

OVERHEARD AT BREAKFAST OUT

By Nancy Martz

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"This is freaking rank, Mother. She's just jacked up because you raised her to think she was the center of the universe. Why are you like surprised when people outside the family won't put up with her attitude?"

"Keep your voice down! Do you want everyone to hear how disrespectful you are?"

I glanced up and met eyes with the girl in the next booth. I quickly looked down at my plate of sourdough toast and remnants of egg-over-medium. Obviously, she was the daughter, a teen according to her vocabulary and her wardrobe of kaki overalls with double green and yellow halter tops underneath. Her blonde hair was pulled around to her left and she flipped it behind. Her face was a bit broken out, and she had done her best to cover the red bumps around her mouth and chin with bronzing powder. She wore no lipstick, but her blue eyes were heavily lined and shadowed in navy and silver.

I could see the back of the mother who had short ash blonde hair pulled behind her ears and was wearing small silver hoop earrings and a light blue sleeveless silk blouse with tiny pearl buttons at the back of the neckline. She was slim and square shouldered, like her daughter, and I could see that her bare arms were tan and muscled when she lifted her glass of ice tea.

I took a sip of coffee and stared at the ceramic box of packaged fruit jams on my table to avoid the daughter's eyes as the mother sniped angrily in a lowered voice that was nevertheless distinct and audible.

"You've always been jealous of Leah. I know you sabotaged your sister's friendship with Emma. Even that homely Mikayla acts distant to her, and Sophie never calls her anymore. You think I don't know you're behind it?"

"Oh, Mother, please spare me. I've tried to help her make friends, but sooner or later she disses everybody. It's like she's always drinking haterade. Why don't you quit blaming me and think about how you raised her?"

"Karma, how dare you speak in such tones to me and with such viciousness!"

"You always want me to say, 'My bad,' Mother. Leah loves it when you treat me this way and take her side. Don't you know she laughs behind your back!"

The waiter came to see if I needed a coffee refill or anything else and wanted to clear my table. I missed the mother's response when I told the waiter I wanted to keep my toast, only picking up the low growl of vowels without consonants from their booth. The mother suddenly stood up, grabbed the check and motioned roughly to her daughter, who sighed heavily and stood as well.

As they passed, the mother glanced at me, and I sucked in a breath. I smiled weakly and looked at my purse, hoping she wouldn't reprimand me for being accidentally within earshot.

They left the building and walked past the windows, and I saw the mother's mouth moving rapidly and the daughter's face reddening before they disappeared around the corner to the parking lot.

I tried for a few seconds to predict what the mother was saying but noticed a sharp pain in my shoulder. I guess I had been shrugging stiffly during the whole experience. I spread some strawberry jam over my remaining toast. But then a sadness crept in, and I thought to just go home.