. The only secret to constructing a good risotto is time and patience. At the critical moment in preparation, hot stock is added to the rice, in small increments, and the rice is stirred, gently and steadily, for over twenty minutes. One cannot hurry a risotto. One cannot neglect a risotto. A risotto requires tender, loving care. A properly made risotto transforms simple ingredients into a rich, creamy, culinary masterpiece.

“What am I going to do with that girl?” Chef wondered. Amy was scatterbrained, impulsive, and unpredictable. She was also curious, hardworking and charismatic. When she was on she was on. “I’ve got to be strong. I’ve got to set an example,” Chef told herself. Then she remembered the night the grill cook never showed up. Not the first time. “Don’t worry. I got this. “ Amy had boasted.

“What other choice do I have? “ Chef thought.

Tentative at first, Amy quickly got up to speed. Finding her way. The steaks, the chops, the char-grilled salmon, the tickets all went out, on time and miraculously, didn’t come back. With the kitchen in the weeds, Chef actually caught herself, shaking her head in disbelief, watching Amy rockin’ the grill, workin’ hard, having fun.

At one point, a waiter popped his head in to the kitchen. “The six top had steaks and send their compliments to the chef,” he said. Amy gave a little fist pump and turned from side to side, nodding her head letting the kitchen know “king of the grill in the house.”

“Oh my goodness. There’s something there,” Chef had thought.

Chef watched Amy skulk back into the kitchen and saw herself, thirty-five years younger. Just a kid, still a lot of mistakes to wash down the drain. Amy stood silently before Chef. Chef thrust the smoldering pot of risotto in Amy’s face.

“Oh wow. You really do have to stir it.”

Amy’s eyes met Chef’s. “I’m so sorry. I’ve learned my lesson. It won’t happen again.” Amy’s eyes pleaded.

“Star over.” Chef barked.

“Yes, Chef” came Amy’s contrite reply.

“And clean this pot before you go home.”

“Yes, Chef.”

Chef turned, walked away and smiled.