

Meg placed the spotless butter dish down on the table set for twelve. There. With a final scan of the room, she nodded to herself and went to check on the goats' cheese soufflé. It had risen perfectly and was just going starting to become golden. Inviting bottles of Chardonnay lay in wait in the new wine fridge.

She removed the apron, slid open the patio door and bravely stepped out onto the decking to the sound of live jazz and snatched murmurings of inebriated guests. The setting sun made the scene quite picturesque.

“My darling wife,” exclaimed the squat man with a receding hairline. His pot belly made a bid for freedom between the buttons of his pink pinstriped shirt. “You mustn’t slave away all alone in there. You’re missing out on all the fun.”

She bent to kiss him on the cheek. At the last moment, he turned and they smooched wetly. She shuddered but maintained her smile. Colin’s parents,

the wonderfully named Vicky and Ricky, smiled at them indulgently from the wicker love seat.

“Dinner is served, thanks to this wonderful woman,” brayed Colin, and tapping his wine glass with his nails, brought the music and chatter to a stop. They walked on ahead. “Come on and soak up the booze with some sustenance!” he called over his shoulder. Though she stood a full foot taller than he, Meg could hear wisps of conversation behind them - “What a lovely couple”, “Isn’t Col lucky to have met her”. She and Colin exchanged smiles of relief.

Several hours later, they watched the last guest stagger down the drive to her own home. They waved in unison as Edith looked back, almost falling over.

“Your neighbour is quite a scream, isn’t she,” sneered Meg. “All those down the nose comments about the wine and she turns out to be the biggest boozer here.”

“Couldn’t not invite her. She’s the village gossip,” said

Colin, lighting a cigar. “Fancy a nightcap?”

“Shower then bed for me. See you in the morning,” said Meg. “We can sort out payment then.”

“Okily-dokily,” said Colin, letting out a smoke ring. Once Meg was out of the room, he picked up his phone and hit speed dial one. He swigged straight from the bottle of port beside him. Then his face lit up in a way unseen all evening. “Good evening, Lover. I’ve missed you.”

A tinny voice replied.

Meg stood at the threshold. She had forgotten to ask Colin for a towel. He had not noticed her yet. “It did, she’s a whizz in the kitchen, and she had them eating out of her hand too - if it’s not too OTT to mix metaphors.... Oh yes, the parents were totally taken in.”

He spotted Meg. “Towel?” she mouthed. “On the guest bed,” he said quickly, and returned to his call as she smiled and disappeared.

He chuckled at the phone. “Oh, I can’t wait to have you in my arms again, you naughty boy.”

The End.