

Lunch

by

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FADE IN:

INT. CAR - DAY

NATALIE RHODES (24), an olive-skinned brunette with warm brown eyes is driving her blue Volkswagen Jetta through the streets of MANHATTAN. Her hair is swept up in a messy ponytail, and she is dressed very modestly; wearing plain blue jeans and a regular t-shirt. She is sitting uncomfortably in her seat.

JAMES ASHMORE (25), sits next to her in the passenger seat. He is handsome, with green eyes and a clean-shaven face. He is wearing a white buttondown, the first few buttons undone with studied casualness. He notices Natalie's hands gripping tighter on the steering wheel.

JAMES

Nat, relax. It's going to be great.

NATALIE

Your mother hates me. She referred to my jacket as "frumpy" last time I saw her. After she meets my mother, she'll *really* hate me.

JAMES

(laughing)

My mother is just a country club woman from a strict upbringing. She is just very set in her ways.

NATALIE

Ugh.

JAMES

You want to marry me, right?

NATALIE

Right.

JAMES

Well I want to marry you. And I fell in love with you for you, not for how much money your family makes. So smile and relax. My mother loves weddings. She almost died on the phone when I told her. She'll be in a good mood as well. She loves lunch. So she'll love your mother.

NATALIE

What about your father?

JAMES

He will too. He's been a lot nicer about things ever since he had that surgery a bunch of years back.

NATALIE

What surgery?

JAMES

I was five years old. He got some sort of kidney failure disease, which made him really sick. My mother told me it came out of no where. Anyways, the steroids and medication weren't working, and the doctors told him the only way he would survive is if he had a kidney transplant.

NATALIE

(shocked)

Oh my god. So who gave him the kidney?

JAMES

(shrugging)

My family was freaked out by all the health risks that supposedly come along with donating a kidney, so they figured they'd pay a healthy donor to do it instead. Some guy did it. My parents never told me the name.

NATALIE

That's crazy.

JAMES

Yeah. Anyways, how did your mom react to the engagement news?

NATALIE

She was so happy! Ever since my dad passed, she's done nothing but talk about us getting married. She's definitely nervous about the cost, though.

James grabs Natalie's hand.

JAMES

I'm sorry your dad can't be here today, Nat. I'm sure he would be so proud of you.

(Natalie smiles.)

And don't worry about the finances, I'm sure my parents will be more than willing to help.

NATALIE

I love you.

JAMES

I love you, too.

(sarcastically.)

Now focus on driving, wouldn't want to miss this lunch.

NATALIE

(laughing)

You wish.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

James' parents, who picked out the restaurant, promptly sit at the head of the table when the hostess brings NATALIE and JAMES over. SANDRA ASHMORE (55), perfect posture, is sitting with a Chanel tweed suit. She has an extremely proper demeanor.

FRANK ASHMORE (57), is sitting next to Sandra. The MENU is in front of his face, and his only visible features are his salt-and-pepper hair and a pair of portable reading glasses on the bridge of his nose.

ELLEN RHODES (50), Natalie's mom, sits awkwardly at the table. She is also wearing plain jeans with white sneakers, nervously fidgeting with her watch. James looks at Natalie.

JAMES

(whispering to Natalie)

I guess they met already.

(to his parents)

Great. You've met Ellen. Good.

ELLEN smiles and gets up to hug her daughter and James. SANDRA nudges FRANK'S arm to get his attention. She gets up from the table and walks towards James, passed ELLEN, with her arms wide open.

SANDRA
James, my dear. So good to see
you.

SANDRA turns to hug NATALIE. Her cold embrace makes Natalie stiffen.

SANDRA (CONT'D)
Natalie. My future
daughter-in-law. A pleasure.

NATALIE smiles and nods. FRANK takes off his reading glasses and waves hello to NATALIE and JAMES as they sit down. JAMES squeezes NATALIE'S hand under the table, alleviating her anxiety.

SANDRA (CONT'D)
Hope you both were able to find
the place okay.

JAMES
We were, thanks.

NATALIE
(impressed)
Beautiful restaurant.

SANDRA
Have you been here before, Ellen?
They have excellent bisque.

ELLEN
I have not, it is nice though.

ELLEN picks up the MENU and begins to examine it. She notices that most of the menu is entirely in French, and she cannot understand it. While SANDRA and JAMES indulge in small talk, she leans over to Natalie to whisper in her ear.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
(whispering)
This restuarant is outrageous! I
don't understand anything on this
menu.

