

END OF THE MEAL

by Tom Smith

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CHARACTERS

CAMERON **Female or Male, 30s-50s**

NICK **Male, 30s-50s**

TIME/PLACE

A small, elegant restaurant

The present

Author's note: This meal happens within two time frames: "real time," meaning the last 10 minutes of the meal, and "compressed time," meaning the last 10 years of their relationship.

END OF THE MEAL

A small, elegant restaurant. CAMERON and NICK have just finished an elaborate meal.

CAMERON

That was astonishing!

NICK

I haven't eaten like that in—

CAMERON

And the wine—

NICK

Buttery.

CAMERON

Phenomenal! For a local wine—

NICK

Unparalleled! I don't know why we don't—

CAMERON

We can hardly afford—

NICK

I know. But still... We deserve this!

CAMERON

We really do.

(Beat.)

NICK

I'm giddy! I'm actually—

CAMERON

Every single course was so—

NICK

The perfect meal!

CAMERON

(Gazing appreciatively.)

Thank you.

NICK

For what? For this?

CAMERON

For tonight. For everything.

NICK

I need coffee.

CAMERON

Get dessert too, if you like. I'm in no hurry.

NICK

I didn't get to the gym today.

CAMERON

Treat yourself!

NICK

I'll just ask what they have...

CAMERON

I'm perfectly at peace! I could stay like this forever...

NICK

I need a little something...sweet.

(CAMERON stares at NICK's tie, confused.)

What?

CAMERON

That.

NICK

This? I've had it for years.

CAMERON

It doesn't look old.

NICK

It's not.

CAMERON

Oh.

(Beat.)

You said it was.

NICK

What? When?

CAMERON

"I've had it for years."

NICK

You sure you don't want dessert? I shouldn't, but... A year maybe. They have a tiramisu that's deadly. People actually die from the—

CAMERON

It's not really you.

NICK

The color?

CAMERON

That too.

(Beat.)

I'm not being mean. I just believe in honesty. I—

NICK

I get it.

(Long pause.)

CAMERON

How long have we been coming here?

NICK

A few months?

CAMERON

Months?

NICK

Right?

CAMERON

Ten years. Years. Our third date!

NICK

Ok...

CAMERON

Do you honestly have no sense of time? Of history?

NICK

What's with you tonight? You're acting—

CAMERON

I'm just trying to—

NICK

We were enjoying an incredible meal together. Now...this?

CAMERON

Now this.

NICK

Where's our waiter?

(Beat.)

Do you think someone gave me this tie? Is that why you're— We should be talking about something. Some thing. Not...

CAMERON

It's only conversation.

NICK

It's accusation.

(Long look. NICK takes off his tie.)

Do you want to smell it?

CAMERON

You can't do that here! There's a—

NICK

That way you can tell if there's some trace of deception.

CAMERON

I didn't say a word!

NICK

I want dessert!

(HE throws his tie on the table. Pause.)

CAMERON

Ten years!

(Pause.)

NICK

Is this how you ended all your other relationships?

CAMERON

What?

NICK

I'm just asking.

CAMERON

"Ended."

NICK

A simple question.

CAMERON

Is this how I "ended all my other relationships?"

NICK

Well...?

(Beat.)

CAMERON

You should take yoga with me. You're getting doughy.

NICK

No, I'm not!

CAMERON

You shouldn't miss a work-out. You need structure, routine.

NICK

I missed one day!

CAMERON

One day is a lot! One day is everything! I thought you had more discipline.

NICK

Yoga is for sissies.

CAMERON

Go on, order dessert! Since you must!

NICK

It's trendy!

CAMERON

Order two. Hell, you "deserve" it!

NICK

It's for people who get their news out of magazines.

CAMERON

I've noticed your entire family is inclined to overweight. Too many "sweets."

NICK

You're not skinny, you know. We're both just fit.

CAMERON

A little cream with your coffee? Sugar?

NICK

You're normal, like me. Fit but normal.

(Pause.)

CAMERON

I would have remembered that one.

(Pause.)

NICK

Let's get the check...

CAMERON

What's the rush? Let me sit here a moment.

NICK

Stewing?

CAMERON

Staring.

NICK

What do you see?

CAMERON

I don't know.

NICK

You know everything.

CAMERON

You tell me. What do I see?

(Long, uncomfortable stare. NICK's guilt flashes to the surface for a fleeting moment.)

NICK

We should go...

CAMERON

...I need to...digest.

(Pause.)

NICK

(Grabbing CAMERON'S hand.)

I don't want anything else. I'm sated.

(NICK looks at CAMERON, hopeful. HE slowly puts his tie back on. CAMERON reaches over and

lovingly straightens it up. NICK smiles.)

CAMERON

It...wasn't right.

*(Slowly rises and exits, leaving NICK
alone at the table.)*

END OF PLAY