

The Strangest Breakfast

I woke up groaning, drum beating painfully inside my head. Tongue thick and dry, body drained - not unusual for a Saturday morning.

I wanted to return to my dreams, but imagined I smelt coffee. Thirst winning; I dragged myself out of bed. Donned my threadbare maroon toweling robe, pushed my feet into my old-flapping carpet slippers and set off to investigate the unexpected aroma.

My dizzy descent downstairs was torturous, each step making my head pound. The smell of freshly ground coffee driving me on - more attractive than the stale ale surrounding me.

Normality fled as I opened the kitchen door. My stomach rumbled a hungry greeting at the welcome odour of cooking food - but how? What the hell had I been up to last night?

"Morning Louise, your breakfast is ready."

Astonished to hear a woman's voice, my head snapped round. The drums started up again, beating a painful tattoo on my brain. My eyes opened wide in disbelief at the odd sight before them.

There they were, sitting at my kitchen table: A plump, motherly type wearing a frilly apron - as yellow as her peroxide curls.

Opposite her, a man - small, balding and mean looking. Dressed in an old-fashioned white collarless shirt, black braces over the top.

Next to him a boy, gap-toothed and freckle faced. Head crowned with a mass of wavy ginger hair - clashing discordantly with his purple checked shirt.

All 3 looking at me expectantly - or were they? Confused, I glanced over my shoulder - nobody. I studied the room, yes it was my kitchen - unusually clean and tidy, but mine. I didn't understand.

"Who?" I started to ask.

Fell silent, shocked to see the man swat the boy's ear with the back of his hand, saying "Stop messing with your breakfast Jimmy."

The woman calmly picked up a knife and carved a thick slice of bread from a crusty loaf. Who were they? She looked at me again, knife pointing towards me. Being a coward I decided to retreat.

"Where are you going Louise?" The woman waved the lethally sharp knife at me. I took another step backwards. "Get in here and eat your breakfast." she ordered.

Bemused, I tried to put them right. "I'm not...." Didn't get a chance to say any more.

"Do as your mother tells you Louise." The little man thundered, starting up the drums again.

Exasperated, I ran my fingers through my uncombed hair. "She's not..."

"Stop arguing young lady, you're not too old to put over my knee," He said as he clouted the lad's ear again, presumably for laughing at me. The boy's face screwed up in pain, mouth popped open emitting an unearthly wail. To be silenced abruptly as the despotic little man said menacingly. "JIMMY"

Angrily, I approached the table, ready to eject the strange trio from my house, "How dare you behave?"

Was interrupted again. "Sit down Louise - NOW!" His rodent like face red with fury.

With a kind of languid helplessness I obeyed, sitting down opposite Jimmy. The boy winked at me conspiratorially as mother put a plate in front of me.

"Here you are Louise, eat it while it's hot." She smiled warmly at me. Grateful to have two allies I eyed the steaming plateful greedily.

Eggs - sunny-side up, well-browned sausages, bacon and kidneys. Golden fried bread, mushrooms and tomatoes - a feast to tempt anyone but the strictest dieter or vegetarian.

But was it real? Only one way to find out!

Pass the sauce please Jimmy." I requested. He handed the bottle over nicely enough, then the little brat kicked my shin. Glaring, I kicked him back, missed his leg, stubbed my toe on the chair leg. "Ouch." I yelped.

"What's going on?" Father asked.

"She kicked me." "He kicked me." Jimmy and I said simultaneously, conspiracy over,

"Behave yourselves, both of you." He warned as Jimmy started to whine. "Eat, your mother went to a lot of trouble to make this lovely breakfast. Think of all the starving children who would be grateful for a meal like this."

Feeling ashamed, I applied myself to my food. Picked up the ketchup bottle, turned it upside down, banged the bottom. Red goo gushed out, covering the mushrooms.

"Louise." The obnoxious man shouted, snatching the sauce bottle from me. "How many times do I have to tell you? Go easy on the sauce - God knows what your insides are like!"

"Rotting away." Jimmy chimed in, enjoying my discomfort - SWAT. It was my turn to gloat. I smirked before taking a bite of sausage.

"Bread Louise?" Mother offered me a doorstep plastered with butter.

"Yes please." I accepted, content to be Louise for the sake of the tasty grub.

"Don't talk with your mouth full." The man bellowed. Never have I detested anybody as much as I did him. Angry words formed in my mind, I looked at him fiercely.

I couldn't believe it - he actually slapped my hand. Knocked the fork out of it. On to my lap it fell, sauce covered mushroom dislodged, leaving a red trail as it rolled off my knee.

"Messy girl." He blamed me. Furious, I was just about to stab his hand with my newly retrieved fork. Changed my mind as he threatened to swipe Jimmy again. "Stop laughing at your sister, eat your breakfast—I won't warn you two again."

Chastened we turned our attention to our plates.

"Tea Louise?" The woman asked, seemingly unconcerned at the violent atmosphere.

"I'd rather have coffee." I replied, eyeing the percolator.

"You know you're not allowed coffee Louise, you're far too young." The nasty little man interfered. Who did he think he was? How dare he order me around in my house?

Indignant, I opened my mouth to tell him to get lost - the wrong words came out. "Okay then tea it is." I said weakly.

"Manners Louise." He picked on me again.

"Please." I added quickly, at seeing his hand twitch. Accepting the tea, I was careful to say thank you.

Enjoying the soothing effect the milky drink had on my dry throat, I was amazed to hear mother say - "Put your blue dress on today Louise, it's your ballet lesson this morning."

I couldn't help laughing. It was all very well pretending to be the unknown Louise for the sake of a scrumptious breakfast. Feeling the stubble on my chin, picturing my six foot tall, slightly overweight thirty year old body dressed in a blue frock, ridiculous. Even funnier to my eyes - ballet dancing, I just cracked up.

Thwack. My headache returned with excruciating speed. Fuming, I stood up, fists clenched.

"Sit down Louise," He roared. "Manners, you ask to leave the table in this house."

Deflated, I sat down, couldn't believe I was hearing myself ask. "Please may I leave the table?"

Given permission, I slinked out of the room.

Upstairs, I washed and shaved. Was pleased to see me - Jonathon Ridley in the mirror and not Louise. I was relieved to find blue jeans in the wardrobe - no blue dress.

Once clothed, I went back downstairs, opened the kitchen door tentatively. Almost jumped with joy, no trace of them or the breakfast remains. Only the disorder left from the night before: Flies buzzing round empty cartons. Curry stains on the red-checked table cloth. Overflowing ashtray, surrounded by empty beer cans.

I must have been hallucinating - but why did I feel so well fed? Why was there a red sauce stain on my robe? Why did my ear hurt? Questions I've asked myself many times since. I don't know what really happened - just hope it never happens again!

About the Author

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