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Certificate of Approval

Portfolio

Therapy and Other Stories:

A Writing Portfolio

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by

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building from here? I usually drive a different way, but I'm rather turned around now."

Patricia told her how far to drive, where to park, and even which elevator to take. Dani thanked her and left the restaurant. Patricia went back to wedding invitations in an oversized book.

"I have to order them now," Patricia said, "even though the wedding isn't til July. That gives us four months." She moved the book to a side chair while Ellie placed the dish on the table.

"Is it a big wedding?" Ellie said.

"Only my sister who was in here yesterday, so it's pretty small. He had a bad first marriage before he came to Georgia, but he's--well, we're both ready to settle down."

After work Ellie drove to the university to arrange her counseling schedule around work. She waited outside her advisor's office in the hall, squeezed into a student desk better used for grade school. Thumbing through a counseling text, she was interrupted by a door opening further down the long corridor. A trim woman emerged, smoothed her hair, and to Ellie it seemed, tried to decide which exit to take. As she approached, Ellie recognized her.

"Hi," Dani said. "I found the place after all."

"Great. Are you in school?" Ellie said.

Dani nodded. "I started last semester, but I still haven't learned the area yet."

"Are you a psych major?"

"Anthropology."

"I'd been wondering where I'd seen you before," Ellie said. "It was in this building, in the lobby. I couldn't place you before, but now I remember."

"I--uh--probably not--I've only been here once before," Dani said. "Well, see you at Schroeder's tomorrow." She walked toward the exit and disappeared, leaving Ellie unable to figure out why Dani pretended she wasn't in the lobby. Several times, she was sure now, she had seen her.

With some time left before her appointment, Ellie determined to find out more and walked toward the office Dani had come from. It belonged to Dr. Robeson, the new psychiatric supervisor on staff. That explains it, Ellie thought. Dani's in therapy. Well, at least I will learn about her problem in our therapists' team meeting, she thought. But Dr. Robeson didn't mention Dani the next day, and before Ellie could ask about his new client, the meeting was interrupted, and she forgot.

At Schroeder's on Saturday night, Ellie was thankful of her bad memory. She hadn't planned to work, but had traded with one of the other servers at the last minute. They were preparing for a private party.

"Whose party?" Ellie asked.

"Patricia from lunch," said Sarah.

"Her wedding isn't til July," Ellie said, wondering how the party had been planned without her knowing.

"She and her fiance are having an engagement party. Now

we get to see the man who gave the diamond."

Ellie brought water around the table as Patricia stepped into the banquet room. Her golden hair was clasped in a French twist, exposing her neck and back in a sequined black dress that plunged in a low V. Ellie thought half the men in the restaurant were turned to see her. Her fiance had stopped to talk to a group of men, so Ellie missed his entrance as she hurried with hors d'oeuvres.

"Now those are looks to kill," Sarah whispered. "I'll take his ass--I mean, glass." The other two giggled.

"What's going on here, you guys? We have a crowd to serve," Ellie said, loading a tray with caviar.

"Ellie." Sarah grabbed her face with both hands and turned it toward the door. Ellie finally saw the tall, black-haired man who resembled a young Gregory Peck or a thicker Pierce Brosnan. He wore a tuxedo and Patricia's jeweled hand through the crook of his elbow.

Red colored Ellie's neck and face as she moved past the guests and served the caviar at the head table. Patricia and her mate reached their seats and proceeded with introductions.

"Dr. Robeson is my supervisor in the psych program," Ellie said, keeping her eyes on Patricia's face. "I didn't know we had a connection. Congratulations, Dr. Robeson."

Ellie's face flamed. She placed each plate of caviar, one by one, more and more carefully until she nearly lost track of the time. She couldn't understand the reaction she was having. Had she been personally betrayed? No. She

would be happy for Patricia, but--something bothered her about all this secrecy. Dr. Robeson had a private life, she thought. Period. Ellie wanted Uncle Dan to tell her what to do in his simple way, not sophisticated, perhaps, but true--what's right.

