

Family's kinda quaint—that's been applying to a lot of places here—and looks a bit out of place with all that grass around it, a house in front and one on the left and the right, but well away as to make the diner feel out of place. There's a gravel lot in front with just enough space to park five cars, but there isn't one, even if more than three quarters of the tables and booths I can see through that windowed wall are occupied.

I guess when your town's not even half a mile wide in any direction, walking everywhere in it is the norm.

The building looks old, but well maintained. Red brick, with a sign over the door just saying 'Family's'.

"Grab a seat wherever you want," a portly man says from behind the counter as he feels a coffee cup. "Be with you in a minute. Steak and eggs' the special this morning."

Tristan scans the room while Emil heads for a booth.

With Tristan satisfied there are no threats he can't handle—I don't think those even exist—we join him. Emil sat with his back to the door, which means Tristan can watch it. I go in first, then he sits. Emil slides to the left slightly, and I look over my shoulder for the reason. From his new position, he can see the back door between our shoulders.

He is definitely taking after Tristan.

"Coffee," I tell the man as he steps to the table. "Black and hot."

Tristan shoots me a look as the man places glasses of water before us, but I ignore it. I haven't had coffee since we arrived in this town. If he doesn't want me to explore, he will let me have this.

"I'll have one too," Emil says, looking over the one laminated page that is the menu. "With that, I'll take the steak and egg special, a side of waffles with strawberry jam, the side of toast, a bowl of oatmeal, and the fruit salad dish."

"Need all that energy to keep growing?" the man asks with a chuckle as he writes this down on a paper notepad.

Emil's expression darkens, but before he can point out he's nineteen to someone else, Tristan catches his attention with a minute shake of the head. Now isn't the time to make a scene.

"Something like that," Emil replies, all smiles, when the man looked up from his pad.

"What about you?" he asks me.

"The steak and egg with a side toast will do."

"Water will be fine," Tristan says when the man looks at him.

I elbow him gently. "Come on, he's running a business. Eat something. It won't kill you." I reply to his threatening look with an innocent smile.

"Eggs," Tristan says, "poached. No salt or peppers."

"Eggs, as boring as they get, got it." He writes it and leaves.

"What's the plan?" Emil asks.

"Supervising the repairs," Tristan states while I look at my phone and frown at the lonely Wi-Fi spot that registers at one bar, still bearing the model's manufacturing number.

"I need to find Wi-Fi," I say. "Any internet cafe around here?" I ask our host as he places cups of black Ambrosia before me and Emil.

"Gigi's and Sunshine should have that."

My reply is interrupted by the taste of whatever is in my cup and my attempt at not

spitting it out.

“Something wrong?” he asks, concerned.

I force it out. “Hot,” I reply, watching Emil put his down after his sip.

“You did ask for it that way.”

I smile at him. “Still took me by surprise.”

He nods and returns behind the counter, taking a plate from the service window and taking it to an older man at the end.

Emil takes another sip from his cup, after dumping three sugars and two creamers in it. “That makes it tolerable,” he has the gall to tell me.

“Emil, if you need to alter coffee in any way,” I inform him, “it wasn’t coffee to start with.” I hope they aren’t all supplied from the same place in this town, because I cannot go four days without coffee.

He shrugs.

I look at Tristan. “So, just going to sit in the garage and watch someone work on your RV?”

“I’ll assist if he offers, but I don’t expect he will.”

“He’s actually asking if you’re planning on going around the town looking for ‘something to do’,” Emil says.

“I do not go looking for ‘things to do’,” Tristan says, surprising us both by mimicking the air-quotes.

“What do you call investigating my neighbors?” I ask.

“Or the people living around the garage?” Emil adds.

“Establishing proper security. Which isn’t required here—” he stops and I look to see our host taking a tray of plates, and bring it to us.

I’m surprise he doesn’t just put the tray before Emil for him to pass the one plate and one bowl that aren’t his.

“Enjoy,” he says, leaving with the tray.

“So long as we do not attract undue attention, there will be no need to establish a security perimeter for the short time we will be here.”

“Undue attention,” I say, cutting up the steak. “Two guys with a kid, one black, and one far too wealthy to travel with those two for legitimate reasons. It’s a wonder the sheriff isn’t here already.”

“I think the people around here are too nice to think of us that way,” Emil says.

“Ahh, the innocence of youth,” I reply wistfully. “If only I’d know it.”

Emil gives me the finger.

“And what will you be doing, son of mine?” I ask. “Going to help Jude with her duties?”

He looks at Tristan, who is slowly cutting his poached eggs.

“I don’t have restrictions on your movement beyond what I’ve already stated.”

“I might. I already asked what there is to do here, and there isn’t much. No theater, no library. There’s the baseball field behind the highschool, but that’s not really my thing. I might just hang out with dad and see if Ralf will teach me some things.”

“Be sure you aren’t bothering him,” Tristan states, still cutting his eggs.

I peer into the bowl. "I think they're dead," I whisper. "It's time to eat them."
He locks eyes with me and forks a piece, brings it to his mouth, and purposefully chews.

I pat his cheek and beams. "I am so proud of you."

Emils groans. "You're going to keep me awake all night, aren't you?"

"Ear plugs," I whisper to him, grinning. "Ear plugs."

He glares at me and gives me the finger, again.