A quiet dinner

Collegiality rules among interpreters even away from the conference room. In our world everyone has the proverbial place at table.

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I like to visit Joe whenever I go to his town, a metropolis of green parks and a no-nonsense attitude to carbohydrates – there is a dumpling for every occasion.

We had arranged to go out together next time I was working at the organization in question. I don’t know if I told you, but Joe is a chief interpreter, although I first knew him when he was a humble foot soldier with a pithy turn of phrase about, er, well, you get the picture. Anyway I braved the stony security guards to enter Joe’s domain on the 7th floor – he has carpeting and a window – to check we were still on for some liquid refreshment and crunchy gossip. Joe had remembered and that was fine, but could we meet early to save his having to go home first, and by the way he’d mentioned dinner to Steve and could he tag along. I was delighted – Steve is a witty raconteur who knows a thing or two about wine, an empirical asset to any fine dining.

I went downstairs – stony security, you know the drill – to find Steve, who was just confirming that he was certainly up for dinner when his booth mate wandered in after a break and we asked her, would you like to join. In fact I think there may be an AIIC rule that when discussing entertainments and general shenanigans you must invite anyone within earshot; in AIIC’s spicy idiom this is called collegiality. She was delighted, so now we were four.

I wandered lonely as something nebulous down the corridor and bumped into Ian who said, I hear you’re organizing a do at the Dancing Ferret, and I said yes, do you want to come, it will get you away from wiping noses and bottoms for an evening (Ian has a baby at home). Ian was game so now we were five.

My meeting finished early so I went home to get in some practice on the imperfect subjunctive in a language I am learning with desultory vigour, but my eyes began to droop when I reached the section on verb forms for Tuesdays. I was happily distracted by a message on my mobile. Susan was asking if it was true that I was arranging a get together that very evening and could she come too. She could. Now we were six.

Susan texted again to ask if Ronald could join us because she had mentioned the tentative plan to him and one doesn’t want to be rude or stand-offish (remember what I told you earlier about offering moral support to your colleagues). So yes to Ronald. Now we were seven.

Ian emailed to ask if the restaurant had high chairs, because we would all like to come, me, her and fruit of joint loins. I thought not, best bring your own. So now we were nine, or to be accurate 9.5.

The place we were going is a popular watering hole in the famous city so it is best to book. I phoned
and said we would like a table for, well let us say eight people at 7:30. We have been good customers – regulars even – over the years so they said they would find us a table. I relaxed, a contented event manager.

At this point I had a text from Tarquin to ask if he and John could join the party and possibly bring Graham and perhaps Sally. I could not turn them down – he’d once overheard me referring to him as Tarquin the Otter, so I needed to tread warily. All were welcome. This made it 13 people at a table for eight, but I had gone beyond of point of worrying. I also had a sneaking feeling there might be one or two no-shows.

No sooner had this very thought staggered across a functioning synapse when Susan sent me a text to say that Ronald could not come but she was still on for dinner.

I was by this time in need of a little lie down, but thought that with a bit of luck it would all work out. What’s the expression actors use – it’ll be all right on the night.

And it was. We turned up at the restaurant and there was a table for us, Ian came with his young family and we all played pass-the-parcel with the baby who gurgled with delight, they even had a high chair. Tarquin cried off in the end, in fact I don’t quite remember who turned up and who didn’t but we had a very nice evening with delicious food, quality wine, witty conversation and gossip I can only repeat if you bribe me. Both Joe and Steve were on form and had us all rolling in the aisles. Who could ask for more?

But next time I think I might just keep my dinner date with Joe to myself.

[i] The name has been changed to give me half a chance of getting a table.

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