

Artsun Akopyan

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# *Witty Ways*

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A Collection of Short Stories with a Twist

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**Witty Ways. A Collection of  
Short Stories with a Twist**

«Издательские решения»

**Акопян А.**

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This collection includes 5 short stories with a surprise ending that were published in Writers' International Forum, AlienSkin Magazine in the USA, and online.

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# **Witty Ways**

## **A Collection of Short Stories with a Twist**

**Artsun Akopyan**

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## **Introduction**

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## A Cure

Ann entered the living room and sat down on the sofa near her husband. She wore a silk dressing gown and perfume filled the air around her.

Philip tore himself away from the TV. “Darling, have you turned off the light in the bathroom?” he asked, hugging her shoulders.

Ann got irritated. “Yes, I have,” she said. “Is that the only thing that concerns you?”

“Of course not! I’m concerned about everything connected with you,” he smiled and kissed her cheek. “For instance, the hall. Have you turned off the light in the hall?”

Despite his sense of humor, Philip was sometimes absolutely unbearable. He had been preoccupied with the idea of buying a new car for nearly half a year and seemed to think about nothing but saving money.

Ann dropped her gaze. She knew by experience that if she expressed her annoyance with his “economy” that their conversation would end in a row. Suddenly she remembered her intention to introduce Philip to Harry Roberts, her colleague. Actually, she did not care for Mr. Roberts, but he might be the only person who could influence her husband.

“One of my work mates has moved,” she said and paused hesitatingly. “Would you like to take part in their housewarming?”

Philip shrugged his shoulders, “Why not? We haven’t been to a party for ages. Is the admission free?”

Ann did not answer. This time she was not sure whether he was joking or not.

The housewarming had been arranged for 7 o’clock in the evening. Having stopped his old Ford before Mr. Roberts’ two-story house, Philip shook his head in surprise. “How can a common clerk afford such a mansion? Has he won the national lottery?”

Ann smiled, feeling a little nervous. “I hope he’ll tell you about it himself.”

Philip and Ann went to the front door and he pressed the doorbell. It produced no sound. Philip pressed it once again and then knocked at the door loudly. Immediately they heard footsteps and Harry Roberts, an imposing, tall man of about 50, opened the door.

He and his wife Margaret, a small elegant woman, showed their guests around their extremely well-decorated, spacious house. Then Margaret suggested sitting at the table and having dinner.

“Aren’t we going to wait for the other guests?” Philip asked in bewilderment.

“We haven’t invited anybody else,” Harry said and took his seat.

On the dinner table there turned out to be nothing but a dish with biscuits, a sugar bowl, four tea cups, and a saucer with a sliced lemon.

“We don’t eat too much in the evening,” Margaret explained, catching Philip’s puzzled look. “By the way, Harry, you’ve forgotten to bring the cognac!”

After drinking the first toast Harry seemed to get drunk.

“You must be surprised that we own such a posh house,” he said, looking at his guests haughtily.

“My husband has supposed you’d won the lottery,” Ann said, smiling.

Harry sneered. “Nonsense! The thing is we’ve been saving pennies where we can. The doorbell is an example. Do you think it’s broken down? Nothing of the kind! We turn it off to economize on electric power!”

Philip stopped chewing and gazed at Harry in disbelief. “Are you joking?”

“No, I’m not. If you’re interested, I’ll tell you some more details.”

“That would be wonderful,” Ann said, showing enthusiasm.

Philip looked at her in surprise but said nothing.

Harry started talking. According to him, he had always liked gardening and grown lots of vegetables and fruit. His wife hadn’t needed to go to the supermarket for them as she could buy

them from him at cut rates. When drinking tea, they had always hung their tea bags out to dry and preserved lemon slices in water to be reused later. They had installed a pay phone for their guests, had taken a taxi not more often than once a year and had limited themselves to two sheets of paper per visit to the lavatory. At 7:30 Harry suddenly announced that the housewarming was over. He and his wife had to go to bed before dark so they wouldn't waste electric power.

On the way home Philip did not utter a word. His teeth were clenched and he did not look at Ann. When they arrived, he took a bottle of expensive French red wine from the rack and started uncorking it.

“What are you doing?” Ann asked nervously. “We've been keeping that for next Christmas!”

He turned around and gazed into her eyes. “Why did you suggest my meeting Mr. Roberts? Did you want me to see what I might be in 20 years' time?”

Ann grew cold. It was obvious that Philip had seen through her intention. There was no point in denying the facts.

“You're right,” she said in a cheerless tone and looked aside.

