Family Recipe

**By Suki Litchfield**

“Can you smell that? It’s the paprika. I throw it in everything. We’re a quarter Hungarian; it’s sort of an instinct.

Now, the spices are important, but the real secret to a good stew is quality ingredients. This corn came from my garden last summer. See how yellow that is? Let’s add both ears.

If you haven’t guessed, I love cooking. It’s my passion. I should probably be a chef, but I went to nursing school instead. I’m the practical one. Nursing pays the bills, yadda yadda. But, man, I love to cook.

Listen to me babbling on. Are you comfortable? Good.

Know who loved my cooking? My sister. You met my sister. That girl, she could scribble on a piece of paper and you’d think it was a Monet. But cooking? Not part of her skill set, as they say. Honestly, she was a grown woman, but if you opened up her cabinets, it was all Ramen noodles and Chef Boyardee.

All right, that’s probably enough carrots. We’ll dump those in. What else…Ah, potatoes. Chopping them is hell on the wrists, but they add so much to a stew. You know what? I think I’m going to throw in the eyes for extra flavor. It’s not an exact recipe.

The thing about nursing, though, is the hours. They are *long*. And the schedule is so unpredictable. My sister and I were going to go out that night, but the schedule shifted, and I lost my Friday off. Happens all the time. That’s why she was in that bar alone that night. Because of my work schedule.

The bar was right down the street from her building, by the way. That’s a point that was lost in the court case. If what happened to her was consensual, why go to some random field? Her apartment was right there.

Anyway, while the flavors are building, I’m going to brown the meat separately. That’s going to be sizzling in no time.

Oh, while I have my hands free, though, I want to show you this on my phone. It’s the footage from the bar. I know, I know, you’ve seen it a million times. Just humor me, please. Let me— This damn phone, I swear—okay. *Play*.

So, in the courtroom they focused on my sister when they showed this. ‘Look, she’s smiling. Look, she’s happy. She knows what she’s doing.’ But I always looked at the men.

Now, your brother, he’s the leader. You can tell. He’s the one holding her up; he’s the one talking to her. Look, he doesn’t see the bouncer there; he’s just heading for the door. But—Right there! Did you see it? We can play it over…There, see? That one second, that was you. That little nudge you give your brother, then the way you change the angle the three of you are walking in, the way you guide them around that pole so that you’re behind the bouncer now. So that he doesn’t see you. And he can’t stop the two of you from dragging this drunk-ass girl out of the bar.

You know, consensually.

I’m sorry. I didn’t want to cry. It’s just seeing her face again. We didn’t always agree; we weren’t always alike, but we were close. Like you and your brother, I suppose. Let me get a Kleenex. Anyway, I just wanted to show you why I invited you to dinner today.

You hear that sizzle? You can’t see it from there, but that meat is browning beautifully.

Do not make that face. You do not want to throw up right now, I promise. You ok? Good.

She threw up. She couldn’t help it. Part of the anaphylactic reaction.

Because, as your lawyer pointed out, after the two of you consensually had your way with her and then consensually left her lying in a field, it was a bee that killed her. You boys were at home snug in your beds by then. It wasn’t your fault she was allergic to bee stings.

She knew she was allergic. She had an EpiPen. It was in the purse she consensually left in your car. So as she was crawling towards the road, her face and tongue and lungs all swollen up, drenched in sweat and puke, trying to suck in air, she knew she was dying. But she kept crawling, trying to save herself.

All right, that meat’s done. Let’s add it to the stew. You know, the original recipe called for pork, but I think this is going to do nicely. The stew is almost there. You know what I’m going to add? This will surprise you. I think it needs another potato. After that complaining I did about how hard they are to cut. It’s fine; I can handle it. My sister was an itty bitty thing, but I’m stronger. She could never have dragged you into the Jeep.

Your brother was the heavy one. That surprised me. I estimated the paralytic correctly, but then, Jesus, I almost threw my back out getting him into the car. (He was easier to get out. By then he was dead weight, if you’ll excuse the pun.)

Are you crying? Don’t worry, he didn’t suffer. That’s one of my regrets, in fact. But I was so eager to be done with him so I could go find you.

But you…Have you lost weight since the trial? I went a little overboard on the succinylcholine. For a little bit I thought I was going to lose you, there. Thank God you’re awake and alert now. And I hope you’re hungry.

All right, we’ll just sit and wait for the flavors to come together. We can look through my photo albums. It shouldn’t take too long, and then it will be ready, and I’ll peel off that duct tape and feed you a nice big bowl of stew.

You know. Consensually.”