

FAMILY DINNER

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FAMILY DINNER DISASTER

LYNN'S POV

I SHOULD'VE KNOWN BETTER.
THE moment I said, "Alright, everyone, let's just relax and act like a normal family for once," I could see the disaster coming. It was the kind of thing you never say out loud, like daring the universe to prove you wrong.

I stood at the head of the table, watching the afternoon's work laid out in front of me: jambalaya, cornbread, collard greens, mac and cheese so rich it looked dangerous, and a pecan pie waiting on the counter, still warm. I've had to slap Gaston with the wooden spoon four times for trying to sneak a piece, with him, that's normal.

The table was set.

The sweet tea was poured.

Everyone was seated: Landry, sweet babe Laramie in his highchair, Rosalie, Elius, Adrian, Gaston, and Boudreaux, all looking relatively peaceful.

For exactly four and a half minutes, it worked.

Then Gaston reached for the tomato salad.

"You know," he said, spearing a cherry tomato with his fork, "technically, this is a fruit salad."

I felt the mood shift, sudden and sharp, the way the air changes before a storm.

"Excuse me?" Adrian's fork paused halfway to his mouth.

"Tomatoes. They're fruits. Botanically speaking." Gaston popped the tomato in his mouth, completely oblivious to the

bomb he'd just dropped.

Landry set down his glass with the kind of deliberate care that meant trouble. "In a Southern kitchen, Gaston, a tomato is a vegetable. That's just how it is."

"But science—"

"Science doesn't season the gumbo, now does it?" Boudreaux cut in, already getting heated.

I closed my eyes. We were thirty seconds into the tomato debate, and I could already feel my blood pressure spiking.

For fucks sake

"Okay," I said, forcing a smile so tight my face hurt. "Let's just agree that tomatoes are... flexible. Culinarily flexible. Can we move on?"

Adrian muttered, "Flexible? That's not even a real classification." Just as the tension from the tomato debate began to fade.

A few minutes later, Adrian reached for the cornbread. He buttered a piece with unnecessary gusto, then paused. "Hold up," he said, eyeing the crumb.

"Did you put sugar in this cornbread, Lynn?" I braced myself, knowing what was coming.

Boudreaux's fork paused midair. "God as my witness, there's not supposed to be sugar in cornbread. That's cake, not bread."

Rosalie raised an eyebrow. "Some people like it sweet. My mama always put a little in hers. And Elius likes it that way, right?" She nudged Elius, who just shrugged.

Landry snorted. "That's because Lynn grew up north of I-10. Down here, real cornbread is barely sweet at all."

Elius chimed in, "Cornbread's cornbread. Sweet, savory, as long as it's hot—if it makes Rosalie happy, it's fine by me."

Adrian shook his head, "No. There are rules. Sugar in cornbread is an abomination."

I tried to keep my voice calm. "It's my kitchen, Adrian. I'll put whatever I want in my cornbread. Besides, it's just a spoonful."

Boudreaux muttered, "Next thing you know, she'll be putting raisins in the potato salad."

Gaston piped up, "Raisins aren't even—"

I held up a hand. "Nobody mentions raisins. Or potato salad. We're not opening that can of worms tonight."

A brief, uneasy silence settled over the table as forks clinked and everyone pretended not to have very strong opinions about cornbread.

Landry took a long drink of his sweet tea, then set the glass down with a grimace.

My head snapped toward him so fast I nearly gave myself whiplash. "Excuse me?"

"Your tea, Lynn. It's... It's fine. It's just not sweet tea. It's more like... vaguely sugared tea. Tea that's considering the idea of sweetness but hasn't fully committed."

I felt my eye twitch. "My tea is perfectly balanced."

"Your tea is weak."

"My tea won't give everyone in the parish diabetes!"

"That's the point of sweet tea!" Boudreaux jumped in because apparently, everyone had a death wish tonight. "It's supposed to be sweet! That's why it's called sweet tea and not 'tea with a conservative amount of sugar that Lynn thinks is appropriate'!"

"I make it the way I like it—"

"And then you force the rest of us to drink it!" Landry was grinning now, the bastard. He knew exactly what he was doing.

"Nobody's forcing you to drink anything! You could make your own tea!"

"I do! And then you drink it and complain that it's too sweet!"

"Because it is! I watched you put a full 2 cups of sugar in a gallon pitcher, Landry. TWO FUCKING CUPS. That's not tea, that's candy!"

"That's tradition—"

I was about to launch into a full dissertation on reasonable sugar ratios, but before I could get the words out, I threw up my hands

and walked out to the back deck. The argument had officially reached a boiling point, and I needed a breather.

-- Nineteen minutes later,

I came back inside, calmer but still annoyed. Laramie banged a spoon on his highchair tray, flinging a glob of mashed sweet potato onto the floor. Landry sighed, got up, and scooped Laramie out of the highchair, muttering something about a bath. He carried Laramie toward the hallway, promising, "Just a quick clean-up, buddy. You'll be back for dessert."