NATALIE
Me either.

ELLEN
All I want is a cheeseburger, do
you even think that's on here? I'd
be much more satisfied at the
Chili's down the road...

NATALIE
 (interrupting)
 Just try to find *something*,
 please.

SANDRA
 So, I guess a congratulations are
 in order.
 (lifting her water
 glass)
 I couldn't be happier that you two
 have decided to exchange wedding
 vows to each other.

JAMES
 Thanks, mom. We are really
 excited.

SANDRA
 Of course I have already made
 arrangements with the Bridal
 Boutique for you to pick out your
 dress, Natalie. When you're ready
 I have many thoughts as to where
 the wedding should be, who to
 invite. Oh, it will be lovely. We
 could do it at the Boat House in
 the club! Or perhaps in...

JAMES
 (interrupting)
 Mother. We *just* got engaged. Let
 us breathe a little.

NATALIE
 (hesitating)
 It all sounds lovely, Sandra. I
 have some ideas in mind as well.

SANDRA smiles at NATALIE for agreeing with her.

The WAITRESS comes over to take their orders. She has GUCCI SNEAKERS on. ELLEN notices her shoes as she walks up to their table. She sighs, looking down at her Target sneakers.

WAITRESS
 Hello, welcome to Cafe Panache.
 Can I get you all started with a
 couple of refreshments?

SANDRA
 (looking at the menu)
 Yes, I will have a glass of your
 house Pinot Noir.

WAITRESS
You got it. Sir?

She motions towards FRANK. He looks up from his menu.

FRANK
(chuckling)
Oh, no thank you. Gave up
drinking, unfortunately. Got that
new kidney to take care of.
(Motioning towards his
side.)
I'll just have a sparkling water
with lemon.

JAMES
I'll have a Heineken. Nat?

NATALIE
Margarita on the rocks is fine.
Mom?

ELLEN
Just a water, please.

WAITRESS
Sounds great. I'll take your
entree orders when I get back with
your drinks.

WAITRESS walks away. ELLEN is curious about FRANK'S remark
regarding his kidney, but decides to let it go.

SANDRA
So. Ellen. What do you do for a
living?

ELLEN
I am a secretary for Smith &
Associates. Law Firm.

SANDRA
Oh, well isn't that wonderful.

ELLEN
Yes, uh. I enjoy working there.

WAITRESS comes back with their drink orders. She gets out
her pad to start taking their entree orders. Everyone at
the table orders, one fancy phrasal of French words after
another. The last to order is ELLEN. She is nervous and
attempt to order.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
 Um. I will have the "Pootrine day
 Poolet Grill-ee."

SANDRA and FRANK look at ELLEN, confused by what she has just said.

WAITRESS
 (laughing)
 It's actually pronounced "Poutrine
 de Poulet Grillée."

ELLEN and NATALIE are embarrassed by Ellen's mistaken vocabulary. WAITRESS walks away to plug in their orders.

SANDRA
 Don't worry about it. We've gone
 to Paris many times. For years.
 You'll get the hang of it.

ELLEN
 (under her breath,
 sarcastically)
 Oh, I'm sure.

She looks at Natalie. Natalie's face reads "calm down mom."

ELLEN (CONT'D)
 So anyways. Frank, I noticed you
 said something about your kidney.
 I hope you don't mind me asking,
 but is everything okay?

FRANK
 Oh, yes. Very well. I had to have
 a kidney transplant a long time
 ago, so just have had to play it
 safe alcohol-wise since then. No
 big deal.

ELLEN looks startled. WAITRESS brings over their food.
 Everyone but ELLEN begins to eat.

ELLEN
 How many years ago was the
 surgery?

FRANK
 Hm, I think it will be about 20
 years this May. Been great ever
 since.

ELLEN

(curious)

Oh. Twenty years, huh? Well. I'm glad you recovered so well. Was your donor in the family?

NATALIE and JAMES look at each other, confused by all of ELLEN's questions.

FRANK

It was actually an outside donor. Some man living out of Northern New Jersey.

NATALIE

Oh, we used to live in North Jersey! I wonder if we would know him.

ELLEN's heart sinks. TEARS began welling in her eyes. She starts to pick up her things.

