### A Very Good Year...

Roger Zelazny

“Hello,” he said.

She looked at him. He was sandy haired, thirtyish, a little rugged looking but well groomed and very well dressed. He was smiling.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “Do I know you?”

He shook his head.

“Not yet,” he said. “Bradley’s the name. Brad Dent.”

“Well... What can I do for you, Mr. Dent?”

“I believe that I am going to fall in love with you,” he said. “Of course, this requires a little cooperation. May I ask what time you get off work?”

“You’re serious!”

“Yes.''

She looked down at the countertop, noticed that her fingers were tapping the glass, stilled them, looked back up. His smile was still there.

“We close in twenty minutes,” she said abruptly. “I could be out front in half an hour.”

“Will you?”

She smiled then. She nodded.

“My name’s Marcia.”

“I’m glad,” he said.

At dinner, in a restaurant she would never have found by herself, she studied him through the candlelight. His hands were smooth. His accent was Middle American.

“You looked familiar when you came up to me,” she said. “I’ve seen you around somewhere before. In fact, now that I think back on it, I believe you passed my counter several times today.”

“Probably,” he said, filling her wineglass.

“What do you do, Brad?”

“Nothing,” he said.

She laughed.

“Doesn’t sound very interesting.”

He smiled again.

“What I mean to say is that I am devoting myself to enjoying this year, not working.”

“Why is that?”

“I can afford it, and it’s a very good year.”

“In what way is it special?”

He leaned back, laced his fingers, looked at her across them.

“There are no wars going on anywhere, for a change,” he finally said. “No civil unrest either. The economy is wonderfully stable. The weather is beautiful.” He raised his glass and took a sip. “There are some truly excellent vintages available. All of my favorite shows and movies are playing. Science is doing exciting things—in medicine, in space. A flock of fine books has been published. There are so many places to go, things to do this year. It could take a lifetime.” He reached out and touched her hand. “And I’m in love,” he finished.

She blushed.

“You hardly know me...”

“... And I have that to look forward to, also—getting to know you.”

“You *are* very strange,” she said.

“But you will see me again...”

“If it’s going to be that king of year,” she said, and she squeezed his hand.

She saw him regularly for a month before she quit her job and moved in with him. They dined well, they traveled often...

She realized, one evening in Maui near the end of the year, that she was in love with him.

“Brad,” she said, clasping him tightly, “this spring it seemed more like a game than anything else...”

“And now?”

“Now it’s special.”

“I’m glad.”

On New Year’s Eve, they went to dinner at a place he knew in Chinatown. She leaned forward over the chicken fried rice.

“That man,” she said, “at the corner table to the right.. .”

“Yes?”

“He looks a lot like you.” Brad glanced over, nodded.

“You know, I still don’t know you very well.”

“But we know each other better.”

“Yes, that’s true. But—Brad, that man coming out of the restroom.. .”

He turned his head.

“He looks like you, too.”

“He does.”

“Strange... I mean, I don’t even know where you get your money.”

“My family,” he said, “always had a lot.”

She nodded.

“I see... Two more! Those men who just came in!”

“Yes, they look like me, too.”

She shook her head.

“Then you really never had to work?”

“On the contrary. I’m a scientist. Bet I could have had the Nobel Prize.”

She dished out some sweet-and-sour pork. Then she paused, eyes wide, head turned again.

“Brad, it *has* to be more than coincidence. There’s *another* you!”

“Yes,” he said, “I always dine here on New Year’s Eve.”

She laid down her fork. She paled.

“You’re a biologist,” she said, “aren’t you? And you’ve cloned yourself? Maybe you’re not even the original...”

He laughed softly.

“No, I’m a physicist,” he said, “and I’m not a clone. It *has* been a very good year, hasn’t it?”

She smiled gently. She nodded.

“Of course it has,” she said. “You say you *always* dine here on New Year’s Eve?”

“Yes. The same New Year’s Eve. This one.”

“Time travel?”

“This has been such a good year that I have resolved to live it over, and over, and over—for the rest of my life.”

Two couples entered the restaurant. She looked back.

“That’s us!” she said. “And the second couple looks a lot older—but they’re us, too!”

“Yes, this is where I first saw you. I had to find you after that. We looked so happy.”

“Why have we never met any of them before?”

“I keep a diary. We’ll go to different places each time around. Except for New Year’s Eve...”

She raked her lower lip once with her teeth.

“Why—Why keep repeating it?” she finally asked.

“It’s been such a very good year,” he said.

“But what comes after?”

He shrugged.

“Don’t ask me.”

He turned and smiled at the older couple, who had nodded toward them.

“I think they’re coming over. Perhaps we can buy them a drink. Isn’t she lovely?”