

MOEZ SURANI
SEAFOOD

A IS MARRIED TO B and C is married to D. On the surface everything is as it should be.

A and B invite C and D to dinner. C prefers his Saturday nights to be wilder, but he smiles and agrees. D puts on a polka-dot dress and considers if her hair should be up or down. She tilts her head in critique of C, who she believes is underdressed.

While making dinner, A and B become short with each other, but the tension never rises into an argument.

When the doorbell rings, all four are smiling.

They eat in the kitchen.

Midway through dinner, B becomes sure that A and D have slept together. She wonders if C knows this; their marriages, after all, predate their friendship. She wants to pull C aside and divulge everything her intuition is telling her. Most interestingly, B wants to be both absolutely right and absolutely wrong about this hunch. Everything in between is despair.

During dinner, A and D are mutually fascinated.

A is thoughtful. D, in her polka dots, is kind though reserved. C is light and witty. And B is losing her mind.

C is the first to realize that they have somehow lost B and she is not speaking. He asks her about her work, how one teaches dance, and if dance is innate. B's answers are sad and terse. Wine circles her glass. She is wearing her glasses and almost no jewellery.

A launches into a long story that he regards as a joke. B finds it arrogant and embarrassing. How, she wonders, does he feel comfortable talking so much? She looks at D's lovely dress, then at her neck and shoulders. She wonders if C is more naïve than her or simply more detached and permissive. She wants to look at him, to study him, but he reacts soon after she looks at him. C, she decides, is more handsome than A, but A has the more engrossing ego.

It is the same dynamic, she realizes, with herself and D.

Then she hears A say, "All people are essentially the same."

B is happy she is wearing her glasses because she realizes she is about to cry.

C leans back and, reaching to the counter, turns the music way up. A smacks the table with a hand, stands and opens another bottle of wine with theatricality. D smiles. She is dancing in her chair, bobbing, and nodding yes for more wine.

C stands too, but he takes B's hand. Her confused gaze travels up from his hand to his eyes and then sweeps back down to her empty glass. C, she realizes then, has in fact the biggest ego, but he conceals it and is not made brittle by it like A who can be sensitive.

"Teach me something," C says loudly, above the music. "Teach me a dance. Teach me an obscure one."

She maneuvers his hands and applies pressure as instruction to him. Does he know, too? she wonders. Is this his tactful way of offering her comfort? Of expressing his solidarity and support? Or is this just a dance? And why, she wonders, does she no longer understand things? Why, these days, does she always feel on the outside? Moving quickly in the cramped kitchen space, she can't even be sure if she is crying or not.

"Is this a real dance?"

"No," B replies, suddenly hysterical with laughter. "Of course not."

"But what's it called?" C asks.

"Sexy Jeans!" A yells.

B's hands are clutching C's shirt and C's hands are on her, but otherwise, she feels absent, like smoke in his arms.