

## LOBSTER QUADRILLE

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On a Friday afternoon in late August David Griffiths found the dusty lot at Southport Fish and Lobster nearly full. The sun was hot and trouble with driving around in an elderly sports car with its top down was that there was no place cool to stow his groceries. He threw a beach towel over the bags and went into the small store appended to the corrugated metal side of the warehouse. Griffiths loved the place. Trips to buy fish were among his favorite rituals of summer. He was a handsome man with a well-trimmed salt-and-pepper beard, smiling eyes, and a fringe of gray curls beneath his faded Red Sox cap. He stood at one end of the counter happily watching as customers ogled the displays of glistening seafood on trays of ice: lobster, shrimp, scallops, crabs, clams, and oysters to the right; hake, halibut, flounder, haddock, cod, swordfish and tuna to the left.

On this Friday Kayla, the daughter of the owner, was attending to two older women who were trying to decide what to buy. Griffiths was immediately intrigued by the contrast between the two. One was a striking woman, tall and straight, with short white hair, elegantly feathered to emphasize her graceful neck. She had dark, phlegmatic eyes set off by carefully plucked brows. She was watching her friend with an expression of calm affection—warm, but not quite smiling. The friend was shorter and rounder and a bit unkempt. She had a plastic face that was expressive and constantly changing. The taller woman put her hand on her friend's arm and asked,

“What do you think, Danni, a nice piece of cod loin? Maybe cooked in that luscious béchamel sauce you make?”

“Is that what you want, Jeannie ...? I’m not sure ... let me see.”

Danni reached into the copious pockets of her striped kaftan, digging out sunscreen, a paperback, and a little notebook. “Oh, I must have left it,” she said, her round face wrinkling, lips pursed. Jean looked at her thoughtfully and said, “I think it’s in your purse, dear.” Phone located, Danni peered at it, searching for recipes. Jean smiled and gestured to other customers behind them. “Go ahead, we’re still deciding.”

“We could,” said Danni, “Do a sort of *bon femme*—you know, sautéed in wine, then broiled with a cream sauce made with the wine and shallots.”

“Yum. That’s perfect.”

“Though it does seem like a lot of cooking just for the two of us.”

“Let’s invite Barb and Evan. We haven’t seen them in a while.”

“It ... it might be awfully rich for a summer evening. And the house would smell of fish.”

Danni raised a small hand to brush back a strand of hair that had escaped the ribbon loosely holding her graying ponytail. Stray locks framed her round cheeks. Jean waved a hand at the display case. “Let’s not worry about it, Dee. How about something we can grill. That swordfish you grilled a few weeks ago was amazing.”

“Was it? Gosh, how did I do it? It’s gone out of my mind. Maybe I can find it.” She reached into her pockets again. “Did you pick up my phone.”

“You laid it on the display case, dear.”

“Oh, I did. I forget everything. I wonder where I found the recipe?”

“I think you just made up a basting sauce. *Ala Danni*.”

“Oh, I do remember: butter, garlic, soy sauce and herbs. But isn’t swordfish a problem—you know, the mercury? We shouldn’t have it too often.”

“Not really an issue for old birds like us.”

Danni looked at her friend in confusion and then anguish.

“Are you teasing me? I’m so worried I’ll cook something, and it’ll be all wrong and people will wonder why you even tolerate me.”

“You are the *cordon bleu* of my life, Dee, my sweet. Just close your eyes and envision something delicious, and then open them and point.”

“Okay.”

She scrunched her face. Tears slipped out of the corners of her small eyes. Jean put an arm on her shoulder. Danni rolled her head back and wailed, “I can’t. You’re just too nice to me.” She lurched out of the store. “I guess,” said Jean to the audience of customers, “that I am choosing the fish.” She turned to Kayla. “We’ll have two pounds of the cod loin. And could you pack it in some ice please?”

“Sure, Mrs. Simms. And some lobster meat for Danni when you get home?”

“Yes, just right, Kayla. Enough for a couple of rolls. Put it on my account, will you?”

Kayla shoveled crushed ice into a plastic bag, added the packages of fish and lobster, and handed the bag to Jean. She looked as if she might say something, but just smiled until Jean was out the door, and then she shook her head.

Griffiths looked at Kayla and raised his eyebrows. She said,

“Danni and Jean. They come in most every Friday, Dr. Griffiths. I understand Danni’s an amazing cook, but she gets upset about the craziest things.”

