

## **Southern Exposure**

We were in New Orleans, at Andrea's, one of the finest restaurants the area has to offer. 5 stars and it was a beautiful night. We were so happy, celebrating our engagement and being miles from home. The place was mobbed and we purposely requested a table near the back, to have some privacy. It was an old and historically protected building, so the noise level was incredible - there was no insulation to buffer the happy vibrations. The tall windows reached to the ceilings and the wooden walls echoed back the sounds of glass on glass, silver on china. This dining experience was multi-coursed, designed to last for hours, from the Calamari Fritti Marinara to rich Scaloppine Di Vitello Maria Louisa to rapturous Praline Pecan Cheescake. It was heavy cream heaven for two voyeuristic Northerners.

Everyone one was dressed to the nines. Elegant women displaying matching dresses, shoes and purses dined with proper gentlemen in soberly suits, all behaving very well. We however were not. Living on opposite coasts and only able to meet once a month, it was a time for romance. Copious amounts of fine champagne accompanied the beautiful courses, a mélange of yellows and pinks. We were very watchful and when no one was looking into our dark corner, engaged in happy kisses and hugs.

We marveled at the decorum and manners of these people, so formal on a Saturday night! The women had severe hair styles, and perfect makeup. Their men didn't even remove their jackets. They spoke in low tones, with downcast eyes. Our casual contrast and conduct we thought went unnoticed in the dim light.

As the evening progressed we started to speculate on the many patrons there. This place was very expensive so these were at least the upper middle class of the area. My fiancé would pick out a man, and create a story about him, depicting him as opposite from his regulated behavior. I would select a woman and theorize about her marriage, her friends, her true self hidden behind the graceful behaviors. After several hours we were convinced of our invisibility, an error in judgment soon to be made obvious.

Late into the evening, a middle aged woman dressed in a perfect blue suit got up from her chair and proceeded towards the lobby. As she passed our table, she suddenly stopped, with gloved hands folded primly in front of her.

“We all been watching you,” she spoke in cultured smooth tones. “We all think you should get married.” She was quickly joined by the remaining members of her table, men and women impeccably dressed, all standing directly in front of our secret hide-away. “We would like to sing you a song...”

To our astonishment, this fine assembly, who had never once during the entire evening even glanced in our direction, broke into a love song! Their postures remaining stiff, with arms held in proper performance stance, they sang a loud verse about lovers and marriage. Then with as much precision, turned to their left and filed out towards the lobby. We were speechless. Before we could even begin to feel shamed by our naiveté, and assess just how many of these ostensibly clueless Southerners had been watching us all night, another party rose from their table. They too lined up in front of us, like actors on their mark, and a meticulous male stepped forward. His dark three piece suit and colorful cravat identified him as the spokesperson for this collective.

“We would like to sing you a song as well!” He boomed.

This choir even clapped their hands to accompany the tune, and it was very lively. We shrunk lower into our chairs with each verse, and when they were done, they merrily filed out laughing, at us, with us, with eachother.

The sound of their cheerful serenade echoed through the entire restaurant. Even the robotic waiter was smiling. My fiancé sheepishly grinned and we sat quiet, delighted by our hosts, and our exposure. We had been trumped, the worldly business professor and Fortune 500 advisor, and the controlled clinical psychotherapist, who while not directly using clothing or behavior to signal our superior stations, certainly held our culturally different friends at bay with attitudes. It was a relief to let down our barrier towards our current environment and to the separate worlds of eachother. Our beautiful evening concluded with the finest of exquisitely served dessert, the South’s best humble pie.