

Brunch

Her footsteps faltered as she entered her parent's home and noted the quartet seated on the patio. She caught her mother's eye who was in the kitchen with the chef and housekeeper and pressed her lips together.

"I didn't know Odin was coming to brunch today or he was bringing guests."

"Me either and it's been f*****g delightful," her mother guzzled a mimosa and then started making a second one while the housekeeper Mary huffed her agreement of the woman's sarcastic snarl. "Anderson is drunk already I think, and Cruz hasn't said two syllables however your father and Odin were bickering about money. I came in here to try to get a good buzz before I go back out there. Join me?"

She giggled at her mom's words and then accepted the offered drink, "bottoms up." She took a long drink and then smacked her lips together, "delicious."

"Thanks. I told your father if I needed to put up with the bullshit out there, I was opening the champagne he was saving for our anniversary."

"Fair deal."

They clinked glasses.

"How is the new book?" her mother asked leaning her hip on the counter.

"Fantastic." Especially with the new cover design she was drafting. She'd found a photo of Cruz Hawley on a rugby fan site after he'd ripped his shirt off after his team scored a try. It was being heavily edited of course but she couldn't wait to send him a copy when it was released. "My editor is doing the nal editing now and it'll be released in ten days."

"I can't wait to read it."

She giggled. "Daddy will be upset. He doesn't like my books."

"He appreciates your art, he simply doesn't want to read what you've written." Her mother leaned sideways, "looks like your father is beckoning. Shall we?"

"If we must," she laughed. She walked ahead of her mother onto the patio and smiled at her father who was seated at the head of the table, "hi Daddy." She plunked on his lap and kissed his cheek. "I missed you for lunch Friday. You stood me up."

"You stood your own daughter up?" Odin immediately jumped on it, "were you f*****g your secretary or something?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact I was." Her father retorted bluntly. "Scarlett has adjusted her practice and has been covering off for my admin assistant who is on maternity leave. She and I opted to play hooky on Friday and spent the entire day in bed."

"Ew Dad, don't say such things when I'm sitting on your lap." Presley got off her father's lap as he chuckled. "Gross."

Her mother squeezed her shoulder laughing, "as if you're a prude."

"Are you kidding? I've spent my entire life walking into rooms with my hands over my eyes praying to God I don't see esh not intended for my vision," she scoffed. She avoided the furious gaze of the man sitting opposite the chair she took next to her mom.

"When do you leave for your trip, P?" her father asked as he leaned back while the housekeeper began setting the table.

"You're going away? With whose money?" Odin asked her and shot a look at Cruz. "Where are you going?"

She almost laughed at how stupid they were. As if she couldn't read them now and knew they'd be trying to sabotage her vacation. "Yes. I'm going on a well-deserved vacation. I've not enjoyed a true day off work in nearly eighteen months. It's due."

"What do you do?" Anderson asked.

Her father slowly turned his head to Anderson as if he was nuts, "you don't know what she does? You've known her since her birth, your sister is her best friend, and you don't know what she does?"

"She's not my sister, Mr. Brookmore." Anderson defended himself and shot a glare at Odin who gave a shrug. "Even he doesn't know what she does."

"Because he's a selsh, narcissistic prick who thinks he's the only one who matters in this family," Presley said bluntly and watched her brother's ngers curl around his fork. "Usually, our forced meals have to do with Dad releasing more of Odin's trust for another scheme he's concocting or belittling me or mom. He's only here because if he fails to make appearances, he doesn't get his monthly allowance. He can't survive without Daddy's money. However, he was here two weeks ago, and Dad released his stipend the same day, so I'm really curious as to why we're blessed twice in a month for his lovely appearance." She nally shot a glance at Cruz and noted his eyes were focused entirely on her. Interesting.

"Presley enough," her father admonished. "Play nice."

"Last time I was here, he locked me in the pantry after you and Mom left for your golf game. I was forced to break the doorknob off to get out. Quite sure it's not me you need to tell to play nice. It's the fth grader I share blood with." She gave a snarling smile of her own at Odin before turning to Anderson, "I'm a New York Times best selling author with ve number one stories in the last seven years."

"As if!" Odin folded his arms over his chest. "I would know if you were on the New York Times bestseller list."

"Why would you know? You barely know how to scratch your balls let alone read a book you buffoon." She looked up to the housekeeper with big smile, "oh Mary, this looks delightful. Thank you so much." She caught the woman's hand and kissed her knuckles.

"You spoil me."

"I do. Also, I received my birthday present, Presley. Thank you so much. I love it."

"I'm glad."

"It was your birthday, Mary?" Odin asked. "What did the loser gift you?"

"Miss Presley bought tickets for me and my sister to see Neil Diamond in concert."

"Neil Diamond?"

