

The Best Lunch Ever

Chuckie was troubled. His marriage was crumbling, his daily routine had been interrupted, and worst of all, he was forbidden to practice with his vuvuzela garage band. His mother-in-law Ethel had moved in three weeks earlier and he had stood by helplessly as his wife Darlene and her mother took over his domicile, while relegating Chuckie to houseboy status.

Chuckie was serving lunch, a stunning lobster thermidor. The parmesan was aged to perfection and the white wine sauce was to die for. Notwithstanding his current status, he believed in eating well. He walked the walk, talked the talk, and cooked the cook. Darlene and Ethel dug into the dish without comment, they simply ignored him. He left the room and went in the kitchen to clean up.

"Chuckie!" Ethel's voice was grating, raspy, like bone on broken bone, painful to listen to. Chuckie threw down his dishcloth, irritated.

"What?" Chuckie walked back into the dining room.

"It's time for my foot rub!" She had a severe case of blepharospasm combined with paralytic strabismus. She looked straight at him with one twitching eye, while the other rolled round and round, looking mostly at the ceiling. Talking to her creeped Chuckie out.

That was it. He'd had it. No more.

"Rub your own stinkin' feet!"

Darlene dropped her wine glass, her third. It shattered on the tile, breaking a shocked silence. Ethel was quiet, her left eye twitched like a sonofabitch while her right stared at something in the Magellanic Cloud, while Darlene screamed at Chuckie.

"You can't talk to my mother like that!" She ran toward him, babbling, drawing back her arm to slap him.

At that moment, Chuckie became the vessel of a divine inspiration, the best idea he'd had in years. He put on his most contrite face and caught Darlene's slapping hand.

"I'm so sorry sweetheart, I was completely out of line."

"You sure was." Darlene replied. She appeared taken aback at his sudden demeanor. Ethel's twitching eye was now completely shut, while the other was staring somewhere behind her right shoulder.

“Sit down and I’ll bring you both some dessert, ok?” He gathered up their empty plates, swept up the broken glass, poured two glasses of Poulet Mort, then went to the refrigerator.

Hope it’s still there. He dug through the freezer till he found it, the blueberry pomegranate ice cream he had been saving for just the right special occasion. He prepared two bowls and took them to the dining table. Darlene dug in right away, Ethel’s lazy eye suddenly focused on the delicious frozen concoction. She plunged her spoon into it, and beaming, slurped down a couple of deadly spoonfuls.

Chuckie cleaned up and watched carefully as both women settled onto the sofa, nodding, heavy lidded.

He dialed a familiar number. “Andy? Good, good. Look, can you get the guys together for practice? Yeah, I’m free this afternoon. Yeah. Oh, and bring beer.” He glanced at his wife and mother-in-law. They sat slumped on the sofa, silent, eyes closed, unmoving. Chuckie checked their pulses and left, closing the door and locking it behind him.

An hour later, the vuvuzela band were in his garage, a plastic cacophony accompanying Chuckie as he blew a mournful, sonorous, single note dirge.