He turned to look out the store window. He could see Danni in their car, hands over her face, weeping. Jean was saying something. Griffiths watched with open fascination and turning back to Kayla said, "Remarkable. Quite childish." Kayla continued to watch the two women as Jean backed the car out. "I don't know. They've been coming here for years. My dad says Danni used to be really funny ... kinda wicked."

"Huh. Hard to believe." Griffiths pointed to the chalkboard listing prices. "Are the mussels clean?"

"Yup. They came in this morning."

"I need five pounds."

Kayla went into the back and returned with a sack of mussels, which she placed on the big scale on the counter.

Griffiths whistled and said, "Whoa, right on, first try."

"Not bad, huh? I've had practice."

"So, you've known those two women for a while?"

"My Dad has. He told me Danni and Jean had some parties that got wild. But something happened. I don't know, maybe Danni's just getting wifty. It seems like Jean takes care of her now."

Griffiths drove home wondering about the two women. He would find a way to learn more. He entered the house, yelled hello to his wife, threw the mussels in the refrigerator, stuck the three long baguettes he'd bought at the bakery into a heavy vase, and wandered down the hall to his wife's studio.

"Aha, you're back. Did you remember to get the mussels?"

"Uh huh."

"Leeks? Garlic? Wine?"

"Yes, yes, and yes. You don't trust me at all, do you? I even went to the bakery to get bread. You're still working on those rocks?"

"What do you think? I can't seem to get the color of the light."

"More purple, I think. Can I talk while you paint?"

"Mmm, sure."

"I met two women, a gay couple, in the fish store. Jean and Danni. Do you know them?"

"I think I know Danni. Round and sort of silly?"

"More or less."

"You remember when I took that children's literature course? She taught one of the classes. I think she's a professor at Brown, or she was. She was very good, and outrageously funny."

"Well, she had a meltdown in the fish store. Left in tears while her partner finished the shopping. She was talking about forgetting things. At first, I wondered whether she was in the early stages of dementia, but it wasn't that. Something got her flustered, and her partner Jean just sort of took it in stride, like an experienced mom with a four-year-old."

"Uh huh."

“We should have them over.”

“David Griffiths! I am not collaborating with another of your surreptitious research projects. Leave the poor women alone.”

The following Friday Griffiths found himself watching for Jean’s car as he drove past Southport Fish and Lobster. Just curiosity, he said to himself, but he pulled in as soon as he saw the silver Mercedes arrive in the dusty lot. He followed Jean and Danni into the store, looked at them, smiled, and said, “It all looks so good, doesn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Danni, “scrumptious. But we came with a plan today, *Coquille San Jacques*. No choosing. No distractions.”

“You must be Danni, I’m David. I hear you’re an amazing cook?”

“You do? But I don’t know you, do I?”

Jean reached around her friend and took Griffiths’s hand, peering intently into his eyes.

“Nice to meet you, David. I’m Jean Simms, and this is my partner, Danni Aron.”

“Yes, yes, as I said, I have heard about Danni.” He smiled again. “You know, I’m collecting the best recipes of local cooks for a book, Danni. I would love to hear some of yours?”

“My recipes?”

Jean shook her head. “Maybe not, Mr. Griffiths, it’s not the best time.”

“Of course. I understand. Maybe we could just have a cup of coffee and talk about food.”

“I don’t think ...”

“It’s OK Jean. I’d love that.”

Jean nodded. “Come tomorrow morning, then. We live in the yellow house by the red barn on Bay Road.”

“Sure, I know it. Ten-ish?”

Kayla handed a plastic container filled with big ocean scallops to Jean, who held them out to Danni. “Such a nice choice.” Kayla turned to Griffiths.

“Have you decided, Dr. Griffiths?”

Jean looked at him sharply. “We’ll see you tomorrow then ... Dr. Griffiths.”

“David, please. Yes, tomorrow.”

The little yellow house was one of the oldest in the town. It sat quietly behind a mossy stone wall and a pair of apple trees. Its small windows had dark-green shutters and divided lights with wavy old glass. With the beautiful symmetry of its era the house had an elaborate federalist portico and a green front door topped with a delicate arch of glass. As he opened the gate, walked down the path, and mounted the front steps, Griffiths noticed that each of the four columns supporting the portico sat atop a large carved pineapple painted gold and green and ochre. Someone, he thought, had put a lot of thought and money into making the house perfect.

