



FRIENDS  
through  
THICK  
wallets—and  
THIN

» I'M RUSHING TO meet a friend for dinner, a friend I almost lost to either my envy of her affluence or her refusal to make reparations for my lack of it, depending on which of us you asked. For years I've been admiring, begrudging, adoring and resenting her, while battling my own pettiness.

She and her husband have season tickets to a lecture series; when he doesn't want to go, she invites me. Great seats, always, and a jousting match about where to go for dinner beforehand—always. Sometimes she holds her nose and eats five-buck burritos or Thai food with me; sometimes I swallow hard and pony up my \$50 share of a yummy yuppie meal.

Now it's 2009 and we have a brand-new economy, which is to say, both of us have lost about one third of everything—her third, of course, far more substantial than mine. So when my friend called to invite me to tonight's reading, compassion lent me access to my

higher self. "I'm taking you out to dinner," I announced. "Wherever you want to go."

As I scurry down the street now, 10 minutes late to meet her at her favorite restaurant, I'm surprised to see her waiting outside. "This place is outrageously expensive," she declares. She takes my arm and steers me decisively to the falafel joint around the corner.

I watch my friend wincing, sipping her three-dollar glass of house red, and I'm suffused, suddenly, with pure, unfettered love for her. I have always wondered whether the class warfare between us covered up some deeper, unspoken discord. But now I see that the more financial woes the two of us have in common, the less our differences will pull us apart.

"How's that Zin?" I ask.

My friend swirls the swill in her glass. "2008," she says, "was a very good year."

She looks at me. I look at her. And we burst into laughter. —MEREDITH MARAN