

“Birthday Party” by Katharine Brush – Revisited by Christi Gervasi

Here we sit, my wife and I, in the same restaurant where we have celebrated most special occasions in our nearly twenty-year marriage. I am proud that I can afford to bring her here for these celebratory dinners. I still find her quite pretty, but I worry that she is hiding behind that “big hat” that she wears. I doubt that people are taking much notice of us, and I’m glad as I am almost certain she has some “surprise” in store for me.

Oh no! Here comes the headwaiter carrying a “small but glossy birthday cake, with one pink candle burning in the center.” As he places the cake before me and the orchestra plays, “Happy Birthday to [Me],” I see the joy in my wife’s eyes. I’ll never let her know that I suspected something – that would ruin it for her. I wish the rest of the restaurant’s patrons would stop clapping; I feel myself turning red with embarrassment – such a terrible thing that I can’t control this blushing. She always says the flush makes me look angry. I do feel the need to remain dignified as I quietly thank her for her thoughtfulness.

I wonder why that woman at the next table is staring at me. She almost looks as if she is scolding me for some reason. Now that we are no longer the center of attention, I must let my wife know how special this was for me... Oh, please don’t cry, dear. I know you love me. Thank you for your thoughtfulness. How I love your tender heart.

“The Birthday Party” retold by Nicky Moore

I came upon the realization quite suddenly, quite sadly, quite profoundly. It was a little narrow restaurant where the tables are all too close together and the man in the hat and the mustache noticed us, and smiled. I was wearing the hat I bought for today, and I dipped my head so you wouldn't notice me meet his eyes. You would never like that.

The realization that you'd never like surprise came when the waiter placed the cake the table and winked at me. You caught the second-long glance and the “knowing” smile, the secret we shared and you disapproved. The knowing had meant he and I had spoken in secret, had planned. You always tell me this is the worst thing a woman could do. The name you call me hurts much worse than the first time, and it lingers and it stings. The little mustached man frowns, looks down and tries to avoid looking at me. But I am too ashamed of myself to hide my tears behind the gay big brim of my hat.

**Apologies to Katharine Brush for altering her story.*