

Toad in the Hole

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We are at the stove. I am probably ten, maybe younger, at an age when I had to look up to you. You were so tall, so handsome, with your dark wavy hair and blue eyes. You didn't normally cook, Daddy. You certainly didn't bake and were not often in the kitchen, but on this day Mom is not cooking and I am standing at your side, me with my reddish brown hair and your blue eyes, looking up at you, watching you, listening to you tell me how to make that wonder of egg and bread, Toad in the Hole.

I am tall enough to see the top of the electric stove, to see you lift the cast iron pan, black from years of use, and place it on the front left burner, the small one, and turn the knob to medium.

Bread and eggs and butter are near us, probably on your left, on the counter that you built with the shelf for cookbooks and the nook for the clock radio. I don't know exactly what you said — it was 40 or so years ago — something like, "First, you put some butter in the pan," and I am betting, because you were always good at teaching me how to fix things, you let me take a knife, cut a pat of butter, and *tap tap* the knife on the bottom of the pan so that the butter slipped off, and together we watched it melt.

Next you took a slice of bread from the loaf and showed me how to cut a hole in the middle. Did you use a biscuit cutter? Or did you cut the hole with a knife? It doesn't matter, but now, all these years later, I'd really like to know. Then you took an egg, tapped the shell, once, maybe twice, on the edge of the pan, *tap tap*, cracked it open with your thumbs, grease-stained from all

the work you'd done with your hands over the years fixing air conditioners, stoves, faucets, tractors, cars. We watched the sunny yolk and nearly clear egg white drop into the pan and start to sizzle.

We are standing side by side, and I am too young to know that things will change. That a day will come when you can no longer build and fix and instruct, that near the end of your life you will spend hours in the basement shop sorting nails and screws and pieces of metal into jars, in an attempt to make sense of the muddle in your brain.

But in my memory, we are still together at the stove, watching the egg sizzle and the bread toast. You must have taken a spatula that day and flipped the Toad in the Hole over to toast the other side of the bread to a golden brown, to cook the egg so it was no longer runny. Added some salt and pepper. Perhaps laughed with me at the name "toad in the hole," as we wondered together who came up with that funny name to describe one egg cooked in a hole in a slice of bread. Me looking up at you, smiling at my daddy who knows how to cook fun things, as you slipped the spatula underneath my Toad in the Hole and slid it onto a plate. "Thank you Daddy," I hope I said, as I carried my plate to the kitchen table and sat down to the feast.