He knocked and Jean opened the door and led him to a low-ceilinged sitting room that stretched the length of the house. There were windows on three sides and a fireplace fitted with a tiled wood stove. The walls were covered with hand-painted wallpaper and hung with watercolors of farm and coastal scenes. The room felt welcoming and comfortable, but small. Danni was seated on a low sofa behind a tray of coffee and fragrant scones.

“See?” she exclaimed. “You gave me an excuse to bake something I haven’t made in years—Oolong scones.” She looked up at him and winked and said, “A bit of a fraud: I like the name Oolong, but I actually soak the currents in Hu Kwa for the smoky flavor.”

Griffiths laughed. “That alone makes my visit a success ... to say nothing about how they’ll taste.”

Danni took an embroidered cover off a glass pot, pushed the *presse* down, and filled three china cups. She passed him a plate with a scone and a dollop of strawberry jam on one side and clotted cream on the other. Jean stood behind the sofa, observing, and Danni looked at her and said, “C’mon lovey, sit down.” She turned to Griffiths. “Jean doesn’t really approve of rich, sybaritic foods before lunch.”

Jean eased slowly into a very straight-backed, antique wicker chair. “I don’t. We all have aging arteries. I should think that you would disapprove on professional medical grounds.”

Griffiths didn’t respond, but asked Danni, “Do you have the recipe written down?”

“Sort of. It’s worrying story. When I started getting forgetful it really upset me. Especially cooking. I’d stand in the kitchen and just scream. Jeannie would think I’d spilled hot grease on myself. So she suggested we start writing down my recipes. Then we decided, what the hell, let’s put ’em on my phone so I don’t have to go find some card file—”

Jean interrupted, “The trouble is, Danni doesn’t have recipes, as such, she just has wonderful instincts. I’d sit there with the phone asking what I should write down, and she’d get mad and claim she couldn’t remember anyway.”

“I couldn’t! You try to protect me from recognizing I’m losing it.”

“Nah,” said Griffiths, “you seem ok now. The scones are fabulous. You must have remembered that recipe. We all forget stuff as we get older.”

“When I walked into the kitchen this morning and thought about your visit, it just came to me that I wanted to cook scones. I put on my apron and felt happy. I don’t know why. I just started mixing butter and flour and cream.”

“With a wonderful result. Can I ask you something then?”

“Sure....”



“What is it with the fish store? You seemed so very upset the other day.”

There was a tense silence. Jean rose from her chair and started to clear the plates and cups. Looking at Danni she said, “I think you should stick to cooking.” She started toward the kitchen, and then turning back toward Griffiths said,

“I’ll try to find some of the recipes to send you. Fish is her specialty.” It sounded like a dismissal.

“Perhaps when I have seen the recipes,” Griffiths said, “I could come back and talk them through with you, Danni?”

Jean was shaking her head no, but he kept his eyes on Danni, who smiled. He said he’d visit again the following week.

There was no recipe collection. It was a subterfuge he’d invented to justify a visit. Not a lie exactly, just a harmless bit of flattery. It could be true. He was drawn by curiosity about these two women. Danni’s behavior struck him as more emotion than dementia. And Jean had seemed to expect, almost welcome, the outburst. He had often dealt with dementia in his psychiatric practice—couples struggling to confront the reality of one partner becoming a different person. But the way Jean and Danni interacted was different different. Like a parent and child. He had no nefarious purpose in engineering a visit. He wanted to observe. Perhaps he could even help. Something was out of kilter, and he wanted to understand what it was.

No recipes arrived. He was neither surprised nor deterred. He suspected that Jean had diverted Danni from sending anything. He would turn the tables. He called a former patient, a chef who had a restaurant called Noah’s Net, and asked him for the recipe for one of his most popular dishes – skate wings with shallots, capers and brandy butter. It took some wrangling, but

he got what he wanted, along with the advice not to be afraid to cook it fast in a hot pan.

Griffiths laughed and assured Noah he wasn't planning to cook anything.

A few days later, on a hot still morning, Griffiths, dressed in baggy khaki shorts, a tattered Bernie Sanders T-shirt, and a straw hat, knocked on Jean and Danni's door. Jean appeared and looked at him coolly.

"Hello, Dr. Griffiths, to what do we owe this pleasure?"

He heard Danni's voice from the living room. "Is that David?"

"Yes, it's me," he answered. "I never got your recipes, Danni."

"We weren't sure you were serious, right Jean?"

"Oh," said Jean, "I think he's serious, but I'm not sure about what." She turned abruptly and walked up the narrow stairs.

