

Suspicious

“Cheers darling! And a happy birthday!”

Megan lifted her wine glass and looked into Luke’s eyes.

“And many more of them, together.”

She kissed him, and they drank their wine. Nathan looked at the barbecue.

“Not too many more glasses of wine, Daddy! Look! You’re burning the steak!”

Luke turned to the barbecue, and moved the steaks to one side.

“Hey! You used to be really good at cooking barbecues. What’s happened?”

“Too much wine!”

“Quiet, Nathan! Luke, you don’t look too well. Are you sure you’re all right? Here, I have some beef curry for you over there – that should make you feel better.”

But Luke didn’t eat the beef curry, or any of the barbecue food. Megan was worried.

“Darling, really! What’s the matter?”

“It’s O.K. Megan. I’m just not very hungry.”

The telephone rang. Luke went to answer it. A familiar voice spoke to him.

“Happy birthday, partner!”

An echo from the past! Luke’s face became white with fear. He put the phone down and walked back into the garden. Megan saw the colour of his face.

“Luke, love. What is it? You look terrible! Who was on the telephone?”

“Nobody. It was a wrong number.”

“Well, come over here and cut your cake. OK everyone! Here he is!”

“Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Luke. Happy birthday to you!”

All the guests cheered and clapped. Luke cut his cake and handed everyone a piece. Soon, he was laughing and joking with them all.



Later in the evening, Megan told Nathan to go and have his bath.

“Oh, Mum! All right. I’ll go if Daddy will come up afterwards and say goodnight.”

“Of course I will!”

“And tell me a story?”

“Yes. Now you go and have your bath.”

Nathan came out of the bathroom – clean, tired and happy. Luke was sitting on his bed, waiting for him.

“Hey, Daddy! Aren’t you glad you had that birthday? I certainly am! Daddy, will you tell me that story – you know, the one about the fisherman and his wife? The way you used to tell it, with the funny voices?”

“What story is that, Nathan?”

“Oh, you know, Daddy – our story! I’ll be the fish, and you’ll be the fisherman.”

“I don’t think I know that one, Nathan.”



"Oh, don't tease me, Daddy! Of course you do! We've done it a thousand times!"

"Well, I suppose I just don't remember it, then."

Nathan looked worried. Was Daddy joking or not?

"Daddy, you can't have forgotten it! It's like forgetting your own name, or who you are, or Mummy, or me!"

"Well, it looks as if I have forgotten it. Shall we have a different story? Shall I read you something from a book?"

"Well ... yes. If you say so, Daddy."

Nathan listened to the story and then Luke said goodnight. Nathan heard him going downstairs. Then he lay in bed, worrying about his father.

Something was wrong. Why didn't he know how to do the barbecue? Mummy was worried too. She hadn't said anything, but Nathan knew. He was watching, and listening. And who was phoning him? Why was he upset after the calls? And what about the story? He must know it. He listened to his parents talking. His mother wanted to go somewhere.

"To Lucy's house. You know Lucy, my friend from aerobics. She's having a tea party on Thursday afternoon. A chance for us all to have a good chat. Do you think you could stay here and look after Nathan? I'll be back by nine o'clock."

"Yes, my dear, of course. I know how you women love to gossip."

"Oh, really, Luke! Anyway, Lucy's very nice, you know! You won't forget, will you?"

"No, my love. I'll be here."