

Dinner For Two

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Jacqueline glanced out the kitchen window. The clouds were like custard cream puffs, floating across the sky. It was warm for October, and she wondered if she should bring along her sweater, just in case. You never could tell about October in Michigan. She decided to just carry it with her, and went into her bedroom in search of it. In front of the mirror over the dresser she stopped and looked at her reflection. She liked what she saw. Her complexion was what her Avon representative called "peaches and cream." The apples of her cheeks were so pink that most of the time she went without blush. If it hadn't been for the smallness of her eyes, they could have been considered her best feature. It was the color that gave them their beauty, chocolate brown and almost liquid. She plucked her sweater off of the hook at the top of the closet door and rubbed its soft sleeve against her cheek. Plum was a good color for her, according to her girlfriends. She looked in the mirror again, and decided that she would freshen up her lipstick. It was a new shade that Jill, her Avon lady, had talked her into buying. "Not everyone can get away with that shade," she had told Jacqueline. Jacqueline loved the names of the new lipsticks; it was part of the fun of choosing them. This one was called Cherry Jubilee, and she could see why, it was so bright. She rubbed her lips together back and forth, and decided it was time to go. Should she do something different with her hair, she thought? Perhaps pull it back into a bun? No, she thought; I'd better just get going.

It was with some reluctance that she crammed her feet into her high-heeled shoes. The week before she had had a corn removed from her left pinky toe, and it was still very tender. Oh well, she thought, that's the price we women pay for vanity's sake. It was definitely worth it. Wasn't she now going out the door to meet her husband for dinner? For fifteen years they had been married, and he was still in love with her, just the same as she was with him. They were the envy of all their friends, who thought of them as a matched set, salt and pepper, his and hers, the perfect compliment to each other. They even had pet names for each other, Ying and Yang. Today was the day for their weekly dinner date. Neither of them had ever missed in their fifteen years of marriage. Today was even more special than usual, Jacqueline thought as she tottered down the front steps. She stopped for a moment to take in a big gulp of fresh air. Oh how happy she felt inside. She had the best news that any wife can give to a husband. She felt that all of life was celebrating with her, even nature had decked itself out for her. Jacqueline loved fall more than all the other seasons. The beauty of the pumpkin pie and lemon drop colored leaves waved like banners from the trees, and it was not lost on her.

She took in another gulp of air, and as she did, the button of her blouse popped off, and began rolling down the driveway. Oh dear, she thought, do I have time to change my blouse? Probably not, I'll just have to wear my sweater over it. She

took just a minute to look for the button, but it being oatmeal colored, and the same size as the oyster cracker shaped stones of the driveway, she gave up her search and lowered herself into the car. It seemed to sink even lower than usual, and she wondered if she should get the tires checked for air. They must have a slow leak, she thought, because it seemed like every other week she had to put air in them.

She wasn't going to think about it today, however. Nothing was going to spoil their dinner, and her announcement.

She drove to the restaurant, Godiva's on automatic pilot. They had come here so often in the past fifteen years that she felt like it was their special place. She turned right at McDonald's and drove past the Donut Den and the Keebler Cookie factory. She slowed down when she got near to Nickolson's Bakery, and debated whether to buy a layer cake for after dinner, but decided against it. They could always pick one up later, if they wanted.

At the restaurant Jacqueline parked her car and searched the parking lot for her husband's car. She didn't see it, so she decided to wait inside for him. He had had a late doctor's appointment; they had just managed to squeeze him in. Jacqueline knew that sometimes doctor's appointments took longer than they were supposed to. She wouldn't let it worry her, although in the back of her mind a nagging doubt began to surface. He had not been looking well lately, she thought. He was far too thin for his height, and his skin had been looking a bit liver-ish around the edges. Well, now they were both going to have to start taking better care of themselves, they had an extra special reason. She smiled to herself, gave her their name to the maitre de and followed him into the small waiting area. It was only about five minutes before she saw her husband walk through the door. He didn't see her at first and she studied him as he looked around. His face was pale, and his adam's apple appeared more prominent than ever on his thin neck. Inwardly she chided herself, she really needed to start preparing more meals that he would eat. She needed to fatten him up a little. He was such a picky eater, though, she thought. She called out to him then and his face brightened when he spotted her. He stooped over and kissed her when he got close enough. She moved over on the bench to give him room to sit down.

"Sorry I'm late, honey," he said to her. "The doctor's appointment took longer than I thought it would. Did you give our names to the maitre de, yet?"

"I sure did, it will just be a few more minutes. How did your appointment go?"

