

The kitchen

Years ago I decided that my kitchen was a dangerous place. It might have been after I had spilled boiling water on my hand, or burned my fingers on a bowl of hot soup. I can't remember, but I know I made a firm decision. I cleared out the fridge, padlocked the pantry and closed the kitchen door for good.

Whatever my hunger or thirst, I buried it. I did, however, allow myself a little bread, a little wine, at least once a week, confident that God would be pleased with my self-denial. It was, after all, the cross I chose to bear for Jesus, and all that.

That was until one evening when he turned up on the doorstep, laden with shopping bags and smiling broadly. "I've come to cook you a meal. May I come in? Where's the kitchen?"

I was mortified. The place that I had shut up for years; what state would it be in!? "Um....we could go to the local pub." I said lamely. "No, no, no. This is my treat. Just point me in the right direction."

I gingerly opened the door to the kitchen. It was just as I had left it, albeit a bit dusty. He stood, hands on hips, surveying the scene. "Hmmm." he said, then produced a bolt cutter and attacked the padlock on the pantry. Then he set to work cleaning up. I retreated, embarrassed, into the lounge room next door.

I didn't know what to do. I was angry and ashamed at the same time, but I couldn't just leave him to it. I did, after all, pride myself on being a good hostess.

After a while, amidst the sound of clattering pots and frying pans sizzling on the stove I heard him humming cheerfully to himself. I crept into the kitchen to find him wearing a pink frilly apron (not mine, I might add!), and enjoying himself immensely. The food smelled wonderful, and stirred up some long-forgotten memories of pre-padlocked-pantry days that I tried unsuccessfully to suppress. He chatted to me about nothing in particular, and after a while I felt easier about his being there.

When the meal was ready, I noticed that he had laid the little table-for-two in the corner with a white table cloth and some flowers. They were sour sobs in a jar. "Sorry about the flowers," he said, "but they were all I could find. And I couldn't find a vase, either."

My heart sank, but I bravely smiled and said, "They're lovely." and tried to mean it, but it gnawed away at me. If he had noticed my hesitation, he didn't show it, and calmly proceeded to dish up the meal. After the first few tentative mouthfuls, I found myself relishing the food (which was simple and delicious), the company, and the conversation. It seemed that my stoic self control was being eroded in a very pleasant way.

He asked me about my work, what I liked doing, my friends and other things with genuine interest. And he made me laugh, something I hadn't done in a long while.

After we'd eaten, we did the washing up - he washed, I dried. During the easy conversation, I felt I owed him an explanation for my reaction to the flowers. I told him about the time when, as a seven year old, I had picked sour sobs on the way home from school to give to my mother, only to have her

throw them in the bin, saying crossly that they were 'just weeds'. Having related just one of my many humiliations, I couldn't stop. The flood gates opened, and other stories poured out, along with my own tears - my own 'sour sobs'. All this time he simply listened, but I could tell that he was paying whole hearted attention to what I would have called 'childish' memories. When I had run out of stories and tears he simply said, "Thank you for laying bare your heart. It took a great deal of courage, and that means a lot to me."

Afterwards I made coffee for us both (he allowed me that luxury) and we retired to the lounge and sat in companionable silence. Finally he said, "Well, I must be off. Thank you for your hospitality. It's been wonderful."

When he'd gone, I went into the kitchen and sat there for a long while, reacquainting myself with the pantry (now well stocked with fresh food), the fridge, the stove and the little table for two, sour sobs still bravely standing in the jar. 'Funny,' I thought, 'in all that time he never scolded me, or told me what I had to do or be, or psychoanalysed me. He just..... I don't know.....loved and affirmed me for being me.'

They say that the kitchen is the heart of the house, the one room which makes it a home. It seems that I had rediscovered that heart, and it felt good.

He now comes quite often for a meal.

Sometimes he even lets me cook.

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