

Father Figure

by Steven Michelson

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Characters:

JEFF - a well-groomed guy, 31 years old. He is intelligent, studied hard in college, and did well so that he could get a good job as an accountant. He and Simon are childhood friends and roommates.

MICHELLE - a stylishly dressed but overly accessorized woman, 29 years old. She is a college graduate, and currently works at Macy's, with a writing career based more in her head than in practice. She believes success is measured by personal appearance. She and Cindy are roommates.

WAITER - a man about 40 years old. He takes waiting very seriously, and likes to get to know his customers. He's an observant man, and although he won't admit it, he likes to play armchair psychologist to his customers.

Father Figure

Tuesday, 6:30 P.M.

(Jeff appears at the entranceway to Flannigans, a nice but not overly fancy restaurant. He's a little nervous. He enters the restaurant and notices a bowl filled with after-dinner mints wrapped in clear plastic on a nearby counter. He takes a mint, unwraps it, and puts it in his mouth. He starts looking around, takes a menu and browses through it. He places the menu back.)

JEFF

That's not the wine list.

(He notices the wine list on the wall above the bowl of mints, and leans over to read it. He scans it briefly, then proclaims:)

Eighty dollars!

(As he says this, the mint drops out of his mouth and into the bowl. Hoping nobody will notice, he starts fumbling through the bowl to reclaim the mint. At this point, Michelle enters and bangs up against him. This sends the bowl of mints flying and Jeff tumbling. The mints spill everywhere. He begins to clean up the mess. Michelle watches him for a moment, and he eventually notices her.)

JEFF

Michelle?

MICHELLE

Yes, Jeff?

JEFF

Yeah. I kind of made a mess of things here.

MICHELLE

No, I did. Here, let me help you.

(Together, they clean up the mess, laughing about it all the while.)

JEFF

Be careful. There's a sticky one.

(As they are finishing up, the waiter enters and looks at them strangely.)

WAITER

Can I help you?

JEFF

Yeah. Um... table for two please.

WAITER

Right this way.

(The waiter brings them to their table, and takes notice of Michelle.)

Ma'am, I hope you don't mind me saying, but that is a lovely outfit.

MICHELLE

Why, thank you. No, I don't mind. I don't mind at all.

WAITER

(Hands them menus.)

Can I get you something to drink?

JEFF

Just water for me right now.

MICHELLE

Me too.

WAITER

Very well.

(The waiter exits.)

JEFF

This place is great. I suggested it because they have an incredible five course dinner special. It takes them *three hours* to serve it. It starts with an appetizer, and finishes with a choice of desserts. The appetizers alone are out of this world. I hope you're hungry. I'm starved.

MICHELLE

Well, I'm hungry, but I'm not sure if I could eat an entire five course dinner.

JEFF

Ah, come on. It'll give us time to get acquainted. Time to get to know each other. So, what do you do for a living?

MICHELLE

I write children's books. Well, that's what I hope to do. I haven't actually published any yet, but a couple of publishers are interested in my work.

JEFF

Do you have a job to hold you over until you're published?

MICHELLE

Oh, sure. I manage the woman's accessories department at Macy's.

JEFF

I can see you certainly have fashion sense. A lot better than my own. That's a very interesting hat.

MICHELLE

Thanks. I debated whether or not to wear this one, and I decided it complemented my outfit so well, it was just begging to be worn.

JEFF

Yes, whenever I hear a hat say, 'that's a splendid outfit; please wear me with it,' I just can't say no. I'm a real softy when it comes to articulate clothing.

MICHELLE

You're funny. I like that.

JEFF

Thanks. You're real nice.

(The waiter returns with their water and some bread. Jeff and Michelle eye each other over adoringly.)

WAITER

Have you decided what you'll be ordering?

JEFF

Not yet. Why don't you come back in a few minutes. We need time to look over the menu.

WAITER

Very well.

(Waiter exits Jeff and Michelle start eating the bread, more out of habit than hunger.)

JEFF

So, have you done this sort of thing before?

MICHELLE

You mean, try the personals? Yeah, I answered a couple of ads before. How about you?

JEFF

First time. I was a bit reluctant. I didn't know what to expect. Didn't want to meet an ax-murderer or something like that. You're not, are you?

MICHELLE

No, I'm a writer, silly.

JEFF

Ah yes. Children's books. You must really like kids, to be writing books for them.

MICHELLE

Yes I do, and I love writing. So, it seemed like a perfect match.

JEFF

Sounds like it. You know, I like kids too.

