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With Love and Olive Oil Healing the Heart

'Valentine's Day saw me sitting down to an intimate dinner that yelled 'effort, effort, effort'. The ambiance had romance written all over it – gentle blues music quietly washing over me, mouth-watering aromas filling my senses and a table so lovingly arranged that it made me want to cry.' Xandre Probyn reports.

There I was surrounded by what should have been warmth, caring and simmering excitement, and yet I found it almost impossible to rise to the occasion. In fact, I was feeling drained, dried up and completely over-indulged. No doubt, a left-over from the season's celebrations. Trying to appear totally enthralled, I started fiddling with the items on the table and was attracted by a bottle sporting a black label with bold pink writing that contained an equally bright pink heart.

To digress for a minute – there is a school of thought to which I am rather partial that states that everything happens for a reason; some feel that the intervention comes from a higher being, others the universe, fate or karma. Regardless of the explanation, what matters right then is that what needs to happen happens. Such was the case that night. Little did I know that my act of subterfuge would create a situation that provided the answer to my dilemma.

With a difference

On closer examination, I saw that the bottle I had been studying was called OliveHeart (the heart replacing the

'v') and was an extra virgin olive oil from Spain. Even I, with my sorely lacking culinary skills, know that olive oil is good for you. Even so, I decided to use this funky little label as an excuse to inject some excitement and as a sign that I was intrinsically appreciative of the effort. I proceeded to innocently ask why the use of OliveHeart extra virgin olive oil, basing it on the fact that I had never set eyes on it before.

My partner, who was more than likely beginning to feel the palling atmosphere, jumped right in with evident relief and started extolling its virtues. Then he encouraged me to try some with a chunk of freshly baked bread. All I can say was that it uplifted my palate straight to Nirvana and sent my misery scurrying in the opposite direction. The search for OliveHeart enlightenment was on and this is what I discovered from him and from my explorations.

The first item that received a tick in my books was that it was produced in Spain – as we all know, people from Mediterranean countries have fewer heart problems and a lower incidence of cancer. Studies indicate that this is largely due to their diet, in which olive oil plays a rather large role. This alone was almost enough to divest

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myself of the sludge that I felt backfiring through my body. Secondly, this olive oil was created on a farm in Córdoba by a group of professionals who lovingly offered more than 30 years worth of experience and expertise to find the right combination of olives to give it a deliciously green fruity flavour. The process was not without its challenges. This oil contains an exceptionally high level of polyphenols, which play a big role in cardio-health, but which can also give the olive oil a bitter taste. To prevent this, the correct varieties of olives need to be picked at the right time in the right way, the weather needs to be perfect and the method of preservation needs to ensure that the olives have retained their high polyphenol content when they arrive on your table. Those close to me will tell you that food does not play a particularly important role in my life, so when I indulge I like to do it with food that tantalises my taste buds and leaves the rest of my senses feeling thoroughly spoilt and sated. A definite tick for this brand of olive oil in this category.

Other benefits

I was delighted to see that OliveHeart would help my diabetic friends as well since it promotes lower LDL ('bad' cholesterol) levels, improves insulin sensitivity and helps to regulate blood sugar levels. I was particularly surprised to see that it is good for obesity – who would have thought so, considering it has a high calorie content?

In my experience, painful joints tends to diminish any feelings of romance and I heaved a sigh of relief when I read some studies that showed that polyphenols can prevent the onset of rheumatoid arthritis. Also, having just heard from my doctor that I had the perfect build for osteoporosis, I almost poured the entire bottle of olive oil down my throat when I discovered that it helps to prevent osteoporosis by building bone strength and health while increasing calcium absorption.

And, finally, as extra virgin olive oil is rich in antioxidants and a powerful free-radical scavenger, it is a perfect pick-me-up and turn-me-around for ageing, and sun-indulged skins.

Ah, bliss as I gaze fondly at my newly acquired bottle of OliveHeart and feel the romance blossoming within me – definitely a reason for a Valentine's Day rerun. ♥

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