Danni watched with a look of puzzled consternation, then invited Griffiths to sit in the living room, saying, "It's too warm for coffee. Can I get you some iced tea, David?"

"That would be very nice."

When she reappeared, she had two glasses with sprigs of mint and a blue glass pitcher of iced tea. She pointed to a pile of index cards under the sugar bowl.

"I did write these up, but Jean didn't think I should send them."

Griffiths laughed. "Ah, yes," he said, "good food can be so dangerous."

Danni blushed. "It's not that. She thought you might, well, make fun of me."

Griffiths shook his head and reached into the pocket of his shorts for the skate wing recipe. Danni's eyes widened. Noah's Net, she told Griffiths, was one of her favorite restaurants. She reached out to take back the recipes from where they lay on the table, saying "I'm not a chef." Griffiths put his hand over hers. "That," he said, "is what will make this collection

interesting. Cooks creating wonderful food, some for money, some for love. Now tell me about how you came to make some of these. What about this? Lobster Quadrille?”

“Oh, that was funny. It was December a few years ago and we had friends over. I was making Lobster Thermidor. You know, you boil the lobsters. Then you cut them in half and remove the meat and make a brandy bechamel and mix in some gruyere and crumbs and put it back in the shell and broil it. The smell of the cooking alone makes strong men swoon.”

“Just your description is enough to do that.”

“I added a few touches for texture and contrast: crispy salted shallots and some orange peel in the breadcrumbs.” She grinned. “This particular night we’d found a fabulous, crisp Sancerre, which I was enjoying while I was cooking. I found myself singing the Mock Turtle’s song, the ‘Lobster Quadrille’ from *Alice in Wonderland*. Jean and I had just been to see the Johnny Depp movie version. Some Scottish rock band sings the Mock Turtle’s song. I thought that before I boiled the lobsters, they deserved their moment of fame. I stood them on their heads—you know, if you do that they stay up—and I put them on a tray and put on my lobster apron and my lobster mitts and brought them out for the guests, singing the song.”

“That must have been quite a scene.”

“People laughed so hard they spilled their drinks.”

“But not Jean?”

“She thought it was cruel. She doesn’t really like the idea of throwing live animals in boiling water ...”

“And ...?”

“After I’ve had some wine, it just provokes me. Even the Sallow Sisters thought it was funny.”

“The Sallow Sisters?”

“Hen and Fran. You might have seen them. They have yellow skin and hair like steel wool. They’re weird, but very nice. I’d never heard them laugh, but that night they brayed, and when Jean acted offended Hen said, ‘Oh, chill, Jeannie dear, they’re aquatic insects.’ ”

They talked on about cooking and Danni’s fear that she was becoming too confused for it. She described how she used to stand in the fish store and invent a recipe as she looked at what was on display. “But then one afternoon I ... well, it’s a long story. Something had happened the week before and I sort of panicked. I couldn’t think. Jean told me I was being silly, that people get forgetful at my age—I’m four years older than she is—and I should ignore it. But that just makes me think she’s not telling me the truth. Some stuff happened, and now I get scared whenever we go into that damned store.”

Griffiths looked at her skeptically and said, “What a load of crap. *You* are not sinking into dementia. You are funny, maybe, but not senile.”

Above them they could hear thumping and banging and then a vacuum cleaner roaring. Danni grimaced. Jean, she said, must be getting impatient. Griffiths invited her and Jean to come to join him and his wife for dinner. “I’ll have cooked lobsters ready, and a very good white wine. You bring your tools and ingredients to make that thermidor.”

Danni agreed and told him he needed to have a light green salad with Boston lettuce and thin-sliced lyonnaise potatoes. The vacuum stopped roaring. Griffiths wondered whether Jean would convince Danni to cancel. He went to the foot of the stairs.

“Jean. I’m off.”

“Goodbye, then.”

“I’ll see you next Friday evening.”

“Oh?”

“You and Danni are coming for dinner. My wife is so eager to meet you.”

“Yes?”

“Could I ask a favor?”

“What?”

“Well, I’ve told her how gorgeous your flowers are. Could you bring a bouquet?”

“That’s nice, David, of course I will.”

He smiled. He had discovered that Jean had owned a very successful landscape design business and guessed that she was proud of their garden. Griffiths, he told himself, you really are a manipulative bastard.