MICHELLE

Yes, you said so in your ad. That was a nice thing to say. A lot of guys don't like kids, but you - you're different. You're really nice. So, why did you place the ad?

JEFF

That's a good question. I guess I'm just looking for ways to meet new and interesting women. I must be desperate, huh?

MICHELLE

No, not at all. I know how difficult it is to meet people. Hey, I responded, didn't I?

JEFF

That's true. Why did you respond?

(Jeff takes a sip of water.)

MICHELLE

(seriously and nonchalantly, in between bites of bread.)

I want you to father my children.

*(Jeff chokes on his water, as if he breathed in a large gulp.
The waiter approaches.)*

WAITER

Are you two ready to order?

MICHELLE

Well, I haven't had much of a chance to look over the menu. Have you, Jeff?

JEFF

*(Still choking on the water, he shakes his head no, and tries
to compose himself)*

MICHELLE

We're thinking about getting the five course dinner special, with the appetizer. I hear it takes *three hours* to serve it.

*(Jeff's eyes open wide, realizing that he'd rather be anywhere
but there at this very moment.)*

WAITER

The dinner special it is, and an excellent choice indeed. For your appetizer, you have a choice of calamari or stuffed baby shrimp. Which would you like?

MICHELLE

I don't know. Both sound so good. Which would you like Jeff?

JEFF

(Finally composing himself)

Why don't you come back in a few minutes. We'll know by then.

WAITER

(slightly disappointed.)

Very well.

(Waiter exits)

MICHELLE

I think the calamari sounded good. What do you think?

JEFF

Actually, I don't like calamari. Squid makes me squeamish.

MICHELLE

Well, then the stuffed shrimp sounds good, too.

JEFF

You know, with all that bread I've been eating, I'm not that hungry any more. I think I'll just get something small, like the salad bar. That sounds good. I hear they have a good salad bar.

MICHELLE

The way you've played it up, I've really started looking forward to the five course meal. I think I've worked up quite an appetite. I've never had a meal last *three hours*.

JEFF

You know, that's an awful lot of food. I didn't realize how much food it would be, but now that I think about it, five courses is *a lot* of food. Are you sure you can eat that much? I mean, with that figure, I find it hard to believe you eat much at all.

MICHELLE

Oh, you flatter me.

JEFF

It's true. I just can't imagine you ever eating more than salad.

MICHELLE

Well, I don't always eat salad, but I do eat healthy. You know, maybe you're right. Maybe a five course meal is a bit much.

JEFF

I think so. By the way - and this might sound silly - but it sounded like you said you wanted me to father your children.

MICHELLE

That's right. Your ad said you liked children, so I figured you'd be the perfect match. So many guys don't like children, and you're different. You know, I realized my biological clock was ticking away, and I haven't started having children. So, I figured I'd better get started. *And soon*.

JEFF

Of course.

MICHELLE

And, well, you seem like a nice guy. And I think we have a lot in common. So, what do you think?

JEFF

Well, as much as I -

MICHELLE

I want to have five.

JEFF

Five?

MICHELLE

Children. Five children. Three girls and two boys. Alternating.

(As she says the next line, she arranges the salt and pepper shakers, and three other condiments in a straight line on the table to represent her five "babies." For the remainder of the scene, she treats these items as if they were her real babies.)

First, a girl, then a boy, then a girl, then a boy, then a girl.

(As she says the next line, she ensures that the spacing between the five "babies" on the table is equal.)

And spaced exactly two years apart, because I figure that's the ideal spacing, what with sibling rivalry and all. You know?

JEFF

Yeah. That makes sense. But you know -

MICHELLE

I want each one to have the same birthday. That way they'll all get presents on the same day, and they won't fight over them. They can do that, these days, you know. I read an article in a magazine about some doctors in Spain who delivered three brothers, spaced years apart, all on the same birthday. Isn't that wonderful?

JEFF

Wonderful. Hey, isn't that the wait-

MICHELLE

And I have the names picked out. First Rachel, then Oliver, then Marie, then Eric, then Olivia.

(Jeff picks up "Olivia" from the table and stares at it incredulously. She takes "Olivia" from Jeff and replaces it on the table.)

What's the matter? You don't like the name Olivia? I wasn't so sure about that one either, but it had to start with an *O*, and it was the best one that I could think of. It was either Olivia or Ophelia, and I definitely like Olivia better. Did you notice? The first letters of all the names spell out Romeo, like in Romeo and Juliet. I love Shakespeare. Do you like Shakespeare? My favorite is Romeo and Juliet. Did you like that one?