I was pouring myself more sweet tea—I was going to need it—when Rosalie's voice cut through the temporary peace like a knife.

"You know what? Since we're airing grievances tonight—" She turned to Elius with a look that could peel paint. "You want to tell everyone here how many pieces of my good glass Tupperware are currently sitting in your truck? Or your office?"

Elius froze mid-chew. "I... what?"

"My Tupperware, Elius. The glass kind. The kind I bought specifically because it doesn't stain and seals properly. The kind I pack your lunch in every single morning, like some kind of 1950s housewife. How many are in your truck right now?"

"I don't—"

"Seven, Elius. Seven containers. I counted. You've been hoarding them like some kind of Tupperware dragon, and I've been over here packing your lunches in plastic bags because I've run out of actual containers."

"I forgot to bring them in—"

"For three weeks?!"

"Why are you yelling at me?" Elius deadpans.

"BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE ANY FUCKING BOWLES, ELIUS"

"Someone has a lot of big feelings tonight..." Gaston mutters, and Boudreaux wipes his hands down his face, already seeing the shitshow his little comment is about to cause.

A few minutes later, Landry returned with Laramie, both cleaner and a little less sticky. Landry snorted into his tea, and I

shot him a warning look. He was not helping. Laramie giggled from the kitchen as Landry wiped sweet potato from his cheek.

-- Twenty minutes later,

I was about to respond when Rosalie stood up and started collecting plates. "I'll just clear some of these—"

As Rosalie started stacking plates, I had the dishwasher open to place the rinsed dishes that Rosalie handed me.

"Wait, wait, wait." Adrian was suddenly on his feet, staring into the kitchen like he'd spotted a crime in progress.

"Lynn. Lynn. Are those forks in the dishwasher facing up?"

Oh no.

"Does it matter?" I tried to sound casual, but I could feel the tension ratcheting up another notch.

"Does it matter?" Adrian looked at me like I'd just suggested we set the house on fire. "They could stab someone! They need to face down for safety!"

"But they get cleaner facing up," Gaston argued, leaning back in his chair. "The water hits them better."

"They get clean either way, Gaston, but only one way doesn't turn your dishwasher into a medieval torture device!"

"I've been loading forks up for twenty years, and I've never stabbed myself once—"

"That's because you've been lucky—"

"Okay!" I clapped my hands together, probably too loudly. "New rule. Everyone loads the dishwasher however they want in their own house, and in my house, I will continue to load it however I feel like on any given day. Sound good?"

Silence.

Adrian sat back down, muttering something about "safety standards" and "common sense."

-- Fourteen minutes later,

Rosalie's voice, quiet and horrified, cut through the chaos.

"Is that... is that soap?"

Everyone froze.

Gaston was standing at the sink, holding the cast-iron skillet, more importantly, the cast-iron skillet that Maribelle gave me

after Landry and I got married. the one that had been seasoned for forty years, the one that was practically a family heirloom, and staring at it as if he'd just discovered a murder weapon.

"There's soap on this," he said, his voice barely above a whisper.

The room Remained silent. The kind of silence that happens right before someone gets smited by God.

"Who," Adrian said slowly, standing up from the table, "put soap on the cast iron?"

Nobody moved. Nobody breathed.

"It was an accident—" Gaston started.

"An accident?" Rosalie looked like she might actually have a stroke. "You don't accidentally put soap on cast iron! That's like accidentally setting the Bible on fire!"

"I was just trying to clean it—"

"You don't clean cast iron with soap! You wipe it! You season it! You treat it with the respect it deserves!"

"It had bits stuck to it—"

"THAT'S FLAVOR!" I pressed my fingers to my temples. My peaceful family dinner had officially devolved into a cast-iron intervention.

"Alright," I replied, attempting to hold onto my remaining sanity. It's okay. We can re-season it. It's not the end of the world—"

"Not the end of the world?" Landry looked at me like I'd lost my mind. "Lynn, that skillet is older than me, and I'm the oldest person in this house!"

"And it'll survive a little soap—"

"You don't know that!"

Thirty-two minutes later

We lingered at the table, the cast iron debate finally losing steam. Rosalie bounced Laramie on her knee, her touch gentle, his eyes bright as he gnawed on a teething ring. For a moment, the room

felt almost calm. Then I caught sight of Boudreaux, red-faced and sweating, tugging at his collar like he couldn't breathe.

"Boudreaux? You okay?"

"It's hot," he muttered. "Why is it so hot in here?"

"It's not hot—"

"It's like a sauna! What do you have the AC set to, Lynn? Eighty?"

"It's seventy-four—"

"Seventy-four?!" He looked at me like I'd suggested we all move into an oven. "That's not air conditioning, that's just... slightly cooler outside air!"

"Seventy-four is perfectly reasonable—"

"Seventy-one," Adrian cut in. "That's the correct temperature. Anything higher and you might as well be living in the swamp."

"Seventy-one is freezing," Rosalie argued. "I'd need a parka."