"You know, Sweet Caroline, Love on the Rocks, Forever in Blue Jeans?" Presley stared at her brother with disdain. "Mary used to play it all the time while she was cleaning your messes, dumbass."

"Huh, I don't remember."

"Because it wasn't about you," Presley muttered as she lifted a slice of thick cut bacon and put it between her lips. "Oh my god, cooked to perfection." She caught the eye of the man sitting across from her who lifted an eyebrow at her moaning. "Come on. You can't tell you don't appreciate a perfectly cooked piece of bacon. It's not chewy but not burnt. It's perfectly crisp."

"You're weird." Anderson mumbled.

"You would know weird, freakshow," she shot back wondering when Cruz was going to join in the fun and games of insulting her. He was instead simply staring her down across the table. She waved bacon at him, "hey, Mr. Roboto, did someone forget to charge your battery last night? Do you need a factory reset?"

"No."

She shrugged but before she could retort her phone rang. She pulled it from her purse and smiled widely, "oh it's Marsha."

"Wait," Odin lunged forward in his seat. "My mother Marsha?"

"I don't know a bunch of Marsha's idiot." She answered, "Hey Marsha. I'm with Mom and Dad. Your waste of a space son is here too. What can I do for you?"

"Hey Presley. Hi Gavin, Hi Scarlett. Hi, my sweet Odin. Are you having brunch?"

"We are," Scarlett leaned over Presley's arm to talk into the phone. "You should be here. I made the best mimosas. They are going down like juice."

"You're drinking because Odin's there," Marsha called her out with a laugh. "I wish I could be there but unfortunately, I'm stuck waiting on a delivery. I'm a hundred percent sure the freak across the hall is stealing my packages."

"Ugh, that's the worst," Presley commiserated. "What can I do for you then?"

"Well, I'm calling to ask instead of coming in person, since I'm stuck here, if you wouldn't mind doing me a huge favor."

"Morn!" Odin cut into the conversation, "why are you calling Presley to do favors for you?"

"Because she's sweet, loving and kind and I like her, and we work in the same building, so we have lunch together multiple times a month." Marsha responded, "anyway, Presley honey, I know you're heading out on your exotic vacation soon but I'm wondering if you have time to meet someone with me. She's a huge fan."

She made eyes at her mom and a big smile stole her cheeks, "really?"

"Yes. I was telling her this morning."

"This morning?" Scarlett squealed. "You saw her this morning. How early this morning?"

"Would you stop? Gavin, control your wife," Marsha called out laughing.

"As if," Gavin laughed back.

"What time was she there?" Presley and her mother were both holding the phone ignoring Odin's growls.

"We ate breakfast together and she saw my autographed copy of Rogue Deserter and asked where I got it. I told her I have the entire autographed collection, and she was so excited. Maybe, she can join us for lunch tomorrow?"

"Yes! I'll be thrilled."

"You'll be honest with me after you meet her though?"

"Marsha. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks. If you like her, it's all which matters."

"Bullshit." Marsha laughed at the patronizing words from Presley. "Your mom and I told you straight up the guy from the spin class was a t*t and you liked him until we said it. The opinion of family matters."

"True."

"She isn't your family!" Odin hissed. "Her mother stole your husband!"

"Odin don't be rude. It was twenty-six years ago. I'm over it. You should be too. I've moved on."

Anderson cut in, "Marsha are you gay?"

The entire table was silent at the rude question.

"She's not gay. I would know if my mother was gay," Odin snapped.

"Odin, perhaps when you're done brunch you can pop over for a visit and we can chat while I wait for my parcel. Presley, I'll see you in the lobby of the building at noon tomorrow?"

"Sounds great. Bye."

Odin was glowering at Scarlett, "you're friends with my mom?"

"Yes."

Presley looked to her father, and he was watching the interchange carefully.

"Why?" Odin barked the question.

"Because she's a great person and I like her." Scarlett shrugged.

"You f****d her husband and got knocked up. It broke her heart, and she never dated again. She's been alone all this time."

"Odin," Gavin spoke quietly, "maybe you need to ask yourself why your mother is more comfortable talking to us than she is to you. I promised your mother this would not be my conversation to have with you and you're not going to push the girls to get answers which are not ours to share. When brunch is nished, go visit your mom and talk to her."

"I don't understand why she would be conding in this b***h -"

"Enough!" Presley slapped her hand on the table before her father lost his temper and ended up punching Odin. It happened more than once in the last ten years. "You selsh turd ball. You've spent nearly three decades blaming me and mom for something your puny little mind could never understand. You're so narrow minded and self-absorbed it blows my mind how someone as sweet and loving as Marsha or as kind as Daddy could have produced such an elephant-sized pile of dung such as you." She got up from the table. "I need a minute, Daddy. Excuse me" She leaned sideways and kissed both her mother and father's cheek, throwing her napkin over her seat, and stomping away.