

# Table Thoughts

by Foster Trecost

We are four: my wife and I on one side, another couple on the other. I've known the man sitting across me for quite some time, but we haven't always been so willing to spend our evenings at the same table. That wasn't my fault, nor was it his; in the beginning we accepted not everyone was destined for friendship--just because our wives were friends didn't mean we had to be. Then one day he invited me on his boat, two men beneath the hot sun, fishing the deep sea. We set sail at daybreak and by lunchtime, while we filleted a portion of our catch and drank beer, we talked like old friends; we both wondered what took so long.

Later that day, he spilled over the gunwale of the starboard side and I laughed at him; not the nasty laughter given to those misfortunes that are welcomed, more like a devious chuckle that hinted a desire to have pushed him in the first place, but he didn't laugh back. The look in his eyes told me he was drowning, though he uttered no cries for help. My first thought was to throw him one of the life jackets that lined the rail, but a second thought had me throw myself instead. I jumped in and hauled him to the ladder over-hanging the stern. I saved his life and had he gone over a few hours earlier, I'm not so sure I would have. "Thank you," is all he said, then walked to the ice chest and pulled two beers. He downed them both, and then pulled one for me.

\* \* \*

I'm sure it was the rescue that ushered in the affair.

His wife sits at the corner opposite me, close to him, closer than she needs to be, still afraid the slightest hint might reveal our indulgence, which ended a long time ago. Her hand often finds the top of his hand and rests there in unspoken assurance, but the notion is anything but silent.

\* \* \*

Not long after the rescue, I began to feel he owed me so I took compensation by taking liberties with his wife and felt justified

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enough in doing so. It was easy, for in her eyes I was a hero, someone who saved the life of her love. The affair lasted a year and then, without reason or warning, I ended it. She threatened to tell him, but I knew she wouldn't and as far as I know, she never did. Now, I can sit at the same table and relish in those things that make her cringe, and with each she places her hand atop his, but looks at me and in her face I see something I've seen before: I see the same eyes I saw from the boat. Like him, her cries for help are silent, but she's drowning, just the same.

\* \* \*

My wife sits to my left. God bless her she always sits to my left. She allows herself the comfort that comes from these friendships because she knows nothing of the betrayals. She's happy because she doesn't know she has reasons not to be; true happiness only comes from not knowing certain things. She looks at me and smiles and drinks her wine and I look back at her and smile and drink my wine; she doesn't even know who we are. She thinks we are the same people our waiter sees; to him, to the others sitting nearby, we're all friends, four people who enjoy spending time together. They know nothing and neither does she.

\* \* \*

The bill arrives and he insists on paying, but only because he knows I won't let him. He does this every time. His wife glances at me again as if she knows what I'm thinking, that he's already paid enough. She's wounded, resentful, and wants me to know it. "You should've let him drown," she once told me. Doesn't she see that I did? I'll let her drown, too. I look back at him, waiting for me to take the check, so I do. I provide in the only way I can

We'll do this again next month at a different place, different waiters and different food. We'll even order different wine. But for me, it'll be much the same.