Griffiths and his wife Lisa had a large, gray, shingled house with white trim. It nestled into a slope that faced west across the mouth of the Sakonnet River. The house was modern, designed around the magnificent view of the wide river entering the sea. When Jean and Danni arrived, a thick, wet southwest wind dimmed the early September sun. Griffiths led his guests to a wide, screen porch buffeted by swirling mist.

“This is one of the nicest places on the coast to watch the sun set,” Griffiths said, “but when we get a smoky southwester like this, we usually retreat inside.”

Jean, pulling a silk shawl around her shoulders, shivered and nodded. They went back into the living room. Danni sniffed. “Ooh, garlic and capers?”

Lisa appeared from the kitchen with a tray of fried artichoke hearts. “I hope,” she said, “that these are up to your standards.”

Danni speared one with a toothpick, popped it into her mouth, closed her eyes and moaned with delight. “Wonderful. A little lemon? And ... some anchovy. Oh, these are brilliant.”

Lisa laughed. “I am flattered. You have an extraordinary palate. When David said you were a cook, I didn’t realize that he meant a culinary genius. But we have lobsters to deal with. I hope we can do them justice.”

Lisa trailed off, and Danni put her hand on her shoulder. “Oh fiddle, I just love good food and cooking. Can I come see what you’re doing?”

Griffiths said, “Wait!” and waved a wine bottle wrapped in a towel, but they were gone. He turned to Jean and said, “Well, we’ve been abandoned. But we have been left with this very nice wine. I believe this is just the Sancerre that you had the evening of the Lobster Quadrille.”

“How ever did you figure that out?”

“We all patronize the same wine store. This is special. Michael remembered.”

They sat on a pair of small white sofas, facing each other across a low rosewood coffee table. Griffiths thought what an elegant and attractive woman she was. She didn’t really sit, she perched erect and graceful, watching him as he watched her. If she were his patient, he would wait her out, allowing the silence to demand a response. No need now. He would ask his questions directly.

They heard a shriek of laughter from the kitchen, and he wondered what Lisa and Danni were up to. He suspected his wife of weaving some net of protection around Danni. His spouse disapproved of his artful probing of people he found interesting, accusing him of invading their privacy. He responded that he was just naturally inquisitive, and never misused what he learned.

“No, David,” she’d said, “You’re a psychic spy, a voyeur.”

“Isn’t that the essence of good of conversation?” he’d asked.

He poured more wine for Jean, and himself, then held up his glass.

“To the cooks.”

“Yes, to the cooks. It sounds as if they are having a good time.”

“How long have you and Danni been together?”

“A long time. Almost twenty years.” She looked at him very directly. “Why do you ask?”

“I’m curious.”

“Professional curiosity?”

“No, just human curiosity.”

“Are we a case?”

“No, there’s no book in the offing.”

“Not even a cookbook?”

“Not even.”

He cocked his head to one side and asked, “Have you always taken care of Danni?”

“In her wilder days I just trailed behind her and tried to keep things from getting out of hand.”

“And now?”

“She needs my care.”

“Why?”

“Why does she need care? I’m not sure, David. She is less sure of herself. She gets confused and frightened.”

David leaned back and took a sip of wine wondering how blunt he should be. Jean, he thought, already knew what he was asking.

“Do you believe she is slipping into dementia?”

“No. No, I don’t believe that.”

“Then what?”

“Well, you’re the psychiatrist ....”



Lisa pushed the blue swinging door open, saying, “Tada!” Danni emerged from the kitchen with a tray of lobsters, red shells halved, filled with meat, and topped with browned bechamel. Lisa clapped her hands and announced, “This woman is a marvel. I feel privileged to be her sous-chef.”

A shadow crossed Danni’s face, then she turned and put her free arm around Lisa’s waist. “You flatter, but I love it.”

David looked at them solemnly, eyebrows raised. “No Quadrille?”

Danni started to answer, but Lisa interrupted. “These elegant crustaceans have traveled far to give their all for your gustatory pleasure. Dr. Griffiths, we shall not make light of them. *Nest cest-pas vrai, chef.*”

“Well and wisely said, *mon amie.*”

The two cooks returned to the kitchen to bring salad, bread, and cheese. Jean sat, legs crossed, back straight, eyes bright, watching Griffiths. A slight smile bent her lips. He wondered whether she suspected he had married more than his match. If she had asked him, he would happily have admitted it. Instead, she said, “Now you have seen my dear Danni flying on golden wings. She is so beautiful. I wish ...”

