

RON TANNER

Cats as Tuna

I filled a pot with housecats. The pot was my biggest. Still, there were a lot of cats. They didn't seem to mind being in the pot. I knew they weren't tuna. But I needed to make tuna salad. And all I had were cats. Cats always seem to be around and underfoot, winding through my legs. Cat hair floats through my house like dandelion down.

I'd left my guests in the front room playing blind man's bluff. I had promised a luncheon and told everyone to carry on, I'd be back shortly. But, as in a dream, I found myself moments later in the kitchen, staring at an empty cupboard. Where was the tuna?

I make tuna salad with mayonnaise. Not a lot of mayonnaise. If there's more mayonnaise than tuna, then you've made a mayonnaise sandwich. You can't call it tuna salad. For texture, I add finely chopped celery. If I'm feeling feisty, I'll put capers in, too. You have to drain the capers. Cats won't eat capers, but they love tuna. So I thought I was on the right track.

Pepper is a must. But not salt. Canned tuna is very salty, you may have noticed. As I was not using canned tuna, but cats instead, I debated whether or not to add salt. Capers are quite salty. So are cured olives. I prefer pitted kalamata olives marinated in red wine and rosemary. I wasn't feeling so feisty that I was inclined to add pitted kalamata olives marinated in red wine and rosemary. Nonetheless, I opened the fridge to take a look.

My fridge is an old one that, at a glance, may remind you of a 1957 Cadillac convertible. It has aerodynamic contours and a lot of chrome. Like an old automobile, it also has rusty sides. I used to feel self-conscious about owning an old fridge with rusty sides. I thought I should have a stainless steel fridge. It seems everybody does. But then I considered my prospects for retirement—which seem to grow slimmer by the day. I considered, too, the great number of cats I have to feed. After that, I decided I could live with my old fridge. Then, in a perverse, slightly defiant mood, I contemplated naming my fridge because, when the motor kicks in, the thing shudders and

grumbles like an old man waking from a nap. I thought, Wouldn't I be the eccentric, naming my fridge Harold or Ramón or Oliver?

As I opened Oliver's heavy door, I noticed a few cats were sitting on top of him, looking down at me with that curious, *what's-up?* expression that cats wear so well. "Get back in that pot," I told them. They blinked at me. I looked around and saw that the pot was still full of cats. These cats—the fridge cats—weren't tuna cats, I realized. "Sorry!" I said in a mock teen voice that is best suited for "What-ever!"

I had no pitted kalamata olives marinated in red wine and rosemary. But I did have dried Greek olives, though I couldn't remember having bought these. It took me an hour to pit them. Pits were everywhere. Cats were hockey-pucking the pits across the kitchen floor. Not the tuna cats. The tuna cats were still in the pot, busying themselves with capers and celery. Or so I thought. Imagine my surprise when I found them licking mayonnaise from each other's coats. Cats love mayonnaise. Why had I forgotten that?

Fortunately, I had an extra jar. You may have noticed that most manufacturers of mayonnaise are now packaging it in plastic jars. I don't know that you can call plastic containers *jars*, but that's what they look like. I'm willing to spend a little more to get glass. It doesn't feel right to spoon mayonnaise from a plastic container that *looks* like a jar. Cats couldn't care less.

I heard a crash—the shatter of glass—from the front room and then laughter. "Oh, look at that!" someone exclaimed. Were my guests growing impatient?

I tamped down the cats in my pot, then dolloped in more mayonnaise. One cup, to be precise, though I wasn't sure if this was too much or too little, since I'd never made tuna salad with cats. I am aware, as I'm sure you are, that one should not eat tuna frequently. Like us, tuna is high on the food chain and so it accumulates toxins in its tissue. Mercury, especially. For those who love tuna, it is recommended that one eat no more than a single can each week. I myself am mad about tuna. I may eat two or more cans each week. This is a risk I am willing to take. Happily, none of my guests was pregnant or a child. What is more, I wasn't preparing tuna. I was preparing cats *as* tuna. So there was nothing to fear, was there?

Still, I wasn't sure I could carry it off. Cats are *not* tuna. Everybody knows that. But I wanted to make the right gesture. I wanted to be

a good host. I sighed, then looked into my pot of housecats. They continued licking their coats. I imagined their mayonnaised paw-prints all over the dining room table. And flicking tails in the eyes of every guest. Could an entrée be more unruly? Oh well, I told myself. Now is not the time to lose heart! So I added pepper. Let the cats sneeze! I thought. And, yes, let them complain when stirred. These are hard times and some days we do our best when, with only a few things at hand, we simply make do.