

Dinner of Three

It isn't her fault he cheated. It isn't Marcy's either, but she seems to think Adelaide blames her. Seriously? It's never the woman's fault a man can't control his own inhibitions, his own desires. Besides, boys will be boys, if that's how the saying goes. And to that, Adelaide says, girls will be girls.

"Do you want the leg, or should I have it?" The leg has never been Adelaide's favorite part, but maybe she should try harder to warm up to it.

"I think it's best you have it. Save the other one for later, maybe we can share." Adelaide gives her a wink before returning to the meat simmering in oil. The pop of the oil upon the hot pan slows. Where's the olive oil? Oh, on the table. She turns, grabbing for it, but is met with her sister instead.

"Adelaide!" Marcy's chin strikes her arm, causing her in her confusion to almost drop the other leg she's wrapped in saran wrap, prepared for the cooler with a latched lid.

"Sorry, sister." Adelaide smiles and shoos her off, then adds more oil to the skillet.

The kitchen is small. Their parents hadn't left them much, but it would do. The square room was only big enough for a round table in the center and a line of cabinets, an oven and stove-top, and fridge on the opposing side. The walls were innocent with dainty florals, mainly callilies and other pretty little white and green things. The wallpaper was beginning to peel at the edges, but it never concerns them. Most of the peeling happens at the door, or rather, where a door was. If dad hadn't hurt mom maybe the door wouldn't have been ripped from its hinges. Maybe mom would still be here. Marcy always tells her it's better this way. Better without them. But Adelaide doesn't think so. It might have been fun at first, but money and supplies are running low. Neither of them want to get a job, so having any more money is out of the question. They've rationed the money their parents were

saving well. Spending dimes on bills at a time, and only splurging on the necessities: coolers and trash bags to name a few. Still, money's running out.

Marcy waltzes back into the kitchen, her face aglow with that mischievous grin she's always had. Adelaide didn't inherit that from her mother, but she sure did. Marcy looks a lot like her, too. The same matted brown hair and grime under her nails. The same smile and quirk of her brow. She almost misses her, her mother. If only she could see them now. Are you proud, mother? She hopes so.

"I'm gonna miss that guy." Marcy pokes a fork at the cubes simmering in the skillet.

"You don't even remember his name."

"Yeah I do, Adelaide, it's Jason." Marcy proclaims it, certain she's got it right.

"Jackson." She corrects her.

"Ah, Jackson. Isn't that what I said?" Adelaide loved him once. Maybe she still does. She doesn't know. The rich smell under her nose quells the knot in her stomach.

Silence passes between the sisters. Marcy plops down in one of the chairs around the table with a grunt. A melody floats through the room. It's Adelaide, and she's whistling. Her whistle shakes as she runs out of breath between the phrases. The tune is one her mother used to hum to them at bedtime. Adelaide knows the song better than anything. It's sweet and short, and Marcy joins in as it reaches its bitter end. The sisters haven't heard that bittersweet melody in years.

"I miss her." Marcy wrings her hands and pushes at her cuticles. Adelaide hadn't heard Marcy say those words in months.

"Me too."

The meat sizzles as Adelaide flips the cubes one final time. The tender meat is charred brown with red reaching through like the moon through thick leaves. The knob for the oven burner is mint

green with rust on the perimeter. The knob gets stuck, like it always does, at 5. 5 months since she last saw her mother. 5 months since Adelaide screamed her mother's name, but was hushed by her sister. 5 months since mother screamed out into a house where no one answered. 5 months since mother was found dead. Adelaide leans into the knob and manages to turn it all the way down. The oil in the skillet slows to a light simmer as the heat recedes. Dinner is served.

"Can you believe Jackson almost convinced us to be vegetarian?" Adelaide scoops the meat onto the porcelain plates to the right of the oven.

"I can't believe most of the things he did." Marcy smirks, "you included."

"Don't act like he didn't make moves on you, too," Adelaide always knew Jackson liked her sister. Maybe too much. She never let it bother her, though, no matter how much it tried to keep her up at night.

"Did he love you good?"

"Marcy!" Adelaide gives her best attempt at a glare, but the two giggle instead. Adelaide hands Marcy her plate, "okay but did he do *you* good?"

"He never tried it." Marcy's cheeks flush, answering Adelaide's question for her.

Marcy mutters something about starving but Adelaide can't make it out. Through a mouth full of food, Marcy asks, "what would he say if he saw us right now?"

"That wouldn't even be possible. But, if he could, I'd hope he'd appreciate the steak sauce." Adelaide drags her knife along the plate, unable to bring herself to dig in.

"I mean, he *is* with us, if you really think about it." Marcy has swallowed half of her serving of dinner faster than Adelaide could even begin.

"I guess." Adelaide sighs, the scrape of fork against plate filling the air between them.

“What’s wrong, sister?” Marcy gnaws on her cheek with a scrunched face.

“I don’t know, Marcy. Don’t you feel guilty?”

“Guilty? No! We’ve been doing this for ages now. Guilt is something I thought we got over a long time ago.”

“You’re right.”

“I always am, sister.” Marcy winks.

Adelaide’s dinner finds its way to her mouth. The meat is tender, almost melting in her mouth as she forces herself to chew. Eating gets easier the more she does it. That’s how it’s always been with these meals: tough at first but not impossible.

Jackson wasn’t a bad person. He wasn’t a great person either but no one really is. He was in that gray area often denied by Marcy. She could never see the good in people, not like how Adelaide could. Marcy forced her to do this. Or did Adelaide force Marcy? She can’t remember. Maybe Jackson did deserve it. He only made a mistake—a big one at that—but everyone makes mistakes. Should he have to pay for his?

“Guilt is eating you up, Adelaide. I can see it in your face.” So Adelaide wasn’t doing as good of a job hiding it as she thought she was. Typical. “What’s gotten into you?”

Adelaide ponders at her question. What’s wrong with her? She hasn’t been this difficult in the past. “Like I said, I don’t know. Maybe I just don’t have an appetite tonight.”

“You always have an appetite. Sister, tell me, really, what’s going on?”

Adelaide’s mouth won’t form the words she’s thinking. Frustrated tears form in her eyes and flush her face.

“You still love him.” Marcy leans back in her chair.

“I still love him.” Adelaide wipes her tears with the back of her hand before balling them up in her lap.

Marcy pushes herself away from the table and comes over to Adelaide. She places her hands on her shoulders, massaging her frame and feeling the tension in her sister release. Adelaide sighs.

“Consider this a final act of love.” Marcy hugs her sister, and Adelaide places her hands on Marcy’s.

“That’s beautiful.” Adelaide’s face cracks into a smile and Marcy’s hands leave her body. Adelaide chews on another piece of meat as Marcy returns to her seat. It melts in her mouth, juice dribbling from the side of her lips, the flavor filling her senses.

She hadn’t expected her ex-boyfriend to end up on her dinner plate, but either way, Adelaide finds peace in this closure. She loves him, and he knows it now more than he ever did before.