

Psychic Chicken Soup

Amy Beth Arkawy

Scene: A home in suburban New York

2 Men and 1 Woman

Vivian (50s), a zaftig yet vengeful wife, Howard (50s), her disloyal yet obedient husband, and Sam (20s), their confused son.

Sam has rushed to his parents home having heard that his father has suffered a heart attack only to find his dad to be alive and well. In fact, his philandering father is sitting in the kitchen eating copious quantities of fatty foods provided by Vivian. Here, Sam demands to know exactly what's going on.

VIVIAN: Eat, Howard, eat! Pick up the pace.

SAM: Dad, oh my God. Are you okay?

HOWARD: (*Mouthful*) Yeah, son, fine. Want a fry?

SAM: What are you doing?

HOWARD: Eating a large, never-ending lunch. Join me?

SAM: You can't eat like that now.

VIVIAN: Sammy, sweetheart you're home. Sit down, I'll fix you a plate.

SAM: Fix me a plate? You already have more food than the Pearlman wedding and Jerzy Markowitz's Bar Mitzvah combined.

VIVIAN: Oh that Bar Mitzvah was such a to-do, wasn't it? Sally really pulled out all the stops with four life-sized chopped liver sculptures of little Jerry.

HOWARD: Good thing you weren't in charge of his diet. Or those sculptures alone would have sent Herb to the poorhouse.

VIVIAN: A little less sarcasm, a little more eating, Howard, and we'd all be better off. Two months after the Bar Mitzvah, Sally filed. But who could blame her what with Herb shacking

up with his secretary's stepson. Midlife crises keep getting more complicated. Don't they, Howard?

HOWARD: (*Sniffing a container of food.*) This smell funny to you? (*Hands container to Sam.*)

VIVIAN: Eat, already, Howard. There's no time for this finicky nonsense. At this rate you won't get to my chocolate-strawberry cheesecake and Apple Brown Betty before dinner.

SAM: What are you doing? Trying to kill yourself?

HOWARD: Not exactly.

VIVIAN: Eat, Howard, eat.

SAM: Why are you feeding him all this fatty foods? Are you trying to kill him?

VIVIAN: It's not me, sweetie. It's karma. I'm just helping it along.

SAM: What are you talking about? Michelle called. She said Dad had a heart attack. I came home early.

VIVIAN: Oh, how was Club Med, Sweetheart?

SAM: Club Med? I wasn't at Club Med. I was working in a dental clinic in Mexico City.

VIVIAN: Did you hear that, Howard? (*Bringing a plate of brisket over to table.*) Try the brisket. Our son spent his vacation putting braces on poor little Mexican children so they should look nice in their school photos, while you were having your episode. I hope you didn't drink the water. The least they could do was keep you in Evian or Poland Spring. I mean, you were donating your services, you don't deserve The Revenge.

SAM: Episode? What episode? I thought it was a heart attack.

HOWARD: It was nothing. (*Eats brisket.*) It's a little fatty.

VIVIAN: Just a little? I told Epstein, "The fattest cut you've got." But after twenty-seven years of lean, lean, lean, old habits are hard to break. Some things I can forgive.

SAM: It wasn't a heart attack?

HOWARD: It was nothing.

VIVIAN: More eating, less talking. Try Mr. Wong's special deep-fried duck dumplings. (*Walks to table, force-feeds dumpling to Howard.*) I had him double deep-fry them and triple the order. And don't forget the Lobster Newberg. You should be

proud of your old mom, Sammy. While you were away, I went back to school myself.

SAM: But how, with Dad in the hospital.

HOWARD: There was no hospital. It was nothing.

VIVIAN: Your mother is an official student at Madame Nonsenska's College of Cosmic Arts.

HOWARD: Just how much is that mail-order diploma mill gonna cost me?

VIVIAN: *(Glaring at Howard.)* Eat, Howard, eat. The lasagna's almost ready. Did you know your father is Taurus with libido rising?

SAM: What?

VIVIAN: I'm a quick study.

SAM: *(Exasperated.)* What about the heart attack?

VIVIAN/HOWARD: There was no heart attack!

SAM: But Michelle called. She said Dad collapsed, right in the middle of Bloomingdales.

HOWARD: *(Mouthful.)* It was nothing, already. Oh this is delicious. If you've got to kill me, Vivian, this is the way to go.

VIVIAN: Don't enjoy yourself too much, Howard. There are other ways. I could fill up an IV with schmaltz and send for Dr. Kevorkian.

SAM: What's the matter with you people? If dad had a heart attack why do you want him to eat like this?

