

A Momentary Lapse

by Ryn Cricket

The Bohemian etched-glass stemware must have been at least a couple hundred years old, but they were in perfect condition; well taken care of by their owners and their owners servants, being passed down from the oldest child to the oldest child. In the set, there was also a wine carafe, a pitcher and a fruit bowl. It was easy to imagine these being the focal point of a well-set dinner table for a high-status dinner party. “Oh, yes,” the hostess would gush. “These were handed down from my great-grandmother. They were a wedding present to her grandmother. They remain perfectly pristine, don't they?” And the guests would “ooh” and “ahh” and look at each glass closely as if they were museum curators.

And for such a party, Elizabeth set her table with Martha Stewart precision and flair. The bowl contained an uneven number of fruit arranged as if they were randomly placed there, but actually painstakingly arranged so that nothing of the same type, color or shape was near another. The pitcher had a simple gathering of miniature sunflowers to represent the late summer season, and placed so that the face of each flower faced a guest.

She picked the perfect white wine that she poured in the carafe early to give it ample time to breathe before the guests arrived. She thought of everything. The first course would be Asian Carrot-Ginger soup with black sesame seeds and diced green onions on the top, served in Chinese tea cups she had bought in a market in a small village outside of Shanghai.

She chose Cornish hens as her main entrée, marinating them for twelve hours in a beautiful marinade that was handed down from her grandmother who was not only extremely efficient in a time of few luxuries, she was an amazing cook. Elizabeth loved the moment that she walked into her kitchen because the smell of potatoes, onions, sausage, and pastry was always overwhelmingly comforting. The hens marinated in her big cooler because there was no other way to soak all twelve. Glazed carrots and smashed garlic

potatoes would be on the side of each china plate. Smashed potatoes were the “new” thing now, but it's so much easier than peeling all of those potatoes and using a mixer to whip them. Dessert would be bread pudding with custard sauce like you can get in any pub in London, for no other reason than it was her favorite dessert, and should she make one, it might as well be her favorite.

It was nearing six o'clock, and everyone should be arriving soon. In fact, usually her daughter, Linda and her family often arrived a little early, so it might be considered unusual that she wasn't there yet. But that left time to take off her apron, check her hair and face, and tidy up the kitchen so that it looked like no one had even been in there.

She sat on the sofa to wait. There was no other detail to attend to. She could take a few minutes to catch up on her reading. There was that article in Redbook she was aching to read about an easy way to make the burnt sugar top on Crème Brulee. She looked up from her article and it was ten after six. Was there a traffic accident that she wasn't aware of. This was very uncommon behavior of her close circle of family and friends. She wanted to go to the bathroom, but was afraid that she would be in there when someone rang the doorbell. She checked on the hens to make sure they were staying warm, but not drying out. There is such a precision to the time management of bringing together a dinner such as this.

At twenty after, Elizabeth called Linda's cell-phone. “Where are you?” She asked her daughter.

“What do you mean?”

“Dinner's been ready for twenty minutes and you are not usually late.” Elizabeth said.

“Mom, I'm not sure I know what you are talking about.”

“Didn't I invite you and your family over for dinner tonight?”

“No, and I'm sorry, but Michael's not home from work yet, and Kevin has soccer practice so we couldn't possibly make it now at the last minute. Are you sure you're ok?”

“Yes, I'm fine, but I remember so clearly inviting you, and Joey, and Marianne, and April to dinner tonight.”

"Joey's in Chicago for work. The kids are at Lisa's parents' house and Lisa went with him. And isn't it Marianne's bowling night?"

"What day is it?" Elizabeth asked feeling even more confused.

"It's Tuesday."

Now Elizabeth began to wonder why she would ever even think of planning a dinner on a Tuesday night. Had she forgotten the night she planned? Had she forgotten what day it was? Was it really a simple mistake?

"Did I invite you over at all, for any day?" Elizabeth asked?

"No, but we'd be happy to visit on Sunday. Are you sure you're ok? Do you want me to come over right now? I'll have Carrie in tow, but she'll be good."

"No, no, I'm fine, really. But if you don't have dinner made, I have twelve Cornish hens if you want to pick some up." Elizabeth laughed in a way that she tried to sound flippant but came off as a bit nervous. "Anyway, you go take care of your things, and I'll see you on Sunday."

She sat there on the sofa in a slight daze for a minute before her eyes caught the sight of the envelope on the coffee table. She picked it up to remind herself of the guest of honor for this party: the diagnosis.

It was happening faster than she expected.