In the days following the party, Ellie tried to sort things out. She listened intently for the report of Dani's therapy from Dr. Robeson, but he didn't mention her. She had wondered if she were supposed to divulge her connection to Dani in the therapists' meeting when it came up, but now she wondered if she were supposed to keep quiet about Patricia as well. It didn't really matter, she kept telling herself.

But it needled her. Ellie found herself behind Dani on her way to the psych building, and as she drove, noticed the New York plates. Ellie parked so that she would not be seen, then stayed behind as Dani entered the building. Though she tried not to play detective, she had to know if Dani was there to see Dr. Robeson again since therapy sessions were usually scheduled one week apart. As she left the elevator, she glimpsed Dani slipping into his office. Unable to control herself, Ellie asked the secretary if Dr. Robeson had a client at 3:00.

"No, his next appointment is at 4:30," she said.

"Could you buzz his office for me?" Ellie said.

"He asked not to be disturbed, but I'll leave him a message if you like."

"No thanks. I'll catch him later," Ellie said. She headed for the stairway and walked down four flights of

stairs as she thought about what the secretary told her. She sat on a step and looked down six rectangular banisters to the bottom floor. Ellie wanted Uncle Ira to tell her what to do in his simple way, not sophisticated, perhaps, but true to what's right.

Over pizza that night, she threw the situation out to Jason. "What would you do if you thought a supervisor were involved in something unethical?" She sipped water as she watched for his reaction, her hands as icy as her glass.

"Unethical with a client?"

"No, this would fall into the category of personal life."

"I'd keep my mouth shut. You know we have one year left. Let it be, whatever it is, Miss Nosy. Supervisors can make life miserable."

"You're probably right--I've thought of that," she said.

"Is this the doctor we're discussing?"

"Yes."

"I know about it," he said.

"What?"

"His two women." Jason served them both another slice of pizza.

"How do you know?" She wanted proof.

It was none of her business.

"But what if it involves other people you care about?"

Ellie said.

"It will probably work itself out without your help, Ellie."

*Fine, then that's the end of it,* she thought.

During the night, though, she woke up to Uncle Ira saying: *The world provides situations for people to act. If you don't, you've missed a chance.* The next day at 1:15, Ellie and Sarah went to work. They placed books on all but one table in Ellie's station of the restaurant. *Let the chips fall after this,* she thought.

When Dani arrived, she surveyed the room and sat at the empty table. Patricia entered shortly afterward, looked around and started for another part of the restaurant.

"Would you care to join me, Patricia?" Dani said. "They must be planning a study hall today."

"If you don't mind. I'll be writing most of the time, anyway."

Ellie listened from the kitchen as she splashed water from the glasses. Patricia told Dani she had a party the weekend before, and planned to send thank you notes.

"Hello, ladies," Ellie said. "Sorry about the tables today. Dani, was that you I saw near the mall yesterday?"

"I went exploring and ended up there," she said, nodding.

"How is Dr. Robeson, Patricia?"

"Fine, thanks. He's leaving the thanking to me and taking over arrangements for the honeymoon."

"Well, are you two ready to order?" Ellie watched Dani slide back in her seat and the color leave her face. She



wanted to hug them and tell them it would be better to know.

"Patricia?"

"Pasta primavera and water--Dani would you split a carafe with me?"

Dani brought her head up to reveal a blanched face. For several seconds, she hesitated. Then, her almond eyes looked squarely at Patricia. "Yes. I will."

Ren Fisher ran a delicate finger around the rim of her water glass as a man in a gray tweed jacket walked to her table. She had called him when she heard the news, and though she hadn't seen Chuck McLean in several years, he was the one to call. They had the kind of relationship that picked up where it left off, no matter how long the absence.

"Ren," he said after a long hug. "I was surprised to hear from you. Have you found out about the funeral yet?" He sat down in the chair beside her and pulled it up close.

She told him about calling the funeral home in Chicago to find when the funeral would be, but she had come up with nothing. She reported what she had read and heard about their former debate coach and friend, how he was found in his empty house lying dead on his bed of an apparent overdose.

The brokerage firm had called her with him the day before. It said he had a terminal illness, so they wouldn't prosecute.