

## The Method for Soup and Love

His discomfort assured him that she was lurking behind evaluating his ritual of trial and error. It used to be a simple task, turning the television set on. Point and press, point and press...finally, the screen blinked to life. *It's the red button at the top right*, he drilled himself; *it's the top red button... It's a button somewhere... there... at the top*. She ambled into the bedroom, her arms folded under her breasts. What would he like for lunch? He didn't mind. Really, he didn't. His taste buds had long abandoned their pleasure for food. It was all bland to him now, bland and prohibited. Cholesterol, high blood pressure and digestive problems had found a faithful companion in the septuagenarian. Soup for you, then, she announced and withdrew.

After the familiar aroma filled the kitchen, she wheeled him in tightly under the table and placed a soup bowl before him. "Soup?" he asked oblivious of their brief aforementioned exchange. Consequently, he tried to shut out the disagreeing volume but fractured chunks punctured through. *"...didn't I tell you...how many times... do you think I...?"* He caught glimpses of her reflection in his lukewarm soup as she darted about the kitchen. Her arms gestured energetically synchronising with the more emphatic portions of her lamentations. He was startled when she slapped a spoon down in front of him causing some of his soup to dribble down the side of the bowl.

He waited for her to sit down before undertaking the laborious task of feeding himself. This demanded some effort - as well as time - but he had never been one to shun challenge. He silently set about dipping his spoon into the speckled liquid and bringing it as fully as possible to his mouth. She finished her soup long before him and this even having woven in an abundance of orders that were fired at the old man.

She was standing next to him now with the corners of her mouth pulled down. Her hands rested on her hips waiting for a response, a reaction from him. His pale eyes scanned about slowly in search of a hint. Yes, yes, he remembered now. There was a systematic method in having soup. He should dip his spoon into the bowl and collect the liquid in an outward sweep of the spoon. Yes, yes, he remembered now, never shall the spoon motion towards him. Or perhaps he was slurping? Was his hand trembling too much? Was his napkin in its place? His mind was too sluggish to aid him to a conclusion. Consequently, his forearms patterned a forceless crisscross in an attempt to shield her knobby blow as he was thrust forward in his wheelchair.

He could feel his eyelids heavy now, preparing for an abbreviated nap. He tried to resist so that he could toil with his recollections and therefore perform better next time but it was overwhelming for him to surface such vast amount of detail. Just like having soup today, every task performed had been prone to a systematic method. And presently he had a scarce remembrance of it all. Of course he still knew there was a method, only one correct way to go about things or at least only one way that proved best - this knowledge would never escape him.

He was already asleep by the time she had finished tucking him in. She returned to the kitchen. It goes without say that washing the dishes should be done with the tap turned off until the final rinsing stage thus avoiding wasteful recharges of detergent. Did one have to have a college degree to make the ingredients in any culinary venture equally sliced, diced or cubed? Wasn't it plain common sense to water a plant with the hose poised at a reasonable distance so as to avoid causing any unnecessary splatter? The table is to be wiped off in energetic half circles. Sleeping until after seven in the morning is for the sluggish bastards. You do not leave a glass or any item resting near the edge of a table or kitchen counter. If it falls it is not an accident, foolishness can be foreshadowed. Toothpaste is never to be squeezed the middle- it does not

matter that tubes are plastic now. You do not sweep bringing the broom towards you but away from you. A knife is to be held so that the hand and fingers do not meet the back of the blade at any point but rather stay gracefully gripped on the handle. Your choice of language should not fall victim to how the uneducated insist on mangling it; you say the newspaper, not the paper.

Life this way had been hell for her. Forty-two years he had been scrutinizing her every move, assessing her mental capacities whenever they did not match his criteria. She had lost trace of who she might really be underneath the emotional and tangible scars. Her identity was now free to explore and search but ironically she found this notion of spontaneity unwelcoming. She dried her hands on her apron as she went to check in on her slumbering husband. He looked fragile now. He looked pathetic. So pathetic that it pulled the corners of her mouth down. There were no words to explain how much she missed him.

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