

Supper

Quinn Higby

Mitchel watched his wife like a mouse, unblinking, scared to move. He sat still in his chair, careful not to make the floorboards creak. It was cold in the house. Mitchel was freezing.

“Would you please put another log on the stove?” Mitchel asked.

“One or two?” asked Margaret.

“Two.”

“We only have one.”

“One, then. Please.”

Mitchel could smell his wife’s cooking. She was cooking chicken stew, his favorite. Margaret only made it for him on special occasions, the last time being Christmas, the time before that was their anniversary. Today, however, was not a special occasion. None that Mitchel knew of.

“Are you excited for dinner?” Margaret asked.

“I can’t really taste anything.”

“But are you excited?”

“I can’t taste.”

“You don’t need to taste to be excited.”

“Is it cold in here?”

“It feels quite hot to me.”

Margaret finished tossing in the potatoes and, with her quilted oven mitt, opened the stove and tossed another log into the fire. She didn’t look back at Mitchel.

“I made your favorite after all, so you should be excited,” Margaret said.

“Where did you get the chicken?” Mitchel asked.

“They gave it to me.”

“They gave it to you?”

“The shopkeeper and her daughter. For no cost. A gift, they said.”

“Did they say why?”

“They said it was a gift. Did I not say that?”

Mitchel’s eyes darted away, finding a spot up in the rafters to hold his gaze.

“Why was it a gift?” Mitchel asked.

“What gift?”

“The chicken.”

“It was a very good chicken, you know? Not the best, but not the worst. Better than what they’ve had in the past.”

Mitchel felt lightheaded, his heart pounding like a racehorse’s gallop. A cold sweat dripped down his neck and onto his back, causing him to shiver.

“Do you know?” Mitchel asked.

“Know what?”

“Do you know?” Mitchel asked again.

“Of course I know. Everyone knows.”

The words came quick and fast, slashing Mitchel across the face like a whip.

“You and she are the talk of the town,” Margaret said.

A long silence fell over the two, choking out any reasonable response Mitchel had.

“Supper’s ready!” Margaret placed one bowl on the table, accompanied by a napkin and a single silver spoon.

It was their best bowl, a porcelain bowl with painted periwinkles along the side and center of it. The spoon was part of their best silverware set as well. A wedding gift from Marget’s aunt. They had never used it before tonight.

“I’m cold,” Mitchel said.

“Let me place another log in the furnace,” Margaret said.

“Where is your bowl?”

“I’m not hungry tonight.”

“It’s lonely eating alone.”

“Alone? You’re worried about being alone?”

“I’m sorry.”

“I’ll sit with you. So you’re not alone. Not tonight, at least.”

“It feels wrong to eat this by myself.”

“I’m not hungry, weren’t you listening?”

“I’m not hungry either, but I’ll eat if you eat.”

“There’s only one bowl.”

“We’ll share it.”

“Did you share with her, too?”

Mitchel looked down and dared not look up.

“There’s only one spoon,” Margaret said.

“We’ll share that too.”

Margaret stared at Mitchel for a while. Staring through him as if he were made out of glass.

“All right,” Margaret said. “For only tonight.”

Mitchel took the first sip, catching some carrots and potatoes with his spoon. He placed the spoon down carefully, then slid it around to be on his left and Margaret’s right. Margaret picked up the spoon and caught some chicken with it. The two took their time sharing the stew. Even after it had gone cold, the two sat there at the table, sipping away at the golden broth until the oil in the lamps went dim and the lights flicked off.