“You were a success. I don't want to become such a wretched skinflint one day. Why don't we have our own dinner party now?”

It seemed to Ann that she had misheard Philip. She darted a glance at him. There was a slight smile on his lips. Relief and joy surged through her.

Philip hugged her and kissed her lips. “I love you,” he said. “Don't you worry about this wine. We can always buy as many bottles of it as we wish.”

Arriving at her office the next day, Ann came up to Mr. Roberts and gave him some bank notes. “It's my turn to carry out my part of our agreement,” she said. “Here's the money for the tea, the cognac, the biscuits and wearing out the dishes and the chairs.”

“Don't mention it,” Harry grinned and quickly counted the money. “When would you like me to invite you again?”

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## Proposal

Jane got out of the car and looked at her watch. It was nearly six. In half an hour Mark would come back from work. She had to hurry up to be able to cook dinner in time.

She opened the rear door of the car, snatched out the bag filled with food and quickly went towards the house along the path paved with colour flagstones and bisecting the small garden planted with roses. Now she didn't have a minute to enjoy the odour and the view of these beautiful flowers. If the table wasn't laid by the moment Mark washed his hands, the catastrophe would be unavoidable. He'd start walking up and down the kitchen and stuffing his mouth with everything catching his eye – chips, sweets, the remains of the day-before-yesterday apple pie. As a result, all the floor would be littered with crumbs. Jane wouldn't have any time to scrub the kitchen clean till tomorrow. By that time the crumbs would have dried up and crunch under foot, which Jane hated.

Unlocking the front door, she entered the hall, put the bag onto the chest of drawers and began unbuttoning her raincoat. Fortunately, she wouldn't have to waste her time on thinking over what to cook. It had become a habit with her long ago to create a menu in the evening for the next day. Today she was going to make mushroom soup for the first course, fish cutlets and salad for the second. Any gourmet would enjoy everything – or nearly everything – she cooked. Probably that was one of the main reasons of her popularity with middle-aged unmarried men. No one of them had ever wanted to break off relations with her.

She took off her raincoat and hung it on a hook. Suddenly it seemed to her that besides the odour of roses that got into the hall when she had opened the door, there was something else in the air – seemingly, a perfume. Standing motionless, she took a sniff. There could be no doubt. It was a delicate French perfume – probably quite an expensive sort. Jane had never used anything like that. She grew cold. What if Mark had got a secret lover?

She looked around. There was no trace – like a forgotten comb or pin – of a strange woman in the hall. Slowly, Jane went to the kitchen beating her heels against the floor as loudly as she could. Mark and his girlfriend could still be in the house. Jane didn't want to catch them with their pants down. It would make her feel embarrassed.

There was no perfume in the kitchen. Of course, it could have simply blown away as the kitchen window was wide open. On the floor there were a few biscuit crumbs. Jane remembered very well that in the morning, after Mark had gone to work, she swept the floor carefully. It meant Mark came here later being hungry. Probably he hadn't had lunch in the cafe near his office – usually he went there during his lunch time. Judging by the positions of the crumbs, he ate biscuits standing near the window— and maybe his woman, too. Jane felt blood started to hammer in her temples.

She left the kitchen and opened the bathroom door. There was a terrible mess. Water was running from the tap as someone hadn't tightened it up; the loo lid was open; there was a piece of tooth paste, half an inch long, on a sink brim; the towel hanging on a rail was creased in a loathsome manner. Mark could have left the bathroom in such disorder only if he had been in a great hurry. Where did he hurry to? To the bedroom where the woman had been waiting for him?

Jane's palms became moist, hammering in the temples strengthened. She closed her eyes for a moment. Whatever or whoever she found in the bedroom, she should be absolutely quiet; otherwise she might have a heart attack.

She went and peeped into the bedroom. There was neither Mark nor his lover in it. His bed was in perfect order, all the subjects were on their places. Jane sighed with relief. Suddenly it occurred to her that there might have been no woman in the house at all. Mark could have come home for lunch because, for example, he had forgotten his wallet here. It had happened once or twice before. And the perfume could have got into the hall from the street. Some women spray so much of it onto their body that it can be felt miles away.

Calming down a little, Jane proceeded to the living-room. Opening the door, she was rooted to the spot. There was a thin cognac bottle and two glasses on the coffee table. Next to the bottle there was an empty chocolate wrapper and some biscuits on a saucer. Chocolate and biscuit crumbs were scattered on the table, on the leather sofa and on the floor – eleven or twelve crumbs altogether. Slowly, Jane approached the table and saw a faint print of lipstick on one of the glasses; then she smelt a slight odour of the French perfume in the air.

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