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Social Intercourse

by Candida Lloyd

Colin looked in the hall mirror deciding whether to undo the top button of his flowery shirt thus exposing some greying chest hair. His wife Carol was upstairs making some last-minute adjustments to her outfit. They had spontaneously booked a table at the new French bistro chain that had opened on the high street and were making an effort. Their friends Alison and Colin from number 8 had recommended the moules frites and a bottle of rose and said it hadn't broken the bank.

A knock at the door startled Colin. They weren't expecting anyone. It was probably his namesake, from a few doors down, popping round for a missing supper ingredient, some capers or smoked paprika.

But Colin opened the door to see an unfamiliar couple smiling and looking expectantly at him.

"I'm George," the man said handing over a fancy bottle of champagne in an orange box, "You must be Colin."

"It's so kind of you to welcome us on to the street by having us over" said the woman, "I'm Jenny."

Colin masked his shock by shaking their hands warmly and showed them into the living room. His wife didn't usually forget that she had invited people over. Shame they'd have to abandon their dinner plans, but he liked the look of that expensive fizz.

Hearing the introductions, his wife came downstairs to find two strangers in her living room. Thank goodness she had hoovered earlier and straightened the cushions. This wasn't the first time her husband had neglected to tell her about a social arrangement. She'd have a talk with him later.

“How lovely to see you,” she said, with exaggerated warmth, extending a hand. Was that confusion on their faces or a reaction to her being a little over-zealous? The couples exchanged niceties and then Carol went off to the kitchen to fetch some glasses.

Colin, left alone with the strangers, was aware of a slight tension in the air. He put on some relaxing jazz and couldn't help thinking about the mussels and chips that some other diner was probably enjoying instead of him.

“Shampoo anyone?” said Carol returning with a tray of champagne flutes. She wondered if the guests were expecting dinner. Pre-empting any awkwardness, she declared “We thought we'd keep it casual tonight and order a take-away. Chinese alright?”

Her husband groaned inwardly but set about taking orders from a strangely reluctant George and Jenny, and was alarmed to hear there was 45 minute wait for their food. What on earth were they going to talk about for all that time?

He was therefore relieved to hear a knock at the door after only fifteen minutes and sprang up to open it. There stood his good friend and neighbour, Colin from number 8.

“You're not going to believe it,” he said, “Alison invited the new neighbours over tonight and the fuckers haven't shown up!”

From the living room, Carol and her unwanted guests could hear every word.