JEFF

Sure, but where is that waiter? You know, they smother you with attention when you don't want them to, and they're never around when you need them. I wish he'd bring the check already.

MICHELLE

You silly thing. We haven't ordered yet.

JEFF

But I'm so full. I could have sworn-

MICHELLE

(She wraps her arms protectively around her "babies.")

You shouldn't swear. At least not around our children. You won't swear around our children, will you?

JEFF

No, of course not. Um... Well... Let's look over the menu.

MICHELLE

Good idea.

(The both start looking at their menus. Michelle looks over her menu briefly.)

I want to breast feed. How do you feel about breast feeding? I think it's healthier, don't you?

JEFF

Much.

MICHELLE

And natural childbirth - how do you feel about that?

JEFF

Well, I've never actually -

MICHELLE

Because I want you to be there with me when I have our five children. You'd be there with me; you'd hold my hand throughout the delivery, wouldn't you?

JEFF

Um... You know, it's funny you bring that up because -

MICHELLE

And you'd cut the umbilical cord. You'd do that for our children wouldn't you? You'd be there to welcome them into the world.

JEFF

Well... I'm not so sure the world is such a good place to raise children anymore, with all its problems and all, you know?

MICHELLE

How do you feel about disciplining children?

JEFF

Well, discipline is important, I suppose.

MICHELLE

But so is love, don't you think?

JEFF

Love is good too. Can't have too much love. Where is that waiter?

(Starts looking around for the waiter, who's nowhere to be seen.)

MICHELLE

Have you ever changed a baby's diaper?

JEFF

Not exactly, but maybe the waiter has. Where is he?

MICHELLE

Well, that's okay. It's easy enough. I'll teach you how. Because a lot of guys wouldn't want to change their baby's diapers. You're not like that, are you?

JEFF

Of course not.

(Continues looking around for the waiter.)

MICHELLE

Good, because it's important to me that we share parental responsibilities.

JEFF

Me too. Look, there's something I need to tell you.

WAITER

(Suddenly enters, seemingly from out of nowhere.)

Are you ready to order your appetizer?

MICHELLE

We'll have the stuffed baby shrimp. He's squeamish around squid.

WAITER

Excellent choice. I'm sure you'll enjoy it. And can I recommend the baby back ribs as your main course? They're served with baby carrots, baby peas, and baby corn.

JEFF

Michelle, I thought we agreed not to order the five course dinner.

MICHELLE

Well, yes, we did, but I thought you'd still want an appetizer. I know how you love appetizers. Can we at least get the appetizer?

JEFF

No I'm not that hungry anymore. I couldn't eat an appetizer at this point. I really just want the salad bar.

MICHELLE

(to waiter)

Why don't you come back in a few minutes. We'll know by then.

WAITER

(getting slightly annoyed.)

Very well.

(Under his breath)

Newlyweds. They must be newlyweds. Newlyweds can never decide.

MICHELLE

So, what is it that you need to tell me?

JEFF

Um... I have a low sperm count.

MICHELLE

Oh, really? You're sure?

JEFF

Yes, I'm sure. I wasn't going to mention it right away, but, well, I felt I had to be honest with you.

MICHELLE

That's so sweet. You really are a special guy. You're so open and honest. I really like that in a man. You're going to be a wonderful father.

JEFF

No, you don't understand. I might not be able to father any children. There just aren't very many of the little guys.

MICHELLE

That's okay. I only need five.

JEFF

It's not quite that simple.

MICHELLE

It's okay, really. That magazine I told you about - the one with the article about the Spanish doctors - it also had an article about an Italian fertility specialist who helped a woman give birth to twins, and her husband had the same problem. That whole issue was devoted to fertility. Believe me, we can work through this.

JEFF

Yes, I'm sure we can. There's... something else, too, that I should share with you.

MICHELLE

What is it?

JEFF

Well... I'm a cross-dresser. Yeah. That's it. I'm a cross-dresser.

MICHELLE

What size?

JEFF

What do you mean, 'what size?' I thought you'd be upset.

MICHELLE

Why would I be upset? It's not like you're an ax murderer.

JEFF

Well, true, but I thought you might think I wasn't a good father figure for our children.

MICHELLE

Oh come on, don't be silly. I think you're a wonderful father figure. I'd make sure your outfits were all in style. I know you aren't that good with fashion.

JEFF

You would do that, wouldn't you?

