

bad girls club

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I lean over the table so my father will know I'm talking to him. "If I start work right after school gets out, I can probably buy a car by the end of the summer, Daddy. Isn't that a good thing?" I clench my teeth, hoping it wasn't the wrong thing to say, but once the words leave my mouth, I know it was.

Dad stares at me. "I can buy you a car. And you can help your mother. That's your job, and I don't want you to forget it and go off on some stupid idea. We're a family. We look out for each other. But you seem to drift, Destiny."

"The Edmonds' Arts Festival is coming up," Mom says, as if she's missed the whole conversation. She leans over the table and goes on and on about the festival—how she's going to get a booth and sell her painting of Aunt Leena. I sit there with my mouth open because I can't believe my parents.

"And Destiny could help you with the festival. Right?" Dad's eyebrows go up, his signal to me that I'd better agree.

“It’s June 24th,” Mom says.

I put down my fork and turn to my father. “I wanted to get a job for the summer, and if I don’t get one in June, they’ll be hard to find, Daddy. Chloe got hired at that Mail Depot place over on 196th, and she thinks she can get me in too. Can’t Grandma come help Mom instead of me? I always help her.”

My words come out so fast they sound like I’m a zillion atoms of electrical energy gone berserk. I catch myself and calm my pounding heart, because I don’t want them knowing how much it means to me.

2

Dad makes a fist, but he catches himself and puts his hand on his lap. “Grandma? Why would we ask your grandmother to drive all the way up here from Olympia?” His voice becomes more powerful as he speaks. “It takes her over two hours to get here with all that traffic. And by the time she gets here, she’s in a bad mood. Then she’ll want to drag you and Cassidy to the mall for half a day. You know how she upsets your mother.” His face is red with anger when he stops speaking.

Mom nods her head in agreement, and I can see from the look in her eyes that there’s no way she wants my grandmother around.

Cassidy pulls her little body into a ball like a potato bug.

“There will come a day when your mother

is gone, and you'll look back and regret the things you didn't do. You only get one mother, Destiny."

They take off on a discussion about my grandmother, cutting her into bite-sized little pieces as they speak. I wonder what in the world Grandma did that's so bad, but I think that—whatever it was—I will love her all the more for it.

I try to ignore them, but they chatter on in the background. I scan the room and finally end up staring at the window. The early evening sun filters through the mini-blinds, forming a stairway of brilliant white lines across the dining room wall. I wish that I could climb onto one of those sunbeams and ride away. If I could, I'd take my sister, and we'd never come back.

I turn and look at my family. "Can we change the subject and talk about something else?"

The angry expression on Mom's face says maybe not. "Like what, Destiny?"

Cassidy's eyes grow big as half-dollars when she hears Mom's tone of voice. We can both see that if someone doesn't start plugging the holes real soon, Mom's going to start leaking all over the place. Dad doesn't even notice; he takes another bite of steak and stares out the window. He's oblivious to the fact that we're taking on water.

"Chloe and I want to go camping at Deception Pass State Park with some of the other girls next

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weekend. Can we talk about that for a minute?" I make my voice emotionless so Mom won't know how much I want to go, but she sits there fidgeting in her chair, as she chews on her fingernails and spits the pieces on the floor like a truck driver. I can't stand it when she does that.

"That's not safe! There are perverts running around looking for girls just like you," she says sharply.

"I don't think there are guys riding around looking for girls in state parks. That's why they have park rangers."

"You're not going. Especially since you have that boyfriend now."

"Joshua isn't my boyfriend."

"If you ride in his car, he's your boyfriend."

I toss my napkin on the table, and it lands on top of my water glass. "That's not fair! Chloe's mom is going to be there, just three campsites away. There aren't any boys coming. Let me go!"

Mom gets out of her chair and stands over me. "You are NOT going. Do you hear me? I am your mother. You'll do what I say." When I don't answer her, she takes her seat. But I sit there with tears pouring down my face.

Cassidy reaches over and grabs the butter, but she gets so close I can see the fading yellow bruises on her forehead. Her elbow falls in my plate, spotting her cotton shirt. She lets out a groan, pulls

her arm away, and rubs the stain desperately, as if she can make it disappear. I hear her exhale as she draws as far back into her chair as she can. She pulls up her legs and buries her face in her knees to protect herself.

“Look what you’ve done!” Mom stands, pushes back her chair, and points a finger at Cassidy. The veins on her forehead stick out like they’re going to blow wide open. “If you were careful, you wouldn’t make messes like that. How many times have I told you that this is not a boarding house? Who do you think I am? Your maid?”

My arm automatically goes around Cassidy’s shoulder. I lean my body in close, but Mom reaches behind her, grabs a towel from the counter, and throws it in my sister’s face. I quickly pull it off.

Dad comes to. “June, it’s no big deal. Take a deep breath and relax.” He points to her chair as if it is a destination worth visiting.

