

JP Delaney

Simple pleasures

Good food and conversation

BY JUDY GELMAN AND VICKI LEVY KRUPP

Costco's suggested Book Club read provides insight into a selected novel, as well as an appropriate recipe to accompany your own book club's discussion.

IN JP DELANEY'S psychological thriller, *The Girl Before*, Jane, recovering from a traumatic event, has applied to be a tenant at a minimalist London rental home designed by the owner, architect Edward Monkford. Jane seizes the opportunity to reside at One Folgate Street, despite Edward's selective process and unusual house rules. When Jane begins a relationship with Edward she learns that Emma, a previous occupant, met a mysterious death in the house. Jane and Emma tell their stories in alternating narratives as Jane attempts to untangle truth from lies.

"Afterward, it's as if he comes out of a kind of trance, and the urbane, thoughtful Edward is back in charge. He cooks us some pasta, the sauce nothing more than some green olive oil from an unlabeled bottle, a smear of fresh goat's



cheese and plenty of ground pepper," Jane reports in *The Girl Before*.

"Edward is a minimalist architect who requires that those who live in his houses adopt the minimalist credo 'less is more' in its entirety, meaning no ornaments, no pictures, no rugs, even no books," Delaney tells *The Connection*. "When Jane starts a relationship with him, she discovers that his minimalism even extends to the food he cooks, such as this incredibly simple dish, a variation on the classic *cacio e pepe* [cheese and pepper]. Yet because the ingredients are very high quality—in Edward's version, the oil is 'lacrima,' the 'tears' which rise to the surface even before the olives have been pressed, hinting at his obsessive and uncompromising nature—Jane discovers how delicious it is. She's being seduced by his beliefs even as she's being seduced into his bed."

To non-Italians, Delaney says, *cacio e pepe* can look almost Spartan. "But if you have really good cheese and really good olive oil, those flavors sing through," he explains. "Pecorino Romano is traditional, but it's hard to find a good one out of Italy, so I substitute fresh goat's cheese, which has the same acidity. Most Parmesan doesn't have that sharpness." Delaney suggests half Parmesan cheese



EDWARD'S CACIO E PEPE

¾ pound fresh linguine
½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons good-quality olive oil
2 teaspoons coarsely ground black pepper
Salt to taste
2 ounces goat cheese
Basil leaves (optional)
Cherry tomatoes, quartered (optional)

In a pot of boiling salted water, cook the pasta until al dente. Drain, reserving ½ cup of the cooking water. Return the pasta to the pot and add the Parmesan cheese, olive oil, pepper and cooking water. Toss well. Season with salt. Divide the pasta among 4 bowls. Smear ½ ounce of goat cheese on top of each portion. Add basil and tomatoes if desired. Serve immediately. Makes 4 servings.

Recipe and photo courtesy of JP Delaney

and half goat's cheese for a less aggressive taste. "You can jazz it up with basil leaves and quartered cherry tomatoes," he adds, "although jazzing it up somewhat goes against the spirit of the dish, which is its simplicity."

Delaney's past work as a food and travel writer covering Italy for Great Britain's *The Sunday Times* left him with a love of Roman food and its simple, fresh ingredients. "As they say in Italy: 'Whereas French food is all about the skill of the chef, Italian food is all about the glory of God—respect for the ingredients,'" he says.

To accompany this dish, Delaney says, "Italian wine is a must!" He suggests a light-bodied, fragrant red such as Chianti or other sangiovese, or an unoaked, piquant white such as Gavi or vermentino, or an Italian aperitivo, such as an Aperol Spritz, made with Aperol, prosecco and soda water. ☛

THE COSTCO CONNECTION

The Girl Before (Item #1213105, 1/5) is available in most Costco warehouses, along with food and drink to make this dish and more for your book club.

Judy Gelman and Vicki Levy Krupp are behind the cookbook and website The Book Club Cookbook (bookclubcookbook.com).