He hesitated a second longer before he answered her. "Maybe we should wait until we have a table. I need to talk to you about it."

Jacqueline was having difficulty paying attention to what he was saying. She was full of her own news, and she didn't know if she could wait any longer to tell him. "I've got some news for you too, some good news. I can't wait to tell you." She leaned against him and gave him a hug. Just then the maitre de

approached them. "It'll be about ten more minutes for a table, ma'am," he said to Jacqueline.

"No problem," she said brightly. She turned back to her husband. "Go ahead and tell me what the doctor said. I want to save my news for last."

He looked down at his hands in his lap and then he looked at her. "Apparently I have a heart condition of some sort. The doctor discovered it today after he took my blood pressure, which was abnormally high. They're going to run some tests on me Monday, and I'm supposed to take it easy until then. It might not even be something serious, he told me, so I don't want you to worry about it, okay?"

She looked at him tenderly, and squeezed his hand. He was such a dear, always thinking of her first. Sometimes she felt like the luckiest woman on earth. Especially now, she thought, as she passed her hand lightly over her stomach. Was now a good time to tell him or should she wait?

"So tell me what you wanted to tell me, sweetie. I need some good news after what the doctor told me." He patted her cheek lovingly.

Should she tell him?

"C'mon, baby, give me the good word," he teased her. "I can see that you're just dying to tell me your news."

Jacqueline took a deep breath and then let it out slowly. She grabbed his hand again and looked into his eyes. "We're going to have a baby, darling, our own baby. I took a home pregnancy test this morning, after you left for work. Can you believe it, after all these years? I can hardly believe it myself, but the test was definitely positive. We're going to have a baby, Jack."

He brought her hand to his chest and held it there for a moment before he spoke. "I'm going to be a father? You and I are going to have a baby? I can't believe it either. Are you sure?"

"Yes I'm sure. You're happy about it, aren't you?" She felt a little anxious, they hadn't discussed having a baby for a long time. Both of them had assumed that it was never going to happen and so over the years, they had simply let go of the idea. "You're happy about it, aren't you," she repeated.

"Happy, am I happy? Happy doesn't even come close to how I feel. I'm overjoyed," he cried. He thumped himself on his chest with his fist and leaned his head back against the bench.

Jacqueline felt like crying for joy. This must be how every woman feels after they tell their husbands they're going to have a baby. Jack was thumping himself on the chest over and over, and Jacqueline laughed out loud. He's so happy that he's beating himself on the chest, like Tarzan, or something, she thought. She stopped laughing and looked closer at him. It seemed like time stood still for a

second. Jack's eyes were rolling back in his head, and before she could comprehend anything else, he slumped over forward. He would have fallen to the floor if she hadn't caught him.

"Oh my gosh," she squealed, "somebody help me. I think he's having a heart attack."

The horrified couple sitting next to them on the bench acted quickly. The man helped Jacqueline lower Jack's body to the floor, while the woman reached into her purse and pulled out a cellular phone. Quickly she punched in the numbers, 911, and called for an ambulance. Jacqueline knelt down on the floor beside her husband while the man applied CPR. His eyes fluttered open for a moment and he looked up at Jacqueline. He's alive, she thought, he's alive. Thank you God.

Fortunately the hospital was nearby, and within minutes she saw an ambulance pull up outside the door. The maitre de, who had been away from the front desk, heard the commotion and now he hurried over. He got to the waiting area in time to see the paramedics lift Jack onto the stretcher and into the waiting ambulance.

"Oh my," he said to the couple who had now sat back down on the bench. "What happened?"

The man shook his head. "That was a close one. I think he was having a heart attack, but he was conscious by the time the ambulance got here."

"Oh I hope he's alright," the woman said. She leaned into her husband and buried her face into his jacket.

The maitre de stood for a moment looking out the door. The ambulance was just leaving the parking lot. He was new on the job and he had never had to handle this type of situation. "I suppose I had better call the boss," he said outloud. He stopped a passing waitress on the way to his desk, and handed her his clipboard. "Can you handle this for just a minute? There's something I must do immediately." She nodded, and looked down at the clipboard. She walked into the waiting area and called out the top name on the list. "Jack Sprat, table for two?" She waited. The couple on the bench shook their heads in unison. "Jack Sprat, a table for two," she called out again. She waited another minute and then she crossed out the names. "Cole, a table for two," she called out. This time the couple stood up and walked toward the waitress. "Follow me," she said. Away in the distance the sound of a siren could be heard screeching down the street, like the whistle of a teakettle.