ELLEN

I, uh, have to excuse myself. I've suddenly fell ill, so I must go. I'm so sorry for skipping out on this lunch so quickly, it was so nice meeting all of you.

NATALIE

(startled)

Wait, mom. What? Why are you leaving?

FRANK

I'm sorry, Ellen. Did I say something that offended you?

ELLEN

I just have to go.

Leaving her food uneaten, she hurries out of the restaurant. NATALIE rushes to follow her.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESTAURANT - SAME TIME

NATALIE catches up to ELLEN, waiting outside for the valet service to bring her car.

ELLEN

Damn valet services take forever to bring your car when it costs less than fifteen thousand dollars.

NATALIE

(sighing)

Mom. What is wrong with you? Why were you asking Frank so many questions about his kidney transplant?

ELLEN looks at her daughter, then looks away.

ELLEN

You wouldn't understand, honey.

NATALIE

Try me. This was supposed to be a nice lunch. James and I are getting married and wanted you to meet his parents.

ELLEN's eyes begin filling with tears. She is speechless for a few moments. Natalie is frustrated.

ELLEN

(sniffling)

Ask the Ashmore's if they know David Rogers.

NATALIE

(angrily)

David Rogers? Who the *hell* is *David Rogers*?

The VALET comes back with ELLEN's CAR. It is 2006 champagne Toyota Avalon. She walks to the driver's side and opens the door.

ELLEN

Your father.

NATALIE

What? My father? But my last name isn't Rogers!

ELLEN

We changed our last name after..

She steps into the car before Natalie could react.

NATALIE

After? After what? Mom. How did
dad *actually* die?

ELLEN bursts into tears, and can no longer answer Natalie.
She drives away.

NATALIE attempts to run after the car, giving up after a
few seconds. She stands silently for a few minutes watching
her mother drive away. She begins to reflect on the series
of events leading up to her mother leaving lunch.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

(In her head)

What does my father have to do
with this?

She looks up, fearing what she thinks could be the truth.
Once she is able to collect herself, she walks back inside.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - SAME TIME

SANDRA sits back in her seat, startled by Ellen's offbeat
departure. She is bordering on offended. JAMES and FRANK
are puzzled, looking at each other.

JAMES

I should go after her. What do you
think happened?

SANDRA

(sarcastically)

I can't imagine what we could have
done wrong. We were being nothing
but cordial. Maybe she was too
overwhelmed by the upscale
ambiance of the restuarant...

JAMES

(angrily)

What the hell is that supposed to
mean?

FRANK

James, calm down. Your mother
simply means that Natalie's family
is a bit... well. Needy. Doesn't
mean they are bad people, just
stating observations.

SANDRA

Yes. Her appearance was a bit meager, don't you think darling?

JAMES

No. Ugh, Jesus. No. How incredibly belittling you are of others is going to come back and bite you one day.

NATALIE comes rushing over to the table. She is very overwhelmed and frustrated. James stands up as she approaches.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What happened? Everything okay?

NATALIE

No. I mean, I don't know. I don't even know if I heard my mother correctly.

FRANK

Well what did she say?

NATALIE looks up at FRANK.

NATALIE

Do you know who David Rogers is?

FRANK

David Rogers. Hm. Name sounds familiar.

SANDRA

Who is David Rogers?

NATALIE

David Rogers. Lived in Northern New Jersey. Married. One daughter. Perfectly healthy. Until he wasn't. Sound familiar *now*?

EVERYONE at the table fell silent.

JAMES, FRANK, SANDRA

Oh my god.

SANDRA put her face in her hands. JAMES sunk into his chair, not saying a word.

FRANK

I do remember. Dave came to us when we posted about needing a donor. He told us that he had lost his job and needed the money to put his daughter through school. He knew the risks. I am eternally grateful.

TEARS began streaming down NATALIE's face.

FRANK (CONT'D)

But last time I checked, my doctor's assured me that he was completely healthy post-surgery.

NATALIE

Until he wasn't.

SANDRA begins to sob. FRANK places his arm around her. They are both mortified to have judged NATALIE and her mother the way that they had.

JAMES looks at his parents in pure disbelief. NATALIE stands above them.

EXT. RESTAURANT - SAME TIME

Pedestrians walk by the restaurant. SANDRA, FRANK, JAMES, and NATALIE are seen through the glass inside the restaurant.

:FADE TO BLACK.