

WHLE

WHOLENESS · HEALING · LIVING · EVOLVING



TheLong
Table



TABLES, NO. 00

The Very First Table



told by
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Cooking is something unique and flexible, not something rigid that goes only with recipes, structured and defined.

Everyone has a unique way of cooking, depending on their culture and motivations.

While cooking, what matters is to experience, care, and repeat, over and over again, with many different ingredients, so you can improvise and create new tastes.

— F.

How the first table was set

I cut my finger on the very first vegetable.

Kuwait was not my choice. Nobody had told me the trick every woman learns in her first weeks in a new country: *a house is not yet a home, and a city is not yet a place, until you have cooked in it — and fed strangers who become the shape of the room.*

In Urla I had already had a shape. Cooking classes with Filiz. The Aegean sun. Herbs at the door. Students who arrived hungry and left as friends. My hands knew what to do. And then I landed here, and my hands did not know where to go.

So I went to the Turkish Women's Society. Not to teach anything — just to be with the ones who had already been here longer, who knew where to do what, who had passed through their own first weeks and could tell me which streets to walk down.

That is where I met Meltem.

She came to my house. We sat in my kitchen. I told her the whole thing.

The classes in Urla. The way it felt when the pot came to the boil and the room went quiet. How I did not know how to begin again in Kuwait.

I said the words out loud for the first time.

She was excited. She did not hesitate. She said: *let's do this together, in my house.*



the very first reunion to host TheLongtable

Everything started at that moment.

I chose the name — TheLongtable — because a long table is what I had always been looking for; a table that keeps making room. I sat down and typed the letters, and the way they fell became the logo. Nothing designed. Nothing polished. Just the word, standing there.

And I stood up too. I was the first chef ever at TheLongtable, on the first night, in Meltem's kitchen, cooking the food I knew by heart from Urla, feeding people I had only just met.

Before the guests arrived, I went to a shop.

I bought twenty-one cutting boards — round, every one a different colour. And a new set of knives, one for each person. That was the whole plan.

No perfection. Just: *bring your enthusiasm and your laughter, and enjoy the new taste of the dish in front of you.*

The social side of cooking. Culture, exchanged.

I organised the shopping list. We washed and prepped every vegetable together with Meltem's helpers — the women who kept the kitchen running while we prepared to keep the whole room running. Every vegetable cleaned. Every board wiped. Arranged in the middle of the table as if they were the centrepiece.

We would cook as a family. One pot to share.

When I stepped back and looked at the room, it had turned into something I did not quite plan. The table dressed itself. The colours — the vegetables in the middle, the twenty-one boards around them, the light on the plates — put an Aegean spell on the whole salon. It was as if Urla's afternoon air had walked into Meltem's kitchen and stayed. Enchanting. That is the only word for it.

The order of a class matters. We start with the dessert, so it can cool in the fridge until the end of the meal. Every dish has its place in the sequence. Two hours is all you have to prepare the whole menu before people get tired — and no one wants a silent dinner. Cooking is the warm-up. Eating is the reward.



Aegean breeze on the table — set, waiting

Then the guests started to arrive. I was trembling with excitement to be on the spot — and then bad luck appeared, on the first minute.

The knife was brand new. The very first vegetable I picked up was an artichoke. I cut my finger.

We stopped. Someone put a glove on my hand. *Çaktırmadım ama korkmuştum.* I didn't show it, but I was frightened. Then I kept going as if nothing had happened.

— and there I was, forced into a glove on my own opening night. The chef in latex. Very glamorous.



preparation, glove and all

And I succeeded.

By the time the pans came off the stove and the food arrived at the table, the room was already what I had wanted it to be. Everyone was talking. Everyone had cooked something. The finger was invisible under a plaster. The plates went around and around.

Blood on the artichoke. Meltem's kitchen full of laughter I hadn't yet earned. And this is what I learned that night:

You do not need to be ready.
You need to stand up.

Nine years later, there have been more than two hundred tables. Twenty cuisines. Women from twelve countries at the head seat. But the first one was in Meltem's kitchen — twenty-one coloured cutting boards, one plaster on my finger — and I stood up.

That was the beginning.

What was cooked that night

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|----|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 01 | Rice Pudding | <i>Sütlaç · the soft opening</i> |
| 02 | Artichoke Rice | <i>Enginarlı pilav</i> |
| 03 | Fresh Fava with Basil | <i>Bakla ezmesi</i> |
| 04 | Roasted Eggplant Salad | <i>Patlıcan salatası</i> |
| 05 | Pink Lady | <i>Beetroot & feta</i> |
| 06 | Cacık | <i>yoghurt, cucumber, herbs</i> |
| 07 | Smoky Eggplant Purée | <i>Beğendi — under the steak</i> |
| 08 | Halloumi in Grape Leaves | <i>passed around the table</i> |
| 09 | Steak | <i>the main — melting on beğendi</i> |

RECIPE 01

Rice Pudding

Sütlaç · the soft opening

We start with the dessert, so it can cool down in the fridge until the end of the meal. Order is important. There is only 2 hours to prepare the whole menu — people get tired after that. No one wants a silent dinner.

