

“Doris?” the doctor said.

5 “Hmm?”

“Doris, do you know where you are?”

“Certainly,” Doris replied. “I’m in a hospital.”

“Good, good. Do you remember what happened?”

Doris furrowed her brow. “Not all of it, no... I think there was an explosion?”

10 “Yes, that’s right,” the doctor confirmed. “You were very lucky, Doris. Your father’s entire kitchen was destroyed by the explosion. It’s a miracle that you survived with only minor burns.”

“I supposed it is,” Doris smiled.

“Do you know who I am?”

15 “Are you my doctor?” Doris guessed.

“That’s right. I’m Doctor Mitchell.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Doctor,” Doris said politely.

“We’ve met a few times before, actually,” the doctor said. “You’ve been my patient for almost a week. Your memories are a bit jumbled.”

20 “Oh, I see,” Doris said. “Well that can’t be good.”

“You’re in fine physical shape, Doris. Nothing to worry about. You’re just a little confused. You had quite a shock to your system. Do you remember anything from after the explosion?”

25 “Um... no. Not really. I remember sirens, and men lifting me on to, well, I guess it must have been a gurney. Then it gets hazy.”

“That’s all right. It’ll come back to you. How about immediately before the explosion?”

5 “Hmm,” Doris said. “Well I remember being at my father’s house. I hadn’t seen him in some time and I’d gone over for a visit. I don’t remember the details, but I remember he wanted me to cook for him. I’m a professional chef, you see.”

“A chef,” to doctor said.

“Yes, indeed. I’ve been excellent at cooking my whole life. Ever since I was a little girl.”

“I see. Go on.”

10 “I never found Mr. Right,” Doris continued, “and in this modern era a woman doesn’t need a man to be complete, anyway. So I had to make do on my own. And cooking was the only thing I was good at.”

“May I ask, when did you first start cooking?”

15 “Well,” Doris pondered, “I guess it all started around the time my mother died. Once she was gone, my father insisted I start cooking for him. He said that he was earning the money to maintain the household, and I had to pull my weight.”

“How old were you at the time?”

“Eleven.”

“Eleven?” The doctor said. “That’s pretty young to be cooking.”

20 Doris shrugged. “It was no different at eleven than it is at thirty-five. I was a little smaller and things were harder to reach. But with experience, I got to be as good as any adult.”

“How often did your father make you cook for him?”

25 “Pretty much every evening. On weekends, he’d want lunch as well. Occasionally he’d want breakfast, but usually not.”

“Did you resent it?”

Doris looked back at the doctor. “Funny you should mention it. Yes. Yes, I did resent it. I didn’t like being forced in to that role, and I didn’t like his arrogant presumption that it was my job to do it. Yes, I resented it.”

“What did you do about it?” the doctor asked.

5 “Well, I left home just as soon as I turned 18. I went out in to the world to make my way. That was almost 20 years ago. Ironically, the thing I was running away from was the only saleable skill I had. So I became a chef.”

“How did that work out?”

10 “At first, not well,” Doris admitted. “I was working in terrible venues; People didn’t care about professionalism or presentation. They just wanted a quick meal and to be on their way. I hated it. But I pressed on.

15 “Then I learned how to market myself. I found the right places to advertise, and made the right contacts. I started moving up in the world of cooking. There is no shortcut, I can assure you. Becoming an expert at your profession, be it chef or doctor, requires a lot of hard work.

20 “In time, I earned a name for myself. I became a commodity. People would call me and offer me jobs, instead of me asking them. I started charging more and more, and people were willing to pay. I would do private parties, large groups, even invite premiere clients and their friends over for a custom meal in my own home. After all, the business they got for me was well worth giving up an evening for.”

“And during this time,” the doctor said, “you never visited your father?”

“No,” Doris said. “I guess I still resented him,” she said. “Irrational, I know. But there you have it. Emotions aren’t always rational.”

“So how did you end up at your father’s house the day of the explosion?”

25 “Well, I decided it was time to drop by,” Doris explained. “I figured I couldn’t hold a grudge forever. It had been 20 years. Maybe things didn’t go well for us back in the old days, but I was an adult now. And I figured I at least owed him a visit or two. He did raise me, after all.”

“And how’d that go?”

“Well, like I said, the first thing he wanted was for me to cook him a meal. I’ll be honest, it kind of made me angry. After 20 years, he hadn’t changed. Not at all. Not one little bit. I was pretty disappointed.”

“So what did you do?”

5 “I went to the kitchen,” Doris said. “What else could I do? He followed me in there. We chatted for a bit while I got ready to cook him something. It was a gas stove, and I must have inadvertently turned on the gas while talking to my father, then forgotten that I did so. Then I turned on another burner and tried to light it. That’s pretty much the last thing I remember.”

10 Doctor Mitchell leaned back in his chair. “Doris, can I ask you a question that may seem completely out of the blue?”

Doris shrugged, “Whatever you like, doctor.”

He took a deep breath, then let it out uneasily. Looking her in the eyes, he asked “What’s the difference between a teaspoon and a tablespoon?”

15 “What?” Doris said, taken by surprise.

“A teaspoon and a tablespoon? What’s the difference?”

“A teaspoon is a spoon used to stir tea,” Doris explained, “while a tablespoon is used for other eating uses, such as soups, custards, and desserts.”

20 Doctor Mitchell rubbed his brow. “No, Doris. Teaspoon and tablespoon are both units of measurement used by chefs all over the world. Any professional chef would know that. Even ordinary people who cook at home know that. You’re not a chef, Doris. You never have been.”

Doris snorted. “Well that’s just ridiculous. Of course I am. I’ve been doing it my whole life!”

25 “No you haven’t,” Doctor Mitchell said. “I have your criminal record. You’ve been arrested for prostitution seven times over the last 20 years.”

“Prosti-?” Doris stammered, incredulous. “That’s utterly absurd! You’ve obviously mixed up my file with someone else’s. What kind of hospital is this!?”

30 “It’s a mental hospital, Doris. You killed your father in that explosion, and you were trying to kill yourself, too.”

“No!” Doris yelled, struggling at her restraints. “That’s not true! I’m a chef!”

“You transposed sex with cooking. Ever since you were eleven. It was a defensive mechanism. It was the only way you were able to survive.”

“NO!” Doris screamed.

5 “But you were strong,” Doctor Mitchell said. “Stronger than he thought. Strong enough to run away, strong enough to survive by selling yourself, and strong enough to come back and get revenge for what he’d done to you.”

“NNNG!” Doris groaned.

10 “He’s dead,” Doctor Mitchell said, “He can’t ever hurt you again. He’s dead and you killed him. You got revenge. You won.”

Doris howled a primal scream so loud Doctor Mitchell worried she would permanently damage her vocal chords. He quickly pulled out a needle and injected her.

As she slipped in to unconsciousness, he made a note in his case log.

15 “We’ll get you through this,” Doctor Mitchell said to her unconscious form. “You survived things that would break normal people, and I’ll get you through the rest of the way. I promise.”

He checked his notes. Two days ago, she didn’t remember the explosion at all. Yesterday, she remembered the explosion, but not that it was at her father’s house.  
20 Tomorrow, she’d remember more. He was sure of it.

“I promise,” he said again as he left her room and locked the door.

*(Author’s Note: Now read it again.)*