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AN EASY, FESTIVE DISH FOR YOUR HOLIDAYS
AND SPECIAL GATHERINGS

AS IF THEY KNOW SCHOOL is about to start, leaves are about to color and days are about to get cooler. August ratchets up its gears to go out with a bang rather than a whimper. The Blue Angels with their death-defying aerial acrobatics come to the Chicago Lakefront for the Chicago Air and Water Show. Lollapalooza brings revelers from around the world to rock and stomp with the best bands in the land. The farmers' markets are ablaze with riotous colors of produce, and at press time, the Cubs are battling to stay in the division lead. What a month!

Mother Nature, never one to take a back seat to anyone or anything, had to come up with something phenomenal to top all of that. Something to make us stop in our tracks. Something earth-shattering in its splendor. "Aha," she must have thought, "I'll make darkness descend on the light of the day. For only a few minutes, the sun will disappear in its tracks. This will be my gift to you:

a magical, heavenly extravaganza with free admission for all." Egalitarian to the end; that's our mom.

A solar eclipse! What a great excuse for a party. Oohs and aahs are so much more powerful in numbers. Some of my friends were heading south to Carbondale, Ill., where the darkness would be most complete. Some were heading west to Montana or Wyoming, where solar festivities were taking place at a feverish pace. I was staying home. My backyard would be my planetarium.

Now came a dilemma. What would I serve for this occasion? The eclipse would take place around 11 a.m. Breakfast or lunch? I wanted it to be festive, yet I wanted to be outside with my guests, not watching something bubbling away on the stove. Nature chose the theme. I wanted to comply.

Eggs seemed an obvious choice. I remembered serving them to a whole group of people for dinner when I immolated the lamb on the barbecue. No one seemed to mind. They attacked the frittata

with gusto. Now that I had the main ingredient in mind, it was a matter of coming up with something special that could serve a crowd, but leave me, for the most part, out of the kitchen and on the lawn.

Shakshuka! (Did you just say, God bless you?) No, I didn't sneeze; I came up with a most festive dish for this occasion. Shakshuka, it is believed, originated in the Ottoman Empire, then rapidly spread throughout the Middle East and Spain. In its most basic form, it is an egg dish with garlic, chili, and paprika. Across various countries and cultures, different spices were added: cumin in Spain, harissa in Yemen, feta in other parts of the Middle East. A food blogger from Paris makes hers with olives and cinnamon. Moroccan Chef, Mourad Lahlou garnishes his with edible flowers and micro greens, and uses only the egg yolks rather than the whole egg. The incredible, edible egg is the common denominator. Everything else is chef's choice.

Although I made my shakshuka with whole eggs for breakfast last weekend, I decided to go with Chef Lahlou's variation of using only the yolks for my eclipse party. Metaphorically speaking, I liked the idea of the dark, rich sauce slowly covering the golden orbs of the yolks. I could use all those egg whites to make an angel food cake, another heavenly idea. (Ha!)

The shakshuka sauce can be made in advance, as can the angel food cake. The champagne can be chilling, for who wouldn't want to toast this celestial event? And speaking of toast, make sure you have some to soak up the sauce. You won't want any of it to get away. U