

CHAPTER 005: Breakfast News

~~Julie~~

Ugh, my head feels like it weighs a thousand pounds.

I crack my eyes open and glance around. I'm in my living room, but I can't for the life of me remember how I got home last night.

Shit, Ryan's car.

I scramble to the window, heart racing, and peek outside. There it is, still parked in the driveway. Thank God. Ryan would have been so pissed if I'd wrecked it.

I need a shower. And denitely a toothbrush. My mouth tastes like something died in it.

I drag myself upstairs, but as soon as I push open the master bedroom door, I freeze. Emily is on top of Ryan, both of them completely naked, moving in sync. Their panting lls the room.

I scream.

Emily yelps and tumbles off him, scrambling to cover herself.

"Jesus Christ, Julie," Ryan mutters, sitting up and glaring at me. "Ever heard of knocking?"

I want to tell him I've never had to knock in my own house, let alone my own bedroom, but what's the point? "I just came to grab my things."

"It's already done," Emily snaps. "Everything you own is in the guest room."

I nod stiy and close the door. If I stay in this hallway a second longer, I might decide to walk back in there with a knife. So I climb down the stairs slowly, counting down from ten. You've got this, Julie. You're doing great.

When I get to the guest room, I see Emily's handiwork. My things are scattered everywhere—on the oor, on the bed, like some chaotic display of disrespect. I'm too tired and hungry to deal with it now.

In the shower, I let the hot water wash over me, willing it to cleanse the pain of yesterday, today, and whatever fresh hell tomorrow brings. The sound of the water is like white noise, drowning out the sobs I refuse to let out. I won't cry for Ryan. I won't cry for Emily.

"Martha?" I call, heading into the kitchen where our cook is busy with breakfast.

"Good morning, ma'am," Martha says, glancing over. "Hope you slept well?"

"Like a baby," I lie. "I'm starving, though."

"I'll bring your food in a moment. Please, take a seat."

A few minutes later, she sets a plate in front of me, and I blink, surprised. Just a few pieces of lettuce and some sad-looking greens.

"Where's the rest of it?" I ask, lifting an eyebrow.

"The new missus says we're no longer allowed to cook high-calorie meals," Martha explains, looking nervous. "I told her you had a meal plan, but Mr. O'Brien said I'd lose my job if I didn't follow Ms. Emily's orders."

Of course. The little snake is starting a war. First, she takes my husband. Now, she's messing with my kitchen. Game on.

"That's ne, Martha. You're just doing your job."

I stare at the plate of greens, my stomach growling. I force a bite down, trying not to gag. It's no wonder Emily's so tiny—she eats like a rabbit. I try to nish it out of respect for Martha, but every bite feels like torture.

My mind drifts back to last night. Should I call Luke? How are we even supposed to pull off this fake boyfriend plan?

I grab my phone and shoot him a quick text, saving his number under Luke Escort. "Hi, it's the drunk rich lady from last night. Just letting you know I got home safely, and no scratches on the car. I'll be in touch about our plan. Cheers."

I hit send.

Within seconds, his reply comes in. "Who?"

Oh, my god. He doesn't remember me. Now that's awkward.

But then he sends, "Kidding. I'll keep my ngers crossed, Julie."

Ugh. He's insufferable.

Just then, I hear footsteps on the stairs. Ryan and Emily appear, hand in hand, looking smug.

"Good morning, Julie!" Emily chirps, smiling too brightly. Her teeth look expensive. "How was breakfast?"

I return her smile. "Delicious. Exactly what I needed. You're right, we should all be eating like New Yorkers—everyone's so tiny these days, they might start building smaller doors."

Emily giggles, clearly missing my sarcasm. "That's so true, Julie! Martha, we're ready for our breakfast too."

Martha brings them the same sad plate of greens she gave me. I smirk as Ryan takes a bite and immediately struggles not to spit it out.

"You like it, babe?" Emily asks.

Ryan nods, chewing reluctantly. "Yeah, it's... nice."

Perfect. Now, time to give him something else to choke on.

"You know," I say, leaning back in my chair, "I've been doing a lot of thinking. I realize I gave you a hard time, Ryan. You didn't deserve that."

He glances at me warily, sensing something's off.

"You're my husband," I continue, keeping my tone sweet. "And everyone's entitled to their desires, even if they don't make sense. So, I've decided I'm fully on board with this arrangement."

Ryan doesn't look comfortable. After all these years, he knows when I'm bullshitting.

But Emily does not. She seems genuinely relieved. "That's great to hear, Julie! I mean, humans were never meant to be monogamous."

"Is that so?" I say, raising an eyebrow.

"Denitely. From the beginning of time, our ancestors were explorers."

Right. Biology lessons from the woman sleeping with my husband. Fascinating.

"Exactly why I've decided to do some exploring myself," I say, watching their faces closely. "I've found myself a boyfriend."

Ryan freezes, fork halfway to his mouth. Emily's smile falters.

"Boyfriend?" Ryan asks, his voice tight.

I grin, enjoying the moment. "That's right, honey. I gure it's only fair. If you're going to explore, so am I."