This was my grandfather's favourite dessert. I always thought the logic of a *sweet rice* was strange — but the more I ate it, the more I loved it.

The prized ones were the sütlaç made in the old days with fresh, full-fat milk bought from the milkman. A layer of cream (*kaymak*) would form on top, naturally. And when it went into the oven and that cream browned, it left something on the roof of the mouth like *crème brûlée* — sweet, burnt, sticking.

It brought the taste of heaven — a heaven I can only catch a glimpse of. Nourishing. Sweet. Calming. Safe.



the promise, cooling in the oven

INGREDIENTS

- 7 cups milk
- 1 cup rice, already boiled
- 1½ cups sugar (a little less)
- 4 tbsp rice flour

METHOD

1. Boil the rice slowly, over low heat, so it releases its starch into the water.
2. In another pot, whisk together the milk, sugar and rice flour.
3. Stir over medium heat until it thickens; add the already-boiled rice.
4. When the mixture returns to a boil, turn off the heat and pour into small oven-safe cups.
5. Place under the top grill of the oven to brown the tops.

You can add orange peel — or any other fruit skin — for aroma. Depends on your creativity and taste.

Artichoke Rice

Enginarlı pilav · the rice with spring inside

Since my childhood, my favourite vegetable to cook has been the artichoke. Its thorny shell, its resilience, the hidden benefit and softness inside. The way you peel it, and the effort of keeping it from oxidizing — half a lemon rubbed against the cut to hold its natural colour. It always impressed me. And its benefit for the liver, which carries our anger — it serves the body's detoxification.

Nowadays you can buy the frozen, already-peeled ones from the market. I still prefer to peel them myself.

And Urla is the best place to find *milk-tender artichokes (süt enginar)* — not babies, teenagers — the ones so soft that when you shake them, they don't crack. They dance.

The İstanbul artichokes are bigger, more abundant. But the Urla dance is hard to find in them. Their bottoms (*çanak*) don't come out from those — they stay rigid. That's the seed. That's the air. That's the water.

In the Urla ones, you eat even the *çanak*. You suck the stem in your mouth. Every part is a different medicine. Nothing to throw away.

Urla artichokes are expensive. You don't find them easily at the market — and if you do, there is no continuity. You have to know a farm. You ask, and they set some aside for you.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups rice
- 6 spring onions, chopped
- 4 cups water
- 1 tea-glass olive oil (~100 ml)
- 5 tsp salt
- 2 tsp sugar
- 2 packs frozen artichoke
- Juice of 1 lemon
- Fresh dill, to finish
- Grated lemon zest, to finish

METHOD

1. Sauté the spring onion whites in olive oil over low heat, 4-5 minutes.
2. Add the rice and stir until glossy.
3. Pour in the hot water, salt and sugar. Cover, turn heat to low, cook until the rice absorbs all the water.
4. Take off the heat. Lift the lid, drape a clean kitchen towel over the pot and cover again. Let stand 5 minutes.
5. Fold in lemon zest, fresh dill and the green parts of the spring onions. Serve warm or cold.

Fresh Fava Bean with Basil

Bakla ezmesi · from the frozen bag, made green again

Ezme is the indispensable of Anatolia. Any ezme.

Bakla is the vegetable that the ancient ones recommended to nursing mothers — the same way cows are fed to multiply their milk, they said. But it makes gas. *You fart, and it passes.* The baby cries too, for a while — it gets gassy too. Life!

Peeling the outer skins off each bean, one by one, is important. The skin is hard to digest. Then a good pour of olive oil, a rasp of fresh lemon zest, and torn basil leaves — that Mediterranean fragrance, the herb and the citrus finding each other — and something happens. Freshness on the palate, a small smile, a lightness. The face of the person eating it opens up.

INGREDIENTS

- 900 g frozen fava beans
- 1 tea-glass olive oil (~100 ml)
- 4 garlic cloves
- 4 large onions
- ¼ cup water
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp sugar
- Fresh basil, torn
- Zest of 1 lemon

METHOD

1. Slip the beans out of their skins.
2. Put the beans, onions, garlic, salt, sugar and water in a pot.
3. Boil together until soft.
4. Off the heat, add the lemon zest and torn basil.
5. Crush with a hand blender until smooth.

RECIPE 04

Roasted Eggplant Salad

Patlıcan salatası · the smoky one

Roasting the eggplant is an art. There are many ways to do it. I prefer the old way.

Take the eggplant, stab it two or three times with a fork — open small holes so it can breathe — and place it directly on the fire of the stove. Then let it cool. Peel.

