



Title: One Dish Party

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Level: Intermediate

Genre: Fiction, Parties, Life changes

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“What kind of party is it going to be?”

“It’s going to be a party where we all bring our own **cooked** food.”

“So we will all eat together, right?”

“Yes! That’s right.”

“But Jeni, you know I can’t cook!”

“Hmm! That’s a good point. Let me ask Razib about this.”

“Why Razib? Is he organising it?”

“Kind of. In fact it was his idea for us to get together like this. I am just helping him.”

Muhib didn’t like the sound of this. Helping *Razib*? His idea? All his interests going down? *Muhib* told *Jeni* not to call *Razib*, and said he could not be present at the party because of other **responsibilities**. In this way, he turned down *Jeni*’s **invitation** to go to the party with their friends from their former university days.

Jeni was a married woman with one child. Her husband *Raihan* was a very kind person. He was a **government** officer and was 6 years older than her. *Muhib* didn’t know him that well. *Razib*, on the other hand, was a friend of both *Jeni* and *Muhib* from their university days, but even after all this time, *Muhib* still couldn’t accept the friendship between *Jeni* and *Razib*. He had developed a strong **jealousy** of *Razib* while they were students and it had never gone away. Even though *Jeni* was married to neither of them, he still felt **uncomfortable** around *Razib*. He really didn’t want to go to a party organized by... him.

Muhib left *Jeni*’s home! He stopped at a *tong** **shop**, where local boys’ drank **tea**, talked and passed the time of day.



His **phone** started to ring. It was *Razib*. He was hoping to **convince** *Muhib* to accept *Jeni*’s invitation.

“**Hello?**” *Muhib* spoke the word as if it was a question. He could see that the call was from *Razib*. He didn’t really want to talk to *Razib* at all. He tried to give his **excuse** about being busy, but *Razib* wasn’t listening.

“*Dost**! Don’t **worry** about cooking anything. Just bring some **bottles** of soft drink,” said *Razib*. “I’ll bring something to share from both of us.”

“Really?...Ok then.” *Muhib* did not sound very **eager** to go, but it had always been hard to say “No” to *Razib*.

“You know what I’ll bring?” said *Razib*. He didn’t seem to notice *Muhib*’s **flat** voice.

“What?” *Muhib* could only bring himself to say one word each time he spoke.

“One *packet of biscuits** for each of us, and two packets for *Jeni*’s husband.”

“Why does *Razib* always seem to have a plan?” thought *Muhib*.

“Are you sure he won’t mind?” he said.

“No! Don’t worry!” laughed *Razib*. “I’ve already talked to him about this! He’ll enjoy it.”

Muhib couldn’t say, “No” any more. It would not sound **polite**.

“Okay then,” he said, “I’ll come.”

As usual, *Muhib* couldn’t say anything **negative** to *Razib*. This was *Razib*! He always made it so difficult to go against his wishes. He was impossible!

Finally, the day came - the first of January - New Year! Six friends gathered together in *Jeni*’s beautiful home. They were sitting in the living room, talking about the food they had each brought for their friends. There were four girls: *Jeni*, *Raina*, *Anisha* and *Tahera*, all married now. Of all of them, only *Anisha* was wearing a *hijab**. *Razib* didn’t recognize her first.

“Oh! *Anisha*, is that you?”

“Yes, It’s me.” she said, laughing. “And you are *Razib*, yes?”

“Of course.” he said, “You know me well. But what happened to you. Why are you all covered?”

“As a *Muslim** woman, I can do that!” said *Anisha*.

“Ya! When I last saw you, you were the most **fashionable** girl in the class. Remember?”

“A *hijabi* girl can still be fashionable!” said *Anisha*.

Razib was surprised, but he wanted to be polite. “Well, you still look very beautiful in a *hijab* too.” he said.

“Last year, I **performed** my *hajj** with my in-laws’ family. Now I observe *hijab* very **strictly**.” said *Anisha*. There was a touch of **pride** in her voice.

“Well, good for you!” said *Razib*.

This is how they got to know each other again. *Jeni* called everybody to see what they have brought for today’s **dinner**. *Jeni*’s husband *Raihan* returned home and also joined them. He was very **excited** to see all his wife’s friends together. All of them became silent when they saw *Raihan*. They didn’t really know him that well, as he had not been at university with them. It felt a little strange. *Razib* was the first to break the silence.

“*Raihan bhai**, which one is your **dish**?”

“Me? Cook? No way!”

“No! No! No! You must have brought something, surely. Don’t be so **modest**.”

Raihan looked at *Jeni*. She took her friend’s side.

“Well, Where’s your dish then?” she said, “I’m not doing it for you.”

“Oh well, I am out of it, then.” said *Raihan*. He started to move towards the door.

“Wait! Wait! Wait!” *Razib* stopped him.

“*Raihan bhai*, I don’t see a **fruit basket** on the table. You could **arrange** that for us.”



Raihan stopped, “Ok!” he laughed. “I can do that. Let me go and get some fruit from the shop!” He **paused**, “You should all start having dinner. Don’t wait for me,” he said, and he turned and left the room. After he left, the room was silent again for a moment.

Muhib **relaxed** into a chair. “Finally I feel like I can talk.” he said.

“Ah! Why? Who stopped you from talking?” *Razib* thought *Muhib*’s words sounded strange.

“Talking to a friend in front of her husband is not easy, my friend. Husbands are so *possessive** of their wives.”

“I think...” said *Razib* with a laugh, “...the problem is not with the husband, it’s you, *Muhib*.” *Razib* laughed and looked at the others as if he expected them to agree with him.

“Me? Why, what have I done?” said *Muhib*.

