

Trick or Treat

Joseph liked to use his lunch hour to exercise on the basketball court. On a windy, late October day, the sky was dark and threatening to rain. Colored leaves were strewn over the court and his usual group of friends had not shown up. "Must be the weather. Wimps." As he went up for a jump shot, a buzz in his pocket disrupted his concentration; the ball hit the front rim and rolled off the court. "What now?" He punched a button and saw a text message.

*Private client meeting...5pm at the Barclay
Restaurant of the Ritz Carlton. Tell no one and don't
be late.*

"Hmmm." He had been courting some clients away from his former firm. Maybe this was the payoff. Joseph headed back into the showers, and then returned to his brokerage office.

Karen was in the middle of a divorce settlement negotiation when her phone vibrated in her purse. "Excuse me a minute please." She flipped open the earpiece and saw a text message.

*Meet me at the Ritz Carlton at 4:30pm. Dress for
dinner. Keep confidential. A friend.*

Joseph and Karen had been married for six years. Their careers in finance and law had taken a toll on their plans for children as well as their love life. Professional obligations had often disrupted dinner plans. Both turning 30, they were entering another phase of life, one filled with stress and a review of their once ideal romance.

Joseph dotted off an email to Karen before heading to the hotel. "Honey, I have a business dinner. I probably won't be home till 8pm."

Karen paused a moment, then replied. "No worries. I'll have dinner with a friend and see you at home."

Karen left work early to shower. She put on her black dress, pearl necklace and earrings, then got into her BMW and left for the Ritz. When she arrived at the lobby, a concierge greeted her. "Karen Johnson?" Karen nodded. "Follow me please." The man led her behind the restaurant to the spa area, and then handed an envelope to the woman at the desk. "Ms. Johnson will be having a treatment before dinner."

Karen was startled but excited. "I don't have anything to change into."

The woman brought out a complimentary bundle of clothing, towels and toiletries. "We've been expecting you. Change into this Danskin and robe and go into the massage area at the back of the locker room."

Meanwhile Joseph pulled out his standby suit and shirt, all pressed for unexpected meetings. He thought the meeting must be with one of his college buddies he had been trying to get to invest so a professional appearance was necessary.

An athletic girl, no more than 20, greeted Karen at the massage table. “Ms. Johnson?” Karen smiled. “I’ll take your robe. Please lie on the table here.” New age music and scented candles accented the low lighting in the spa. The masseuse gave Karen a relaxing 20-minute massage. “Please take 10 minutes in our Eucalyptus steam bath, then dress for dinner. Your reservation is waiting under your name at the Barclay at 5:30pm.” Karen was too relaxed to question the directions and happily glided into the steam room to continue her relaxing diversion.

Joseph walked up to the host at the restaurant. “Do you have a reservation for Joseph Charles?”

The host was expecting him. “Certainly, Mr. Charles, right over here” leading him to a secluded table in the corner by the piano. As he sat down, he noticed the table was set for two. Joseph took the menu and looked over the entrees.

“Joseph, is that you?” said a tall brunette in a business suit. It was a woman from Karen’s law firm.

“Susan, so nice to see you. What brings you here?”

Susan gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Just finished a business meeting. I was going to have dinner. May I join you?”

Joseph saw how this was going. “Love to” and he held out a chair for her. Joseph had flirted with Susan at the Christmas party so this was a most pleasant surprise. If she had planned this, he knew his night would be exciting.

Knowing that her husband was busy, Karen arrived at the restaurant with anticipation. “I believe there is a reservation for Karen Johnson” she told the host.

“Yes, Ms. Johnson, you’re table is over here” leading her to a booth out of sight from Joseph and Susan.

Noticing that the booth was set up for two, Karen continued. “My guest hasn’t arrived yet?”

The host reassured her. “He will be right here. He said he had to pick up something.

Then Karen saw Rick, an old boyfriend from college, holding flowers. “Karen, so nice of you to come.”

Karen stood up and kissed Rick on the cheek, noticing he was not wearing a ring. “What’s this about?”

Rick sat down. “Oh, there’s no harm in old friends getting together for dinner. I figured you’re working too hard in that law firm and needed a night out.”

Karen stroked her wedding ring but didn't object. "Dinner would be lovely, thank you and the spa was especially just what I needed."

Rick didn't know anything about a spa treatment, figuring Karen came early and got a massage. "Yes, their spa is quite nice."

Joseph assumed that Susan had arranged this all along, especially when she rubbed her foot against his leg and held his hand. Joseph hadn't felt this kind of excitement for quite some time with Karen and he welcomed the attention. But he knew this indiscretion would have to be their secret since Susan worked with Karen. "So Susan, are you seeing anyone?"

Susan made eye contact. "Not presently. Does it matter?" she said with a wicked smile.

Joseph stroked the inside of her arm. "Just curious," he replied. Joseph and Susan had a most flirtatious dinner, each letting down their inhibitions, helped by champagne and body language. When it was time for dessert, Susan excused herself. She leaned over to Joseph and whispered in his ear. "I'll be right back lover. Bring us something chocolate with whipped cream" and she blew slowly into his ear.

"Waiter" Joseph called and he ordered something decadent from the dessert menu. The romantic jazz playing on the piano only heightened his anticipation.

Karen was similarly letting go. She needed a night of romance with an attentive man. "Rick, didn't you ever get married?"

Rick sighed. "Yes, but it didn't work out. My wife was married to her work and we drifted apart. I won't make that mistake again."

Karen was relieved by his attitude. Maybe this could be an affair without the complications. "I know what you mean" as she held his hand. "Would you excuse me a minute?" Before she could enter the ladies room, (and possibly run into Susan), a buzz came from her phone.

Go to the lobby and get a key for room 742. I'll be waiting. ;)

She freshened up, went to the lobby and picked up the key. When she got to the room, she saw candles and rose petals around the bed and heard Diana Krall music coming from speakers. It was dark, just the flickering of candles to see by. Karen gently undressed and got into bed, then closed her eyes.

After a few minutes, Joseph got a text from his phone. Thinking his wife was looking for him, his smile turned to concern.

I'm in room 742. Bring the dessert with you in ten minutes. Our little secret ;)

Joseph's tension was reignited. He asked the waiter for the check and to have the dessert bagged to go.

Joseph picked up the dessert and a room key, and then got into the elevator. Loosening his tie, he decided that he deserved this fling. Karen had been paying more attention to work than to him and what she didn't know wouldn't hurt her. He silently entered the room, put down the dessert, undressed and got into bed. Then, like an earthquake, the two devoured each other for thirty minutes before either of them realized it was their spouse. What happened? Deciding that this was some delightful mistake, each pretended that the other had arranged for this meeting, less the dinner companion and made the best of it.

"Why lover, how long have you been planning this" she said to her husband.

Also, ignoring the obvious, Joseph replied. "You scamp. It's a good thing my wife is working."

After more champagne, conveniently laid out on the table, and dessert, Joseph and Karen continued their illicit lovemaking with each other, still pretending to have an affair, when suddenly a loud knock on the door interrupted their bliss.

"This is the police. Open up or we'll break the door down," which they did. (Cops never wait, do they?). "Ok boys, take them away."

The couple was shocked and confused. "What is this about?"

The policeman took out his pad. "So you don't know anything about the murder of one Rick Johnson and Susan Wilson? We have witnesses that put them with you earlier tonight at the restaurant. Thought you could make this a murder scene with sex chaser, did you?" Then the police took them away in handcuffs.