But the new kitchens are a bit toooooo clear and clean. No more fire. Electric stoves instead. I don't like them. If yours is one of those, put the eggplant in the oven to roast — not the same taste, but it does the job. Everyone gets used to what they use.

That's life.

INGREDIENTS

- 6 eggplants, roasted
- 8-10 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 tbsp vinegar
- 1 teacup olive oil (~100 ml)
- Parsley, chopped
- Salt · a pinch of sugar

METHOD

1. Roast the eggplants; peel and remove the seeds.
2. As you cut the flesh, work in the crushed garlic, vinegar, olive oil, parsley, salt and sugar until you have a rough salad.

RECIPE 05

Pink Lady

Pancarlı · the colour of the table

This one I made up. I gave it its name.

I had never known this meze before. I had boiled beetroot at hand and I just crushed it. I love feta. And olive oil. I mixed the three, spread it on artisan roasted bread with olive oil — crust and all — and it tasted like a bruschetta.

And I loved the colour. So I looked at it and said: *your name, from now on, is Pink Lady.*

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g boiled beetroot, drained
- 1 kg feta cheese
- 1 teacup olive oil (~100 ml)

METHOD

1. Drain the beetroot well.
2. Crush and mix with the feta.
3. Loosen with a little olive oil.

RECIPE 06

Cacık

The cooling one, always

There are many ways to prepare cacık — every culture has one. It is on almost every table.

What matters is how you cut the cucumber. *Ha ha*. And how dense you like your cacık to be.

Some cut on a board — not good enough to reach truly tiny pieces. Some grate — too much water, you have to strain it out. Some cut the way I do: take the cucumber in your left hand and start applying small touches from the head, randomly, horizontal and vertical. Easy. Quick. Many small pieces. And not too much water.

Dry mint, olive oil and garlic — the unchanging trio of cacık. That is the secret.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g yoghurt
- 6-7 cucumbers, finely chopped
- A little water
- Crushed garlic
- Fresh dill and mint
- Dry mint, dry red pepper
- Olive oil
- Ice cubes

METHOD

1. Whisk the yoghurt with a little water in a bowl.
2. Fold in the chopped cucumbers and everything else.
3. Serve with ice cubes.

RECIPE 07

Smoky Eggplant Purée

Beğendi · under the meat

INGREDIENTS

- 8-10 roasted eggplants
- 2 sticks butter
- 3 tbsp flour
- Milk (enough for béchamel consistency)
- Salt · pepper
- 200 g mozzarella, grated

METHOD

1. Melt the butter; add the flour and cook briefly.
2. Whisk in milk until you reach a béchamel consistency.
3. Fold in the roasted eggplant; cook the two together.
4. Blend smooth with a hand blender.
5. Stir in the cheese. Serve as a bed for the steak.

RECIPE 08

Halloumi in Grape Leaves

A little jewel to pass around

Every Aegean can reach a vine leaf. They are abundant in the Aegean. What matters is to collect them at the right time.

In my garden I have a bunch of them. In spring, they begin to give the small and tiny ones, and every day I pick a handful — the ones that have grown just enough.

Traditionally we stuff them with rice and parsley, lemon juice, black pepper, plenty of onions. But here I did a creative one. Halloumi is famous from the island of Cyprus — born there because of the goats. *Keçi sütü*. I love halloumi, and combined with pomegranate juice, it was an amazing finger food, a hot appetizer before the main meal.

INGREDIENTS

- Halloumi, sliced
- Grape leaves
- Pomegranate molasses
- Olive oil

METHOD

1. Boil the grape leaves in plenty of water until soft.
2. Brush each leaf with pomegranate molasses; place a slice of halloumi in the centre and roll tightly.
3. Heat olive oil in a pan and sear the parcels until the halloumi begins to melt through the leaves.

Steak

The one that ends the meal — the main, over the beğendi

There is no specific way of cooking a steak. There is only *how you choose it*.

Newly killed meat is still tight, still muscle. It needs to relax. To age. The steak you slaughter and cook the same day will not travel down the throat — it stays where you bite. *Aged enough, relaxed enough*. That is the whole difference between meat that hides in your mouth and meat that opens.

Mine was *lokum* steak from the Sultan chef in Kuwait — bonfile, aged just enough. Cut like Turkish delight. Melting in the mouth before you even chew.

If you know how to choose the meat, every way you cook it will melt in the mouth. That is the whole secret.

Then combine with your carbs of choice. That first night I laid the steaks over smoky eggplant purée — the beğendi from Recipe 07. If you make one, make the other. They belong on the same plate.



the whole table, ready

WHAT MATTERS

- The cut — bonfile / tenderloin
- The aging — enough, not too long
- The butcher — the one you trust

HOW

1. Bring the meat to room temperature.
2. Salt generously just before it hits the pan.
3. Hot pan. A little oil. Sear both sides.
4. Rest before you cut. That is the only real rule.