“Nothing! Nothing at all,” said *Razib*, and he laughed again. Everybody started laughing **loudly**! They all knew how *Muhib* had felt about *Jeni* when they were at university together.



Seeing *Jeni*’s happy face, *Muhib* got lost in their *chatter**. They were remembering the happy days of student life. As he listened, he remembered how he used to do so many things to make *Jeni* happy. He had always been able to make her smile, but he could never say anything to her about the wish of his heart. In the end she had married *Raihan*, and that was the end of it.

While everyone was enjoying the very first day of the new year, one of the other young women, *Raina* received a phone **message**. She seemed a little **upset** about something. Though she did not express her worries, they showed clearly on her face. She stood up, and **quickly** left the room, and went out onto the *balcony** holding her phone. *Jeni* noticed the change in *Raina*’s manner and followed her out of the room to the balcony. This was her favourite spot in her home. She had made it into a **calm** garden space, where she kept some beautiful green plants in big **pots**.

Raina couldn’t stop the tears falling down her face. Her in-laws didn’t like the idea of their daughter-in-law going to a friend’s place for a party. “Come home right now! You are needed here!”, their message said.



Come home right now! You are needed here!

“What’s wrong, *Raina*?” *Jeni* asked very calmly, as if nothing had happened.

“I’ve got to go!” said *Raina*.

“Really? Right now? Can’t you stay until you have had dinner?”

“No! I have to leave right now. I’m **sorry**. Please carry on without me.” *Raina* couldn’t say another word, and she left quickly.

When *Jeni* got back to the party, she found everybody enjoying the **taste** of all the dishes and passing judgement on each other’s cooking abilities. She looked at each one, and thought about how their lives had moved on since their university days. Though they knew each other well, it was clear there had been some changes. Things were different now. Perhaps they would have to get to know each other all over again in this new **phase** of life.

Glossary

balcony - a platform on the outside of a building, which is entered from an upstairs door or window

packet of biscuits - a paper or plastic bag holding sweet baked snacks

chatter - informal talk

possessive - adjective meaning to show a sense of ownership

*Bangla Words

bhai - brother. A term used among friends

dost - very informal expression used when addressing a male friend (in English, ‘dude’.)

hajj - Muslim pilgrimage (religious trip) to Mecca

hijab - a head covering worn in public by some Muslim women

Learning Activities

Vocabulary

1. **Words from the second 1000 high frequency General Service Word list. (38)**

arrange basket bottles calm chair cooked dinner dish eager excited excuse fashionable flat
fruit government hello invitation jealousy loudly message modest paused performed
phone plate polite pots pride quickly responsibilities shop sorry strictly taste tea
uncomfortable upset worry

2. **Words from the Academic Word List (5)**

convince finally negative phase relaxed

Comprehension Questions (Try to answer these questions without looking back at the story)

1. **Remembering:** What was *Muhib*'s excuse for not going to the party?
2. **Understanding:** What was the real reason *Muhib* didn't want to go to the party?
3. **Remembering:** Why was *Raima* upset?
4. **Understanding:** What does it mean in the story when it says *Muhib* "...didn't like the sound of this."?
5. **Understanding:** At the end of the story, why did *Jeni* think, "things were different now?"

Critical Thinking Questions

1. **Analysing:** The story describes a group of friends who knew each other well when they were at university. The story suggests there had been some changes in their lives since they had last seen each other. What kinds of changes had taken place? What other kinds of changes do you think may also have taken place? In what ways do people's lives change when they stop being students and become adults? Think about your own answers to these questions, then discuss your ideas in English with a partner.
2. **Applying:** Who is your oldest friend? How long have you known that person? How has that person changed since you first met them? What has happened in your lives over the time you have known each other? Make a timeline showing your friendship with that person. Start with when you first met them, and add some of the events and experiences you have shared together to the timeline. Finish your timeline with today's date. When you have finished, share your timelines with other students in a small group. Ask and answer questions to get more information about each person's friend.

3. Evaluating: Discuss these questions in a small group

a) *Muhib* felt uncomfortable about going to the party. Do you think you should do something to please your friends even if it makes you feel uncomfortable? When would it be better to say “No” and stick to your decision, even if it upsets your friends? (Give some examples of real life situations)

b) *Raina* felt unhappy because she had to go home before the party was over. Do you agree with her decision to leave, or do you think she should have stayed a little longer and had dinner? Do you think *Raina*'s in-laws were being unfair towards her? Give reasons for your answers. If you were *Jeni*, what advice would you have given *Raina* in that situation?

4. Creating: 10 to 20-line dialogues

Work with a partner. Choose one of the following situations and write a short play in English to show what each person would say in this situation. Your play should have between 10 and 20 lines of dialogue. Practice your play, then perform it to others in your class.

a) **Characters: *Muhib* and the owner of the tea shop.**

Muhib is complaining to the owner of the tea shop about *Razib* and the party. The tea shop owner (who is a friend) is giving *Muhib* some advice about what to do.

b) **Characters: *Jeni* and *Raihan*.**

It is after the party. *Jeni* is explaining to *Raihan* why she supported her friends and not *Raihan*, when they were discussing the party food. *Raihan* is a little annoyed with *Jeni*.

c) **Characters: *Raina* and her mother-in-law.**

Raina has just arrived at home from the party. Her mother-in-law seems to have good reasons for why she told *Raina* to come home right away, but *Raina* is still feeling upset because she couldn't spend time with her friends.

d) **Characters: *Jeni* and *Muhib*.**

It is after the party. *Jeni* and *Muhib* are discussing the changes in *Anisha* since she got married. They are surprised at the ways in which she has changed. They compare her with the way she was when she was a university student.