

## All of Me

By Betsy Hanson

“A man must have homely food,” Miss Maude Doggett said as she slipped the platter of cauliflower cheese in front of Wyatt Tweed. Wyatt looked at Jessie Morrow, who was perched on a chair on the opposite side of his formica-topped dining table. Maybe she would signal how he should reply to this declaration. The dish certainly was *homely*, the smothering of cheese sauce not adding to the eye appeal of pale cauliflower on a white crockery plate.

“Good plain English cooking,” Jessie suggested. “Miss Doggett wanted to fix lunch for you, to thank you for your hospitality.”

“With your many responsibilities, teaching piano and performing, you have no time to prepare a nutritious meal.” Miss Doggett added some gray lamb chops and a bowl of overcooked peas to the table.

“No need to apologize for the appearance,” Wyatt said. “I’m sure it tastes fine. Nothing parsley wouldn’t help, to add some color.”

Miss Doggett silently plopped a scoop of cauliflower cheese on Wyatt’s plate. “It is the nature of cauliflower cheese to be of a pale hue,” Miss Doggett sniffed.

“Now I understand!” Jessie laughed loudly but didn’t care if this earned her a scolding from Miss Doggett. They were in the freewheeling West Coast city of Seattle, and didn’t American women talk in loud voices and guffaw as they pleased? “It’s the word *homely*. For us it means pleasant and comfortable, as if from one’s own home.”

“Ah!” Wyatt Tweed laughed too, showing prominent teeth. “In American English, *homely* means unattractive.”

“I still say, a man must have homely food,” Miss Doggett persisted. “And surely we must stop discussing the meaning of words and eat our cauliflower cheese before it becomes tepid.”

If *homely* means unattractive, perhaps that is how an American would describe Wyatt Tweed, Jessie thought: a forty-ish man with large stick-out ears, thinning red hair, spindly long legs, and those large teeth.

But his brown eyes twinkled. So often one read in novels of a character’s twinkling eyes, Jessie thought, but Wyatt Tweed has the first real-life pair I have ever experienced.

The lamb chops proved to be tough, requiring determined chewing that stifled conversation. In fact Jessie found she had little appetite, distracted by the excitement of her first days in far-flung Seattle. British tourists chose New York or Boston or Washington DC, maybe even Miami. She knew no one who had traveled to the Pacific Northwest.

Of course she and Miss Doggett had not crossed an ocean and a continent because they were inventive travelers. Lucille Harbinger, Miss Doggett’s second cousin who had moved to Seattle as a war bride, had died in June. Wyatt Tweed was Lucille’s nephew by marriage and her only

surviving relative. To receive her inheritance from Lucille, Miss Doggett was required to visit Wyatt in Seattle to “comfort him in his grief.”

“It is my duty,” Miss Doggett had declared. “I would journey across the world to comfort her bereaved nephew in any case. I am not concerned about an inheritance.”

Yet in the Leamington Lodge library, tidying up before their departure, Jessie had found a memo with the words, in Miss Doggett’s hand, “5,000 American dollars! A tidy sum from Lucille!”

“A delicious *homely* meal,” Wyatt said, clearing the plates, though he’d decided he would not seek out another chance to experience “good plain English cooking.”

“Miss Morrow often does the washing up,” Miss Doggett said. “She’d best continue with her typical duties, even when we are in foreign lands.”

“No, I insist. Go relax in the living room, Maude,” Wyatt said. “You too, Jessie.”

Jessie flinched at Wyatt’s use of their given names. This was the American custom, but she and Miss Doggett barely knew Wyatt Tweed. And even after all these years living together at Leamington Lodge, I would not presume call my employer Maude, Jessie thought.

But jet lag was more insistent than Miss Doggett’s need to feel affront.

“If you will excuse me,” she said, yawning, “I shall rest in my room. Miss Morrow, I would advise you to do the same.”

“I’m not wasting a single hour of my first week in America taking a nap,” Jessie said, aware of her cheeky tone. “I shall explore the neighborhood instead.”

“As you wish.” Miss Doggett yawned again and tramped down the hallway to the guest room.

Wyatt washed the dishes, swiping a sponge vaguely over the plates and silverware, and Jessie dried.

“Nice of you ladies to come to my gig tonight. I hope the cacophony of jazz isn’t too much for Maude,” Wyatt said.

“I tune in to the jazz station on the radio on my bedside stand, nearly every night,” Jessie said. “Miss Doggett allows only classical music in the main rooms.”

“Well, let’s see if we can convert her. Jazz is America’s classical music.” He twinkled a smile. “Hey, I just realized—Wyatt Earp and Jessie James! We’re a couple of Wild West hombres!”

Jessie smiled as he laughed, though she had not the slightest idea what he was talking about and didn’t want to ask and show her ignorance.

Putting on her oversized cloth coat, Jessie headed out into the unseasonably warm November sunshine. Red and yellow fallen leaves brightened the sidewalk as she ambled past the tidy but modest American houses. Perhaps these were the homes of professors who taught at the nearby University of Washington. None had the protective fences or walls that guarded the houses in North Oxford. Instead carpets of green lawn stretched a welcome down to the

sidewalk—a metaphor, Jessie thought, for the openness of Americans compared to the closed-in attitude of the British.

Her walk took her to a small shopping center with a thrift store, a sign in the window advertising “All Clothing, Half Off!”

Jessie laughed out loud—did the owners realize the double-entendre? In the window display sat a pair of red cowboy boots.

As if an invisible hand had given her a push, Jessie marched into the shop and asked to try on the boots, which fit her—though she had to admit that “fit” was a relative term, the pointed toes and chunky heels as unlike her usual soft-soled oxfords as a rodeo horse was from a Clydesdale.

