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Adult Food

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It is a fine night out – cold enough to wear a coat, but not cold enough to need a scarf. The family is having a special meal together, and the husband, a soft spoken but loving man, is very much looking forward to it. The wife, a stern and unapproachable woman, is only eager to look important at a foreign restaurant. They are seated at a small, round table barely big enough to hold two meals. Their child is placed in a baby booster seat.

Their waiter is a man who looks like a kid in his twenties. He has greasy, too-silky hair, and his face looks like it's missing a mustache. He asks them what they want, and the wife, still glaring at her menu, politely tells him to please go away and come back later. The husband glances at the waiter and tries to give an apologetic smile, but he only feels in the wrong so he shifts his glance around the room uncomfortably.

The wife looks up at her husband and casually demands to know what he wants to order. He takes too long to tell her that he would like the Salmon Panang Curry so she interrupts to tell him that she would just *love* to have the Bangkok Duck. He quietly says that he's not surprised.

She glares straight into his soul and asks, "Why's that?" as she puts a smile of fake pleasure on her lips. She always has to appear stern yet happy to anyone who may glance her way. She has to be dominant.

He stutters for a while, but eventually manages to say that he isn't surprised because it's the most expensive meal on the menu. Of course, he doesn't mean anything by it. He would be glad to buy her anything she wants, but he had noticed the routine. She immediately begins harassing him about why the price was such a big deal, how much money they had, and how much money he made versus how much she made. When he reminds her that she brings home a majority of their money, she reprimands him for being anti-feminist. He decides to agree and end the conversation.

He tells her that he wants to order the Salmon Panang Curry. She simply nods and inquires about their baby, who sits quietly in a booster seat perfectly in between them. "What is she going

to eat? What did you bring her to eat?"

He speaks quietly again – as he usually does out of something that may be fear. "I didn't bring along anything."

She uses her eyes to slice him into pieces. "What?" She stabs at him with her voice. Always freshly sharpened. "Why wouldn't you? You expect our baby to eat *Thai food*?"

He swallows, trying to maintain even breathing. "I just thought... we're out at dinner as a family... maybe we could all eat something here? There's something she can eat here I bet." He keeps his eyes glued down at his daughter's tiny feet the whole time so he won't have to look at his wife.

His wife just scoffs at him. "I really don't think you know what's best for her. Otherwise you would have brought her baby food along."

"She's sixteen months old now. She doesn't need to eat that goopy mess anymore." He keeps his voice soft and his eyes on the ground. She does the opposite. They begin to discuss the menu. Or rather, he begins to discuss the menu; she just begins to analyze it and sarcastically demands for him to inform her of what baby Thai food he's looking at.

He glances down and flips through the pages of the menu. He isn't too excited about dinner anymore. He can't even remember why he was excited to begin with. Something about a first family meal out for everyone to see. He wanted to show off his family. But now he realizes that it isn't his family – it's hers. He glances up at her. She stares at him expectantly, waiting for him to please tell her what to order for their daughter. "Well... there's rice. She could eat cucumbers. We could have them bring out a lot of stuff separately for her, like vegetables. I'm sure families do that all the time when they have young children with them." He nods as strongly and as boldly as he can to support his idea; he is actually quite proud of himself.

Until she slams his face into the dirt.

She groans and rolls her eyes way back into the depths of her head – where the army of dung beetles lives – and stabs him with her pointy eyes again. She refutes his idea entirely. She can't eat

the rice because it's sticky and they don't want her to choke. They aren't going to order raw vegetables because those aren't a menu item. He thinks it's completely ridiculous that it has to be a meal listed on the menu. Normally he would hold back and let her have it, but this time he decides to put forth some effort.

"Now look, you were the one that said she couldn't eat a meal here. I'm just thinking of other options."

She looks at him in mock surprise. She doesn't think he is capable of the effort. She thinks he is pathetic. He gives in.

"Okay, so what meal should we get her?"

She grins half amused and half sadistic. He can see behind that, though. She wants to play a game. So he will play along. "Alright. Call the waiter over here."

They stare relentlessly at each other with near-equal glares while waiting for their greasy-haired server. He plays for a chance to fight back – not to tame or cage the beast, but to knock it down for once. She plays for blood.

The waiter arrives at the table. Are they ready to order?

The wife starts. "I would like the Bangkok Duck for myself, and my husband would like..." She smiles at him with her fake "I'm-a-good-wife-all-the-time" smile.

His turn. "Yes, I would like the Salmon Panang Curry." The waiter starts to speak, but the husband is feeling too-bold and continues. "But may you also bring us..." glance at the menu. First two items. "The Mango Chicken and the Pad Him Ma Parn."

Again the waiter opens his mouth, but the wife is quick on her feet. "And we would also just love to have a bowl of the Tom Kha and a plate of the Broccoli with Oyster Sauce. That just sounds delightful." She smiles that sickly sadistic smile of hers. As she glances at her husband's eyes, ablaze with fire, a battle begins. What their daughter is to eat no longer matters.

"Gai E San."

"Pumpkin Curry Beef."

"Mussaman Lamb."

"Spicy Basil Lamb."

"Kids do love their animals, am I right?"

"Oh yes, of course. So add another Bangkok Duck, dear."

"And the Pineapple Fried Rice with Tofu."

As they continue, their voices become louder and louder. People from the restaurant begin to glance over in confusion and curiosity.

"Volcano Beef with Avocado."

"Tao Hoo Tod."

"House Seafood Special."

"Larb."

"Yum Pla Muk."

"Evil Jungle Noodles!"

"Pad Prik!"

"Garlic Pepper Mushrooms!!"

At this point the waiter suggests that he bring them everything on the menu. "Perfect!" The couple yell in unison. They are so flustered and intensely concentrated on slitting the other's throat that they don't notice the people all around them staring. Even the wife – who usually tries to make her appearance perfect to everyone – doesn't seem to care that she is in public anymore. The husband just wants to show his wife that she does not own him; that she cannot control him. He is an animal, free and wild and untamed.

They bear their eyes into each other's like daggers until their food arrives. Once it is delivered, the family is moved to another table – a larger one for a party of at least fifteen. The baby sits at the head of the table drooling while the couple sits across from each other, now stabbing the food with their eyes. Soon with their forks and knives.

They dig into it, mixing meals, and yelling through their teeth as they chew the food. The more they eat, the more topics they have to argue about. With each different type of meat, with every vegetable, and even with every spice, some new topic of disagreement is born. The house. The mortgage. The car. Their jobs. Whose is better. Who makes more mistakes. Who didn't say "I love you" first. Who smiled the least at their wedding. Whose parents are more insane. Who chose the restaurant. Their yelling soon becomes so out of hand that people all through the restaurant stop to listen.

They spit, chew with their mouths open, and spew food as they yell. They snort and scream and snarl. They are both animals. Untamed, wild, and too-free for their own good. They are fighting for blood.

The people watching shake their heads in disappointment.

Still in full argument, the parents stand, grab their coats, throw several large bills on the table (hopefully enough to cover all the meals they had wasted, plus the tip), and sweep out of the restaurant. They don't hear the gasps behind them or the waiter calling after them. They don't even hear their own stomachs screeching at them in anguish. All they hear are their own words, colliding together and shattering. The pieces all fit together in the same pattern every time, though - which is ironic for such a discordant result as divorce.

Back at the restaurant, the baby sits alone, feasting on Thai food.



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Watercolor and gouache



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