"You're being dramatic—"

"I'm being cold—"

"Oh, for the love of—" I stood up, marching toward the thermostat. "Fine. I'll change it. What do you want? Sixty? Fifty? Should I just open the freezer, and we can all climb in?"

"Sixty-four," Boudreaux said.

"Sixty-seven," Adrian countered.

"Sixty-nine," Elius offered. He was side-eyeing Rosalie, making her blush. She smacked his arm lightly, but she was smiling.

I stared at the thermostat, my finger hovering over the buttons, and seriously considered just walking out of my own house.

"You know what? It's staying at seventy-four. My house, my rules. If you're hot, go stand outside. If you're cold, there are blankets in the closet. We're done negotiating."

I sat back down and took a long drink of my tea, perfectly sweet, exactly how I liked it. And finally, there was peace. I let myself hope, briefly, that the storm had finally passed.

As the night wore on, plates emptied and people drifted out, until only Rosalie and Elius remained.

Then Rosalie stood up. "Well, I guess we'd better get going."

Oh no. Oh no.

"Yeah," Elius agreed, pushing back his chair. "It's getting late."

They did not move toward the door.

Nobody ever actually moves toward the door.

"Thanks for dinner, Lynn," Rosalie said, still standing exactly where she was. Elius rested his hand on her hip as she spoke. "The jambalaya was perfect. What'd you put in it this time? I swear it tasted different." Before I could answer, Landry piped up, "How's your morning sickness been, Rosalie? You kept it together all night, I'm impressed." Rosalie smiled sheepishly, admitting, "It comes and goes, but tonight, I guess the drama distracted me." Affectionately, Elius squeezed her shoulder, while Laramie babbled from his arms, gnawing on a plastic giraffe.

And just like that, we were caught in the goodbye loop.

"Oh, I added a little extra cayenne," I said, because apparently I'd forgotten how Southern goodbyes worked. "And I used andouille instead of regular sausage."

"Andouille! That's what it was. I knew it tasted different. Where'd you get it?"

"The Market shop, actually. They had it on sale—"

"On sale? I need to get down there. Elius, remind me to stop by the market this week—"

Twenty minutes later, we were still standing in the same spot. The conversation had somehow moved from sausage to someone's wedding that Belle mentioned, to the price of gas to whether or not the new stoplight on Main Street was actually helping traffic or making it worse.

Landry, his arms cradling a now-sleepy Laramie, stood with Elius leaning against the wall, the pair of them looking remarkably like hostages. "We've been trying to leave for half an hour," Elius muttered to Landry.

"I know."

"We're still in the dining room."

"I know."

Another fifteen minutes passed.

We'd moved about six feet closer to the door.

They weren't the only ones, either.

This was apparently a group departure, even though this is our house.

Rosalie was now telling a story about Pearl, and how she swears the dog can roll her eyes to get her way, then somehow spiraled into a discussion about the vet in town, which led to a debate about why he wasn't married yet, which somehow circled back to Tupperware because apparently everything came back to Tupperware tonight.

"Okay," Elius finally said, his voice tight. "We're leaving. Right now. We're walking to the door, we're saying goodbye, and we're getting in the car."

"Oh, don't be dramatic—" Rosalie started.

"Rosalie. I love you. But if I don't leave this house in the next sixty seconds, I'm going to lose my mind."

Landry nodded. "Same."

"You're both being ridiculous—"

"We've been saying goodbye for forty-five minutes!" Elius' voice had gone up about three octaves.

Here we go.

"Forty-five minutes! We could've driven home, watched a movie, and come back in the time we've spent standing in this hallway!"

I bit my lip to keep from laughing. He wasn't wrong.

"Fine," Rosalie said, finally, finally, moving toward the door. "We're going."

It took another ten minutes.

By the time they actually made it out of here, I was exhausted. I closed the door, leaned against it, and looked at the disaster of a dining room behind me. Landry appeared beside me, and Laramie, who had somehow managed to nap through the last round of goodbyes, was dozing against his shoulder at last.

"So," he said. "Normal family dinner?"

I started laughing. I couldn't help it.

"Next time," I said, "we're ordering pizza."

"Next time," he countered, "we're not inviting anyone."

Honestly, it was the best idea he'd had all night.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

S.G. writes psychological thrillers and dark romance where Southern grit meets Gothic mystery.

With a firm belief that healing often begins in the darkest places, she crafts high-stakes stories that explore trauma, resilience, and the quiet strength it takes to reclaim your life.

For S.G., writing is more than storytelling, it's transformation, creating a space where even the most fractured souls can find a place that feels like home.

In her stories, you will always find:

Found Family: Because loyalty is the ultimate anchor.

Wicked Banter: Because sometimes survival comes with a smirk.

Unflinching Truth: A refusal to look away from the hard things, and a belief that the light is always worth fighting for.

When she isn't crafting her next high-stakes universe, S.G. is busy reminding herself (and her readers) that being "*too much*" was never the problem.

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