“You wish that you could help her to be that way more of the time?”

“Yes, but I guess you think I try to control her.”

“What would happen if you let go?”

“She depends on me.”

“I’m sure she does. And you depend on her?”

“I love her. Giving is not control.”

There was a silence. Griffiths said, “Not always.”

The meal was bright with lemon and parsley and the red shells of the lobsters. The table was elegant with yellow roses and gleaming crystal. On an old mahogany sideboard a vase of tall Asiatic lilies from Jeanne's garden spread fragrant blossoms.

Lisa stopped as she rounded the end of the table. "What's going on out here? We have created a shrine to good food beautifully served, yet the atmosphere has grown heavy?"

Her husband shook his head. "We are wondering, what is love? But we may not agree on an answer."

Conversation at the table was mostly about food, and wine, and how much earlier it seemed to get dark, now that summer had yielded to October. Griffiths asked whether it was chilly enough to light a fire in the fireplace. "I've had it laid for weeks," he said. "I think tonight's the night."

He wondered, as the dry kindling crackled into flame, whether to try to renew the conversation about Danni and Jean. Lisa would not approve, but she would, nonetheless, have perceptive insights. He decided to wait until after dinner. There would be fruit, nuts, cheese, and brandy and toasted rye crackers. He thought of it as philosophical food.

They cleared the table, and Lisa insisted that they leave the dishes. "We have never," she said, "believed in breaking up the best part of a dinner party for dishes. Come enjoy some cheese and port."

They did. It was very good port, delicious cheese, and superb brandy. Griffiths leaned back, sloshing the brandy around in his glass, and asked, "Danni, is it true that you used to be total hellion?"

Jean started to respond, but Danni waved her off, put her glass down with a clink, as if she were going to respond angrily and said, “You mean you don’t think I have it in me anymore? Shall I break something, or sing a bawdy song?”

“Is that what you’d like to do?”

Jean stiffened and said, “Christ, David, give it a rest. Is this some sort of game for you?”

Lisa glared at her husband and said, “Dammit, David, Jean and Danni are our guests. Be a host, not a doctor. Stop digging in their lives.”

“Fair enough. Danni, would you prefer I stop asking you these questions?”

She shook her head.

Jean asked, “What do you think, David? That Danni is sweet and funny and I can’t stand being outshone by her bright light? Shall I tell him the story, Dee?”

Griffiths was about to answer, but Jean was looking at Danni, who nodded yes.

“I am not sure why you should know this, David, but you seem determined.”

Lisa broke in, “Jean, don’t let him bully you into saying more than you want.”

“No, at this point I’d rather he knew what happened rather than imagine it. Danni?”

“I’m glad David’s interested.”

David knew Lisa was right. He was crossing boundaries he should respect, but he didn’t think he was doing any harm.

“There was an evening, it was a little over a year ago. We went to the house of some friends for dinner. The wife is a sweet but rather fragile woman. She’d told me that she was thinking of having the dinner catered. She was worried about cooking for Danni. I told her there was nothing to worry about. I warned Danni to be kind. We arrived and discovered there was

another couple there, people we don't really like, and who don't care for us ... because we're a couple, you see. The atmosphere was, let us say, very stiff."

"And I," said Danni, "began drinking. A lot. When Jean signaled I should go easy, I went and got a bottle and began a serious effort to get drunk."

"The food was slow in coming and it was terrible. Horribly overcooked meat, potatoes that were almost raw. Everyone was trying to reassure our poor hostess ... except Danni. She just stared silently at her plate and pushed stuff around with her fork, and then moaned. It was hard not to laugh. The next day we were in the fish market and Danni was telling some friends that she had just survived the worst meal she'd ever encountered. She had a little limerick about meat of leather and raw potatoes, all at their worst when served together. Everyone laughed except our hostess from the night before, who happened to be standing at the back of the store in tears. It was awful. When we got home Danni was ... I don't know ... cocky. I was disgusted. I pushed her into a chair and told her she wasn't being funny, she was being mean. I told her I wondered how I could love someone that nasty. She fell apart."

"I did. I worship Jean. It got through to me as if I'd been stabbed, that everything Jean had said about me was true. I had this horrible insight that without the nasty parts I wouldn't be me."

"So, David, you have pried open our box of secrets?"

He felt saddened. Chagrined.

"Danni, if it causes you such misery, why do you go to the fish market?"

"It is just remorse, which is good. Regret, and the hope that I can learn to be worthy of Jean's love."