

Excerpt from *Reservations for Two*, by Jennifer Lohmann

“You have goose bumps on your arms.”

“Pardon?” Dan looked down. Little bumps covered his arms, but he didn’t feel cold. Warmth came off Tilly, a light from the way she embraced life.

“We should get out of the fridge. I’m sure you want to go home, shower, go to bed and get some sleep.”

Shower? Yes. Bed? Yes. Sleep? No, he didn’t want to sleep. He wanted to take Tilly home with him, to bring color into his stark, white house. Instead, Tilly walked past him out of the fridge. The moment was broken.

She was packing takeout food containers into a paper bag when he found her again.

“Here.” She thrust the bag at him.

“What is this?”

“Leftovers for your lunch tomorrow. There’s even dessert.”

He took the bulging brown bag. “Thank you. You didn’t have to.”

“You didn’t have to fix my sink, and you did.”

“It was my pleasure.”

The brown paper crinkled as he tightened his grip. He’d never noticed what a chiding noise paper made when clutched in nervous desperation.

They faced each other awkwardly. Tilly shifted her weight from one foot to another while Dan wished he had kissed her in his townhouse. Or in the walk-in fridge, before his conscience reminded him that she didn’t know he had written the review.

If he wanted to kiss her, if he wanted to see her again, he had to tell her who he was. She would be hurt, understandably, but he could make her see that they could get past all of this. He could make her see that the review was business, but their relationship could be pleasure. She was interested. He’d seen the heat in her eyes and he hadn’t been mistaken about what it meant.

Pans clanked together and someone in the kitchen cursed. *There was no audience in the fridge. You should’ve kissed her there.*

Tilly was staring at his lips and Dan cursed his alter ego.

“I should walk you to the front door,” she said. “I’ll need to lock up behind you.”

He followed her out of the kitchen, past Candace wiping down the bar with smooth, even strokes. In the dimness of the closing restaurant, the bartender’s dark eyes disappeared into damning, empty holes. Which was ridiculous. When he blinked, she turned back into the polished bartender of earlier that night.

At Babka’s front door the bag crinkled again, scolding him. He had to tell Tilly the truth. Even if their

relationship went no further than this front door, he couldn't let her look at him so openly, pack him lunch for God's sake, without knowing what he'd done.

"Tilly—" he put his tool kit on the floor and rested his hand on her shoulder "—I have something I have to confess to you."

"Yes?" She cocked her head in response, her eyes wide and her expression unguarded. He needed to enjoy that unsuspecting look on her now, as he might never see it again.

"I'm Dan Meier, the food writer, as you may have guessed.... No, don't interrupt," he said when she opened her mouth. "I also write reviews for *CarpeChicago* under the name 'The Eater.'"

She slapped him.