

An abstract painting with a textured, canvas-like appearance. The background is composed of various colors including yellow, green, blue, red, pink, and black, applied in thick, expressive brushstrokes. The overall effect is vibrant and dynamic.

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Sawell®

*Nothing is ever really
lost to us as long as
we remember it.*

-Lucy Maud Montgomery-

Turkey for Two

by Mary Ellen McGinty Collins

With Thanksgiving just two weeks away, I decided to explain sympathy invitations to my newly divorced colleague, John. I was single with a salary that didn't support frequent trips from Boston to see my family in Pennsylvania, so I often received offers to join friends for special occasions. I assumed they felt sorry for me so I always turned them down with made-up tales of other commitments. And then I made myself seem deserving of that sympathy when my holiday dinner consisted of a bowl of Raisin Bran and maybe some Oreos for dessert.

John and I had gone out for a drink after a work event, and I told him to prepare for an onslaught of people clamoring to give him a seat at their Thanksgiving table. Although we hadn't yet acknowledged the mutual attraction that had been simmering below the surface of our professional interactions, I wasn't 100% surprised when he said, "Well ... would you like to go out for dinner on Thanksgiving so neither one of us will have to accept a sympathy invitation?"

My concern about the appropriateness of having a crush on my boss took a back seat to horror at the idea of spending Thanksgiving in a restaurant. As the daughter of a top-notch cook in a family that takes holiday food traditions seriously, I told him that going out was not an option. I'm lucky that my ungracious response didn't prompt him to retract the invite.

"Why don't we cook?" I asked. "I'll get all of my mother's recipes, and we'll make dinner." He accepted my alternative and a few days later we strolled the aisles of the Super Stop 'n Shop. I opened his eyes to the concepts of cranberry sauce made from cranberries and stuffing that doesn't come from a box while thinking, "The poor man doesn't know what he's been missing."

Sometime before the date he told me had gotten tickets for us and his friends, Henry and Laura, to see *Forbidden Broadway* on Thanksgiving evening. Really? I was unnerved by the prospect of adding strangers to the mix before I even knew my date, not to mention the fact that the friends had been a part of John's married life. But since I'm a diehard Broadway fan *and* I didn't want to make a bad impression, I said I thought it was a great idea.

When he picked me up at 11:00 am on Thanksgiving I was toting a freshly baked pumpkin pie, a stack of recipes on index cards, and a cute dress to wear for the theatre. In his miniscule condo kitchen we talked nonstop, drank wine, and replicated my mom's traditional feast, scaled back for a party of two. Since we both had zero interest in watching football while the turkey roasted, we headed out for a chilly stroll around Jamaica Pond.

Several hours later, we enjoyed our dinner sitting on the floor at the candlelit coffee table. Around 7pm we changed clothes and headed to the theatre for Part II of our date, which I hoped would go as well as Part 1. The friends were perfectly nice, but the conversation was awkward and I kept wondering if they were comparing me to the former spouse. I couldn't relax enough to enjoy them or the show, so I just counted the minutes 'til I could impress John with pie that was baked from scratch.

When the house lights came up Henry surprised John with a request for a ride to Laura's house 40 minutes away rather than Henry's house just across town. That wasn't on our agenda, but John is a nice guy. He acquiesced and I went along, hoping for a continuation of our date after the drop-off. It was midnight by the time we were back in his apartment with our pie. And when he delivered me to my front door at 2:00 am, he suggested a second date for turkey sandwiches on Saturday night – just the two of us.

This year will be our 34th Thanksgiving together, and our families don't expect us to join them. However, we will still have to decline overtures from friends who can't believe that turkey for two is anything but sad. For us, the private dinner/long walk/no football strategy is the perfect way we give thanks *and* celebrate the anniversary of an excellent first date. Tradition is in the eye of the beholder.



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