Mom stands there and defies him; the look on her face tells him not to suggest what she should or should not do. “You don’t have a clue, Bob. You’ve never done laundry, so what the hell do you think you’re talking about? Do you know how hard it is to get out tomato sauce?” Her voice cracks as she speaks, but with each word it becomes louder, until it reaches its peak. “I can’t spend my whole life GETTING OUT THOSE DAMNED STAINS!”

She pounds her fists on the table as she screams at the top of her lungs. Cassidy whimpers and silently prays to the darkness in her lap.

In an instant, I'm on my feet. "Don't scream at Cassidy. I'll take care of it so you won't have to." I use the dishtowel to wipe at the stain on my sister's arm to show my mother that I'll fix it.

Mom reaches over and pushes me as hard as she can. I grab onto the table for support, but I fall backward in my chair, hitting my arm on the side. "Mother! I was trying to help."

"You can help me by shutting up," she yells.

Before I can speak, Mom goes to the cupboard, pulls her medicine from the shelf, and swallows two pills while we all sit there staring at her.

I open my mouth to speak, but Dad interrupts me.

"Are your pills working better, June?" he asks.

I can't believe he's that stupid.

Mom bursts into tears, but she covers her pain with a forced smile, wipes the tears from her cheeks, and sits back down at the table.

I try to hold back my own tears, but they run down my face like a driving rain.

"Oh, yeah, they're working real well, Bob. I'm particularly enjoying the memory loss and the confusion. The constipation is nice, too."

I pull my chair closer to Cassidy and put my arm around her back. Dad shakes his head at

Mom. He does it so quickly that I would have missed it if I hadn't been watching closely. Mom gets his signal and picks up her fork like there's nothing wrong with her at all.

"You're going to find something that works good, Mom. I know you are," I say in my most optimistic voice as I wipe tears from my face.

Dad stuffs a piece of steak in his mouth and nods, but when he speaks, his voice is cool. "Please don't jump into our conversation, Destiny. It's really rude. In fact, you do that a lot, and I want you to stop."

He takes another bite and then turns to see if I have understood. I don't dare speak.

Mom sits back in her chair and glares at me. Her hands shake, slowly at first, but then faster and faster until the table vibrates. When she sees me looking at them, she clasps them together, finally pulling them under the table. My breathing comes faster, and my head feels like it's going to burst.

Mom's eyes meet mine, and she turns away. Cassidy snatches a strand of hair and starts pulling until she yanks it from her head. She drops it to the floor and seizes another clump. I pull her hand away and hold it in my lap.

"Come on, June. Let's go rest for a little bit. You did a lot today, and you always get stressed when things build up. The girls are out of line. Let

me help you to bed.”

All my muscles tense. I want to tell him that he’s wrong. She’s the one who’s out of line. He always blames us, and I’m tired of it. I open my mouth to speak, but I say nothing.

Dad gets up and hugs her, but she pulls away from him. She picks up her fork and stares at it as she turns it in circles.

“I’m OK, Bob. Don’t treat me like a baby in front of the girls.” Tears stream from the corner of her eyes down to her neck, and her hands shake so hard that the glasses on the table rattle.

“Isn’t this just great? I try to keep everything together, but it always gets messed up. I have this show coming up, and it really stresses me out. Destiny wants to run off to some state park where all the perverts are running around looking for young girls. Cassidy won’t stop staining her clothes. And you’re trying to get to my trust money, Bob.”

“June!”

“Well, it’s true. You think Destiny doesn’t know? She’s not deaf.”

She’s right. I hear more than I admit. I know what they fight about. I know a lot of their dirty little secrets.

“Stop it this minute!” Dad yells.

“How am I supposed to handle all this plus clean, cook, and do laundry? How am I supposed

to keep everything under control when the rest of you are working against me? On top of that, my idiot psychiatrist keeps feeding me those freaking pills, so I'm asleep more than I'm awake, and half the time I can't even think straight."

"Mom, I think that he's really trying..."

Before I can finish, she gives me a glare. I shut my mouth.

She bursts into tears when she sees her trembling hands. "Don't stare at me like that, you imbeciles!" she screams. "I'm not some sideshow freak for you to gawk at. Do you hear me?"

"You'll be just fine, June. Really you will."

"Oh, shut up, you fool. You don't know your head from your ass. My whole body is shaking, and you're standing there telling me that everything will be fine. I know it won't be fine! It doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure that out."

She pushes her chair back so it falls on the floor with a crash. My head feels like it's going to blow open, and Cassidy begins crying. I throw my arm around her back and pull her as close as I can. My tears fall on my sister's head and disappear into her hair. Mom walks to the door and glares back at all of us. When we don't speak, she bangs her head against the door molding. She keeps pounding and smashing her head against the wood until blood runs down her face, and Dad runs over and pulls her back. He drags her from the kitchen, but

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she kicks and screams all the way down the hall.

“You bastards are driving me crazy,” she yells.
“Do you hear me? You’re driving me right over
the edge! I know what you’re up to, and you won’t
get away with it!”