I am, after all, a “Wild West hombre,” Jessie thought, as she pulled some small green American bills from her wallet and boldly bought the secondhand red cowboy boots.



“Miss Morrow, wherever have you been?” Miss Doggett sat on the lumpy sofa near Wyatt’s baby grand piano, dunking a tea bag into a mug. “It’s been dark for nearly an hour.”

“Out for a walk. The streetlamps brightened my path.” Jessie was surprised at these poetic words, as the “streetlamps” were not in fact lamps at all, but tall metal poles with glaring flat fixtures.

“I offered Maude a ‘cuppa,’” Wyatt said from where he sat on the piano bench. “One for you, too?” A couple of hours away from the ol’ Maudie Doggett did you good, he thought, as he admired the color in Jessie’s cheeks and her springy curls, set loose from whatever had held them into a tight bun.

“No thank you,” Jessie said. “I think we’re leaving for the jazz club at six? I need to change.”

“I’ll run through this chart one more time, and we’ll head out,” he said.

“I told Wyatt that as his grateful guests, we would provide him with an audience.” Miss Doggett grimaced as she sipped the tea-bag-dunked cuppa.

Wyatt began to play and sing the jazz standard “All of Me.” Jessie paused to listen: *Take my lips, I’ll never use them / Take my arms, I want to lose them.*

His long fingers chased chords up and down the octaves and embellished the melody line, his voice channeling a feeling for the melody as well as the lyrics. You look so happy, Jessie thought, with no need at all for comfort in your grief.

Why do I like this song so much? Jessie wondered. I’ve never been in love and then scorned to the degree that I wouldn’t need my lips or arms. Maybe it’s the message about giving too much of yourself to another person and not caring if he takes whatever is left.

“I hope you sing that one at the club,” Jessie said.

“I’ll dedicate it to you.” Wyatt was even more con-

vinced that this was appropriate when Jessie appeared fifteen minutes later in her going-out-to-a-club outfit.

He nearly dropped the sheaf of sheet music he’d collected to take to the gig.

“Wow! Quite the transformation!” And about time! he could have added. Why should you dress as dowdily as Miss Doggett? Jessie’s blue velvet dress was perfect with her pale skin and soft curly hair. Her legs in the sheer stockings were slender and nicely formed. She had even put on some lipstick.

And a pair of red cowboy boots.

“Miss Morrow, whatever are you thinking?” Miss Doggett bore down on her paid companion like a schoolmarm on a naughty child. “We have been invited by Mr. Tweed to an evening of musical performance, *not* a low-life masquerade ball! As your employer, I insist that you change your footwear. I cannot allow you to make a fool of yourself.”

“No time for her to change, Maude,” Wyatt said. “We’re going to be late if we don’t leave right this instant!”

Wyatt Tweed twinkled a smile at Jessie and opened the door for his two British guests.

“I am a Wild West hombre,” Jessie whispered.

He laughed. “And a brave one, at that.”



“Drinks are on me,” Wyatt offered when Jessie and Miss Doggett were settled at a small table near the piano at the Jazz Bistro.

“We shall have orange juice,” Miss Doggett said.

“I will have a martini, please,” Jessie announced, crossing her legs to better display her red boots.

Wyatt ordered a plate of cheese and crackers, one orange juice, and one martini.

From his seat at the piano, he could see Jessie leaning forward and smiling—no, *grinning*. Well, of course this prim and proper woman, who had only heard jazz trickling from a radio on a bedside table, would grin, if not swoon, at hearing the music live.

Miss Doggett, her mouth set in a dutiful line, sat back in her chair, as if to get as far away as possible from the sounds emanating from the piano.

“Miss Morrow,” Miss Doggett whispered loudly, “compose yourself! It is not seemly for a single woman to have such an expression of . . .”

“. . . of pleasure?” Jessie said. “Of delight?” She drained her martini glass. “Of *desire*?”

“Oh my, oh my, what have I done? I have traveled all this way to offer succor to poor Wyatt Tweed, and by bringing you with me, I have allowed you to fall into an unsavory infatuation!”

Miss Doggett clasped her hands and looked up at the dingy ceiling of the club.

If it’s God you’re looking for, you won’t find him up there, Jessie wanted to say.

He’s in that music coming out of that piano.

“We shall return to Wyatt’s home, right now,” Miss

Doggett said. “Surely he will understand that we are still suffering jet lag. And one needs a solid meal, not just some crackers and cold cheese.”

Wyatt was speaking into the microphone.

“One more number and I’ll take a short break. I’m dedicating this song to a new friend, Jessie Morrow, a jazz lover from England.”

Jessie closed her eyes while she listened to “All of Me.” I’m not going to risk catching a glimpse of Miss Doggett’s disapproving expression while I enjoy this, she thought.

When he was finished, Wyatt came over to their table. Miss Doggett was standing up with her coat on, her felt hat with its garnish of wax grapes slightly askew on her head. A waiter delivered a second martini to Jessie.

“We do beg your pardon, but we must excuse ourselves. We are quite exhausted,” Miss Doggett said to Wyatt. “And we do *not* need any additional beverages.”

“That must be the royal ‘we’ you are using,” Jessie heard herself say, standing up and looking directly at Miss Maude Doggett. “*You* may excuse yourself. *I* shall stay and enjoy an additional beverage.”

“Miss Morrow, this is the martini speaking! You will put on your coat and come with me, right now!” Miss Doggett barked.

“No, *Maude*, I won’t. I am your paid companion, which means you may have *some* of me. You are not permitted to have *all* of me. No, you aren’t.”

Miss Doggett started to sputter something but Wyatt held out his arm and said, “So kind of you to be part of my audience. Come with me now, and I’ll call you a taxi.”

And he twinkled at Jessie, whispering, “Atta girl!” and escorted Miss Doggett to the door.