

## YourEssence

### Chapter 9 - Food Time For Lovers



"All right! I'm back. One order of Moo Shu Pork and one Mapo Eggplant for me. Come and get it, David."

The couple served themselves the usual servings of their respective favorites. As David took his first bite, he noticed something off instantly. He usually loved that first bite of savory goodness mixed with a touch of sweetness, but this tasted cloyingly sweet today. He almost spit the food out on the spot, but he choked the bite of food down, swallowing and hating it the whole time.

"Does your food taste off? I think they dropped a full bag of sugar in my sauce," David asked with a grimace.

"Oh? That's not like them to make a mistake. Let me try mine...," Diana said as she

took her first bite. David could see on her face that it wasn't her liking, but she dutifully swallowed her bite. "See? The food doesn't taste the same. Did they get a new chef?" David jumped straight to some justification to explain the poor quality of food.

"Wait, before we decide that they messed up the food, let me try yours," Diana said. She seemed to have some intuition about the food that David didn't.

"Here, but don't blame me when you see how bad it is," David said confidently. He was so sure his food had been prepared poorly. His memory felt infallible, so Diana's willingness to take a bite of his meal seemed ludicrous.

"I don't think you'll like what I say..."

"What?" David was incredulous. He commented on Diana's appearance, "You don't look miserable... Why don't you look miserable?"

"That's just it. It tastes fine to me. It tastes delicious. I know you're not going like this, but you should try mine."

"Why? Your eggplant always tasted so bland to me. You didn't even like it today, proving I was right about it."

"Just try it for me. Just a little, ok?"

David reluctantly agreed, but Diana could tell he wasn't looking forward to it. David's face shifted from discomfort to pleasant surprise as the small forkful of food was chewed.

"Get it now?" Diana asked David.

"Yeah, they must have a new chef. He messed up my order but finally made this eggplant have some flavor. I could eat a whole plate of this," David said while Diana shook her head.

"No, that's not it... I like the pork. You like the eggplant. Our tastes are inverted. So are our bodies. We inherited each other's tastes."

"Dammit, so now I have to eat what you like? It's bad enough having to be you at work. I don't even act like myself at home and eat what I like," David said as he hung his head.

"Don't be so sour, David. It's not so bad to like different foods. You said it yourself: you could eat a whole plate of the eggplant. Try to relax and enjoy the meal. Now

we know you will want to order what I like when we eat out. There are plenty of things we both like."

David shook his head in dismay but was scooping more eggplant onto his plate, having resigned himself to eat the meal. "I'm sorry, babe, it will be all right. It's just a short time that we have to do this." The couple ate their meal together and covered the areas that David could work on to improve his impersonation of Diana to deal with her students more effectively the next day.

As the couple lay in bed, Diana reminded David they had their second couples therapy meeting tomorrow afternoon. "Oh God, you're going to make us go to that as we are? In each other's bodies? Aren't you?" David asked, but he already knew the answer. Diana would think it's good to get the couple to explore their relationship from this perspective.

"Yes, and no alluding to who you are. I was hoping you could try and answer questions like how I would answer them. It will show if we are understanding each other better."

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Dr. Simms sat opposite the couch as the couple came in. Mary looked at their body language as they walked in and sat on the sofa. Similarly to last time, they both sat on opposite sides of the couch, but there was a marked change in the demeanor of each of them. Whereas Diana had been open and anxious last time, sitting with her body angled towards Mary and David, this time, Diana was turned away, arms crossed and looking like she was on the verge of tears. Today, David looked more open and willing to engage, but he was sympathetic to Diana's feelings. Mary noted that this reversal in disposition was quite unusual for such a short time frame.

"Diana, I can't help but notice you seem upset. I don't want to make you uncomfortable, but would you like to share what's happening? This is a safe space to share, and I'm sure David would like to help if he can. As will I."

David lowered his head. He wanted to unload. Unburden himself with someone, anyone, but he was nervous to do so in public. He might slip up and get him and Diana in trouble. Doctors don't treat YourEssence abusers kindly. Even psychiatrists are required to disclose misuse to authorities. The dangers of the abuse of drugs were that extreme. So many billions of dollars had been stolen from unscrupulous people pretending to be others that the world uniformly acted quickly to enact laws punishing people who abused YourEssence. So, David took a deep breath and unleashed his best impression of what he thought Diana would say, given the public experiences he had been through over the last few days.

"I have had the worst week at work, Mary. It's hard to talk about because it's not anyone's fault but my own. I should be able to handle this better and... well, I might lose my job if I don't get it under control."

"Diana, I'm happy to help you talk through this, but do you think you'd like to try letting David help you? He seems ready to help, and you'll have me here to mediate."

David knew that Diana would have agreed. He was nervous about doing so in front of Mary, however. David had failed to implement Diana's advice on handling his troublemaking students and got dragged back into Robert's office for the second day. David felt like Robert was targeting him for some reason, and David was paranoid that Robert could tell he wasn't the original Diana. He'd have to leave that last part out, in any case.

"Sure, Mary. 'David,' I'd like your help on this..." David recounted his experience from the day to Diana. Diana looked on, nodding and listening. At this point, David had gone on for almost ten minutes without interruption. Diana just kept letting David unload his problems and feelings. When David finished his story, Diana opened her arms to hug David. David was shocked. The simple gesture felt so affirming. So welcome. So necessary. He scooted over on the couch and let Diana embrace him. The warmth of the gesture and the feeling of the embrace sent David over the edge. His tears started flowing, and he pressed his face into Diana's shoulder. Diana kept holding David and eventually added gentle pats and back rubs. A few minutes later, David pulled himself back from Diana's shoulder and wiped some tears from his face.

"Thank you, 'David.' I... I needed that. I didn't realize how much it was bothering me."

"That's ok, 'Diana.' I want to help, and I want you to know that I'm here for you. I'll always be here for you," Diana said as David observed Mary furiously scribbling on her notepad.

A lull in the conversation opened the window for Mary to offer her insights. "David, I can tell you listened to the Diana last time. You did so much better in not dismissing her concerns. Diana, I know you had many concerns about intimacy last time. How have things been on that side?"