Dinner with Eleanor

When we were sixteen, my BFF Sophie asked me what I wanted for my birthday. I only wanted to talk to my dad, who had died a few months before. Sure enough, he kissed me awake at dawn on my birthday. I remember he said he was sorry he couldn’t give me a string of pearls, a traditional sixteenth gift from father to daughter.

The day before my sixtieth, Sophie asked, “If you could have your birthday dinner with anyone, living or dead, who would it be?”

“Eleanor Roosevelt, no question.”

She grinned. “I’ll see what I can do. Maybe she’ll be at Maxine’s tomorrow.”

“Who would you want?”

“Brad Pitt.” We laughed like teenagers.

A note arrived to come to Antoine’s at 7:00 for a birthday dinner. So much for Maxine’s.

Candles and twinkly lights greeted me in a small private dining room with a table set for two. I ordered wine and waited.

“My column took some time today. I apologize for being tardy, but you could have played cards on my coattails getting here.” Eleanor Roosevelt sat across from me. “You wanted to see me, dear?” She fussed with her gloves.

*Oh, Sophie. You’ve done it this time.*

I chirped, “Well, hello!”

“I cannot stay too long. Franklin has a few people coming in and I’m meant to greet them.”

 She looks like Eleanor, sounds like Eleanor. *Okay, I’ll play*. “Where does your strength come from? The war, your husband, your children.”

“One must bear up and accept what cannot be explained.”

“Yes, but all the criticism . . .doesn’t it bother you?”

She thought for a bit. “You will be criticized no matter what you do, so do what’s right. People cannot make you feel inferior without your permission.”

That voice was real. She did her homework, this one. I looked closely; no makeup or wig.

We chatted about women’s roles over chicken *cordon bleu*. She was fascinating and true to form. I forgot she was an imposter.

“I really must go. Mr. Churchill will be roaming the halls.”

I blinked and she was gone.

An open box sat next to my clutch. A string of pearls nestled in the burgundy velvet glowed in the candlelight. I jumped, upsetting the wine glass. I gathered my things in a state of shock and speed-dialed Sophie. “I never told you about the pearls.”

“What pearls? What are you talking about? Janie and I have been here for the past hour and we’re getting hammered waiting for you. Maxine’s, remember, birthday girl? Just the three of us?”

I turned and looked back. The doorway to the private room was now a solid wall with familiar artwork. Either Sophie had superpowers or I did, because I held one of Eleanor’s gloves and the velvet box. *Accept what cannot be explained.*

“Are you coming?” Sophie asked.

I smiled. “You can play cards on my coattails.”

“Huh?”

“Never mind. Private joke.” I fingered the warm pearls on my neck. “Thanks, Dad.”

I enjoyed your heartfelt story. You balanced the description and dialogue well. Grea job! I only edited a few things for clarification. Think about my suggestion for the beginning.