HOWARD: It wasn't a heart attack.

VIVIAN: It was a warning.

SAM: Thank God. But a warning, at his age, that's bad enough.

VIVIAN: It wasn't a cardiac warning. It was a cosmic warning.

HOWARD: And now the condemned man must pay and pay. *(Tasting new dish.)* This Newberg could use a little something. Maybe some rice. Pilaf, no saffron.

VIVIAN: Eat, already. Remember, you're not a gourmet, Howard. You're a gourmand.

SAM: Are you nuts? *(Pause longingly looks at food.)* That lasagna does look good. *(Starts to taste.)*

VIVIAN: Not for you, sweetie. You I want around a while. (*Hands him a plate of veggies and tofu.*)

SAM: I don't get it. Dad practically has a heart attack and you're feeding him all this rich food and me I get tofu?

HOWARD: It was nothing. The store was stuffy, I just did two root canals and Abe Shapiro's bridge. The man hasn't flossed since 1963, it's a wonder he's got two teeth left in his head to connect. So I didn't eat all day. I was tired and I passed out. End of story. It was nothing.

VIVIAN: It was nothing except he collapsed right in the ladies' lingerie department at Bloomingdales.

SAM: So?

VIVIAN: So? So, he was buying a little red satin something for Phyllis Rabinowitz. I mean if you have to have a last orgasmic hurrah, couldn't you find someone more respectable to have it with than Phyllis Rabinowitz?

SAM: You're having an affair with Mrs. Rabinowitz?

HOWARD: It was nothing. Let's not call it an affair, exactly.

VIVIAN: Eat, Howard, eat. Phyllis Rabinowitz—everyone knows she's into some kinky business. She carries handcuffs around in her purse.

HOWARD: They're for protection. She takes night classes at Columbia. Social work, not some cosmic nonsense.

VIVIAN: You're neglecting the dumplings, Howard. And that whip in the glove compartment is for what? In case some professor gets out of line, I suppose. And what's with the rolling pin?

HOWARD: It's nothing. She just likes to have someone roll out the cellulite on her thighs and buttocks every once in a while.

VIVIAN: Must I get a mental picture of you rolling out Phyllis Rabinowitz's flab?

HOWARD: Cellulite. Not flab. And I never rolled anything out, so you can stop with your silent movies. She just told me about it after a meeting once.

VIVIAN: A fine thing to be talking about at school board meetings.

HOWARD: After. You're right, these dumplings aren't bad.

VIVIAN: Before, during, after. What's the difference. Here don't forget the double fudge peanut butter brownies. (*Hands plate to Howard*). Everyone knows Phyllis Rabinowitz is the only dominatrix in the history of the Scarsdale school board.

HOWARD: Don't be so sure. (*Bites brownie.*) Hmm . . . these are some brownies, Vivian.

SAM: Mrs. Rabinowitz is a dominatrix? She used to be my cub scout leader.

HOWARD: She's just creative. I wouldn't call her a dominatrix, exactly.

VIVIAN: You had to flaunt your tawdry affair in Bloomingdales of all places. What? Macy's or Penny's isn't good enough for Phyllis Rabinowitz? God forbid you could have been discreet and ordered something through the Frederick's of Hollywood catalog. Now, I'll never walk through those hallowed doors again, never carry out a Big Brown Bag. This, Howard, this is what you've done to me. (*Pulls out Bloomingdales charge card, cuts it up, letting pieces fall into Howard's food.*) It's bad enough you had to rip out my heart, but did you have to stomp all over it, too?

HOWARD: I'm sorry, darling. How can I make it up to you?

VIVIAN: Keep eating yourself into an early grave.

HOWARD: This is some cheesecake. Let me tell you, Sammy, no one paves the road to Hell like your mother.

SAM: You're both crazy!

VIVIAN: (*Inspecting Sam's clothes, maybe tugs on his shirt.*) Sammy, sweetie, you look a little shabby. We'll have to go shopping before you go back to dental school.

SAM: But you can't.

VIVIAN: I can't take my Sammy shopping for some new clothes so he shouldn't look as poor as all those people without dental insurance who let dental students perform tricky periodontal procedures on them? Since when?

SAM/HOWARD: Since you cut up your card!

VIVIAN: I may never step foot in Bloomies again, but there's still

Nordstrom's and Lord and Taylor and Neiman's and Saks and—

HOWARD: So things aren't really all that bleak, after all.

VIVIAN: Eat, Howard. Eat!

HOWARD: (*Mouthful.*) Oh my God, Vivian. This Apple Brown Betty is to die for.