MICHELLE

You bet I would.

JEFF

But don't you think it would set a bad example for the children, seeing their father dressed in drag? They'd be all confused. They wouldn't know how to deal with it.

MICHELLE

No, they'd be exposed to a wonderful alternative lifestyle. It would be eye-opening for them. They'd be more worldly. I think it would be good for them.

JEFF

But their friends would tease them for it. Kids can be real cruel.

MICHELLE

That's true. But it would build character - they'd be stronger for it.

(Waiter enters.)

WAITER

Have you decided what you'll be ordering?

JEFF

In a minute. Can I ask you a question first?

WAITER

Very well. What is it?

JEFF

Do you think a cross-dresser would be a good father figure for his children?

WAITER

Sir?

JEFF

A cross-dresser; a guy who wears women's clothing. Do you think he would be a good father figure for his children?

WAITER

Well, it's not really my place to say. But can I recommend the baby back ribs? They're excellent today.

JEFF

But if it were your place to say.

WAITER

Well, if his outfits were in style, I don't see what harm it would cause.

JEFF

If his outfits were in style?

WAITER

Yes, like that hat, for instance.

(Points to Michelle's hat.)

Very stylish.

JEFF

Okay, thank you. Thank you very much. Why don't you come back in a few minutes, we'll know what we want by then.

WAITER

(getting irate)

Very well.

(Waiter exits)

MICHELLE

You see? Even the waiter doesn't see the problem. And he should know better than anyone.

JEFF

Why should he know any more than you or me? He's just a waiter.

MICHELLE

(noticeably upset by this remark.)

And what is that supposed to mean?

JEFF

What is 'what' supposed to mean?

MICHELLE

Just a waiter. What is that supposed to mean?

JEFF

He's a waiter. He's not a child psychologist. Why is that so terrible?

MICHELLE

I never realized you held such contempt toward waiters.

JEFF

What are you talking about? He's one person with an opinion; he's not an expert on the effects of cross-dressing on child development. For all we know, he might not even have kids.

MICHELLE

Oh, and he can't have kids because he's *'just a waiter?'*

JEFF

That's not what I'm saying at all.

MICHELLE

I'll have you know my father was a waiter, and my mother was a waitress. Together they once waited on the President of the United States. I was a waitress, too, in college. I paid my tuition by waiting tables. And I was good at it. We were all good at it. It's an honest way to make a living.

JEFF

So, what are you saying? That I don't like waiters?

MICHELLE

Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. Really, Jeff, just because he works in a restaurant is no reason to degrade him. He's a human being, with feelings, just like you and me. He's doing his best to make ends meet. I'm starting to see a side of you I don't much care for.

JEFF

You're reading quite a bit into this.

MICHELLE

I don't think so. You're ad didn't say anything about this. Next time maybe you should think twice about what you write. It couldn't hurt you to be honest.

JEFF

All right, you're right. You've figured me out. I hold contempt toward waiters. Maybe it was a bad idea meeting in a restaurant, given the likelihood of running into a waiter. And it's not just waiters I deplore. It's bus-boys, chefs, and even parking lot attendants. I just can't hide this from you anymore!

MICHELLE

I knew it. I wonder what other skeletons you're hiding. Now I'm beginning to wonder whether this thing is going to work at all. I wouldn't want to expose my children to someone with such a judgmental attitude.

(She wipes out the line of "babies" on the table.)

JEFF

Well, it's not something I'm proud of, but I can certainly understand that.

MICHELLE

Maybe we should end this date now.

JEFF

If you think that's best.

MICHELLE

Yes, I do.

JEFF

Okay, then. It was nice meeting you.

MICHELLE

I wish I could say the same.

(She storms out. Then, under her breath)

Just a waiter. What a weirdo. You never know who you'll meet with these ads.

(Waiter enters, noticing that Michelle has left in a hurry.)

WAITER

Your lovely wife - is she all right?

JEFF

My wife?

WAITER

Yes sir. She seemed upset about something. Is she all right? Was something wrong with my service?

JEFF

Oh, she's not my wife. No, nothing was wrong. She... Uh... She just remembered she has a meeting of Schizophrenics Anonymous. When she arrives, they'll have a quorum. She won't be dining with me after all.

WAITER

I see. I'm sorry, sir. Is there something I can get for you? Perhaps a nice house salad with baby greens?

JEFF

Actually, that five course dinner special is sounding real good. I'm starved. I think I'll have the calamari for my appetizer. I love squid.

(The lights go down.)

THE END